

## QUESTIONS FOR ANALYSIS

1. What is the overall aim and approach of the "Lila Manifesto"? On what basis does it critique women's status in GDR society? What economic, political, and social changes does the manifesto propose? How does it define feminism? How do the societal transformations envisioned in the manifesto compare with what took place in the GDR following the unification of Germany?
2. How does Małgorzata Tarasiewicz analyze the treatment of women's issues and women activists within the Solidarity movement? What was the role of the Women's Section of Solidarity? How was it transformed by the Solidarity leadership? What role did the Solidarity leadership and former members of the Communist Party in Poland assume during the debates on abortion legislation in the 1990s? How does Tarasiewicz analyze the role of Polish nationalism in influencing women's status in Polish society in the past and present, including within Solidarity? How does she compare the status of women in Polish society before and after 1989?



## WOMEN AND THE NEW MULTICULTURAL EUROPE

The "new" Europe of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries is increasingly multicultural. For the most part, the ethnic minorities in each European country have emigrated from its former colonies. In West Germany, however, where the largest minority is Turkish, the post-World War II government preferred to recruit largely male Turkish workers to alleviate labor shortages rather than promote German women's industrial employment. Women of minority groups face a double form of discrimination: racism and sexism. Their concerns are often ignored by society at large as well as by white feminists. They are also expected to conform to the traditional, patriarchal norms of their ethnic group. These concerns are being addressed by local and nationally based grassroots women's organizations as well as by such European-wide women's organizations as the European Women's Lobby.

## 183. Pragna Patel

## "Third Wave Feminism and Black Women's Activism in Britain"

Born in Kenya and raised in Britain, Pragna Patel is a founder of the first Black Women's Center in West London and Women Against Fundamentalism. Since 1982, she has been active in Southall Black Sisters, a community organization. Patel's writings on issues arising from her activism include *Against the Grain* (1990) and "Multi-culturalism: Myth and Reality" (1991). Her article "Third Wave Feminism and Black Women's Activism in Britain" appeared in the anthology *Black British Feminism* (1997) edited by Heidi Safia Mirza. In Britain, *black* is a political definition that refers to people from Southeast Asia, Africa, and the

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Caribbean. This use of the term emerged in the 1960s as a means of uniting people with the common experiences of colonialism, imperialism, and racism. In these excerpts, Patel examines the activities of the Southall Black Sisters and its sister organization, the Brent Asian Women's Refuge. She also critiques how the use of "multiculturalism" has served to rationalize patriarchal customs detrimental to women. At the time of this article, Patel was studying law.

The time has come, the Walrus said, to talk of many things...

(L. Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*)

I was born in Kenya and came to Britain at the age of 4. I have known no other landscape, but I never felt that I belonged here. With no other choice but to make my life here, I grew into a politics of resistance; against the racism that I experienced outside my home because I was the wrong colour, and against the injustices I experienced because I was the wrong gender. In this way I fashioned for myself a strong political identity, in struggle with other black men and women. Despite hovering on the margins of British society, this identity is a source of tremendous power and strength, and even, dare I say it, moral righteousness.

It was precisely this sense of belonging, this black identity, which fell apart in December 1992. When militant right-wing Hindu nationalists destroyed the sixteenth century Babri-Masjid mosque in India, I was forced to confront the elements of the 'Hindu' identity within me which I had supposed had all but withered away. By virtue of being a member of that diaspora of Indian-Hindu origin, I was, whether I liked it or not, also part of a Hindu collectivity. This collectivity contained elements which, as part of a majority in India, was embarking in the name of God and religion on a course of annihilation of minorities and dissenters, and attacking the very foundations of democracy in that country. Yet this very same collectivity, as a minority elsewhere in the world, knows what it is like to experience discrimination and hatred. These

painful contradictions compelled me to critically re-examine my own Hindu background in order to be able to understand, and crucially to oppose those who, in the name of Hinduism, were acting in a way which was deeply inhuman and shameful to witness.

The recognition that I may belong at one and the same time to an oppressed minority and to an oppressive majority, with all the contradictions that entails, has found an echo in my experiences in Britain. Many of the struggles we have waged as black people here have rested, sometimes uncritically, upon a white majority/black minority dichotomy. This has been useful in creating the sense of solidarity necessary to mobilize against racist attacks from the state and thugs on our streets, uniformed or otherwise, but in asserting a singular and absolute identity—as 'victims' of racism—we have evaded the need to look critically at the inner dynamics of our communities. This has resulted in a tendency to deny uncomfortable realities and has tended to give us a distorted and partial view of ourselves and the world around us. This tendency has been particularly difficult for black women to deal with, as our struggles often arise out of our experiences within our communities, and in fighting to force these onto the wider political agenda we have also often had to fight against the imposition of a singular identity either on ourselves or on our communities.

What follows is an attempt to locate these struggles by retracing some of the campaigns of Southall Black Sisters (SBS) and our sister organization, Brent Asian Women's Refuge. Our struggles have, out of necessity, arisen from the routine experiences of many Asian, African, Caribbean and other women who come to these

centres with stories of violence, persecution, imprisonment, poverty and homelessness experienced at the hands of their husbands, families and/or the state. In attempting to meet the challenges they pose in their demands for justice for themselves and for women generally, we have had to organize autonomously. But we have always endeavoured to situate our practice within wider anti-racist and socialist movements, involving alliances and coalitions within and across the minority and majority divides. This has not always been easy, but it is the only way we know in which a new and empowering politics can be forged.

By organizing in women's groups and refuges, many of us have fought for autonomous spaces and for the right for our own voices to be heard in order to break free from the patriarchal stranglehold of the family. In the process we have also had to challenge the attitudes of the wider society, as well as the theory and practice of social policy and legislation which seeks to restrict our freedom to make informed choices about our lives. Our organizations and our practice are critical in unmasking the failures, not only of our communities and the state and wider society, but perhaps more tellingly, of so-called multiculturalist and anti-racist policies.

Throughout our campaigns on domestic violence, whilst countering racist stereotypes about the 'problematic' nature of South Asian families, SBS has sought to highlight not only the familiar economic and legal obstacles faced by all women struggling to live free of abuse, but also the particular plight of Asian women; language barriers, racism, and the specific role of culture and religion which can be used to sanction their subordinate role and to circumscribe their responses. Culture and religion in all societies act to confer legitimacy upon gender inequalities, but these cultural constraints affect some women more than others in communities where 'culture' carries the burden of protecting minority identities in the face of external hostility. We have had to formulate demands and strategies which recognize the

plurality of our experiences, without suppressing anything for the sake of political expediency. Alliances have been crucial in this, not only in gaining wider support, but also in breaking down mutual suspicion and stereotypes, and to ensure that some rights are not gained at the expense of others.

We began our protests in the early 1980s over the murder of Mrs. Dhillon and her three daughters by her husband who burnt them to death. In 1984 we took to the streets in response to the death of Krishna Sharma, who committed suicide as a result of her husband's assaults. Organizing with other women in very public ways, through demonstrations and pickets, we broke the silence of the community. Until that point there had been not a single voice of protest from either progressive or conservative elements within the community. The women who led the demonstrations had themselves fled their own families in Southall, but returned to join us with scarves wrapped around their faces so that they might escape recognition. We demanded and won the support of many white women in the wider feminist movement, although initially they were hesitant in offering support for fear of being labelled 'racist'! One of our slogans—'self-defence is no offence'—was appropriated from the anti-racist 'street-fighting' traditions, but ironically it has now become the much quoted slogan of the wider women's movement against male violence in Britain. The form of our protests drew directly from the varied and positive feminist traditions of the Indian sub-continent. We picketed directly outside Krishna Sharma's house, turning accepted notions of honour and shame on their heads. It is the perpetrators of violence, we shouted, who should be shamed and disrobed of their honour by the rest of the community, not the women who are forced to submit. Another slogan—'black women's tradition, struggle not submission'—was first coined on this demonstration, and that, too, has been adapted to become the rallying cry of feminists against male violence in this country.

The lessons of those early years have ensured that we have understood the importance of

campaigns and direct action as an essential means of articulating the needs of the women who turn to us daily. From the murder of Balwant Kaur by her husband at the Brent refuge in 1985, to the life imprisonment of Kiranjit Ahluwalia for killing her violent husband in 1989, our response has been driven by a recognition that those tragedies reflected, albeit in extreme forms, the day-to-day experiences of many Asian women facing violence in the home. Over the years we have managed to retain a campaigning edge to our work, while also providing day-to-day services....

### *The State and the Family*

The state for us has never been an abstract concept. It has a real existence which defines our roles and position in society; it negotiates our existence as women within our families....

It has been left to women to highlight the manner in which immigration law can combine with the institution of the family to construct the women as an appendage to her husband, economically and socially dependent upon him, and a potential prisoner of violence and abuse within the home. When a woman has come from abroad to marry here, should the marriage break down within a year her immigration status is rendered illegitimate should she leave her husband (this is known as the 'one year rule'). In the absence of an immigration status in her own right, a women's option to leave a violent or abusive home becomes virtually non-existent. In such a situation if a woman does leave her husband, not only is she ineligible for any form of state assistance in the form of housing or welfare benefits, which are a prerequisite for giving women a real choice about leaving a violent home, but she also risks deportation. As there is no right of appeal in such cases, her fate is then entirely dependent upon political decisions taken by the Home Office. The arbitrary and discriminatory nature of such decisions, underpinned by notions of Third World peoples as 'aliens' or 'undesirables', means that the majority of women in such cases are forcibly deported to countries where their futures may be at risk. Persecution based on gender

is not recognized as grounds for asylum in this, as in many other western countries.<sup>1</sup>

In this way, as in many others, we see the state applying double standards to the treatment of families from different communities. The premise of social services intervention, for example, is to preserve the unity of the family as far as possible, whilst the police and immigration services end up dividing and separating many black families. Women in the majority community have, through women's own action, managed to extend their choices to enable women to leave unhappy marriages, but for women from minority communities, particularly those with immigration difficulties, that choice is absent. Our demand is for the right of black and minority families to live undivided when they choose, but for women to have a real option of leaving an unhappy marriage without the state and the community colluding to deny that choice....

### *Multiculturalism and Religious Fundamentalism*

Religion and culture is the terrain on which the politics of multiculturalism and variants of anti-racism are built, often amounting to nothing more than a preservation and celebration of minority culture and religion. Multiculturalism has its roots in past British colonial practices in such countries as India.<sup>2</sup> In Britain it allows the state to mediate between itself and minority communities, using so-called 'community leaders' as power-brokers and middle-men. Needless to say, such leaders are male, from religious, business and other socially conservative backgrounds who, historically, have had little or no interest in promoting an agenda for social justice and equality, least of all the rights of Asian

<sup>1</sup>See Southall Black Sisters submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee, *Immigration and Domestic Violence*, HMSO, 1992.

<sup>2</sup>Sahgal, G., 'Secular Spaces: The Experience of Asian Women Organising' in Sahgal, G. and Yuval-Davis, N. (eds) *Refusing Holy Orders*, London, Virago Press, 1992.

women.<sup>3</sup> In return for information and votes, the state concedes some measure of autonomy to the 'community leaders' to govern their communities. In reality, this means control over the family—women and children. Together the state and community leaders define the needs of minority communities, to limit their influence and to separate off the more radical elements by labelling them extremists.

In the name of tolerance of 'cultural differences', the rights of women are dismissed, and many Asian women seeking support to escape from violence are often told by state agencies that such a breach is not an acceptable method of resolving their problems in 'their cultures'. They are denied protection and delivered back to their families and communities....<sup>4</sup>

Multiculturalism has provided the ideological framework for fundamentalist and conservative leaders within the Asian communities to emphasize the primacy of religious identities. In this country the rise of religious fundamentalism is in part a response to the upsurge in European nationalism and racism, and the failure of progressive left politics, coupled with the fallout from the Rushdie affair and the Gulf War....

The resurgence of religious fundamentalism feeds off parallel developments within the majority community. The reassertion of Christianity as the main signifier of 'British' identity in schools, or the 'Back to Basics' campaign, underlined by a Christian morality aimed at preserving the nuclear and heterosexual family unit, are developments that have fuelled reactionary demands for formal recognition of minority religious life-styles. Fundamentalist movements may differ in detail, but they have two major objectives in common: recognition as distinctive (to legitimate the claim for access to resources); and the reclamation of family values, with particular emphasis on control over the sexuality and fertility of women.

<sup>3</sup>Ali, Y. 'Muslim Women and the Politics of Ethnicity and Culture in Northern England,' op cit.

<sup>4</sup>Patel, P. "Multi-culturalism: Myth and Reality," *Women, a Cultural Review*, vol. 2, no. 3, winter 1991.

Increasingly the received wisdom in the formulation and implementation of social policy is that minority communities are identified according to their religious backgrounds. Other social divisions of class, caste and gender are hidden beneath this monolithic, characterization. Increasingly references are made not to Asian culture, but to Sikh, Muslim or Hindu culture. Such multicultural norms are also permeating popular perceptions of Asian communities.

Women's minds and bodies are the battleground for the preservation of the 'purity' of religious and communal identities. So the role of women as signifiers and transmitters of identity within the family becomes crucial. There is a growing phenomenon of organized gangs and networks of Asian men who hunt down runaway Asian girls and women who are perceived to have transgressed the mores of their culture and religion, and to have defiled their honour and identity. The family has therefore become a site of struggle for feminists and fundamentalists alike....

... The third wave of feminism has a lot to contend with. The rise of new forms of racism, fascism, nationalism and religious fundamentalism world-wide demands from us a new and visionary politics. We must avoid the pitfalls of the identity politics of the 1970s and 1980s which made it so difficult to share experiences, and we must move beyond the limitations of anti-racism and multiculturalism which equally limit our perspectives and our ability to act. We must reject the vicious and blinkered vision of nationalism and fundamentalism. Our task is to find new ways of resisting and new ways of truly democratic thinking which give us the optimism to go beyond all of these failed forms of politics. Our alliances must cross our different identities, and help us to reconceptualize notions of democracy, human rights and citizenship. Whatever the dividing lines drawn by priests, mullahs, gurus and politicians, we will then be able to reach out to our each other, to support one another in our transgressions and defiance. Above all, we must leave room for doubt and uncertainty in our own orthodoxies. The time has come, in the words of the Walrus in Lewis Carroll's poem, to talk of many things....

## 184. Iona Zambo

### "Gypsy Women: Barriers to Citizenship"

There are some 2 million Gypsies, or Roma, as they prefer to be called, living in the member states of the European Union and 15 million in Europe as a whole. Their status in Eastern Europe has deteriorated sharply since the collapse of communism and the emergence of market economies. In the Czech Republic, for example, three-quarters of Roma were unemployed at the beginning of 1999, a situation specifically criticized by the European Union. Roma throughout Europe face increasing discrimination in housing and education, and many are the object of right-wing violence carried out by skinheads. In response, Roma are increasingly organizing on their own behalf, as in Cologne, Germany, where the Association for the Advancement of Roma opened a center in March 1999 to document the history and culture of the Roma and to challenge negative stereotypes. In this article, Iona Zambo examines the specific issues faced by Roma women in Hungary, how Roma women are affected by the market economy, and the patriarchal structure of Roma families. The article appeared in an anthology edited by Tanya Renne, *Ana's Land: Sisterhood in Eastern Europe* (1997).

All over Europe reemerging nationalism aggravates the situation of minorities. Research shows that in the region, specifically in Hungary, prejudice against Gypsies has grown. Social and economic crisis and a spread of poverty were followed by a dramatic increase in segregation. The prevalent ideology, held by politicians and common people alike, is that Gypsies are culturally, morally, and intellectually inferior. Let me quote a few lines from an article that appeared in the November issue of *Cigakritika* (*Gypsy Critic*). A reporter asked random Hungarians on the street about their opinion of Gypsies. A taxi driver replied: "It's the easiest thing in the world to recognize a Gypsy. I hate them in principle, but I still have to give them a ride because they are the only social groups who can afford taxis. You don't have to ask where their money comes from; just read the police reports." An unemployed skinhead answered: "They should be wiped out—every last one. Hitler's biggest sin was starting this job and never finishing it. We skinheads will do it and defeat all inferior races." Of course, there are a few positive voices as well,

but the forgoing examples describe the general attitude. Out of Europe's Gypsy population of 15 million, eight hundred thousand live in Hungary. The Gypsies are the biggest losers in the transition process. Neither the country nor the Gypsy community was prepared for the effects of the transition. It caught the Gypsies unprepared and without economic resources.

Because of a lack of basic living conditions, Gypsy families that are multiply disadvantaged can't join the market economy. Most Gypsies live in extreme poverty, have large families, and are unemployed and unskilled. Their housing is unhealthy, dark, damp, and crowded. It doesn't meet basic hygienic standards. Gypsy settlements, *putri*, are often located near garbage dumps or swamps far away from infrastructure.

Our state of health is radically deteriorating. There is not much hope that it will improve in the near future. Infant mortality as well as premature birth is very high. Children's physical and mental development is slowed, which presents serious problems in education. They are be-