

# CIVIC & CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION

Challenging Inequalities

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# EDITORIAL

*Karin Bračko-Kraft*

Have you ever been treated differently because of the way you look or because of your association with a certain cultural group? Discrimination takes place every day, from the use of language to being denied opportunities. Among other factors, it can be based on ethnicity, political or religious beliefs, sexual orientation and gender identity. In terms of the gender identity aspect, compared to boys and men, girls and women are at greater risk of poverty, violence and abuse. Today, on average, women represent only 38.9 per cent of the total acknowledged global labour force. The numbers are no better at the political level — worldwide, only 25.6 per cent of parliament members are women.<sup>1</sup> Projecting current trends into the future, the overall global gender gap will close in 99.5 years, while it will take 257 years to close the economic participation and opportunity gender gap.<sup>2</sup>

Ultimately, systemic institutionalised discrimination is creating inequalities across the world. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, these challenges and inequalities within society have become even more apparent. The discrimination of various societal groups on multiple levels — political, social and economic — are even gaining ground. For women, higher socio-economic vulnerability, exacerbated domestic violence during lockdowns and their principal roles as caregivers and medical workers have all meant higher exposure and more precarity. The crisis is also aggravating the situation of LGBTIQ people as safe spaces are closed, leaving many to face discrimination when

seeking health care. And some COVID-19 directives have also been misused by police to target these individuals. All over the world, reports have been circulating about incidents of discrimination, xenophobia, racism and attacks against people scapegoated for spreading the virus.<sup>3</sup>

The pandemic not only made us more aware of these inequalities but also how they intersect, sometimes pushing people to extremism.<sup>4</sup> »People who feel marginalised are more vulnerable to arguments that blame their misfortunes on others, particularly those who look or behave differently«, said UN Secretary-General António Guterres.<sup>5</sup> Also, our gender identities influence nearly every aspect of our daily lives; therefore, one could argue that such gendered power relations also shape the nature of violent extremism.<sup>6</sup>

For these reasons, we decided to focus on these topics at last year's CrossCulture Programme (CCP) workshop on civic and citizenship education (CCE). Within this thematic focus, our goal was to ensure a lasting cross-border knowledge transfer while empowering and enabling CCP Fellows and Alumni to act as disseminators helping shape transformation processes in their home countries. Furthermore, we wish to intensify the exchange between civil society actors, strengthen civil societies across the world in a sustainable way and foster international networks ranging from Central, South and Southeast Asia to countries of Eastern Partnership and Russia, North Africa, the Near and Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean.

With approximately 30 CCP Fellows and Alumni as well as stakeholders from civil society worldwide taking part in the workshop, we focussed on gender inequalities which were reinforced during the pandemic. We asked ourselves several questions: How can we challenge a worldview that largely takes the role of gender for granted? How can social inequalities and power imbalances be challenged? What kind of role does gender play in the process of radicalisation<sup>7</sup> and how can this be included in prevention work?

The findings of the workshop, supplemented by good practice examples, personal stories and numerous original quotes, have been compiled in this issue to present global perspectives from civil society actors on the topic of civic and citizenship education as a way to challenge and act upon the current inequalities worldwide.

Among others, this publication includes a contribution by Madeleyne Aguilar and Evelyn Callapino about the current situation of women in Bolivia which illustrates why the country has the highest rate of femicides in Latin

America (pp. 14). CCP Alumna Olfa Jelassi explains why climate change is not gender neutral and how she and her organisation are trying to raise awareness about this issue (pp. 20). With her input, Susanne Olschewski emphasises the importance of gender-inclusive language, explaining recent developments in the German language (pp. 26). In an interview with Olga Karatch, the activist explains the role of women as symbols of change in the recent Belarusian protests. Harald Weilnböck, a long-term expert on radicalisation, clarifies what role gender plays in the process of radicalisation and how to address this phenomenon in prevention work (pp. 42). CCP Alumnus Aizat Shamsuddin shares his story of radicalisation and how he ultimately became an advocate for intersectional dialogue and peace (pp. 48). The publication concludes with practical recommendations for both CCE practitioners and decision makers.

As UN Secretary-General Guterres eloquently expressed »[g]ender inequality harms everyone because it prevents us from benefitting from the intelligence and experience of all of humanity.«<sup>8</sup> We therefore hope you will join us on our journey to challenge inequalities and wish you a good read!

**EXTREMISM**

Whilst recognizing that there is no internationally agreed-upon definition, UNESCO, within the »Preventing violent extremism through education: a guide for policy-makers« document, suggested that the most common understanding of the term, and the one which it follows within the guide, is one that >refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals<. This can include >terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence<.<sup>4</sup>

**RADICALISATION**

»The notion of >radicalization< is generally used [by some States] to convey the idea of a process through which an individual adopts an increasingly extremist set of beliefs and aspirations. This may include, but is not defined by, the willingness to condone, support, facilitate or use violence to further political, ideological, religious or other goals.«<sup>7</sup>

1

»Gender Data Portal«, The World Bank, accessed September 15, 2021, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/data/datatopics/gender>.

2

World Economic Forum. »Global Gender Gap Report 2020«, 2020, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf), p. 5.

3

United Nations. »COVID-19 and Human Rights«, 2020, [https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un\\_policy\\_brief\\_on\\_human\\_rights\\_and\\_covid\\_23\\_april\\_2020.pdf](https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/un_policy_brief_on_human_rights_and_covid_23_april_2020.pdf), p. 11–12.

4

United Nations, UNESCO. »Preventing violent extremism through education: A guide for policy-makers«, 2017, [https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764\\_eng](https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000247764_eng).

5

»Secretary-General’s Nelson Mandela Lecture: >Tackling the Inequality Pandemic: A New Social Contract for a New Era<«, United Nations, July 18, 2020, <https://www.un.org/sg/en/content/sg/statement/2020-07-18/secretary-generals-nelson-mandela-lecture-%E2%80%9Ctackling-the-inequality-pandemic-new-social-contract-for-new-era%E2%80%9D-delivered>.

6

UNDP, UN Women. »Conflicting Identities: The Nexus between Masculinities, Femininities and Violent Extremism in Asia«, 2020, <https://www.undp.org/publications/conflicting-identities-nexus-between-masculinities-femininities-and-violent-extremism#modal-publication-download>, p. 2.

7

United Nations General Assembly, Human Rights Council. »Report on best practices and lessons learned on how protecting and promoting human rights contribute to preventing and countering violent extremism«, 2016, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/G16/162/55/pdf/G1616255.pdf?OpenElement>.

8

Mandela, »Tackling Pandemic.«



# CALL ME HEENA

## *Shahria Sharmin*

Hijra is a South Asian term with no exact equivalent in the English language. Hijras are people who adopt a feminine gender identity after being designated as male or intersex at birth. Many hijras prefer the term third gender.

Traditionally, hijras held a semi-sacred status and were hired to sing, dance and bless newly married couples or new-borns at household parties. Their earnings were pooled through a guru system, meaning hijras declared allegiance to a guru and submitted to group rules in exchange for financial and social security.

Growing up in Bangladesh, the photographer *Shahria Sharmin* was influenced by prejudices and stereotypes about hijras until she met Heena, a hijra who opened up her life to Sharmin. Heena helped the photographer to get to know other members of the hijra community, showing her how to see them as the mothers, daughters, friends and lovers that they are.

The project »Call me Heena« (2012–2018) features hijras in Bangladesh as well as a number of hijras who migrated to India. While hijras continue to face discrimination in Bangladesh, some have found greater social acceptance in India. At the same time, many hijras in Bangladesh and other South Asian countries have stood up for their rights and have at least gained limited legal recognition. But the road to actual acceptance is still long.

[\*shabriasharmin.com\*](http://shabriasharmin.com)



Already as children, many hijras feel their gender identity is different than the traditionally accepted ones. Some are lucky to have an accepting family, but many fear hatred and exclusion.





Poppy and Kesri may be considered dead to their families, whom they left ages ago, but with each other, they have found a friendship that is as deep as unconditional love.

*Shabria Sharmin*



After the end of her 15-year relationship, Natasha gave up on love. Now she is on a journey to love herself, hoping for fulfilment without heartbreaks.

Call me Heena







# GENDER (IN)EQUALITY



# NOT ONE WOMAN LESS IN BOLIVIA

*Madeleyne Aguilar Andrade and Evelyn Callapino*

Bolivia has the highest rate of femicides in South America and under the lockdowns during the coronavirus pandemic, the situation has worsened. A patriarchal society and socio-economic structures that limit women's opportunities play a determining role in domestic violence and hate crimes against women.

In February 2020, the discovery of the bodies of four missing women in the Chapare province in Central Bolivia shocked the country. The region is known for its cultivation of coca and is therefore a hotspot for drug trafficking. Women often become victims of prostitution and human trafficking in drug cartels, which was likely the fate of Monica Olmos, Nayeli Lizarazu, Beatriz Garcia and Margarita Maldonado, who were abused, murdered and then buried.

But this is not the only cause of femicides in Bolivia. In fact, most women die at the hands of their male partners. The situation worsened under the mandatory quarantine measure to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In 2020, Bolivia registered 113 femicides, and in 2021, the Bolivian Prosecutor's Office registered 6,332 cases of violence against women at a national level in January and February alone. In addition, since the beginning of the year until 18 May, 46 cases of femicides were reported.<sup>1</sup>

Femicides do not entail murder alone. A report in the newspaper *Página Siete*<sup>2</sup> from May to October 2018 reveals that in several femicide cases, male perpetrators also seek to humiliate and strip the victims of their dignity – by wounding their face or cutting their hair – before killing them.

## THE DEMONSTRATION OF POWER

Violence against women and femicides are currently being discussed all over South America. Women are taking to the streets, protesting for their rights and lives. Movements like *Ni Una Menos* (Not One [Woman] Less) have started up and spread all over the continent. The Argentine writer, anthropologist and feminist activist Rita Segato explains that the bodies of dead women hold a violent and disciplining societal message of men demonstrating their power over women in an attempt to retain control. This is called »pedagogy of cruelty«.

Segato explains that the fact that women all over the world have managed to position themselves in all kinds of professional occupations has led to the reorganisation of the once patriarchal society and caused many to question the privileges inherited by previous (male) generations. This rearrangement transgresses the traditional roles imposed on women, like caring for the family and being a »good woman«, and femicides are a violent outburst against this development. The new roles women are seeking out and achieving make some men uncomfortable; it shakes their own social foundations and forces them to adapt to a new situation.

## OPPRESSION AGAINST INDIGENOUS WOMEN

Although Bolivia is culturally diverse, behind each femicide, there is a society deeply wounded by perpetual violence. And in rural Bolivia in particular, violence against women is even more widely accepted, which sustains the cycle of subordination. People from these places tend to respond more strongly to cultural mandates, clinging to cultural traditions to reinforce habits. This means that being a woman in an indigenous community in rural Bolivia is doubly oppressive.

On average, indigenous women give birth to four children, assuming a full-time role as mother and attending to the household while men make the political decisions in the community. What's more, these women are also economically disadvantaged. For example, in the municipality of Tinguipaya in Potosí, a rural department in southwestern Bolivia, land is traditionally only allotted to men, meaning while not being able to acquire property directly, women are made economically dependent on men.

## NO SAFE SPACE IN POLITICS AND MEDIA

Women participate in politics to a lesser extent because these spaces have historically been occupied by men. Since 1825, Bolivia has had 67 presidents, 65 of whom were men, and two women who were both only interim presidents. Many women who do hold a political office endure discrimination and harassment. An example of a severe case is that of Juana Quispe, who was an indigenous councillor in Ancoraimes in 2012. While exercising her political rights, she suffered continuous political harassment and was eventually murdered. The case is still unresolved. The situation at the national level improved when the first quota laws aimed at reducing gender inequalities in politics and guaranteeing more political rights to women were approved in 1997. Moreover, a law to ensure equality and alternation has been approved with respect to women's political participation. In 2020, women occupied about half of the seats in the two chambers of government, a statistic that is not reflected in rural areas where most of the representatives are still men.

In the last decade, important advances in women's political participation have been made, but still, violations within political parties, organisations and decision-making positions are on the rise. A recent case occurred in June 2020; the Potosí Assemblywoman Miriam Vargas suffered harassment and political violence. Her

house and property were burnt down, she and her family also suffered intimidation, and the members of her own political party forced her to resign.

The media plays an important role. In addition to informing the public, journalists should make problems clear and raise the public's awareness of particular issues. Therefore, when faced with an evident emergence of femicides, they are required to provide objective journalistic coverage. However, many times femicides are reduced to numbers and sensationalised, making a headline more attractive. By publishing morbid stories of abuse with unnecessary details, journalists worsen the situation and often perpetuate negative perceptions of women in Bolivian society. People become desensitised to the realities, unable even to be shocked, which in turn, leads to victim shaming and the normalisation of violence. Perhaps this is one reason why even though there are currently more cruel cases of femicides involving ever younger victims, not much is being done to change the situation.

Despite several laws guaranteeing women a »life free of violence« and the ability to persecute harassers, seeking justice in Bolivia after being raped, beaten or after a woman has been murdered, involves a whole series of legal procedures which are not only costly and time-consuming, but which often do not bring justice.<sup>3</sup> Legal progresses are important and they are a start. Still, the Bolivian reality goes beyond regulations since laws themselves do not necessarily change societal awareness. One of the main challenges involves deconstructing macho patterns that promote the gender stereotypes which place women in a constant state of subordination.

## LOVE WITHOUT VIOLENCE

The organisation Mujer de Plata was created in 2017 to combat injustice and inequality. It is the only organisation working to protect the rights of women and vulnerable people in Potosí.

Mujer de Plata seeks to denaturalise violence in relationships, applying participatory, role-playing methods, like the Teatro del Oprimido (Theater of the Oppressed). The project »Amar sin Violencia« (Love without Violence) questions the myths of romantic love and the belief that women are weak and men are there to rescue them.

The target population of this project are adolescent men and women from semi-peripheral schools in the city of Villa Imperial Potosí. Since most femicides in Bolivia occur in relationships either because men feel possessive of their partner or because they are jealous, the project was created to address these issues.

Mujer de Plata prioritises prevention issues in order to deconstruct certain harmful patriarchal patterns. In addition to this, the organisation reaches out to women miners and sex workers to inform them about labour, reproductive rights and economic empowerment. The multidisciplinary team has also founded the Mujer de Plata Legal Committee, providing follow-up and legal training to address violence in the city of Potosí while empowering local women.

- 1 »Feminicidios Reporte 18-05-2021«, accessed September 15, 2020, <https://www.fiscalia.gob.bo/index.php/estadisticas/125-feminicidios/5181-feminicidios-reporte-18-05-2021>.
- 2 »100 feminicidios: los crímenes son más violentos y las víctimas más jóvenes«, Página Siete, December 23, 2018, <https://www.paginasiete.bo/anuario/2018/12/23/100-feminicidios-los-crmenes-son-mas-violentos-las-victimas-mas-jovenes-203592.html>.
- 3 »Bolivia registró 113 víctimas de feminicidio en 2020«, Deutsche Welle, January 3, 2021, <https://www.dw.com/es/bolivia-registr%C3%B3-113-v%C3%ADctimas-de-feminicidio-en-2020/a-56117971>.



**MADELEYNE AGUILAR ANDRADE** holds a Master's Degree in English and a degree in international relationship and globalisation. She served as a corporate communications consultant and has taught English in La Paz and at Da-Yeh University in Taiwan. Currently, she works as a freelance investigative journalist for, among others, the Bolivian daily »Página Siete«. Andrade founded »La Nube« news media website with colleagues to reach young people. In 2020, she was a CCP Fellow at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.



**EVELYN CALLAPINO** was born in Potosí, one of the most underserved regions in Bolivia. She graduated with honours from the Universidad Católica Boliviana San Pablo in La Paz with a degree in political science and holds degrees in international relations and political and electoral analysis. Callapino is a columnist for Página Siete and other national media as well as a university lecturer and writer of academic essays. She is the founder of Mujer de Plata in Potosí, an organisation that works for the rights of women in vulnerable sectors. She is currently a technical advisor to the Gender Rights Committee of the Chamber of Deputies in the Plurinational Legislative Assembly.



# WHAT DOES GENDER EQUALITY MEAN TO YOU?

»Gender equality has a special importance to me as a person who grew up in a family where domestic abuse was common. I am not an exception. Statistically, every third woman in Belarus is a victim of abuse. Domestic violence is a widespread, socio-cultural phenomenon, rooted in the days of the Soviet Union where this mindset was considered normal:  
>If he beats you, he loves you.< Fortunately, the younger generation is moving away from this mentality, but this does not completely solve the situation.

However, gender equality is not only about women's rights, but also about the rights of everyone, regardless of sex, gender and sexual orientation. Sexual minorities often suffer from discrimination; plus, there are many stigmas and stereotypes that limit men's rights, choices and self-expression as well.«

**VIKTORYIA ANDRUKOVICH, BELARUS**

»Gender equality is a culture of mutual respect, a culture of awareness about one's own borders and someone else's, and a culture of openness to different thoughts.«

**VASYL KUNDRYK, UKRAINE**

»I would define gender equality as giving people equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities regardless of their gender.

Where I'm from, women continue to be excluded from the highest levels of leadership and decision making, mainly because of unconscious biases, poor recruitment practices and poor workplace cultures. These stereotypes are really harmful as they desensitise people to violence against women and portray women as objects.«

**OLGA VASCAN, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

# » CLIMATE CHANGE IS NOT GENDER NEUTRAL «

*Olfa Jelassi*

Climate change affects women and men differently, still the gender dimension continues to be widely overlooked in climate change policies. CCP alumna *Olfa Jelassi* from Tunisia is speaking out to change that.

*Olfa, you have been committed to women's rights and gender equality in the context of climate change for several years. How did you first get involved in the issue?*

I have always been interested in environmental issues, in water and other energy resources and how to use them in more efficient and sustainable ways. This is one of the reasons I studied hydrometeorological engineering. In 2012, inspired by the general spirit of change spurred on by the Tunisian revolution, I co-founded the NGO *We Love Kairouan*. This youth civil society organisation seeks to strengthen civil engagement, youth empowerment and culture as well as environmental awareness in the city and region of Kairouan. I remember a conference in 2013 when one of our guest speakers highlighted the link between gender, climate change, women's rights and the environment. That was the moment I realised that the fight against climate change is also a fight against gender inequality! And then in 2016 I joined GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice,\* a global network that promotes gender equality in decisions about climate protection worldwide.

*Could you elaborate a bit more on how gender and climate intersect?*

Climate change is not gender neutral. Given their different roles and responsibilities in societies, women are more severely affected by climate change than men. Women, particularly in the developing world, bear the brunt of increasing climate-related disasters.

*For example?*

In some rural areas, collecting water is traditionally a woman's job. Due to the rising temperatures caused by climate change, water resources have become scarce in places, forcing women to travel farther to reach water sources, and as a consequence, they work longer, more strenuous hours. At the same time, since their communities consider this a »natural« task, it's taken for granted and women are neither paid nor rewarded. Another example: where I'm from, more women than men work in the agricultural sector. They're not only paid less than men for the same work, but in cases of drought or flood, they risk losing their main source of income. Plus, since many of them do not own or control the land, they are also excluded from the process of finding solutions, such as creating rural land and water management systems. But women have built strong resiliency practices, so they should have a voice in defining local strategies for facing flash flood risks and adapting to periods of drought!

*As UN Women claims: »Women are not just victims of climate change. They are powerful agents of change.« What key measures could involve more women in decision-making processes related to climate change?*

First, we need equal access, whether it's access to land, financial services such as credits and insurances, education or decision-making processes. It is important that gender equality is not reduced to legislation and quotas. We must talk about participation and empowerment, about the roles of women and men in societies. Gender equality is not about quantity. Having a women's quota doesn't help if, at the same time, women are still overburdened with household chores. If we want gender equality to be more than an empty slogan, we need a fair, social transformation of roles, responsibilities and norms.

»Gender equality is not about quantity«

*Changing social norms, values and roles requires time, a lot of effort and incentives.*

Sure. It is a holistic process in which awareness and knowledge play a crucial role. In my experience, many women and men don't take action because they're not aware of these inequalities nor do they know their rights. Knowledge changes individuals' opinions and empowers them to act.

*Raising awareness is something you also focus on as a committee and board member of the global network GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice. What have been the biggest achievements of GenderCC so far?*

GenderCC, a network that was officially founded in 2008, evolved in the context of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the entity responsible for international climate change negotiations. In the beginning, this framework was gender blind; it did not consider gender in its policies and programmes because it failed to recognise the different needs and roles of women and men in the context of climate change. It was due to the constant and hard advocacy work of GenderCC, among other civil society organisations, that in 2017 a Gender Action Plan was finally adopted. For me this was a milestone that I am still proud of today!



*What is the Gender Action Plan (GAP) about?*

It could be described as a road map for countries, UN entities and other stakeholders to mainstream a gender perspective in their climate policies. It also seeks to achieve equal and meaningful participation of women in the UN climate negotiations itself. Even there, women are still underrepresented. The GAP helps to raise awareness, integrate and explicitly consider women, for example in the Nationally Determinant Contributions (NDCs). NDCs are national strategies highlighting climate actions through which governments aim to achieve the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement.

»Gender aggregated data is needed«

*Tunisia ratified the UNFCCC as well as the Paris Agreement. What is the status quo of gender mainstreaming in its national climate policies?*

The government set ambitious climate change mitigation and adaptation plans. In 2014 it even incorporated climate change in its constitution, guaranteeing »the right to a sound and balanced environment and the contribution to a secure climate«. However, gender still hasn't been integrated into environmental and climate policies due to the lack of gender-differentiated data and gender-responsive indicators in most sectors. For example, when the impact of climate change on water availability is studied by national institutions, a statistic on how many women are responsible for water collection is missing; it simply hasn't been measured. This lack of data leads to an underestimation of how women are being affected by climate change, which consequently leads to insufficient representation when making decisions and implementing policies. Gender aggregated data is needed to design specific climate change solutions for all genders!

*Which best practice examples could you share from your own work to mainstream gender?*

In addition to my advocacy and policy work at the UN level with Gender CC, I try to raise awareness in every possible context – as a consultant and trainer for local and national NGOs as well as for international institutions. In my workshops, I talk about the principles and values of human rights, women rights and environmental rights. I also provide tools to evaluate a project and indicators to integrate gender in project designing. Plus, I facilitate workshops on how to empower women to participate in climate negotiations at the UN level. It

might seem obvious, but even at the UN level, many representatives are not aware of the differing consequences men and women face because of climate change nor are they familiar with the Gender Action Plan. I was also involved in the development of an app called Gender Climate Tracker which provided analysis from several countries of the MENA region. This platform, launched in 2016, provides updated country information on policies related to gender and climate change.

*During the CCP workshop, you met other CCP alumni and people who are active in the field of civic and citizenship education and gender empowerment. What ideas did you take back?*

Sharing experiences is always powerful because I really believe in lifelong learning. With each seminar and with each person you meet, you learn something new. One session in particular has stuck in my mind. We were asked to interview each other, and when asked to speak about ourselves, we had a minute to reflect; and self-reflection is the first step for everything. In the end, we are all fighting for a just, fair and sustainable future for our communities and the planet. Even if our struggles differ from one country and context to another, we all share the same engagement and motivation to make this world a better place.

Interview by  
Juliane Pfordte

\* GenderCC – Women for Climate Justice is a global network of organisations, experts and activists working for gender equality, women's rights and climate justice. GenderCC has evolved in the context of the international climate negotiations (UNFCCC). It includes women and gender experts working in policy, research and practical implementation at international, national and local levels. (source: [www.gendercc.net](http://www.gendercc.net))



**OLFA JELASSI** is a hydro-meteorological engineer, graduating from the National Engineering School of Tunis. She has been working in international cooperation and development for more than eight years and is a board and steering committee member of the international network GenderCC-Women for Climate Justice as well as a member of Women and Gender Constituency (WGC). Jelassi is an international expert, trainer and lecturer on gender, women's rights and climate change, participating in the UNFCCC negotiations and (inter)national climate policies. Currently, she is a project manager for a German cooperation at the German Embassy in Tunis. Jelassi was a CCP Fellow in 2013 at Fairtrade International.

# HOW IS GENDER INEQUALITY SEEN IN YOUR COUNTRY?

» There are various levels of knowledge regarding gender inequality in Indonesian society. People with a good education and access to information see gender inequality as a social problem and feel the need to discuss it, whereas people with a more basic level of education, mostly individuals from rural areas, are often not aware of their rights. The fact is, legal barriers, coupled with a patriarchal culture and religious conservatism, continue to prevent girls and women from fulfilling their rights.

The biggest challenge in Indonesia is to open people's minds and move towards change; we need to strengthen our society both materially as well as psychologically by providing sufficient information and facilities to accommodate people's needs. We need to make laws, regulations and programmes to support girls and women in their choices and professions. «

**LINDA AGUSTINA EFFENDI, INDONESIA**

» Sexual harassment, job segregation, wage gap, discrimination in the labour market and lack of legal protection are very much present in Belarus. There are also very conservative notions about family and gender roles regarding both men and women.

Furthermore, a lack of awareness about the problem of gender inequality amongst people in society in general and women in particular is an issue. Many women accept the lack of opportunities and rights as the norm and even support conservative gender roles. At least half of the victims of domestic abuse neither seek help nor confront the fact that they were sexually and physically abused. This is not only due to the culturally conservative framework of the past but also because of fear, shame and even guilt. «

**VIKTORYIA ANDRUKOVICH, BELARUS**

» The perception is mostly limited to the advocacy of women rights. As a cis-male person, I have so-called privileges, but I also face people's presumptions about male roles, for instance I am expected to help with more physical tasks. Another example is from my workplace experience; leadership roles often go to male managers in teams where people's understanding of gender roles is conservative. And at my current job, women are usually responsible for organising happy hours or teambuilding events. «

**VASYL KUNDRYK, UKRAINE**



# HE DISCUSSES, SHE GOSSIPS: LANGUAGE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON GENDER EQUALITY

*Susanne Olschewski*

On the path to equality, language is a decisive factor. It greatly influences our perception, our understanding of roles and our behaviour. In her commentary, *Susanne Olschewski* shows why it is important to raise children's awareness about gender-neutral language and how this can be done.

At the start of 2021, Duden introduced a change: in the standard dictionary of the German language, the generic use of the masculine form was removed, at least in the online dictionary. In the future, Duden's editorial team will list personal and professional terms in both the feminine and masculine forms. For example, instead of implying both male and female, the word *Lehrer*, or teacher, now only refers to a male teacher, while a female teacher is referred to strictly in the feminine form, *Lehrerin*. What seems like a mere formality has drawn a variety of reactions, including heated debates in the news and on social media. Justifiably so? Ultimately, it is just language, right? Gender equality in Germany is progressing, yet it still lags far behind in many regards, like in terms of the proportion of women in management positions or in terms of gender-neutral language. Language is a decisive factor on the path to equality. It creates and conveys realities and helps us to understand the world around us. Language also has an impact on what we imagine; therefore, it shapes what we can imagine and what we consider normal, particularly our understanding of feminine and masculine roles and stereotypes. The use of language influences our thinking and, consequently, our actions.

However, language does not treat the sexes equally. Language that is not gender-neutral produces a biased view of gender, which, for example, can lead to unequal opportunities in the working world or to problems in finding one's identity. Through language, biases are formed in early childhood. So, what does this have to do with the generic use of the masculine form? Aren't women included in the word *Lehrer*? This may be true for the person using the word. However, this may not be automatically perceived as such by the recipient of the message. Numerous studies prove that if the masculine form of terms and titles are used, the test persons see a man in their mind's eye, like in this familiar example:

A father and a son are in an accident in which both are badly injured and brought to hospital. The son needs an operation. The surgeon (*der Chirurg*) arrives, becomes white as a sheet and says, »I can't operate. This is my son!«

If you imagined two fathers, you've fallen into the typical pattern of automatically imagining a man when you read the masculine form of the word surgeon, *der Chirurg*. But the surgeon in the story is a woman. Had the narrative used the feminine form, *die Chirurgin*, this wouldn't have happened.

Here's another example: when job titles are mentioned in gender-neutral language, naming both the masculine and feminine forms, girls tend to consider even typically male professions as easily attainable and show more interest in taking up these professions. One possible explanation is that children, as early as elemen-

tary school age, learn to associate male-dominated tasks with higher difficulty. A study by psychologists at the Freie Universität Berlin, published in the journal *Social Psychology*, concludes that gender-neutral language reinforces children's confidence that they can succeed in traditionally male occupations.<sup>1</sup>

## FROM FORCE OF HABIT TO REINFORCED GENDER ROLES

But why is gender neutral language still not the norm? There are many reasons: the force of habit, reinforced gender roles, the claim that language becomes cumbersome as a result, or even a generally pejorative attitude against feminist endeavours and the trivialisation that goes along with it. However, it's not just the invisibility of the female form that's problematic in our society, but also the negatively connoted characteristics that are considered typically female. A man may be described as assertive and dynamic, whereas the same attribute in a woman would be described as bossy and moody. Men are direct, women impolite. And the list goes on.

These distorted perceptions, or gender bias, are widespread. The following is an example from the poem »Impressions from an Office« by the American author and university lecturer Natasha Josefowitz (excerpt):

The family picture on HIS desk.  
Ah, a solid, responsible family man.  
The family picture on HER desk.  
Um, her family will come before her career.

HE is talking with his co-workers.  
He must be discussing the latest deal.  
SHE is talking with her co-workers.  
She must be gossiping.

Often girlishness also carries negative connotations, even for children. Girls are described as weak, unathletic and whiny. These become insults to boys who don't conform to the male norm: »You throw like a girl!« and »Go ahead and cry, you whiny little girl!« Or when teachers say they need a few strong boys to help move tables in the classroom. It's no wonder then that the self-confidence and self-esteem of young girls often falls by the wayside.

That is why it's important to make children aware of gender-neutral language as soon as possible. Gender-sensitive language should not just be a matter of course at home and in school, it should also be discussed and integrated



into lessons. For this to happen, parents and educators must also address this issue, question roles and behaviour, and change thought patterns. Habits can be changed when they are overwritten with new ones. A good place to start, for example, is to avoid stereotypical expressions and to discuss them when they arise.

When dealing with children and youth, it is also important to criticise role behaviour. Attentive learning and the deliberate use of language are key to the language of appreciation. And essentially, using both the feminine and masculine forms is not at all a question of sounding cum-

bersome but simply a matter of habit. It would be a small effort with a big impact. And to those people who argue that this is about unrealistic egalitarianism, I'd like to say, it's not about making genders equal, but about perceiving and accepting them as such.

1 Vervecken, Dries, and Hannover, Bettina. »Yes I can! Effects of gender fair job descriptions on children's perceptions of job status, job difficulty, and vocational self-efficacy«, *Social Psychology*, no. 46 (March 2015): 76–92.



**SUSANNE OLSCHESKI** entered the pedagogical field after working in journalism as well as press and marketing at the editorial Hueber Verlag in Madrid, Spain. She has experience as a certified DaF and DaZ teacher at the Goethe-Institut, various language schools, universities and German schools in Germany, Brazil and Bolivia. Olschewski has been teaching German at a Berlin primary school since 2020. After years of international exchange, her mission is to empower women and promote equality between women and men in all cultures.



Of the least-developed countries worldwide, Bangladesh is at the forefront when it comes to addressing gender disparity. Still, early child marriage and traditional gender roles continue to pose challenges.



# CREATING EMPOWERMENT FOR ALL GENDERS

*Proma Parmita*

Gender empowerment is not only about empowering women, but also about strengthening the role of other genders and achieving the equality of all gender identities. Based on her personal experience as a woman and a professional development worker, *Proma Parmita* shares various aspects of gender empowerment in Bangladesh.

When we talk about gender empowerment, we commonly understand it as the empowerment of women. However, gender empowerment refers to the power or authority given to a person of any gender. Therefore, we should not just consider male and female, but also recognise the third gender and transgender communities.

Despite making up about half of the total population in Bangladesh, women are significantly disadvantaged regarding basic rights compared to their male counterparts. Although there are no overt governmental barriers or institutionalised discrimination towards women keeping them from accessing education or the job market, women face numerous social and religious obstacles based strictly on their gender. For example, according to the Hindu Women's Rights to Property Act 1937, women will not inherit any share of their father's or husband's property if there are sons in the family. In the absence of a male heir, only the unmarried daughters and married daughters with sons can inherit property. Those who do inherit properties have limited ownership and are not allowed to sell them. In Islamic Shariah law, women can inherit property, but only half of what a male counterpart would obtain. Most families do not give transgender or third gender children any property despite of the lack of religious or legal restrictions. This religious property discrimination among sons and daughters has contributed to a common social mindset that only sons can be rightful descendants responsible for caring for their parents in their old age. As a result, parents, mostly from poorer households, often hesitate to invest in their daughters' education and financial security.

## MORE OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN

Due to religious sensitivity, the government cannot legally ensure equal property rights for everyone. To ensure more opportunities for women, the government and some NGOs provide livelihood development trainings in sewing, handicrafts, small-scale gardening or farming livestock for women all over Bangladesh. The government also provides collateral free bank loans to women entrepreneurs for up to BDT 2.5 million (about 25,000 €) to support their business. To ensure girls' enrolment and prevent school drop outs, the government has been providing monthly stipends to female students up to higher secondary level. For higher education, many NGOs and corporate organisations offer stipends to financially disadvantaged female students.

The government and NGOs are jointly working to raise citizens' awareness about the importance of women's empowerment. They run campaigns to help

parents understand that if their daughters are educated and financially independent, they can take care of their parents like sons do. Through these initiatives, the government and NGOs are gradually changing the mindset of parents towards their daughters. As a result, the net enrolment rate for female students in primary level was about 98% in 2018. Furthermore, to increase women's participation in politics, seats are reserved for women in the parliament and local governments. Due to these efforts, Bangladesh attained the highest gender equality in South Asia according to the Global Gender Gap Index in 2020.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the increase of educational opportunities for girls, there continues to be serious concern regarding child marriage in rural Bangladesh. According to the findings from the 2019 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey conducted by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and UNICEF, 15.5 % of women were married before their 15th birthday.<sup>2</sup> The number of child marriages has increased since the pandemic because joblessness, school closure, poverty and lack of food security are on the rise. The loss of jobs has also increased domestic violence, which women and girls are mostly the victims of. An increase in gender-based violence like rape, molestation and abduction is also a major factor which forces parents to marry off their daughters early. According to an assessment report by the Manusher Jonno Foundation, at least 13,886 girls in 21 different districts were victims of child marriage between April and October 2020.<sup>3</sup> Early marriage instantly hinders a woman's chances at an education and financial independence. It also affects her reproductive health as pregnancy before 18 is dangerous. Most of the child brides in Bangladesh suffer from malnutrition and sometimes they become seriously ill both physically and mentally due to being forced to have a conjugal relationship and get pregnant at a very young age. To prevent child marriage, the government continues to offer financial support to female students despite school closures due to the pandemic.

## WOMEN AS CAREGIVERS

In the Bangladeshi social structure, women are still considered to be the primary caregivers and are responsible for household chores. Consequently, they spend most of their time doing unpaid labour, and despite perhaps being educationally qualified, they are being forced to stay out of the job force. To counter this situation, women have created alternative sources of income. They are engaging in online business such as selling clothes, accessories, handicrafts or supplying homemade food to

households and offices and thus creating jobs for other women who want to work from home as well.

With the joint efforts of the government, developmental organisations and women themselves, Bangladesh has made significant progress in women's empowerment in the last years.

Additionally, if we discuss what genders need to be empowered in Bangladesh, we should consider the particularly marginalised third gender in the country's socio-political context. According to Bangladeshi law, the third gender is an identity-based category for people who do not identify themselves as male or female. This term is commonly known as »hijra« around South Asia. It includes people assigned male at birth as well as some (but not all) intersex and transgender people.

The main barrier to their empowerment is social acceptance. A third gender person faces a lot of discrimination, even from their own family. Families often abandon their children of non-traditional gender identities, meaning male or female. As a result, these children end up in hijra communities. They are unable to enrol in regular educational institutions and thus prepare for a regular job. Therefore, hijras' most common sources of income are usually singing and dancing at cultural events, engaging in prostitution or begging. Basically, they are denied many basic human rights. Some NGOs provide livelihood development trainings for third gender or transgender people, giving them the opportunity to obtain sustainable and legal sources of income.

## INEQUALITY LEADS TO/ INITIATES EXPLOITATION

There are serious issues regarding gender-based violence and sexual exploitation against people of third gender. As they live outside their family in poorly secured accommodations, they become easy targets for perpetrators. They regularly become victims of abuse by their community leaders, local area miscreants and are often forced into prostitution. Their clients regularly abuse them sexually and financially. The definition of rape as stated in section 375 of the penal code of Bangladesh is based on the assumption that only women can be victims of rape. This makes it difficult for third gender victims to seek justice.

Over the past years, progress towards more gender equality has been made. On 11 November 2013, hijras were recognised as a separate gender by the Bangladeshi government, which was an important milestone for the empowerment of gender minorities in the country. Additionally, on 19 April 2019 they were granted the right to use their full gender identity to register as a voter. In 2020, the first ever hijra madrasa (Islamic school) called

Dawatul Quran Third Gender Madrasa was established in Dhaka to provide formal education to these communities. Even though Bangladesh is making many efforts to attain equality for all genders, there is still a lot to do.

My organisation Making Development Effective (MaDE) is one of the non-governmental organisations in the country working towards that goal. Together with our partner organisations, we organise workshops and campaigns with the aim to empower women and youth from underprivileged communities and persons with disabilities. One of our projects is to support young single mothers, ensuring them a sustainable income by giving them jobs raising livestock, sewing or producing handicrafts. In 2020, we provided groceries to hijra communities that did not have enough income. MaDE is also developing a project to train educated transgender persons in graphic design and SEO, thus helping them to become self-employed. In addition to that, we regularly participate in workshops and advocacy campaigns, sharing information about third gender people and underprivileged women and informing people about what kind of support they require.

- 1 »Global Gender Gap Report 2020«, World Economic Forum, accessed on July 27, 2021, [http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GGGR\\_2020.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf).
- 2 »Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys«, UNICEF, accessed on July 27, 2021, <https://mics.unicef.org/surveys>.
- 3 »13,886 child marriages took place during lockdown last year«, accessed September 15, 2021, [http://www.manusherjonno.org/latest\\_stories/13886-child-marriages-took-place-during-lockdown-last-year/](http://www.manusherjonno.org/latest_stories/13886-child-marriages-took-place-during-lockdown-last-year/).



**PROMA PARMITA** worked for over five years in socio-economic research before founding Making Development Effective (MaDE), an organisation dedicated to ensuring financial security to people with special needs living in precarious conditions by providing them with decent professions. Parmita is also committed to gender equality, climate change and to preventing violent extremism. Additionally, as an experienced workshop facilitator, she conducts sessions for young female professionals on the importance of being financially independent. In 2015, Parmita completed her CCP Fellowship at Eine Welt Netz in Dusseldorf. She is currently based in Dhaka, Bangladesh.



# WHAT ARE IMPORTANT STEPS THAT NEED TO BE TAKEN IN ORDER TO ASSURE MORE GENDER EQUALITY?

»It would be important to raise awareness about gender inequalities, start empowering women and acknowledging all the unpaid work they do in the household, while helping them to access the labour market through business incentives and ensuring basic human rights, which starts with the abolition of child marriage and sexual harassment.«

**LINDA AGUSTINA EFFENDI, INDONESIA**

»We need to involve leaders who publicly stand for modern perceptions of gender equality, including popular political and opinion leaders. So far, we have several opinion leaders in show business who attract a young audience. But we need more advocates for a mature audience, people who can explain that gender equality is not only about women's rights or LGBTQI people but also about a larger spectrum of human rights.«

**VASYL KUNDRYK, UKRAINE**

»Gender equality will not happen overnight; it is a long process. At my workplace, I organise seminars with young people to discuss the importance of empowering women to be leaders and decision-makers. I raise women's awareness about their rights and possibilities and make them understand that society needs them«

**OLGA VASCAN, REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

# » WOMEN ARE DEMANDING POLITICAL DIVORCE «

*Olga Karatch*

The protests in Belarus have been going on for months, violence has shattered society, and more and more people have been standing up to President Lukashenko. *Olga Karatch*, opposition activist from Belarus and founder of the civic initiative Our House, speaks about the catalyst for the uprisings and why women are at the forefront of resistance.

*Olga, your home country Belarus has been gripped by unprecedented, peaceful mass protests. When did the protests start and what triggered them?*

The protests erupted in 2020 after Alexander Lukashenko declared his victory in an evidently rigged presidential election. In the beginning, people took to the streets because they felt their votes were stolen, but when the state responded to these protests with extreme violence and cruelty, even more people joined the protests, which have become the largest in the history of our country! And COVID-19 pushed the red button: Lukashenko did not take any measures to prevent or protect people in the pandemic, so our medical system collapsed. What is more, Lukashenko humiliated people who died from the virus, saying it is cleansing the Belarusian nation of old, sick and disabled people...

*Women have not only been in the vanguard of the political opposition but also of the civil resistance. Why have they decided to take a stand?*

That is an interesting question! One could also ask why they have been asleep for so many years. Three years after Belarus' independence, Lukashenko came to power in 1994 in the first democratic elections ever held. For us, he was like a prince granting us freedom. Until recently, women have been Lukashenko's core electorate because they enjoyed generous social guarantees, such as three years of childcare leave. There was some kind of unwritten social agreement between him and the women in the country, something like »I'll feed you as long as you remain silent«. They hoped that he would take care of them after all. But they realised that his so-called social protection was a fraud. Seeing this, they also realised that they don't want this kind of »prince« anymore, that they have to take control and decide how to have a better life for themselves.

»Women have changed their attitudes«

*What led to the erosion of this social agreement?*

Women have always been in a kind of sandwich position between taking care of their children and their parents. They are tired of seeing Lukashenko solve the country's economic problems at the expense of their free, invisible labour. What is more, he curtailed some of the previous social guarantees, for example childcare has been reduced to only about 20 per cent of the average salary! Women's values and attitudes have changed, and they are fed up with his misogynous political style.

*Could you give an example?*

During the electoral campaign in 2020, he publicly stated that the constitution »is not made for a woman« and that our society »hasn't matured to the point to vote for a woman«. <sup>1</sup> Women started to wonder how much longer it's going to take for them to be treated as equals instead of second-class citizens. During the same electoral campaign, Lukashenko said he would quit if the people of Belarus voted him out of office. But now, as women and men are taking to the streets and shouting, »My »no« means »no««, he continues to insist that we still want him as our president. He is like a domestic tyrant, and women are now demanding political divorce!

*What are the biggest challenges to women's rights and gender equality in Belarus?*

There are so many! Domestic violence against women is still a huge problem. In 2018, Lukashenko rejected a draft bill criminalising domestic violence, describing it as nonsense taken from the West. Another challenge is institutionalised discrimination. Women are banned from 181 professions, including working as a lumberjack, blacksmith, miner or international truck driver. Women, especially those who are politically active, risk state violence. When they are detained, they are threatened with sexual assault, torture, or seizure of their children – and too many times they become victims of these crimes. According to Decree No. 18, the state is allowed to remove a child from the family when women »perform their parental duties improperly«. But the law doesn't state any clear definition of what »improper« means, which paves the way for the abuse of power.

»It is a Cultural Blossoming«

*If we look at the media coverage of the protests, the dominant images have been of women in red and white clothes, protesting peacefully, holding flowers, singing lullabies. Would you agree that this is a feminist revolution as it has often been labelled to be?*

It is a feminist revolution if we speak about the popularity of feminist ideas. Our society has become more sensitised to topics such as domestic violence or gender inequality and feminism, but the current revolution cannot be reduced to feminism – rather, it is a cultural revolution, a cultural blossoming! In the past year, more than 200 songs were written that have become hits on social media, and people created visual art about the issue. Plus, more theatre plays were written and staged





Not only are traditional gender roles prevalent in Belarus, but women are also banned from certain professions. That is why Olga Karatch and her team initiated a campaign highlighting women's capabilities in work of all kinds.

than in the last 26 years! You mentioned the red and white clothes – they refer to the national flag of the short-lived Belarusian National Republic that was declared more than 100 years ago. The flag re-emerged briefly after the collapse of the USSR and was adopted as the state flag until Lukashenko held an illegitimate referendum in 1995 bringing back Soviet symbols, including the Soviet flag. Therefore, the clothing in red and white symbolises the struggle for democratic values, for the freedom of the Belarusian people.

*What about the three female presidential candidates Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, Maria Kolesnikova and Veronica Tsepkalo – what role did they play in the protests?*

To my understanding, these three brave women inspired protests nationwide because they also represent different types of women: Svetlana Tikhanovskaya is a housewife, Maria Kolesnikova is a feminist and cultural activist, and Veronica Tsepkalo is a woman from the IT sphere. Therefore, this spectrum inspired feminists as well as women who are satisfied with their role as housewives.

*You founded the NGO Our House in 2005. Its YouTube Channel has become quite popular since the beginning of the presidential campaign in April 2020. What is the reason for its popularity?*

We do not produce news but videos with topics and information that people are craving, like how to protest in a peaceful way or how to survive persecution, to name a few. We share our experiences and important practical tips. We were also the first to address taboo topics, such as the torture inflicted under Stalin, the repression after World War II, the mass participation of Belarusians in the war in Afghanistan, etc. A new culture of discussion and interest has emerged in Belarus. People want answers!

»We need to tackle  
taboo topics«

*How does Our House empower civil society, especially women?*

We do that with numerous advocacy campaigns. In 2012, we launched a campaign called »Caution, Militia!« to stop police harassment of women. I started it after I had been detained because of my political activism. I faced physical violence and threats of being raped. We filed a case with the Supreme Court, and the policeman in charge was imprisoned and also lost his job. Then there weren't any cases of harassment, at least of women,

registered for nearly seven years. But last year, numbers exploded. Between early August 2020 and the beginning of 2021, about 35,000 people were detained and tortured. Currently, 49 women are recognised as political prisoners, and more than 15,000 women have been prosecuted in administrative cases.

*How can institutions such as ifa help strengthen a culture of non-violence as the foundation of stable democratic change?*

Sharing your knowledge about peaceful conflict resolution is crucial. I learned a lot from my cooperation with German institutions. Peacebuilding is easy to discuss on a theoretical level, but when you have to face your enemy in dialogue, it is quite hard to deal with your emotions. I learned to use my emotions as energy for the good cause, for concrete action plans. Awakening and restoring our historic memory is another challenge where we need external help. In order to build a stable democratic future, we need to start tackling taboo topics of our past, such as Chernobyl and Soviet repressions, the gulags, military rape from all sides. All of these traumas of our society are still being passed on from one generation to another. It will be a very painful process, but it is a necessary one.

*You said that after these protests, nothing will be the same. What are your hopes for Belarus' future? Could these past developments lead to long-term peace and gender equality in Belarus?*

Definitely! A shift in values and a transformation of opinions are happening – both are changing our picture of the world. The society has woken up, women have woken up. The price we have already paid – all the losses and victims of violence – must make some kind of sense. It is impossible for us to continue to agree with these brutal, patriarchal politics. My hopes for Belarus' future are Lukashenko's removal, democratic reforms and a long-lasting peaceful culture. Belarus is our common home, our house, and we will rebuild it!

Interview by  
Juliane Pfordte

1 Andrew Roth. »Women unite in maverick attempt to unseat Lukashenko in Belarus«, *The Guardian*, July 26, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jul/26/belarus-svetlana-tikhanovskaya-unseat-alexander-lukashenko>.



**OLGA KARATCH** is one of the founders of the peace movement Nash Dom in Belarus. In December 2005, she and her colleagues founded Our House, an international centre for civil initiatives and one of the leading peace-making organisations in Belarus championing for non-violent action. Our House addresses a variety of issues related to violence, including the brutality inherent in Belarusian power structures. Karatch has also helped found various international network initiatives such as the Women's Peace Dialogue and the Global Peacebuilders Summit. She is currently one of the most popular YouTube bloggers in Belarus; her video messages about non-violent protests in Belarus were viewed by more than 11 million people in the last six months.

# RADICALISATION AND THE ROLE OF GENDER



# UNDERSTANDING GENDER AS A FACTOR OF RADICALISATION

In the last decade, it has become increasingly apparent that gender-related developmental issues influence the tendencies of young women and men to radicalise or not. Researcher and therapist *Harald Weilnböck* and his Berlin NGO Cultures Interactive are addressing this phenomenon in their prevention work within the field of right-wing extremism.

In 2017, four years after her troubling study on the radicalisation of the right-wing terrorist Anders Breivik, Norwegian journalist and author Åsne Seierstad published *Two Sisters*, a novel showing how complex the connections between gender and radicalisation have become within the last few years. The work portrays two Norwegian teenagers with Somali background, Ayan and Leila, who decide to leave their home to join the Islamic State in Syria. Their fictional story sheds light on the process of radicalisation, namely that this phenomenon is not necessarily limited to young men without prospects, but rather showing that people of any gender, anywhere in the world, could decide to join the jihad. The extreme right movement has found their female »icons« too, like the terrorist Beate Zschäpe of the German Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU) and the politician Marine Le Pen, leader of the French political party Front National.

According to Harald Weilnböck, co-founder of the Berlin NGO Cultures Interactive e.V., the German film *Kriegerin* from 2011, released shortly after exposing the NSU, brought the issue of women in violent right-wing extremism to the attention of a broader audience. Internationally known as *Combat Girls*, the film traces the path of a young female Neo-Nazi in Germany through all the ambiguity of her early adulthood until her violent death.

## UNDERESTIMATING FEMALE EXTREMISTS

The discourse about white supremacist and Islamist extremism is including more and more discussions about women's involvement, and in focussing on the subject of gender, we are gaining a better understanding of the process of radicalisation. Violent extremist organisations use typical male and female gender roles in a strategic way. For instance, people tend to find women more approachable and therefore they are often used to convince young people to join extremists' ranks. Plus, the common misconception that women are more harmless than men is useful to them, too. Even law enforcement underestimates the role of female extremists as organisers, recruiters and aggressors. In addition to that, every kind of violent extremism – whether it is Christian, right-wing or Islamist fundamentalism – is based on various gender related prejudices and attitudes, including sexism and homophobia; two aspects that are central to the understanding of the role of zealotry in the life of extremists. This is why every sort of violent extremism is based on a philosophy of gender inequality, laying the foundation for the acceptance of other inequalities, like antisemitism, racism and antagonistic thinking.

Which means, women not only enter what is typically considered male territory, but in so doing, men are also confronted with gender roles at another level, including their own insecurities about what it means to be masculine or their fears of an unknown, perhaps divergent sexuality. Thereby, they seek refuge in an extremist worldview, and in this way, gender issues do not simply concern women; they are an aspect that men consider as well. In the course of prevention work, therapists have found that young people's search for a stable concept of self mostly revolves around gender issues. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that social and gender motives play a major role in radicalisation – and that when it comes to extremism, gender-related identity conflicts can often be more subversive than questions of ideology or faith.

For this reason, the chances are small that generalised anti-discrimination or anti-racism workshops and education will prevent young people from becoming extremists or even persuade them to leave their extremist environment. According to Weilnböck, it is vital to give people the ability to reflect on their own biography, identity, and social contexts. He is a practitioner of group dynamic psychotherapy in which his clients – either in mixed gender or separated gender groups – talk with each other in order to find biographical, familial and social milieu traces, leading them to successfully acknowledge the sources of their affinity for violent radicalisation and hatred. For his open process approaches, Weilnböck does not use the term »therapeutic.« Instead, he introduces the term »intensive pedagogy«, distinguishing it from traditional educational work. In this concept, it is essential for the facilitator to empathise with the vulnerability of the client, reflecting trust and respecting the client's right to confidentiality even with violent offenders in custody. The client's self-awareness, particularly regarding his or her own ideas on gender, is central in the process. Weilnböck's NGO, Cultures Interactive, calls this narrative group work method »intensive pedagogical civic education« as it is based on sharing individual experiences and connecting narrative accounts and emotion with theoretical educational content.

## MEN HAVE GENDER TOO

Through the NGO's 2014/15 European project titled *WomEx – Women/Gender in Extremism* that researched female extremists, the perspective on gender has become central in more traditional methods of social work as well. The research shows that many interventions to help women leave, for example white supremacist movements,



happened because they had a kind of safety net, namely a place like a women's shelter where they could escape a violent relationship. The situations which usually lead women to leave extremist groups are gender specific as well. Pregnancies and parenthood pose an extra challenge for social work, particularly if one parent decides to quit the scene while the other one stays committed to it. Still, as Weilnböck underlines, »men have gender, too«, meaning that they are under »typical« masculine constraints and perpetual gender roles which often lock them into fixed concepts of how to be and how to act. In the face of violence, as men in extremist groups, they are expected to be strong, tough and unemotional, inciting young men to become perpetrators.

It is notable that although gender aspects have been gaining more recognition, the topic of sexuality is still excluded when considering radicalisation and prevention. But the anti-Semitic terrorist act in Halle, Germany in the autumn of 2019 for instance, shows an obvious intersection of the right-wing extremist scene and that of the so-called »Incel« movement, in which young men claim to be »involuntarily celibate« because they can't find a partner. However, when it comes to dealing with issues of sexualisation and considering how sexual repression and unacknowledged desires often play a role in a person's tendency towards extremism and hatred, broader prevention strategies still fall short.

Ultimately, there is still a lot of research to be done when it comes to understanding the various dimensions of identity that are interwoven in extremist biographies. This is not only relevant for prevention but for society as a whole. Aspects of personal experience and self-awareness are not yet sufficiently integrated into the regular

school curriculum, leaving the doors wide open for positions of toxic masculinity, sexism, misogyny, binarity\* or homophobia to become widely accepted, thereby leaving us vulnerable to an »extremism of the mainstream«. To this effect, studies have shown that there is a connection between extremist positions and mass popular culture, which means preventing extremism always includes taking a keen look at the mainstream culture as well.

And, as Weilnböck points out, if a person is directed into constructive, pro-social activities, there are numerous cases where individual extremists have been able to hone certain tendencies for the better. For instance, many young people of all genders explain their path into extremism as a kind of emancipation – from the expectations of their family or society, from traditional gender roles, from experiences of being put down. In this regard then, it would appear as if, to some degree, they were misguided into negative behaviours by their need for empowerment. Once they have realised this, there is potential to take this understanding and turn it into a positive impulse of empowerment instead. It is this spark of potential, as Weilnböck explains, that can be used to help people become involved actors of a democratic civil society.

Text by  
Steffen Greiner

\*Here, binarity means the classification of gender into two distinct, opposite forms of masculine and feminine (»man« and »woman«), excluding the existence of other forms of gender identity.



**HARALD WEILNBÖCK** is a practitioner and researcher of good practice methods in both the prevention of and rehabilitation from right-wing extremism, offering his programmes in schools and prisons. Weilnböck earned his Ph. D. at UCLA, Los Angeles, his professorial degree at the University of Leipzig and also completed training in group dynamic psychotherapy. In 2005, he co-founded the NGO Cultures Interactive, which now is part of the national programme Prevent Violent Extremism (PVE). Since 2010, he has supported the establishment of the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network and conducted numerous EU-wide and national projects.



The NGO Cultures Interactive has developed and piloted innovative and sustainable approaches to prevent and counter youth extremism, polarisation and violence. They seek to promote capacity building in view of a resilient civil society.





# HOW DO YOU DEAL WITH EXTREMISM/RADICALISATION IN YOUR WORK?

»I am working as a Senior Monitoring and Evaluation Officer at the Justice Centre for Legal Aid in Jordan. While my organisation does not specifically tackle extremism/radicalisation issues, we primarily focus on increasing public awareness about individual rights and ensuring equal access to justice. We believe that the inability to gain access to justice, meaning the inability to hire a lawyer and/or the lack of legal knowledge, could lead people to feel unfairly treated, which could result in radical behaviour. I think that in order to prevent radicalisation, people need to feel like they are being treated equally and without discrimination.«

**JIDA OJJEH, JORDAN**

»Iraqi society is very diverse, which impacts the mindset of the population. As Iraqi citizens, we face different forms of extremism in our everyday life because of our identity or our religious and ethnic background. Personally, instead of avoiding it, I try to get to know and understand what made a person become an extremist or to act in an extremist way.«

**NIJIRVAN SHAYAL, IRAQ**

»In our organisation, we work to promote discussion, advocacy and a culture of dialogue among young people. We believe this helps them to settle conflicts by promoting understanding, structuring arguments and reaching common grounds. Through our work, we help young people raise their awareness about issues that concern their communities and the world.«

**ABDEL MOUMEN ALIGUECHI, ALGERIA**

# A JOURNEY FROM EXTREMISM TO ADVOCACY FOR MINORITY RIGHTS

*Aizat Shamsuddin*

Malaysian society is highly diverse when it comes to ethnicity, class and religion. Growing up, CCP alumnus *Aizat Shamsuddin* became influenced by political Islam, leading him to join a Salafist movement. His own doubts and curiosity for the world beyond the movement along with a growing network outside his »bubble« helped to reverse his ways. Now he is advocating for intersectional dialogue and peace.

No one is born an extremist or a terrorist. Many factors can lead a person to become radicalised. I was born and raised in a working-class family in the northwest of Malaysia. For my family, as for many other Malay-Muslim families, »Malay values« are important. They are heavily influenced by cultural traditions and Islamic virtues which emphasise humbleness, openness and tolerance towards others, which is particularly important within multi-racial, ethnic and religious Malaysia. Over time though, these cultural values have been diminished by the spread of political Islam through the Islamisation of the legal and education systems in Malaysia.

## MY WAY INTO POLITICAL ISLAM

From the 1990s to early 2000s, government-controlled TV channels, state-sanctioned sermons at mosques and in school classes were the main platforms for information about Islam and politics. As a teenager, I was infiltrated with the idea that »my Islamic identity should come before my Malay identity«. Suddenly, Muslims were told by political and religious elites to strive for a stricter Islam or Sharia system in order to be »more Muslim«, and it became an obligation I felt strongly about acting upon.

In my experience, political Islam inculcates the idea of »us« versus »them«, or Muslims versus non-Muslims. It is a narrative of fear disseminated in schools and mosques in Malaysia, claiming Islam is under the threat by enemies, meaning liberals, Christians and Jews. The oppression and injustice against Muslims in Bosnia, Palestine or Iraq are frequently cited as a testament to incite anger and assert political dominance. Although human rights are certainly often violated in these places, one largely fails to recognise the complexity of the geopolitical problem from these examples. Instead, further hate against certain groups is incited merely because of religious beliefs.

Furthermore, Malaysian society has been divided by race, religion and class for a long time. Following the country's independence in 1957, many policies based on affirmative action were introduced to boost the socio-economics of the Malay population. This supplied another narrative of fear in the Malay society that I was told back then: we will lose these privileges if we do not defend them. This burgeoning fear drove me into political Islam and to believe that Malay Muslims should dominate the political arena to protect our rights and religion. I joined the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (PAS), an Islamist party that champions Malay-Muslim viewpoints and aspires to establish Sharia law in the country.

In high school, I followed PAS regularly. I bought their tabloid Harakah, which means »The Movement«, I participated in their campaign tours and rallies, and even worked as a teacher at their private religious school. The key goal of PAS was to establish Sharia law and implement a set of hudud or criminal punishments such as public flogging and stoning to prevent moral offences, including adultery, sex before marriage, intoxication, etc. At that time, I believed that it was important to replace the current civil system inherited from the British and deter the moral corruption that, in my eyes then, was rampant in modern Malay society.

## A VICIOUS ENVIRONMENT

I wanted to become a lawyer to establish Sharia law, which led me to complete my Bachelor's Degree in Sharia and Law at an Islamic university. There, I started to get acquainted with Salafism through my university lecturer, a graduate of the Islamic University of Madinah in Saudi Arabia. Salafism is predominantly practiced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, but it has also taken root in Malaysia, especially after the terror attacks of 9/11 when Saudi Arabia started to intensify its soft power in Muslim-majority countries, including Malaysia, mainly through education. Salafism in Malaysia is an ideological and sectarian Sunni movement that advocates for the rigid and puritanical practice of Islam – from forcefully eliminating cultural-religious practices, like group recitation of prayers and singing, to excommunicating others, especially Shia Muslims and non-Muslims. Salafists also believe in the absolute allegiance to the current rulers, as evident in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

After being introduced to Salafism with its stronger ideological teachings that affirmed my exclusivity and righteousness as a Sunni Muslim, I left the PAS and joined the Salafist movement. Particularly when sectarian war was spiralling in the Levant at the time, Salafism fuelled my anger to support wars against the Shia regime in Syria and Shia Muslims in general. However, I faced many humiliating moments within my Salafist circle; for instance, when I trimmed my beard, my lecturer scolded me, calling me »kafir«, or infidel, because it is mandatory for men to keep their beard long in Salafism. And it was not just me: I witnessed my female friends being publicly humiliated for not covering their feet, and they were sent back to their dorm to cover up in order to join the class. Moreover, in many university classes, students were not allowed to ask sensitive, critical questions related to Islam or Malay rights because it was considered rude toward the teachers and seemed like you were doubting your own religion.



The fact that I was living in this vicious and fearful environment made me rethink my belief in Salafism, and so I started to question the practice of Islam, particularly with regards to compassion and egalitarianism, which the Quran repeatedly emphasises. After 4 years, I decided to leave the Salafist movement, and I also abandoned my ambition to serve as a lawyer.

## TURNING OVER A NEW LEAF

It took me a long time to process and self-reflect. During this time, I learned that other people, including myself, were never »Muslim enough« in the eye of these radical movements. My journey to not only be a better Muslim but also my commitment to my religion was manipulated by self-interested politicians and hateful intellectuals. I also found it unbearable to cast judgement on others just because they did not suit my version of Islam. Plus, I began to notice that my social exchanges had been limited to Malay-Muslims since high school and that this homogenous lifestyle made me susceptible to a narrative of exclusivity, fear and hate. I began to wonder if my ability to think critically, to understand the complexity of the world and to nurture empathy beyond my own religion and social bubble was being obscured.

Consequently, I started to explore nuanced debates about religion, politics and justice. Thanks to social media, scholars like Khaled Abou El Fadl, and growing progressive Muslim organisations such as Sisters in Islam, the Indonesian Nahdlatul Ulama and Muslims for Progressive Values, I could get more information and engage in critical discussions. I also started to get out of my comfort zone by participating in law events to interact and build friendships with people outside of my existing circle. During my final year at university, I developed my critical thinking skills and honed diverse networks consisting of peace and human rights advocates. I am still at the stage of deconstructing my innate, absolutist way of thinking and learning to fully embrace humanity and justice for all.

This tiring yet enlightening journey led me to establish my own organisation in 2015 called Komuniti Muslim Universal (KMU Malaysia) to counter hate and violence as well as to promote empathy and critical thinking, especially among the youth in Malaysia. My friends and I want to help those who might have experienced similar journeys and are looking for alternative narratives. Our advocacy approach focusses on promoting civic and citizenship education through dialogue since this is not typically practiced in Malaysia. Young people are often segregated by race, religion and class, limiting their exposure to interreligious and inter-

cultural engagements, which consequently makes them unable to build empathy for cultural diversity and the rights of people different from themselves.

To achieve just that, we organise talks at KMU with youth from different minority groups, such as Ahmadiyyah, Christians and LGBT+. They interact with each other through conversation, games, group work and cultural celebrations. We make sure that discussions are honest, continuous and well-facilitated. Some of the outcomes are heart-warming as participants start to develop empathy, share values and, most importantly, exchange stories that highlight their real-life challenges facing discrimination and prosecution from state and society. These humanising experiences beyond their social bubble show the participants how to view others as equal in rights and dignity. In so doing, they also start to gradually challenge the preconceived narratives rooted in hatred and dogmas, applying empathy and sometimes even becoming active human rights advocates. We at KMU are convinced that no one is born a terrorist or extremist and that dialogue can build a more resilient society that fights against racism and religious hatred. This advocacy work faces many obstacles due to religious authorities who repress the freedom of expression and affluent fundamentalist groups who incite hate and violence. However, our passion and support from our allies who believe in our cause as well as the positive changes we are making, are all strong motivators for continuing the work we do.



**AIZAT SHAMSUDDIN** is a project coordinator at Komuniti Muslim Universal with more than six years of research and practical experience in human rights, good governance with local and international organisations and the prevention of extremism through the mainstreaming of inclusive education and dialogues. In 2018, he received the Australia Awards scholarship by ASEAN and the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Shamsuddin was a CCP Fellow at the Nuremberg Human Rights Centre in 2017. Earning his master's from the University of Melbourne, he specialised in counterterrorism, conflict studies and political Islam. Shamsuddin also holds a Bachelor's Degree in Sharia and Law from the Islamic Science University of Malaysia.



The organisation Komuniti Muslim Universal fights for respect and tolerance while informing participants about the subtle ways radicalisation can take hold.



# » IT IS EASIER TO TALK ABOUT ART THAN MENTAL HEALTH «

*Sonal Dhanani*

Countering and preventing violent extremism are at the heart of *Sonal Dhanani's* work. It was a terrorist attack in her hometown Karachi that made her realise that the community needed stability for sustainable peace. This is why her approach to building peace promotes mental health through creative expression.

*Sonal, you were planning on doing your master's in business administration when you decided to take another path – the one of empowering communities in Pakistan through creative expression. How and when did this journey begin?*

In 2013, I was part of a project at Aga Khan University to improve early childhood education in schools in the region of Baluchistan. I became increasingly interested in creating educational methods outside of the typical curriculum – a system I had struggled in as a student myself – using arts and crafts, music and storytelling. Soon afterwards I started an educational camp for young students with Aga Khan Youth and Sports Board called Jugnoo – which means »fireflies«. This camp aims to promote critical thinking, creative expression and tolerance. I remember once when we were conducting a camp in Northern Pakistan, a student asked me why we don't have schools like Jugnoo in Pakistan. This was the moment when I decided to dedicate all my energy to making this happen.

*You continued this journey in 2016, when you founded Parindey, a social enterprise that offers alternative educational camps and mental health programmes. Why did you choose to focus on mental support?*

In 2015, I lost a close family member in a terror attack on Ismaili Shi'a Muslims, a religious minority my family belongs to, in Karachi. I was shattered. And it was even more shocking to learn that the attack was planned by a graduate student of one of Karachi's top universities. I could not stop asking myself where this hatred came from; how it was possible that an educated youth could kill 47 people based on religion! I started researching and found out that mental health issues such as depression, anxiety or posttraumatic disorder are risk factors, making people susceptible to violent extremism. The problem is that mental health is still being stigmatised in Pakistan and remedies hardly exist. That is why I decided to focus on providing mental health support in order to make people and communities more resilient to violent extremism.

»We need to create  
safe spaces«

*How would you define resilience in this context and what does it require?*

Resilient communities and people have the capacity to tackle uncertainty, to adapt to change and to recover from human or natural disasters. They are connected

with each other and able to identify those who put seeds of hatred in their community. They are therefore less prone to being instrumentalised by extremists. One of the most common resources needed to build community resilience is to create safe spaces where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds can come together, exchange ideas, ask critical questions and accept their differences. Tolerance is one of the core values of being resilient. Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the lack of tolerance makes it is easy for extremists to misuse religion to divide us.

*Creative expression plays an important role in your work. How would you describe the potential of art in civic and citizenship education?*

There are feelings people hesitate speaking about. Art is a way of opening a door and connecting the communities we work in, especially with the more traditionally minded communities, because it is easier to talk about art than about mental health issues. We therefore usually avoid the term »mental health« in our programmes and use words such as »self-exploration« or »healing drum circle« instead. I also consider art a kind of peacebuilding tool because when people of different backgrounds meet and share their thoughts through art, when they create their own narratives and learn to decide for themselves whether they would like to support a certain ideology or not, this also leads to resilient, peaceful communities.

*You mainly work with young people. Why is youth empowerment in Pakistan important?*

Pakistan is a very young country: 64 percent of the population is younger than 30; one third is between 15 and 29. Much of what happens in the future depends on the input these young people receive today. Unfortunately, violent extremism tends to have a deep-rooted impact on them. We therefore have to empower them to become agents of positive change for a better future of our country.

»A stable person can  
bring stable peace«

*What have been successful methods for encouraging youth to prevent and counter extremism?*

One example of countering extremism is Parindey's programme »Khayal«. Victims of terrorist, ethnic, religious violence as well as victims of domestic violence participated in a three-month process focussing on self-discovery and creative expression. Our purpose was to give them a platform for addressing and chan-



nelising their emotions. We provided them with tools like counselling, art therapy and meditation through which they could find purpose in life and become positive members of society. We believe that a stable person can bring stable peace.

*And in the field of preventing extremism?*

Cross-culture interactions and training programmes are a great method. As our communities are segregated by religion and ethnicity, they have preconceived notions about each other. Cross-culture programmes allow them to break these narratives and to explore other religions by meeting individuals and working with them. In one programme called »Champions of Change«, we focus on leadership, online advocacy and stakeholder management including local community leaders, educational institutes and religious leaders. After a 30-hour training, students design activities to foster healthy dialogue and reduce hateful narratives on their campuses. We partner with universities in Karachi because, unfortunately, violent clashes on campuses and the recruitment of university students for violent extremism are increasing.

*What are some other common tactics used by extremists?*

They tend to offer free food and money, involve people in their agendas to spread their messages on social media and invite people to gatherings. Unemployment and lack of education are other major factors leading people to be easily recruited. Plus, extremists play to people's fear of the afterlife, promising rewards to those joining their groups. Similarly, when a person becomes a victim of violence or violent extremism – like my family and I experienced – you are in a constant state of fear. This permanent anxiety as well as a traumatic loss might lead people to seek comfort in extremist groups or even to take revenge.

»Do not build up  
a fantasy world«

*To what extent are women and men radicalised differently?*

In terms of action, I can say that boys and men are more involved in violent extremism, but women are equally radicalised. When they get involved in extremist networks, it has a huge impact on the whole family. For example, if a mother is associated with an extremist group she tends to inculcate same narrative and practices in the

family. The problem is that in Pakistan, we have limited public spaces for women, most are religious. And that is where extremist narratives are usually formed and can be passed on. Our workshops, open to both women and men, provide safe spaces for women to share their thoughts and experiences outside of a religious context.

*Apart from the resilience-based approach, what differentiates your work from those of other civil society organisations in Pakistan?*

I would say it is connected to the way we facilitate the trainings. I don't use many technological gadgets so people don't think they have to possess those things. And I choose to work in an environment that is familiar to them, such as community centres or public parks. I believe it can be harmful to create a fantasy world because after the training participants have to go back home to their own realities, which usually cannot be so easily changed. I remember one incident when a young girl committed suicide right after she attended one of our camps. To this day, I don't know if there was really a connection, but maybe returning to her conservative, underprivileged community after the session was too much to bear. This incident was alarming and influenced the way we conduct our trainings.

*One last question: What is your personal resilience based on?*

As a member of the Pakistani National Youth Council, I can see positive opportunities for change at the policy level. Of course, we cannot deny that extremism is growing in Pakistan, but we have to recognise that there are many people making efforts to reduce it! My work gives me strength and hope. And there are many magical moments that stay with me. I remember one Jugnoo camp held in Islamabad where a kid with ADHD participated. He was very active and quickly switched from one session to another, but we accepted him the way he was, and the other participants received him with open arms. When his father came to the presentation at the end of the camp, he was so touched when he saw him. I remember him crying and saying, »My son is 13 years old, and in those 13 years, I have never seen him smile like this.«

Interview by  
Juliane Pfordte

\* Daesh is an Arabic acronym for Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant. The term is often used by Muslims to better separate the terrorist group from Islam.



**SONAL DHANANI** is a CVE/PVE, neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) and art-as-therapy practitioner as well as a trainer and founder of Parindey Training and Consulting. She works to build resilient communities through countering violent extremism and promoting mental health in Pakistan. Dhanani has participated in platforms like the European Union Interfaith Dialogue, Global Peace Chain and Pakistan Youth Development Index, designing policies to involve youth in the process of preventing violent extremism and co-creating solutions for sustainable change. In 2019, she became a member of Pakistan's first National Youth Council building programmes and policies for civic engagement and youth-focussed institutional reform. Dhanani was a CCP Fellow in 2020 at the organisation Inside Out.





CCP alumna Sonal Dhanani is working to counter radicalisation through arts education.





# LET'S PLAY RADICALISATION *INSIDE OUT*

Radicalisation can emerge out of a variety of contexts. Young people in search of their identity are specifically targeted by radical groups. Using XGames, *INSIDE OUT* conveys the radicalisation process in the form of a game.

INSIDE OUT has developed all kinds of fun programmes – no matter how paradox that might sound when it comes to extremism and radicalisation. For us, it's important to get young people excited about democracy, not to bore or lecture them. Besides that, having fun while learning is proven to be more effective. We often spend just a day at a school or other educational institution. That means our programmes have to be engaging and appealing in order to have an impact. At the same time, it's also crucial to provide information about counselling centres that work with more radicalised people in the long term. Our services usually deal with universal prevention, meaning they're aimed at people who are not yet entrenched in a scene.

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF XGAMES

The concept behind XGames is to involve the players in a game, a kind of experiment, about self-awareness. At first it seems harmless – playful jokes are made, people give each other friendly pats on the back. But subtly, the scenario changes and becomes increasingly threatening. Similar to the process of radicalisation which often initially goes unnoticed, the game escalates, and the next thing you know, you've »killed« another person in the game. By the end, namely at the negative climax of the game, the players have literally got played. The deception is laid bare for all to see, and the players realise that they were manipulated, instrumentalised, incited and subtly checkmated. This becomes suddenly clear to everyone, and the reactions range from amusement and relief to anger. And that is the purpose of XGames: people should tangibly feel what it is like to be radicalised.

Over a period of a year and after countless trials, failures and improvements, the game was developed by a team of various professionals including an actor, a director and a religious scholar. Thanks to funding through CCP Synergy, we were also able to incorporate the experiences of former fighters, who are now involved with the Lebanese NGO Fighters for Peace, into XGames.

## WHO IS THE GAME INTENDED FOR?

In principle, anyone can play the XGames who understands irony and is capable of looking critically at him or herself, reflecting from a meta-perspective. We played with theologians, educators, prospective officers of the Bundeswehr and those in leadership positions in Germany and Lebanon as well as with refugees and non-refugees in various languages – all of them can be radicalised. But also made aware of the fact.

## CAN EXTREMISM BE CURBED THROUGH PLAY?

From our experience with roughly 500 XGames, we can say, yes, it works. In fact, we think it's the best approach.

Over the past few years, we have used the game to talk to right-wing extremist youth about the death penalty. In one of the games, a player fictitiously has to endure the death penalty, and together we have the opportunity to critically question and reflect on the appropriateness of the »death penalty for child molesters«, which is a popular statement in the right-wing scene.

Numerous people with experience as refugees have also played the game. Time and again, many of these young people have said, »Hey, that's exactly how the leaders (in this or that war zone) did that to us!« We've seen that the reflection phase of the game is the highlight for many refugees, which, interestingly enough, negates the initial concerns that the game could trigger re-traumatisation.

More information about INSIDE OUT and other projects can be found at [www.io-3.de](http://www.io-3.de).



**INSIDE OUT** was founded by Tilman Weinig and Alexej Boris. The organisation develops programmes for political education and the prevention of extremism, radicalisation and group-related hostility to other people.





INSIDE OUT particularly works with youth to make them aware of the mechanisms and steps of radicalisation in a playful way.





# WHAT ARE IMPORTANT STEPS TO COUNTER EXTREMISM IN YOUR COUNTRY?

»Education is the key to helping people as individuals and as groups to counter extremism. For that, we need to ensure everyone has access to education – especially children. It is particularly important to help people stay educated because dropouts or people with little access to education are more vulnerable to extremism. We also need to work on equal participation and inclusion within society, especially for young people, women, people with special needs and marginalised groups.«

**ABDEL MOUMEN ALIGUECHI, ALGERIA**

»Since extremism and radicalisation are deeply rooted in our society, preventing radicalisation is not an easy task, particularly because of the impact of the war between the neighbouring countries and the fighting going on in our country.

Some of the points which need to be tackled if the Iraqi government wants to overcome and prevent radicalisation in Iraqi society are to provide religious education for all religions acknowledged in the constitution, to reform the educational system to be secular and inclusive, to improve the overall socio-economic situation of the population, and to offer programmes aimed at deradicalising youth and reintegrating divided communities.

There is a clear connection between gender and radicalisation. Most of the studies related to countering violent extremism only focus on men and youth in general and ignore some of the marked differences between males and females in these processes. There is very little information on the recruitment and radicalisation of girls and women into violent extremism even though in many countries, including Syria, Iraq, Chechnya, and Sri Lanka, women and girls have been active and willing participants in terrorism.«

**NIJIRVAN SHAYAL, IRAQ**

# WHAT'S NEXT? LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*Karin Bračko-Kraft*

Gender inequality influences all of us. Many women face sexism, are disproportionally left with familial caregiving roles and suffer from lower wages in the workplace, while men can become victims of society's hypermasculine expectations which force them into competition and violence. Some people who do not identify with the gender binary are marginalised, threatened and even killed because of their gender identity. The ongoing pandemic and the rise of right-wing governments have further increased the gender divide and garnered extremist views. In the workshop »Civic and Citizenship Education« we collected ways to fight for gender equality and decrease people's chances of falling for extremist views.

## PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY

### 01 BE AWARE OF GENDER POWER RELATIONS

Challenging inequalities means challenging power relations between different genders. It is important to acknowledge your own position when raising your voice while being sensitive to other voices. Be aware of power relations and change them in your own life, family, community and society. The connection between liberating yourself and liberating society is very powerful. Start with your own experiences, your own biography, be self-critical and engage in dialogue.

It is important that gender equality is not reduced to legislation and quotas. Therefore, we must talk about participation and empowerment, about our abilities to influence society and government, as well as about the roles each one of us has in society and the role of the state and its regulations.

### 02 USE GENDER NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

Language shapes us by influencing our perception and understanding of roles and behaviour. It has the power to encourage sexism, racism and other forms of discrimination. Therefore, by avoiding biased, discriminatory or demeaning word choices which imply that one sex or social gender is the norm, gender neutral language reduces gender stereotyping, promotes social change and contributes to achieving gender equality. It should be integrated into school lessons, supported by the government and widely used in the media.

### 03 ENSURE GENDER MAINSTREAMING IN EDUCATION

It is essential to invest in preschool, elementary and secondary education which closes the learning gap and gender divide. We need educational policies that equalise, which requires adequate policies at the local level and measures aimed at implementing gender mainstreaming in school curricula, teaching methods, career guidance and educator training.

Education is needed to become aware about one's own rights. Knowledge empowers individuals to act and is also a key to prevent early marriage and discrimination of non-binary genders.

### 04 SUPPORT SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP INITIATIVES

Social entrepreneurship not only gives practical and innovative answers to urgent issues but allows people economic empowerment and financial sustainability, especially for marginalised groups. Social businesses are a good way to provide women with a possibility to develop the skills they need to enter the job market and navigate the institutional and economic barriers linked to race, immigration status, health issues and gender. Social entrepreneurship also tackles social issues by providing employment and giving marginalised groups the possibility to generate income and live a self-determined, financially independent life. Through this process, the community itself often changes its attitude towards marginalised groups of society; therefore, promoting social enterprises can be a good way to foster more gender equality.



PREVENTING AND CONTAINING  
RADICALISATION

The use of digital technology has significantly increased in society during the past years. Therefore, internet and new media should be used more often in civic education and more online educational tools need to be developed. This would help people to access the knowledge needed more easily and gain certain skills more quickly, which would also contribute positively to greater social inclusion. Also, it would expand the access of various focus groups to education, reduce the costs of implementing curricula and improve its effectiveness.

01 ENSURE INCLUSIVE  
EDUCATION

Education is key to countering extremism. For that we need to ensure access to education for everyone – especially children. Dropouts or people with little access to education are more vulnerable to extremism, so it is important to help people stay educated. To make students feel equal and accepted in school, the educational system should be reformed to be secular and inclusive while encouraging students to form their own opinions. Different points of view should always be discussed no matter how foreign they might be to pupils and students. It is important to teach basic human rights and to transmit the spirit of tolerance, social integrity, stability and peace. Activities aiming towards de-radicalisation of youth, such as critical thinking and media literacy, should also become part of the school curriculum.

02 FIGHT HATE SPEECH  
AND MISINFORMATION

Hate speech and fake news fuel inequalities, which is why it is important to raise awareness on media ethics and increase efforts to deal with bots and fake accounts spreading hate. This is paramount since people’s consumption of social media is quickly on the rise. Children and youth, who are often not aware of the algorithms behind their use of social media and who have difficulties distinguishing real news from misinformation, can therefore easily fall victim to misleading content or even extremist viewpoints. Recently, many direct links have been found between social media posts and violent attacks.<sup>1</sup> The safety in digital environments must be improved, which means media that spreads misinformation must be identified and blocked.

03 BUILD RESILIENT  
COMMUNITIES

According to CCP Alumna Sonal Dhanani, stable people form a stable society. However, mental health is still largely stigmatised and, in many countries, therapy options and care hardly exist. Therefore, more programmes are needed that provide mental health support, which in turn, will make people and communities more resilient to violent extremism. By creating safe spaces where people from different cultural and religious backgrounds can meet, exchange ideas, ask critical questions and accept their differences, tolerance becomes one of the core values for being resilient. Cross-culture interactions and training programmes are great methods for forging tolerance and preventing extremism.

04 BECOME AWARE  
OF THE STEPS  
OF RADICALISATION

Radicalisation is subtle, often absorbing people before they realise they have been affected. An important part of prevention is making people, especially young people, aware of the steps of radicalisation, meaning the methods extremist groups use to lure people in. Media literacy is again key here, along with civic interaction and social work in schools which inform, educate and offer counselling. Also, it is vital that de-radicalisation programmes provide their services without making participants feel stigmatised or threatened.

1 Müller, Karsten and Schwarz, Carlo, »Fanning the Flames of Hate: Social Media and Hate Crime«, June 5, 2020, <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3082972>.

IFA AND ITS CROSS-  
CULTURE PROGRAMME

With its CrossCulture Programme (CCP), ifa (Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen) is working in partnership with the Federal Foreign Office to build strong civil society networks between Germany and the rest of the world. Since 2005, professionals and committed volunteers from the fields of culture, education, science, arts and media have benefited from the opportunities provided by work-related stays either in Germany or in CCP partner countries.

- *Strengthening civil society:* With the CCP Fellowships, the CrossCulture Programme funds around 125 professionals and committed volunteers from more than 45 countries each year. During two to three months of professional exchange in host organisations in Germany or in CCP partner countries, participants deepen their expertise and acquire intercultural skills. In turn, the host organisations benefit from the expertise, regional knowledge and networks of the CCP Fellows. Upon returning to their home organisations, the participants bring their experiences gained abroad into their everyday working life. Work placements are currently being offered in the following areas: policy & society, media & culture, human rights & peace, and sustainable development. From 2019 to 2023, the focus will also be on civic & citizenship education, digital civil society and climate justice.

- *Networking civil societies:* Civil society organisations from Germany and from a CCP partner country are supported by the CCP Synergy programme as they work together on a collaboration and create a lasting network. Funding for short stays is provided to employees of the two cooperating organisations. Aims of the cooperation can be the development and the expansion of joint projects, publications or events. The programme encourages the direct exchange between organisations and helps to bring together civil society actors across borders in order for them to learn from each other.
- *Intensifying collaboration:* With travel grants and regular seminars, workshops and symposia, the CCP Alumni programme promotes the professional development of hundreds of CCP Alumni worldwide. Since 2005, the programme has been helping participants build upon their established partnerships and networks. Travel grants are available to alumni to attend conferences, work on small joint projects and undertake fact-finding missions. In addition, CCP appoints volunteer representatives in the respective countries to act as contact persons in cooperation with alumni, the German Embassy, ifa and other interested parties. Together with the CCP, they organise regular alumni network meetings on topics of regional and professional interest.

For more information about the programme, please visit: [www.ifa.de/en/fundings/crossculture-programme](http://www.ifa.de/en/fundings/crossculture-programme)

STRENGTHENING  
CIVIL SOCIETY

CCP FELLOWSHIPS  
2 – 3 months

Fellowships for professionals and volunteers

Cultural exchange, professional development, networking and knowledge transfer

NETWORKING  
CIVIL SOCIETIES

CCP SYNERGY  
7 – 30 days

Promoting collaboration between civil society organisations

Developing cross-border bilateral partnerships between organisations

INTENSIFYING  
COLLABORATION

CCP ALUMNI  
individual

Travel grants and networking meetings for CCP Fellowship alumni

Individual training and networking

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Civic and Citizenship Education is one of the thematic foci of the Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen's (ifa) CrossCulture Programme (CCP), making it a vital part of the CCP Fellowships and thematic workshops. In 2020, CCP offered a workshop for its fellows, alumni and other civil society actors centred on the topics of gender (in)equality worldwide and its ties to radicalisation and extremism. This publication is the product of the global cross-cultural exchange during that workshop. It presents personal commentaries, best-practice examples and recommendations for taking action.

ifa supports civil society actors worldwide in their advocacy for democracy and peace, encourages dialogue within civil society and contributes to the protection of minorities and persons at risk.

With the CrossCulture Programme Fellowships, ifa supports the interlacing of German and foreign civil society actors from the cultural, educational, scientific, artistic and media sectors in more than 45 partner countries. The goals for participating fellows and organisations are to broaden their expertise, share and acquire intercultural skills, and learn from each other.