

# 1. INTRODUCTION

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This book celebrates – while also acknowledging the huge challenges it faces – a particular kind of feminism, one that has been concerned with challenging both fundamentalism and racism. It consists of the autobiographical political narratives of feminist activists of different ethnic and religious backgrounds who have been members of Women Against Fundamentalism (WAF), a feminist anti-racist and anti-fundamentalist organisation that was established in London in 1989, at the heart of the Salman Rushdie affair.

Political narratives have been described as ‘stories people tell about how the world works’, the ways in which they explain the engines of political change, and as reflections on the role people see themselves and their group playing in their ongoing struggles.<sup>1</sup> And the contributors to this book offer just such narratives – they talk about the trajectories of their lives, and how they see themselves and the groups to which they belong in relation to the wider political struggles in which they have been involved. WAF women have shared solidarity and trust, based on common political values, but, as can be seen from the chapters of this book, their perspectives – as well as their personal/political histories – have also differed.<sup>2</sup> This variety of voices is significant not only for these women as individuals but also for WAF as a political organisation. In this introduction we highlight what we as editors perceive to be the most important issues for WAF’s activism throughout its history. However, the book has been constructed in such a way that reading all the chapters will itself provide a more pluralistic and contested flavour of WAF’s politics.

This introduction outlines the rationale for the book, introduces WAF and its political context, explains the book’s theoretical and methodological framework, and explores some of the themes that have emerged from the activists’ stories.

## THE RATIONALE FOR THE BOOK

The impetus for this book is threefold. Firstly, it aims to explore how, both within Britain and across a closely related global context, a particular arena of feminist activism – that of anti-fundamentalist anti-racist feminism – confronts and analyses contradictory pressures. On the one hand it is faced with a growing majoritarian politics of belonging that is exclusionary and often anti-Muslim, and draws on either civilisational or Christian fundamentalist discourses.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand it is confronted by an undercutting of secular and other emancipatory movements by fundamentalist absolutist and authoritarian political projects in all religions. What's more, these latter projects are also connected to a growing identity politics among some minorities (especially but not only Muslims) that often utilise human rights and anti-imperialist discourses. And all of this is taking place within a local and global crisis of neoliberal political economy and a securitarian 'war on terrorism'.

Secondly, the book stems from a motivation to understand the specific pathways that have led particular women to choose these complex arenas of feminist political activism, and how these choices relate to other aspects of their lives – their social locations, their identity constructions and their political and moral value systems.

The third impetus for this book was a sense of the urgent need for documenting and understanding the lives of WAF women before it's too late to do so. This was prompted partly by the death of two central members of WAF, Helen Lowe and Cassandra Balchin, to whom this book is dedicated; and partly by a political crisis within the organisation that has meant that its formal days of activism are over.

## FOUNDING WAF

As mentioned above, Women Against Fundamentalism was formed in 1989 in London, during the height of the controversy surrounding the publication of the novel *The Satanic Verses* by Salman Rushdie, but with the express objective of challenging the rise of fundamentalism in all religions. Its members included women from a wide range of ethnic, national and religious backgrounds, who were primarily united by their position as feminists and as dissenters within their communities. Fundamentalism as defined by WAF refers to modern political movements that use religion to gain or consolidate power, whether working within or in opposition to the state. We strictly differentiate

fundamentalism from religious observance, which we see as a matter of individual choice.<sup>4</sup>

WAF established itself as a women-only organisation because it recognised that the control of women's bodies and minds lies at the heart of the fundamentalist agenda. Fundamentalists perpetuate women's role as upholders of community morals and traditions; and women who refuse this role risk being demonised, outcast from their community, subjected to physical violence or even killed. So WAFers' resistance was shaped by their experience as women and as dissenters. They persistently asserted women's right to contest and doubt manifestations of religion, culture, tradition and norms, and to challenge self-styled leaderships that claim to represent them. This was most clearly reflected in WAF's adoption of the powerful slogans initially coined by members of Southall Black Sisters – 'our tradition, struggle not submission'; 'religious leaders do not speak for us'; and 'fear is your weapon, courage is ours!'

This did not mean that WAF was opposed to religion per se, but rather that its members emphasised the crucial role of secular spaces in ensuring equality for people of all religions and none. In its later years WAF discussed and rejected the proposal to change its name from the singular 'fundamentalism' to the plural 'fundamentalisms', because it wanted to emphasise the continuities rather than differences across authoritarian mobilisations within all religions.<sup>5</sup>

WAF's work carried several objectives: highlighting the resurgence of fundamentalism in *all* religions and lobbying for a secular state; demanding women's rights over their own bodies and control over their own lives; opposing institutionalised Christian privilege; and resisting ethnic minority parity demands for religious accommodation, such as demands to extend rather than abolish the blasphemy law (and later legislation on incitement to religious hatred) and to extend rather than abolish state funded religious schools.

Over the years WAF organised seminars and public meetings, and produced a journal, an education pack and a website. It set up two working groups – on religion and the law, and on religion and education. Although it was based in London (though for a couple of years it had a branch in the north of England), it worked with various feminist groups around the UK, as well as with transnational feminist organisations that shared its perspectives, including Catholics for Free Choice, Women Living Under Muslim Laws and the Association of Women in Development (AWID).<sup>6</sup>

## THE RUSHDIE AFFAIR AND MULTICULTURALISM

Multiculturalism can be a descriptive term that simply expresses an ideal situation in which people of different origins live harmoniously alongside each other. As a state policy, multiculturalism was born out of the political rejection of assimilation, but it went on to become the dominant frame through which relations between the state and ethnic minorities within Britain were managed. The right has always objected to multiculturalism on the grounds that it threatens so-called 'British values' and the 'British character' of the UK. But the women involved with WAF were critical of multiculturalism for different reasons, two in particular. As anti-racists they saw multiculturalism as a mechanism for sidestepping the substantive challenges that were being made to structural racism; while as feminists they were critical of the ways in which multiculturalist practice undermined their concerns about internal community power relations, and about violence against Black and minority women. In fact many women came into WAF through involvement in the search by Southall Black Sisters for political allies to counter both cultural relativism and Black identity politics. WAF's critique of multiculturalist practice drew attention to a layer of unaccountable 'community leaders', and to the projection of minorities as unified and internally homogeneous. It lobbied for public funds to be administered by accountable, democratically elected representatives and not by religious leaders.<sup>7</sup>

In Britain, the resurgence of religion as a political identity began in earnest in the 1970s, among Sikhs mustering support for a separate Sikh state (Khalistan) in India.<sup>8</sup> However, it was the Rushdie affair that heightened the tension that exists between the 'freedom to' assert religious beliefs and make demands for religious recognition, and the need to safeguard people's 'freedom from' religion – the right to critique and live free from the influence of religion, religious leaders and religious organisations. The importance of the Rushdie affair is also that it was one of the earliest examples of new media and communications facilitating the compression of time and space to enable the conjuring up of an imaginary and unified religious community – in this case the emergence of a transnational Muslim 'umma' ('community'); new media allowed the binding together of ethnic, national, cultural and linguistic identities and histories that otherwise might not have had any necessary connection with each other.<sup>9</sup>

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* was published by Viking/Penguin in

September 1988. By October 1988 Indian politician Syed Shahbuddin had succeeded in obtaining a ban on the book in India, on the grounds that it was offensive both as 'literary colonialism' and as 'religious pornography'. So, very early on in the debate, a narrative emerged that brought together anti-imperialist sentiment and arguments about the need to protect the sexual purity of Islam.<sup>10</sup> This sentiment then swiftly became part of the transnational activities of the right-wing Jamaat-e-Islami party.<sup>11</sup> However, their fairly mundane lobbying activities intensified rapidly in January 1989, when a number of Bradford Muslims decided to publicly burn the book. This act was then copied in other northern towns, and an ad hoc Islamic defence group was established that organised a march through central London. Following on from this the Jamaat-e-Islami initiated a number of public demonstrations among their supporters around the globe.<sup>12</sup> And so as not to be outdone by JI mobilisations, Ayatollah Khomeini, then leader of Iran, issued a fatwa (Islamic legal pronouncement) condemning to death Rushdie and his publishers. He also declared that defenders of the fatwa would be revered as 'martyrs'.<sup>13</sup> In effect, this was an incitement to murder.

As Julia Bard later described, the Ayatollah's fatwa 'broke the left and liberal consensus on anti-racism' as people in these circles debated whether they should defend the free speech of the protestors as 'express(ions) of their culture' or be seen to be siding with racists by depicting these actions as 'barbaric'.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, some members of the Labour Party Black Sections, as well as other anti-racist activists, either overtly or implicitly, framed this new wave of religious fundamentalist mobilisations in 'Black' or 'anti-racist' political terms.<sup>15</sup>

An increasing level of intolerance among some Muslim activists was matched by scathing press coverage that likened Muslims to Nazis, using the now familiar 'backward irrational Muslim' narrative as a way of dismissing multiculturalism, and pointing to the contrast between such backwardness and enlightened progressive (white Christian) British nationalism. One of the more curious examples of this was Fay Weldon's 1989 pamphlet *Sacred Cows*, which drew on concerns about alleged cultural relativism as a justification for asserting the superiority of 'British culture' and Christianity, as Clara Connolly pointed out in her subsequent review.<sup>16</sup> Weldon also entangled together political concerns about 'race', class and gender to depict anti-Rushdie activists as an ignorant, uncultured, working-class mass, and argued that a conserv-

ative sexual morality would be the best way to avert a growing Islamist narrative about 'the decadent West'. Clara was also critical of the 'rescue narrative' that underpinned the pamphlet, and countered Weldon's call to 'save' minority women from sexist minority men/cultures with a series of examples of minority women's own autonomous activism.

However, a growing fundamentalist narrative about Rushdie as an 'infidel' and 'blasphemer' whose writing defiled the purity of Islam did ring alarm bells for a number of feminists (as can be seen from the contributions to this book of Pragna Patel, Gita Sahgal, Shakila Maan and Hannana Siddiqui, as well as Clara and Julia). Accordingly, on 8 March 1989 SBS co-organised an International Women's Day event with the Southall Labour Party Women's Section, entitled 'The Resurgence of Religion: What Price do Women Pay?', an event that was attended by around two hundred women. SBS focused their intervention on fundamentalism, and the need to defend secular traditions. At the end of the meeting they surprised the local Labour Party by issuing a statement in defence of Salman Rushdie and the right to free speech, and of the right to dissent and doubt, and to not have their lives determined by so called 'community leaders'; and they also called for the abolition of the blasphemy law – an archaic piece of legislation which at that time censored any criticism of Christianity in Britain, and has only recently been modified.

Encouraged by the response to their Southall meeting, SBS joined forces with other feminists who had attended the event – including members of Voices for Rushdie, Brent Asian Women's Refuge and the Iranian Women's Organisation in Britain – to establish a network of women opposed to fundamentalism in all religions. And at their first meeting, on 6 May 1989, they officially established WAF, in order to highlight the impact on women of fundamentalist mobilisations. The statement from that meeting was later published as a letter to *The Independent* (see Appendix pXXX). WAF women then decided to take a public stand against a large anti-Rushdie march scheduled to go through central London on 27 May 1989, and coined the slogan 'Rushdie's right to write, is our right to dissent!'<sup>17</sup> This stand is now considered a foundational moment in WAF's history. Images of the event provide strong visual representations of WAF's political location – of women from diverse backgrounds shouting slogans both at ethnic minority fundamentalists demanding censorship and at white fascists hurling racist abuse. This demonstration was captured on film by Gita Sahgal in

*Struggle or Submission*, a documentary about the impact of religious pressures on women's ability to determine the direction of their own lives.<sup>18</sup>

When several years later, in 1994, Bangladeshi writer Taslima Nasreen was also subjected to a fatwa and forced into exile, in response to her novel *Lajja* (Shame), WAF again expressed its solidarity; they made the connections between Nasreen's situation and the mobilisation against Rushdie, in that both involved the transnational activities of the Jamaate-Islami.<sup>19</sup> Gita's chapter in this volume discusses her research on JI activists who fled Bangladesh after their involvement in the 1971 genocide, and how she discovered them sitting comfortably alongside local authority politicians in the east London borough of Tower Hamlets; while Georgie Wemyss's chapter reflects on her own experience of JI mobilisations (and their front organisations) within Tower Hamlets.

WAF did not focus solely on the violence committed by Muslim fundamentalists however. For example WAF members joined forces with other South Asian activists in Britain to speak out against atrocities committed against Muslims by the Hindu Right at Ayodhya in northern India in 1991, and again in Gujarat in west India in 2002 (see chapters by Pragna and also Rashmi Varma in this volume); while Nira contributed to an international women's delegation to Gujarat whose findings were published as a report by the International Initiative for Justice.<sup>20</sup>

### **'WOMEN WHO WALK ON WATER'**

All the accounts we have come across (many but not all of which are contained within this book) describe the first phase of WAF as highly energetic, dynamic, creative and colourful. For example Clara and Pragna recall the picnic in Parliament Square, and Julia played in a klezmer band at a WAF fundraiser. The lyrics of one of WAF's earliest songs proclaimed that 'we are women who walk on water'; and these women did indeed create waves and walk through a sea of voices to confidently assert brave and novel positions. As noted by many contributors to this book, being involved in WAF deeply affected their lives, their thinking, and their way of doing politics. Even during periods of inactivity, WAF continued as a source of inspiration, a resource for political analysis and a method for political engagement. In this section we provide a brief summary of the key moments and context for the first phase of WAF, which ran roughly from 1989 to 1996.

This first phase has to be understood in the context of a decade of Thatcherite governance at the centre, and several years of Ken Livingstone's GLC in London. On the religious-secular front, this gave rise to a number of contradictory pressures and opportunities. As a frontrunner of neoliberal economic policy, Margaret Thatcher was hyper-individualistic and frequently confronted the traditionalism of the Church of England, but she was also a strong defender of the Christian character of British nationalism. Furthermore, while secularism may by this time have become a lived reality for many British people, the British state has never been secular in the sense of a full separation of religion and the state. Indeed, the Church of England continues to enjoy its status as the established church, with the Queen as the titular head, the prime minister appointing the Archbishop of Canterbury and 26 Bishops sitting in the House of Lords; and right up until 2008 Christianity was legally protected by blasphemy legislation (and some would argue that this continues today in lieu of the Incitement to Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006).<sup>21</sup>

But in spite of its role at the heart of the establishment, during the social fallout resulting from neoliberal economics the Church of England positioned itself as a critic of the state, and tasked itself with providing a safety net and voice for the increasing numbers of disadvantaged and unemployed people, particularly within Britain's inner cities – as did the Catholic Church.<sup>22</sup> Christian groups were also an important source of support for anti-racist activism, as places of worship doubled-up as places of sanctuary for those at risk of deportation; while some Christian organisations provided access to a slightly better academic education for working-class children who were being failed by impoverished state comprehensives.

Meanwhile Ken Livingstone's GLC was funding right-wing ethnic minority religious projects under the guise of a multicultural commitment to strengthening minority identities.<sup>23</sup> But at the same time it was enabling and supporting the growth of a radical secular civil society through state funding for autonomous secular women's, LGBT, anti-racist and creative arts projects, which in turn strengthened the foundation for progressive opposition to conservative sections within communities across London.<sup>24</sup>

During this period WAF organised a number of seminars that attempted to grapple with the various dimensions of advocating secularism in the context of imperialism, nationalism, racism and state



neutrality.<sup>25</sup> WAF members wanted to reclaim the term as a meaningful principle and practice for ensuring democratic accountability and plurality. During these seminars WAF met with supporters and also (theoretical) opponents. Tariq Modood, for instance, accused WAF of articulating a majoritarian anti-religion (and indeed anti-Muslim) position – as ‘partly located in the prejudices of most Britons’.<sup>26</sup> Modood was one of the earliest advocates of what we now refer to as ‘multifaithism’, and he argued that equality for cultural and religious minorities was to be gained not by severing the ties between religion and the state – which he claimed would ‘further marginalise minorities’ – but by opening these out to create ‘full citizenship’ for all groups. This would be achieved by providing religious leaders and members of other faiths with the same representation (for example in the House of Lords) and state funding as the Anglican church, especially where it could be shown that such faiths were ‘the primary identity’ of a group, or that a group was ‘not fully able to identify with and participate in a polity to the extent that it privileges a rival faith’.<sup>27</sup> This was met with a strong counter argument by Clara Connolly, who emphasised that Modood’s multifaithism would inevitably be reflected in legal restrictions on the freedoms of women, and of sexual minorities such as gays and lesbians, and could lead to reversals of women’s hard-fought-for civil rights on divorce and reproduction.<sup>28</sup> Modood also argued that religious groups ought to be able to influence public policy on the same premise – the personal is political – that feminists had drawn on to push against strong distinctions between public and private spheres. This analogy was met with a firm rebuttal: feminist projects such as WAF were precisely opposing the way that such public/private distinctions were used by religious groups to curtail women’s movement and impose differential and subordinate roles on women and girls.

WAF was supported in these arguments by Homi Bhabha, who countered claims that secularism is an alien concept for minority communities. Moreover, Bhabha defended the normative importance of secularism as enabling and protecting the changeability of religions over time, and the multiple forms of religious practices that develop with the movement of populations within and across countries (including among ethnic minorities).<sup>29</sup> And Rohini PH emphasised the importance of secularism for averting the worst effects of communalism, in its attempts to seal the boundaries of group identification – attempts that historically had specific and detrimental impacts on

women.<sup>30</sup> WAF women believed that many of the demands being made for religious accommodation in Britain – such as for the extension of blasphemy legislation and faith-based schooling – were being made more credible because of the privileged position of Christianity in Britain, and they therefore took the view that disestablishment was both important and necessary. (However, WAF also actively distanced itself from autocratic forms of secularism, such as in Kemalist Turkey, that sought to erase difference in conjunction with a monocultural nationalist project.)

What WAF's campaign for secularism meant in real terms could perhaps be seen most clearly in its call for the withdrawal of all state funding for faith schools, and its opposition to the Education Act 1988, which imposed Christian worship within state schools.<sup>31</sup> At the same time WAF also supported attempts to stop the establishment of new faith-based schools, including through the Save Our Schools (SOS) campaign, which pointed to the importance of secular public institutions for safeguarding the rights of women and girls, particularly those within minority communities. SOS was set up by Southall Black Sisters and other secular left and socialist organisations in Southall in order to resist attempts by Sikh parents and governors to establish autonomous but state funded Sikh schools under Thatcher's new rules for taking local secondary schools out of the control of the local state. Parents and residents also complained that the Sikh groups were using this Tory attempt at privatisation to establish more conservative schools that would enable greater policing of young people – particularly young women; such schools would allow them to closely monitor, regulate and restrict the life choices of their students.<sup>32</sup>

WAF also drew to a considerable extent from discussions and models of secularism around the world; and this led to a deeper understanding of the context-specificity of policies and strategies, and also of the increasingly sophisticated games that fundamentalists play in order to impose their agenda. For instance, WAF expressed solidarity with Indian feminists who were highlighting the way that religious 'personal laws' for family and property matters were meted out as differential rights for Muslims, Hindus and Christians in India, and pointing out how this contradicted the secular universalist ethos of the post-colonial Indian constitution. They were of course equally critical of attempts by Hindu fundamentalist political parties to hijack the feminist campaign for a single secular gender-just civil law through

their advocacy of their own idea for a single system – one that sought to privilege Hindu provisions on marriage and property and to impose these on others while dressing them up as nationalist demands.<sup>33</sup>

Back in Britain, at a WAF public meeting on 'Resisting Religious Fundamentalism World-Wide', on 8 March 1990, Rabia Janjua spoke from the floor about her own personal experiences at the hands of the complex intertwinings of immigration law, religious persecution and gender. Rabia had been forced to marry her rapist in Pakistan, who had then fled to England to escape prosecution under Zina laws (for adultery/unlawful sex) – which both of them faced. He made arrangements for Rabia to join him in England but never enabled her to resolve her immigration status. When he became violent and abusive she left him, but then risked deportation back to Pakistan, where she would face a prison sentence of up to ten years and public flogging. Her situation was a stark reminder of the way in which racist immigration laws in Britain could compound the impact on women of fundamentalist interventions on 'personal laws' in other parts of the world. Rabia was subsequently supported by WAF and SBS, who campaigned for her right to stay in Britain, and this campaign was one of the earliest to highlight the need for the British government to recognise the gendered dimensions of religious persecution as grounds for asylum.<sup>34</sup>

Many of the founder members of WAF originated from countries where religion had a stranglehold on public affairs, including from places where this had resulted in a concerted assault on women's reproductive rights – such as in Ireland and Iran.<sup>35</sup> Campaigning against restrictions on abortion rights was therefore an important part of WAF's political work: as Ann Rossiter has pointed out, in Britain it is 'religious fundamentalism which forms the basis of most, if not all, the recurring challenges to the 1967 Abortion Act'.<sup>36</sup>

As can be seen from Clara's chapter in this volume, a number of Irish women who joined WAF were also involved in the Irish Women's Abortion Support Group, which provided urgent support for women travelling from Ireland to England to undergo abortions. The personal biographies and bodies of these women were marked by forces that drew on a potent synthesis of anti-imperialism and religious nationalism, as well as by transnational activism. In Ireland, the Catholic Church traditionally drew its strength both from its special relationship with the state and from its projection of itself as heroically standing up to British imperial forces and assimilationist pressures. In

1983 a constitutional amendment had secured equal rights for the foetus, and in 1986 pressure from the British-based Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) had led to the suspension of non-directive pregnancy counselling and criminalised the provision of information on abortions. SPUC then extended their reach by campaigning for restrictions on abortion information offered by Irish student unions, censorship of women's magazines and restrictions on contraception. In May 1990, therefore, Dublin Well Woman Clinic and Open Line Counselling decided to pursue the matter in the European Court of Human Rights, citing the restrictive measures as violations of Article 10 of the European Convention of Human Rights, the right of access to information.<sup>37</sup> In London WAF members showed their support for this legal action in their second ever demonstration, a noisy picket outside the Irish embassy; and in October 1990 Rita Bertenshaw, the Director of the Dublin Well Woman Clinic was invited to address WAF's first ever public seminar, and participate in a discussion on religious fundamentalism and reproductive rights alongside activists on abortion rights in the USA and Latin America.<sup>38</sup> At the time of the third anniversary of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, in February 1992, WAF were once more demonstrating outside the Irish embassy in London, against a decision by the Irish courts to prevent a 14-year-old rape victim from travelling to England for an abortion.<sup>39</sup> The chapters within this book by Clara, Shakila, Sue O'Sullivan and Ritu Mahendru are a testimony to the ways in which working on or writing about sexuality, sexual health and sexual violence necessitates a fight against fundamentalism.

For WAF the demonstrations outside the Irish embassy were also important for the part they played in showing that the organisation was not focused solely on Muslim fundamentalism, but was concerned about fundamentalism in all religions. Several other connections were made during these campaigns. The battle over reproductive rights in Ireland had revealed the growing influence of transnational Christian fundamentalist campaigns – bringing together as it did a range of US Christian denominations in the Moral Right and British groups like SPUC in order to bolster the legal and normative power of the Catholic Church.

The Dublin Well Woman Clinic's appeal to Strasbourg was also reflective of the increasing recourse by both feminists and fundamentalists to supranational rights institutions and an international language

of human rights. By the mid-1990s, when WAF activists were participating in UN conferences in Vienna (1993), Cairo (1994) and Beijing (1995), fundamentalists across a number of religions had formed alliances to lobby those spaces for the restriction of access to abortion and contraception (including through the use of the language of women's empowerment).<sup>40</sup> These international dimensions, and the growing relevance of an international language of rights and UN conventions, marked an important step-change for political activity within the domestic context. And this in turn led to many discussions about the possibilities and limitations of 'universalism'. In a *WAF Journal* special issue on reproductive rights, Gayatri Spivak highlighted the limits of universalism by pointing to the disjuncture between Northern feminists lobbying for reproductive rights at the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo and the subjection of their sisters in the South to population controls.<sup>41</sup> This was countered by WAF's Rayah Feldman, who identified examples where women in the South were also campaigning for the right to abortion and contraception.<sup>42</sup> Nevertheless, issues of context, geography and feminist solidarity did arise; and here Nira made the argument that 'transversalism' could offer a way out of the schism between universality and cultural relativism or contextual particularism (which is discussed further in the second half of this chapter).<sup>43</sup> WAF also began to discuss the language and meaning of feminism, and whether or not this could be articulated through religious discourse.<sup>44</sup> The group had already worked closely with Catholics for Free Choice and Women Living Under Muslim Laws, but, as is clear from Cassandra Balchin's chapter, some WAF members wanted to explore religious frameworks, while others (Sukhwant Dhaliwal, Pragna and Hannana) pointed to the dangers of travelling this road within a British context in which secular alternatives could be compromised.

In spite of the challenge from within deconstructionist postcolonial discourses to the use of the term 'fundamentalism' and a universalist discourse of rights – and criticisms levelled at WAF for fuelling imperialism and racism by campaigning on these issues and in these terms – WAF members proved time and again that they could speak out about religious absolutism and simultaneously challenge, rather than give way to, racism and imperialism. On the heels of the Rushdie affair, WAF women joined forces with Women in Black to oppose the bombing of Iraq in the first Gulf War in 1991 (see Naje Al-Ali's

chapter for a detailed account of this period, and Rashmi Varma's chapter for concurrent campaigning on the other side of the Atlantic). Furthermore, amidst the heat of racist mobilisations in Tower Hamlets, WAF members from east London joined other local women in setting up Women United Against Racism to assert the right of women to simultaneously campaign against the British National Party and against the sexism and harassment of male anti-racist activists, including those associated with fundamentalist organisations (see Georgie Wemyss' chapter in this book).<sup>45</sup>

### **POST 9/11 AND THE RE-BIRTH OF WAF**

In 1996, WAF closed its office (Sukhwant's chapter talks about putting WAF into storage) and experienced a period of inactivity, due to a cumulative sense of over-commitment among the various WAF members, who were all, as the many chapters of this book demonstrate, already fully engaged in other forms of political activity. However former WAF members continued to interact in campaigns against fundamentalism, violence against women, on racism and against immigration controls through the ongoing activities of other political groupings, such as SBS, Women in Black, WLUML, Interights, refugee and migrant forums.

Then on 11 September 2001 the Al Qaeda suicide attacks on the Twin Towers in New York unleashed a new political world. Tony Blair dutifully lined up behind George Bush's enraged patriotism and war-mongering. Political discussion in the UK became extremely polarised between a racist discourse about Muslims forming dangerous 'fifth columns' and an anti-racist defensiveness against any critique of Islam. If it had been difficult before, it now became almost impossible to have a rational debate about Muslim fundamentalism, the actual existence of terrorist networks within Britain, or the role that ought to be played by both the state and civil society in challenging fundamentalism.

So, after a few years of remission, WAF women started to meet again. At first they met in each other's homes over pots of vegetarian soup, exchanging analyses of the new national and global political realities. WAF opposed Blair's claim to be carrying the mantle of freedom, democracy and Afghan women's rights, but many were also uncomfortable with the Stop the War Coalition's response, which was to build a

majoritarian alliance with factions of the right-wing Muslim Brotherhood and Jamaat-e-Islami networks based in Britain. While there were some good people involved in this coalition, producing really important critiques of British and US foreign policy, Stop the War foreclosed any attempts to talk about the resurgence of Muslim fundamentalism. It also Islamicised its demonstrations by allowing prayers from the podium, and eventually also hosted Islamic Right speakers on its platforms.

When Bush and Blair began their assault on Afghanistan, Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) organised a meeting that was attended by a number of WAF women.<sup>46</sup> This meeting highlighted the problem for women's rights under both imperialism and fundamentalism. Then in September 2002 WAF joined forces with Act Together, Women in Black, Southall Black Sisters, Women Living Under Muslim Laws and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom to run a women's teach-in on 'Anti-militarism, Fundamentalism, Secularism, Civil Liberties and Anti Terror Legislation after 9/11'.<sup>47</sup> Alongside this re-emergence into the public arena, some women took it in turns to lead informal discussions within WAF in order to debate the dramatic transformation of the political landscape and to share information about fundamentalist mobilisations.

At this time there was little scrutiny of global fundamentalist networks by anti-racist and feminist activists or academics. WAF saw it as important for feminists and the left to disavow the imperialist agenda in Guantanamo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, and also agreed on the necessity of critiquing the co-option of feminist claims by neoliberal and neo-fascist politicians. However they also objected to the way in which these justifiable concerns were then mobilised to marginalise or silence critical discussion of the growing global strength of fundamentalist tendencies (see Nadjé's chapter) and to reinforce the 'faith agenda' within Britain (see Pragna's, Hannana's and Sukhwant's chapters). Eventually WAF called a public meeting and began giving out leaflets at Stop the War demonstrations that spelt out its arguments against *both* the War on Terror *and* fundamentalism (see Appendix 2 pXXX). More women started to join WAF, and the organisation began a series of women-only meetings for those on its email list, as well as larger public meetings that were open to all.

Some members of the Stop the War Coalition looked to capitalise on widespread disenchantment with Blair and the Labour Party by attempting to transform the mass demonstrations against the war into

an electoral challenge. The Socialist Workers Party and the Muslim Association of Britain joined forces to establish the Respect Party, and once again Tower Hamlets became a focal point for religious-political machinations when George Galloway became the Respect Party candidate for Bethnal Green and Bow in the 2005 general election. WAF women voiced their concern about the dirty games of Respect and the myopia of the Socialist Workers Party during the campaign, but were also critical of the sitting Labour MP's support for the war on Iraq.<sup>48</sup>

### FROM MULTICULTURALISM TO MULTIFAITHISM

New Labour was a paradoxical project, often pushing in contradictory directions, and this was particularly the case in its attempts to simultaneously revive both social democracy and religious communitarianism. It promoted a human rights and anti-racist agenda while simultaneously carrying out policy that actively undermined its own measures.

New Labour established the Human Rights Act 1998, looked to extend the anti-discrimination provisions to incorporate all six European equality strands, and established the Equality Act 2010. In 1998, then Home Secretary Jack Straw initiated an inquiry into the murder of the black teenager Stephen Lawrence and supported Lord Macpherson's findings of 'institutional racism' within the police force; and this led to a new Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000 that compelled public bodies to promote good race relations and produce racial equality impact assessments, thereby providing another important tool for demanding accountability.<sup>49</sup> It was also New Labour that initiated the first government working group on violence against Black women – the Forced Marriage Working Group (discussed in the chapters by Hannana, Gita, Pragna and Sukhwant) – and it was the New Labour Home Office minister Mike O'Brien who engaged with feminist critiques of multiculturalism to coin the phrase 'mature multiculturalism', and, influenced by SBS, applied a human rights framework to tackling violence against women.

However, this was compromised by its counter push towards religious communitarianism, the tightening of immigration controls and asylum provisions and the pursuit of a neoliberal economic agenda that encouraged the outsourcing of public services and privatisation. Under Tony Blair, the Labour government nurtured a new settlement



that involved the state in active moves towards de-secularising its relationship with civil society, particularly as regards ethnic minorities. Thus a new 'Faith and Cohesion' Unit was established within the Department of Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which administered a range of funds to encourage and consolidate a role for religious organisations in the public sphere, including a 'Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund' (FCCBF) and a 'Faiths in Action' programme.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, the DCLG produced 'myth-busting guidance' in order to counter the concerns of local authorities that were cautious about contact with religious organisations, with little pause for reflection on the historical reasons for supporting secular public services. These New Labour commitments then trickled down through state apparatus at national, regional and local levels, including to the Greater London Assembly and government-led quangos. All this enabled religious organisations to have formal lines of influence over policy and practice in a wide range of areas, including domestic violence – an area where they had previously been accused of compromising the safety and rights of women and children.<sup>51</sup> Alongside this government policy, both civil society mobilisations and academics started to project religion as 'cohesive', 'faith communities' as central players in tackling terrorism, and religious groups as important carriers of social capital and providers of welfare support.<sup>52</sup>

Community Cohesion was a concept widely promoted after the Cantle report of 2001, published after an inquiry into the Northern 'race riots' of 2001. It marked a turn away from cultural diversity and tolerance, and towards an earlier form of assimilationism; it sidestepped the direct racist abuse, structural racism and socio-economic disadvantage that had led to the disturbances and instead placed the onus on ethnic minorities to 'integrate'.<sup>53</sup> Various members of the teams inquiring into the causes of the 'race riots' expressed concern about segregation between the white majority and ethnic minority communities: they believed that the distance between communities could grow into a fear of difference and could be exploited by extremist groups.<sup>54</sup> Yet there was little or no reflection on the contribution of government policy to such segregation, including its local authority housing and dispersal strategies, New Labour's commitment to faith schools and a faith agenda that further fragmented and communalised minority communities.

As the 'War on Terror' got underway, this concern about cohesion was bolstered by the Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) programme

of 2007, which funded Muslim community organisations under the guise of ‘tackling radicalisation’. PVE gave rise to a number of new actors and systems, and a large-scale transfer of public resources to ‘Muslim’ specific programmes.<sup>55</sup> Ironically, although government reports on cohesion and extremism had drawn attention to the propensity for religious organisations to encourage both segregation and extremism, the PVE agenda was being filtered through the same government’s faith agenda, in order to strengthen religious identification above all else. New Labour’s response to the events of 2001 should be seen as reflective of Blair’s view that Britain had become a post-class, post-race society. The effect was to exacerbate a situation where religion had become the primary legitimate signifier of difference.<sup>56</sup>

In 2007 WAF and SBS made a joint submission to the government’s Commission on Integration and Cohesion’s consultation document ‘Our Shared Future’.<sup>57</sup> This submission was critical of the Commission’s terms of reference, particularly its focus on ‘cohesion’ and ‘integration’ rather than on human rights, equality and non-discrimination. They questioned whether there was any such thing as a set of fixed or distinctive ‘British values’ (and especially whether these were superior to others), but at the same time defended the values that had emerged from the Enlightenment tradition, particularly the universality of human rights; it was these that provided the common basis for fighting discrimination and inequality. And WAF also stood by the Enlightenment emphasis on the right to question, doubt and dissent. (Indeed many of the chapters contained within this volume – Ruth Pearson, Pragna, Clara, Gita, Nira, Hannana, Nadjé, Cassandra, Georgie, Rashmi and Sue – reflect a simultaneous desire on the one hand to challenge imperialism and eurocentrism, and on the other to safeguard an international language of rights, principles and values as articulated through the human rights framework and enforced through a number of human rights conventions.)

Women within WAF coined the term ‘multifaithism’ to describe New Labour’s stance on religion: the party had overseen a transition from multiculturalist governance to a multifaithist public policy that privileged religious identity and religious representation over all others. The Labour Party had heavily relied on ethnic, religious, caste and kinship networks to help rebuild popular support during their long years in the opposition wilderness,<sup>58</sup> and now the government – with the assistance of the newly galvanised religious councils modelled

on the Jewish Board of Deputies (the Muslim Council of Britain, the Network of Sikh Organisations and the Hindu Forum of Britain) – was well placed to push multifaithism. This was done – of course primarily through working with male representatives, although the initiation of a Muslim Women's Network in 2002 by then Minister for Women Patricia Hewitt was also part of this shift.

The WAF/SBS submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion stated that the institutionalisation of religious communitarianism in public policy and practice was 'accelerating the process of the communalisation of what were once Asian or even Black communities'.<sup>59</sup> The submission identified the Muslim Women's Network as part of a trend that took issues affecting Black and minority women and reframed them as issues facing 'Muslim women'. This denied both the importance of secular Asian women's projects and the role that Muslims had already played in democratic processes within Britain – not as 'Muslims' but as people actively engaged with Black, Asian, anti-racist and other struggles.<sup>60</sup>

However WAF members interacted with these new religious discourses and layers of religious leadership in different ways. Indeed Cassandra Balchin became the Chair of the Muslim Women's Network, and her chapter in this book explains her commitment to engaging with these new bodies – whether driven by government or civil society – in the hope that she could influence the emerging 'Muslim' political spaces in a progressive way. Pragna, Hannana and Sukhwant, on the other hand, found the practice of speaking of specific 'Muslim', 'Hindu' or 'Sikh' women's 'needs' or 'issues' as problematic, and their chapters highlight the way that religion-speak shifted the terms of debate in areas such as violence against women.

The WAF/SBS submission remains an important contribution to the Cohesion and Prevent debates, in two main ways. Firstly, it draws attention to the state's relationship with fundamentalist partners; and, secondly, it emphasises the implications for women of the revival of 'community' and religious identity politics (issues which are otherwise absent in the literature on Community Cohesion).

WAF noted that the War on Terror had brought a discriminatory pressure to bear on Muslims to demonstrate their loyalty to Britain, but it also highlighted the contradictory response of the British state, which was in search of Muslim allies to fight extremism but at the same time working with (and often funding) a number of the front

organisations of undemocratic, violent authoritarian movements, particularly branches of the Jamaat-e-Islami, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Hindu Right in Britain.<sup>61</sup> (Chapters by Georgie and Gita note the local and transnational implications of such actions.)

The WAF submission also criticised the lack of recognition by the Commission of the problems of ‘community’, especially for women. The Commission on Cohesion and Integration had wilfully ignored several decades of feminist critique of ‘community’, and the existence of power relations and inequalities within communities. The problems with who it is that defines and represents ‘the community’ are discussed by almost every contributor to this book. New Labour’s promotion of ‘faith communities’ specifically encouraged fundamentalist and anti-democratic elements to establish themselves as representatives of large groups of people, which in turn served to legitimise campaigns for religious accommodation of all hues – including separate religious based schools; dress codes in secular state schools; personal laws (especially family laws governing marriage, divorce, child custody and inheritance); and legal protection against religious discrimination.

The WAF/SBS submission also highlighted the adverse implications for censorship and dissent that had arisen from the British state’s engagement with fundamentalist forces. In particular it was critical of the invitation to Ramesh Kallidai, Secretary General of the right-wing Hindu Forum, to participate in the board of the Commission for Integration and Cohesion. This was in spite of the Hindu Forum’s undemocratic tendencies being in full public view when they had forced the closure of a London art exhibition by the renowned Indian painter M.F. Hussain, on the grounds that Hussain’s depiction of naked Hindu female deities offended Hindu sensibilities. The WAF/SBS submission drew parallels between attempts to censor M.F. Hussain and other situations where fundamentalist mobilisations had attempted to censor dissenting artists, including the threats made to the life of Gurpreet Bhatti for her play *Behzti* (Dishonour), which had dared to speak out about rape and power abuse within Sikh gurdwaras.<sup>62</sup> Shakila’s chapter in this volume recounts that period from the perspective of an artist who has been forced to deal with the fundamentalist and conservative stranglehold on definitions of ‘community’, ‘religion’ and ‘ethnicity’. (Similar concerns are raised by the Jewish contributors to this book; in particular, Nira and Julia reflect on the erasure of Eastern European and Yiddish traditions in the cultural politics of Zionism.) It was the experi-

ence of dealing with religious opposition to artistic license and intra-community pluralism – right through from the anti-Rushdie protests to the Behzti protests – which had led WAF to oppose the Incitement to Racial and Religious Hatred Act 2006.

In 2007, Southall Black Sisters, WAF's sister organisation, was itself subjected to the hard reality of the Cohesion and Prevent agendas, when Ealing council decided to cut its funding on the grounds that specialist services for black and minority women work against 'equality' and 'cohesion'. Community Cohesion meant that local councils were starting to do away with 'race' equality departments. Moreover, while longstanding progressive secular organisations were facing funding cuts, PVE policy led the same councils to initiate and fund 'Muslim' projects. At the same time that Ealing Council decided to withdraw funding to SBS, it was promoting religious literacy, inter-faith networks and faith-based (largely Muslim) groups to deliver local welfare services.<sup>63</sup> This included the creation of Muslim women-only projects. Ealing chose to ignore SBS's casework with Muslim women, and also to ignore Harriet Harman MP's applause for SBS's work in challenging segregation and extremism.

In fact the threat to SBS's funding can be seen as the culmination of a three-pronged attack by the New Labour government on specialist feminist services: there was a mainstreaming agenda, which pushed for 'difference' to be accommodated within generic service provision; a commissioning agenda, which involved a competitive tendering process that favoured much larger generic providers; and a faith agenda that validated religious organisations whilst simultaneously cutting secular providers. Fortunately, in 2008, SBS won a legal challenge against Ealing Council: the High Court affirmed the organisation's right to exist as a secular specialist provider because of the need for advice and advocacy to be framed within a democratic and secular ethos; and it also recognised the importance of specialist services for enhancing BME women's participation in the public sphere. WAF women supported SBS in their legal challenge and convened a joint public meeting at the House of Commons to highlight these issues. Unsurprisingly, all this led to a renewed sense of urgency about fighting for secular spaces.<sup>64</sup>

## **FUNDAMENTALISM, EDUCATION AND THE LAW**

Education and the law are two areas that have been subjected to strong and sustained lobbies by fundamentalists, and, accordingly, during its

second period of activity WAF set up two sub groups to deal with them. It's impossible to do justice to these in the short space of this introduction, and what follows is therefore a very short summary highlighting a handful of the concerns and debates, beginning with the group on education.

As we have seen, in opposition the Labour Party had courted the ethnic minority vote, including by promising public funding to ethnic minority faith-based schools, on parity grounds. This was acted upon immediately the party took office, through the extension of Voluntary Aided status to minority faith schools (an overall policy commitment from which many Christian organisations also made significant gains). In defence of state funding for faith schools, New Labour utilised a wide variety of arguments: choice and parental power; the high rates of academic success of faith schools; the high levels of demand for them; and the role of faith schools in strengthening moral values.<sup>65</sup> Many of these claims have been subject to challenge.<sup>66</sup>

There were some suspicions that New Labour's interest in faith schools was motivated less by a concern about achievement than by Blair's personal religious belief, the need to give a sop to electoral vote banks and provision of a guise for neoliberal privatisation. WAF's response was to reiterate its position against faith schools, and emphasise the importance of secular schools for teaching critical thinking skills, and for providing young people with coherent personal, sexual and relationships education as well as progressive pastoral support. Moreover, WAF women were concerned that amid all the debates about faith schools little consideration was being given to their impact on gender equality. The government chose to bat away this issue by arguing that an investigation into the impact of faith schools on gender equality would be 'a massively disproportionate use of taxpayers' money' (in spite of the soon to be enacted gender equality duty).<sup>67</sup> As the number of state-funded faith schools continued to grow at an exponential rate, WAF decided to engage with the Accord Coalition, who were campaigning for the regulation of existing faith schools, through challenging their admissions policies and employment practices, and insisting that the national curriculum should be compulsory for all schools.<sup>68</sup> The Accord Coalition hoped that regulation would effectively pull faith schools towards a more mainstream character. WAF sought to add to the Accord discussions by restating the normative implications for gender, sexuality and dissent when religion enters

the education system (i.e. they questioned whether simply opening up the admissions criteria is a sufficient goal). And WAF argued that a number of other issues needed to be considered: the use of these spaces for fundamentalist forces to accrue power and influence, and to seal the boundaries of their religion; the lack of plurality on religious holidays; the lack of sex education and PSHE; and the restrictions to women's access to extracurricular activities.<sup>69</sup>

WAF also raised concerns about the incursion of religious discourses within mainstream education subsequent to fundamentalist lobbies of mainstream comprehensive schools.<sup>70</sup> This more sophisticated strategy pushed for the accommodation of religion and religious 'sensibilities' within mainstream education – which effectively meant the encouragement of differential norms for young women, as primarily structured by conservative patriarchal tropes of 'respect' and 'decency'.<sup>71</sup> Importantly, some of the demands around religious accommodation were being made by women utilising a range of rights frameworks (the Race Relations Act 1976; the Human Rights Act 1998; and the new Religion and Belief Regulations 2003 that were part of New Labour's extension of equalities legislation in line with Europe). In 2002, Shabina Begum, a fourteen year old girl from Luton, took her school to court when it refused to adapt the school uniform to accommodate her desire to wear the jilbab (a full length robe). Begum accused the school of breaching her right to exercise her religion, and effectively of also denying her right to an education. The case went all the way to the House of Lords, who decided against Begum and in favour of the school. The judgement quoted from Nira and Gita's book *Refusing Holy Orders* (see note 5) to note the contestatory nature of religious claims; to argue the importance of balancing Begum's needs with the needs of the other girls at the school; and to be wary of the political motivations of specific religious mobilisations, including the desire to make strong distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Muslim girls.<sup>72</sup>

In 2008, when New Labour proposed to extend the Public Sector Equality Duty to include 'the need to promote equality of opportunity to religion or belief', WAF made a submission to the Discrimination Law Review Team to oppose such proposals. In particular, WAF distinguished between 'religion and belief' and other equalities strands on the basis that the right to express religion is not an absolute right but rather is expected to be tempered in relation to its likely impact on

others; in some instances the right to manifest one's religion had been limited in order to safeguard the rights of others. WAF argued that, in the context of resurgent fundamentalist forces and the contestatory nature of religious identities, extending such provisions to include religion would do far more to create inequality than to enable equality. In making this argument WAF found itself ranged against the growing strength of the Christian lobby in Britain, as Christian organisations, particularly Christian schools, campaigned hard for exemptions from the public sector equality duty, so that they would not be obliged to promote equality of gender or sexual orientation.<sup>73</sup>

As to questions about religion and the law, these began to materialise as demands for the recognition of religious councils and religious 'personal laws' as quasi parallel legal systems. This situation was compounded when religious groups began to make use of clauses in the Arbitration Act 1996 to offer cheap alternative dispute resolution forums. On the whole, there was an acceptance within WAF that the push on religious courts and personal laws was politically motivated, and an extension of fundamentalist political projects. Therefore, these were to be recognised as active political bodies with an agenda, rather than seen as passive cultural or religious institutions. Moreover, there was general agreement that such forums discriminated against women and children and were incompatible with human rights; that they were premised on a 'sacred' law, which meant that any legal determinations arising from them could not be challenged; and that many aspects were in direct conflict with UK law with regards to inheritance, property matters, child custody and polygamy. Within WAF there were numerous debates about how to approach this issue, and we began to develop a position paper that did not support a wholesale ban on these bodies (in recognition that people are entitled to seek the views of religious organisations if they so wish), but rather emphasised the importance of secular civil law, and argued the need to ensure that religious courts are not formally legally recognised, particularly in family matters, and that they are not engaged by statutory bodies to resolve issues pertaining to marriage, divorce, child custody and property (there is evidence to suggest that this was becoming the practice<sup>74</sup>). Moreover, there was a keen awareness that the Christian Right, the English Defence League and UKIP were weighing in on debates about Shariah courts, and that WAF's lobbying needed to take place away from these right-wing agendas; and there was also recognition that the



problem lay not just with Shariah courts but also with Jewish Beth Dins and other religious dispute resolution mechanisms such as gurdwaras and caste panchayats.

A further discussion among WAF members also revealed concerns that a growing number of women were themselves approaching Shariah councils to intervene in family matters. The debates revolved around two issues. Firstly, there were questions of agency and choice – how far were women choosing this route, and how far were they acting under pressure (whether physical, emotional, normative/societal or because they had entered into religiously sanctioned marriages that were not recognised in civil law and therefore required access to religious divorce). Secondly, there was the question of whether to ban or to regulate – some circles, notably One Law for All, were calling for a ban while some members of WAF (see Cassandra's chapter in this book) wanted to engage with religious councils to attempt to shift their practice to a more feminist position. Other WAF members, however, believed that engagement with religious councils would effectively legitimise the existence of these bodies, and of parallel legal systems, and would thereby undermine the gains of secular civil law.

## **COALITION CUTS AND A RESURGENT CHRISTIAN RIGHT**

New Labour's engagement with religious organisations was part of their larger discovery of the neoliberal uses of communitarianism, and their development of an 'etho-politics', a new moral vocabulary for public policy that focused on individual behaviour and values as the way to rectify social problems.<sup>75</sup> In this there has been far more continuity than change with the Conservative Party's Big Society agenda. Moreover, to appreciate the ways in which an anti-bureaucracy Conservative Party rhetoric, which questions rather than supports equality legislation, interacts with state-led support for religious organisations, one need only note that immediately on taking office, Andrew Stunnell (a former Baptist lay preacher and at that time Minister for Communities and Local Government) and Eric Pickles (Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government) started to arrange meetings with religious groups such as the Jewish Leadership Council, at which they assured them that the government would cut the red tape on equalities so that religious groups could contribute to

the Big Society.<sup>76</sup> In state policy terms, religious groups have gained additional leverage through the Coalition's Localism Act, and their nurturing of Academies (started by Blair).<sup>77</sup>

This continuing religious communitarianism has had a specific impact on people's access to public sector services such as education, youth provision, health and housing.<sup>78</sup> And there have been direct consequences for women's rights from this combination of a neoliberal austerity package, an aversion to equalities and a government that recognises religious groups as pivotal in enabling the decimation of the welfare state. Thus, for example, very soon after the election of the Coalition government, the anti-trafficking feminist group, the Poppy Project, had its funding transferred to the Christian Salvation Army.<sup>79</sup> This should be understood within the wider context of Coalition cuts to women's services and to legal aid, and the comparative rise of faith-based provision.

During this period an emergent network of right-wing Christian organisations has begun to gain public credibility within Britain, partly because of a general boost to critics of New Labour, as people demoralised by their policies were looking for political and electoral alternatives. The Conservative Party has been capitalising on this and revitalising its grassroots (and especially increasing its Black supporters) by tapping into the growing network of evangelical Christian organisations.<sup>80</sup> These new waves of Christian mobilisation raise some interesting issues, as, for example, when the British Pakistani Christian Association (BPCA) invited WAF to join their campaign against blasphemy laws in Pakistan, which have impacted upon Christians, Ahmadis and Shias alike. This was an issue close to our hearts: as well as supporting minority Muslims against persecution (see above), WAF women were also cognisant of the persecution of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs by the Taliban in Afghanistan and the Jamaat-e-Islami in Bangladesh. But, although we had campaigned against blasphemy laws in a number of countries, WAF had not as yet supported a Christian mobilisation against religious persecution. The BPCA was very responsive to WAF's suggestions about their campaign, but at the same time they were drawing support in Britain from multifaith platforms and also from the Christian Right. This presented a dilemma: whilst WAF had a lot of space to contribute to the organisation's policy submission, and was able to speak at their rallies with great directness about religious fundamentalism, including Christian fundamen-

talism, we were also pressurised to work in partnership with key proponents of Christian fundamentalism within Britain. The BPCA were critical of our unwillingness to participate in an alliance with Baroness Caroline Cox and the right-wing Christian Peoples Alliance, even though the Christian Peoples Alliance has been at the forefront of anti-abortion demonstrations against the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and the Marie Stopes organisation, and have been responsible for a new wave of misinformation about reproductive rights. (Indeed WAF had already challenged Caroline Cox during the 1990s, when she had cultivated an alliance with the religious right of all hues to push a multifaith lobby against sex education under the guise of 'parental rights'.) Cox and the CPA are evidence that the ability of fundamentalists to grow their power and sanitise their concerns through working in broad alliances is by no means limited to Muslim organisations.

### CONTEMPORARY FUNDAMENTALIST NETWORKS IN THE UK

This period saw the emergence of new constellations of activists and organisations from many religions but with compatible fundamentalist world views; such groups were actively building alliances with both state institutions and civil society organisations in order to embed themselves within broader discussions about equality, civil liberties and human rights. For instance, a number of Muslim Brotherhood, Jamaat-e-Islami, Salafist organisations and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir began working with each other across different forums and spaces.<sup>81</sup> Moreover, these groups have been projecting themselves as 'moderate'. They have been critical of the anti-Muslim, anti-imperialist nature of the state, but at the same time have worked closely with the police and the state and managed to attract PVE funding, which they have used to strengthen their own position and perpetuate their specific version of Islam.

In February 2010 a flashpoint ignited from the heat of these contradictions. WAF founder member Gita Sahgal, who was at the time Head of the Gender Unit at Amnesty International, made a public critique of Amnesty International's relationship with former Guantanamo detainee Moazzam Begg and his organisation Cageprisoners. To briefly summarise, Gita was critical of Begg's sympathies for the Taliban, and argued that both he and Cageprisoners

were located within salafi-jihadi networks within Britain that had been actively promoting Islamic Right tendencies, through publishing and reproducing, in a non-critical way, salafist lectures and books. At the heart of her critique were questions about the legitimacy that right-wing religious organisations could acquire through alliances, and a concern to persuade human rights organisations to work as hard on challenging human rights violations by non-state fundamentalists as those by nation states. Gita called for a clearer distinction to be made between facilitating the telling of the horrendous experiences of former Guantanamo inmates as part of a campaign for the dismantling of Guantanamo Bay and similar spaces used in 'the global war on terror', and the legitimisation of Cageprisoners as human rights defenders and potential partners. She pointed to the propensity of such uncritical alliances to enable the entrenchment of fundamentalist ideas and discourses, and used the word 'sanitisation' to describe this process.

There was some disagreement within WAF on this issue. Some members saw similarities with the Rushdie controversy, and viewed Gita's argument as indicative of all the entanglements and problems of identifying and challenging fundamentalism in the current moment. Others found the argument tenuous, and the focus on Begg and Cageprisoners misplaced, and argued that the way the public campaign had developed was uncomfortable. This was a tense period, during which fissures emerged within WAF that probably caused a stalemate within the organisation, and inhibited its ability to act as a unified political group.

The use of a human rights framework by fundamentalists is by no means confined to Muslim fundamentalism. Hindu Right activists were also lobbying within this frame, while Khalistanis (Sikhs demanding the secession of Punjab from India to establish a separate theocratic state) were positioning themselves as human rights defenders by talking about civil liberties violations and the right to self-determination; and the Christian Right, too, frequently talk about rights, especially the rights of the unborn child.

This complex array of political issues, in combination with the economic crisis and the government's austerity policies, and the need to campaign on green issues, are the context within which women gradually moved away from WAF to focus on different political concerns, though some of us continued to meet as individuals or as

members of other organisations, to try to make collective sense of the contemporary political landscape.

## THE THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE BOOK

Feminism, like all significant social movements and ideologies, is more a cluster than one homogeneous body of principles, perspectives and practices. Early accounts of 'what is feminism' focused on differentiating between liberal, radical and socialist feminisms; later, the homogeneity of women assumed in the feminist slogan 'sisterhood is global' was challenged by particular groupings of women who organised not just as women but also as 'Black', 'lesbian', 'disabled', 'Jewish', etc, to reflect their multiple identities and stipulate simultaneous struggles against multiple axes of oppression.

The kind of feminist activism in which WAF women have been engaged is somewhat different. Although the ethnic, national, religious and racial origins of the women who participate are often important, it is not the ultimate focus of their activism. Rather, their activism is of the kind that can be referred to as 'intersectional politics'.<sup>82</sup> In contrast to early feminists such as Dorothy Smith, who spoke of a 'women's standpoint' in a somewhat similar way to Marx's 'proletarian standpoint', an intersectional approach recognises that people's concrete social locations are constructed along multiple (and both shifting and contingent) axes of difference, such as gender, class, race and ethnicity, stage in the life cycle, sexuality, ability and so on.<sup>83</sup> However, intersecting social divisions should not be analysed as items that are *added* to each other (as is common in identity politics – and in some popular misinterpretations of what intersectionality politics is), but rather as *constituting* each other, and therefore impossible to be experienced separately.<sup>84</sup> There isn't a 'human' who is not gendered, classed, ethnicised, located in a particular stage in the life cycle, etc. Class cannot be experienced or lived outside of 'race', gender, sexuality and the same is true of other categories. Similarly, people's moral and political values are *related to*, but cannot be *reduced to*, their identifications and emotional attachments on the one hand or their social locations on the other. WAF's feminists shared solidarity on the basis of common moral political values, but, as can be seen from the individual chapters in this book, their perspectives also differed in light of

their personal/political biographies and locations. The variety of voices within this book is significant in that it illustrates both the diverse political formation of WAF women *and* WAF's specificity as a political organisation.

The autobiographical accounts in this book are based on life history interviews carried out by Nira (except her own, which was carried out by Sukhwant), and then transformed into written narratives by the contributors. There are two exceptions to this format, caused by the greatly mourned loss of two of the WAF members whose contributions were planned for inclusion. Cassandra Balchin died whilst we were putting together this book, and her chapter was therefore edited by us from her interview transcript. Helen Lowe died after the book was conceived but before we had had the opportunity to interview her, and we have therefore included a short biographical piece written by Judy Greenway.

In most narrative studies, interviewers analyse and interpret the narratives from a critical distance. However, with this book, such a 'critical distance' did not exist, since we were all 'WAF women'. As the editors we took the view that each interviewee should decide which issues or aspects of her life she wanted to highlight, and then write this into a short personal-political autobiography. This approach shifted the balance of power from us, as the editors, to the contributors. Such an approach has some disadvantages. One has been that in a couple of cases the contributors decided to withdraw from the book project altogether once they had listened to their own interviews, because they felt too uncomfortable to embark on writing an essay about their own personal lives. Another disadvantage has been that as a result of the need to condense several hours of rich interviews into a fairly coherent five thousand word chapter, the stories have been somewhat flattened, and ambiguities or contradictions that were in the original interviews have been reduced. On the other hand, it has given women control over their own stories: they did not become mere 'case studies' in an illustrative generic study. They were encouraged to decide what should and what should not be included in their narratives. They highlighted different themes according to their own priorities. Another bonus of this process has been that when they listened to the recordings, they often realised that they had left out important issues, which they were then able to include in the final written version.

## THE POLITICAL FORMATION OF WAF ACTIVISTS

As explained above, WAF was formed during the height of the Rushdie affair in 1989, and a common feature of its members has been their critical approach both to the state and to their own communities, including where they have been part of the hegemonic majority. From the beginning its membership included feminists from different origins and cultures, some of whom were mobilised by SBS, who initiated the first meeting of what became WAF on the basis of their previous work on violence against women, anti-racism, state multiculturalist policies and welfare provision. In this way, SBS has always been a collective presence in WAF, while other members have come as individuals. During the heyday of separatist identity politics, at a time when some Black feminists avoided co-operation with white feminists, assuming that 'mixed' activism would always be dominated by white women, SBS activists invited all feminists to Southall to support their activities because they had the confidence to do so. Nira's, Gita's and Pragna's chapters, for example, highlight the significance of all feminists being invited by SBS to the Krishna Sharma demonstration in 1984, when they marched through Southall and picketed the home of Krishna's husband and in-laws to shame them for provoking Krishna's suicide (following the political practice of feminists in India).

Individual members followed a variety of personal pathways that eventually led them to WAF. They came from different religious backgrounds (atheist, of different Christian denominations, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh), as well as from different countries of birth (e.g. Czech Republic, India, Israel, Ireland, Kenya, the UK and the USA). The roads to WAF activism among all members were deeply affected by the societies in which they grew up – whether they grew up as members of hegemonic majorities (whether in the West or the South) or as members of racialised minorities. For WAF members who grew up in hegemonic majorities, proto-feminist and/or socialist consciousness (e.g. Clara, Gita, Jane Lane, Natalie, Rashmi, Ritu) often came before proto-anti-racist ones. For others, feminism and/or socialism followed initial experiences which pertained to racism (e.g. Eva Turner, Nira, Pragna, Hannana, Shakila, Ruth and Sue). Green Party leader Natalie Bennett's involvement in WAF highlights the compatibility of WAF's anti-fundamentalist politics not only with anti-racist and

socialist feminism, but also with the wider spectrum of contemporary emancipatory politics.

What is specific to WAF politics, however, is not just its combination of feminism and anti-racism, but opposition to religious fundamentalism. Most members of WAF had encountered religious authoritarianism and fundamentalist movements (e.g. Clara the Irish Catholic church; Nira – Jewish fundamentalism in Israel; Pragna – Hindutva; Sukhwant – Khalistanis) long before 9/11 brought a more public awareness of the dangers of religious fundamentalism. A small number of WAF members of UK Christian majoritarian origin had close personal and familial involvement with women and men of Muslim origin (and/or had lived for some years in South Asia, e.g. Georgie, Cass). Other members of Christian origin grew up in Quaker homes and saw their involvement in WAF as compatible with these values (i.e. Jane Lane and Sue O' Sullivan). However, some African Caribbean feminists who originally joined WAF during the Rushdie campaign left shortly afterwards because they resented what they saw as WAF's insufficient regard for the importance of Christian churches as a sanctuary and an organising space against racism (see Jane's chapter for concerns about this).

The political development of WAF women has often been individualistic rather than collective. In part this is connected with a widely shared experience amongst the contributors of discomfort, of feeling 'out of place' or 'out of time' in their activist surroundings, and therefore of searching for (and ultimately finding it in WAF) a political home that fitted more clearly with their perspective (e.g. Clara, Eva, Nadje, Sue and Sukhwant). For some WAF women, books played a particularly strong role during their teenage years, supplying them with inspiration and role models that substituted for more social forms of solidarity in situations in which they felt isolated and confronted by family and/or community (e.g. Nira, Pragna, Rashmi, Sukhwant).

Migration, in their family histories as well as in their own lives, has played a major role in most WAF women's identities. Several women are from families that travelled the routes of colonial labour exchange from countries that were colonised by the British (Pragna, Shakila, Hannana). Many women's lives were made or transformed by the dialectical relationship between particular sections within specific countries and the British state (for example the Congress political elite



in the case of Gita, or Jat Sikhs and their role in British colonial rule in the case of Sukhwant). The British colonial dimensions of these narratives are also scrambled by ancestral ties to colonial pasts that drew someone like Georgie out of England to live in India and then Bangladesh, and took Cassandra to Pakistan. And these life histories also recount the lives of new post-colonial/Commonwealth migrants who drifted towards the centre from the periphery (e.g. Clara, Rashmi, Ritu, Sue and Natalie). All these movements across borders share an uncanny connection with an ever present colonial past that refuses to either fix or erase the 'here' and the 'there'. The history of migration and discrimination on the part of the Jewish members of WAF (Julia, Ruth, Eva, Nira and Helen) further complements as well as complicates any binary construction of racialisation which relies on a simplified geo-political dichotomy between 'the West and the Rest'.

Education has played a particularly important role in the lives of most WAF women, often linked to spatial mobility (see for example Eva's chapter – she was the first to get a university education in her family). Migration within the UK was often associated with going to study at university in a different city. This was a common pathway. Given the class origin of many WAF members, education was often possible only because free university education and maintenance grants were still available when they were growing up (e.g. Hannana, Pragna, Sukhwant). The new kinds of people, ideas and organisations that WAF women encountered during their university studies were often a launching pad to new forms of being, as well as activism. This was true also for WAF members who went to study in universities in different cities and in other countries (e.g. Natalie, Nira, Gita, Rashmi, Nadje, Sue and Ritu).

### **WAF IS DEAD. LONG LIVE WAF!**

The characteristic which we found to be common to all WAF activists is that, whether they are founding members or later joiners, WAF was never their first 'political home' or their only centre of activism. This is because to be a 'WAFer', one's politics had to become not solely feminist, and/or anti-racist and/or anti-fundamentalist: it had to encompass all these different dimensions in order to tread the precarious pathway of 'washing one's dirty linen in public' and simultaneously be anti-racist; to make a distinction between secularism as a separa-

tion of religion and the state and secularism as a blanket rejection of any religion or spirituality; to combine all this with a critique of the ethnic 'community', the local, the national and the global. Such a political perspective was achieved in different ways and involved activism in multiple arenas – from racist violence to domestic violence to anti-war to immigration to interventions on multiculturalist and multi-faithist policies to interventions on UN human rights commissions to campaigns on women's reproductive rights. However, what united them was holistic and organic: the specific and the generic were continuously kept together in a dynamic but analytically solid way. WAF was highly valued for many years by virtually all its members as the best context in which they could think and analyse what was happening and learn new ideas and insights – and as a place from which they could take insights back to the other political contexts in which they were operating.

This was both WAF's great strength and its great weakness. Great strength, because in this way WAF members were at the forefront of political analysis, thinking in a complex intersectional way, examining particular social and political issues and policies in a holistic way. Weakness, because it was not easy for new members to join, and even when persevering it often took years before they 'dared' to speak in the name of the organisation (e.g. Eva, Jane, Sue's chapters in this volume).

Moreover, because of the multi-politicking of most WAF members, there was never enough time and energy to accomplish particular WAF campaigns and to nurture the organisation. Eventually – and having been seriously affected by the sudden death of Helen Lowe, a WAF activist who created and sustained the WAF website and email list – the organisation was unable to withstand all the debates and disagreements about new political developments, and eventually it petered out, although, as we have noted, some of the core members continue to meet for occasional political discussions and to attend public symposia, such as the series on Gender and Fundamentalism organised by WAFers Nira and Nadjé.<sup>85</sup> The demise of WAF opens up more general questions about the nature and effectiveness of political organisations that resist becoming formally funded and structured bodies or NGOs; about feminist decision-making mechanisms; and about the all too often weakness of intergenerational feminist reproduction.<sup>86</sup>

There were a number of ongoing organisational dilemmas for WAF.

The continuous pull between structuring the organisation, making it function as a formal organisation, and its nature as an activist body with maximum participation, resulted in an uneven relationship between a growing number of e-list members and an ad hoc Organising Group that by default became more of a decision-making and management body than it had intended. This point is connected to the continuous tension between WAF as an activist organisation, supporting and running its own campaigns, and WAF as a space for discussion and reflection. Furthermore, the fact that women involved with this network were already active elsewhere meant that additional activism was restricted, but a simple 'talking shop' was not what everyone wanted. At each stage, newer members in particular had become involved specifically because they felt that anti-fundamentalist activism was needed. In the earlier days, it was this tension between WAF as an academically informed, writing, reflecting space and the practical needs and preferred language of activism that brought about the end of the WAF journal.<sup>87</sup> (This absence of a journal has inevitably meant that in its second phase less of the organisation's work has been recorded.) Finally, WAF's practice of 'speaking in pairs' could be both liberating and constraining for its members. Speaking in pairs was something that emerged in the early days, as a means of countering populist impressions and media coverage that portrayed WAF as anti-Muslim or as only interested in Muslim fundamentalism. By undertaking speaking engagements in pairs of members of different ethnic and religious origin, WAF members made an attempt to deflect such perception, to reflect the diversity of the organisation, and to speak about fundamentalism in all religions. Paradoxically, at times this encased WAF within the same logic that the organisation pushed against – identity politics and all the authenticating and legitimising processes that accompany it.

Needless to say, with the end of WAF's second life we all share a great deal of frustration and the sense of a lost opportunity for social and political impact precisely at a time when the need for it is probably greater than ever.

During the peak of its existence, WAF was used as an example for what is known as 'transversal politics'.<sup>88</sup> This is a kind of politics that feminists and other emancipatory activists developed in many parts of the world, and in transnational and global organisations, in which the solidarity among the activists is not built on common origin or iden-

tity but rather on shared political values and they are seen as advocates for rather than representatives of their collectivities. At the same time there is a recognition and respect for the differential intersectional locations of the different participants in the transversal dialogue, and their uneven power relations. The dialogue is sustained by ‘shifting’ – an empathetic identification with the situated gaze of the other participants in the dialogue – and ‘rooting’ – a reflective grounding of one’s own social as well as ideational location.

The feminists in Bologna who in the 1990s first used the terms ‘shifting’, ‘rooting’ and ‘transversal politics’ in relation to feminist co-operation across borders and boundaries of national and ethnic conflicts borrowed the term from ‘the Transversalists’ – a group of autonomous leftist liberation activists in Bologna. However, the first person to use the term transversal politics was Felix Guattari, who used it in a very different way.<sup>89</sup> His concern was a dialogue not across borders and boundaries but one that was internal to a political organisation. He felt that only a transversal process of communication, which would encompass both vertical and horizontal layers of the organisation, would ensure that a political organisation would not outlast its purpose, would not continue to exist just because of any organisation’s tendency to perpetuate itself.

In the case of WAF it is clear that the reason for its existence, its purpose, is not accomplished. As several chapters in the book indicate (e.g. Gita, Julia, Clara), the changing local and global context of WAF since the days of its establishment, the highly complex, shifting and contested articulations of its politics and priorities, as well as some of its structural weaknesses, have meant that the organisation was not able to sustain the transversal alliance that had kept it working for so many years. This, however, does not invalidate what some of us call the intersectional political perspective of WAF, which argues the need for an encompassing emancipatory political analysis and feminist activism that is at the same time anti-racist and anti-fundamentalist. It is our hope that reading this book will encourage old and new activists to take on this crucial task.

#### **A NOTE ABOUT HOW THE CHAPTERS ARE ORGANISED**

The contributors’ chapters are organised according to the time period in which women joined the organisation. So it begins with those that

were involved in initiating the earliest meetings, and then moves on to those that joined through those meetings – and so on and so forth.

## NOTES

1. M. Andrews, *Shaping History: Narratives of Political Change*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2007.
2. Some of us called this transversal politics, as discussed towards the end of this introduction.
3. See S. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations', *Foreign Affairs* 72(3), 1993: 22-50); this perspective is also an important feature of contemporary Christian Right interventions in politics.
4. See Women Against Fundamentalism journal archive: [www.womenagainstfundamentalism.org.uk](http://www.womenagainstfundamentalism.org.uk); and G. Sahgal and N. Yuval-Davis, *Refusing Holy Orders: Women and Fundamentalism in Britain*, Virago Press, London 1992.
5. For further reading see *WAF Journal*, number 5, 1994, which debates the term 'fundamentalism' and its application across religions and in several different contexts.
6. A few years ago several WAF women, but notably Cassandra Balchin, were involved in an action research project about the impact of fundamentalist movements on the lives and activism of feminists, human rights defenders and development workers in 160 different countries. The publications that emerged from that work can be accessed here: [www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Religious-Fundamentalisms](http://www.awid.org/AWID-s-Publications/Religious-Fundamentalisms).
7. See G. Sahgal, 'Fundamentalism and the Multi-Culturalist Fallacy', in SBS Collective (eds), *Against the Grain*, Southall Black Sisters, Southall 1990; F. Anthias and N. Yuval-Davis, *Racialized Boundaries: Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*, Routledge, London 1992; Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
8. P. Cohen and H.S. Bains, *Multi-Racist Britain*, Macmillan Education, London 1988; V. Das, *Critical Events: An Anthropological Perspective on Contemporary India*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996; and S. Dhaliwal, 'Orange Is Not the Only Colour: Young Women and Religious Identity in Southall', in R. Gupta (ed), *From Homebreakers to Jailbreakers: Southall Black Sisters*, Zed Books, London 2003.
9. C. Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity: Race, New Religious Movements and the Ethics of Postmodernity*, Routledge, London 1997, p110.
10. *Ibid*, p113.
11. The Jamaat-e-Islami is a Saudi-funded fundamentalist group that was formed in 1941 in colonial India, drawing inspiration from Abu a'la Maududi, one of the first thinkers of the Islamic Right, who formulated an ideology of the Islamic state and of modern jihad. Many of its leaders are currently being prosecuted for war crimes in Bangladesh, including

those who have been living in London and/or have been regular preachers at London institutions.

12. Bhatt, op cit.
13. At a recent discussion organised by the Centre for Secular Space, Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui provided insights on the connections between Islamist projects, demands for blasphemy laws, persecution of intellectuals and artists, and the eruption of genocidal violence. See: *Bangladesh Genocide: what human rights, anti-racist and peace organisations won't tell you*, speakers: Gita Sahgal, Dr Ghayasuddin Siddiqui and Asif Munier, SOAS, London, 27 November 2012. A full video of the talk is available to view at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKEHLvMQm-0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HKEHLvMQm-0), Accessed on 22 September 2013.
14. J. Bard, 'Women Against Fundamentalism and the Jewish Community' in *WAF Journal*, No 4, pp3-5, 1992/1993.
15. See Bernie Grant's statement in *Hullabaloo Over Satanic Verses* (Part 2), a film made by Gita Sahgal for the Channel 4 Series *Bandung File* in 1989. Available at: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLbx47Nyfio&feature=relmfu](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cLbx47Nyfio&feature=relmfu); and K. Shukra, *The Changing Pattern of Black Politics in Britain*, Pluto Press, London 1998.
16. C. Connolly, 'Review essay on "Sacred Cows"' in *Feminist Review*, No 35, 1990.
17. The anti-Rushdie march represented the coming together of politically liberal Barelwis, Iranian shias, Wahhabis and Saudi funded networks (particularly Jamaat-e-Islami and the Muslim Brotherhood chapters in Britain). See C. Bhatt, *Liberation and Purity: Race, New Religious Movements and the Ethics of Postmodernity*, Routledge, London 1997.
18. *Struggle Or Submission*, made in 1989 by Gita Sahgal for Channel 4's series *The Bandung File*: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPZ22wBT46Y](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPZ22wBT46Y).
19. See A. Cummins, 'Taslina Nasreen and the fight against fundamentalism', in *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995, pp53-57.
20. International Initiative for Justice, *Threatened Existence: A Feminist Analysis of the Genocide in Gujarat*, IJ 2003.
21. G. Sahgal and N. Yuval-Davis, Introduction, Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
22. As articulated in the Church Urban Fund's 1984 report *Faith in the City*, which also represents the first steps that gave rise to the now prominent Christian-led campaigning body, Citizens UK.
23. G. Sahgal, 'Secular Spaces; The Experience of Asian Women Organising' in Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
24. Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
25. As documented in *ibid*; and issues 1, 2 and 6 of the *WAF journal*.
26. T. Modood, 'Beware of a Secular Intolerance', in *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995.
27. *Ibid*.

28. C. Connolly, 'WAF replies to Tariq Modood' in *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995.
29. H. Bhabha, 'On Subaltern Secularism', in *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995.
30. Rohini PH, 'The struggle against communalism: defining our positive alternative', in *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995.
31. For more detail of WAF's position on religion and education see *WAF Journal*, No 1, p8, November 1990, where there is a copy of the 'WAF Model Resolution on Religious Schools'.
32. Sahgal, 'Secular Spaces' in Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
33. See A. Chhachhi, 'Religious fundamentalism and women' in *WAF Journal*, No 1, 1990, pp14-15; and 'Civil codes and personal laws: reversing the option working group on women's rights', in *WAF Journal*, No 8, 1996, pp20-24.
34. 'Rabia Janjua Must Stay: Statement by WAF', dated 29 August 1990, in *WAF Journal*, No 1, November 1990.
35. As well as the chapters in this book, see A. Rossiter, "Between the devil and the deep blue sea": Irish women, Catholicism and Colonialism'; and M. Poya, *Double Exile; Iranian Women and Islamic Fundamentalism*: both in Sahgal and Yuval-Davis, op cit.
36. A. Rossiter, 'Granting Civil Rights to the Foetus in Ireland – A Victory to Christian Fundamentalists Worldwide', in *WAF Journal*, No 1, November 1990, p9.
37. A. Rossiter, 'Between the devil and the deep blue sea', op cit.
38. Rita Burtenshaw's seminar talk was reproduced in full in *WAF Journal*, number 2, July 1991, pp3-5.
39. A. Rossiter, 'Outraged protestors call for the Irish fatwa against a 14 year old pregnant rape victim to be lifted', *WAF Journal*, No 3, 1992, pp1-3.
40. See *WAF Journal*, Number 7, 1995, which focused on reproductive rights and these international alliances among fundamentalists.
41. G.C. Spivak, 'Public Hearing on Crimes Against Women', *WAF Journal*, No 7, 1995, pp3-5.
42. R. Feldman, 'Reply to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak', *WAF Journal*, No 7, 1995, pp5-7.
43. N. Yuval-Davis, 'The Cairo Conference, Women and Transversal Politics', *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995, pp19-21.
44. See the entire WAF Journal devoted to this issue, *WAF Journal* number 8, 1996.
45. See East London WAF Members 'Resistance to fundamentalism in Bangladesh and Britain', *WAF Journal*, No 4, 1992, pp9-11; and 'Women unite against racism: WAF report', *WAF Journal*, No 6, 1995, pp35-36.
46. See A. Imam, J. Morgan & N. Yuval-Davis (eds), *Warning Signs of Fundamentalisms*, WLUML 2004.
47. See WLUML Occasional Paper number 14 (November 2003), which is a written report on this event and can be downloaded from [www.wluml.org/node/471](http://www.wluml.org/node/471).

48. The story of Respect and its alliances is now well documented. See C. Bassi, 'The Anti-Imperialism of Fools: A Cautionary Story of the Revolutionary Socialist Vanguard of England's post 9/11 Anti-War Movement', in *Acme: An International E-Journal for Critical Geographies* 9(2): 113-138, 2009; S. Glynn, 'Bengali Muslims: The New East End Radicals?' in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 25(6): 969-988, 2002; S. Glynn, *Playing the Ethnic Card – Politics and Ghettoisation in London's East End*, Institute of Geography Online Paper Series, University of Edinburgh 2006; R. Phillips, 'Standing Together: The Muslim Association of Britain and the Anti-War Movement', *Race & Class* 50(2) 2008: 101-13.
49. W. Macpherson, *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry* (Macpherson Report). HMSO, London 1999.
50. About 45 million pounds have been allocated since 2006 to fund hundreds of religious organisations, and then, in 2009, to establish nine Regional Faith Forums to work with regional statutory bodies and quangos to raise concerns about religion and belief in the region. See E. Spratt and M. James, *Faith, Cohesion and Community Development: Final evaluation report from the Faith Communities Capacity Building Fund*, Community Development Foundation, London 2008; D. Permain and A. Hatamian, *Faiths in Action Interim Report: First Year Evaluation of the Regional Faith Forums and the Faiths in Action Programme*, Community Development Foundation, London 2010.
51. Examples include: the document 'Consulting London: A Framework for the core GLA, LDA, LFEPa, MPA and TFL', published in September 2003, which clearly identifies 'faith groups' as 'stakeholders', and institutionalises their place in consultation mechanisms; the 2006 GLA-organised meeting of religious organisations to discuss their role in tackling domestic violence; and the 'Faith in the Future' project of 2001/02, developed by the Housing Corporation.
52. See for instance: A. Dinham, R. Furbey and V. Lowndes, *Faith in the Public Realm: Controversies, Policies and Practices*, Policy Press, London 2009; A. Dinham, R. Farnell, D. Finneron et al, *Faith as Social Capital: Connecting or Dividing*, Policy Press, London 2006; A. Dinham and V. Lowndes, 'Religion, Resources, and Representation', in *Urban Affairs Review* 43(6) 2008: 817-845; R. Furbey and M. Macey, 'Religion and Urban Regeneration: A Place for Faith?' in *Policy & Politics* 33(1) 2005: 95-116.
53. See L. Back, M. Keith, A. Khan, K. Shukra and J. Solomos, 'The Return of Assimilationism: Race, Multiculturalism and New Labour', in *Sociological Research Online* 7, 2002; J. Burnett, 'Community, Cohesion and the State', in *Race & Class* 45(3): 1, 2004; A. Rattansi, 'Who's British? Prospect and the New Assimilationism', in R. Berkeley (ed), *Cohesion, Community and Citizenship*, The Runnymede Trust 2002, pp96-105; A. Sivanandan, 'Race, Terror and Civil Society', in *Race & Class* 47(3), 2006,



- pp1-8; D. McGhee, 'Moving to "Our" Common Ground – a Critical Examination of Community Cohesion Discourse in Twenty-First Century Britain', in *The Sociological Review* 51(3) 2003; 376-404; C. Worley, 'It's Not About Race. It's About the Community': New Labour and Community Cohesion', in *Critical Social Policy* 25(4), 2005: 483-496; A. Kundnani, *The End of Tolerance: Racism in 21st Century Britain*, Pluto Press, London 2007.
54. This was counter to the findings of some of the independent inquiries which expressly talked about the prevalence of racism. For instance, the Oldham Independent Review Panel report, dated 11.12.01, points to: the rise of the far right in the area, including their gaining of seats in local elections; a petrol bomb attack on the then Asian Mayor's house; common usage of the word 'Paki' to refer to Asians in the area; self-imposed curfews amongst ethnic minorities to avoid racist attacks; and complaints by ethnic minorities of people dumping rubbish or throwing bottles, both of which are common forms of racist harassment.
  55. Arun Kundnani (2009) and Rahila Gupta (2010) estimated that up to £140 million were disbursed through local authorities to mainly Muslim groups to tackle radicalisation in communities. In the context of an acute shortage of voluntary sector funding, voluntary sector organisations were uncritically signing up to the terms of this new source of funding in order to meet their core costs. See R. Gupta, 'This religious give-away is hard to justify', *Guardian*, 23.10.10: [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/mar/23/denham-funding-religious-groups](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2010/mar/23/denham-funding-religious-groups); and A. Kundnani, *Spooked! How Not to Prevent Violent Extremism*, Institute of Race Relations, London 2009.
  56. Tony Blair (8.12.06), 'The Duty to Integrate: Shared British Values': [www.politics.co.uk/news/2006/12/8/blair-warns-of-duty-to-integrate](http://www.politics.co.uk/news/2006/12/8/blair-warns-of-duty-to-integrate).
  57. WAF/SBS Submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, dated January 2007.
  58. John Solomos and Les Back coined the term 'machine politics' to describe this phenomenon. See J. Solomos and L. Back, *Race, Politics, and Social Change*, Routledge, London 1995.
  59. WAF/SBS submission to the Commission on Cohesion and Integration, London, 2007, p36.
  60. Muslim Women's Network, *She Who Dispute; Muslim Women Shape the Debate*, Women's National Commission, London, November 2006.
  61. C. Bhatt, 'The Fetish of the Margins: Religious Absolutism, Anti-racism and Post-colonial Silence', *New Formations* 59 (Special Issue – Post-colonial Studies After Iraq), 2006; and G. Sahgal, 'Two cheers for multiculturalism', in A. Imam, J. Morgan and N. Yuval-Davis (eds), *The Warning Signs of Fundamentalism*, WLUML, 2004.
  62. WAF/SBS Submission to the Commission on Integration and Cohesion, dated January 2007.

63. P. Patel and U. Sen, *Cohesion, Faith and Gender: A report on the impact of the cohesion and faith based approach on black and minority women in Ealing*, Southall Black Sisters and Oxfam, London 2011: [www.southall-blacksisters.org.uk/reportrequests.html](http://www.southall-blacksisters.org.uk/reportrequests.html).
64. The public meeting *Faith, Equality and Cohesion* took place on 25 November 2008 at the House of Commons, and included as speakers Karon Monaghan (Matrix Chambers), Pragna Patel (SBS) and Sandhya Sharma (Saheli).
65. The state funding of faith schools remains a scandal. The Coalition government continued the commitment to schools of a religious character and, according to the British Humanist Association (BHA), schools in Britain now take six different forms: local authority owned and managed secular community schools; three types of schools which may be legally registered with a religious character (Voluntary Controlled; Voluntary Aided; and Foundation 'faith' schools, academies or Free Schools); and academies and Free Schools that have no registered religious character but may have a 'faith ethos'. Each of these streams has differing levels of autonomy from state control. The BHA chart is a useful guide and can be found at: <http://humanism.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/schools-with-a-religious-character.pdf>. Their website also provides annual statistics about schools of a religious character. See: <https://humanism.org.uk/campaigns/schools-and-education/faith-schools/>.
66. See D. Gillard, *Never Mind the Evidence: Blair's obsession with faith schools*, 2007: [www.educationengland.org.uk/articles/26blairfaith.html](http://www.educationengland.org.uk/articles/26blairfaith.html), accessed 18 October 2013; S. Gibbons and O. Silva, *Faith Primary Schools – Better Schools or Better Pupils?*, Discussion Paper number 4089, March 2009: <http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/dp4089.pdf?abstractid=1369835&mirred=2>; K.M. Gokulsing, 'Without Prejudice: An Exploration of Religious Diversity, Secularism and Citizenship in England', in *Journal of Education Policy* 21(4) 2006: 459-470.
67. See N. Hanman, 'Unequal Opportunities', *Guardian*, 9.5.06: [www.theguardian.com/education/2006/may/09/faithschools.schools](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2006/may/09/faithschools.schools), accessed 19 October 2013.
68. See the Accord Coalition website: <http://accordcoalition.org.uk/about-us/> Last accessed on 19 October 2013.
69. Julia Bard raised concerns about the links between the growing number of Jewish families sending their children to Jewish schools and the way in which this enabled religious councils and faith schools to determine what it is to be Jewish and to seal the boundaries of the community as a whole. See J. Bard, 'Faith Schools: minorities, boundaries, representation and control' in *FORUM*, vol 49, number 3, 2007, pp277-280. Similar concerns were raised by O. Valins, 'Defending identities or segregating communities? Faith-based schooling and the UK Jewish community', in *Geoforum*, 34, 2002, pp235-247; and J. Romain, 'Faith Schools are Still a Recipe for Social Disaster' in *FORUM*, vol 49, number 3, 2007, pp207-212.

70. See: [www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/creationism\\_1.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/christianity/beliefs/creationism_1.shtml); and [www.muslimgovernors.org/](http://www.muslimgovernors.org/); and P. Mukta, 'New Hinduism: Teaching Intolerance, Practising Aggression', in the *Journal of PCIRE*, Autumn issue, 1997.
71. See the research report by two WAF members: S. Dhaliwal and P. Patel, *Multiculturalism in Secondary Schools: Managing Conflicting Demands* (2006): [www.workinglives.org/research-themes/discrimination/cre-multiculturalism-in-secondaryschools.cfm](http://www.workinglives.org/research-themes/discrimination/cre-multiculturalism-in-secondaryschools.cfm), accessed 19 October 2013. More recently the BHA have picked up the concern about sex and relationships education by lobbying government to make this a part of the compulsory national curriculum; for that national curriculum to apply to all schools; and to remove the right of parental withdrawal from these classes. The BHA has also been involved in pushing against pro-life campaigners attempting to influence the school curriculum.
72. R (on the application of Begum (by her litigation friend Rahman)) v Headteacher and governors of Denbigh High School 2006, UKHL 15.
73. D. Gillard, op cit.
74. S. Bano, 'Islamic Family Arbitration, Justice and Human Rights in Britain', in *Law, Social Justice and Global Development Journal*, 2007 (1): [http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2007\\_1/bano/](http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2007_1/bano/).
75. See N. Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999; and 'The Politics of Life Itself', in *Theory, Culture & Society* 18(6): 1, 2001.
76. R. Rosen, 'JLC Advises on Big Society' in *The Jewish Chronicle*, 9.12.10: <http://www.thejc.com/community/community-life/42326/jlc-advises-big-society>.
77. According to the British Humanist Association, in 2012 the Coalition government approved 102 Free Schools to open in 2013, of which 33 are faith based. See <http://humanism.org.uk/2012/07/14/news-1077/>.
78. See S. Dhaliwal, *Religion, Moral Hegemony and Local Cartographies of Power: Feminist Reflections on Religion in Local Politics*, Doctoral thesis, Goldsmiths, University of London, 2012: <http://eprints.gold.ac.uk/7802/>. In her study of two local areas of London Sukhwant noted the growth of new local systems of election where local areas are being restructured along the lines of believers and non-believers, with the former gaining access to additional educational and welfare resources simply because of the strength of their religious belief.
79. P. Butler and A. Travis, 'Sex Trafficking Charity Loses Out to Salvation Army over £6m Contract', *Guardian*, 11.4.11: [www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/apr/11/eaves-housing-trafficking-salvation-army](http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/apr/11/eaves-housing-trafficking-salvation-army), accessed 23 September 2013.
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- evangelical-religion-tory-conservatives; and C. Cook, 'Christian Tories Rewrite Party Doctrine', *Financial Times*, 12.2.10: [www.ft.com/cms/s/2/12400596-16ac-11df-aa09-00144feab49a.html#axzz1AJyjO0UY](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/12400596-16ac-11df-aa09-00144feab49a.html#axzz1AJyjO0UY); and J. Doward, 'Secret Christian Donors Bankroll the Tories', *Observer*, 2.5.10: [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/02/secret-christian-donors-bankroll-tories](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/may/02/secret-christian-donors-bankroll-tories).
81. Tax, M, *Double Bind: The Muslim Right, the Anglo-American Left, and Universal Human Rights*, Centre for Secular Space, London, 2013.
  82. See for instance K. Crenshaw, *Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex*, University of Chicago, Chicago 1989; A. Brah and A. Phoenix, 'Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality', in *Journal of International Women's Studies* 5(3) 2004, pp75-86; N. Yuval-Davis, 'Intersectionality and Feminist Politics', in *European Journal of Women's Studies* (special Issue on Intersectionality) 13(3): 193-209, 2006.
  83. D. Smith, *Feminism and Marxism: A place to begin, a way to go*, New Star Books, 1977.
  84. For discussion reflecting the 'addition' approach, see for instance Z. Williams, 'Are you too white, rich, able-bodied and straight to be a feminist?' *Guardian*, 18.4.13: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/18/are-you-too-white-rich-straight-to-be-feminist](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2013/apr/18/are-you-too-white-rich-straight-to-be-feminist), accessed 14 October 2013; and B. Adewunmi, 'What the Girls Spat on Twitter tells us about Feminism', *Guardian*, 8.10.12: [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/08/girls-twitter-feminism-caitlin-moran](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/oct/08/girls-twitter-feminism-caitlin-moran), accessed 14 October 2013.
  85. N. Yuval-Davis, 'Belonging and the Politics of Belonging', in *Patterns of Prejudice* 40(3) 2006: 197-214. Also see Nira's CMRB UEL website [www.uel.ac.uk/cmrb/](http://www.uel.ac.uk/cmrb/); and Nadjie's CGS SOAS website [www.soas.ac.uk/genderstudies/](http://www.soas.ac.uk/genderstudies/).
  86. For an article that critically discusses some of these issues with regards to the feminist movement as a whole see N. Yuval-Davis, 'Human/Women's Rights and Feminist Transversal Politics', in M.M. Ferree and A.M. Tripp (eds), *Global Feminism: Transnational Women's Activism, Organising and Human Rights*, New York University Press, New York 2006.
  87. Towards the end of WAF's first phase of existence, some members of WAF criticised the members of the WAF journal editorial team for producing an overly academic journal and wanted to replace it with a more accessible activity oriented one. Alas, the result was the cessation of the journal's production in its previous format and no alternative emerging, either then or during WAF's second phase, although the website aimed to fulfil this need to a certain extent.
  88. See for instance: C. Cockburn and L. Hunter, 'Transversal Politics and Translating Practices', in *Soundings* 12, special issue on Transversal Politics, summer 1999; N. Reilly, *Women's Human Rights*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2009; N. Yuval-Davis, 'Women, Ethnicity and Empowerment',

in *Feminism and Psychology* (special issue on Shifting Identities, Shifting Racisms) 4(1) 1994: 179-98.

89. See F. Guattari, *Psychoanalyse et transversalité*, Maspero, Paris 1974.