



**Unmasking the Fundamentalist Politics of  
Inequality and Violence**  
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Those trying to push us back to the “good old days” when rigid rankings of domination and violence against “inferiors” were socially accepted recognize a critical, though still largely ignored, political fact. Be it Hitler in Germany, Khomeini in Iran, the Taliban in Afghanistan, or the rightist-fundamentalist alliance in the United States, these people give top priority to “getting women back into their traditional place” in a “traditional family” – a code word for an authoritarian “male-headship” family where women are subordinate and children learn it’s extremely painful to question orders no matter how brutal or unjust.

Yet many people working for democracy and equality fail to recognize the political importance of how a society constructs our primary human relations – the gender and childhood relations that so profoundly affect what people consider normal and moral. They still view “women’s rights” and “children’s rights” as secondary to “more important matters.”

This blind spot is a massive obstacle to building a more peaceful and equitable world. It is not coincidental that the 9-11 terrorists came from cultures where women and children are terrorized into submission. Nor is it coincidental that the rightist-fundamentalist alliance in the United States first organized as a powerful political block around a “women’s issue” – the defeat of the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. Or that the people who make pushing women back to their “traditional” subservient place in a punitive male-headed family seem to see nothing wrong with torture, and like their Muslim fundamentalist counterparts, advocate “holy wars.”

We must show that the fundamentalist agenda is not a religious one. Despite their dominator overlay of angry, vengeful Father Gods, there are many teachings of caring and nonviolence in religious scriptures. The fundamentalist agenda – be it Eastern or Western – is an domination agenda: an integrated agenda to push us back to a world of authoritarian, coercive families and states, rigid male dominance, and the use of violence and terror to maintain top-down rule.

When we come upon domination teachings, such as that God will only save “true believers” or that God rewards terrorists who randomly kill women and children and commands that women be stoned to death, we must say, wait, this is only part of the story. Instead of focusing on control, coercion, and violence, we must build on the partnership values of empathy, nonviolence, and caring that are at the core of most religions.

We must bring a strong moral voice to end violence against women and children. We must do

this for the sake of the millions whose lives are blighted and all too often taken by this global pandemic of violence – from child and wife beating, rape, and “honor killings” to genital mutilation, selective female infanticide, and “bride burnings.” We must also speak up against this violence – which is the most pervasive human rights violation worldwide – for the sake of us all. Because intimate violence is a training for using violence as a means of imposing one’s will on others – and we can’t break cycles of international violence without changing traditions of intimate violence.

We must show religious and political leaders, as well as the public at large, that intimate violence and international violence are as integrally interconnected as the fingers of a clenched fist. We must ask them to break their silence on this basic issue of human rights.

Bringing a strong moral voice to end traditions of intimate violence is the goal of the Spiritual Alliance to Stop Intimate Violence (SAIV), an international initiative of the Center for Partnership Studies that I co-founded and invite you to support.

Only by ending traditions of intimate violence can we construct the solid foundations on which a better society can be built . We cannot end international violence unless we address violence in the fundamental relations between women and men and between parents and children. If enough of us join together to do this, we can leave behind traditions of inequality and violence and move to a more peaceful and equitable world.

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