



## **SITUATING THE CONTEXT “CITIZENSHIP: DEMOCRACY; RETRIBUTION AND RIGHTS”**

**BY GIGI FRANCISCO**

**DAWN PANEL AT THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM 2007, NAIROBI KENYA**

Welcome to the DAWN panel entitled “Citizenship: Democracy; Retribution and Rights”

In the last two years, DAWN has been examining the dissonances, ambivalences and contradictions in the democratic practices and systems of societies in the South. Particular attention is given to how these processes arise from the combined assault of capitalist neo-liberal globalization and political neo-conservatism that find convergence in the havoc and insecurities caused by US unilateralism and war on many states and societies and on the international community.

We had observed in many places a re-assertion of nationalist, religious, ethnic and other communitarian moral codes that are pushing back or eroding hard-won social contracts around women’s formal rights and our equality with men. The oversimplification and narrow interpretations of rights, including women’s and migrants’ rights as well as the continued denial of rights to discriminated individuals and social groups, are reflected in the new anti-trafficking, anti-terrorist and security regulations that are being placed at the regional and inter-regional spheres. Backlash reactions and conservative views on women, gender relations and sexualities are also manifest in the trend of national and local governments to change, re-interpret or even resurrect old laws and rules aimed at the total control and subjugation of women along with LGBT people and other excluded social groups, including the re-criminalization of so-called deviant behavior based on some previous legal and moral order. Still in some cases, women’s rights are either sidelined traded off or used as populist but token promises by political forces that contest around the capture of state power.

The assault on women’s rights are also manifest in how social movements that challenge neoliberalism, war and unilateralism are helping to promote and reinstitute fundamentalist and patriarchal notions and moral judgments on women’s proper behavior and rightful place in societies. This is manifest in this 7<sup>th</sup> World Social forum where we find some groups which claim a rights-based approach to poverty also carrying intolerant views on sexual and reproductive rights of women and of LGBT people, based on their assertion of some religious dogma. We find some women (and men) in other movements who are simultaneously militant resisters of US imperialism, are in struggles for people’s control of resources in the face of the attack on livelihoods by global capitalism, are defenders of social rights and democratic inclusions, yet may also be

socializers of views that accept dichotomies and hierarchies in gender relations, reproduction and sexualities.

The presenters in this panel will each discuss through different experiences and cases how as a result of these processes, women are being deprived of our personal autonomy, welfare and rights; are being forced to fit within a rigid hetero-normative frame; are being criminalized and in some cases stoned to death for leading lives that are contrary to officially sanctioned values and norms; or are caught in a difficult situations wherein democracy and women's rights become unclear in a context where issues and narratives are entangled or woven in rhizomatic fashion.