

# Speaker: Third World women move to equality

By Diane Andersen

The world is moving toward the time when a revolutionary process will bring about the full equality of men and women. Women may even initiate the struggle, according to Moira Ferguson, associate professor of English and chairperson of UNL Women's Studies.

Ferguson spoke Wednesday on the subject of "International Liberation," which she defined as the "double revolution" — a struggle in Third World nations such as Iran, Cuba, Nicaragua, Eritria on the Horn of Africa, El Salvador and Guinea Bisau (formerly Portuguese Guinea), against colonialism, imperialism and patriarchy.

Ferguson spoke as part of the Women in Perspective speaker series sponsored by the Student Y. She praised the Student Y for its "progressive feminist and anti-racist politics on campus that have been so consistent over the years."

Ferguson explained her views on how women have participated in class struggles in Third World nations and how women's liberation movements are progressing there.

## Participated in struggle

"In Iran, she said, women and children participated in the struggle to overthrow the former shah, Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, whom Ferguson called an agent of U.S. imperialism, as well as in the current struggle against the Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

Khomeini, an Islamic fundamentalist, has reintroduced the compulsory wearing of veils by Iranian women. Many women ridicule the rule by wearing transparent scarves or putting on veils just before going to work, Ferguson said.

Still, she said, "Many Iranian woman have resumed their previous roles in society as second-class citizens."

"Khomeini's regime has been discredited as a feudal patriarchy" in which robbers, homosexuals and adulterers are routinely tortured and executed, she said.

## Labeled prostitutes

Iranian women demonstrating for reform are labeled as prostitutes, Ferguson said, and the latest leftist platform in Iran "never addresses even indirectly the issue of patriarchy, nor are women even mentioned."

Ferguson said one woman who led protest movements in Iran, Ashraf Dehghani, was arrested in Iran in 1971 and tortured until her escape in 1973, which she accomplished by disguising herself in a smuggled-in shador, or veil.

"That was a positive use of the shador," Ferguson said. The story of Ashraf Dehghani shows that "women are just as likely as men to take on guerrilla roles in a revolution," she said.

Some Iranian women are calling for a separate and independent women's movement in Iran, Ferguson said. Although there appears to be no strong women's movement in Iran today, there is strong leadership by women, she said.

## Machismo attitudes

In Cuba, where Fidel Castro overthrew the Cuban government in 1959, Ferguson said women have made amazing strides against oppressive Roman Catholic and Latin machismo attitudes toward women. Women's needs in Cuba have been subordinated to general land reform, education and industrialization goals, she said, but much progress has been made in obtaining equal pay, access to jobs and elimination of sex roles.

The Federation of Cuban Women has helped to eliminate advertising that exploits women and protective legislation based on the concept of women as the weaker sex, Ferguson said.

Advances have been made in day care, pregnancy leave, and a family code has been passed requiring Cuban men to do 50 percent of the housework, among other things.

However, Ferguson said, the "residual reactionary

machismo culture" in Cuba still allows discrimination against homosexuals and lesbians. There are no laws against homosexuality in private, she said, but attitudes against it still prevail.

## Bought and sold

The advances for women in Cuba seem astronomical compared with the situation in 1959 in which women were bought and sold as property, she said.

"I'm not a Cuban apologist, but I like to look around and see what these countries are doing for people," Ferguson said.

In Guinea Bisau, formerly Portuguese Guinea, on the west coast of Africa, men who led the revolution for independence in the 1950s were chosen for their attitudes supporting equality, Ferguson said.

From 1963 to 1974, war was waged until Portugal recognized Guinea Bisau as an independent nation. Women, traditionally the food producers in the country, had a central rather than a subservient role in the revolution, Ferguson said.

"Women were unused to thinking in terms of their own power," she said, adding that they eventually were persuaded to participate in governing councils.

## Traditional practices ending

Traditional practices such as allowing a man to have seven wives and routinely performing clitoridectomies are now ending in Guinea Bisau, she said. In addition, contraceptives and abortions are now legally available, unlike in such Moslem and Catholic nations as Iran, Cuba and Palestine.

Ferguson said a coup in Guinea Bisau within the last year has brought a leader to power who seems to be sympathetic toward Portugal.

Nicaragua is an example of women contributing at all levels in overthrowing an imperialist regime, Ferguson said.

Nuns and a women's coalition supported by Sandinista leftists who fought to oust dictator Anastasio Somoza have helped to resolve national problems and defend human rights in Nicaragua, she said.

In the Nicaraguan revolution, she said, 30 percent of all women served in the military, and the women's coalition "addressed economic and political values in the context of the whole revolution."

Some of the goals of the Nicaraguan women's movement are child care and health education, but "no mention has been made of the issues of sexual preference and reproductive freedom."

## Nicaragua: testing ground

Considering the endemic machismo in Nicaragua, Ferguson said, lots of progress has been made. She said Nicaragua "may be a testing ground" for the advanced

theory of a class struggle for national liberation being connected with women's liberation.

Eritria is a former Italian colony on the strategic Horn of Africa that has been under British control since World War II. In 1962, the country was annexed by Ethiopia and has since fought a battle for liberation. In 1970, Ferguson said, the Eritria revolutionary movement set a goal of raising the consciousness of women.

Today, the women of Eritria have formed an association to fight the 85 percent illiteracy rate that existed in 1978 as well as to increase their participation in traditionally male dominated occupations. They are, she said, "taking an active part in village assemblies in the liberated areas."

## Progressive marriage laws

Changes in Eritria include the proposal of progressive marriage laws advocating total freedom of choice. Ferguson said the women's movement in Eritria will probably succeed if the class struggle succeeds.

Ferguson said she was very disappointed when she first heard that revolutionaries in El Salvador have said the needs of women will not be pursued in earnest until after the revolution's final victory.

However, she said, such a position makes sense if the women's movement follows the same course as it did in Nicaragua, where women organized everywhere and thus raised the consciousness of the general population.

"In El Salvador, the situation is dire," Ferguson said.

She said the average wage is less than \$2 a day and 40 percent of the population is illiterate. El Salvadoran sanitation conditions are horrible, she said, and one-third of all 14-year-old girls have been pregnant at least once. Many deaths result from illegal abortions. Clitoridectomies are common, Ferguson said.

"Women are the slaves of slaves, and starvation is their biggest problem," Ferguson said, adding that it is understandable that general class goals come before women's liberation in places like El Salvador.

Although all the movements in these Third World nations are individualistic, Ferguson said, it is obvious that the last two decades have been "the high noon of women's participation in international struggle," a trend which she said she is sure will continue.

People in the United States, she said, don't have an easily visible rallying point of imperialism or class oppression but "unless women are in the vanguard of a revolution against racism and sexism in the United States, no revolution in this country will be successful."

"It is encouraging that there is now a much greater focus on international issues in the women's movement," Ferguson said. "These are easy words, cheap words. Nothing will happen unless people organize and take action."

# Rutford one of seven semifinalists

UNL Interim Chancellor Robert Rutford is one of seven finalists for president of the University of Montana at Missoula.

"He was recommended to us," search committee chairperson Margery Brown said, and he sent an application when the committee contacted him. The search, which began Feb. 7, drew 152 applicants, she said.

Rutford will interview with the committee on May 17 and 18, Brown said. The committee will recommend three of the seven candidates to the MU Board of Regents by late May or early June, she said.

The regents' choice will replace current President Richard Bowers, who is resigning. Bowers received about

\$50,000 a year, but "we anticipate an increase in that salary," Brown said.

Rutford receives \$58,100 a year as interim chancellor. Rutford became interim chancellor Aug. 10, replacing former Chancellor Roy Young who resigned. The NU Board of Regents will vote on President Ronald Roskens' nomination of Martin A. Massengale for UNL chancellor at their Saturday meeting. If elected, Massengale would take over June 1.

Rutford was the vice chancellor for research and graduate studies before becoming interim chancellor, and Massengale has said that Rutford would return to that position.

Rutford couldn't be reached for comment.

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