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Violence against women of the South in a globalised world



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Editor's Note

VIOLENCE against women is a major problem in the South as in the rest of the world. With the steady growth and development of women's groups in developing countries, there is increasing resistance to such gross violations of human rights coupled with agitation for judicial, legislative and other forms of redress. While the prominent role of the women's movements has drawn the ire of reactionary and backward groups in such societies, there can be little doubt that the growing consciousness of women of their rights and their public demonstration of it has forced governments to respond firmly to acts of violence.

A case in point was the brutal, fatal rape of a 23-year-old medical student in Delhi, India, last December. While the outrage was widespread and many young men joined in the protests, it was the voice of women that was loudest. It could not be ignored. Fear that it could translate into a vote of no confidence in future polls prompted the authorities to take swift action.

While there is no doubt that acts of violence such as rape and the more heinous gender-motivated crime of 'femicide' (the murder of a woman because she is a woman) must be dealt with firmly, it is imperative to understand the roots of these crimes if they are to be effectively tackled and prevented.

Central to the whole problem of violence against women is the persistence of patriarchy. Patriarchy – defined as a system of male domination – predates modern capitalism and has been particularly dominant in traditional societies. However, while patriarchal attitudes to women may be a key element, they are not the only cause of such violence. The problem has multi-causal origins and has to be approached in all its complexity if it is to be effectively tackled.

While attention has understandably been focused on gender crimes, it is important to bear in mind that violence against women may take different forms. When capitalism first became globalised in the 19th century with its expansion outwards from the West where it originated, a new form and source of violence began to impact on the people of the South. When the countries of the South came under the orbit of the West, largely as a result of conquest, their pre-existing societies and social relations were, in the words of one of capitalism's most famous critics, 'pitilessly torn asunder'.

But while this colonial phase of globalisation impacted adversely on many Third World countries and populations, it is the latest phase of globalisation, which began in the late 20th century, that has violently shattered existing societies and social structures beyond anything previously conceivable. It has drawn millions of women in the South into the global marketplace.

But while liberating them from the confines of the domestic sphere and providing them with a measure of economic independence, for women who leave their homes and children to work long hours in factories for low wages, there is no support system to alleviate their

drudgery when they return home. And yet it is their unpaid labour in the domestic sphere that keeps the whole system going. It is not only essential in materially sustaining the present generation of the workforce but also critical in perpetuating the next generation of workers through the process of reproduction. The net result is that women are doubly oppressed, both at home and in the workplace.

But it is not only the women on the assembly lines of transnational corporations who are the victims of the violence of the market ideology (known as neoliberalism) which underpins this whole process. Where the workforce is largely made up of migrant workers from distant villages, the lack of basic provisions for the workers in the towns where they work results in a break-up of the family. And because of the persistence of patriarchy, women are forced to either stay back or return to the villages to take care of the children and the family.

But that is not all. Industrialisation cannot be sustained without a continuous and unending flow of natural resources. For profit-hungry transnationals seeking to secure these, no corner of the earth is too remote or out of bounds by notions of traditional sanctity or concerns of ecology or climate change. The result is the violent uprooting of indigenous communities from their traditional homelands which they have occupied for millennia. Indigenous women who play a critical role in the preservation of the habitat and biodiversity on which their communities' livelihood depends are suddenly thrust into leading the struggle for survival against powerful corporations which are quite often backed by the full power of the state which has granted the concession.

In short, in the age of neoliberalism the challenges facing women's movements are no longer limited to patriarchal acts of violence. They also have to confront the violence emanating from a global market system driven by profit.

Our cover story attempts to capture the struggle and plight of women in different parts of the Third World as they confront such violence. Much of the focus is on working women and the additional burden of unpaid labour imposed on them to make up for the failure of the state to discharge its obligations. While overall the picture is a grim one, the fact that women are unrelenting in their struggle against so many odds is a cause for hope.

— The Editors

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Women in the South face not only patriarchal acts of violence but also violence emanating from a global market system driven by profit. Picture shows women workers in an electronics factory in China's Guangdong province.

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Publisher and Chief Editor: S.M. Mohamed Idris; **Managing Editor:** Chee Yoke Ling; **Editors:** T Rajamoorthy, Lean Ka-Min, Evelyne Hong; **Contributing Editors:** Roberto Bissio (Uruguay), Charles Abugre (Ghana); **Staff:** Linda Ooi (Design), Lim Jee Yuan (Art Consultant), Lim Beng Tuan (Marketing), Yap Bing Nyi (Editorial)



Running dry

We are sucking the world's ancient freshwater stores faster than they can be replenished.

Jessica C Kraft

ACROSS the globe, human civilisation depends on mining the vast reservoirs of freshwater that have accrued deep underground through millennia. Stretching underneath national borders, these 'fossil' aquifers sustain us and our industries, and influence the health of many ecosystems. The aquifers account for 99% of our world's unfrozen freshwater supply. We are now depleting them faster than they can be replenished. In the process, we are reshaping not just the surface of Earth but the subsurface as well.

'Humans are overexploiting groundwater in many large aquifers that are critical to agriculture, especially in Asia and North America,' says a recent analysis of the world's groundwater footprint published in the journal *Nature*. Water withdrawals in the American Great Plains, the Upper Ganges region in India and Pakistan, the Nile Delta region, and parts of China, Iran, and Mexico are exceeding underground reservoirs' capacity for renewal, the report says. Together, these areas support one quarter of the world's population.

These regions also happen to be among the world's most vital agricultural zones, and researchers say agriculture is largely to blame for the looming water crisis people in these regions face.

According to UNESCO estimates, groundwater use has tripled in the last 50 years, with India's usage growing most rapidly. Between 2002 and 2008, more than 26 cubic miles of groundwater disappeared from the Indus River plain aquifer. Researchers say the reservoir would require 54 times as much rainfall as it now receives to replenish the water that has

been taken out.

In central Saudi Arabia, fossil water remained sealed underground while local populations adapted to desert conditions. But now these ancient water stores are being tapped in areas that never before supported agriculture. In Australia, the Great Artesian Basin, the largest aquifer in the world, provides most of the country's inland with its only reliable source of freshwater. It is being depleted not only through agricultural uses, but also through illegal bores and open-earth drains. Because the desert area has very low rainfall, the aquifers there don't get recharged. Once they are drained, they are gone.

In the United States, aquifers have become more important as monoculture agriculture expands and droughts occur more frequently. The vast Ogallala Aquifer, stretching from South Dakota to Texas, provides nearly 30% of the nation's freshwater used for irrigation. But it's being depleted by as much as two feet each year in some counties. Scientists estimate we would need 6,000 years of uninterrupted rainfall to refill it.

Because most of the extracted groundwater eventually winds up in the oceans and seas, hydrologists have found that groundwater use causes an annual sea-level rise of 0.3 mm. This accounts for nearly a quarter of the total annual sea-level rise that is also perpetuated by global warming. In some low-lying coastal areas, like the Bengal and Mississippi deltas, aquifers will likely be inundated by seawater and ruined.

The controversial natural gas extraction process of hydraulic fracturing that requires millions of gallons of water per drilling well also has a huge impact on our freshwater reserves. A 2011 Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) report estimated that 70 to 140 billion gallons of water are used to fracture 35,000 wells in the US every year. That's the annual water consumption of 40 to 80 cities each with a population of 50,000, according to the mining watchdog group Earthworks.

Drawing too much water from aquifers also impacts rivers, wells, and wetlands connected to them because depleted aquifers tend to suck in water from these surface water sources. Which means they can dry up streams and rivers and reduce wildlife habitat.

As the world's population continues to grow, the need for freshwater to produce food and sustain humankind is only going to rise. The challenge now is to figure out ways to feed the world and at the same time manage our freshwater resources so that we aren't left depending on the uncertain rainfall patterns of our changing climate. ♦

This article is reproduced from Earth Island Journal (Spring 2013).



The Great Artesian Basin in Australia, the world's largest aquifer, is being depleted not only through agricultural uses but also through illegal bores and open-earth drains. Picture shows water being pumped out from the Basin.

Cuba creates four anti-cancer vaccines, media ignores story

Cuba has made impressive strides in research and development in the medical field, particularly in the development of vaccines against serious diseases and ailments. *Jose Manzaneda* highlights some of the recent achievements.

THAT Cuba has already developed four vaccines or inoculations against different types of cancer is without doubt important news for humanity. The World Health Organisation says each year about eight million people die from this illness.

However, the international mainstream media have almost totally ignored this news.

Last year, Cuba patented the first therapeutic vaccine against advanced lung cancer in the world, called CIMAVAX-EGF. In January, the second one, called Racotumomab, was announced.

Clinical testing in 86 countries shows that these vaccines, although they don't cure the illness, do manage to reduce tumours and allow for a stable stage of the illness, thereby increasing hope and quality of life.

The Molecular Immunology Centre of Havana, a Cuban state organisation, is the creator of all these vaccines.

In 1985 it developed the vaccine for meningitis B, the only one in the world, and later others that fight hepatitis B and dengue. For years, the centre has been conducting research to develop vaccines against HIV/AIDS.

Another Cuban state-run centre, Laboratories LABIOFAM, has developed homeopathic medicine for cancer such as VIDATOX, created from the blue scorpion's venom. Cuba exports these medicines to 26 countries, and takes part in joint ventures with China, Canada, and Spain.

All of this goes against the widespread stereotype, reinforced by the media silence regarding advances achieved by Cuba and other countries in the global South (the so-called Third World), that vanguard medical research takes place only in so-called



Developed in Cuba, CIMAVAX-EGF is the world's first therapeutic vaccine against advanced lung cancer.

developed countries.

Different philosophy

Undoubtedly, the Cuban state obtains an economic benefit from the international sale of these pharmaceutical products. However, its philosophy of research and commercialisation is diametrically opposed to the business practices of the large pharmaceutical industry.

Nobel Prize for Medicine winner Richard J Roberts recently denounced the pharmaceutical industry for orienting its research not to curing illnesses, but to developing medicine for chronic ailments, which is much more economically profitable.

Roberts suggested that illnesses particular to poorer countries simply are not researched because of their low profitability potential. That is why 90% of the budget for research is aimed at illnesses suffered by 10% of the world's population.

Cuba's public medicine industry, even though it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange for the

country, is guided by radically different principles.

In the first place, its research is aimed in large part at developing vaccines that prevent illnesses and, as a consequence, reduce the population's spending on medicine.

In an article in the prestigious journal *Science*, researchers from Stanford University (California), Paul Drain and Michele Barry, said Cuba has better health indicators than the United States, despite spending up to 20 times less on the sector.

The reason for this is the absence, in the Cuban model, of commercial pressures and encouragement by pharmaceutical companies, and a successful strategy of educating the population about preventive healthcare.

Furthermore, traditional and natural therapies, such as herbal medicine, acupuncture, hypnosis and many others – practices that are not very profitable for the makers of medicine – have been integrated into the free public health system of the island for years.

Also, in Cuba, medicine is dis-

tributed via the national public hospital network as something that is either free or highly subsidised, thanks to the income from exporting it.

The Cuban medicine industry also barely assigns any of its budget to publicity. In the case of the multinationals, publicity spending is higher than what they invest in actual research.

Finally, Cuba promotes the production of generic medicines. These are made available in other poor countries and to the World Health Organisation at much lower prices than those offered by the global pharmaceutical industry.

Opposition

But these measures, removed from market rules, are meeting with opposition from the pharmaceutical industry.

Recently, the Ecuadorian government announced a large purchase of medicines from Cuba in exchange for scholarships for Ecuadorian students to study in Cuba and for the support provided by Cuban specialists in the Manuela Espejo programme for disabled people.

Protests against the move by the Ecuadorian Association of Pharmaceutical Laboratories were immedi-



The Molecular Immunology Centre (pic) in Havana has developed vaccines against cancer, meningitis B, hepatitis B and dengue.

ately converted into a media campaign spreading the message of the supposed poor quality of Cuban medicine.

On the other hand, many analysts see the international pharmaceutical industry as being behind the coup in Honduras in 2009. The elected government of Manuel Zelaya, in the framework of agreements made within the Cuba- and Venezuela-founded Bolivarian Alliance for the

Peoples of Our America (ALBA) to which Honduras then belonged, had aimed to substitute Cuban generic medicine for imports from multinationals.

The US blockade against Cuba imposes big obstacles to the international commercialisation of Cuban pharmaceutical products, but it is also directly detrimental to US citizens. For example, the 80,000 diabetics in the US who have their toes amputated each year do not have access to the Cuban vaccine Heparprot P which would prevent such amputations.

The Chemistry Nobel Prize winner Peter Agre recently said: 'Cuba is a magnificent example of how scientific knowledge and research can be integrated.'

Irina Bokova, Director-General of the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), has said she was impressed by Cuba's scientific achievements and her organisation is willing to promote them to the rest of the world.

The inevitable question is: can she count on the collaboration of the international mainstream media to spread this information? ♦



Cuba's public pharmaceutical sector is guided by radically different principles than those informing the business practices of the commercial pharmaceutical industry.

This article originally appeared in Spanish on www.cubainformacion.tv. It was translated by Tamara Pearson for Green Left Weekly, from which this is reproduced (No. 955, 27 February 2013).

Cyprus: Dismal lesson and obscure future

Cyprus is the latest casualty in the Euro crisis but the story of how this small island state became mired in a financial and banking crisis and the draconian nature of the bailout imposed on it by the Troika (International Monetary Fund, European Central Bank and European Union) has not been adequately and accurately reported by the international media. *Roberto Savio* explains what really happened.

THE narrative of the Cyprus crisis story is an excellent example of how inadequate media coverage has now become. Very few will have understood what has really happened, and what its implications are.

Following events without any background or without placing them in their contexts is one of the main reasons for the decline of media as windows on the world.

To explain what has happened and what is likely to happen now requires three angles of analysis: how the Cyprus crisis came about, how it stands in the context of the banking sector worldwide, and what its implications for Europe are.

Let us start from Cyprus and, more precisely, with the Republic of Cyprus. In fact, when speaking about the Cyprus of the banking crisis, we are referring to three-fifths of the island of Cyprus, the Greek part. The other two-fifths are a separate political entity, the Turkish Cyprus that only Turkey recognises.

When Greek Cypriot nationalists and elements of the Greek military junta declared the union of the island with Greece in 1974, the Turkish army invaded the northern part of the island to protect the Turkish population, a substantial minority. The result was a serious blow to the island's economic development. Greek Cypriot losses of land and personal property in the occupied areas were substantial, and they also lost Famagusta, the only deep-water port, and the Nicosia International Airport.

The GDP of the Greek sector dropped by one-third between 1973 and 1975. Today, the Republic of



A protest in the Cypriot city of Limassol. A new bailout for Cyprus – and, with it, more suffering and misery for its people – is looming on the horizon.

Cyprus is a small territory of just over 5,000 square km, and a population of 860,000 people.

With only tourism as its main economic activity, the Republic of Cyprus chose to become a financial centre by making it attractive for companies that decided to set up on the island. It offered generous rates of 6-7% per year on deposits, and a very light 10% tax on foreign companies (even less than the 12% of Ireland).

There were not many other choices and when, on 1 May 2004, Cyprus joined the European Union (EU) together with nine other countries, everybody in Brussels knew that finance represented 45% of the GDP of the small Greek part of the island.

By becoming part of the EU, Cyprus became very attractive for in-

vestors from outside Europe, especially for Russians who wanted to take away money from the uncertain Russian banking system, and now about 60,000 Russians live on the island.

The banking sector grew so much that its total deposits reached nine times its GDP. In 2008 alone, \$40.7 billion was funnelled into Cyprus through loans and bank deposits, amounting to 161% of the Cypriot GDP that year.

But the Cypriot banks, like all banks after the final elimination of the separation between deposit banks and investment banks (the fateful decision by US President Bill Clinton in 1999, under pressure from the financial lobby), used the money from their deposits to gamble on investments that could give a higher yield. So, they

invested more than \$4.7 billion in Greek bonds, which were giving a high return. But those bonds were based on fake data provided by Greek authorities about their financial health. And everybody in Brussels, Bonn, Paris, The Hague and elsewhere knew that!

Meanwhile, all banks became involved in two successive global crises: the derivative-mortgage crisis that originated in the United States in 2008, and then Europe's sovereign bond crisis (the bonds issued by states were not backed by healthy national budgets). The financial markets went into panic, and banks worldwide were stuck with bad investments.

To make a very long and complex story short, let us remember that worldwide over \$4 trillion went into stabilisation of banks and stimulus initiatives.

And then, in May 2010, Greece asked for help from the EU, followed by Ireland in November 2010, then Portugal in 2011 and Spain in June 2012. The bailout for Greece was 172.6 billion euros, Portugal 78 billion, Ireland 67 billion, and Spain 41.3 billion. The bailout for Cyprus was established at 10 billion euros. This amounts to 0.06% of Europe's annual economic output. And the entire problematic Cypriot banking system, with 126.4 billion euros in combined assets, is smaller than the 11th largest German bank and the 44th largest bank in Europe.

So why did Cyprus become so important, and why did it shake Europe's foundations? And why did all this happen after the famous declaration of the President of the European Central Bank (ECB), Mario Draghi, that the ECB would never let the euro sink, thus stopping all market speculation against the bonds of European countries?

Here, we need to look into the timeline of the Cyprus affair.

On 25 June 2012, the then President of Cyprus, the Communist Dimitris Christofias, makes the first request to the eurozone for financial assistance.

On 29 November 2012, the first



Cypriot President Nicos Anastasiades leaving after attending a Eurogroup meeting in Brussels. The EU has been criticised for its handling of the Cyprus crisis.

memorandum of understanding on financial assistance for Cyprus is drafted, barely noticed in international circles.

The EU waits to act. Why? Because Cypriot elections are coming, and hopefully a Conservative government will take over. Christofias is considered too close to the Russian investors, and he obtained a loan of \$2.5 billion from Russia, bypassing Brussels.

On 11 January 2013, European Conservative heads of government, including German Chancellor Angela Merkel, arrive in Limassol to support opposition leader Nicos Anastasiades ahead of general elections. Anastasiades is a successful investment lawyer who has several Russian billionaires in his portfolio.

On 24 February, Anastasiades wins the presidency in a run-off.

On 1 March, the new government is sworn in, and Michalis Sarris, a former finance minister and World Bank official, becomes finance minister. He was also a member of the board of the second largest bank in Cyprus, the Cyprus Popular Bank (Laiki Bank in Greek).

Then on 15 March, Cyprus reaches a deal with the Troika [the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the ECB and the EU] for a 10 billion euro bailout. But, to reach its requested target of 17 billion euros, Cyprus must source the remaining 7 billion euros internally. From where? From its banking sector, of course.

The Cypriot president wants to

defend the big Russian investors at any cost, so he presents a plan to impose a one-off levy of 6,755 euros on deposits up to 100,000 euros and 9.9% on deposits over 100,000 euros. The Troika and finance ministers accept this proposal. This was a major mistake, as the EU solemnly decided to protect all deposits up to 100,000 euros by insuring them with ECB backing, and leaving deposits over this amount uninsured.

A large campaign, triggered by a leaked German secret service report, and relaunched by German and British media, presents Cyprus as a haven of laundered Russian and drug money, and denounces any Cypriot resistance to the Troika requests as protection of dirty money and investments.

In actual fact, Cyprus has obtained high marks from MOKAS, the official Council of Europe body that evaluates anti-money-laundering measures, as one of the few countries in full compliance. And it scores 406.5 on the Financial Secrecy Index, against 1879.2 for Switzerland, 669.8 for Germany and 616.5 for the UK.

Anastasiades goes back to Cyprus, and, as we all know, the Cypriot parliament rejects this plan, with not one vote in favour. Anastasiades goes back to negotiations and on 25 March, a new plan is agreed, winding down the Cyprus Popular Bank, the second largest lender, and transferring its assets to the Bank of Cyprus, the largest. Insured deposits (up to 100,000 euros) will be left untouched, but uninsured deposits will be taxed, up to the level of coverage required for the bailout.

Close to \$4 billion had already left the island at the time of negotiations, before banks were closed, and some estimate that uninsured deposits will have to be taxed up to 80% and all shareholders (136,000 people) and bondholders will lose everything, around 5,000 people will be fired and international companies will leave Cyprus. Strict control on capital is introduced, with many restrictions, strangling the island's economy.

Now, let us draw the main con-

clusions.

It is widely known that Germany was the main enforcer of this new approach to strict severity, where for the first time not only bank shareholders and bondholders but also depositors were called on to contribute to the bailout. But then, the new chairman of the Eurogroup that brings together Europe's ministers of finance, Dutch finance minister Jeroen Dijsselbloem, explained in a lengthy interview that this is a 'new template' which will be used for future bailouts. Bank investors will be required to participate, and no longer will European countries alone pay for the mistakes of banks.

Of course, this created a wave of concern in the weaker countries, like Spain and Italy, met by a soothing reassurance from the European authorities that 'the Cyprus case is exceptional'.

But then Klaas Knot, another Dutch member of the ECB, said that eurozone banks needed to clean up their balance sheets by winding down their loss-making operations. 'Firstly, there has to be transparency about losses in the banking sector. Secondly, banks have to wind down their loss-making operations,' Knot said.

And then, ECB sources started to admit that this was going to be the basis for future bailouts. German finance minister Wolfgang Schauble declared: 'Cyprus is living with a banking sector with low taxes and favourable laws that is completely overdrawn and that makes Cyprus bankrupt. This business model is not sustainable.'

The same position was taken by the ECB board member Jorg Asmussen (former German finance minister), who represented the ECB in the negotiations. So, it was clear that there was an agenda being pushed by Germany and the Netherlands, which, together with Finland, represent the fiscal hawks of the Eurogroup. Largely absent in the negotiations were the ministers of other countries.

Now, it is certainly upsetting that so many supposedly brilliant personages did not realise the message they

were sending to Europe. They were basically saying:

(1) Deposits are no longer safe. If in the first negotiation, the Troika accepted to tax ALSO deposits below 100,000 euros, this meant that no deposits in European banks are safe in the event of a crisis. Bondholders and shareholders make investments in a bank, and they enter a financial game in which they can lose. But depositors enter a bank to protect their money, not to speculate. To wipe out those deposits is an ethical issue, especially if – without the depositors' knowledge – the bank gambles with their money on the market and thus becomes responsible for its demise. Depositors are, in other words, victims twice over. As Nobel economics laureate Paul Krugman says, this is like putting up a big neon sign saying 'Bring your money to the safest bank in the safest countries, like Germany or Switzerland'. But this will increase the internal imbalance between the countries of Southern Europe and Northern Europe. Is this in the interests of the whole of Europe?

(2) To avoid capital flight, restrictions on capital are now in place in Cyprus that will last a long time. But freedom of movement of capital was a very central European idea. This idea has now been undermined. And so has the idea of a European currency. There are now two euros, not one. The Cypriot euro, for example, can be spent freely only in Cyprus.

(3) The destruction of Cyprus as a financial haven is an understandable idea. But what about the people? There will now be a drop in GDP of at least 20% in the immediate future. The EU will have to do another bailout, as was the case with Greece. Again, a large part of the population will go into suffering and misery. Will the hawks take the same moral attitude of intransigence?

(4) The credibility of the Troika has taken a serious hit. After the collapse of the first proposed agreement (the one which also taxed insured deposits), a sad show of leaders all trying to pass the blame for this mistake to the others has undermined the legitimacy and trust of the present lead-

ership. And it has provided further ammunition to those who complain about the opacity and unaccountability of the EU.

(5) This handling of the Cypriot crisis has made it very clear that Germany is the undisputed decision-maker on European questions and acts according to its views, with little ability to listen to others. Commerzbank's chief economist Jorg Kramer has already suggested 'a one-time property tax levy and a tax rate of 15% on financial assets' to save Italy from probable bankruptcy. Of course, this looks like a not-too-subtle invitation to shift Italian deposits to German banks.

(6) Russia was never involved or consulted, in spite of its massive presence in Cyprus. In Moscow, this was seen as further proof of German Chancellor Merkel's efforts at containing Russian leader Vladimir Putin's access to Europe.

To complete this part on Cyprus, let us make clear that if that financial model is not acceptable, next in line are two other European countries: Slovenia and Malta.

The IMF says that Slovenia will need to issue three billion euros in bonds this year. Since yields have shot up from 4.5% to as high as 6.4% as a result of the Cyprus rescue, that could be a costly order. And notice that these are dollar bond yields; the country is taking a currency risk to obtain these funding rates. The country may be forced to seek painful assistance from the Troika. It is also one of the smallest members of the EU, with fewer than two million inhabitants.

As with Cyprus, Slovenia's problem is its banking sector. But it is a tame 200% of GDP, not the Cypriot banks' 900% of GDP. One of Slovenia's biggest banks was one of only four in Europe to fail the stress tests (two of them were the banks in Cyprus now inflicting haircuts on big depositors). Non-performing loans at the three biggest banks, according to the IMF, rose from just under 16% in 2011 to over 20% last year. That means that they are insolvent. The debt is mainly corporate debt, the result of lax lending by state-owned banks to cronies. Therefore, in the

case of Slovenia, there is even less ground for pity than there was for Cyprus.

The next case is Malta. Covering just over 300 square km of land, it has few natural resources, restricted fresh-water supplies and no domestic energy sources. Until the late 1980s, the Maltese economy was heavily dependent on tourism, a limited manufacturing sector and its favourable position as a freight transshipping stopover, but that has changed radically over the past 25 years. The government decided to develop the financial sector, and to make it a viable alternative to Dublin and Luxembourg as a base for investment funds and operators alike.

Although the country is sometimes still referred to as an offshore tax haven or a low-tax jurisdiction, neither term correctly describes Malta's tax system. In response to a request from the European Commission that Malta abolish tax provisions that might distort competition within the EU, a number of changes were introduced in 2007 creating a tax regime that is fully EU-sanctioned.

A full imputation tax system has existed in Malta since 1948. The rate for corporate taxation in Malta stands at 35%; however, upon distribution of dividends, shareholders may qualify for a refund generally equivalent to 6/7 of the tax paid, resulting in a paid tax rate of 5%. The financial publication *The International Banker* reported, 'Malta Represents A Safe Haven For Currency Flight From Cyprus Misery'.

With the situation in Cyprus critical, Malta – just a two-hour flight away from Cyprus – may play an important role for business and domestic capital flight from Cyprus and even more so for the Russians who have invested in Cyprus and are seeking an alternative international financial services centre.

These facts, combined with the strength of the financial services sector in Malta, make it the ideal international financial services centre for 'currency flight from the misery in Cyprus'. Malta's banking sector is already three times its GDP. But it is

unclear how much money went into bad investments, and the rumours are not positive.

Then, finally, comes Luxembourg, the richest country in the world on a per capita basis. It is also a small country, with an area of 2,586 square km and a population of fewer than half a million. It will probably not need any bailout because it is doing extremely well, thanks to a very cautious investment policy. But Luxembourg is the paradigm of the model that Germany's Schauble and the Troika are fighting. Its financial sector is 21.7 times its GDP. It has three billion euros of offshore capitals, of the 20 existing worldwide. And it has a Financial Secrecy Index score of 1621.2, against 406.5 for Cyprus.

It has created the SPF ('Societe de gestion de patrimoine familial') regime, which does not pay taxes on capital, on revenues or on VAT, and is only subject to an annual subscription tax of 0.25% levied quarterly on its share capital. Already, Luxembourg authorities are raising voices against the argument that financial havens are not sustainable and legitimate.

But it is clear that new bailouts are looming on the horizon and this brings us to the second point of this Cyprus crisis post-mortem. It is incomprehensible why our political system agrees to place so much suffering on its citizens without facing a very simple fact: the banking system as we know it is intrinsically fragile, and will continue to create one crisis after another.

This is because there are two problems that we do not address: one is the bad investments made by banks worldwide. Nobody knows exactly how much is hidden in bank budgets. Some estimates talk of \$2 trillion, others of \$3 trillion. The IMF estimates that there are \$800 billion of toxic titles still in existence, after all the efforts to clean up bank budgets.

The second problem is clearer. Until 1999, we did not experience this state of permanent financial crisis. That was due to the fact that until then the deposit banks were not allowed to use their funds for speculation. The

deposits were held in a stable system, and the banks did what they were supposed to do: take deposits, and make loans to households or enterprises on the basis of a cautious evaluation of the quality and feasibility of the loan, taking into account the collateral.

But ever since Bill Clinton eliminated the distinction between deposit and investment banks, all banks have gone into the market, creating financial instruments like derivatives and many other high-risk investments in order to obtain higher returns.

That has brought about a division between finance and production. Finance has taken on a life of its own: make revenues, even at a high risk, to be able to give absurd bonuses to bank executives.

Today, for every dollar which comes from production of goods and services, there are \$40 moving in financial transactions. And of course, this enables more money to be made from investing/speculating in financial markets than from making loans to households and enterprises.

The banks have become entities that are frequently subjected to criminal investigations, something that has never happened before. They have become a systemic risk for the international community. It would take pages and pages to report the cases in which they have been found guilty of criminal activities.

Just to report what has been going on recently: In Spain, 92 financial executives are in court for fraud, linked to the 37,700 million euros of taxpayers' money they have received – more than what was cut in health and education spending.

In the United States, the SAC hedge fund paid an amount of \$602 million in a settlement with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC).

In Europe, Deutsche Bank has set aside 600 million euros for legal costs, for its role in fixing the Libor interest rate. This fraud will cost the banking sector more than \$2 trillion.

Incidentally, we now know that Deutsche Bank received at least \$11.8 billion in US taxpayer-funded bailout money. What did it do with the funds

provided by the American taxpayers? It invested this in opening the giant Cosmopolitan Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas for a total of \$4.9 billion: a poor investment, because the world capital of gambling is suffering from the consequences of the US economic crisis.

And the bleeding continues. On 1 March, the US government gave AIG, the giant insurance company, another \$30 billion of taxpayers' money; this, after the \$150 billion given since September last year.

What is disheartening is the declaration by US Attorney General Eric Holder before the Senate that there is a reluctance to pursue legal actions against these firms for fear of destabilising the markets.

'It does become difficult for us to prosecute when we are hit with indications that if we do ... bring a criminal charge, it will have a negative impact on the national economy, perhaps even the world economy,' he said. 'It has an inhibiting influence [and impacts on] our ability to bring resolutions that I think would be more appropriate.'

The subsidy and its effects remain entrenched and continue to distort the free market. And if justice acts, the banks fight back. In New York, 15 banks are fighting a ruling in the US mortgage case, where they have been summoned for selling billions of dollars in sub-prime mortgages that soured, causing banks and investors to incur huge losses. That was the start of the global financial crisis which has left millions suffering all over the world.

And now, who has been appointed as the new head of the SEC? Mary Jo White, who has spent the last decade in private law practice defending banks, including JP Morgan, which lost \$1 billion on the London exchange through gambling beyond reason. And in the US House of Representatives recently, seven bills explicitly designed to expand taxpayer backing for derivatives were approved in a committee by 31 to 14 votes.

By now, it is clear that the financial mess is due to lack of political leadership. Nobody dares to put the

genie back inside the bottle.

As an example of what we have lost in political leadership, let me quote part of a speech given by former German Federal Chancellor Helmut Schmidt on 4 December 2011 at the Social Democratic Party Conference in Berlin. At that time, he was 94 years old:

'At all events, the members of the euro currency union should work together to introduce radical regulations for the common financial market in the euro currency area. These regulations should cover the separation of normal commercial banks from investment and shadow banks; a ban on the short selling of securities at a future date; a ban on trading in derivatives, unless they have been approved by the official stock exchange supervisory body; and the effective limitation of transactions affecting the euro area carried out by the currently unsupervised rating agencies ... Naturally, the globalised banking lobby would again move heaven and earth to prevent this. After all, it has thwarted all the far-reaching regulations that have been introduced so far. It has deliberately engineered a situation in which its herd of dealers has put European governments in the predicament of having to constantly invent new "rescue mechanisms" and to extend them by means of "leverage". It is high time something is done about this. If the Europeans have the courage and the strength to introduce radical financial market regulation, we have the prospect of becoming an area of stability in the medium term. But if we fail in this respect, Europe's influence will continue to decline ...'

This brings us to how memory is short. Sweden did exactly this. When its banks went bankrupt, they were temporarily nationalised, their shareholders and bondholders were wiped out and boards and management fired. Then, the state restructured and recapitalised the banks before selling them on the market, with the proceeds going back to the taxpayers, offsetting the restructuring costs.

Iceland went well beyond. The three largest banks amounted to 10 times the country's total GDP. There

was no way the government could face that amount of loss. The government decided to let the banks go bankrupt. A large part of the deposits and investments were from British and Dutch citizens. British deposits alone were 2.3 billion pounds. Of course, the UK and the Netherlands governments held Iceland's government accountable, and asked for repayment, with the UK using an anti-terrorism law to freeze the UK-based assets of Kaupthing Bank, Iceland's biggest bank.

Then the Icelandic government organised a referendum, and the 312,583 inhabitants voted 93% against and only 2% in favour of the British and Dutch requests. Even more, the prime minister and the finance minister were brought to court because of their inability to monitor the banks. So, the UK and the Netherlands went to the court of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which recently delivered a judgment in favour of Iceland. But did you hear anything about this?

And now, the last lesson from the Cyprus mess. It is clear that Europe is in a very serious crisis but there was no need to bring the IMF into European affairs.

The IMF is under Washington, which is the single largest shareholder and has a blocking vote in that institution, and its managing director Christine Lagarde has much less power than her predecessor, Dominique Strauss-Kahn. The IMF staff has been pressuring Europe with its traditional financial cure: bleed the patient for his recovery. Countries can afford welfare and social justice if they have the means. Otherwise, a good bloodletting will do.

The IMF interaction has given legitimacy to the sinister bow of the EU to the financial markets, with the misery that the macroeconomic quest for balanced budgets has brought to the weakest sectors of Europe's population. ♦

Roberto Savio is founder and president emeritus of the Inter Press Service (IPS) news agency and publisher of Other News. The above is extracted from an article which first appeared on the Other News website (www.other-news.info).

Reflections on the intellectual property system: A development perspective

In questioning the claim that intellectual property (IP) necessarily promotes innovation, *Carlos M Correa* argues that civil society can play an important role in shaping or opposing new IP initiatives.

I WILL focus on three areas during this presentation. Firstly, I am going to talk about the relationship between intellectual property (IP) and innovation, mainly based on the views of economists from developed countries. Secondly, I will discuss some trends in legislation, jurisprudence and policies in developed countries that limit IP protection in some respects. And thirdly, I will refer to law-making in IP.

Let me start with a quote from the Austrian-American economist Fritz Machlup who, in a study for the US Senate made half a century ago, said that 'If we did not have a patent system, it would be irresponsible, on the basis of our present knowledge of its economic consequences, to recommend instituting one'. Machlup was saying basically that for smaller economies – not necessarily economies like the United States of America – it would have been better to abolish the patent system.

IP and innovation

Of course, a lot has changed in the world since Machlup produced his report, with increased globalisation, new technologies, etc. However, the view that IP does not necessarily have a positive effect on economic development is still predominant among economists. For instance, based on an analysis of historical studies, Bessen and Meurer (2008) concluded that '...nations with patent systems were no more innovative than nations without patent systems. Similarly, nations with longer patent terms were no more innovative than nations with shorter

patent terms'. According to Boldrin and Levine, '[I]ndeed, historical evidence provides little or no support that innovative monopoly is an effective method of increasing innovation.'

On the cost-benefit balance of patents, Bessen and Meurer also said, 'Note that patents do provide profits for their owners, so it makes sense for firms to get them. But taking the effect of other owners' patents into account, including the risk of litigation, the average public firm outside the chemical and pharmaceutical industries would be better off if patents did not exist.'

The Nobel Prize laureate Joseph Stiglitz (2007) said, '...are the incentives provided by the patent system appropriate...? Sadly, the answer is a resounding "no".' Richard Posner (2012), US federal appeals court judge and Chicago University professor, said, 'In most [industries], the cost of invention is low; or just being first confers a durable competitive advantage...so there's no point to a patent monopoly that will last 20 years... Most industries could get along fine without patent protection.'

In addressing the importance of non-IP incentives for innovation, Torrance and Tomlinson (2009) concluded that '[a] growing body of empirical research appears to support the view that patent systems do not necessarily "promote the Progress of...useful Arts".'

It is not only economists who have this view; it is shared by a growing sector of business actors. For instance, the Computers and Communications Industry Association

(CCIA), whose members include Google and Microsoft, said, 'We do not think it is an accident that innovation has flourished in a society that values an open, competitive economic marketplace, nor where original independent and free speech are enshrined in law... Therefore, our commitment to vigorous competition, freedom of expression, and openness is a natural product of the understanding of what has helped our industry thrive, and what it needs to continue to do so.'

The World Health Organisation (WHO)'s Consultative Expert Working Group on Research and Development: Financing and Coordination also recommended open approaches to research and development (R&D) and innovation. It found that there is insufficient R&D for diseases that prevail in developing countries and endorsed the adoption of a binding convention that guarantees the results of R&D will be public goods i.e. not subject to appropriation but free for use, to generate medicines needed particularly in developing countries. They also recommended prizes as incentives to innovation, in particular milestone prizes.

In summary, there is no conclusive evidence on IP and innovation. IP may promote innovation but it is not a 'magic tool'. It may also deter it. A large number of factors (such as the R&D infrastructure, the availability of risk capital, the qualification of personnel) can influence the nature and rate of innovation in developing countries. It is crucial, hence, to consider non-IP mechanisms to effectively promote innovation in those countries.

Trends in legislation, jurisprudence and policies in developed countries

The last 20 years has shown a trend towards more and more IP protection. IP has expanded and been strengthened. Are there limits to this protectionist trend? I will explore four areas to answer this question: gene patents, inventive step, permanent injunctions and counterfeiting.

Regarding gene patents, when a gene is found to perform a certain function, if absolute protection is granted, further research can be discouraged. The patent holder will be able to appropriate any possible use, including those he had never discovered. In order to address this problem, France limited the scope of patents to the specific use of the gene. Article L613-2-1 of the French Industrial Property Code, as amended in 2004, says:

‘The rights created by a patent grant that includes a gene sequence cannot be invoked against a later claim on the same sequence if this claim complies itself with the [patentability] requirements... and it discloses another specific application of this sequence.’

Similar limitations to gene patents have been made in other developed countries’ laws such as in Swiss and German laws.

In the case *Association for Molecular Pathology, et al., v. United States Patent and Trademark Office, et al.*, the plaintiffs challenged patents held by the company Myriad Genetics over genes and diagnostic methods relating to BRCA1 and BRCA2 (breast cancer type 1 and 2 susceptibility protein). The US District Court for the Southern District of New York held that the patents were invalid on the grounds that the isolated genes are not patentable products of nature and that the diagnostic method claims were mere thought processes. The court went even further and stated that claims of ‘isolated’ genes were just a lawyer’s trick. The US Department of Justice’s amicus curiae indicated that ‘The chemical structure of native human genes is a product of nature, and

it is no less a product of nature when that structure is “isolated” from its natural environment than are cotton fibres that have been separated from cotton seeds or coal that has been extracted from the earth’.

How skilled is a PHOSITA (person having ordinary skill in the art) in the US practice? Burk and Lemley (2002) have concluded that ‘The courts have endowed the PHOSITA with mediocre personality traits; she is conceived of as an entity that adopts conventional approaches to problem solving, and is not inclined to innovate, either via exceptional insight or painstaking labour.’ In fact, patents are too easy to obtain on any subject matter, and the low PHOSITA standard is partly to blame. A redefinition of the inventive-step standard in favour of the public domain was suggested in the US Supreme Court decision in *KSR v. Teleflex* which indicated that ‘A person of ordinary skill is also a person of ordinary creativity, not an automaton.’ However, a substantial change in the policy of the US Patent and Trademark Office is not apparent so far.

Regarding permanent injunctions, an interesting case is *eBay Inc. v. MercExchange, L.L.C.* MercExchange had sought a permanent injunction to prevent eBay from continuing use of patented subject matter. Despite the fact that it was found that eBay had infringed the patent rights, the District Court denied the request. The United States Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit reversed this. The US Supreme Court then overturned the Federal Circuit’s approval of the injunction. It indicated that ‘the decision whether to grant or deny injunctive relief rests within the equitable discretion of the district courts’.

In *Amado v. Microsoft* (26 February 2008), Carlos Amado had sued Microsoft for infringement of US Patent 5,293,615 – a ‘point and shoot interface for linking database records to spreadsheets’. Microsoft requested the Federal Court of California for a compulsory licence, which was granted against a royalty of \$0.12 per copy; Amado had requested \$2 per

copy.

These examples show the use of flexibilities in the implementation of the patent system in the United States, which illustrate well the policy space available to member states under the World Trade Organisation (WTO)’s Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), and the significant use of legislation and case law in such circumstances.

Regarding counterfeiting, developed countries are actively pursuing a crackdown on counterfeiting and piracy, focusing on its allegedly negative effects. If broadly understood, this may also affect the commercialisation of legitimate products, such as in the case of the Anti-Counterfeiting Act that Kenya was induced to adopt. The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) is another example of a broad approach. It is often argued (based on an OECD estimate) that annual losses due to counterfeiting and piracy amount to around \$200 billion.

However, more nuanced views than the unqualified anti-counterfeiting approach generally articulated by developed countries and their business associations can be found in a study published by the US Government Accountability Office (‘Intellectual Property: Observations on Efforts to Quantify the Economic Effects of Counterfeit and Pirated Goods’, April 2010). The study concludes that current estimates of losses due to counterfeiting are not reliable, and considers both the negative and positive effects of counterfeiting. It found, for instance, that there are potential positive effects of counterfeiting and piracy:

- ‘Some consumers may knowingly purchase a counterfeit or pirated product because it is less expensive than the genuine good or because the genuine good is unavailable, and they may experience positive effects from such purchases. For example, consumers in the United States and other countries purchase counterfeit copies of high-priced luxury-branded fashion goods at low prices, although the products’ packaging and sales venues

make it apparent they are not genuine. Consumers may purchase movies that have yet to be released in theatres and are unavailable in legitimate form.'

- 'Lower-priced counterfeit goods may exert competitive pressure to lower prices for legitimate goods, which may benefit consumers.'

- '...companies that experience revenue losses in one line of business – such as movies – may also increase revenues in related or complementary businesses due to increased brand awareness. For instance, companies may experience increased revenues due to the sales of merchandise that are based on movie characters whose popularity is enhanced by sales of pirated movies.'

- '...consumers may use pirated goods to "sample" music, movies, software, or electronic games before purchasing legitimate copies, which may lead to increased sales of legitimate goods. In addition, industries with products that are characterised by large "switching costs", may also benefit from piracy due to lock-in effects.'

This analysis confirms that the right balance regarding this issue should be found in implementing national policies.

Another example of a more critical view of intellectual property than that generally articulated by developed-country representatives is provided by a study undertaken by Professor Ian Hargreaves at the request of the UK Prime Minister. The Hargreaves Report (2011) found, *inter alia*, that:

- 'Copyright, once the exclusive concern of authors and their publishers, is today preventing medical researchers studying data and text in pursuit of new treatments. Copying has become basic to numerous industrial processes, as well as to a burgeoning service economy based upon the internet. The UK cannot afford to let a legal framework designed around artists impede vigorous participation in these emerging business sectors.'

- 'Government should firmly resist over-regulation of activities which do not prejudice the central objective of copyright, namely the provision of

incentives to creators. Government should deliver copyright exceptions at national level...The Government should also legislate to ensure that these and other copyright exceptions are protected from override by contract.'

- 'Government should ensure that development of the IP System is driven as far as possible by objective evidence. Policy should balance measurable economic objectives against social goals and potential benefits for rights holders against impacts on consumers and other interests. These concerns will be of particular importance in assessing future claims to extend rights or in determining desirable limits to rights.'

Some of these recommendations are in tune with the positions held by developing countries in dealing with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) Development Agenda and in other exercises and fora.

In view of some of the case law and reports mentioned above, it is pertinent to question whether the positions in international fora of some developed countries are consistent with changes in internal policies and perceptions on IP. Flexibilities on IP should not only be implemented at the national level, but preserved and developed at the international level, such as in normative activities in WIPO.

Law-making in IP

ACTA, a plurilateral agreement negotiated in a secretive manner, has been developed to set a standard to be followed not only by its contracting parties but by other countries. ACTA is functional to the interest of big companies, but overlooked the interests of small and medium enterprises and the general public. Despite the efforts of the small club of countries who are the proponents of ACTA, it did not turn out to be a success story. There was strong resistance to it by civil society. For instance, during the Valentine's weekend in 2012, there were mass protests all across cities in Europe. In Poland, the

prime minister suspended the ratification process of ACTA after widespread protests and attacks on government websites. The European Parliament voted by 478 to 39 to reject ACTA on 4 July 2012. It is a question now whether this initiative is still alive.

There were also important protests against the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and Protect Intellectual Property Act (PIPA), two bills submitted to the US Congress that would give authority to the US government to block access to foreign websites on the grounds of copyright infringement. In one single day, on 18 January 2012, 10 million signatures against those bills were obtained through different sites, eight million calls were made to US Congressmen, four million mails were sent to Congress and 115,000 sites participated in a blackout, including Google, Yahoo and Wikipedia. On the same day thousands of people mobilised against these bills in different US cities. In the US Congress, the number of those in favour of SOPA dramatically decreased and those against dramatically increased after these protests. The number of Senators who publicly opposed PIPA went from only one Senator on 16 November 2011 to 32 on 18 January. The bills were not passed.

These examples show the potential direct influence that civil society may have in IP law-making. With the widespread use of the Internet and social networks, civil society can play an important role in shaping or opposing new IP initiatives. This may help consumers and users of technology to be heard, and developing countries' interests and concerns to be taken into account, ultimately leading to more balance in IP rules nationally and internationally. ♦

Professor Carlos Correa is Special Adviser on Trade and Intellectual Property with the South Centre. The above is a summary of his presentation at a side-event on 'Reflections on the IP System: A Development Perspective' organised by the South Centre during the 50th World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) General Assemblies on 5 October 2012 in Geneva. It is reproduced from the South Bulletin (Issue 71, 28 February 2013) published by the South Centre.

Notes on violence against women in the neoliberal age

In the neoliberal era, while violence structures the lives of the poor across the world, the injustice of these lives is profoundly gendered, says *V Geetha*. It is the poor and marginal woman's body that bears the burden of both keeping her family together as well as labour for very low rates, thereby making sure wages stay depressed at all times. In the bargain, her children, her kin, in short the community that she makes with her labour of care, are also doomed to reproduce the self-same cycle of exploitation.

AS I write this in the third week of February, I see all around me signs of the latest global campaign to protest violence against women: the One Billion Women Rising (OBR) event co-ordinated by the playwright Eve Ensler from the United States who went viral with her provocative play, *The Vagina Monologues*. Ending violence, the campaign proclaims, is as important as ending poverty, fighting climate change and global warming, ending wars...

Known worldwide as VAW, that is, violence against women, this phenomenon appears so given that even attempts to describe it, such as the acronym VAW itself, only end up naturalising it. In other words, this violence appears irrevocable, almost inevitable, as the statistics that come attached to these campaigns tell us: in this instance we have been told that one in three women on our planet can expect to endure physical hurt in her lifetime.

However, the act of violence is seldom singular – it is not a single act, merely, which a man commits and a woman endures. Sexual violence or more generally violence against women informs and expresses the very essence of authority: to harm and assault a woman in the most casual sort of way, be it by powerful ruling-class men, or men from socially dominant classes, or by personnel of the state, appears to be the very hallmark of impunity. It is this impunity which produces sexual harassment, makes for highly exploitative workplace cultures, renders state personnel opaque



Forest-dwelling indigenous communities in India, known as *adivasis*, have been displaced from their lands by corporations seeking mineral and forest wealth. Picture shows *adivasi* women at a rally in West Bengal state.

to criticism, and places women in such vulnerable and risky positions whenever the societies they are part of experience major crises or disruptions, such as we are witnessing in places like Syria and Libya, and closer to home in Sri Lanka. In this sense sexual violence is one of the most acute expressions of power that takes itself for granted; from the man on the street who stalks a woman to men in a nation's armed forces, they are all equally convinced of women's inferior status, of her being an object available for male pleasure, and it is this conviction which renders their position on gender unassailable.

However, I do not wish to dwell

overmuch on what makes for the existence of impunity that is fundamentally gendered – it is something that many of us across the world live with, endure and resist. Instead I would like to rethink the problem of sexual violence from another position, which is not unknown but does not nearly get the same critical attention as singular acts of violence, as is evident from the OBR campaign against violence.

Violence as structure

Whether inevitable or not, violence structures the lives of the poor across the world: the violence of dispossession, hunger, malnutrition, long

hours of unremitting labour and discrimination and humiliation which are built into their work and life environments. In this world, men as well as women survive precariously, though drawing on different skills and solidarities and clearly accessing options and resources available to them albeit on an unequal basis. Thus, the injustice of these lives is profoundly gendered: it is the poor and marginal woman's body that bears the burden of both keeping her family together as well as labour for very low rates, thereby making sure wages stay depressed at all times. In the bargain, her children, her kin, in short the community that she makes with her labour of care, are also doomed to reproduce the self-same cycle of exploitation.

This is what the world is like for women across the global South – be it in South Asia, South America, Africa or the countries of the Balkans – where the biggest challenge is the expansion of what may be called predatory capital, which has produced a global market that appears to know no rationale except its own profits, and is willing, therefore, to sell, market and ultimately destroy everything precious to human existence, including water, trees, grain... Faced with this pitiless logic of expropriation, whether by multinational mining, iron and steel businesses or companies that market water and air, women in poor, peasant, nomadic and working communities across the globe, but particularly in the global South, have had to work very hard and ingeniously to both confront challenges as well as circumvent them.

Predatory capital: Resistance and responses

What do a global profiteer and his national colleagues – global capital co-exists with and with the support of national governments in much of the global South, where increasingly national sovereignty is being defined in terms of state power, rather than the well-being of the people – typically do? To start with, they mark out terrain that they would like to work over for their industries; they identify



An anti-human-trafficking protest in the US. Women have been victims of sex and labour trafficking.

populations that live on that terrain, and then work out schemes for getting them to comply with their industrial and market logic; and where compliance is not to be had, they resort to coercion, using their own private armies or looking to states and governments to support their will to plunder.

In India, for example, the entire central Indian region, and parts of the eastern plains and plateau, home to some of the country's richest mineral and forest wealth, are at present being held captive by global and local industries. Of the latter, many have recently begun to expand their interests across the world, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Far East and parts of Africa, and may therefore be considered 'global' in their own right. In order to get at the mines, companies have resorted to terrorising, shifting and destroying entire populations, which in the Indian instance comprise a large number of indigenous communities. Known as *adivasis*, these people of the forest and fastness are being literally thrown out of their homes and fields. Attempts to protest are immediately countered with force, arrests, murders, both judicial and non-judicial.

In such a context, women bear the brunt of the tensions, and also because in many terrains they are in the forefront of the struggle. Women who thus

have put their lives on the line have had to reckon with police interrogations, custodial violence and vile sexual assault by both the minions of the state as well as the hired goons of capital. There are other issues at stake as well: the loss of livelihoods, when lands are taken over, has meant that families migrate in search of work. Where men migrate initially, women, children and the elderly stay behind, and in such cases, the burden of survival is borne almost entirely by women. Whether having to protect their fragile peasant economies, or enter into strategic negotiations with the brokers of capital and industry, women are forced to walk the knife-edge in an everyday sense.

Sometimes women migrate too, with their families, or even on their own – and are forced to be part of a labour pool that is employed for uncertain periods of time and often for very depressed wages, with almost no safety at workplaces and certainly no laws in place against sexual harassment or assault. Migrating single women stand to be trafficked, or sometimes voluntarily enter the sex trade, and in either case cannot expect to have any guarantees against assault: only when there is a possibility of organised action have women sex workers experienced a measure of autonomy, as has been made evident in places where such organisa-

tions exist, like in parts of India, the Philippines, Indonesia and Vietnam.

Yet this is not all. Women resist, and have made it clear that the hills, the rivers and the coast are theirs and meant for them and their unborn generations. This maternalism which goes beyond the familial has helped draw hundreds of women into the struggle – for instance in southern India's Tamil Nadu state, which has for over 550 days witnessed a struggle against a Russian and French-supported nuclear plant, women have time and again drawn attention to their roles as guardians of life, and argued vociferously against energy options that strengthen the hands of the rich and take away from the poor, that help the cities to live and grow while disenfranchising all those who have to part with their share of resources that the city's affluent populations may live.

The market and its many contexts: A gendered critique

In such a context, what is the everyday life of a working-class, disenfranchised woman in the global South? How may we understand the violence that she endures, negotiates and confronts? While the larger picture is bleak and extremely worrying, the fact remains that in any number of contexts, women affected by the effects of the new market economies are not mere victims. In the Indian context, for instance, the presence of new manufacturing industries in the vicinity of small towns or rural populations that lie on the fringes of metropolitan centres such as Chennai or Delhi has meant that girls from working-class and lower-middle-class families have new work options: rather than settle for underpaid domestic labour, modest vending of goods, or service labour that is uncertain and often exploitative, young women have chosen factory labour.

This is not a new development: it has been noticed that women by and large have preferred the grind of a garment sweatshop to labouring on the fields, where they are the victims of not only capricious work conditions, the weather and limited number

of workdays, but also of social control and humiliation. In India, where most of the labouring people come from the so-called subordinated castes, this latter can be a fairly traumatic, though everyday, experience. Factory labour, while exploitative, relentless and cruel in the manner it attaches workers to the grind of the assembly line, is yet better-paying in a relative sense, and while there is the ever-present threat of sexual harassment and coercion, chances are that social humiliation is less easy to enforce.

For women, then, the market, such as it is, allows a pyrrhic reprieve from an older and more resilient violence, of the caste system. However, this cannot be assumed and has to be precisely established: and much depends on where the factory is, the nature of the labour pool, especially its varied nature, and whether recruitment has been through local agents or directly through company-appointed personnel. Besides, even where women's lives have marginally improved, they still have to negotiate and fight for their dignity and survival.

The point is that the feminisation of certain kinds of labour is not accidental, and while it may pay provisional and temporary dividends, it cannot in the long run make for female labour mobility in the workplace or help women develop skills that will help them negotiate their terms in the workplace. There is a further twist to all of this: for instance, many factories in Tamil Nadu recruit women with the explicit promise that their wages will help them earn their dowry! This has led to all sorts of unfair labour practices and besides has helped sustain the pernicious practice of dowry, paid at the time of marriage to the groom's family, and through it a cycle of domestic humiliation and violence.

In another sense too, the growth of the market has put additional pressure on women from peasant or working-class communities. The structural adjustment regimes imposed on many countries in the South by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and its

cohorts have resulted in the state withdrawing from its welfarist role. In countries like India, where the state's welfarism has translated into subsidies for agriculture through soft loans and the whole paraphernalia of the so-called 'green revolution', the sudden withdrawal of the state from this role and the concomitant problems that peasants are left with have led to the tragic phenomenon of farmers' suicides. While this has been identified and studied as a grievous social problem and elicited responses from policy makers, the nether side of this problem, of what a commentator has called the problems experienced by 'those who did not die', that is, the widows and daughters of the deceased, has been relatively ignored. The struggle for survival, the issue of loans, personal safety, sexual vulnerability and the burden of honour that peasant families carry with them to the grave – all these have made for a very unhappy rural female populace in parts of India, who are unable to leave, but equally unable to continue to be peasants as their foremothers had been. This is a silent sort of violence and one that is barely acknowledged.

Then there is the problem of dispossession and all the ills that attend it, from forced migrations to being trafficked. Related to the unwieldy and unchecked growth of economies that service the export trade or fill the pockets of the national rich and powerful, trafficking is a complex phenomenon and includes women being coerced into sex work. Labour trafficking is equally a problem: hundreds of women are lured to seek work as service providers, as ayahs, domestic workers and care workers in either West or South-East Asia. Denied rights, straddling several wobbly legal realms, both of the countries they belong to and of the countries where they go to work, these women workers are particularly vulnerable. Instances of domestic workers being sexually harassed, accused of adultery or of being irresponsible and therefore cruelly punished have been well documented in the countries of the South.

In addition to all these structural issues to do with the economy, which entail extremely destructive consequences for women in spite of their determined effort to negotiate with it, there is the pervasive phenomenon of low-intensity conflict. Conflict comes about for any number of reasons: when dispossessed, the poor fight back, and if they happen to come under the leadership of militant armed socialist or communist groups, as we find in several parts of India and earlier in Nepal, and in some parts of South America, they have to reckon with state violence.

However, this war is never merely a people's war against a state: it causes 'collateral' damage of the worst kind, since the state uses the excuse of militancy to wilfully deny rights to ordinary citizens who suffer from its economic policies and to enforce its own neoliberal agenda. This has meant, as has happened in Chiapas in Mexico and in the plateaus and plains of central India, that entire populations are harmed, turned out of historical homes and packed into internal refugee camps. Sexual violence against women is routinely used in such instances, and marauding state-supported vigilantes in the name of fighting armed militants wreak havoc on communities, especially women and children.

Another reason for conflict is the manner in which states across the global South have managed to link their own ruling-class interests, military power and the spread of capital to stymie democratic dissent as well as settle older conflicts: Sri Lanka is a classic example of this phenomenon, and the unholy triumvirate of the military, a racist state and predatory capital – Chinese, Indian and others – have managed to punish critics and attack those who organise against the state. This set of developments has fed into and exacerbated the violence of the civil war, once again with disastrous consequences for women: forced to live in camps, having lost their all, their loved ones, sexually victimised, without prospects, the lot of Tamil women in Sri Lanka is completely unenviable. A similar situation obtains



Women in the world's conflict zones have been subjected to violence. Picture shows members of a Palestinian family after Israeli bulldozers demolished their home in Arab East Jerusalem.

in Kashmir and the Indian north-east, where decades of ethnic protests by populations that have resented being integrated into the Indian Union are now made worse by the neoliberal path to development that the Indian state appears determined to take forward at any cost. Here too, we find that women suffer in exceptional ways: being at the mercy of the armed forces, and having to deal with their children caught in the crossfire of battles between the forces and ethnic militia, and the everyday problems of survival.

We know too the issues at stake for women in other conflict zones, from the Sudan to Palestine, from Mali to Syria, and none of these situations appear easy to resolve: the fate of the oil economies in the 21st century, and the manner in which this fate is linked to the fate of democracy are matters that cry out for understanding. Meanwhile, the lives of ordinary people in these regions continue along difficult paths, and women, in all those nations of the Islamic Crescent, stretching from the African Magreb to the Arabian Sea, have had to bear the brunt of two sorts of violence: of civil war, of American and Israeli imperialism on the one hand, and the cultural backlash in their own contexts, where so-called 'crimes of honour' continue to haunt their intimate lives.

Conclusion

However, as this article has endeavoured to argue, the picture, however bleak, is leavened by the fact that women caught in the ugly dynamism of events that are not of their own making are not hapless victims, and do make important and often rational choices. It is just that these choices appear far too limited and circumscribed to change their conditions of existence, in terms of labour conditions, wages, freedom in matters of love and marriage, dignity in the family, equality in the larger culture...

On the other hand, every act of dissent, protest and every attempt at confronting and negotiating what appear at first to be intractable realities has to be acknowledged for what it is, and while we may now and then realise the strength of a Malala or rue the fate of Rizana, the fact remains that women like them are legion – braving everyday odds that are actually insurmountable, and leading lives that sadly and cruelly are all too easily damaged and hurt. As against the impunity of states and the merciless logic of the market, we need must balance compassion and justice, understanding and action. ♦

V Geetha is a writer and publisher with Tara Books in Chennai, India. She is the author of the books Gender and Patriarchy.

Women's work in the economic expansion of Asia

Women in Asia have taken the brunt of the changes brought about by globalisation, with rapid shifts into (and out of) paid work, greater roles in providing outside income for households, increased rates of migration for work and greater involvement in unpaid, largely household labour, says *Jayati Ghosh*. There has to be a focus on the quality, the recognition and the remuneration of women's work in developing countries, as well as the conditions facilitating it, such as alternative arrangements for household work and childcare.

ONE of the many ways in which capitalism survives despite its many contradictions is through its ability to generate its own labour, whether through migration or drawing in different segments of the population into paid work. This is particularly evident in the case of female labour. Of course it must be remembered that even when women are not paid workers, their often unacknowledged and unpaid contribution to social reproduction as well as to many economic activities has always been absolutely essential for the functioning of the system. All women are usually workers, whether or not they are defined or recognised as such.

In all societies, and particularly in developing countries, there remain essential but usually unpaid activities (such as cooking, cleaning and other housework, provisioning of basic household needs, child care, care of the sick and the elderly, as well as community-based activities) which are largely seen as the responsibility of the women. This pattern of unpaid work tends to exist even when women are engaged in outside work for an income, whether as wage workers or self-employed workers. Women from poor families who are engaged in outside work as well usually cannot afford to hire others to perform these tasks, so most often these are passed on to young girls and elderly women within the household, or become a 'double burden' of work for such women.

This means that the issues relating to women's work employment are



In Asia there is now a great reliance on women as workers in very small units or home-based production at the bottom of a complex subcontracting chain for export manufacturing.

qualitatively different from those of male workers. Just increasing paid employment does not always mean an improvement in the conditions of women workers, since it can lead to a double burden upon women whose household obligations still have to be fulfilled. So there has to be a focus on the quality, the recognition and the remuneration of women's work in developing countries, as well as the conditions facilitating it, such as alternative arrangements for household work and child care. All of these are critically affected by social relationships as well as economic policies and processes, which determine whether or not increased labour market activity by women is associated with genuine improvements in their economic circumstances.

There is some historical evidence that with material progress in a soci-

ety, the socio-economic conditions of women in that society tend to improve. But this is not automatic; it also reflects the outcome of women's struggles for equality and justice. The growing significance of paid work by women is one aspect of that. In recent times the ability of women's movements to fight for greater rights and empowerment has been conditioned by the broader economic processes which have determined the explicit participation of women in the labour market. There has been progress as well as reversal, and it is evident that early gains in some societies cannot be taken for granted.

Global processes affecting women

The dominance of finance capital, the emergence of new trade links

and the expansion of global production chains based on splitting up the production process across different locations, have all dramatically changed productive structures and labour markets across the world. Both financial and productive sectors have become more concentrated, causing a relative decline in small enterprises that are typically more employment-intensive. Except for a brief spurt in public spending immediately after the global financial crisis in 2008, governments have been less willing or able to use macroeconomic policies to maintain or expand employment. Trade openness has destroyed some livelihoods while creating some new opportunities for income generation and employment, albeit to a lesser extent. These changes have been reflected in changes in labour markets in different countries. Thus, open unemployment rates have increased and formal or organised sector employment has declined as a proportion of the workforce across the world. At the same time, reduced public spending on 'social sectors' has tended to devolve more of the tasks of social reproduction to the unpaid labour of women within households.

Because of the decline in formal employment, workers have crowded into the informal activities sector, perpetuating a vicious circle of poverty leading to low employment generation leading to poverty. Global production chains are growing in significance as a result of technological changes, making production and workforces in different countries more interdependent. There has also been a global increase in unpaid labour within households – predominantly performed by women.

These changes have been particularly marked in developing Asia, which has become both the most 'globalised' and the most economically dynamic region of the world. And women in Asia have taken the brunt of the changes, with rapid shifts into (and out of) paid work, greater roles in providing outside income for households, increased rates of migration for work and greater involvement in unpaid labour. Women have moved

– voluntarily or forcibly – in search of work within and across countries and regions, more than ever before. Their livelihoods in rural areas, dominantly in agriculture, have been affected by the agrarian crisis that is now widespread in most developing countries. Across societies in the region, massive increases in the availability of different consumer goods, due to trade liberalisation, have accompanied declines in access to basic public goods and services.

The expansion of global production chains that rely on the labour of women especially at the bottom end has transformed patterns of paid work. In addition there is a significant globalisation of services, which involves both local shifts in workforce and migration of women, in the 'care' sectors of economies. At the same time, technological changes have made communication and the transmission of cultural forms more extensive and rapid than could have even been imagined in the past. All these have had very substantial and complex effects upon the position of women and their ability to control their own lives.

In addition, these economic changes have other adverse social consequences for women. The increasing emphasis on markets and profitability requires luring more consumers into the web of purchase through advertising and attempts to manipulate people's tastes and choices. In this effort, advertising companies have notoriously used women as objects to purvey their products. The dual relationship with women, as objects to be used in selling goods and as a huge potential market for goods, creates a peculiar process whereby women are encouraged and persuaded to participate actively in their own objectification. The huge media attention given to beauty contests, 'successful' models and the like has fed into the rapidly expanding beauty industry in developing Asia, which includes not only cosmetics and beauty aids, but slimming agents, beauty parlours, weight loss clinics, and so on. Many of these contribute to the most undesirable and

retrograde attitudes to both women and their appearance, which can push women into newer forms of social oppression that are no less demeaning than earlier, explicitly patriarchal forms.

Women's involvement in paid work

Over the past three decades, macroeconomic processes in Asia have significantly affected women's involvement in paid work. There have been very rapid shifts in the labour market in the space of less than one generation, as Asian women have been first drawn into paid employment, especially in export sectors, and then ejected from it. The phase of disproportionately high use of women in export-oriented manufacturing in several rapidly growing Asian economies in the 1980s and early part of the 1990s was followed by a period of subsequent ejection of older women and some younger counterparts into more fragile and insecure forms of employment, self-employment or even back to unpaid housework. It has been plausibly argued that gender wage inequality stimulated growth in developing Asia, as those Asian economies with larger gender gaps tended to grow the most rapidly from 1975 to 1990. Low female wages spurred investment and exports by lowering unit labour costs, providing the foreign exchange to purchase capital and intermediate goods which raise productivity and growth rates.

This trend towards feminisation of employment in Asian countries resulted from employers' needs for cheaper and more 'flexible' sources of labour, which meant more casualisation of labour, shift to part-time work or piece-rate contracts, and insistence on greater freedom of hiring and firing. All these aspects of what is now described as 'labour market flexibility' became necessary once external competitiveness became the significant goal of domestic policy makers and defined the contours within which domestic and foreign employers in these economies operated.

Women workers were preferred by employers in export activities primarily because of the inferior conditions of work and pay that they were usually willing to accept. They had lower reservation wages than their male counterparts, were more willing to accept longer hours and unpleasant and often unhealthy or hazardous factory conditions, typically did not unionise or engage in other forms of collective bargaining to improve conditions, and did not ask for permanent contracts. They were thus easier to hire and fire at will, or according to external demand conditions.

Life-cycle changes such as marriage and childbirth could be used as proximate causes to terminate their employment and engage a younger and fresher set of female workers. Greater flexibility was thus afforded to employers to offer less secure contracts. Further, in certain of the newer 'sunrise' industries of the late 20th century such as computer hardware and consumer electronics, the nature of the assembly line work – repetitive and detailed, with an emphasis on manual dexterity and fineness of elaboration – was felt to be especially suited to women. The high 'burnout' associated with some of these activities meant that employers preferred to hire workers who could be periodically replaced, which was easier when the employed group consisted of young, mostly unmarried women who could move on to other phases of their life cycle.

That the feminisation of labour in export-oriented industries was dependent upon the relative inferiority of remuneration and working conditions was evident also because it turned to be a rather short-lived phenomenon. Already by the mid-1990s – the height of the export boom – women's share of manufacturing employment had peaked in most economies of the region, and in some countries it subsequently declined in absolute numbers. Some of this reflected the fact that such export-oriented employment through relocative foreign investment simply moved to cheaper locations: from Malaysia to Indonesia and Vietnam; from Thailand to

Cambodia and Myanmar and so on. But even in the newer locations, the recent problems of various export sectors such as the garments industry worldwide have meant that jobs (especially for women workers) were created and then lost within the space of a few years.

As women became an established part of the paid workforce, and even the dominant part in certain sectors (as indeed they did become in the textiles, readymade garments and consumer electronics sectors of East Asia), it became more difficult to exercise the traditional type of gender discrimination at work. Besides an upward pressure on their wages, which caused gender wage gaps to come down to some extent, there were other pressures for legislation to improve their overall conditions of work. But these strategies designed to improve the conditions of women workers tended to reduce their relative attractiveness for those employers who had earlier relied precisely on the inferior conditions of women's work and their greater flexibility in terms of hiring and firing to keep their costs low and enhance their export profitability. The rise in wages also had the same effect. As their relative effective remuneration improved (in terms of the total package of wages and work and contract conditions), their attractiveness to employers decreased.

Subsequently, manufacturing in Asia tended to occupy a much less significant position in the total employment of women, and also relied less on female employment at the margin. It is increasingly evident that export-oriented production does not always result in formal feminisation of the workforce, which is essentially dependent upon the relative inferiority of female wages and work conditions and the use of patriarchal relations to establish control over women workers and keep wages down. If mechanisation and newer techniques require the use of more skilled labour, or if the gap between male and female wages is not sufficiently large, export activities do not need to rely more on women's labour. In conditions in which both male and female workers

have been forced by adverse conditions in the labour market to accept adverse low-paid and insecure work contracts, as occurred not only in post-crisis East Asia but in other countries of the region, there has been less overt preference for young women workers than was previously observed.

The nature of such work has also changed in recent years. It was already based mostly on short-term contracts rather than permanent employment for women; now there is much greater reliance on them as workers in very small units or home-based production, at the bottom of a complex subcontracting chain. This became even more marked in the post-crisis adjustment phase. In South-East Asia, women have made up a significant proportion of the informal manufacturing industry workforce, in garment workshops, shoe factories and craft industries. Many women also carry out informal, temporary activities in farming or in the building industry. Home-based workers, working for themselves or on subcontracts, make products ranging from clothing and footwear to artificial flowers, carpets, electronics and teleservices.

The increasing use of outsourcing is not confined to export firms. However, because of the flexibility offered by subcontracting, it is clearly of even greater advantage in the intensely competitive export sectors and therefore tends to be even more widely used there. Much of this cross-border outsourcing activity is based in Asia, although the movement can be across geographical locations, even returning to the North when collapses in employment (as in Europe recently) force women to take up such home-based informal work once again. Such subcontracted producers vary in size and manufacturing capacity, from medium-sized factories to pure middlemen collecting the output of home-based workers.

The crucial role of women workers in such international production activity based in Asia is now increasingly recognised, whether as wage labour in small factories and workshops run by subcontracting firms, or as homeworkers dealing with middle-

men in a complex production chain. A substantial proportion of such subcontracting extends down to home-based work, which provides substantial opportunity for self-exploitation, especially when payment is on a piece-rate basis; also such work is typically left unprotected by labour laws and social welfare programmes. However, even such home-based work may be in crisis, as the textile and garment exports from developing countries face increasing difficulties in world markets and the pressure of competition forces exporters to seek further methods of cost-cutting. The extreme volatility of demand for labour that characterises factory-based export-oriented production has also become a feature of home-based work for export production.

The role of unpaid labour

A crucial feature of work processes across the globe has been the increase in unpaid labour within households – dominantly (but not exclusively) performed by women, as governments renege on basic social responsibilities for the provision of public goods and services, and more of the care economy is devolved onto the unpaid sector. The peculiar combination of increased unemployment and increased requirement of unpaid labour is thus an attribute of labour markets globally.

Public policies have played a role in causing the unpaid labour time of women to rise, either because of reduced social expenditure that places a larger burden of care on women, or privatised or degraded common property resources or inadequate infrastructure facilities that increase time spent on provisioning essential goods for the household, or simply because even well-meaning policies (such as for afforestation) are often gender-blind. Macroeconomic policies of national governments that have systematically reduced employment opportunities for both men and women and allowed agriculture in the South to become a precarious and unviable occupation have also reduced the quality of and access to public goods and

services and thrown open many parts of everyday life to inequalising market processes.

In general these economic policies have generally been in the interests of large corporate capital. The rich, and especially large corporations, have benefited from competitive offers of substantial and growing tax benefits, while the common people have been told that there is no money in the state coffers for basic public goods and services. Food security has been threatened in poor countries; other economic rights have been denied; social sectors such as health and education have been underfunded; and workers' protection has been reduced. The increasing emphasis on markets has implied the commoditisation of many aspects of life that were earlier seen as either naturally provided by states and communities, or simply not subject to market transaction and property relations. For example, the inability or refusal of several governments to provide safe drinking water has led to the explosive growth of a bottled water industry. A whole range of previously publicly provided services and utilities like power distribution and telecommunications has been privatised. Even the growing recognition accorded to intellectual property rights marks the entry of markets into ever-newer spheres.

All this affects women and girls most directly. When incomes from work in the family go down, women are forced to seek any form of employment that will keep the household going. When there is less access to food, women and girl children tend to eat less. When the health services are inadequate, women (especially mothers) not only suffer the most, but they also have to bear the responsibility of looking after the sick and the old. When schools lack basic facilities or charge higher fees, girl students find it difficult to attend and get relegated to household tasks. When cooking fuel and clean drinking water are hard to come by, women have to somehow provide them for the family. So such government policies have led to large increases in the unpaid

labour of women, and thereby contributed to a worsening quality of life for them.

Women workers and labour management techniques

Two major sets of changes have dramatically increased the relocation possibilities in international production. Technological changes have allowed for different parts of the production process to be vertically split and locationally separated, as well as created different types of requirement for labour involving a few highly skilled professional workers and a vast bulk of semi-skilled workers for whom burnout over time is more widely prevalent than learning by doing. They have also enabled geographical relocation in service activities which were previously locationally rigid. Organisational changes have been associated with concentration of ownership and control as well as with greater dispersion and more layers of outsourcing and subcontracting of particular activities and parts of the production process.

Therefore, we now have the emergence of international suppliers of goods and services who rely less on direct production within a specific location and more on subcontracting a greater part of their production and distribution activities. This has led to the emergence and market domination of 'manufacturers without factories', as multinational firms such as Nike and Adidas effectively rely on a complex system of outsourced and subcontracted production based on centrally determined design and quality control. More recent outsourcing in services ranging from publishing to back-office work also combines some amount of flexibility (which implies greater control over workers) with centralised control. In all of these activities, women workers are both essential and dominate the lower end of work processes in terms of pay and lack of control.

Globally, capitalism is increasingly moving towards a system of organisation of production that has been called 'Toyotism' by Peter Custers (in

his book *Capital Accumulation and Women's Labour in Asian Economies*, Monthly Review Press, 2012). The distinctive feature of Toyotism is the combination of internal decentralisation with external centralisation. Internal decentralisation is reflected in the formation of 'labour groups' that are rewarded with common incentives for higher production to enable the disciplining device of peer pressure on workers. This reduces the need for detailed supervision or monitoring, and ensures much greater 'self-discipline'. Far from humanising labour relations, this has the effect of reducing solidarity between workers and further weakening their collective power.

Multinational companies have continued searching for ways to obtain maximum control over factory workers' thinking processes. So while the serial production of mass commodities is not abolished, the internal hierarchical relations within enterprises and the external relations are both profoundly restructured. Quality control circles subject workers mentally to the corporation's rule, and the structure of subcontracting transfers the risks of production to lower levels such as component makers and their workers. This creates segmented categories of workers with differential rights and bargaining power.

It is interesting to note that this method of worker control has been increasingly copied by companies across the world, and has even spread beyond the sphere of production into finance. Micro-credit, for example, which was actively promoted as a 'development panacea' by multilateral organisations and many governments, has relied on creating groups of women who benefit in common from loans (in what are euphemistically called 'self-help groups') so that peer pressure for repayment substitutes for the absence of collateral in lending.

Combined with this is external centralisation, which also affects workers negatively. A large corporation's relations with small supplier firms are increasingly regulated by the principles of 'just-in-time delivery' management that originated in Japan.

These supplier firms in turn are based on employing workers with clearly secondary status in terms of workers' rights, driven by the instability and insecurity of their employers' earning. Methods of transferring risks to workers are firmly entrenched by the informal nature of most work contracts, the reliance on part-time workers and the use of piece-rate wages.

Women and the reserve army of labour

Women workers have always borne the characteristics that Marx described for the major categories of the industrial reserve army: the latent, the stagnant and the floating. The availability of such women workers is conditioned by the broader economic conditions, so that greater poverty or misery of families tends to send out greater numbers of women (often younger women) in search of paid work. This is also affected by life-cycle social pressures. Married, middle-aged women employed as part-time workers often most clearly fulfil the general criteria for being part of the labour reserve. They are available as a cheap labour reserve precisely because of their forced absence from the labour market for child bearing and child rearing, but the patriarchal relations underlying this cement their role as insecure, subordinate and low-paid workers who can be brought into or expelled from jobs whenever employers require.

It is notable that open unemployment has been growing in the developing countries that are currently seen as the most dynamic in the world economy, such as China, East and South-East Asian countries and India, and in many of these economies, it has combined with the persistently high rates of underemployment. The decline in formal sector employment, especially in developing countries, has been associated with the proliferation of workers crowded into the informal sector, especially in the low-wage low-productivity occupations that are characteristic of 'refuge sectors' in labour markets. While there are some high-value-added jobs in-

creasingly to be found as 'informal' self-employment (including, for example, software and some high-end IT-enabled services that allow home-based professional work), these are relatively small in number and certainly too few to make much of a dent in the overall trend, especially in countries where the vast bulk of the labour force is unskilled or relatively less skilled. In turn, this has meant that the cycle of poverty-low employment generation-poverty has been perpetuated and even accentuated because of the diminished willingness or ability of governments to intervene positively in expanding employment generation.

One important response by Asian women to these changes has been economic migration. Asia has become one of the most significant regions in the world both for the cross-border movement of capital and goods, and for the movement of people. The picture of women's migration in Asia today is complex, reflecting the apparent advantages to women of higher incomes and recognition of work, but also the dangers and difficulties of migrating to new and unknown situations with the potential for various kinds of exploitation. It has also been associated with a newer form of production chain: the globalisation of the care economy, with women migrating to other (richer) locations where the per capita incomes of households and demographic patterns combine to increase the outsourcing of home-based care work that was previously the unpaid work of women members of those households.

So it is evident that many aspects of gender relations and the particular forms that patriarchy takes are closely intertwined with processes of capitalist accumulation. Social emancipation today is therefore inextricably linked with a closer understanding of the complex nature of contemporary capitalism and how it relies on the social construction of gender in its accumulation processes. ♦

Jayati Ghosh is an economics professor at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. The above is based on the article 'Women, labour, and capital accumulation in Asia' published in Monthly Review (January 2012).

Chinese migrant women workers in a dormitory labour system

The dormitory labour system is a gendered form of labour use to fuel global production in newly industrialised regions, especially in South China. While the systematic provision of dormitories for internal migrant labour facilitates continuous access to fresh labour reserves from the countryside, it is also helping to generate sisterhood and solidarity among the women workers.

CHINA is well known as a 'world factory', attracting transnational corporations (TNCs) from all over the world, especially from Hong Kong, Taiwan, Japan, the US, and Western Europe. Rapid expansion of export-oriented production has led to a sharp rise in jobs in private, foreign-owned, and joint-venture enterprises that dot the coastal cities of China. The formation of a new working class of internal rural migrant labourers, in contrast to the Maoist working class, has been taking shape in contemporary China. The Fifth National Population Census of China in 2000 estimated that there were over 120 million internal migrant workers in cities, and today the estimates range from 130 to 200 million persons.

Pun Ngai



The rapid expansion of export-oriented production in China has been based on a massive harnessing of young women migrant workers.

'worker', which carried the highest status in the socialist rhetoric of Mao's day, the new word *dagong* signifies a lesser identity – that of a hired hand – in a new context shaped by the rise of market factors in labour relations and hierarchy. *Mei* means younger sister. It denotes not merely gender, but also marital status – *mei* is unmarried and young, and thus often of a lower status.

These rural migrants are identified as temporary residents who work in a city and who lack a formal urban household registration (*hukou*). The *hukou* system, which is still mostly in place, now helps to create exploitative mechanisms of labour appropriation in the cities. The maintenance of the distinction between permanent and temporary resi-

Situating women in the world's factory

Since the early 1990s the development of special economic zones and technology development zones across China, similar to the development in most other developing economies, was based on a massive harnessing of young workers, in particular of unmarried women, who are often the cheapest and most compliant labour. These women migrant workers – *dagongmei* – constitute a new gendered labour identity, produced at the particular moment when private and transnational capital emerged in

post-socialist China. As a newly coined term, *dagongmei* embraces multi-layered meanings and denotes a new kind of labour relationship fundamentally different from those of Mao's period. *Da-gong* means 'working for the boss' or 'selling labour', which connotes commodification and a capitalist exchange of labour for wages. It is a new concept that stands in contradiction to Chinese socialist history. Labour, especially alienated (wage) labour, supposedly emancipated with the Chinese revolution, is again sold to the capitalists, and this time under the auspices of the state. In contrast to the term *gongren*,

dents by the *hukou* system facilitates the state's shirking of its obligation to provide housing, job security, and welfare to rural migrant workers.

China's overall economy, while it needs the labour of the rural population, does not need the city-based survival of that population once demand for rural-to-urban migrants' labour power shifts in either location or emphasis. This newly forming working class is permitted to form no permanent roots and legal identities in the city. Still worse, the *hukou* system, with its labour controls, constructs the ambiguous identity of rural migrant labour and simultaneously deepens

and obscures the economy's exploitation of this huge population. Hence, this subtle and multi-faceted marginalisation of a vast swath of the rural labour supply has created a contested, if not a deformed, citizenship that has disadvantaged Chinese migrant workers attempting to transform themselves into urban workers. The Chinese term *mingong* ('peasant-workers' or temporary workers) blurs the lines of identity between peasant and worker.

Gender and the dormitory labour regime

Since the set-up of four special economic zones in South China in the early 1980s, the new export-oriented industrialised regions dominated by foreign-invested companies have witnessed a systemic use of the dormitory labour system. The foreign-invested companies, irrespective of sector, all have to provide accommodation to their workers in order to keep their labourers. With work and residence combined under the dormitory labour system, production and daily reproduction are hence reconfigured for the sake of global capital, with daily reproduction of labour entirely controlled by foreign-invested or privately owned companies.

This dormitory labour system is not a new arrangement under capitalism. The dormitory use for labour has a long history both in a Western or Eastern context of industrialisation. However, the Chinese dormitory labour system is unique in the way that dormitories are available to all workers and industries regardless of factory conditions. The widespread availability of industrial dormitories not only constrains the mobility of labour, it also facilitates it. The distinctive nature of the Chinese dormitory labour system is also for short-tenure migrant labour within the factory compound or close to it.

In China, the state still plays a very substantial role in shaping labour markets, regulating labour mobility from rural to urban industrial areas and providing housing accommodation to migrant workers. In most of

the newly industrial towns, the Chinese state initially provides the dormitories for the factory owners to rent. As housing provision is not for families, there is no interest from capital in the reproduction of the next generation of labourers. The focus is on maximising the utilisation of labour of the temporary, migrant, and contract labourer by controlling the daily reproduction of their labour power.

The political economy of providing accommodation close to the factory is the linkage it supports between state and capital. Since the migrant working class is deprived of citizenship rights to stay in the city, the state through residency controls allows labour mobility, but workers must have employment to support temporary residence. Dormitories facilitate the temporary attachment or capture of labour by the companies, but also the massive circulation of labour, and hence the holding down of wages and the extensive lengthening of the working day, as working space and living space are integrated by the employer and state. A hybrid, transient workforce is created, circulating between factory and countryside, dominated by employers' control over housing needs and state controls over residency permits.

One characteristic of China's foreign-invested manufacturing plants is the housing of migrant workers in dormitories attached to or close to a factory's enclosed compound. On finishing their labour contracts on average after one to two years, the workers must return to their place of birth or find other temporary employment, again to be confined in the dormitory labour regime. Factory dormitories thus attach migrant workers for short-term capture, and accommodation does not function for a long-term or protracted relationship between the individual firm and the individual worker, which is the rationale for accommodation in other paternalistic factory forms such as in Japan where the relationship can be life-long.

Management within the foreign-invested or privately owned companies would appear to have exceptional control over the workforce under the

system. With no access to a home space independent of the enterprise, working days are extended to suit production needs. Compared to the 'normal' separation between work and home that usual factory arrangements entail, the dormitory labour regime exerts greater breadth of control over the working and non-working day of the workers.

Gender is central to this specific embodiment of the dormitory labour system and the formation of the transient working class. For the past two decades, among the exodus of internal migrant workers into the industrial cities, young women have been among the first to be picked up by the new export-oriented industries. Young women constitute a high proportion of the factory workers, above 70% of the total workforce in the garments, toys and electronics industries. Their gender, in addition to their youth and rural migrant status, is an integral part of China's export-led industrialism facilitating global production for the world market.

As sites of control and resistance, the dormitory labour system simultaneously provides workers the opportunities to resist management practices and achieve some victories in improving working conditions. Ultimately, however, the ability of workers to fundamentally challenge the conditions of work and dormitory living is limited by the temporary nature of the employment contracts and their disempowered status as temporary urban residents.

A new working-class consciousness

I have argued that employers' use of dormitory labour, which has linked itself to both labour migration and daily labour reproduction, serves global production by generating hidden and therefore largely invisible costs borne by the migrant women workers. The situation has deteriorated further now that local governments within China are competing for foreign investment and thus openly neglect the labour regulations and the social provisions implemented by

China's local, provincial, and national governments. The costs of daily labour reproduction are largely undertaken by the dormitory regime, which subsidises the living cost of labour in terms of wages, accommodation, and consumption. The labour reproduction of the dormitory regime has sustained cheap labour in China over the past two decades.

Hence, the systemic provision of dormitories for internal migrant labour facilitates continuous access to fresh labour reserves from the countryside. The dormitory labour regime concentrates labour, nurturing workers' consciousness in the face of acute exploitation by capital; but with the high circulation of labour power of a transitory semi-proletarianised class, it also inhibits the workers from staying long enough within one place or space to form a continuous working-class community. No doubt the dormitory labour system, in concentrating and yet circulating labour between capitals, creates a powerful production regime to spatially contain the formation of a new working class, but dialectically it also becomes a bedrock for nurturing acute class consciousness and facilitating class actions in the future.

The battle for this new working class requires struggles against both capital and state. Against state, the migrant workers have to launch an urban citizenship rights struggle in order to gain the right to settle down in the industrial cities and towns and create their own working-class community. Against capital, the workers need to look for alternative ways of organising since traditional trade union struggle is not effective, if not disallowed, in the Chinese dormitory labour regime. Dormitory-based organising along gender lines to generate sisterhood solidarity among the workers hopefully will be one of the alternative struggles. ◆

Pun Ngai is a professor in the Department of Applied Social Sciences at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. She is the author of Made in China: Women Factory Workers in a Global Workplace. This article is reproduced from the InFocus blog on the AsiaPortal website (infofocus.asiaportal.info).

Pandemic Preparedness

Creating a Fair and Equitable Influenza Virus and Benefit Sharing System

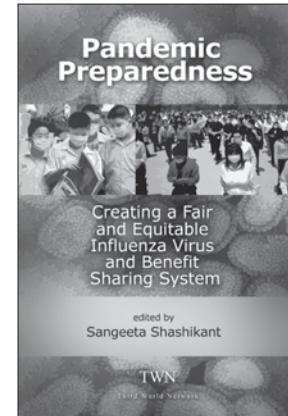
Edited by Sangeeta Shashikant

The WHO, a specialised agency of the United Nations, is mandated to achieve the highest possible level of health for all peoples.

However, in 2007 world attention was focused on WHO when it emerged that WHO's 'Global Influenza Surveillance Network' (GISN) was unfair to the interests and needs of developing countries. This scheme, focused on ensuring that countries shared influenza viruses, failed to deliver fair and equitable benefit sharing, a crucial element to ensure access to vaccines, anti-virals and other technologies at affordable prices to developing countries that were most affected during a severe influenza outbreak of pandemic potential. It also emerged that developed country governments and their entities were winners in the scheme as they profited from the virus sharing system, including by having timely access to vaccines and making IPRs claims over the shared biological materials and products developed using such materials.

Meanwhile, developing countries could face astronomical bills for the purchase of vaccines and other medical supplies, as well as difficulties in accessing such supplies, due to their limited availability. Latest technologies as well as know-how used in vaccine development and production (largely based in developed countries) were also protected by IPRs, creating more obstacles for developing countries that might seek to build their own production capacity.

All these issues came to a head at the 60th WHA in 2007, leading to the adoption of Resolution WHA60.28 titled 'Pandemic Influenza Preparedness: sharing of



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influenza viruses and access to vaccines and other benefits'. Negotiations to create a fair and equitable influenza virus and benefit sharing framework in the context of pandemic influenza preparedness are ongoing in WHO.

This book provides an in-depth understanding of the background to, and rationale for, the current WHO negotiations on influenza virus and benefit sharing as well as a front-line view of the negotiations.

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Left-behind women seek more support

Nearly 50 million Chinese women have been left behind in the countryside as their migrant worker husbands take up jobs in distant towns. The problems facing these women are at last receiving some attention.

IT is said that women hold up half the sky. For Huang Libi in southwest China, she is holding up more than her share.

With her husband away most of the year working in a city, the 48-year-old village woman takes care of her elderly mother- and father-in-law and two children, feeds nearly 100 chickens, grows more than 200 grapefruit trees, and cultivates around 2,000 square metres of cornfield and paddy fields.

'Day after day, I get up before dawn,' said Huang from Longtan village in the township of Hexing in Chongqing Municipality.

During 28 years of marriage, Huang's husband returns from southeastern Fujian Province during the Spring Festival, or the Chinese Lunar New Year.

'This is all for better earnings and a brighter future for our children,' Huang said.

She is not the only woman in the village that lives apart from her husband. More than 75% of male Longtan villagers have left for coastal cities, leaving more than 300 women behind.

Since the 1980s, rapid urbanisation has led to a large number of married men in rural areas leaving their homes for better-paid jobs in cities.

As a result, couples are forced to live apart, with wives staying in the countryside toiling to keep their homes running.

China now has nearly 50 million left-behind women in rural areas, statistics from the All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) show.

According to research conducted by the China Agricultural University, left-behind women have taken up more than 85% of both farm work and

household chores.

But their physical and psychological well-being is being overlooked.

Farmland, for women, has become a 'second battlefield' in addition to housekeeping.

For Huang, the harvest season has become 'the season of affliction'.

In November, when the grapefruit is ripe, the 1.5-metre-tall woman has to climb up and down trees, and carry as much as 3,500 kilogrammes of grapefruit to the purchaser's truck.

'I'm worn out at the end of the day. But the next morning I still have to pull myself together and get back to work that seemingly can never get done.'

'I'm worn out at the end of the day. But the next morning I still have to pull myself together and get back to work that seemingly can never get done,' said Huang, who now suffers severe periarthritis of her shoulder due to years of heavy work.

What makes life harder for such women are feelings of loneliness and insecurity.

Qin Xiaoling in Chongqing has to take care of two teenage sons, her 63-year-old mother-in-law and grandfather, aged 91. Her husband is away in Fujian Province working on construction sites.

'I get stressed if the older relatives get sick, and then I desperately need my husband to be by my side,' the 40-year-old said.

Qin said she looks forward to the day when her husband no longer has to work away from home to pay their sons' tuition fees. 'But I know when that day comes, we will both be old,' she said.

The result from women being left behind is a development gap between rural and urban areas, according to Tong Xin, a professor with Peking University's sociology department.

'Many rural households have sacrificed their normal family life for better earnings,' Tong said.

The professor suggested the government invest in small- and medium-sized cities, where more job opportunities can be created for rural couples so they can afford a house and settle together.

'In this way, urbanisation will not hamper family life,' Tong added.

In recent years, the Chinese government, along with non-governmental organisations, have made attempts to help alleviate loneliness and stress for left-behind women.

More than 220,000 support groups have been set up across the country to help such women with production, parenting and employment, and provide them with psychological counselling.

One such group in the county of Liangping has been helpful to women like Huang Libi, assisting them in grapefruit cultivation and marketing.

The ACWF also provides preferential loans to left-behind women who are willing and able to start up their own businesses.

'I hope there will be fewer women left behind. The real way out lies in the development of rural areas and resulting backflow of migrant workers,' said Liu Yulan, head of the women's federation in the township of Hexing. — *Xinhua* ◆

Another China, other inequalities

In the following interview with *Mai Corlin*, the director of the Centre for Gender and Culture Studies at Shanghai University explains how the changing political scenario in China has shaped perceptions of the role, status and rights of women.

LIKE other researchers and academics of her generation, Professor Min Dongchao was still young during the turbulent years of the Cultural Revolution (1966-76). Most of China's schools and universities were closed down during that time, and the youth were sent to the countryside or to factories to learn from the working class. Professor Min spent the period of the Cultural Revolution as a worker at the Tianjin Machinery and Tool Factory, beginning her factory career at the age of 15 in 1969 and staying there for eight years.

'During the Cultural Revolution, society was turned upside down. We grew up in a transformed environment with no language to talk about gender or differences between the sexes, because there wasn't supposed to be any difference. Everybody wore the same kinds of clothes, did the same job, got the same pay, and so forth. There was basically no sexual division in society – at least not on the surface,' says Professor Min.

The open door

It was only after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 that schools and universities reopened, and it became possible for at least some of the so-called 'sent down youth' to return to the education system. Once again, society was turned upside down: Foreign cultures and influences entered the country, spurring an irreversible development of Chinese society.

'Suddenly we could watch films and television from abroad, films that often demonstrated a clear gender differentiation, where men looked like men and women looked like women. So we wanted to look good, and we wanted to look different from men.



Professor Min Dongchao.

Women started wearing makeup, and clothes in general became more colourful. Suddenly, a more diverse expression and mode of behaviour were allowed again,' explains Min.

But there was another side to the new developments. It soon became more difficult for women to find employment, and they were paid gradually less, as men were generally favoured in job situations. The factories started to lay off workers, and women were often the first to go. Other problems such as prostitution and men taking second wives also resurfaced and, according to Professor Min, this laid some of the foundation for why women and gender studies started taking off in China in the 1980s.

Professor Min returned to China in 2004 after almost 10 years in the UK, and discovered a country in rapid transition. The new generations of young girls had reversed the Cultural Revolutionary tradition of going to the countryside. Instead, they were head-

ing to coastal cities to work in factories – a mixed experience to most. On the one hand, they experience the freedom of getting their own job, earning their own money, and freeing themselves from the pressure of country life. On the other, they work under exploitative conditions and are paid very little, without any unions to protect them.

The introduction of gender

Gender as a concept was introduced into China in connection with preparations for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, which was held in Beijing in 1995. There was growing awareness of increasingly visible gender inequality, and a new conceptual language to discuss these issues was made available to concerned academics and activists.

One of the gender-related issues under discussion in recent years is quotas. During the Mao era, the sex ratio was 50-50 in most party and government organs. In 2008, the government introduced gender quotas stipulating that 22% of the congress should be female, and last year, in collaboration with the All-China Women's Federation, it was decided that there should be at least one woman on village committees. Professor Min, however, argues that the solution to gender inequality issues doesn't lie only in quotas or the recognition of gender issues. Rather, it is a matter of general inequality in society at large:

'Gender equality should be addressed as a very important issue, and by this I don't just mean gender difference – it is not a matter of achieving complete similarity between the sexes. Gender inequality has to do with general inequality in the society at large, the gap between rich and poor, inequality between the regions,

between city and countryside. There are males and females of all classes and walks of life, so there are very rich females and very poor males. Gender inequality exists and can only be understood in the context of all levels of society, and within all classes. The inequality gap in general is growing bigger, which in turn affects gender inequality. When you conduct your research you may forget this, you may think in different categories, but you always have to see the society as a whole. The conditions for life in China are so dependent on geography and class. In many rural places, there are no proper schools, and children run around hungry. And then you have Shanghai with its multimillionaires – even billionaires. If you only look at one class or one geographic location, you get a skewed picture of what is actually going on in China,' Professor Min emphasises.

The local is not subordinate to the global

Many academics agree that you cannot separate globalisation and the local; they are two sides of the same coin. In other words, you cannot take the local out of the global. Globalisation happens in the local. Professor Min argues that this is the case even for places with myriad global connections, like London: Even though all the money flowing through the financial centre influences London from abroad, there is still a feature of something 'local'. Understanding the global in relation to the local is a way to give prominence to people, because they are the ones who experience the changes on an everyday basis, and they are the ones who actually 'practise' globalisation.

As Professor Min notes, 'We often see the railway as a symbol of globalisation, because it links places together, but what we tend to forget is that there are places and people in between the stations. As with railways, there are different routes for gender studies in China. Some people go to Beijing and Shanghai and read Judith Butler, and then others go to the poor areas, like Yunnan. In



Gender as a concept was introduced into China in connection with preparations for the Fourth UN World Conference on Women (pic) which was held in Beijing in 1995.

Yunnan they have gradually changed the gender discourse and related practice, and as a result, the Yunnan Province Women's Federation has managed to obtain more funding for larger projects than they have in places where they have not yet incorporated the new discourse.'

'I think it's good that young women have started to react to society's gender inequalities; it is a good sign. I think it's important that they protest, that they fight for something.'

'The Yunnan Province Women's Federation is a good example of how the global and the local are linked, of how things change in a local environment,' she argues.

The next generation

The new generation of women has begun to stir up radical performances and protests in the big cities. One example is a domestic violence

protest last year in which young women painted their faces so it looked like they had been beaten, and posted pictures of it on the Internet. Another incident was the Occupy Toilet Movement, where women occupied men's rooms to protest the lack of women's toilets in most public places.

'They might have gotten the idea from Taiwan or Hong Kong,' Professor Min adds.

Last year, some universities refused female applicants even though they had the same scores as their male counterparts. The Ministry proclaimed that for the sake of the country the universities needed more men, not girls. The women reacted by staging an event where they shaved their heads and stood out on the street in defiance.

'Because of the Internet, this protest became a big deal. I think it's good that young women have started to react to society's gender inequalities; it is a good sign. I think it's important that they protest, that they fight for something. My generation is about to retire, and we need the younger generation to take over and do the job. I hope that is what we're seeing now,' Professor Min concludes. ♦

Mai Corlin is a PhD student at Aarhus University in Denmark. This article is reproduced from the ThinkChina.dk blog (thinkchinablog.wordpress.com).

Reflections on the Chinese women's movement in the new era

Based on her own experience and engagement in the women's movement in China and globally since the 1990s, a Chinese activist attempts to respond to and reflect on the following critical questions: Where are we now as a Chinese women's movement? Who are the main players in the setting of the women's rights agenda? What are the major issues women are facing and what are the new trends in their mobilisation? And more importantly, how can we strategise and move the women's rights agenda forward?

Cai Yiping

IN this article, I would like to draw on my personal journey as a young feminist nurtured by the 4th World Conference on Women held in 1995 in Beijing and the context and trajectory of the Chinese women's movement since the 1990s. I respond to and reflect on the following critical questions: Where are we now as a Chinese women's movement? Who are the main players in the setting of the women's rights agenda? What are the major issues faced by women? How can we strategise and move the women's rights agenda forward?

I was a lucky one in many ways. As a young feminist I had the chance to attend the Beijing conference, which was an eye-opener for me and reaffirmed what I committed to do and be – a feminist who struggles against all forms of oppression, discrimination and injustice. It was also the first time that I encountered international feminist movements and I was keen to discover more. This would allow me to look at Chinese women's rights in a global context and, equally importantly, to understand the history of women's struggles for equality, what they have achieved and what challenges remain ahead.

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China has established systematic legislation to protect women's rights and interests. China has also



Participants at the 10th National Women's Congress held in Beijing in 2008. Building a culture that entails respect for gender equality and women's rights as core values has been a top priority for feminist activists in China.

ratified the major UN human rights conventions and asserted its commitment to advancing women's rights and gender equality. The government formulated and implemented three National Programmes for Women's Development (1995-2000, 2001-10 and 2011-20) to address the most prominent women's issues and further promote gender equality.

Since the 1980s, China has experienced drastic economic growth, a 'socialist market economy', along with the process of neoliberal-led globalisation. China became the second largest economy after the US in 2010. Against this backdrop is the glaring reality that gender gaps have been widening in the last two decades,

along with rural-urban and regional disparities.

Key gender issues in China

Gender inequality

Despite the principle of 'equality between men and women' being enshrined in the Constitution and the Law on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women, women continue to experience gender discrimination and inequality on a daily basis and throughout their life cycles, for example, son preference that results in sex selection and female infanticide, inequality in education, employment and income, political participation, retirement age, access to health care and social welfare, and unequal

rights to land and property. Some groups of women, for example, migrant women, minority women and those living with disabilities and HIV/AIDS, may suffer multiple inequalities and discrimination because of their age, class, geography, marital status, sexual orientation, ethnicity and so on.

Rights of migrant women and rural women

Migrants experience various forms of discrimination such as in access to social benefits, education, health services and other public services. In rural areas, women who are left behind in the villages have to undertake household chores and care work, in addition to heavy labour in agriculture and raising poultry or vegetables. In recent years, with the feminisation of agriculture, the issue of land rights of rural women has also become crucial. Although women make up 65% of the rural labour force, they occupy only 1-2 % of local decision-making positions.

Gender-based violence

In recent years, areas of concern extended from domestic violence (including marital rape), sexual harassment in the workplace and violence in intimate relationships to sexual assault, rape, trafficking in women and girls (including cross-border trafficking), and so on. There are many initiatives and efforts being made by the government, women's rights advocates and legal practitioners to address this issue.

Women's health, including sexual and reproductive health and rights

This issue is integrally linked with other women's rights issues, such as gender-based violence, economic empowerment and participation in public life. Rural and migrant women are facing health problems attributed to poverty, coercion in family planning programmes, early marriage and early childbearing, environmental pollution, violence against women, and lack of access to health services. Urban women and women workers are also exposed to various occupa-

tional hazards. Another notable health issue concerning urban women in recent years is complications arising from cosmetic surgery, the demand for which is due in large part to the commercialisation and sexualisation of women's bodies. Again, there is a disparity between rural and urban women in terms of their access to health services. Despite the fact that rural women encounter various physical and mental health problems, 70% of China's health resources are allocated to the cities.

Women's economic empowerment

In the Mao era the dogmatic theory on women's liberation claimed that economic independence is a premise of women's liberation. Nowadays more people believe that for a woman, 'good performance in work is not as important as marrying well'. In China's booming economy, the number of women in employment is constantly on the rise. But the income gap between men and women is widening. Women are also disproportionately concentrated in labour-intensive, low-income jobs, and in the informal sector which offers no social security and benefits.

Who are the main players in setting the women's rights agenda?

The Chinese Communist Party and the state continue to play the leading or dominant role in improving women's rights and gender equality, in particular, through the national mechanism for the advancement of women. The National Working Committee on Women and Children under the State Council (NWCWC) formulates and implements the National Programmes for Women's Development and related laws and policies, and allocates needed resources on priority issues.

The All-China Women's Federation (ACWF) is a mass organisation of women from all ethnicities and sections that seeks the further liberation of women under the leadership of the Communist Party. It is also a bridge and link of the party and government

with the masses of women. ACWF, the biggest NGO in China, is an umbrella organisation with a large national network, from the provincial and township level down to the villages. Given its nationwide network, legitimacy and leverage, it influences the decision-making process, plays a pivotal role in mobilising women to participate in development and influences policies on women's rights and gender equality.

Also, there are emerging autonomous and grassroots women's NGOs in China catalysed by the 4th World Conference on Women and NGO Forum held in Beijing in 1995.

These NGOs include women's studies centres in research institutes and universities, self-organised groups or networks that provide services for women, as well as advocacy organisations, for example, Beijing Zhongze Women's Legal Counselling & Service Centre (formerly Peking University Women's Law Studies & Legal Aid Centre), Red Maple Women's Counselling Hotlines, Home of Migrant Girls and Tongxin Hope Home for migrant women, National Women's Network against AIDS for women living with HIV/AIDS, Combating Domestic Violence Network, the Media Monitoring Network for Women, just to name a few. Some organisations simultaneously engage in research, service provision and advocacy. The issues they address range from poverty reduction, education, health, HIV/AIDS and violence against women to environmental protection, migrants' rights and rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people.

Compared to the government-led women's development programmes, NGOs strive to apply a rights-based approach in compliance with the international human rights framework in their initiatives to address issues of inequality, discrimination and violence against women. Women's NGOs have been using the international human rights mechanism and instruments, such as drafting shadow reports to monitor the government's commitments under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of

Discrimination against Women and the Beijing Platform for Action. They also conduct gender training for government officials, development practitioners and NGOs, as a means of advocating for the mainstreaming and integrating of gender into the development programmes for poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS prevention, and educational projects. The efforts of NGOs have also been dedicated to gender awareness raising and mobilisation of public participation, especially for the youth. From 2008 to 2011, the alliance of women's NGOs launched the 16 Days Campaign against Violence against Women, which mainly involved university students. The recent activist undertakings such as the 'occupying men's toilets' campaign against domestic violence, sexual harassment, and gender discrimination in employment, were initiated and carried out by young people. With the rapid development of the Internet and new communications technologies, women's NGOs are maximising the use of such methods to generate and disseminate advocacy messages to a larger audience, as well as to counter patriarchal views and perspectives that often dominate public debates on gender-related issues in cyberspace.

Hurdles before feminist activists in moving the women's rights agenda forward

That 'men and women are equal' is the main discourse in China and this is enshrined in state policy and the Constitution and other laws and policies. But this is hardly made known to the public, not even by the high-level decision-makers who are supposed to enforce and implement this policy, except for a few institutions such as ACWF and the National Committee on Population and Family Planning.

The prevailing discourse of 'gender equality' and the progress achieved in the last half-century has unfortunately been misinterpreted in many quarters to say that there is no gender inequality at all. The result of



A migrant worker in Shenzhen heading home for the Chinese New Year celebration. Some groups of women in China such as migrant women may suffer multiple inequalities and discrimination.

this, in the mindsets of some policy-makers and the general public, is that there is no need to make efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights. This overall insensitivity and denial of the need and urgency to address gender inequality has become a major hurdle that feminist activists face.

Secondly, there is a lack of effective, transparent and inclusive mechanisms for meaningful and full participation of women's NGOs in the decision-making process. Women's federations have played a key role in policy advocacy for many related women's issues and development programmes. Other autonomous and grass-roots women's NGOs are also invited to participate in consultations and negotiations on many relevant issues such as domestic violence, sexual harassment, rural women's development, domestic workers' rights and so on. However, an effective, transparent and inclusive mechanism to ensure the meaningful participation of women NGOs in the policy-making process is needed. Although the work of Chinese women's NGOs has gained significant recognition, the extent to which they can participate is uncertain and depends greatly on many varied external factors, for instance, openness and acceptance of decision-makers towards NGOs, NGO capacities, their relationship with women's organisations, access to relevant information, and the level of sensitivity regarding the issues being

discussed. In addition, some government-sponsored NGOs are often co-opted as representatives of all civil society organisations to participate in the policy-making process, which in fact excludes voices from the ground level and grassroots women's organisations that can then get involved only through these mediatory groups.

The third hurdle pertains to the institutionalised and structured gender inequality embedded in the deep-rooted patriarchal culture. Many activists have come to realise that gender inequality and injustice are caused not only by traditional patriarchal culture, but also by the institutionalised discriminatory policies that strengthen rather than challenge or subvert them. To reconstruct a culture that entails respect for gender equality and women's rights as core values has been a top priority for feminist activists. For example, feminist scholars and activists are reassessing the practice of family planning policy that allows rural families whose first child is a girl to have a second child, and seek to tackle the root cause of son preference by changing the rules, policies and cultural practices in rural communities that favour boys over girls. Meanwhile, campaigns against domestic violence are challenging the prevailing culture of tolerance for domestic violence and the binary thinking regarding the private-public divide.

Last but not least, women NGOs are facing legal barriers and financial constraints. Despite calls for relaxing

the NGO registration policy, constraints in registration remain the biggest barrier to NGO development in China. Only 10% of civil society organisations are registered as non-profit organisations at the Ministry of Civil Affairs; 90% are either not registered or registered in the business sector under the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, which means they are not eligible for tax exemption and other benefits for non-profit organisations. Like many other NGOs, women's groups, which are highly dependent on funding from foreign donors, also face financial constraints. Among these groups, advocacy and grassroots organisations are the hardest hit. The former have little access to governmental and charitable funds; the latter have no legal status, no tax exemption benefits, and no access and ability to raise resources.

A global perspective

The 4th World Conference on Women provided Chinese women the opportunity to interface with the dynamic transnational feminist movements in the 1990s and their slogan: 'Think globally, act locally.' Chinese feminist activists have been and will continue to creatively apply their experience with global feminist movements, issues and strategies in local activism. Chinese women's organisations are also rethinking some of the issues — gender and trade; mi-



Recent activist undertakings such as the 'occupying men's toilets' campaign, which called for more women's toilets in public places, were initiated and carried out by young people. Picture shows a female student holding a protest placard in front of a public toilet as part of the campaign.

grant workers in transnational corporations, their resistance and struggle; cooperation for social responsibility in China's overseas investments; and cross-border trafficking of women — with a global perspective. The concept of 'glocalisation' requires China's women's movement and organisations to reposition themselves in the global political and economic structure vis-à-vis multiple power relations and inequality, as well as to advocate for gender equality and social justice in such structures.

It is within such a context that collaboration with Southern feminist activists to mount resistance against profit-driven globalisation, gender inequality and social injustice is a crucial strategy for Chinese women's

organising. One good example of this is the collaboration of Chinese feminist activists with a Southern feminist network, Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), for strengthening the capacity of Chinese women's groups and civil society in analysis and advocacy on the inter-linkage of gender, economic, ecological and sexual justice. In April 2012, DAWN collaborated with Chinese environmental NGO Greenovation Hub and organised a workshop which for the first time brought together feminist activists, environmental groups, development organisations, health organisations and media to discuss the interlinkages in an analytical framework and seek to ensure that women's voices and concerns would not be treated merely as an 'add-on', in both a national and global development framework. ♦



An advertisement at a bus stop to raise public awareness about domestic violence in China. There are many initiatives by the Chinese government, women's rights advocates and legal practitioners to address the issue of gender-based violence.

Cai Yiping, who is currently based in Beijing, is an Executive Committee member of Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN). She has served as Executive Director of Isis International (2008-11) and was an Associate Researcher at the Women's Studies Institute of China (2006-08) after a 10-year career as a journalist with China Women's News (1995-2005). The above is an edited version of an article which was first published in the Asian Journal of Women's Studies (Vol. 19, No. 1, pp. 113-26). The original article is the text of a presentation at the Ewha Global Empowerment Programme (EGEP), Winter Programme in January 2013 at Ewha Womans University in Seoul, Korea.

The scourge of gender-based violence in South Africa

There is an urgent need for a more thorough response across the whole spectrum of South African society to tackle the root causes of an epidemic of sexual violence, say *Azwifaneli Managa* and *Bertha Chiroro*.

GENDER-BASED violence is a persistent worldwide problem, occurring in every culture in all societies. The underlying problem seems to be that many societies consider it a 'private' affair and therefore 'acceptable'. However, women of different social classes, races, age groups and sexual orientation both in rural and in urban areas are vulnerable to violence perpetrated by men. It is deeply ingrained in societies and has serious impacts on women's health and well-being. Although in South Africa, 16 days of activism against violence on women and children have been set aside, violence pervades our societies on a daily basis with total disregard to the laws and the conventions that our countries are signatories to. What is disheartening is that, whilst the laws are available, whenever a brutal act of violence against women and children happens and the statistics are presented by the police to the public, life seems to go on as usual.

Sadly, the work of combating the scourge is left to a few committed individuals and civil society organisations which continue to support victims as well as lobby for the dignity, freedom and security of women. Sustainable development can never be realised when women and children are petrified and brutalised by violence and any other form of gender-based discrimination which the state has a duty to prevent.

Forms of gender-based violence

Gender-based violence manifests itself in different forms, some brutal, some subtle, such as physical violence; sexual and psychological violence; domestic violence; sexual



A protest outside the South African parliament demanding action against rape. South African women are regularly confronted with systemic sexual harassment and violence.

abuse; rape and sexual abuse of women and children; 'corrective rape' and murder on account of sexual orientation; forced pregnancy; honour killings, burning or acid throwing; female genital mutilation; dowry-related violence; violence and rape in armed conflict; trafficking of women for commercial sex work; and sexual harassment and intimidation at work.

The recent case of the gang rape and subsequent death of a woman in India that sparked outrage worldwide, showed the pervasiveness of violence against women in our societies. However, we are outraged by the fact that South Africa seems to be the epicentre of some gruesome and brutal cases of violence against women and children. There seems to be a notion that South Africa is a place where crimes

can be committed and somehow people seem to get away with it without any severe consequences. For example, the UK businessman Shrien Dewani allegedly came to South Africa to violently murder his own wife; the case is still dragging on in the courts, for the extradition of Dewani to face murder charges. Furthermore, the case of the rape of Anene Booysen left the whole country in shock. Subsequent to the brutal death of this young woman, more reports of women being raped and killed all over South Africa have come to light, evidently showing the ills of our society.

President Jacob Zuma during his State of the Nation Address on 14 February alluded to the fact that such forms of brutality and cruelty are unacceptable in South Africa and should



The brutal rape of Anene Booysen (left) and the controversy over the fatal shooting of Reeva Steenkamp (right) have rocked South Africa.

be dealt with thoroughly.

In addition, the controversy over the death of Reeva Steenkamp, who was allegedly shot and killed by a person close and trusted to her, has had people's blood boiling and every woman living in panic and trepidation. This has raised emotions all over the world, such that society is now calling for tougher sentences for cases of domestic violence.

Scholars have reported that this scourge is caused by a combination of traditional values, relationship jealousy, power relations and ignorance of women and children's rights amongst others. Violence is a mechanism in which women are forced into a subordinate position and therefore unable to realise their full potential, when lives are lost, careers are cut short, and sustainable development is jeopardised.

Unbelievably so, after 18 years of democracy, South African women are regularly confronted with systemic sexual harassment and violence. The government somehow seems to have failed to enforce laws and policies intended to safeguard women's rights, and even the police often fail to provide adequate protection. Instead of women enjoying the fruits of democratic freedom, they are constantly living in fear of rape, harassment, discrimination and murder. Hence we argue that gender discrimination and violation of women's hu-

man rights should have punishable consequences and effective enforcement.

Are our laws failing us?

South Africa has made so much progress since 1994 in terms of putting together legislation, policies, and even resources for the empowerment of women and children, from the country's renowned constitution to various interventions including the recent Women Empowerment and Gender Equality Bill, which is supposed to fill in some gaps with regard to groups that need protection such as widows, women with disabilities, and sexual minorities. Section 9 of the Constitution advises us that 'everyone is equal before the law and has the right to equal protection and benefit of the law'; 'equality includes the full and equal enjoyment of all rights and freedoms'; and 'the state may not unfairly discriminate directly or indirectly against anyone on one or more grounds, including race, gender, sex, pregnancy, marital status, ethnic or social origin, colour, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, conscience, belief, culture, language, and birth.' Furthermore, the South African Sexual Offences Act (2007) affords every citizen the maximum protection from domestic abuse that the law can provide – 'free from all forms of violence from either public or private

sources.'

In spite of all these efforts and considerable measures, there seems to be a disconnect between when an individual has committed a crime and the reaction imposed on such a crime. In addition, the process from allegation to sentencing is long and unrealistic of crimes in South Africa, specifically for women and children.

Therefore 'justice delayed is justice denied.' It seems as though the legal system does not work when in actual fact it does work but it is too slow.

South Africa's decision to join international commitments and obligations to end violence against women and children seems ineffective, since cases of these acts are high during times when celebrations are happening.

Unfortunately, the country always has high incidence of domestic violence cases during such critical times, which suggests the government is failing to offer the women and child victims the maximum protection and security they most require.

State of gender-based violence in South Africa

The UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (1993) states that 'violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations

between men and women.' South African society, like most societies, is patriarchal in such a way that women are forced into a subordinate position compared with men, which exacerbates their vulnerability to domestic violence.

There are high numbers of sexual offences in South Africa; however, there are conflicting statistics. The 2012 South African Police Service statistics reported 64,514 sexual offences for that financial year, meaning an average of 176 cases per day. Although there seems to be a 3.7% decrease from the previous year, the figures are believed to be a considerable underestimate of the true number of rapes, as many cases go unreported. Another study, by the Medical Research Council, found that 28% of men surveyed had raped a woman or a girl, and one in 25 said they had raped a woman or girl in the past year. Seemingly, seven rape cases are reported to the police every hour. These figures on their own should be a cause for societal outrage, more so when we consider the fact that most women and children report that their abusers are people close and known to them.

Gender-based violence is a human rights violation, it is also a brutal manifestation of the wider discrimination against women, which is to be understood against the background of women's subordination within the patriarchal system that still exists in South Africa and in most countries. Gender roles and expectations can and do play a role in abusive situations, and exploring these roles and expectations can be helpful in addressing abusive situations. Likewise, it can be helpful to explore factors such as race, class, religion, sexuality and philosophy. The fact that tens of thousands of rapes continue to take place every year in South Africa is a clear indication that the problem must be addressed in a much more urgent, holistic, and forceful manner.

Conclusion

The entrenched culture of sexual violence which prevails in South Af-



South African President Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation address (pic) said that violence against women should be dealt with thoroughly.

rica must end. We need to build a culture that is intolerant of rape and any form of abuse of women and children. Perpetrators should understand that it is absolutely unacceptable to violate others' human rights and that should they envisage or contemplate any form of sexual violence they will have to face the consequences of their terrible acts. There is an urgent need for a more thorough response across the whole spectrum of South African society to tackle the root causes of this epidemic of sexual violence. These issues of sexual violence and murder against women are not of concern to women alone. Every member of society must play their part in a widespread response to stop gender-based violence.

Recommendations

- First and foremost, society has to realise that committing crimes against women and children is wrong, because it scars the whole community. In addition, women, just like anyone else irrespective of sexual orientation, race, class, age, and location, are entitled to their human dignity and integrity.

- Crimes against women and children need to come out of the 'private' arena and become a public issue with political and societal connotations,

The entrenched culture of sexual violence which prevails in South Africa must end. We need to build a culture that is intolerant of rape and any form of abuse of women and children.

and hence require an adequate and effective response.

- It should be clearly spelt out that gender-based violence is incompatible with the values of a democratic state and the rule of law and is a serious impediment to sustainable development. The scourge and epidemic of violence against women can be eliminated; it requires a multiplicity of interventions, including tightening the legal instruments, moral and political will, and society rallying against this violation of women's rights. ♦

Azwifaneli Managa and Bertha Chiroro are researchers with the Sustainable Development programme at the Africa Institute of South Africa. This article is reproduced from Pambazuka News (Issue 617, 20 February 2013, www.pambazuka.org).

More misery in Marikana

Women's unpaid labour, corporate profiteering and state neglect

The massacre of 34 striking mining workers by police at the Lonmin platinum mine in South Africa brought to world attention the terrible conditions of their life and work. The burden of the inhuman living conditions falls principally on women who have to put in additional, unpaid toil beyond their productive labour (which may be paid or informal) to make up for the major deficiencies.

Samantha Hargreaves

IMMEDIATELY adjacent to the site of the 16 August 2012 police massacre of 34 striking Lonmin mineworkers at Marikana two hours northwest of Johannesburg, thousands of residents in the Wonderkop shack settlement live in desperate and dehumanising conditions. The cheap labour of the men and the unpaid labour of the women which reproduces the predominantly male labour force together guarantee super profits to Lonmin.

This system should have ended in 1994, but in many respects it has been amplified over the past 19 years. After apartheid, mineworkers and their family members may have legitimately hoped for a legislative framework that would rein in the corporations and ensure benefit for local communities and workers from mining extraction. Indeed they would have expected, for the first time in their lives, a public service that fulfils its role in meeting constitutional and legal obligations to shelter citizens and meet their need for basic services.

The Marikana story is about much more than a strike for higher wages, it is also a story about a crisis in social reproduction. State neglect and corporate greed have fomented household crises stretching from the mines back to the sources of migrant labour in far-flung regions and neighbouring countries. Narrow male-dominated trade union and worker interests mean that hope for a radical resolution lies in the struggles of women in places like Wonderkop. The



Women protesters gathering in Marikana on 17 August 2012, one day after the police massacre of 34 striking mineworkers. Women in the area's Wonderkop shack settlement mobilised to demand state accountability following the massacre, but they have also mobilised as women and spoken out about the hardships of life in the settlement.

challenge is linking these with (mainly male) worker struggles and environmentalist solidarity to challenge the extractivist model of development, the social, economic and environmental costs of which are principally borne by working-class and peasant women.

Neglected state services translate into great hardship for women

The settlement layout in Wonderkop is informal. Deeply pock-marked dirt roads run into narrow alleys, which become impassable in the rainy season. The majority of residents live in shacks built of tin and wood, while those that are slightly more confident of their tenure have invested in small mud brick huts or even formal brick housing here and there. The informality of shelter is a source of great stress and additional work for women,

according to one Wonderkop woman: 'With shacks and no roads, it's mud outside and mud inside.' Says another, 'I hide my kids under the bed whenever it is windy in case my shack falls on them and me.'

Residents have built their own hand-dug pit toilets, but many just defecate in the open veld or local streets, and sewerage puddles in street gulleys. For those with the finances to spare, a borehole can be drilled for a fee of just over \$80; for the rest, water can only be accessed by standing in long early-morning queues 'as the water in the shared taps is finished by midday', says another woman.

The nearest hospitals are more than 20km away, and with poor emergency response services, they are only accessible by hiring private transport costing upwards of \$50 for a single trip. Residents rely on the Lonmin private clinic, which one woman complains is crowded, with limited facili-

ties and inadequate infrastructure: 'equipment like the scale is not even working'.

Schools are overcrowded, and distant, with parents having to pay high transport costs. The schools charge fees beyond what national law stipulates, making education unaffordable to many. There is no formal electricity provision in the settlement, resulting in dangerous 'illegal' connections. Reports another woman, 'When it rains, children get shocked.' In the absence of safe energy, she says, residents rely on hazardous alternatives: candles which are 'so dangerous and people die' and paraffin stoves which 'burn people often' when they overturn.

The burdens that arise from poor living conditions fall principally on women and older children who, on an unpaid basis, take care of the household by provisioning safe water, caring for the sick, sourcing and preparing food and so on. For many women, this represents hours of work beyond their productive work which may be paid or informal.

Mining corporations perpetuate deep inequality and injustice

Life is impossibly difficult for the residents of Wonderkop, as it is for the one in every four South African households estimated to live in informal settlements. What sets Wonderkop and other similar mining settlements apart is that the residents here live in the shadow of and service the mine infrastructure and shafts that dig up an extremely rare and coveted metal, platinum.

Lonmin, in whose shafts the majority of Wonderkop mineworkers labour, is the world's third largest platinum producer, mining on the world's largest reserves (78%) of platinum and its associated group minerals.

Lonmin's fortunes fell in 2012 due initially to a depressed market in platinum group metal prices, followed by the August-September strikes, which significantly cut production levels. But after recovering, Lonmin enjoyed tremendous profits in the last

quarter of 2012, as well as earlier, in two separate waves when the price of platinum soared. In 2011 alone, Lonmin's earnings climbed 64% to \$226 million, or 112 cents a share, beating the 84-cent median estimate of 18 analysts surveyed by Bloomberg.

In contrast with these significant earnings at company level, in 2012, a rock driller earned on average \$1,130 in a total-cost-to-company monthly package, an amount lowered by numerous deductions that result in a take-home salary of anywhere between \$325-\$645 a month. Lonmin's CEO earned \$129,192 a month in 2012. The combined salary package of the three top executives at Lonmin was more than the 3,600 rock drill operators who went on strike for a minimum monthly wage of \$1,346.

In spite of significant profits accruing to the mine over more than a decade, generously distributed to shareholders and leading executives, the workers live in what can only be described as deep misery and squalor. To the workers and their families, the mine offers minimal social services, in the form of a clinic (and a hospital for the workers) at Wonderkop, and some water distribution points.

Corporate social responsibility projects have included some investments in education and nutrition, and a failed hydroponics project. Lonmin boasts of an investment of R39 million in community projects in 2012, with enthusiastic backing from the World Bank dating to 2007, but the benefits are small compared to overall profits and the oversized salaries of executives.

In the words of a mineworker: 'People live in very unreasonable conditions. It makes me feel terrible when I look at the mining company and how big it is. It is a world-class group that makes so much money, but look at our community. Look at how we must live.'

Prior to the August 2012 massacre, workers could either live in old-style overcrowded hostels with eight men on average to a room and 40 to a block, sharing a run-down ablution room, or alternatively accept a 'liv-

ing out' allowance of \$200 per month. In 2012, only 3,000 of Lonmin's 28,000 workers lived in the hostels, with the majority choosing the allowance.

State and corporates escape duty to shelter and service workers and their families

The post-apartheid Mining Charter (2002) and the Basic Conditions of Employment Act provided the mining houses an escape clause in the form of these living-out allowances. They absolve the mines of responsibility to provide the needed housing and infrastructure for workers.

The allowances were introduced as part of a strategy to gradually eliminate hostels and phase out the migrant labour system by assisting the families of mineworkers to live with them. However, levels of housing delivery have not come close to actual need – Lonmin claims to have built 1,149 houses and converted 60 hostel blocks into single and family units – nowhere near sufficient to shelter a workforce of 28,000 and its dependents. The living-out allowance effectively devolves responsibility for the delivery of housing and services to individual workers. But these needs cannot be met by individuals given the high cost of housing and credit. A genuine housing strategy can be undertaken only by responsible institutions with the necessary capital and capacity: the mining company, working in partnership with the local municipality, with adequate state subsidies.

The current situation stands in stark contrast to the apartheid past when mining companies developed whole mining towns. White workers resided in pleasant mining villages with quality family housing, although black workers lived in squalid hostel accommodation. There are contemporary examples in Zimbabwe of what can be done when the law obligates and the state regulates mining companies to ensure that workers live in reasonable conditions.

The Benchmarks Foundation, a church-based South African NGO specialising in corporate social re-

sponsibility in the extractive industries, points to the Mimosa and Ngezi mines in Zimbabwe as leading examples. According to the Foundation, these mines enjoy full literacy levels and workers live in formal housing with decent standards of services. On the Mimosa mine, every mineworker – male or female – has their own house, ample enough to accommodate their families. In South Africa, which lacks state legislation requiring minimum standards of infrastructure and service investment, the same company – Impala Platinum – does not come close to these same standards, even though Zimbabwe is a far poorer country.

Local government is obliged in terms of the constitution and relevant municipal law and policy to meet the housing and service needs of populations within its jurisdiction. The Rustenburg municipality, under which the Marikana town and the Wonderkop settlement fall, has been riven with corruption for many years.

After many audits that revealed systematic corruption, the municipality finally succeeded in balancing its books, but at the expense of service delivery. Citizens living in Marikana without basic services become increasingly angry, especially as they reside in the country's second-fastest-growing area in 2010, having a gross domestic product growth rate of 3.9%, compared with the national average of 2.8%.

In Wonderkop and other similar mining frontier informal residential settlements, the absolute failure of state and corporation to house workers and provide a minimum standard of social services is palpable. The state absolves mining corporations of responsibility.

The unbroken 150-year history of mining corporations accumulating massive profits off the back of black labour continues, thanks to the combination of men's cheap paid labour and women's unpaid labour. The migrant labour system was constructed upon profit maximisation by mining capital, premised on preventing family migration and locating responsibility for the social reproduction of the

workforce and the next generation of workers in the rural areas.

Peasant women would continue to grow subsistence food crops, raise children, and take care of sick mine-workers when they returned to the labour-sending areas in South Africa or the region. Women's unpaid labour would take the place of the health and other care services required by mine-workers when they became ill from the many diseases that characterise long years of service on the mines. Through this system, the state too was released from its obligations to render public services in both the labour-sending and receiving areas. Women's unpaid labour has, therefore, been central to the accumulation strategy of mining corporations across sectors for well over a century.

Union and worker struggles fail to address living conditions

In October 2012, the Lonmin workers won a 22% increase in their salaries, which represented a significant victory after one of the deadliest strikes in South Africa's history. Yet, both the new trade union that most actively supported the strike, the Association of Mineworkers and Construction Union (AMCU), and the emergent worker formations (called strike, and now worker, committees) focused exclusively on the demand for a higher minimum wage.

Despite the miserable living conditions that workers and their families endure, and the patent failures of local government and Lonmin, demands related to labour reproduction did not feature in the month-long strike. Neither did the deep indebtedness of the mineworkers, driven by a largely unregulated and profit-driven financial services sector.

This focus on wages, to the exclusion of other critical social and economic challenges, reflects a narrow economic or workerist position, deeply masculine. The majority of Lonmin workers are men, with women representing less than 6% of the total workforce. Women mine-workers complain that the organised

unions fail to respond to their concerns as women workers, which include violence and sexual harassment, maternity leave and the absence of dedicated ablution facilities.

If women's voices demanding housing and social services were listened to, the traditional trade unions and even new democratic worker-controlled formations would have to extend their focus to address the crisis of reproduction. The demands on corporations and the state to fulfil their obligations would allow a much broader and richer debate about social policy.

This more extensive approach may yet emerge. Wonderkop women stood firmly alongside their men – husbands, sons, brothers and lovers – through the long strike, and they mobilised to condemn the police and demand state accountability following the bloody massacre. But they have also mobilised as women and spoken out about the hardships of life in the settlement, including in a women's-only march of nearly 1,000 to the local police station.

They have worked in alliance with others to argue for a community works programme that will address the need for more formal roads and employment for women in an environment in which male labour predominates. Women's concerns about the terrible burden of social reproduction are expressed through their struggles, even if at this time they are somewhat disconnected from those of the male workers.

The best prospects for a sustained radical challenge to an extractivist, profit-oriented and migrancy-dependent maldevelopment model now destroying the very basis for life and its reproduction, lie in unifying these struggles and foregrounding women's perspectives and solutions. ♦

Samantha Hargreaves coordinates the women, gender and extractives programme of the International Alliance on Natural Resources in Africa (IANRA). She is also associated with the Society, Work and Development Institute at the University of the Witwatersrand, and is a leading member of Marikana Women Unite!, a solidarity initiative of women from organisations and movements in different parts of South Africa. The above article was written in her personal capacity.

Sexual violence not just a weapon of war in DRC

Sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo is not a product of war alone but has deeper societal roots. A new report highlights the need to combine gender justice with social justice to bring about real change.

FOR years, the conflict-wracked east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has been cursed by sexual violence on a scarcely imaginable scale, which has seen it labelled as the 'rape capital of the world' and the 'worst place on earth to be a woman'. Until now, most of the blame has been laid at the feet of the Congolese army and the numerous rebel and militia groups that have roamed the region. But a ground-breaking new report calls this view into question – and concludes that rape is just as prevalent in people's homes as it is in the midst of conflict.

Conducted by Promundo and the Sonke Gender Justice Network around the town of Goma in North Kivu province, the report – *Gender relations, sexual violence and the effects of conflict on women and men in North Kivu* – found that more than a third of the men surveyed had perpetrated some form of sexual violence and that more than three-quarters of them hold deeply alarming beliefs about rape and women's rights.

For example, nearly a third of men believe that women sometimes want to be raped and that when a woman is raped, she may enjoy it. Meanwhile, nearly 50% of men think that if a woman does not physically resist when forced to have sex, it is not rape.

So while sexual violence has definitely been used as a weapon of war in eastern Congo, the report makes it clear that it is these kinds of deeply entrenched social and cultural beliefs and attitudes that are largely responsible for the region's appallingly high rates of rape and other sexual attacks. As the report states, 'sexual

Richard Lee



A rape victim recovers in a hospital in Goma in the Democratic Republic of Congo's North Kivu province. Deeply entrenched social and cultural beliefs and attitudes are largely responsible for the region's appallingly high rates of rape and other sexual attacks.

violence...more often reflects widespread acceptance of patriarchal norms and rape myths that justify and normalise rape, the everyday subordination of women, and men's sense of entitlement to women's bodies'.

However, the study – which is part of the International Men and Gender Equality Survey or IMAGES – also indicates that many men are themselves victims of various forms of violence, including sexual violence, and shows a clear association between exposure to violence during childhood and increased likelihood of subsequently perpetrating acts of sexual violence.

In addition, the study looked at the broader socio-economic picture and confirmed that the majority of the population of the region continues to live in extreme poverty and face multiple vulnerabilities, which in turn create challenges for men and women to fulfil socially expected gender roles.

At least half of the population lives on less than \$1 per day and hunger is an all-too-common daily reality for respondents – with 40% of men

and 43% of women eating only one meal a day.

In addition to material hardship and hunger, the effects of lack of work and not having enough money to provide for their families are a source of tremendous stress for men and women. Men often feel ashamed and depressed when they are not able to sustain their families. Indeed, 72% of men report being ashamed to face their families because of a lack of work, while 78% are frequently stressed or depressed because they are unemployed.

'The DRC has frequently been called the "worst place in the world to be a woman" but the results of our study affirm that the areas around Goma are among the worst places in the world to be a woman or a man,' said Dr Gary Barker, Promundo's International Director. 'It is only by transforming gender relations, engaging women and men, and combining gender justice with social justice, that true and lasting change will be possible for the women, men and children who call Goma and North Kivu their home.'

The findings underscore how critical it is that the Congolese government, UN agencies and other development partners promote and protect women's rights – including by educating men and boys about women's basic human rights – as well as act to end impunity for sexual violence and provide psycho-social services to the women, men and children affected by violence. ♦

Richard Lee is the Communications Manager at the Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa (OSISA), from the website of which (www.osisa.org) this article is reproduced.

Focus on rape in India ignores gender violence as a global tragedy

Gender-based violence is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes and social manifestations, and does not lend itself to facile theorisations, warns *Poulami Roychowdhury*.

THE brutal rape and ensuing death of a 23-year-old woman in Delhi – now known as Damini ('lightning' in Hindi) – along with concurrent massive civil society mobilisation in India around these events, has ignited a flurry of speculation and analysis within Western media about why India is such a dangerous place for women.

This quest for causal answers has led to a tried-and-tested theory about India's 'patriarchal culture', where Indian men are characterised, as Libby Purves put it recently in *The Times* of London, by a 'murderous, hyena-like male contempt' towards women. Leaving aside the blatantly problematic metaphor of Indian men as scavenging animals, Sonia Faleiro's *New York Times* op-ed lamented that legal measures against rape in India 'have been ineffective in the face of a patriarchal and misogynistic culture'.

Attention to India's 'patriarchal culture' occludes the prevalence of rape and other forms of violence against women throughout the entire world.

According to the World Bank, more women between the ages of 15-44 are killed or disabled as a result of gender-based violence than cancer, car accidents, malaria and war combined. In the global epidemic of violence against women, the United States is no exception. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that one in five American women will be raped in her lifetime, and the US Department of Justice reports more than 300,000 American



A protest in New Delhi demanding justice for the victim of a fatal rape in December. Analysis within Western media of the rape has focused attention on India's supposed 'patriarchal culture'.

women are raped each year. In 2011, India, a country whose population is four times greater than that of the United States, had 12 times fewer reported rapes.

If police officials in India fail to take rape survivors seriously, American law enforcement is not so far behind. The Federal Bureau of Investigation crime data reveals only 24% of reported rapes result in an arrest in the United States, a rate far below that of other violent crimes such as murder (79%) and aggravated assault (51%). These statistics show that the US displays hostility towards women that is similar to India.

This astonishing reduction of India's issues with gender-based violence to a vast and unchanging patriarchal culture also obfuscates significant differences within India regarding violence against women. What is perhaps most surprising about Faleiro's analysis of India's 'patriarchal culture' is that it directly follows a description of her move from Delhi

to the relative freedom of Mumbai, leaving one to wonder if Mumbai has somehow escaped the overwhelming patriarchy of the rest of India, and if so, how.

Perhaps Mumbai has achieved the true cosmopolitanism that Indian journalist Manu Joseph pines for in his critique of 'village mentalities'? But then again, Mumbai is also the city where a 20-year-old Nepali woman was gang-raped by three men on 22 December, and a 15-year-old physically challenged girl was raped by her father in the supposed safety of her own home. Mumbai, like the rest of India, is a complicated place, and like other Indian cities, boasts higher rates of violence against women than India's villages.

According to India's National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), Indian cities are far more dangerous places for women than Indian villages. Delhi, the city where Damini once lived and studied, is no longer simply India's political capital, but has also achieved the dubious distinction of becoming its 'crime capital' in rates of violence against women.

Reports from the National Family Household Survey, which arguably provides a more accurate picture of actual rates of violence than the reported numbers available through NCRB, also confirm that city-dwelling women are more likely to face intimate forms of abuse than women living in villages. India, after all, is the country where sex ratios are most skewed toward males among the wealthy and educated in urban areas that boast India's greatest 'modern' accoutrements.

This uneven landscape, where violence against women is simultaneously prevalent throughout the world and notably higher in the industrialised, urban centres of developing countries than their ostensibly 'backwards' hinterlands, should make us all pause. Gender-based violence is a complex phenomenon, with multiple causes and social manifestations, and does not lend itself to facile theorisations about 'patriarchal culture' and 'village mentalities'. This reduction not only ignores the facts, but also is dangerously misleading.

The terrible events that unfolded in Delhi, events that sadly could have and do happen in other parts of the world, were made possible by its peculiar position of modernity. Delhi is a city that houses enormous inequalities, much like many US cities, and has undergone rapid and uneven change that leaves residents no longer agreeing on shared norms of social conduct. It is a place where the wealthy increasingly abandon the public sphere in favour of highly fortified, private enclaves, leaving women and other marginalised groups vulnerable to violence.

The silver lining on this otherwise dark cloud is that Delhi is also a place where gross violations of human rights have a chance of making it onto the public agenda. We've seen the public decry social and political complacency through the numerous demonstrations held across India in the wake of Damini's death. The degree to which this mobilisation will lead to concrete change remains to be seen, but that India is a changing nation is certain. No matter how much we may wish the global reality of violence against women were different, and that we may possess the key to its end, we would do well to take a step back and reassess our initial impulses about where the roots of the problem lie. — *GlobalPost* ◆

Poulami Roychowdhury is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at New York University. Her research focuses on law and gender violence in India. Research for this article was conducted by Mandy Van Deven, writer, advocate and online media strategist. Her work exploring contemporary feminisms, global activism and sexuality has been published in The Guardian, Salon, AlterNet and Marie Claire. This article is reproduced from the GlobalPost website (www.globalpost.com).

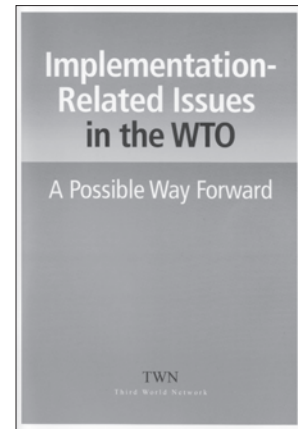
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Implementation-Related Issues in the WTO: A Possible Way Forward

THE set of multilateral agreements under the jurisdiction of the World Trade Organization (WTO) governs the conduct of international trade. Implementation of the commitments imposed by these agreements has, however, given rise to a host of problems for the WTO's developing-country members, ranging from non-realization of anticipated benefits to imbalances in the rules.

These implementation-related issues have been on the WTO agenda for over a decade, yet meaningful resolution is still proving elusive. This paper documents the progress – or, more appropriately, lack thereof – in the treatment of the implementation issues over the years. It looks at the various decisions adopted, to little effect thus far, by the WTO in this area, including the 2001 Doha Declaration which incorporates the implementation issues into the remit of the ongoing Doha round trade talks.

The paper exhorts the developing countries to draw upon the Doha mandate to bring the implementation issues back to the centrestage of negotiations. As a practical measure given the resource constraints developing-country negotiators face in the WTO, it is proposed that the implementation issues be taken up according to a suggested order of priority. Prioritization notwithstanding, the paper stresses that developing countries have every right to seek solutions to each of these longstanding, long-neglected issues.



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Femicide in Mexico: The Cotton Field case and its sequels

Mexico has a shockingly high incidence of femicide, i.e., the murder of women on account of their gender. Although the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in a landmark case has ruled that Mexico is in violation of human rights laws for failing to adequately investigate and prosecute such murders, the killings continue unabated.

Olivia Kirkpatrick

'WE are here today because the search for our daughters is unstoppable, femicide and disappearances force us to continue fighting without respite to demand justice, to raise awareness and to show solidarity, to join forces and denounce together.'

These were the words of the Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Disappeared Daughters in Ciudad Juárez, dozens of women who came together to give a press conference on 11 March 2013.

This year it will be two decades since this phenomenon began, they said – '20 years of impunity, of pain for the mothers and families of Ciudad Juárez'.

In 1993 young women from Juárez started disappearing and turning up in fields and rubbish dumps, mutilated, sexually abused and murdered. Many of the victims were factory workers who disappeared while travelling to or from work. Others were teenage students, migrants and other vulnerable young women. According to data from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 47% of victims (1993-2004) were aged between 10-19 years and 27.8% between 20-29 years.

Such murders of women in Mexico have continued to escalate in recent years, in the complete absence of effective investigations and justice. Women's organisations use the term femicide or feminicide to describe the brutal killings of women by men, often preceded by intense sexual violence and torture.

Femicide occurs not only in Ciudad Juárez, but countrywide: at least 34,000 women were murdered

in Mexico between 1985 and 2009, according to figures produced by the UN and local rights groups. In 2010 alone, Amnesty reported that 2,418 women were killed nationwide, 320 of them in Ciudad Juárez. Between June 2011 and June 2012 almost 4,000 women and girls were reported as disappeared.

Ciudad Juárez is a border town in Chihuahua with an estimated population of 1.4 million. It is a free-trade zone for exports to the US, established following the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and hosts about 300 assembly plants (called *maquilas*). Young women from all over Mexico and Central America come to Ciudad Juárez to find work in these factories. They are especially vulnerable to exploitation by their employers and to acts of violence because they lack the social networks that exist in their home communities.

In the past five years a number of laws have been approved and institutions established to protect women from discrimination and violence. One of the most important is the General Law of Access for Women to a Life Free from Violence (GLAWLFV), which recognises femicide as a crime and lays responsibility both on the perpetrator and on the state for failing in its duty to safeguard women's lives. However, a lack of political will and dedicated resources means that many of these measures are useless in practice. Not only has the state continued to neglect

its duty to protect women and tackle the causes of extreme violence against women (VAW), but femicide rates have increased in the past few years with little being done to prevent these crimes or bring the perpetrators to justice.

The Cotton Field ruling

The negligence of the Mexican state in protecting and safeguarding women's rights came to prominence with the Cotton Field ruling in 2009. This case, involving the brutal murder of three young women, has come to typify the kind of violence, including imprisonment, physical and psychological torture, mutilation and sexual aggression, that hundreds of women suffer before being murdered, patterns of brutality expressly designed to degrade women.

On 21 September 2001, 17-year-old Laura Berenice Ramos Monárrez did not return home after her waitressing shift. On 10 October 2001, 20-year-old Claudia Ivette González was turned away from her place of work – *maquila* LEAR 173 – as she was two minutes late; she was not seen alive again. Fifteen-year-old Esmeralda Herrera Monreal worked as a maid in a family home and on 29 October 2001 she disappeared on her way home. Their disappearances were reported to the local authorities by their relatives; however they were dismissed and told that the young women were probably with their boyfriends. On 6 and 7 November 2001, eight bodies were found with injuries caused by extreme sexual violence, in a cotton field in Ciudad Juárez area.

A complaint against the state of Mexico was filed with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the judicial branch of the Organisation of American States (OAS).

In a seminal ruling published on 10 December 2009, the IACHR ruled that the state of Mexico was responsible for the unsolved murders and disappearances of women in Ciudad Juárez. The court found Mexico to be in violation of human rights laws by failing to adequately investigate and prosecute these murders. Although the Cotton Field case examined only three out of more than 300 Juárez femicides documented since 1993, not to mention the equal number of women who have ‘disappeared’ over the same period, the court’s application of the Convention of Belém do Pará (on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence Against Women) defined human rights for the first time in relation to women’s rights.

‘The Cotton Field ruling was a very important moment from a legal point of view because the Mexican government acknowledged the ruling of the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights. However, femicides have increased in many regions of the country to such an extent that within the whole state of Mexico, these crimes have tripled within the last two years,’ says Mexican sociologist Amanda Hernandez Perez.

The IACHR ordered reparations and this appeared to be a turning point for both victims of femicide and, indeed, all women in Mexico. However, the Mexican government has been slow to carry out the court order and subsequent investigations by international organisations have found that clearly defined deadlines are not being met and no measurable progress updates being provided. According to the Mexican civil society group *Feminicidio del Campo Algodonero*, the state has only succeeded in meeting one of the court’s requirements while implementation of the rest is lagging sorely behind. Despite this, the IACHR does not appear to have imposed any sanctions.

In an exclusive interview, Amanda Hernandez Perez told the Central America Women’s Network (CAWN): ‘The state should guarantee the protection of women in general, and that of women from the *maquilas* in particular, as citizens with rights before the law. Also, corporations have a contractual responsibility towards their workers, above all in their labour rights: payment for accidents, deaths, indemnity etc. However, neither state nor companies are sufficiently fulfilling their responsibilities. We have various problems: absence of rule of law, absence of labour rights, and on the other side, absence of political will to implement measures, programmes and policies pertaining to VAW. Today, one of the major challenges throughout Latin America is VAW. However, the problem spreads further than that, it has to do with gender roles, the authoritarian exercise of power, impunity, the deterioration of the country and the region in every aspect – poverty, unemployment, generalised violence and lack of legislation.’

Defending the defenders

A disturbing development in the violence against women in Juárez is the harassment, attacks and murders of the families of the victims and their supporters and attacks on individuals and human rights defenders who are calling for justice in these cases.

In spite of these threats, numerous organisations and activists continue to raise their voices and demand justice. *Amigos de las Mujeres de Juárez* (Friends of the Women of Juárez) has been helping families since 2001, providing emotional and financial support through fundraising efforts, donations, and outreach work, as well as organising local and international events.

Susana Chávez was a prominent activist and poet who supported groups working with the families of the victims, and who coined the slogan ‘Ni Una Más’ (not one more murder) which is used at rallies against the Ciudad Juárez killings and the fail-

ure of the police to solve them. Susana was herself murdered in January 2011. Another notable case is that of Norma Esther Andrade, who founded the organisation *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa* (Our Daughters Returning Home) in response to her own daughter’s murder and has been tireless in her demands for the police to properly investigate this case. In December 2011 Andrade was shot by a masked man in Juárez and was taken to hospital but had to be discharged early as a result of multiple threats against her and hospital staff. She moved to Mexico City for her own safety but in February of this year she was stabbed in the face in yet another attack thought to be related to her campaigning work.

These women are tireless activists in their fight for the return of their daughters. On International Women’s Day the mothers and families of the disappeared girls in Ciudad Juárez travelled to Mexico City to take part in a protest march, demanding justice for their daughters. Groups of mothers undertook a 20-hour bus journey to reach the capital to join with hundreds of other women in a march organised by *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*. Chanting ‘¡Vivas se las llevaron, vivas las queremos!’ (They took them alive, we want them back alive!), the mothers and their supporters marched on International Women’s Day.

Ciudad Juárez continues to be one of the most dangerous places in the world to be a woman or girl. However, incidences of femicide are easily lost amidst reports of the wave of violent crime sweeping the country. Whilst state judicial systems and regional institutions prevaricate over shouldering their responsibilities towards the women of Mexico, grassroots protests, campaigns and awareness-raising events led by passionate activists locally and internationally are a vital tool to bring the plight of the women of Juárez and the rest of Mexico to the consciousness of a wider audience and ensure that justice is gained for all. – *Central America Women’s Network/Latin America Bureau* ♦

Latin American women and their fight against fear

Brazil and Honduras are two countries in which women are taking the lead in stories of empowerment and resistance against established power in Latin America.

Benjamin Serra

GENDER-BASED violence and femicide, the emancipation of women, female circumcision, universal suffrage, equal pay and work for men and women are some of the issues that arise in different geographic regions.

Those problems occur because in many regions of this planet, women as a community are undervalued, mistreated and ignored, which is what leads them to protest and fight for their rights. This is the case in many Latin American countries, including Brazil and Honduras.

These are nations where a deep machismo prevails, and where these untenable and dangerous situations impinge on women's physical and emotional lives, detracting from their opportunities in work and society.

Dona Dijé, collector of the babassu nuts (*babaçu* in Portuguese) that grow in the Amazon, and Dina Meza, Honduran journalist and defender of human rights, are two clear examples of brave women taking the lead in very different struggles in Latin America.

The babassu nut collectors of Brazil

Some 300,000 women provide for their families in Brazil by collecting and cracking nuts produced by the babassu, a palm tree that grows on the sides of the Amazon River and produces a sought-after oil.

For the *quebradeiras*, as these women are known, this tree is their only source of income. However, today the Brazilian government is supporting biofuel production, mining and other full-scale activities.



Some 300,000 women in Brazil earn a living from collecting and cracking babassu nuts. The women nut breakers have formed a movement to defend their rights.

To tackle this problem, these women formed a movement to defend their rights.

Various small communities of working women united their strength to create the Movement of Babassu Women Nut Crackers (MIQCB) to give a voice to this community, allowing them to improve their quality of life and avoid being marginalised.

One of the movement's founders is Dona Dijé, a descendant of slaves from the Maranhão region in the north of the country and a *quebradeira* since the age of 16. She shared her experience in an event organised recently by War on Want in London.

She says: 'It hasn't been an easy fight. It is a long road and we have had to organise ourselves because they want to change our way of life'.

Therefore, the women's first battle is focused on the right to own their land and have their work respected.

They are also fighting for their rights to have access to healthcare and education. This is why they have decided to unite.

The women's movement has extended to the states of Piauí, Pará and Tocantins, as well as Maranhão, all in the northeast of Brazil. 'We have achieved many things but there is still much more to do,' says Dijé.

With the creation of this movement, these women decided to gain control of the entire process through cooperatives, from collection of the nuts to the sale of the end product. But they also have to face another problem, deforestation. 'If they cut down the babassu forest we will have



A march against the Honduran coup, September 2009. Women have been at the forefront of the human rights struggle in Honduras.

no income. We want to protect our environment in every possible aspect. We don't want to abandon our territory because we are intrinsically linked to it, each tree, each plant... and our children grow up free there.'

Proud of her work, Dijé emphasises that 'We are mothers, we look after our homes, we work, crack nuts and provide everything else for our families'. This work is what allows them to keep their homes and that is why they are fighting to defend their rights.

The Honduran coup d'état

The fight for human rights and women in particular, has a prominent role in Honduras. The Central American country has been in constitutional crisis since 2009.

This, as the Honduran journalist Dina Meza states, had been planned by the most powerful groups in the country, formed by 10 influential families, including the Facussé, the Andonie and the Canahuati clans, with the support of the United States.

According to Meza, the oligarchy



Honduran journalist Dina Meza: '[Even when] they watch over us, persecute us and insult us, women's courage goes beyond all that.'

was annoyed by the reforms, although minor, introduced by the previous government and decided to take control of the country. Since then, they have sold rivers and other natural resources to transnational corporations.

This has allowed them to keep

more than 80% of the nation's wealth. 'Honduras is in its current state not because it is a poor country but because it has been impoverished by the 10 families that misgovern the country,' Meza says.

The journalist says that damaging laws have been approved against human rights and workers, controlling communications and militarising the country, allowing the building of US bases in Honduras.

Even so, there has been resistance – the strongest coming from women. 'Despite the male chauvinism and patriarchal system that wants us in our houses, being mistreated, alone and in silence, with the coup happening on our doorsteps, we have been able to go out onto the streets,' says Meza.

'The military and the police insult us, denigrate us and call us prostitutes. But that doesn't stop us.'

The women include workers, *maquila* workers, peasants, professionals and defenders of human rights, who confront the injustice despite being victims of 'rape, persecution and harassment'.

'When the coup began, the military used to bring condoms to rape women,' points out Meza. 'We want to fight. History has been built with our fights. The problem is that we are not the ones who write it and that's why we do not appear in it.'

Meza, who is in England as a result of persecution, highlights the fight of peasant women against the landowner Miguel Facussé in Zacate Grande and Bajo Agúan.

Even when 'they watch over us, persecute us and insult us, women's courage goes beyond all that. We want a Constituent National Assembly. We have to change our country,' she declares.

She also says she is not scared. 'My only fear is not being able to participate because I can't say to my children that I did nothing to try and solve this problem. That would be even worse than getting a bullet from the military.' ♦

This article was first published in The Prisma – The Multicultural Newspaper (www.theprisma.co.uk).

24 nails dug into body, luckily

Migrant women workers, especially domestic helps, continue to be ruthlessly exploited and brutally abused by their employers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states as a result of the absence of bilateral agreements to safeguard their rights.

Amantha Perera

LAHANDAPUREGE Ariyawathie feels she got off lightly – if returning home with 24 nails embedded in your body is lucky.

Ariyawathie, 52, from the southern Sri Lankan district of Matara, had left to work as a domestic worker in Saudi Arabia in early 2011 with hopes of building a house back home. She worked only five months, and returned home with oozing wounds after burning iron rods were inserted into her skin by her employers.

‘I feel I got off lightly, worse things could have happened to me,’ Ariyawathie told Inter Press Service (IPS) standing in front of her new house – built by the Foreign Employment Bureau and the National Housing Authority after her return and the ensuing controversy.

She has reason to feel lucky. On 10 January this year Rizana Nafeek, a 25-year-old maid jailed in Saudi Arabia for the accidental death of an infant in her care, was beheaded without any notification to the family or Sri Lankan authorities.

‘The same would have awaited me,’ says Ariyawathie, who says she still has six metal objects in her body.

Nafeek was in prison since 2005 and on death row since 2007. She was sent to Saudi Arabia on a forged passport when she was 17. According to her family and others familiar with her case, job agents manipulated the poverty-stricken family and sent the young girl to Saudi Arabia for household work.

She ended up caring for a four-month-old infant, work she was untrained for. The infant choked while Nafeek was bottle-feeding her. Activists say that Nafeek received neither a proper trial nor the appropriate consular and legal support.



Razeena Nafeek, mother of Rizana, a Sri Lankan maid who was beheaded in Saudi Arabia for the accidental death of an infant in her care.

Her family from the remote village of Muttur in the northeastern Trincomalee district is resigned to their fate. ‘What can we do, we have to go on, nothing more can be done,’ her father Abdul Mohammed Nafeek told IPS.

Researchers say such helplessness is instilled into domestic workers and their families by recruitment agencies and scouts who travel to remote villages to locate women like Nafeek.

‘That is what people have been led to believe, that there is no protection, that they are in a foreign land without any protection,’ Miyuru Gunasinghe from the Law and Society Trust, a national human rights advocacy body, told IPS.

Gunasinghe said some countries like the Philippines have signed bilateral agreements with Saudi Arabia to safeguard the rights of workers. ‘The Philippines is a great example, it suspended sending workers to Saudi Arabia for a year till it could negotiate an agreement.’

Bilateral agreements do more than guarantee minimum pay, stipulated working hours and living con-

ditions; they include worker rights. Sri Lanka has such agreements in place with Bahrain and Jordan. The agreements also make sure that all workers are treated equally and not according to individual contracts or tribal laws.

Despite the public outcry over the beheading, the Sri Lankan government is yet to indicate that it is lobbying the Saudis for a bilateral agreement.

Following a proposal made by foreign employment minister Dilan Perera two weeks after the beheading of Nafeek, the Cabinet approved a proposal to raise the minimum age for domestic workers seeking employment in Saudi Arabia to 25 years. For the rest of the Middle East it remains 23 years.

The workers also have to complete a residential training programme of 21 days and obtain a national-level housekeeping certificate.

Gunasinghe said that increasing the age bracket hardly serves the purpose. ‘You can be 25, but if you have studied up to only level 5, don’t know English and cannot operate any appliances, we are left with the same

Amantha Perera/IPS

problem.'

The researcher said that the government should stress training and sending qualified workers at a higher pay.

Ariyawathie went to the Gulf after the three-week government programme that included language training.

But she got into trouble with her employers because she could not communicate with them, nor could she operate electrical household appliances. 'I was abused because I could not understand what they were telling me.'

The Law and Society Trust's Gunasinghe said that the government should consider stringent laws to govern recruitment agencies, and redraft the foreign employment bureau act to include workers' rights. In its current form the act only deals with promoting foreign employment.

She says if the millions who work overseas are given voting rights, politicians will become more attentive to their needs.

Despite the low skills and low pay (some domestic workers are paid as little as \$100 per month), worker remittances are the highest foreign revenue earner for the island. This year they are likely to bring as much as \$5 billion.

There are an estimated two million Sri Lankans working abroad. At least 800,000 are female domestic workers, mostly in the Gulf. Saudi Arabia still remains their most-favoured destination.

But there are subtle changes taking place. Since late 2011, when reports of abuse spread in the media, some workers have shown a reluctance to fly to Saudi Arabia. Agents have been paying a premium of \$800 for any woman who departs.

In Muttur, Nafeek's home village, women have led a signature campaign seeking a ban on sending domestics to Saudi Arabia.

'People think Muttur remained silent. It did not, we did not get justice. We do not want Rizana's death to be just another statistic,' said Mohammed Jihad, a social worker from the village. — IPS

Hope Not Hype

The future of agriculture guided by the IAASTD

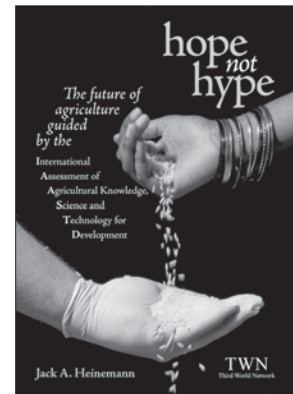
By Jack A Heinemann

Can we feed the world in the year 2050? If we can, will it be at the price of more distant futures of food insecurity? 21st-century Earth is still trying to find a way to feed its people. Despite global food surpluses, we have malnutrition, hunger and starvation. We also have mass obesity in the same societies. Both of these phenomena are a symptom of the same central problem: a dominating single agriculture coming from industrialized countries responding to perverse and artificial market signals. It neither produces sustainable surpluses of balanced and tasty diets nor does it use food production to increase social and economic equity, increase the food security of the poorest, and pamper the planet back into health.

This book is about a revolution in agriculture envisioned by the International Assessment of Agricultural Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD), a five-year multi-million-dollar research exercise supervised by the United Nations and World Bank that charts sustainable solutions. The solutions are of course not purely technological, but technology will be a part of the solution.

Which technology? Whose technology?

Hope Not Hype is written for people who farm, but especially for people who eat. It takes a hard look at traditional, modern (e.g., genetic engineering) and emerging (e.g., agroecological) biotechnologies and sorts them on the basis of delivering food without undermining the capacity to make more food. It cuts through the endless promises made by agrochemical corporations that leverage the public and private investment in agriculture innovation. Here the case is made for the right biotechnology rather than the "one size fits all" biotechnology on offer. This book provides governments and their citizens with the sound science in plain language to articulate their case for an agriculture of their own — one that works for them.



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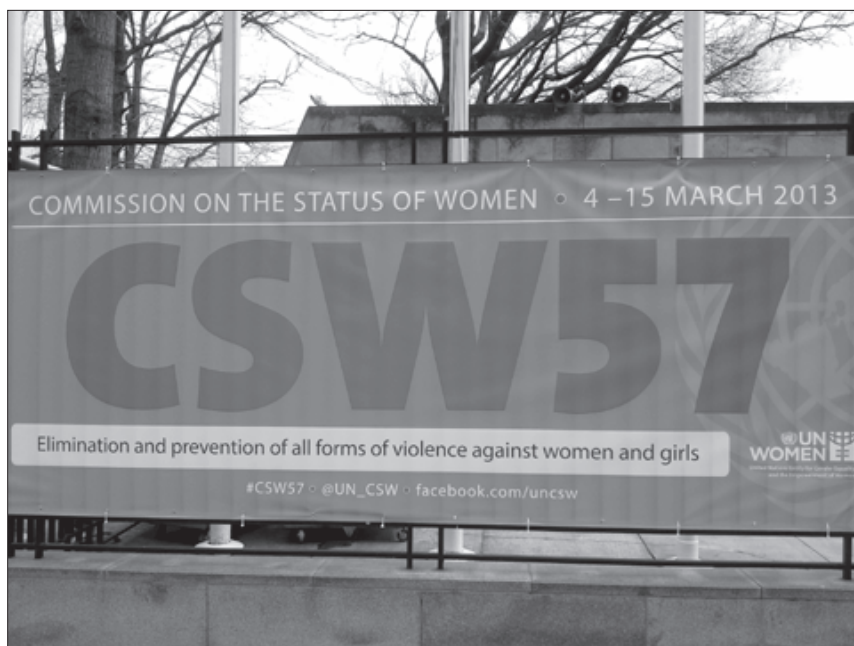
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UN meet on women wrangles consensus to address violence

The United Nations Commission on the Status of Women concluded its 57th session in March with agreement by more than 130 member states on the prevention and elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls. It urged governments to translate the outcome of the 'historic' gathering into concrete actions to protect and promote women's human rights and fundamental freedoms.



The 57th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women focused on the issue of ending violence against women and girls.

George Gao

IN her opening speech for the world's largest conference on ending violence against women and girls, Michelle Bachelet summoned the spirit of 15-year-old Malala Yousafzai, whose skull was shattered on 9 October 2012 by a Taliban bullet.

'It is for Malala – and for every girl and woman, and every human being – that we must come to a strong action-oriented agreement to prevent and end violence against girls and women,' said Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women.

The Taliban singled out Yousafzai for advocating girls' education. She miraculously survived the attack, as

surgeons fitted her skull with a titanium plate.

The atrocity highlights a fact many diplomats and civil society members have taken to heart: that violence against women and girls undermines international development goals and UN values.

The 57th session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW57) took place at UN headquarters from 4-15 March and addressed this issue. It resulted in an outcome document, adopted with consensus by member states.

On the heels of CSW57 is another series of diplomatic negotiations, for an international Arms Trade Treaty (ATT). The UN has allotted 11 days from 18-28 March for delegates to

reach an agreement. Here, too, the issue of gender-based violence is on the table.

A sigh of relief, but the fight continues

Civil society organisations and UN member states were largely relieved that a document of 'Agreed Conclusions' came through this year (see box next page), after last year's CSW session failed to produce one.

'It was a very difficult process because of the broad range of political interests and agendas that member states represent,' said Mavic Cabrera-Balleza, international coordinator for the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders (GNWP).

This year, 'we [successfully] lobbied for language on the link between violence against women and peace and security, women human rights defenders, sexual and reproductive health, small arms and light weapons,' she told Inter Press Service (IPS).

'[But] the final document was not as strong as we want it to be,' she said.

Cabrera-Balleza noted that member states failed to 'reaffirm' – and only 'recall' – UN Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889 and 1960 on women, peace and security.

'However, in negotiations with member states, you cannot play an "all or nothing" game,' she explained.

Radhika Balakrishnan, executive director of the Center for Women's Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University, told IPS, 'There were quite a few things we gained in this new document... which we might

have lost if negotiations continued.’

‘One of the successes was that [member states] weren’t able to invoke [traditional values and morals],’ she said, noting that some governments had been trying to use ‘traditional values’ – as well as ‘state sovereignty’ – as a trump-card against women’s human rights.

‘But many issues that women’s

groups have been fighting for, [such as] sexual orientation [and] gender identity, were lost in the document,’ she noted.

Daniela Rosche, a policy and advocacy adviser in gender justice for Oxfam, told IPS that CSW57 established new norms, but did not address how to implement them.

‘If you really want to do some-

thing to fight the surge of violence and take concrete steps to solve it, you need to also develop an “international action plan”, basically to operationalise the standards that are there,’ she said.

‘We couldn’t convince governments to commit to this,’ she added.

‘What would ensure accountability is [if they] set concrete targets,’ she

CSW57’s Agreed Conclusions

THE Agreed Conclusions adopted during this year’s CSW session place special emphasis on reaffirming States’ existing international obligations related to the prevention of violent gender discrimination. These include the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Geneva Conventions of 1949 and their Additional Protocols, and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (Agreed Conclusions CSW57, paragraphs 3-5). The Conclusions also cite UN Security Council and UN Human Rights Council resolutions (Id. at paragraphs 8-9).

Notably, the Commission defines violence against women as ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women and girls, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life. The Commission also notes the economic and social harm caused by such violence’ (Id. at paragraph 11). Furthermore, the document explicitly recognises the historical and structural roots of violence against women and highlights the negative, ongoing impact of gender stereotypes, discrimination, and unequal power dynamics (Id. at paragraph 10).

Importantly, the Agreed Conclusions reject the invocation of traditional values or customs as a justification for failing to eradicate vio-

lence against women and girls. Paragraph 14 of the Agreed Conclusions reads, ‘The Commission urges States to strongly condemn all forms of violence against women and girls and to refrain from invoking any custom, tradition or religious consideration to avoid their obligations with respect to its elimination as set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women.’ The Commission also emphasised equality through education (paragraph 17), legislation (paragraph 18), and economic empowerment (paragraph 19). Furthermore, the Agreed Conclusions found linkages between violence and women and health, HIV/AIDS, poverty eradication, food security, peace and security, humanitarian assistance and crime prevention (paragraph 20).

The Agreed Conclusions’ adoption followed months of advocacy and negotiation. In a press statement, Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, stated: ‘The Agreed Conclusions are a testimony to the commitment of Member States to do the right thing, to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls. In the last two weeks during the meeting in New York, and in the lead-up to this session, we witnessed global engagement and mobilisation, high-profile advocacy by civil society, and determined leadership by many Member States. Expectations of the world’s women and girls were extremely high for this session of the Commission ... The document highlights the importance of putting in place multi-sectoral services for survivors of violence, including for

health, psychological support and counselling, social support in the short and long term. It draws attention to the need for services to protect the right to sexual and reproductive health.’

The Conclusions’ negotiation was not without controversy, however, as numerous States and civil organisations disagreed over topics such as access to emergency contraception, abortion and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases. In a widely-endorsed statement released during CSW57, the Center for Women’s Global Leadership expressed concern about the possibility of conservative CSW Member States derailing the process and undermining previous agreements, conceivably leading the CSW to ‘waver in its commitment to advance women’s human rights’. The statement warned that ‘[c]ustoms, tradition or religious considerations must not be tolerated to justify discrimination and violence against women and girls whether committed by State authorities or non-state actors.’

Other participants and observers expressed similar concerns, in light of several States’ objections on the language related to sexual and reproductive rights. Egypt, in particular, had signalled its support for language that would allow for a traditional values exception to implementing the Conclusions, but ultimately did not block the Agreed Conclusions’ adoption. However, another contentious issue – protection for sex workers – was reportedly dropped during negotiations. – *International Justice Resource Center* (www.ijrcenter.org) ♦

said, citing the annual Millennium Development Goals reports as an example.

Linking arms with gender justice

‘The relationship between small arms trade and violence against women is in the [CSW57] document, and I think that’s very important,’ said Balakrishnan of CWGL, whose 16 Days Campaign highlighted the issue.

Widney Brown, senior director of international law and policy at Amnesty International, explained to IPS that while the CSW57 outcome document is not legally binding, it can be a powerful instrument for activists to pressure their governments.

On the other hand, ‘the Arms Trade Treaty will be law’ if it goes through, said Brown. ‘But in terms of enforcement, it’s mostly a peer pressure mechanism.’

She noted, ‘In the 27 July 2012 draft of the Arms Trade Treaty, there’s a reference to gender-based violence and violence against children.’



UN Women Executive Director Michelle Bachelet: ‘People expected action, and we have no right to let down the world’s women. And we have not failed them.’

However, some governments will likely use the issue of gender-based violence as a bargaining chip.

‘Anytime you have references to things like gender-based violence in international negotiations, there’s a group of states who are always going to be willing to say, “We’ll give you this, on the condition that you take [that] off”,’ she explained.

‘I think it will be in play again, and we’re going to have to be very vigilant against that,’ she added.

Brown explained that Russia, Syria, Iran and Egypt have often impeded member states’ negotiations for

women’s rights and gender equality – and may also act as barriers during ATT negotiations.

At CSW57, for example, the Vatican worked with Syria and some other member states to strip out any reference to gender identity. ‘This battle has been going on for years now,’ she said.

‘Fortunately, the NGO community is holding very strongly on why it’s important to talk about gender-based violence,’ she stated.

Statement on CSW57 from the SG’s office

On 15 March, the spokesperson for UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon issued a statement welcoming the conclusions of CSW57: ‘No matter where she lives, no matter what her culture, no matter what her society, every woman and girl is entitled to live free of fear. She has the universal human right to be free from all forms of violence so as to fulfil her full potential and dreams for the future.’ – IPS

Michelle Bachelet’s bittersweet hurrah

JUST a year ago, Michelle Bachelet, Executive Director of UN Women, lamented member states’ failure to produce an outcome document at CSW56.

‘We have come to an impasse, which is deeply regrettable,’ she said then.

But this year was a different story.

‘People expected action, and we have no right to let down the world’s women. And we have not failed them,’ she said.

‘Yes, we did it!’ she added.

‘The room erupted in cheers,’ explained Lana Finikin, executive director of the Sistren Theatre Collective and co-chair of the Latin America and Caribbean CSW Planning Committee.

‘They opened the door, and the NGOs waiting in the corridors were celebrating, too,’ she told IPS.

Gruelling negotiations took place for long hours all week. ‘On Thursday, people stayed until five in the morning,’ said Finikin, who is also a member of the Jamaican government delegation.

The moment, however, was bittersweet. Bachelet announced in the same speech that she was stepping down from her post, to return to Chile.

‘It has been an honour and a privilege to be part of this historical moment with all of you,’ said Bachelet, as rumours of a presidential run swirled.

When Bachelet finished her announcement, ‘the room melted’, said Finikin, who attributed much of

CSW57’s success to Bachelet’s leadership.

‘During long negotiations, Bachelet would walk into conference rooms, and it would liven up,’ she explained. ‘People become more productive when she was there.’

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon said, ‘Michelle Bachelet was the right person in the right job at the right time... Her drive and compassion enabled her to mobilise and make a difference for millions of people across the world.’

Mavic Cabrera-Balleza of GNWP told IPS, ‘The big question now is: who will replace her? I sincerely hope that the voices of women will be heard in the selection process.’ – IPS

UN rights expert highlights threats to women's right to food

In his report to the 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council in March, the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to food discussed the obstacles women face in access to food, identifying the areas that demand the most urgent attention.

Kanaga Raja reports.

WHILE women's rights, including the right to food, are protected through a range of human rights instruments, 'discrimination against women remains pervasive in all spheres of life', according to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the right to food.

In his report to the 22nd session of the UN Human Rights Council, which took place on 25 February-22 March, Special Rapporteur Olivier De Schutter said that discrimination against women may result from laws that are themselves discriminatory. More often however, he added, the discrimination women face is the result of social norms or customs, linked to certain stereotypes about gender roles.

Such discrimination includes unequal access to productive resources such as land and to economic opportunities such as decent wage employment; unequal bargaining position within the household; gendered division of labour within households, which results both in time poverty for women and in lower levels of education; and women's marginalisation from decision-making spheres at all levels.

'Only by addressing these different levels, including by challenging the existing distribution of family responsibilities between women and men, shall the root causes of discrimination women face be effectively addressed,' he stressed.

The Special Rapporteur cited several human rights instruments that protect women's rights.



'If women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%.'

For example, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights provides for the right to an adequate standard of living, including the right to food, to be guaranteed without discrimination (Article 2, paragraph 1).

A non-discrimination requirement is also imposed under the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both in the enjoyment of the rights listed in the Covenant (Art. 2, para. 1) and in other spheres of life (Art. 26).

The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women guarantees equality of treatment between women and men in a range of areas; it has a specific provision on women in rural areas, guaranteeing the rights of women to equal treatment, in particular, in land and agrarian reform as well as in land resettlement schemes (Art. 14). The Convention also guarantees adequate nutrition for women during pregnancy and lactation (Art. 12).

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which sets out rights that should be guaranteed without discrimination (Art. 2, para. 1), also refers to the duty of states to protect the right to health of the child, inter alia, by the promotion of breastfeeding [Art. 24, para. 2(e)].

'Despite these requirements, discrimination against women remains pervasive in all spheres of life,' De Schutter underlined.

The report says that the various forms of discrimination are interrelated.

Disempowerment of women results in women facing discrimination as economic agents. This in turn means women are less economically independent, are exposed to violence and have a weaker bargaining position within the household and the community.

As a result, they continue to assume a highly unequal share of tasks and family responsibilities within the household – taking care of the children and the elderly or the sick, fetching wood and water, buying and preparing the food.

Women work more hours than men, although much of the work they perform remains informal, essentially performed within the family and unremunerated, and thus is neither valued nor even recognised. This leads to lower levels of education for women, and an inability to seek better employment opportunities outside the home.

These various forms of discrimination against women and girls are human rights violations that states

have a duty to combat, De Schutter said, adding that they affect directly the right to food of women and girls.

‘Improving the education of women and, thus, their economic opportunities, not only can make a substantial contribution to a country’s economic growth, it is also the single most important determinant of food insecurity.’

According to the report, a cross-country study of developing countries covering the period 1970-95 found that 43% of the reduction of hunger was attributable to the progress of women’s education, almost as much as increased food availability (26%) and improvements to the health environment (19%) during that period combined. An additional 12% of the reduction of hunger was attributable to increased life expectancy of women, so that in total 55% of the gains against hunger during those 25 years is owed to an improvement of women’s situation within societies.

‘Discrimination against women as food producers is not only a violation of their rights, it also has society-wide consequences, because of the considerable productivity losses entailed.’

Evidence suggests that countries where women lack land ownership rights or access to credit have on average 60% and 85% more malnourished children respectively. One study in Burkina Faso found productivity on female-managed plots in the country to be 30% lower than on male-managed plots within the same household because labour and fertiliser were more intensively applied on men’s plots. Yet, the literature also shows that with equal access to inputs, yields for men and women are very similar.

In 2010, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) concluded that ‘if women had the same access to productive resources as men, they could increase yields on their farms by 20-30%. This could raise



Women continue to assume a highly unequal share of tasks and family responsibilities within the household, such as fetching water.

total agricultural output in developing countries by 2.5-4%, which could in turn reduce the number of hungry people in the world by 12-17%’.

Plight of women workers

De Schutter explained that access to food can be secured: (i) by obtaining incomes from employment or self-employment; (ii) by social transfers; or (iii) by own production, for individuals who have access to land and other productive inputs.

Highlighting the plight of women as waged agricultural workers, the rights expert noted that women farmworkers, who represent 20-30% of the approximately 450 million people employed worldwide as waged agricultural workers (the proportion is higher, at around 40%, in Latin America and the Caribbean), face specific difficulties.

Women are disproportionately represented in the ‘periphery’ part of the workforce that coexists with the ‘core’ segment of permanently employed farmworkers. This ‘periphery’ segment of the workforce is made up

of unskilled workers, often without a formal contract of employment, and their work is often seasonal or temporary (or classified as such even when it is in fact continuous).

The main reason why women are disproportionately represented in this segment is because they have fewer alternative options and are thus ‘easier’ to exploit, says the report.

‘A number of the issues that in practice are of particular concern to women could be addressed in principle through effective policies and laws, and collective bargaining. These include equality of opportunity policies, equal pay for work of equal value, maternity leave and benefits, child care issues, reproductive health services.’

However, De Schutter said, apart from the general problems related to unionisation on farms, male-dominated unions do not always pay sufficient attention to issues that matter especially to women.

The report notes that women’s access to employment in the industry or the services sectors of the economy requires improved access to education for girls, and infrastructural and services investments that relieve women from part of the burden of the household chores that women shoulder disproportionately.

‘Improving access to education for girls requires that the incentives structures for families be changed, and that social and cultural norms that lead parents to interrupt the schooling of girls earlier than that of boys be challenged.’

Many poor households are unable to send girls to school because of the costs, both direct and indirect (school fees or other costs related to attending school, such as uniforms and books), of doing so; because of opportunity costs (girls who go to school are not available to work within the household); because of the commute involved, when the family lives at a

great distance from the nearest school, and associated security concerns.

The report finds that various programmes have proven to be effective in removing some of these obstacles.

Bangladesh, for example, launched the Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP) in 1993; 10 years later, as it entered its second phase, the project covered one-quarter of rural Bangladesh and now benefits almost one million girls across the country in more than 6,000 schools. FSSAP provides a stipend to girls who agree to delay marriage until they complete secondary education, for a total cost to the programme of about \$121 per year per person; and it has improved sanitation facilities in schools.

Social protection

The report underlines that the right to social security, as guaranteed under the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, includes access to health care; benefits and services to persons without work-related income due to sickness, disability, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, old age or death of a family member, including contributory or non-contributory pensions for all older persons; family and child support sufficient to cover food, clothing, housing, water and sanitation; survivor and orphan benefits.

The Special Rapporteur said that in many cases, the specific situation of women is not considered in the design and implementation of programmes.

Highlighting the issue of women's access to social protection, De Schutter said that most social transfer programmes are in the form of cash transfer programmes which can be conditional or unconditional. However, partly because of concerns with the fiscal sustainability of unconditional cash transfer programmes, and partly in order to encourage poor families to invest more in their children and thus reduce the inter-generational transmission of poverty, conditional cash transfers (CCTs)

have been expanding in recent years.

Noting that CCT benefits are usually given to women, as the 'caregivers' of households – in Brazil, 94% of the recipients of the Bolsa Familia transfers are women – De Schutter, however, said that too little attention has been paid to the gender impacts of CCTs when such programmes are put in place.

He also cited public works programmes that are designed to provide employment to families who have no other source of income; remuneration is usually in the form of cash (cash-for-work) or food (food-for-work), or a combination of both.

Many public works schemes set aside a quota for women. For example, India's Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA), introduced in 2005 and which benefited 52.5 million households in 2009-10, provides for one-third of the employment to be allocated to women. The Rural Maintenance Programme in Bangladesh goes even further; it is an all-women programme, successfully employing over 50,000 rural women to maintain 60,000 miles of earthen roads.

While access to employment in such programmes can favour the empowerment of women, paying greater attention to the gender impacts could significantly increase their benefits to women, De Schutter stressed.

Challenges facing women producers

'Concerns have been expressed about the impact that the feminisation of agriculture may have on local food security, given the obstacles women face which negatively affect their productivity. Indeed, women often have little legal protection or rights to property ownership, and they face cultural and social norms that hinder their ability to improve productivity,' said De Schutter.

On how these challenges can be met, the Special Rapporteur said that in the longer term, improving education for women and expanding opportunities for them in off-farm employment are key. But for the large number

of women who depend on agriculture, including, increasingly, urban and peri-urban agriculture, it is equally important – and urgent – to improve women's opportunities to thrive as producers.

'Gender-sensitive agricultural policies are required, consistent with guideline 8.6 of the Right to Food Guidelines concerning women's full and equal participation in the economy and the right of women to inherit and possess land and other property, and access to productive resources, including credit, land, water and appropriate technologies.'

Access to land is key in this regard, where 'women face multiple forms of discrimination in accessing land'. Women also face discrimination in accessing extension services. The third area is finance, where 'microcredit schemes often target rural women specifically, who, even more than men, face obstacles in accessing credit.'

'A human rights-based strategy to address gender discrimination against women includes four complementary requirements. It must relieve women of the burdens of household chores; it must be empowering and challenge the existing division of roles; it must systematically aim at taking into account gender in existing food security strategies; and, as regards governance, it must be part of a multi-sectoral and multi-year effort, including independent monitoring of progress towards certain targets,' said De Schutter.

States' obligation to remove all discriminatory provisions in the law, and to combat discrimination that has its source in social and cultural norms, is an immediate obligation that must be complied with without delay. This should be combined with the use of temporary special measures to accelerate the achievement of gender equality, and with effective remedies for women who are victims of discrimination, he added. ♦

Kanaga Raja is Editor of the South-North Development Monitor (SUNS), which is published by the Third World Network. This article is reproduced from SUNS (No. 7524, 13 February 2013).

What Chávez left behind

A titanic figure who changed the course of Venezuelan and Latin American history, President Hugo Chávez, who died in March, was a man revered by millions. But beyond this regional influence, his greatest legacies were in his country's streets, factories and neighbourhoods among the activists, workers and neighbours who have built the Bolivarian Revolution, says *Benjamin Dangl*.

THE bus slid along the Bolivian jungle road, with evangelical music blasting out of the speakers. Rain dripped steadily through the holes in the roof as the vehicle surged ahead in fits and starts, past the lights of small villages and the vast blackness of the Chapare, a tropical region in the centre of the country. Eventually the rain gave way to dawn, and a hot sun baked the damp bus as we rolled into the city of Santa Cruz, where the 2003 Ibero-American presidential summit was taking place. On the outskirts of the city, Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez later spoke to a stadium packed with Bolivian coca farmers carrying bags of the green leaf and miners with mini Bolivian flags waving from their helmets.

Chávez captivated the stadium for hours, talking about baseball and Simón Bolívar, criticising George W Bush's war in Iraq and congratulating Bolivia for recently ousting a neoliberal president in popular protests. Smoke blew over the crowd from barbecues and occasional fireworks as the Venezuelan leader spoke into the night.

Here was a president marked by the movements and politics that surrounded him. Brazil's Landless Movement cheered him on in a dusty gathering in Porto Alegre in 2005 as he announced that Venezuela's Bolivarian Revolution (named after the Latin American independence leader) was a socialist political project. And the crowd went wild later that same year in Argentina as Chávez, alongside Maradona, celebrated the death of the Free Trade Area of the Americas.

At these encounters, what was always the most impressive thing

about Chávez was not so much what he said or did, but the political space and moment that surrounded him. From the Bolivian coca farmers who felt common ground in his anti-imperialist stance, to the many fellow leftist Latin American presidents that came into office during his 14 years in power, Chávez was defined by an era and a movement in Latin America that is far from depleted.

As an icon of the contemporary Latin American left, he helped create a space for other presidents to move in, whether it was with Ecuador's Rafael Correa kicking out a US air base, or Bolivia's Evo Morales nationalising natural gas industries. The progressive constitution that Chávez helped rewrite provided a model for other governments to follow over the past decade. The regional blocs he worked to create fostered South-to-South economic and political alliances, provided a check to US military power in the region, and encouraged the leftist politics and economic policies of presidents across Latin America.

Revolution from the bottom up

Beyond this regional influence, some of Chávez's greatest legacies are not in the presidential palace, but in the streets, factories and neighbourhoods of Venezuela, among the activists, workers and neighbours who have built the Bolivarian Revolution from the bottom up.

From communal councils to worker-run factories, Venezuela is the site of some of the most sophisticated and successful experiments in direct democracy, socialism and worker-

control in the world. While Chávez was a key figure in the development of many of these projects and initiatives, it is the Venezuelan people that brought them to life and that will keep them alive after his death. Many of these programmes are characterised not by top-down, bureaucratic state policies, or government funding handed out to create electoral support. They are the projects of people using the Bolivarian Revolution as a grass-roots tool.

Since taking office in 1999 Chávez used his mandate as a leader, and the nation's oil wealth, to create programmes that provide free education, dental and health clinics, land and housing reform, government-subsidised supermarkets, and hundreds of thousands of business cooperatives. In Venezuela, where much of the population lives below the poverty line, these programmes have had an enormous impact. Other government initiatives have helped spur on activism from below, self-governance at a local level, and direct democracy in political decision-making and funding.

A story from the neighbourhood of El 23 de Enero in Caracas is emblematic of such progressive trends. El 23 de Enero neighbourhood has a history of social consciousness and rebellion; as a poor, working-class neighbourhood, El 23 de Enero was marked by the police as a dangerous area whose residents should be controlled and repressed. During conservative presidencies, the local police station was a place of torture and imprisonment for many leftist community leaders. After decades of state violence, and following the election of Chávez, the community was able

to reclaim and transform this centre of police repression. Juan Contreras, a radio producer, leader in the community organisation Coordinador Simón Bolívar, and long-time resident of the neighbourhood, told me how he and his *compañeros* took over the police station – for decades an outpost for crackdowns on leftist organising – and transformed it into a community radio station and cultural centre.

‘This place was a symbol of repression,’ Contreras explained to me in the studio, which smelled like fresh paint. ‘So we took that symbol and made it into a new one.’ He continued: ‘It is evidence of the revolution made by us, the citizens. We can’t hang around waiting for the revolution to be made for us; we have to make the changes.’ The station receives state funding, but community members fought hard for permission to reclaim the police station by occupying the building without permission. El 23 de Enero’s victories are examples of how Venezuelan movements worked with the Chávez administration by demanding attention through direct action, and then working with subsequent state support.

Communal councils

The tactic used in El 23 de Enero of seizing upon the opportunities and space provided by the Chávez government, while also maintaining grassroots autonomy and momentum from below, is the foundation of many of the hopeful social changes going on in Venezuela today. Communal councils offer an interesting look into some of the participatory aspects of the Bolivarian process. They were created by the government in 2006, and thousands of them exist across the country today. The councils work to solicit funding from the government, begin social projects, programmes, and missions in their community, and deal with issues like the management of local health and water projects. Long-time Venezuelan activist Alfonso Olivo believed the communal councils were ‘the most revolutionary measure that this government has taken’ due to their transfer of power

from mayors and governors to the ordinary citizens in the councils. ‘The people are capable [of social planning] by themselves, without the involvement of the state or the bureaucratic officials,’ he explained in the excellent edited collection of interviews *Venezuela Speaks! Voices from the Grassroots*.

Communal councils in Venezuela show the fascinating push-and-pull that emerges where the state creates structures and projects that build community bonds. The councils are sometimes autonomous from, or even antagonistic toward, the Bolivarian state and party. The Chávez administration organised the councils in ways that encourage community involvement. Anyone over the age of 15 can participate, and for a decision to be officially made, at least 30% of those in the council have to vote on it. In urban areas, councils must involve a minimum of 150 families, and around 20 families in rural areas. This scale means that the councils promote direct participation and are relatively easy to self-manage. When a council comes to a decision for a project, they can receive funding directly from the national government or national institutions, dispersing power away from local mayors and officials and into the hands of residents themselves.

Communal councils have provided a check to the power of local governments, as well as a platform to demand transparency and a more efficient bureaucracy from the government. The smaller scale and local focus of these councils is essential to their functionality, helping to eliminate unnecessary bureaucracy and circumvent corrupt or unresponsive politicians.

The councils can also provide a counterweight to a more centralised state. Political scientist Sara Motta writes in *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy* that the communal councils ‘are an attempt to create a new set of state institutions that bypass the traditional state, and distribute power in a democratic and participatory manner’. The elasticity of the relationship between the grassroots and the state

is tested here through a public empowered by state-created institutions – institutions that citizens can then use to challenge the traditional state if necessary.

The balancing act between remaining autonomous from the state and engaging it is described by council participant Edenis Guilarte in *Reclaiming Latin America*: ‘We must obtain the tools to be able to struggle against the bureaucracy and search for a way to get rid of leaders who want to control us, look to maintain their own power, and who divide the community.’ In this sense, the councils can be a tool of emancipation. ‘What we are doing,’ Guilarte explained, ‘is training, creating consciousness, which is a process that goes beyond repairing a road, obtaining a service, enabling access to water. It’s a macro process, a process of social change, a fight over ideas and practice.’ The social bonds created by working on development projects through these state-created institutions can supersede the immediate goals of the actual project.

While communal councils manage budgets and develop community projects, they also serve as a basis for networking and developing community ties, which are then useful beyond the councils’ work. For example, Ismila, a community activist in a Caracas neighbourhood, explained that when the public water company Hidrolara didn’t respond to demands from her community to deal with a sewage backup for two days, the members of her communal council decided to take matters into their own hands.

Because they were used to working together, debating and organising, it was easy to coordinate a trip to the Hidrolara offices and demand to speak with the person in charge of dealing with sewage emergencies. Together, they had to pressure the officials for two hours, but ended up returning to their community with an engineer to take care of the problem. Ismila said, ‘We learned today that Hidrolara is useless as an institution, it does not work for the communities. These officials think they know eve-

rything and don't listen to the community until there's a problem.' So while the bureaucracy posed a problem, the solidarity and sense of community developed through the communal councils helped to solve it. The communal councils provide the tools for local organising, which has a great potential to dismiss government clientelism and assert autonomy, helping people to live and organise beyond the state.

Worker-control

The Chávez government worked to open up spaces for community organising, like that of communal councils and cooperatives, but also to encourage worker-control at factories and workplaces. In 2005, the Chávez administration announced decrees that enabled the state to expropriate businesses and factories to allow workers to manage them as cooperatives. With the legal steps in place for the state to intervene when a factory or business shuts its doors, the government can now collaborate with the workers to make sure the business continues and the workers remain employed. Furthermore, under worker self-management, workers have control over major decisions about how their workplace is organised. Dozens of businesses across Venezuela have come under state and worker control.

In 2005, workers took control of Inveval, a valve-producing business on the outskirts of Caracas. Pablo Cormenzana of Inveval explained in a 2006 interview with journalist Marie Trigona that the plant shut down on 9 December 2002, leaving the workers out of jobs. 'Originally, there were 330 workers at the plant. A group of these workers decided to begin a fight to demand that the former owner pay them back what he owed them. Later, this demand transformed into the idea of recovering their jobs and to reopen the company.' This legal and political battle went on for years of organising, workers camping outside the factory, and legal battles, until the factory went under state and worker control.

'Not only are the workers at Inveval successfully running a company without bosses or an owner, they're also doing it without technocrats or bureaucracy from the government. The government has had little participation in the functioning of the company,' Cormenzana explained. 'All of the workers make the same salaries, it doesn't matter if they are truck drivers, line workers, or the president of the company. They are putting into practice genuine worker control at Inveval.' Inveval provides an interesting example of empowered workers taking charge to push the government to operate as a tool for the workers, rather than the other way around.

Throughout these various projects, conflicts, and relationships, the Venezuelan public has utilised the state as a people's tool, and collaborated with it when the causes of the people and the government intersect. A true test for these movements from below is to what extent the Bolivarian Revolution will outlast Chávez.

Beyond the ongoing, everyday activism and organising of people across Venezuela, one step will be the new presidential elections, now slated to take place on 14 April. Nicolás Maduro, a former bus driver and union leader, who was first elected to the National Assembly in 2000, was chosen by Chávez to be his successor. Maduro, who was Vice President and is now interim President, will run in the upcoming elections against right-wing opponent Henrique Capriles Radonski, who Chávez beat by 11% in last October's election. It is likely Maduro will win. Regardless of the outcome, the influence of Chávez-initiated programmes and policies will be felt for generations in Venezuela and across Latin America.

The examples illustrated here are just some of the many hopeful projects in direct democracy and worker-control that mark Chávez's legacy. Beyond Venezuela's borders, this legacy includes a wider movement against US imperialism and capitalism, and for human rights, progressive land reform, peace and a just global economy.

On 2 December 2011, as clouds hovered just above the working-class neighbourhoods on the green hillsides around Caracas, the foundational summit of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) met. When walking around their meeting room, I realised that the political left of the 20th century was together there with the left of the 21st century: former guerrillas-turned-presidents Daniel Ortega and Raúl Castro sat at the same table as Cristina Kirchner and Evo Morales, with Chávez looking over it all from the head of the room. The goal of the meeting of 33 Latin American and Caribbean heads of state was to create a regional alliance that would make the US-dominated Organisation of American States obsolete, and move toward self-determination outside of Washington's power.

At that first gathering of the CELAC, Chávez reflected on the 200 years that have passed since Latin America's independence from Spain, and the continued foreign colonisation of the region through capitalism and imperialism. He quoted the last line in Gabriel García Márquez's novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*: '[R]aces condemned to one hundred years of solitude did not have a second opportunity on earth.'

The late Venezuelan leader concluded: 'To us it appears someone had condemned us to one hundred years of solitude, and to one hundred more. But perhaps, because we were condemned to these first hundred and to these second hundred, someone has given us a second opportunity on this earth.'

*Benjamin Dangl has worked as a journalist throughout Latin America, covering social movements and politics in the region for over a decade. He is the author of the books *Dancing with Dynamite: Social Movements and States in Latin America*, and *The Price of Fire: Resource Wars and Social Movements in Bolivia*. Dangl is currently a doctoral student in Latin American History at McGill University, and edits *UpsideDownWorld.org*, a website on activism and politics in Latin America, and *TowardFreedom.com*, a progressive perspective on world events.*

The sociocide of Iraq by Bush/Cheney

The war of aggression launched by the Bush regime against Iraq 10 years ago was a major crime under international law which should be prosecuted, says *Ralph Nader*.

TEN years ago George W Bush and Dick Cheney, as war criminals, launched the sociocide of the people of Iraq – replete with embedded television and newspaper reporters chronicling the invasion through the Bush lens. That illegal war of aggression was, of course, based on recognised lies, propaganda and cover-ups that duped or coopted leading news institutions such as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*.

Wars of aggression – this one blowing apart a country of 25 million people ruled by a weakened despot surrounded by far more powerful adversaries – Israel, Turkey and Iran – are major crimes under international law and the UN Charter. The Bush/Cheney war was also unconstitutional, never declared by the US Congress, as Senator Robert Byrd eloquently pointed out at the time. Moreover, many of the acts of torture and brutality perpetrated against the Iraqi people are illegal under various federal statutes.

Over one million Iraqis died due to the invasion, the occupation and the denial of health and safety necessities for infants, children and adults. Far more Iraqis were injured and sickened. Birth defects and cancers continue to set lethal records. Five million Iraqis became refugees, many fleeing into Jordan, Syria and other countries.

Nearly five thousand US soldiers died. Many other soldiers committed suicide. Well over 150,000 Americans were injured or sickened, far more than the official Pentagon under-estimate which restricts non-fatal casualty counts only to those incurred directly in the line of fire.

So far the Iraq War has monetarily cost taxpayers about \$2 trillion.



US tank troops in the March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Ten years on, Iraq is now a country in ruins.

Tens of billions more will be spent for veterans' disabilities and continuing expenses in Iraq. Taxpayers are paying over \$600 million a year to guard the giant US Embassy and its personnel in Baghdad, more than what our government spends for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), whose task is to reduce the number of American workers who die every year from workplace disease and trauma, currently about 58,000.

All for what results? Before the invasion there was no al-Qaeda in Saddam Hussein's secular dictatorship. Now a growing al-Qaeda in Iraq is terrorising the country with ever-bolder car bombings and suicide attacks taking dozens of lives at a time and spilling forcefully over into Syria.

Iraq is a police state with sectarian struggles between the dominant Shiites and the insurgent Sunnis who lived together peacefully and intermarried for centuries. There were no sectarian slaughters of this kind before the invasion, except for Saddam Hussein's bloodbath against rebel-

lious Shiites. The Shiites were egged on by President George HW Bush, who promptly abandoned them to the deadly strafing of Saddam's helicopter gunships at the end of the preventable first Gulf War in 1991.

Iraq is a country in ruins with a political and wealthy upper class raking off the profits from the oil industry and the occupation. The US is now widely hated in that part of Asia. Bush/Cheney ordered the use of cluster bombs, white phosphorous and depleted uranium against, for example, the people of Fallujah, where infant birth deformities have skyrocketed.

As Raed Jarrar, an Iraqi-American analyst, observed: 'Complete destruction of the Iraqi national identity' and the sectarian system introduced by the US invaders in 2003, where Iraqis were favoured or excluded based on their sectarian and ethnic affiliations, laid the basis for the current cruel chaos and violence. It was a nasty, brutish form of divide-and-rule.

The results back home in our country are soldiers and their extended families suffering in many ways from broken lives. Phil Donahue's gripping documentary *Body of War* follows the pain-wracked life of one soldier returning in 2004 from Iraq as a paraplegic. That soldier, Tomas Young, nearing the end of his devastated life, has just written a penetrating letter to George W Bush which every American should read (http://www.truthdig.com/dig/item/the_last_letter_20130318/).

The lessons from this unnecessary quagmire should be: first, how to stop any more wars of aggression by the Washington warmongers – the same neocon draft dodgers are at it again regarding Iran and Syria. And second, the necessity to hold accountable the leading perpetrators of this brutal carnage and financial wreckage who are presently at large – fugitives from justice earning fat lecture and consulting fees.

In the nine months running up to the March 2003 invasion of Iraq, at least 300 prominent, retired military officers, diplomats and national security officials publicly spoke out against the Bush/Cheney drumbeats to war. Their warnings were prophetically accurate. They included retired Generals Anthony Zinni and William Odom, and Admiral Shanahan. Even Brent Scowcroft and James Baker, two of President George H W Bush's



As a result of the US war on Iraq, over one million Iraqis died and far more were injured and sickened.

closest advisers, strongly opposed the invasion.

These outspoken truthsayers – notwithstanding their prestige and experience – were overwhelmed by a runaway White House, a disgraceful patsy mainstream media and an abdicator Congress. Multi-billionaire George Soros was also courageously outspoken. Unfortunately, prior to the invasion, he did not provide a budget and secretariat for these men and women to provide continuity and to multiply their numbers around the country, through the mass media and on Capitol Hill. By the time he came around to organising and

publicising such an organised effort, it was after the invasion, in July 2003.

Nine months earlier, I believe George Soros could have provided the necessary resources to stop Bush/Cheney and their lies from stampeding the government, and country, into war.

Mr Soros can still build the grassroots pressure for the exercise of the rule of law under our constitution and move Congress toward public hearings in the Senate designed to establish an investigative arm of the Justice Department to pursue the proper enforcement against Bush/Cheney and their accomplices.

After all, the Justice Department had such a special prosecutors' office during the Watergate scandal and was moving to indict a resigned Richard Nixon before President Ford pardoned him.

Compare the Watergate break-in and obstruction of justice by Nixon with the horrendous crimes coming out of the war against Iraq – a nation that never threatened the US but whose destruction takes a continuing toll on our country. ♦

Ralph Nader is a US-based consumer advocate, lawyer and author of Only the Super-Rich Can Save Us! He is a contributor to Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion (published by AK Press and also available in a Kindle edition). This article is reproduced from the CounterPunch website (www.counterpunch.org).



A February 2003 protest in the US against the Iraq war. The war was based on recognised lies, propaganda and cover-ups.

The Pope's history reflects the church's past

The recent election of Pope Francis as primate of the Roman Catholic Church came amidst controversy about his human rights record in his native Argentina. But, as *Kyle Barron* points out, this controversy is bound up with the complexity of the Church's history.

THE election of Pope Francis has brought many issues to the fore that represent not just the complexity of a person, but the complexity of the Catholic Church. This was especially true at the time the most controversial chapters in his history were being written.

Accusations of then Jorge Mario Bergoglio's complicity in the Dirty War in Argentina run the gamut from full-fledged endorsement of the brutal military dictatorship to his own insistence that he worked to secure the protection of dissidents. Between 1976 and 1983, the Argentine dictatorship killed up to 30,000 student and union organisers, leftists, and those suspected of sympathising with dissidents. Documents reveal that Bergoglio was tangled up in the torture of two Jesuit priests, Orlando Yorio and Francisco Jalics, who worked for social justice in impoverished neighbourhoods. Although Bergoglio maintains that he warned them their undertakings were putting their lives in danger, the Jesuits courageously pursued the work they thought was imperative for the church. After the military kidnapped Yorio and Jalics, Bergoglio failed to come to their defence and they were subsequently tortured, but he claims he later worked behind the scenes to have them released.

Argentine writer Horacio Verbitsky is one of the harshest critics of the new pope. Aside from the accusations about the kidnapped Jesuits, he writes about Bergoglio's knowledge of kidnapped babies during the decades-long Dirty War. Conversely, Nobel Peace Prize winner Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, who wrote



Pope Francis (centre) waving to the crowd after his election. His biography is bound to the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America.

extensively about atrocities committed during the Dirty War, says that 'Perhaps he didn't have the courage of other priests, but he never collaborated with the dictatorship.... Bergoglio was no accomplice of the dictatorship. He can't be accused of that.'

The ambivalent nature of his story is a reflection of the Catholic Church in Latin America during the era in question. In the 1970s, the archives of the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA) describe the III General Conference of the Latin American Episcopacy (CELAM) that was held in Medellín, Colombia, in 1968 and ushered in messages of empowerment, inspiring the clergy to work for social justice. During the conference, the bishops produced a document that criticised 'institutional violence' and the 'international imperialism of money'. The conference prompted involvement of clergy throughout Latin America to change the brutal social conditions they lived under and invigorated

many in the Catholic Church who were already practising forms of Liberation Theology, or the commitment on the part of the church to work for social justice.

However, not all of the clergy were equally willing to take the church in this direction, and many bishops were backing away from the progressive moves that had been made. In Argentina, the tension was particularly acute. NACLA republished an open letter to priests, penned from a jail cell in Argentina in 1970 by the Montonero '17 of October' Detachment of the Fuerzas Armadas Peronistas, that called on the clergy to fight against oppression. The writers describe that although the people of Argentina had not lost their faith in Christianity, they had lost their faith in the church itself. They attribute much of this disaffection to the close ties between the state and the clergy, what they call the 'church-system alliance'. The people were left to fight against the 'monster with whom, as they [the Argentine people] see it, the

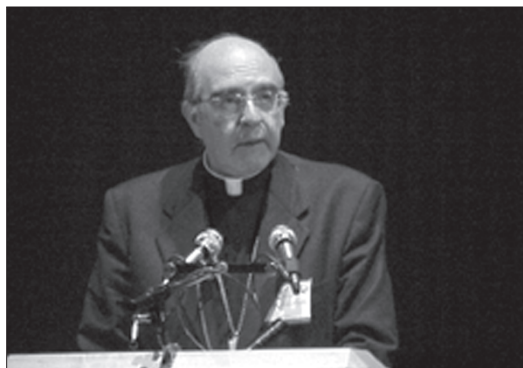


Photographs of some of those who were 'disappeared' during the 1976-83 Dirty War in Argentina. Accusations of the new pope's complicity in the Dirty War run the gamut from full-fledged endorsement of the military dictatorship to his own insistence that he worked to secure the protection of dissidents.

Church identifies', and this letter was a plea for the clergy to join that struggle.

In 1972, just one year before Bergoglio was made the Jesuit Provincial Superior in Argentina, Alfonso Lopez Trujillo was appointed as the leader of CELAM. A conservative auxiliary bishop, Lopez Trujillo came from Colombia, the country where the church hierarchy was most vocal in their opposition to Liberation Theology. He began a campaign to actively oppose progressive religious tendencies in Latin America by appointing conservative clergy to leadership positions.

While the church hierarchy was institutionalising the conservative shift under Lopez Trujillo, many clergy were living the declaration made in Medellín. The conference emboldened many to fight against the military dictatorships throughout the region, and 'Catholic lay persons – as well as priests and bishops – who took Medellín seriously were arrested, tortured, exiled or assassinated'. These people risked their lives through open endorsement and participation in student, peasant, and worker movements – among them the two Jesuits Yorio



As leader of the Latin American bishops' conference CELAM in the 1970s, Alfonso Lopez Trujillo (pic) began a campaign to actively oppose progressive religious tendencies in the region by appointing conservative clergy to leadership positions.

and Jalics were kidnapped and tortured in 1976.

The conservative changes being implemented higher up in the church hierarchy became most apparent in the CELAM meeting held in Puebla, Mexico, in 1979. Under Lopez Trujillo's guidance, CELAM advised that the church should refrain from involvement in politics and move away from viewing the church as 'being born from the people'. This stance was made possible because many bishops had been barred from attending. Interestingly, one of these banned bishops was none other than Samuel Ruiz, a figure who would later be as-

sociated with the Zapatista uprising in Mexico. At the same time that the Catholic leadership within Latin America was working to diminish the influence of progressive clergy, Pope John Paul II appointed a dozen conservative bishops to serve in the region. While the church was condemning any association with social change, they still maintained the option for the poor, in a purely economic sense. The document that came out of the Puebla conference, while warning clergy away from Marxism, also denounced 'economic liberalism' as a 'materialist praxis'.

Clearly Bergoglio's biography is bound to the history of the Catholic Church in Latin America. His insidious comments regarding gay marriage sadly reflect the stance held by many in the Catholic Church hierarchy on equal rights. Early in his career, he sided with the progressives and 'stimulated the social work of the Jesuits', but deferred to the state as they came down on this movement. His lack of will to take a strong stand and do more than fight quietly behind the scenes against the Argentine dictatorship is in stark contrast to the courageous work others were doing to change the currents of repression throughout Latin America.

In the 1970 open letter to the priests, the Argentine resistance fighters observed, 'Facing the reality of a people that suffers, stifled by an inhuman and anti-Christian system, the priest finds himself in an institution alienated from the people's reality, when not actually opposed to the people, and comfortably situated in the system which oppresses the people.' Throughout his career Bergoglio was dedicated to easing the plight of the poor, yet he refused to risk his comfortable situation to stand up for those fighting for the political rights of the very same people. ♦

Kyle Barron is a graduate student in comparative politics at New York University and an Associate Editor at the North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA). This article is reproduced from the NACLA website nacla.org.

US cooption of the human rights movement continues

The choice of Suzanne Nossel as the new Executive Director of PEN American Center, an American branch of the worldwide association of writers devoted to free expression and world peace, is one more reminder of how successful the US has been in coopting the human rights movement to serve its interests.

'WHEN political people have finished with repression and violence PEN can indeed be forgotten. Until then, with all its floundering and failings and mistaken acts, it is still, I think, a fellowship moved by the hope that one day the work it tries and often manages to do will no longer be necessary.'

– Arthur Miller, former president of PEN International

'To advance from a nuanced dissent to a compelling vision, progressive policymakers should turn to the great mainstay of twentieth-century US foreign policy: liberal internationalism... [which] should offer assertive leadership – diplomatic, economic, and not least, military – to advance a broad array of goals...'

– Suzanne Nossel, new Executive Director of PEN American Center, in 'Smart Power', *Foreign Affairs*, March/April 2004 (Emphasis added)

SUZANNE Nossel is a disturbing choice as the new Executive Director of PEN American Center, an American branch of the worldwide association of writers and related professions devoted to free expression and 'the ideal of one humanity living in peace in the world'. The stark contrast between the statements of Arthur Miller and Nossel above is enough to sound an alarm. But Nossel's career path, the masters she has served, the stances she has taken and the activities she has sponsored demonstrate profound differences with PEN. PEN cannot remain true to the ideals articulated by Miller with Nossel at the helm. She is an embodiment of the ongoing, and

John V Walsh and Coleen Rowley



Suzanne Nossel, Executive Director of PEN American Center.

all-too-successful, cooption of the human rights movement by the US government.

Bombing women to free them

Nossel came to PEN after a year's stint as Executive Director of Amnesty International, USA (AI), in 2012. Before that she served in Hillary Clinton's State Department as Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for International Organisation Affairs. Let's consider her time at AI first.

Nossel assumed her post as Executive Director of AI in January 2012. Then in May when NATO held its 'Summit Meeting' in Chicago, AI sponsored a 'Shadow Summit' there. As part of this effort AI mounted a campaign which employed bus-stop billboards supporting the NATO invasion in the words, 'NATO, Keep the

Progress Going. Human Rights for Women and Girls in Afghanistan.' 'Bombing the Women to Save Them' might well have been the slogan.

AI's 'Shadow Summit' featured a number of panels at a Chicago hotel, with the main speaker at the first panel being former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, who famously observed that the deaths of many hundreds of thousands of Iraqis, including an estimated 500,000 children, on her watch during the Clinton administration was a price 'worth it' to weaken former US ally Saddam Hussein. What was such a person doing at an AI event? The same panel featured other female luminaries from the US foreign policy establishment, including Melanne Verwee, US Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women's Issues, who was also a main speaker with Albright; US Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky; and Afifa Azim, General Director and Co-Founder, Afghan Women's Network; along with moderator Gayle Tzemach Lemmon, Deputy Director of AI.

One of us (CR) and Anne Wright, who resigned from the State Department in 2003 to protest the war on Iraq, along with a handful of fellow antiwar activists attempted to attend the panel but were refused entrance until some in the group pointed out that they were members of AI. AI then allowed the group to enter, but, in an apparent lapse of concern for free speech, only if signs opposing NATO's war on Afghanistan were left outside. Such is the forgetfulness that proximity to power breeds.

In a written account of the panel entitled 'Amnesty's Shilling for US

Wars', Rowley and Wright noted that the CIA's 'Red Cell', in a report disclosed by WikiLeaks, had recommended a strategy of using 'women's rights' to sell the war in Afghanistan. Rowley and Wright continued in their piece: 'When we saw that audience participation was going to be limited to questions selected from the small note cards being collected, we departed. We noted, even in that short time, however, how easy it was for these US government officials to use the "good and necessary cause" of women's rights to get the audience into the palm of their collective hand – just as the CIA's "strategic communication" expert predicted!' One has to ask what is afoot when a former State Department official takes over an organisation like AI, which then neatly fits its approach into that of the US government.

A few months after the appearance of the Rowley/Wright piece and complaints by other members and donors of AI, Nossel resigned unceremoniously. A call to AI's national office unearthed the reply from a staff member that the 'staff had been told' that Nossel had resigned 'for personal reasons'. The promise of a return call by someone more knowledgeable did not materialise. Who was responsible, on or off the board, for hiring Nossel in the first place remains a mystery.

The revolving door: A formula for cooption

Nossel had previously worked at the State Department under Hillary Clinton. Nossel is often credited with coining the phrase 'Smart Power', which Clinton repeated interminably in her Senate confirmation hearings to characterise how she would run State and which Nossel defined in a 2004 article in *Foreign Affairs* as 'assertive leadership – diplomatic, economic, and not least, military'. What was this smartly powered State Department like into which Nossel was



When NATO held its 2012 summit meeting in Chicago, Amnesty International, USA, which was then under the leadership of Suzanne Nossel, put up bus stop billboards supporting the NATO invasion of Afghanistan.

hired? Perhaps Ralph Nader has taken the measure of it most perceptively, in a *CounterPunch* essay entitled 'Hillary's Bloody Legacy: Militarizing the State Department':

'Behind the public relations sheen, the photo-opportunities with groups of poor people in the developing world, an ever more militarized State Department operated under Clinton's leadership.

'A militarized State Department is more than a repudiation of the Department's basic charter of 1789, for the then-named Department of Foreign Affairs, which envisioned diplomacy as its mission. Secretary Clinton reveled in tough, belligerent talk and action on her many trips to more than a hundred countries. She would warn or threaten "consequences" on a regular basis. She supported soldiers in Afghanistan, the use of secret Special Forces in other places and "force projection" in East Asia to contain China. She aggressively supported or attacked resistance movements in dictatorships, depending on whether a regime played to Washington's tune.

'Because Defense Secretary Robert Gates was openly cool to the drum beats for war on Libya, Clinton took over and choreographed the NATO ouster of the dictator, Muammar al-Gaddafi, long after he had given up his mass destruction weaponry and was working to re-kindle relations with the US government and global energy corporations. Libya is now in a disastrous warlord state-of-chaos. Many fleeing fighters have moved into Mali, making that vast country into another battlefield drawing US involvement. Blowback!'

Thus did Nossel's strategy of 'Smart Power' play out as she worked at the side of Clinton.

Before working at State, Nossel worked at Human Rights Watch, which has come under increasing criticism for its distorted accounts of the Chavez government in Venezuela and other official enemies of the US. And before that she worked at the UN under Richard Holbrooke as the Clintons masterminded the bombing of Yugoslavia and pushed NATO eastward in violation of assurances given by Reagan to Gorbachev.

Here we behold a revolving door between government and human rights NGOs, much like the one connecting the Pentagon and defence contractors or between regulatory agencies and the corporate entities they are to regulate. Nossel is clearly aware of the use that the US government can make of organisations like PEN, writing in her 2004 'Smart Power' essay that 'the United States' own hand is not always its best tool: US interests are furthered by enlisting others on behalf of US goals.' In what sense can PEN claim to be a 'non-governmental organisation' with Nossel in charge? In what sense can PEN claim to protect writers from the state with someone in charge who has been a frequent and unapologetic presence in the corridors of power?



Human rights rhetoric has been employed to legitimise wars waged by present-day imperial powers, such as the 2011 assault on Libya. Picture shows a tank exploding after being hit during a bombing campaign by Western-led forces in Libya in March 2011.

The subversion of human rights organisations

For many decades the rhetoric of human rights has been used by the West to justify its aggressive actions around the world. James Peck in his superb and much neglected work, *Ideal Illusions: How the US Government Co-Opted Human Rights*, painstakingly and meticulously documents such subversion over the past 50 years. But the subversion goes farther than the selective attention often paid to official enemies and the relative neglect of human rights violations by US allies. He also points out that the concept of human rights that has prevailed in the West over this period is a shrivelled one, basically confined to civil rights. Although the mainstream human rights movement in the West claims to take its inspiration from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it rarely mentions Articles 25 and 26, among others, which affirm health care and education as rights. Thus the fact that Gaddafi's Libya had the highest literacy rate or highest score in all of Africa on the UN's Human Development Index counted for nothing in assessments of Gaddafi. Nor is faintest praise to be found for the many hundreds of millions lifted from poverty and made literate in New China.

Similarly, Jean Bricmont in his insightful *Humanitarian Imperialism*,

another book studiously avoided by 'progressives' in the West, details the use of human rights rhetoric to gain the support of European intellectuals for the Clintons' assault on the Balkans. This in fact marked a turning point in the view of intellectuals toward the wars of present-day imperial powers on weaker nations, a view that set the stage for assaults on Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Libya and now Syria. It marked a sharp break with the opposition of intellectuals to the US war on Vietnam. The important principle of sovereignty enshrined in international law to protect weak nations from falling prey to powerful ones was rudely tossed aside, with much talk of human rights as the justification.

PEN shows no concern for Julian Assange or Bradley Manning

The principle at work here is not new. Julien Benda raised it long ago in *The Treason of the Intellectuals*. As Benda said, 'There are two sets of principles. They are the principles of power and privilege and the principles of truth and justice. If you pursue truth and justice it will always mean a diminution of power and privilege. If you pursue power and privilege it will always be at the expense of truth and justice.' In our time we may identify Noam Chomsky and the

late Alexander Cockburn among those who follow in the tradition of Benda. They represent the best in the tradition of PEN.

The question is which way will PEN go – the way of Benda or continue along the way of Nossel. Today a search on the PEN America website readily yields entries for Pussy Riot, Ai Weiwei, and Liu Xiaobo, but nothing is to be found for 'Bradley Manning' or 'Julian Assange'! That in itself speaks volumes about Nossel's PEN. As Chomsky and others have often pointed out, the primary duty of intellectuals is to critique their own ruling elite. After all, we can most affect our own rulers and it is their actions we are most responsible for. And that is what requires genuine courage. Criticising elites in countries that are America's official enemies is an easy and secure career path.

PEN members should take action

For those who are appalled by what is happening at PEN, a list of current and newly elected officers and Trustees can be found at www.pen.org/current-trustees and www.pen.org/press-release/2013/03/05/pen%E2%80%99s-new-officers-and-trustees-announced. They bear ultimate responsibility for the path that PEN is taking and for Suzanne Nossel's employ. The issue can also be raised at the upcoming PEN World Voices events in New York. It is clear that many speakers at these events, perhaps the overwhelming majority, hold views quite the opposite of Nossel's, as well they should. Nossel should resign. Speaking out in cases like this is the only way to prevent the Empire from corrupting all it touches, including the human rights movement. ♦

John V Walsh, lately become an associate member of PEN, is a biophysicist/neuroscientist living in the Boston area in the US and a contributor to DissidentVoice.org, CounterPunch.org and Antiwar.com. Coleen Rowley, now an antiwar activist in the Twin Cities area, is a former FBI special agent and legal counsel in the Minneapolis field office who wrote a 'whistleblower' memo in May 2002 and testified to the Senate Judiciary Committee about some of the FBI's pre-9/11 failures. This article is reproduced from DissidentVoice.org.

History made as the post-revolution Arab region hosts its first World Social Forum

In the wake of the Arab revolutions, over 50,000 from around the world lend hope to aspirations for justice and dignity in the region and beyond.

Bhumika Muchhala

FOR the first time in the 12-year history of the World Social Forum (WSF), a global gathering of social movements and activists, the Arab region hosted the Forum, which this year took place in Tunis, the capital city of Tunisia.

Through the week of 26-30 March, over 50,000 participants from 127 countries spanning five continents and representing a broad spectrum of social movements, including over 5,000 organisations, consecrated a resounding wave of solidarity in the city where the Arab revolutions first started in late 2010.

Despite the heavy presence of state police across the city, there was an acute awareness that such a free expression of voice would not have been possible in previous years under the nation's long-time authoritarian regime.

In December 2010, Mohammed Bouazizi, an informal street vendor selling fruits in the alleyways of Tunis, self-immolated himself after his fruit-cart was confiscated by a municipal official. His death was a tipping point, igniting the long-held frustrations of the Tunisian people who faced chronic unemployment, a lack of economic opportunities and taxes that kept on increasing.

The rest is history, as the self-determination of the Tunisian people overthrew the deeply corrupt and repressive dictatorship of strongman Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. Dubbed the 'Arab revolutions', the people's movement against dictatorships and unjust societies spread with visceral



This year's World Social Forum, whose theme was 'Dignity', opened with a massive march through downtown Tunis on 26 March.

urgency to Egypt, Libya, Jordan and Yemen.

The theme of this year's 12th WSF was 'Dignity'. Wide banners of white cloth painted with the slogan 'Dignidad, Dignite, Dignity' were strung across street intersections and throughout the El Manar University campus where the official sessions of the WSF took place. The message of dignity was a universal force, redemptive to the sacrifices and struggles of the Arab peoples, and of communities worldwide aspiring for economic, social and personal dignity.

Permeating through the Forum was a contagious energy of collectivity and interconnectedness. Palestine movement activists, Libyan feminists, farmers' movements, political prisoners, youth activists, and campaigners resisting free trade

agreements and the financialisation of nature, for example, all showed respect for each other in a spirit of fellowship.

The Tunisian Organising Committee of the WSF welcomed participants, saying that the Forum was an opportunity for people to connect in their mutual struggles against the 'dictatorship of financial markets and dislocation of society from their communities'. 'The Forum is a place where people who are working to grow democracy, equality, solidarity, justice and peace, and those who are trying to protect the environment and the commons, can meet in solidarity and exchange with one another,' said the Organising Committee.

The WSF opened on 26 March with a massive march where thousands of activists travelled three miles

from downtown Tunis to Menzah stadium, chanting in multiple languages and representing a plethora of movements from the Tunisian Popular Front to Catholic NGOs to ATTAC, a movement challenging global finance.

Subsequent to the march, the opening ceremony saw female social movement leaders from Palestine, South Africa, Tunisia and the US taking the stage, including Besma Khalfaoui, widow of Tunisian opposition leader Chokri Belaid, whose assassination in February triggered protests and rallies by the Tunisian people.

Only women were chosen for the WSF's opening, as a direct response to the rise of conservative religious governments in the region, as well as patriarchal systems and institutions around the world.

Hamouda Soubhi, a social justice leader from Morocco, said, 'We decided this because women are at the forefront of the struggle in the region. We are struggling for parity, we are struggling for rights. The new regimes want the constitutions to be more religious, and we want to take our stand against this.'

In short speeches on the stadium's centre stage, women leaders offered a strong vision of a global movement for dignity and justice that is inexorably rising and unstoppable by the myriad forces of oppression. The audience responded in thunderous applause.

Political messages and performances abounded

In the course of the WSF, El Manar University was host to an awe-inspiring 1,000 workshops, 100 films and 70 musical and dance performances. The workshops spanned an impressive array of subjects, some regionally focused on Arab countries, but most topics were of a global and systemic nature. Organised as informal presentations by small groups of people in the university classrooms, the workshops broke into open discussion where participants engaged in debate and question-answer discus-



One of the events at the 2013 World Social Forum, where some 1,000 workshops, 100 film screenings and 70 musical and dance performances took place.

sions.

Farmers, feminists, rural women, activists, organisers, advocates, academics, lawyers and students spoke from their personal experience, sharing narratives of how they are affected by economic, social and political situations, and what their visions are for a way forward.

The vibrant political momentum from Arab youth and organisations surrounded the Forum, with clusters of young students and unemployed youth gathered together in rallies, chanting slogans or singing songs, playing traditional instruments and beating on djembe drums. Groups of students coalesced in various corners of the campus, listing their demands and their vision for new Arab societies. Musicians, theatre artistes and dancers staged performances infused with political messages before small crowds who gathered to watch.

For example, the Palestinian youth delegation held five events in the course of the five-day Forum, whose topics ranged from 'The Youth's Social and Economic Conditions and Examples of Revolutions from the North and the South' to 'The Role of the Youth in Leading the "Revolutions" – Global Support of the Palestinian National Struggles to End

the Occupation and Apartheid'.

The liberation of Palestine and self-determination of Palestinians was a consensus position at the Forum, which concluded with more than 10,000 people marching in commemoration of Palestinian Land Day.

In the tens of thousands of people present, composing the largest agglomeration of civil society in the world and representing millions more who wanted to come but could not, there was a palpable sense of a new world being born. Also perceptible was support and unity from the global community for the movements of the Arab region that are, despite formidable odds, carrying forward their vision towards justice and dignity.

Declaration of the Social Movements

The WSF produced a Declaration which was read out at the concluding rally and Assembly. The Declaration (whose full text can be found at: <http://www.global-square.net/declaration-of-the-social-movements-assembly-wsf-2013-29-march-2013-tunisia/>) affirmed that 'the Social Movements Assembly is the place where we come together through our diversity, in order to forge common struggles and a

collective agenda to fight against capitalism, patriarchy, racism and all forms of discrimination and oppression’.

The Declaration stated at its outset, ‘We affirm that decolonisation for oppressed peoples remains for us, the social movements of the world, a challenge of the greatest importance.’

With respect to the Arab region the Declaration said, ‘Now, we are at a crossroads where retrograde and conservative forces want to stop the processes initiated two years ago with the uprisings in the Maghreb-Mashreq region that helped to bring down dictatorships and to challenge the neo-liberal system imposed on the peoples. These uprisings have spread to all continents of the world inspiring indignation and occupation of public places.’

‘War, military occupations, free-trade neoliberal treaties and “austerity measures” are expressed in economic packages that privatise the common good and public services, cut wages and rights, increase unemployment, overload women’s care work and destroy nature.’

‘Such policies strike the richer countries of the North harder and are increasing migration, forced displacement, evictions, debt, and social inequalities such as in Greece, Cyprus, Portugal, Italy, Ireland and the Spanish State.’

‘They re-enforce conservatism and the control over women’s bodies and lives. In addition, they seek to impose “green economy” as a solution to the environmental and food crisis, which not only exacerbates the problem, but leads to commodification, privatisation and financialisation of life and nature.’

The Declaration called for action on several fronts, and articulated its visions on the following:

- First, against transnational corporations and the financial system, including the international financial institutions of the International Mon-



Tunis, the venue of this year’s World Social Forum, was the birthplace of the Arab revolutions against dictatorships and unjust societies in the region. Picture shows young revolutionaries in Cairo before the ouster of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak.

etary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organisation.

- Second, the Declaration called for the cancellation of illegitimate and odious debt, which was defined as ‘a global instrument of domination, repression and economic and financial strangulation of people’.

- The Declaration called for climate justice and food sovereignty, ‘because ... global climate change is a product of the capitalist system of production, distribution and consumption. Transnational corporations, international financial institutions and governments serving them do not want to reduce greenhouse gases. We denounce “green economy” and refuse false solutions to the climate crisis such as biofuels, genetically modified organisms and mechanisms of the carbon market like REDD (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), which ensnare impoverished peoples with false promises of progress while privatising and commodifying the forests and territories where these peoples have been living for thousands of years.’

- The Declaration called out against violence against women, ‘often conducted in militarily occupied

territories, but also violence affecting women who are criminalised for taking part in social struggles. We fight against domestic and sexual violence perpetrated on women because they are considered objects or goods, because the sovereignty of their bodies and minds is not acknowledged. We fight against the trafficking of women, girls and boys. We defend sexual diversity, the right to gender self-determination and we oppose all homophobia and sexist violence.’

- The Declaration called for ‘peace and against war, colonialism, occupations and the militarisation of our lands. We denounce the false discourse of human rights defence and fight against funda-

mentalism, that often justify these military occupations such as in Haiti, [Libya], Mali and Syria. We defend the right to people’s sovereignty and self-determination such as in Palestine, Western Sahara and Kurdistan.’

- Finally, the Declaration stressed the ‘struggle for the freedom of organisation in trade unions, social movements, associations and other forms of peaceful resistance. Let’s strengthen our tools of solidarity among peoples such as boycott, disinvestment and sanctions against Israel and the struggle against NATO and to ban all nuclear weapons.’

- The Declaration pronounced the need to democratise mass media and build alternative media, ‘that are fundamental to overthrow the capitalist logic’.

The Declaration concluded by announcing, ‘Inspired by the history of our struggles and by the strength of people on the streets, the Social Movements Assembly call upon all people to mobilise and develop actions – coordinated at world level – in a global day of mobilisation’ on a date to be decided. ♦

Bhumika Muchhala is a researcher with the Third World Network.

Business as salvation

The world of business has become cosmos, says *Jeremy Seabrook*.

THE dominance of 'business' over all other human activities is now established. It has become both cult and path of salvation. Business studies are now a major focus of pedagogy; business-parks invite the playful investor; the business environment determines the supreme ecology, which is that of profit. The world of business has become cosmos.

Business is another country, with its own dialect and its own culture. Business news dominates the media, while experts from financial institutions, investment houses and banks are regularly invited to express their views in the press and on TV, not only on financial affairs, but also on the principal social and moral questions of the age. You don't have to be an enemy of enterprise to see that uncritical adulation of business is in danger of submerging all other purposes, and that the task it is called on to perform is quasi-religious, nothing less than the redemption of humanity. To be 'anti-business' is now equivalent to a belief in witchcraft.

The upholders of a fictive 'real world', slashers of deficits and devotees of the bottom line, preachers of cost-effectiveness and of that tenacious tautology, value for money, are now in undisputed command of the world. It is only to be expected that public service, duty and altruism should fall into profitless abeyance, since there is 'no market' for such archaic qualities, especially at a time of stringency, austerity, even misted over by the crocodile tears of those who wish it were not so, but who find it hard to conceal their exultation in the straitened circumstances and the prospect of a new era of public squalor. Only the gods of wealth remain untouched, as they go about their unaccountable avocations, celestial gambling in the gaming-houses of capital, out-of-this-world dealings in the sacred mysteries of wealth creationism, administering themselves lavish rewards for small talent.

As for the impenetrable labyrinth of bailouts, sovereign debts, rescue-packages, insomniac negotiations in the eurozone that go down to the wire, the gyrations of markets – this is the politics of appeasement, not now of demented dictators, but of a totalising system run amok, the untameable power of markets, against which humanity seeks shelter in vain. As long as books and trade are balanced and the economy re-balanced, it does not matter what other losses of equilibrium may occur.

The ideology of universal business imposes upon everyone the duty to become entrepreneurs, micro-managers, administrators of small businesses; with the result that those who have nothing to sell are pariahs or parasites. 'Business' – a domesticated version of capitalism – has filled the vacuum left by the death of socialism. Commerce, uncontainable, is everywhere bursting its taxpayer-rescued banks and flooding spaces which had formerly been fortified against its resistless spillage. The limits which demarcate humanity from business have been breached, and few can say where one ceases and the other starts: are debt-traps, the toils of poverty, windfalls, credit-droughts and mortgage famines, the rhythms of money, with their arbitrary harvests and undependable seasons, simply an aspect of the natural world or are they reflections of the business cycle? Or are these now the same thing?

Business has invaded areas of experience in which, in a less enlightened time, it might have been thought to have no place. We cannot wait to recast whatever activity we pursue in the image of business, since only those whose business is business are entitled to see themselves as full and true citizens; everyone else is pensioner or dependant. Our very lives demand a business plan. It is our duty, as human products, to 'market ourselves', to re-brand and burnish our image, to top-up our skills and main-

tain up-to-date biodata, to 're-tool' ourselves for the expertise demanded by a future whose shape no one can foresee. Indeed, economic forecasters prove to be no more reliable predictors of the future than meteorologists: they are constantly downgrading their growth forecasts, or failing to factor in some obvious feature of the time, overtaken by events that scarcely figure in their stern version of reality.

We cannot wait to recast whatever activity we pursue in the image of business, since only those whose business is business are entitled to see themselves as full and true citizens.

There is nowhere to rest from this compulsion, the economic miracle that demands that the sick rise from their beds and take up gainful activity, that those with disability seek employment through the healing ministry of business, that the vulnerable and despairing offer their meagre labour to the restorative that is the enterprise of others.

That the expanding universe of commerce is no mere metaphor may be read into the way in which human relationships are increasingly expressed in terms of performance-related business transactions. Our emotional attachments are regarded as good or risky investments: will they pay dividends? What returns can we expect for friendship, devotion or love? Has our commitment become unprofitable? Are our affections unrewarded? This is the era of the pay-out, the pay-back and the pay-off, in the realm of feelings no less than in the social interactions; while no level of human desolation or need is not somebody else's business opportunity.

And although ritual obeisance is paid to the six million unpaid carers of those they love, caring, compassion and concern now provide rich pickings for the pioneers of universal business.

All societies are liable to bouts of ideological madness, not least those which pride themselves on their rationality and pragmatism. We animate our version of progress or development with anthropomorphic qualities, speaking reverentially about the health of business, injections of cash, radical economic surgery, the regenerative power of business, its recovery; and we eagerly await the next quarter's – or next month's – statistics much as allegedly primitive societies examined the entrails of sacrificial animals for a clue to the conduct they should follow. We tiptoe around markets as though in the presence of some capricious deity, calming their nervousness, volatility, their jitters or hesitations. Every day is a day of judgment by the agencies by whose secular, but oddly numinous, grace we survive. David Cameron talks of earning 'market credibility', as inscribed in the holy ledgers of the recording angels of credit-rating agencies.

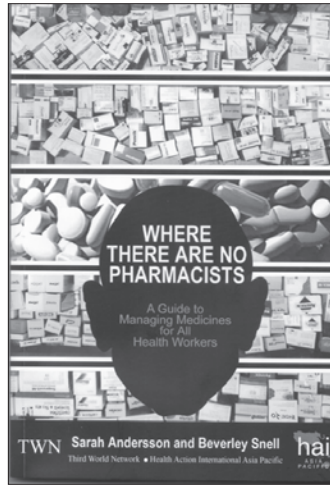
Perhaps the time will come when we look back in wonder at our own credulity, the superstitions of our apparent common sense. Awakenings always follow the raising of aberrant beliefs into orthodoxies. When these are discarded, the apparently good reasons which made them appear inevitable become an object of shame and their abandonment evidence of progress – slavery, child labour, the subjection of women, imperialism, racism; and we look back with revulsion on the broken shrines at which we lately worshipped.

What happens when the business model ceases to function, when the lease runs out on the frail tenement that is our life? How shall we then wind up our affairs? Faced with the bankruptcy of time and the collapse of our bottom line, with what sternness or leniency will the impassive assessors of eternity liquidate our wasted assets and blighted properties?

Jeremy Seabrook is a freelance journalist based in the UK.

Where There Are No Pharmacists

Sarah Andersson and Beverley Snell



WHERE THERE ARE NO

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Though better known as a novelist, the Nigerian Nobel laureate *Chinua Achebe* (born 1930), who died in March, was also a distinguished poet.

Refugee mother and child

Chinua Achebe

No Madonna and Child could touch
that picture of a mother's tenderness
for a son she soon would have to forget.

The air was heavy with odours
of diarrhoea of unwashed children
with washed-out ribs and dried-up
bottoms struggling in laboured
steps behind blown empty bellies. Most
mothers there had long ceased
to care but not this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then –
singing in her eyes – began carefully
to part it ... In another life this
would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave.