

Feminisms From the Global South



Experts and participants weigh in on women's movements in Uganda, Nigeria, Sudan, Arabia, Iran, India, China, Afghanistan, Mexico, Honduras, Argentina and Colombia

Africa

Reclaiming women's rights: Uganda's eco-feminist movement

Posted on womankind.org.uk on March 8th, 2019, written by Sarah Masters (links to donate in online article)

Today is International Women's Day and our 30th anniversary. In the past 30 years, women's movements have achieved real changes : from global frameworks to advancing women's rights and increased political participation to greater control of resources and advocating for laws protecting women from violence, together women's movements have proven they are a force for change. Yet, despite progress, in every region of the world women and girls' human rights are still denied and their contributions are not valued, just because they are women. International Women's Day is therefore our opportunity to draw attention to this and demand urgent action on women's rights.

One place where the urgency cannot be ignored is in rural Uganda. Right now, powerful corporations are digging for oil, planting large scale crops, and setting up new factories. In the process, they are violently evicting local people from the land they call home. Homes are being burnt to the ground and human rights are being violated.

Forced from their homes and livelihoods

Currently 300,000 rural women in Northern and Western Uganda have been evicted from their homes, or are facing eviction. Up to a million women are expected to be affected in the next six years. As the land grab takes hold, oil mining and industrial scale farming is forcing rural communities off their land.

In the Hoima and Kikuube districts of Western Uganda, thousands of women and their families have been displaced due to the development of an oil refinery, airport, sugar refinery and sugar plantation. As big businesses carve up their ancestral land for commercial gain, women are being left with little or no compensation and when it comes to decisions about the future of the land, their voices are not being heard.

Resisting eviction: women understanding their rights

Women make up 76% of all agricultural workers in Uganda. The duty of looking after the family is primarily taken on by women due to socially constructed gender roles. Women are therefore held responsible for growing crops to feed their family and selling any excess to raise money for other essentials such as clothes, schooling, and medical bills. The vast majority of women must rely solely on the land to provide for their families so are more affected by the loss of their land. When women are forced from their homes, not only do they lose a home, they lose their livelihoods, incomes and means of supporting themselves and their families.

There are provisions protecting women's land rights in Uganda, yet women face unequal access to, and control over and ownership of land. Women's formal legal rights only become a reality if women know of their rights and are able to access and enforce them. For many women, this is far from the case. On top of this inequality, there are many cases where only the man receives compensation, or opts to sell his wife's land without her knowledge and/or consent.

A women's movement is growing in strength and numbers

In the face of forced evictions, a movement of brave women is coming together to resist the land grabs. Womankind's partners, **National Association of Professional Environmentalists** (NAPE) and **National Association for Women's Action in Development** (NAWAD) are empowering marginalised women to reclaim their rights and rebuild their livelihoods. By joining forces, women in Uganda can reclaim what is rightfully theirs.

Last year we reported on the impact of Uganda's land grabs on women's rights and how the eco-feminist movement is responding. The movement has continued to grow in strength and numbers since. To date, NAPE and NAWAD have identified 1,500 Ugandan women who are part of this vibrant eco-feminist movements and expect 5,000 more over the next 2 years. Through consultation and collective action, they aim to influence decision making at a national level as well as promote the feminist livelihoods and energy alternatives in communities affected by the land rush. Growing eco-feminism is enabling women to organise and challenge oppression and claim their rights through collective action, solidarity, respect, safety, care and consent.

This movement is innovative and demonstrates how women coming together in movements have the power to effect real, lasting change. Supporting and strengthening women's movements is at the core of all we do and today we share learnings from this project in Uganda, as well as two other feminist programmes in Kenya and Zimbabwe, in new learning paper 'Stronger Together: The power of feminist programmes to strengthen women's movements in Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe'.

How can I play a part?

Together, we have the opportunity to significantly bolster the Ugandan women's movement that is resisting land grabs and supporting women experiencing forced, and often violent, evictions. It's easier to help than you might think:

1. Donate to our **Reclaiming Stolen Livelihoods appeal** by May 28th and your donation will be doubled by the UK government. Donations will also support vital Womankind projects in Uganda, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Ethiopia and Nepal. Matched funding will go directly to helping women who have been forcibly evicted from their homes in Uganda, to fight for compensation, rebuild their livelihoods, and have a stronger voice in decisions that directly affect their land, their community and their lives.
2. Get informed. Learn more about the impact of land grabs on the lives of women in Uganda by reading their stories. **Deodanta** lives near the Kigaaga Oil Refinery and has decided to take matters into her own hands while **Betty** has been able to reclaim her rights by speaking out. You can also find out more about women's experiences of forced evictions in our **Digging Deep report**.
3. Spread the word. Talk to your friends, family and colleagues about land grabs and help to raise awareness about impact on women. Only when people are aware can we work together to support change.

Sudan revolution: How women's participation reveals societal fissures

Posted at middleeasteye.net on July 4th, 2019, written by Azza Ahmed Abdel Aziz

From the portrayal of women to xenophobic attitudes, the uprising has brought simmering tensions to the surface

One of the singularities of the uprising in Khartoum was the remarkable visibility of women from all walks of life. The proportion of men to women was quite equitable, but it was perhaps the unexpected presence of young women that led to the hyperbolic depiction of women as being at the forefront.

As the uprising progressed, women stood as gatekeepers to diverse facets of broader Sudanese realities that were intimately tied to its evolution.

The influx of demonstrators at the army headquarters on 6 April created a "terrain of waiting," which existed until it was shockingly dismantled through a massacre of peaceful civilians on the last day of Ramadan. This occurred when the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), due to geopolitical interests, reneged on their promise to refrain from disturbing the sit-in space. The breach caused a deluge of deaths and rapes that tainted the days of Eid.

This transformed Khartoum into a city void of citizens and teeming with RSF troops for at least 10 days. The modus operandi of evacuation had sent waves of horror throughout Sudanese society, so that it came to describe the Eid as *Eid shahid* (a martyr's Eid) not to be celebrated but rather to be inscribed into the annals of Sudanese history for all the wrong reasons.

A space of hope

While it lasted, this protest space amassed huge swathes of the Sudanese population; orators delivering political speeches could be seen alongside youth dancing to hip-hop music. Diverse segments of the Sudanese population congregated around the call: "Either a civilian power structure, or we implant ourselves here eternally."

Even scorching temperatures could not dissuade protesters from observing the holy month of fasting within this space. The intention of this space was wedded to people's aspirations - but on 3 June, the space of hope was evacuated.

The sit-in depicted many dynamics and fissures within Sudanese society, from the way it was occupied to the manner in which it was dismantled. These were made tangible in the way women invested this zone and their interactions with others therein having a stake in the revolution.

Harnessing majesty and strength

In April, the image of Alaa Salah, a 22-year-old architecture student, chanting to embolden her fellow revolutionaries, went viral on social media (cover image). She was framed as the queen of the Sudanese revolution. Yet, there is reason to pause at this portrayal in regards to the messages it conveys about the position of women in the Sudanese revolution.

Two issues in particular warrant comment: Salah's decision to wear a white *tobe* (a swathe of cloth that is worn over dresses and loosely covers the head and the body) and the attribution to her of the *Kandaka*, or "queen," title. Both elements reproduce dominant and idealised tropes of Sudanese womanhood.

The likelihood of Salah wearing a *tobe* in the contemporary era is remote, but she cleverly engages with a symbol of historical pride, manipulating it to serve the aims of the revolution. Her sartorial choice resonates on the national level, giving Sudanese women a place in society that they once occupied as pioneers.

This goes back to the foundation of the women's movement, where we see images of young Sudanese women fighting for a place while donning their white *tobes*, before the country gained independence in 1956. It evokes the establishment of the Sudanese Women's Union in 1952, echoing the achievement of Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, the first female parliamentarian in the post colonial era in Africa and the Middle East in 1965.

It invokes the possibilities open to other women, giving voice to the efforts of women who were at the forefront of the fight for independence, education and political participation, while preserving an image of female decency.

But while it empowers some, the symbol of the white *tobe* anchors that of the decent, free-born Sudanese woman, connoting belongings to specific ethnic groups (Nile valley and central Sudan) and therefore militates to render women hailing from alternative ethnic groups invisible.

By invoking *Kandakas* (Nubian queens), Salah's image underscores the penetration of Arab culture into Sudan and reinforces a distinct, hybrid northern Sudanese women's archetypal culture, which remains dominant vis-a-vis other women's cultures within the country.

An alternative nomenclature originating in Darfur, such as the title *Hakamat* (female poets capable of inciting men into war or peace), or *Mayram* could have been used to represent the archetype of the strong Sudanese woman. But in Khartoum, this was not to be the case, and the honorific title and image of the *Kandaka* becomes the metonym for the manifestations and multiple histories exhibiting the strength of Sudanese females.

Through excluding some, the image of the *Kandaka* could become a double-edged sword. Nonetheless, it prevails and builds a bridge between older and younger generations. It represents a past that young women could not access under the rule of the Islamist state, due to its imposition of even stricter legalistic control of female bodies (Public Order law issued in 1996) and not as mere social norms which could and would evolve over time.

Salah, by choosing attire reserved for female civil servants and not typical of her age group, succeeds in harkening back to an era when women were making headway in finding their place within the public arenas of Sudan - to moments that are ephemeral and dreamy, centred on the majesty and strength of Sudanese queens of yore. This boosts the morale of the girls present on the site of the sit-in.

Yet, this representation simultaneously vindicates a nostalgia for an idealised past - as compared with a present in which violations against women and encroachment on their autonomy abound. The image could dangerously obscure the current picture, in which young women are out in the streets exposed to real bullets, throwing back tear gas canisters directed towards the crowds by security forces.

Many young women resisted the reticence of their families to participate in these risky demonstrations.

Fluctuating gender relations and the bedrock of patriarchy

The revolution also provides the possibility for a new reading of gender relationships between young people. Formerly, "Prince Charming" was usually embodied in the figure of a professional man who could offer access to creature comforts. In the space of the sit-in, a shift was taking place, whereby young women were divested of their coy doe-eyed demeanours, loudly proclaiming their desire for men who would not have been serious contenders in the past.

At one point, the young women were clamouring for "army men," drawing a rebuke from other young men in the crowd. After the day of the massacre, however, this romance with the army expired. A poignant video showed a young woman asking an army officer whether he would abandon her, as his sister, to the horrible fate she was witnessing; when he failed to react, she fled.

The rapes that took place over this period also served to expose the fragility of women's empowerment during the six months of the revolution. A latent violence, which had been temporarily silenced, erupted in full force - and in its aftermath, the bedrock of patriarchy proved how solid it was.

This was evident in some attitudes that differentiated between female and male rape: the latter, although significantly lower in numbers, was considered more reprehensible since it was deemed to unhinge the ideal of masculinity, whereby it feminised men and lowered their social standing and destabilised their ontological masculinity.

The fact that the RSF militias were the primary suspects in these rapes revealed other fissures within Sudanese society, encompassing class and ethnic distinctions.

Frustration drove some disparate but foreboding voices in Khartoum to suggest that the RSF should go back to Darfur, or even say that part of the recruited troops were in any case not Sudanese. Such discourses were to the detriment of more pertinent interrogations relative to their formation in the first place, and why they wielded the power to spread limitless terror.

Conversely, people from Darfur were stating that finally the people of Khartoum were experiencing the horrors that they had endured. Such remarks could only inflame and give life to deeply rooted historical enmities and social hostilities simmering under the surface that the concert in the sit-in space had not completely erased.

RSF commander Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka "Hemeti," denied the rape accusations and pledged to conduct an investigation during an obfuscating speech at a press conference held on 20 June at the Friendship Hall in Khartoum. He claimed he would accept responsibility for the events if found guilty, alluded to fake militia while also stating that his troops lacked adequate training.

Regardless, the violence exposed nefarious power dynamics, classist distinctions and xenophobic attitudes that have endured within the larger Sudanese landscape. These stood in sharp contrast to the ethos of the revolution, which clearly stated in its chants that " ... all the country is Darfur" - a refusal of the state's instrumentalisation of ethnic differences to consolidate its divide-and-rule policies.

Once the current impasse - that of the Transitional Military Council refusing to hand over power to a civilian government - is overcome, difficult conversations will remain the order of the day to consolidate the achievements of the revolution. This must take place to ensure that the lives given up to uphold its values of freedom, peace and justice were not lost in vain.

Nigerian feminism – past, present and future perspectives

Posted on msafropolitan.com on October 1, 2018, written by Minna Salami

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN FEMINISM REFLECT NIGERIAN WOMEN’S REALITIES?

I grew up in 1980s Lagos, in a chaotic but exciting city in a country which I love, but which struggles with a deeply ingrained male supremacist culture. Already as a child, I took notice and issue, that men had all the so-called “head” positions in our society; they were heads of state, heads of companies, heads of the army and heads of families. In school when we learnt about Nigerian history, we did not learn about notable people such as Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, Margaret Ekpo, Charlotte Obasa, Oyinkan Abayomi or Queen Amina of Zazzau, or the many notable Nigerian women who played vital roles in shaping our nation. We learnt about great men like Herbert Macauley and Sir Tafawa Balewa. We also learnt about westerners such as the Scottish explorer Mungo Park, who was falsely attributed with discovering The Niger, the river which had sustained bustling kingdoms long before Mungo Park was even born.

In 1985, when I was seven years old, Ibrahim Babangida, a man who was then chief of army staff, staged a coup against Muhammadu Buhari who himself had taken power in a military coup. Babangida managed to ruin the socio-political infrastructure in Nigeria; he destroyed labour- and student unions, and implemented debilitating World Bank- and IMF-led Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), which set strict rules for gaining loans. All together these policy changes created a culture of demise in an already fragile system.

Thanks to Babangida’s regime, by the early 1990s, large numbers of Nigerians – those who were privileged to have had foreign passports or permits – left the country. In 1990, as life got politically and financially unstable, my mother and I also decided to temporarily relocate, leaving my father, who would not leave Nigeria no matter what, behind. Although our heritage is Finnish, we headed to Sweden because we had family there. My mother eventually returned to Lagos, and I continued to visit home frequently, but it is only in the past three years, twenty-five years after being uprooted from my hometown, that I gradually began to end my exile.

I share all this because people who know that I lived in Sweden sometimes ask whether I would be a feminist had I not moved to Sweden from Nigeria. The answer to this question is an unhesitating yes. As far as countries shape our politics, it is not Sweden but Nigeria that made me feminist. In fact, I was barely aware of the strong feminist movement in Sweden as a young woman living there. Not only was I dealing with the complexities of early adulthood, I was also grappling with, at times violent, racial attacks that I suddenly faced on a regular basis. Feminism was not at the forefront of my mind in those years.

By contrast, it was during my formative years in Nigeria that my feminist consciousness developed. It was predominantly planted in me by my mother and her close friends; however, also by women from underprivileged backgrounds such as our house help, Margaret, who was a second mother of sorts to me. Margaret taught me so much of what I know about surviving in this world as a woman. She was vulnerable to the harsh realities she had faced and yet she was also sharp, tough and empowered in ways that few middle-to-upper-class Nigerian women were. The society I grew up in makes the foundation of my feminist work today.

Does Nigerian feminism today speak for women like Margaret, who work in an industry with no regulation and few rights? Or is feminism in Nigeria a middle class movement? Does it include the voices and struggles of the

masses of women who do not have economic freedom? Does contemporary Nigerian feminism reflect the realities of all Nigerian women? I will attempt to answer these questions in this article.

However, I must immediately add that the answers to these questions are hardly straightforward. First of all, because the Nigerian feminist movement is not easily definable. The majority of Nigerian feminists have contributed to the movement as African and/or black feminists rather than as Nigerian feminists per se. Consequently, their contributions have had a continent/diaspora/global perspective rather than a specifically Nigerian one. While this is an approach that benefits the pan-African agenda, it means that there is no clear-cut Nigerian feminism in the way that there is a US- or German feminism, for example.

Another reason that Nigerian feminism is challenging to define is because there is an inseparable overlap between the feminist movement and what is nowadays referred to as 'Women Empowerment' in Nigeria. An organisation such as D'Angels, to give an example, an all-female Nigerian biker group providing poor women with free breast cancer screenings, does not explicitly term itself as feminist. However, I would argue that D'Angels are part of the feminist movement, not because the relationship between feminism and women empowerment is always harmonious, but rather because the shapers of women's rights have tended to be involved in both movements, employing the same ideological lexicon. There are countless examples of such overlapping agendas in the Nigerian women's movement.

Bearing these two factors in mind, I will attempt to provide a brief background of Nigerian feminism: An essential task, which is part of the naming process of a Nigerian feminism that is simultaneously pan-African.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF NIGERIAN FEMINISM

Women's liberation – the ultimate goal of feminism – has always been part of the narrative of Nigeria. The very same year that Nigeria was formed in 1914, women staged a significant protest, which the scholar Nwando Achebe has referred to as the "Ogidi Palaver", against both indigenous and British men who had jointly sidelined them in decision-making.

In 1925, the "Nwaobiala Movement" saw women forcefully rejecting colonial values culminating in 1929 into what is known as the "Women's War", where 10,000 women participated and dozens lost their lives fighting back against a drop in female authority.

However, the explicitly feminist movement in Nigeria finds its roots in WIN (Women in Nigeria), an organisation, which was founded in 1983 with a clear agenda to establish an "ideologically feminist movement" in the country. WIN has since been replaced by the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) in 2008. Today, organisations such as Stand To End Rape, Afri-Dev Info, The Nigerian Women's Trust Fund, Coloured Africa and As Equals Africa are emerging as pronouncedly feminist platforms.

Besides, the African feminist movement at large insists that creative expression such as plays, poetry, art and fiction are sites where women can challenge male-dominance as a form of political and intellectual intervention. This stance is a direct critique of Eurocentric and male-centric notions of intellectual work. In this vein, arts and culture play a significant role in shaping the contemporary Nigerian feminist agenda. Artists such as Peju Alatisé, Nike Ogundaike Davies or Otobong Nkanga who use art, sculpture, textile production and performance art pieces to raise issues about tradition, polygamy, and the oppression of the female body are some of the key shapers of Nigerian feminism. Theatrical interventions such as Christine Oshuniyi's "The Cut" or Bikiya Graham Douglas's "WAIT" are also shaping conversations about female genital cutting and a lack of education of girls respectively. Books from authors such as Chimamanda Adichie, Molara Wood and Ayobami Adebayo have similarly had a significant influence on the Nigerian feminist narrative. These are just a few examples of art and culture crafting a feminist voice.

Moreover, like everywhere in the world, new technologies play a significant role in contemporary Nigerian feminism. Thanks to the internet; blogs and social media, Nigerian feminists have been able to propagate an unprecedented feminist awareness revolutionising social relations in our times. The Me Too hashtag aside, there have been strong hashtag movements such as Female In Nigeria, which encouraged women to give voice to the harsh realities facing women in the country; Bring Back Our Girls, a campaign to rescue hundreds of girls kidnapped by the terror group Boko Haram; and most recently No More, a hashtag movement founded by Nigerian activist, Ireti Bakare-Yusuf, calling to end sexual abuse and impunity.

IS CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN FEMINISM INCLUSIVE?

Nevertheless, is Nigerian feminism – to the extent, it can be named as such – inclusive? Or are feminists in Nigeria championing issues of middle class or elite women, and neglecting the concerns of less privileged women?

The notion of a middle class has become a popular metric in a Nigerian context only recently, arguably thanks to a first of its kind study in 2014 entitled “The Rise of the African Middle Class” by the Standard Bank Group.

Furthermore, unlike in the West, where the depoliticised middle class tends to shun tradition, middle class values in Nigeria are reversed.

On the one hand, they are more conservative than in Western societies. Gender roles are pronounced among the Nigerian middle class, and although Western cultures influence them, traditional customs and religious ideals play a significant role, too. While modernisation and economic growth tend to go hand in hand with secularisation in most parts of the world, religious commitment in Nigeria has not waned with modernity. According to Renaissance Capital, 96% of Nigerian middle class regularly attend a place of worship or religious service.

On the other hand, Nigeria’s middle class is more socially conscious than the middle class in the West. It is perhaps no surprise that in a country marked by poverty, ethnic tension, insurgency and corruption, the middle class is politicised in ways that the middle class in other parts of the world is not. For example, in recent years, the middle class has been at the fore of struggles such as Occupy Nigeria and Enough is Enough, both campaigns fighting for the rights of the less privileged. Therefore, insofar that Nigerian feminism is a middle class movement, the complexities of the notion ‘middle class’ in Nigeria should not be ignored.

That said, the best way to answer the question of whether Nigerian feminism reflects Nigerian women’s realities, is by looking at the types of issues that feminists are concerned with in the country. Moreover to do this, I find it useful to think of issues as either political or personal, albeit with the understanding that the personal is political!

When it comes to “the political”, some of the critical issues that Nigerian feminists are involved with include law reform. For instance, feminists lobbied for the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, an African feminist charter of women’s rights adopted by the African Union in Maputo in 2005. It is in my view one of the most radical feminist charters, not only in Africa but in the world at large. Nigerian feminists also drafted the Violence Against Women Bill and the Gender Equality Bill, of which the latter was unfortunately not ratified. because it was seen as too provocative by male politicians. The bill tackles questions of domestic violence, girls’ education, child marriage and sexual violence. It became especially contentious because of the reproductive rights it granted women.

In a country where only 27 out of 469 legislative seats are filled by women, feminists have also pushed for affirmative action alongside issues such as agricultural reform, maternal health and women’s access to financial loans. Since its launch in 2008, the Nigerian Feminist Forum (NFF) has made strides in ending policies that enabled discriminatory practices such as HIV and virginity testing in universities, and state impositions of dress

codes for women. In the cultural sector, films, books, plays, songs and art by Nigerian women tend to tackle social issues such as female genital cutting, witchcraft, ethnic conflict, poverty, war, motherhood, widowhood and marriage.

Nigerian feminists have only recently begun to strongly advocate for liberation in “the personal” space. The culture of challenging domestic roles and marriage, for example, is especially vigorous among modern feminists who use the internet as a main tool of resistance and consciousness-raising. Outspoken and unapologetic feminists such as Ozzy Etomi and Olutimehin Adegbeye are using online platforms to send a powerful and personalised message to young women about the need to question the status quo, not only in political life but also in the personal space.

One of our current leading feminists, Chimamanda Adichie, has played a seminal role in spreading feminism in Nigeria. She has been accused of focusing only on middle class feminist issues such as chivalry and sexual objectification. These accusations ignore the multiple issues that she has tackled. For example, her most famous book is told from the point of a view of a house help.

In a similar vein, the blog that I founded, MsAfropolitan, which has contributed to popularising African feminism, is a space where the political and personal overlap. Yet as I wrote in 2012 in the Guardian article “African women can blog”: “When people ask me what I do, and I respond that I’m a blogger and that I blog about topics that primarily concern African women, quite often they proceed to either tell me about an humanitarian or developmental cause they are involved with or have read about. Sometimes they ask me how my blog reaches women in African villages. [...] I’m tired of people immediately assuming that to blog about African women is to blog about charity work,” I wrote, “I’m tired of this idea that African women can only be objects of pity. I’m tired of the notion that African women can or should only interact on select topics.”

The truth is that African feminists are in the damning position of having to fight back against the effects of patriarchy in our societies on the one hand, and one-dimensional stereotypes and exploitation of African women by Westerners on the other hand. I explored this theme at a later point in a TEDx talk titled “To change the world, change your illusions”. Ultimately, as I argued in an article titled “Seven key issues in African feminist thought”, the primary matters of concern for feminists in Africa are 1) patriarchy, 2) race, 3) tradition, 4) underdevelopment, 5) sexuality, 6) global feminism and 7) love. It is incredibly rare for an African feminist not to have such an intersectional feminist approach, which considers multiple factors affecting African women’s lives.

CLASS, SEXUALITY & SEX WORK

That said, while I hope that this article has shown that especially for a young movement, Nigerian feminism, – to the extent it can be named as such – is inclusive and complex in the manner of issues it addresses, and although I do not believe that focusing on sexual objectification or chivalry, is somehow “less” feminist than focusing on female genital cutting (FGC) or agricultural reform; I do believe it is important to stress that poverty is the most pressing issue facing not only Nigerian women but all of humanity. Anyone who truly desires women’s liberation would therefore automatically understand the gravitas of an anti-poverty approach. In addition, there are three crucial issues the Nigerian feminist movement has somewhat neglected.

The first is LGBTQI people’s rights. A survey led by The Initiative for Equal Rights in 2017 found that support for the Same Sex Marriage Prohibition Act (SSMPA) remains at 90%. This means that only 10% of Nigerian civil society opposes what is a profoundly dehumanising policy. Additionally, the survey has found that only 39% of Nigerians agree that “homosexuals should have equal access to healthcare, housing and other public goods.”

Although attitudes have begun to change (in 2015 only 30% of respondents thought that “homosexuals should have equal access to healthcare, housing and other public goods”), the feminist movement has not been sufficiently vocal about the rights of LGBTQI people. Lesbians and trans women, in particular, face discrimination both on the grounds of being women as well as for being part of a sexual minority community. A new book, *She Called Me Woman* (2018), has paved the way to include voices of queer women from a wide range of class, religion and educational backgrounds.

Secondly, wherever possible feminists should lobby for sex worker rights in Nigeria. Sex work is challenging work everywhere in the world. There is no country where sex workers do not face harassment, violence and torment by men. But a number of countries have decriminalised it, giving sex workers rights such as pensions, healthcare and protection from violence. To be a sex worker in these countries is therefore a professional choice that increasing numbers of women are making. To be a sex worker in Nigeria, however, is a different story. Following what an activist of the Nigerian Sex Workers Association (NSWA) said in an interview: “Sex workers in my organisation face a lot of harassment from the police and other law enforcement agencies. The health care workers are not friendly with the sex workers too.” These are stories that feminists can ensure to be heard and transformed.

Last but not least, the Nigerian feminist movement will achieve greater successes if it continues to tear down divisions between Nigerian women; be they of class, sexuality, religion, profession or ethnic group. I started with saying that it was growing up in Nigeria that made me the feminist I am today. My upbringing taught me that women who had access to privilege were not necessarily happier or worthier than those who didn't. It made me appreciate that women of poor backgrounds would often be my feminist teachers. It showed me that in an imperialist and patriarchal world, African female knowledge systems were always a multiple-way learning stream. We are all teachers and students of one another. The more we appreciate each other's voices and struggles, the stronger our movement. So long as one group of women is not free, none of us are free.

Asia

The Feminist Movement in Saudi Arabia

By Malak al-Shehri and Nasir M. August 6, 2019 for viewpointmag.com

When the campaign first launched, no one would have thought that it would turn into a mass movement.

What distinguished this campaign, or rather, what made it into a movement, is that previous campaigns were made up of relatively privileged women. Almost all of them either had enough money to have a car of their own, or had a male guardian who allowed them to use their car *to challenge the law*. This time, it was a movement mainly composed of women with little to no privileges, for some of whom, as a now-imprisoned feminist activist described, “their only room for autonomy from their families was an anonymous Twitter account.”

It was a movement where thousands of women talked online to each other about their personal struggles, and established local feminist circles and much broader networks of solidarity across the country. The movement was decentralized, yet not leaderless. Veteran women activists such as Azizah al-Yousef and Loujain al-Hathloul were, only *partly* due to their privileged position, able to direct at least the discourse of the movement.

However, this was a leadership based on the recognition that they were only doing so on behalf of non-privileged women. As Loujain herself put it, “I am a woman who has familial and class privileges, but I will not forget the suffering of girls who do not have the personal space that I do. It is my duty to use my privileges so that all women in my country would get their rights.” The movement also produced a new set of leadership, some with known identities, many more anonymous.

These circles and networks worked to establish consciousness-raising platforms, debating and educating on issues such as sexual health, a topic barely discussed in open terms; ongoing work against all forms of body shaming; child marriage (which is still legal in the country); toxic marital and extramarital relationships; domestic abuse; medical abuse, such as the excessively high rate of c-sections and the routinization of episiotomy without informed consent; racism, stateless Saudis, the abolishing of the *kafala* system as a central feminist demand; Palestine and why it matters to us *as* feminists; sexuality and varying gender expressions; an ongoing movement for translating feminist literature into Arabic – the list goes on and on.

Sooner than later, these circles and networks became a basis for mutual support. Saudis living abroad would send in contraceptives and abortion pills to the country, which are particularly inaccessible to unmarried women. The *#MeToo* moment immediately caught on, with exposures of sexual harassers in the workplace, on the streets, among public figures, and even men within the movement itself.

Several public space campaigns were launched that kept in mind the risk associated with visible public organization and therefore relied on discrete forms of protest. The *#ResistanceByWalking* campaign was a notable one, where women would take videos of themselves running everyday errands, to show the difficulty of doing so in high-temperature cities designed with cars as the only mode of transportation in mind.

Another one was the “inside-out” ‘Abaya campaign, which served (along with *nīqab* and Abaya burning) as symbolic protests over the country’s dress code. Significantly, the “inside-out” Abaya campaign was also meant to break the movement out of social media and private meet-ups and into the “real-world”: women, for the first time, could easily identify fellow movement women in public spaces.

But activists were not the only ones to be taken by surprise. The state, which relied on the family as the apparatus to keep women in check, had no clue about how to deal with this movement.

The situation especially went out of hand when several girls – such as, Dina Ali, , Ashwaq and Areej al-Harbi, Shahad al-Mohaimed, and Rahaf al-Qanun, among many others – attempted to escape the country, which was and still is perhaps the only viable, though quite dangerous, path to run away from an abusive family. The state, on behalf of the abusive families, attempted to return them home by voiding their passports and trying to extradite them, sometimes successfully.

Regardless, each case caused an international scandal, especially since the new young Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman (MBS) came to power with promises of social liberalization and economic neoliberalization – the latter of which set high hopes for international capital.

MBS did enact some reforms, but, as per tradition, they were not nearly close to what the movement was calling for: women would be allowed to drive, and guardian’s approval for work, school, and gynecological operations would no longer be needed, among other things. This long-awaited, limited victory was, however, a bitter one.

While we were all celebrating, the most prominent activists in the movement were all silent. It became clear that they had all received calls from State Security threatening them against any form of public celebration or commentary. Only the Crown Prince was to be credited for what they had long fought for.

We were fully aware of the limitations of these reforms. What they established was mainly furthering the limits of a guardian’s discretion. A woman could *theoretically* get a job, go to college, drive a car, apply for (but not receive) a passport, without his approval, but since in *actuality* she still has to live under his roof, that is not really the case.

To be clear, the reforms made a great deal of change, which cannot be understated, but only for somewhat financially-privileged women with already lenient guardians.¹¹ Still, we were hopeful, since this opened up new arenas of struggle.

Surely, the political atmosphere was tense, or to be precise: the country was going through a historically unprecedented level of political repression in both scale and severity, especially after the new Crown Prince came to power. Several waves of mass political arrests and even mass executions occurred since 2015. The state was no longer content with silencing critics – a new process of *istintāq* (to force to speak) came into being: those who are not constantly and properly flattering the Crown Prince and his Vision 2030 risk persecution.

The Ministry of Interior launched an app called *Kollona Amn (We’re all Police)*, a platform for user-generated mass-scale political repression and every day policing that is still available in app stores. To give a glimpse of their mission, their latest tweet at the time we wrote this article, reads: “Be the first policeman, and contribute in the defense of your homeland...by reporting holders and diffusers of deviant ideas on social media.”

Cracking down on the feminist movement was, however, no small task. At least since 2011, the state has been developing its capacity to surveil social media. Twitter was no small problem to regulate, especially in a situation where most users do not have any publicly identifying information.

In 2016, the Saudi government founded the Ideological Warfare Center under the Ministry of Defense. Its function, however, was fundamentally to capture social media through an electronic army of thousands of Twitter accounts ran by real people. The state not only came to have virtually absolute control over what goes trending, but launched a massive campaign of looking through people's tweeting history, and arresting them on that basis.

In mid-2018, the worst-case scenario happened. Several of the most prominent activists in the movement were arrested: Loujain al-Hathloul, Azizah al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, Ibrahim al-Modaymeegh, Mohammad al-Rabeah, and later on, Nouf Abdulaziz, Mayya al-Zahrani, Hatoon al-Fassi, Nassima al-Sadah, and Samar Badawi. Many more were summoned, interrogated, and put under travel bans.

What provoked the arrests seemed to have been a formal application submitted by several of them to establish a shelter for domestic abuse survivors, but that this was an attack on the movement as a whole is unquestionable.

Within days, state-controlled media outlets and its electronic army labeled them "traitors" and "agents of embassies." For months they were held incommunicado, but after that Loujain's sibling spoke up about what her sister went through and some news eventually leaked out about the others, we learned of the horrors they experienced. Most of them were subjected to all kinds of physical and psychological torture. Some, because of that, attempted suicide. The situation was dire.

State-media outlets were constantly attacking and attempting to discredit the movement, ludicrously equating feminists and women who escape domestic abuse to ISIS because "both harm the homeland," the latter by mass murder, the former by damaging its reputation.

Having been dealt such a serious blow, with most of its prominent names either silenced or disappeared, it seemed as if the movement was on its way to die. Every once in a while, however, a new burst of activity would occur around a specific issue.

In March 2019, after months in which Saudi human rights activists in exile campaigned for their release, Azizah al-Yousef, Eman al-Nafjan, and Hatoon al-Fassi were temporarily released, still awaiting trial. Azizah's son, Salah, shared a selfie of the two of them together, smiling, after her release.

The picture was widely circulated, and became a source of encouragement and new hope, but not for too long. Salah would be among around a dozen activists who would be arrested the following month. This time, they were mostly men, along with a couple of women who were involved in Saudi Arabia's progressive intellectual production. Bader al-Ibrahim, Mohammad al-Sadiq, Thamar al-Marzouqi, Ali al-Saffar, Abdullah al-Duhailan, Redha al-Boori, Khadija al-Harbi, Fahad Abalkhail, Ayman Aldrees, Abdullah al-Shehri, Sheikah al-'Irf, Mogbel al-Saggar, and Nayef al-Hindas.¹²

With regard to the reasons behind their arrests, we assumed that it was either their association with the feminist movement since men's arrest tends to draw no international scrutiny, even with two of them being American citizens; or their longstanding pro-Palestinian cause advocacy, which offered national liberation as a definitively progressive alternative explanation to the Saudi state's old and bankrupt religious Muslim-Jewish conflict narrative. Their advocacy is troublesome as the state pursues Trump's Deal of the Century. Or, it could be both, as the two causes, in Saudi Arabia, more often than not intersected.¹³

Some recently "empowered" women, including members of the Shura Council, the Kingdom's powerless legislative body, led the electronic army in a vicious campaign against feminism and feminists. The basis for their attacks changed periodically: they were throwing everything at us to see if something sticks. At first, using old misogynistic tropes, they called feminism a movement for mentally ill women, adding that there is a

difference between women's rights and feminism, the latter being about hating men. Some stated that women who think they are discriminated against simply have "weak personalities" and should only blame themselves.

Eventually, they opted to reposition themselves as the *real* feminists, unlike what they started calling the traitors and the "Intersectionalists."

What seemed at first like a desperate effort to hijack the movement, more recently turned out to be part of a greater attempt to force all those who are left into acquiescence. They are doing so by finding and "exposing" private information and photos of leading women who ran prominent feminist anonymous accounts. Many of these women run these accounts without their guardians' knowledge and such exposure puts them at personal risks. As a result, several Twitter accounts with tens of thousands of followers were deactivated out of fear of reprisal.

A Victory and a New Beginning

At the time of writing this article, we did not expect that the movement's main demand would be won so soon – on August 2, 2019, 1,114 days after the start of the movement, the core of male guardianship laws have been abolished.

This victory came in the form of changes to Civil Status, Travel Document, and Labor laws: The "head of household" has been redefined as both the father and mother, and "non-married women" have been removed from the definition of minors; adult women can obtain passports and travel without their guardian's permission; married women no longer have to live with their husbands; the labor antidiscrimination article was re-written to outlaw all forms of sex-based discrimination in the labor market (which could open up new sectors of the economy to women's participation.)

We wrote this piece with the expectation that it might take us years to get to that point, and did not expect to conclude on a much more hopeful note than was initially possible.

We still have a long way to go. The core of male guardianship laws was abolished but it is not fully dismantled. Fathers still have guardianship over marriage; child marriage is still legal; what is to happen to "Care Houses" is unclear; the *kafala* system remains in place; marital rape and domestic violence are both legal. Moreover, there seems to be no intent to establish institutional mechanisms to enforce even the legal changes made. Notably, our imprisoned friends and fellow activists either remain in jail or awaiting trial. The movement simply cannot stop here.

The feminist movement was the result of a combination of struggles by privileged women, who were fighting against the overarching legal systems that held them back, and mass personalized or localized struggles by women without any privileges, each having lived a life that had to be a political struggle against the manifold manifestations of oppressive and exploitative social relations. Since this movement was founded on the necessity of changing the everyday, we know that legal reforms, no matter how significant, to be insufficient.

In being the country's first social movement that consciously broke through existing tribal, sectarian, and regionalist divisions that characterize most political currents in the country, it can be described as Saudi Arabia's first nation-wide, mass social movement.

This character gives it both a largely (still) unexplored potential and forces it to deal with obstacles that no other movement had to deal with: establishing a nation-wide societal infrastructure for coordination, organization, and mobilization. The movement, we hope, is still in its early years.

Why Are Feminists Opposing The Citizenship Amendment Act?

Posted at feminisminindia.com on December 19th, 2019, written by Pragya Roy

Women and feminists are often confronted with questions about their activism when a mainstream political crisis hits the country. Be it the abrogation of Article 370 in Kashmir, the economic crisis or the recently passed Citizenship Amendment Act, feminists are interrogated with suspicion, and disbelief about their participation in the said act of protest or resistance. They are asked—*what has the Citizenship Amendment Act to do with feminism?*

I hope this article is an answer to such questions and a resource for all the feminists out there, who are confronted to such absurdities. Note of caution: ideally, no feminist should have to take on the task of explaining “the obvious” to any idle curious soul out there. However, since my rage is at its peak and I believe I could attempt to answer such questions to a certain extent, on behalf of all the unputdownable feminists, fighting and resisting against state and police brutalities on the streets and in university campuses, here is my response to the unsolicited probing.

What Have Feminists Got To Do With Citizenship Amendment Bill/Act?

Well yes. It is not rape. I know most of you expect feminists to speak up or protest when, and only when a rape occurs. Of course, rape of Dalit, Adivasi, queer, trans, rural, Muslim women and sex workers do not qualify to your expectations of an acceptable rape case. Unless there is a dead, sexually violated body of a “well-behaved” woman, we are not entitled to your sensationalist mindless outrage. But this is not rape. ***How come feminists have anything to do with an Act that enacts surveillance over citizenship? Which consequently also reads as, how is citizenship a feminist issue?***

Although I believe that most people do or will prefer to consider women (because feminists equal women) as allies/partners/added responsibilities to the “real citizens” of India—men— women constitute 48.20 percent of the country’s citizenry. This includes Muslim women and women from the North East, who are currently subjected to state violence and terror and are fighting through the oppression institutionalised by the right-wing BJP government. They are as much citizens of India as the men, and any changes in the economy, society or legislation have direct consequences on the lives of these women.

Their citizenship is at stake, and the structural-patriarchal apparatus proliferates their vulnerabilities. History is witness to how women have been used as passive props and sexually harassed as per convenience, when ruthless men fight against each other in the name of religion, caste or ethnicity. The state-sponsored pogroms, like the Godhra riots of 2002 led to multiple cases of gender-based violence. The Citizenship Amendment Act is meant to incite such communal divisions and pits diverse groups against one another, in order to lead us to a war-like situation, thereby endangering the lives of people who live in the margins of the margins—the women. Hence, women have every reason to oppose and participate in the protests and feminists have the social responsibility of preventing any such cases of impending state-enabled violence.

Mainstream Politics Is A Feminist Concern

While I understand that women and minorities are poorly represented in the political bodies and spaces, such as the Indian Parliament, it certainly does not mean that mainstream political decisions are not feminist concerns. It is a patriarchal venture to structurally exclude the voices of women in public spaces and in civil society bodies, that paints a picture of a male-dominated and sanctioned state. However, feminist politics constitutes and is

constituted by mainstream political judgements, like the Citizenship Amendment Act that would shape the overall macro-structures of political developments and the micro-politics of everyday life experiences of women and the people around them. Hence, the Citizenship Amendment Bill/Act, even though perceived as, cannot be a gender-neutral policy that excludes or neutralises the lives of women and other minorities.

Even though, the public sphere still resists active participation of women and minorities, our collective ignorance about the impact of fascist policies on these lives will only perpetuate the gendered divisions of labour and the chronic violence that succeeds these policies. The male-streamed essentialism of public policies need to be challenged, and since, concerns about the Citizenship Amendment Bill is 'gender-blinded' or neutralised by both the ruling party as well as the oppositions, feminist intervention becomes crucial, decisive and mandatory.

The National Register Of Citizens (NRC) enlists an array of documents that need to be presented to the government to verify the citizenship of migrants and refugees. Out of the two lists, list A includes land and tenancy records, permanent residential certificates, bank or post office accounts, board or educational university certificate and few other documents. The above mentioned documents should not be read as gender-neutral, since women from time immemorial have been excluded from obtaining civic rights in this country. They were and still are restricted from holding land or property rights, bank accounts and were structurally discouraged from accessing even primary or secondary level education, until very recently.

The Citizenship Amendment Act that promises to "protect" its citizens from exclusion in the NRC list, would grant Indian citizenship by categorically demanding the "proof" established by these documents. And, it is of no surprise that most women will fail to show these documents, as a result of not owning them in the first place, and they will be rendered dependent on the men they are parented by or are married to, to be able to prove their citizenship. The NRC and the CAA is stitched through the rigid threads of patriarchy, which is already prejudiced into thinking them as second-class citizens, whose citizenship is not sheltered from misogynistic ties of their fathers or husbands.

Feminist Concerns Are Not Synonymous Solely To "Women's Concerns"

Women's lives are not discrete, detached or independent of the people around them, including that of the men. Their everyday experiences are inherently interconnected with the lives existing within the institutions of family, work or marriage. Although, dominant and popular discourses would suggest that "feminism is solely about women's rights and concerns", the feminist realm have moved beyond such stereotypes. Every domain of life, be it society, polity, economy, religion, etc., is a part of the feminist movement.

The feminist movement holds in disdain any domain of the society that is constructed on grounds of male-dominance and patriarchy. The Citizenship Amendment Act has the potential to incite a war-like situation, which will be manifested through competing male-egos and absolute disregard for humanity. Such masculinities of the state will only lead to the strengthening of an exclusivist and patriarchal society, that will curb the rights of the minorities, be it women, Muslim people, non-binary people, Dalit people or people with disabilities.

The Transgender Community, The Trans Bill And The CAA

The other exclusionary Bill (now an Act) that claims to secure citizenship rights, has recently been passed is the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill (now an Act), 2019. This Bill promises to grant citizenship to Trans people, only if they can show medical documents of their "transition". It demands Trans people to conform to the hetero-patriarchal gender binary and denies them their Right of Self Determination. These certificates need to be produced by medical officials and has to be further attested by the District Magistrate of their locality. The struggle is doubly burdened as most of them have fled their homes and families, adopted

new identities, including new names and surnames, in order to escape the transphobic, hetero-patriarchal society.

Minorities, within the Trans communities will have it worse, as their intersectional modes of oppression will subject them to more surveillance and state violence. Muslim, Dalit, Dalit-Muslim or poor Trans people's citizenships will be scrutinised to a greater extent. Gender, which is a key category in most of these documents will be policed and, worst case, Trans people, even the ones who have access to those documents will be denied of citizenship of India. This Act, along with the Citizenship Amendment Act demands to trace our parochial and patriarchal lineages, even if we have cut ties with or fled the discrimination exercised by our families.

Conclusion

Creating uncertainties with regard to citizenship within the structure of the nation-state, which is historically male-dominated and is anti-minority, has become a global agenda by most of the fascist groups and governments. The introduction of the Citizenship Amendment Act is not simply an acute change in our everyday, but it is a mode of structural surveillance through which bodies, especially of the people from minority communities will be kept under strict surveillance, only to perpetuate the process of minoritisation. It will throw them on the edges and pit diverse minority groups against one another, within the marginal spaces of the already institutionalised margins.

The sustenance of such discriminatory processes will change the social fabric of our democracy, whereby it will no longer be defined by freedoms, but by our unconditional conformity and submission to the dominant power structures and the government. Democracy will be redefined as anti-minority, the state will be hetero-patriarchal and our governments will legitimise itself as an irresponsible, unaccountable and unanswerable body of ordinance.

Before the country falls into such grave totalitarianism, feminists of India, UNITE!

Two Women Evicted In Delhi For Challenging BJP's Fragile Masculinity

Posted at feminisminindia.com on January 10th, 2020, written by Suchitra

Women like Surya Rajappan, Aysha, Ladeeda, and the women at Shaheen bagh shall go down in history as the women that made thousands of men and their masculinity uncomfortable. Surya Rajappan, a lawyer in Delhi High Court dissented against the Home Minister as he was conducting a door to door drive attempting to garner support on the matter of the ***Citizenship Amendment Act***, 2019. Surya and her roommate, who wishes to remain anonymous, were however evicted shortly after a video of the two women shouting, "***We reject CAA***" from the roof of their building located in Delhi's Lajpat Nagar, went viral on social media.

A mob of 150 men shook at the thought of their strong dissent to Amit Shah's face as he rallied across Delhi on 7 January, 2020. Surya has issued a detailed statement on what followed, describing how an angry mob ran up to their apartment and threatened to break the door down. They were evidently enraged and threatened by the simple act of two girls protesting peacefully to tackle what they perceived as an obvious threat to their propaganda parade. "***The protest banner that we had hung from our balcony was torn and taken away,***" Surya wrote.

She then described the ordeal of the men trying to bang their way in, using derogatory, misogynistic slurs; and locking the common entrance/exit from outside such that the two women were trapped in fear for 7 hours, where even their friends were threatened with physical assault. The landlord, told *Indian Express* that the girls caused “inconvenience” to everyone, and that he shouldn’t have rented the flat out to them in the first place.

Politics Of Women Dissenting

This goes on to show how much women have to risk in order to simply speak out. Many women get flak from their families, are threatened with violence, pulled away from educational institutions and are not allowed to work for the mere act of speaking out. We saw how Ladeeda and Aysha were attacked and questioned by “journalists” for having opinions. We see how Greta Thunberg, a 13 year old girl makes men uncomfortable at the thought of them dissenting.

Toxic masculinity feels an immediate threat as soon as womxn choose to oppose them. At a deep level, the language of politics is tied up with a form of masculine identity predicated on modern capitalism—specifically, an idea of the conquest of countries and power by man, in a world especially made for men. By attacking CAA-NRC-NPR in front of Amit Shah- the first one to speak about it- and the ethos of BJP politics, Rajappan made a statement.

She attacked the core beliefs and world view of certain sort of masculinity; men who came up in mobs to threaten the women with violence, for having an agency, which attacked not just their opinions but also their sense of masculine self-worth. Male rage is their knee-jerk response. She did not try to be “nice” when she dissented. She did not defer or smile. She did not attempt to make anybody feel comfortable. We must not let anyone forget that Amit Shah did not stop, or address this issue, which happened in his rally.

Women are constantly infantilised, it was assumed that they must not know the act, that they must not be aware. Surya is a Delhi High Court lawyer, and the landlord did not respect her democratic right to express dissent. She was bullied for having an opinion by 150 men, who were angry because she had an opinion, and used the democratic right to protest, in front of an elected leader, who rallied for the Act that she disagreed with.

The Home Minister must take up responsibility for this mobocracy that traumatised two taxpaying citizens, and men must grow up to realise that women have their own agency to disagree, react and protest against the masculinity of the state.

Interview: Afghan Women's Struggles against Patriarchy, Imperialism & Capitalism

Posted at komun-academy.com on September 20th, 2019

Women in Afghanistan have been affected by wars and occupation of their country for decades. The plight of Afghan women has often been instrumentalized by imperialist forces, in particular the USA, to justify and legitimize their war-mongering policies in the region. However, women have been at the forefront of fighting both, imperialist and fundamentalist forces in their country.

The following is an interview conducted by activists of the Kurdish Women's Movement with Samia Walid, activist of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan). It was first published in German in Kurdistan Report.

- 1. Can you please tell us about the history and mission of RAWA? What were Afghan women's conditions when your organization was first formed? What is your role in society? How do you organize?**

Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA), is the oldest women's organization in Afghanistan that fights for freedom, democracy, social justice, and secularism. RAWA's founder was Meena who formed this group at a young age in 1977, with the help of some other female university students in Kabul. Meena was assassinated in Quetta, Pakistan in 1987 by agents of KHAD (Afghanistan branch of KGB) with the help of the bloodthirsty fundamentalist gang of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar. She was only 30-years-old. What distinguishes RAWA from other associations is the fact that we are a political organization. When RAWA was found, Afghanistan was under the oppression of the USSR puppet government and later Russian invasion, and Meena felt that the struggle for independence, freedom, and justice was inseparable from the struggle for women's rights. After Meena's martyrdom, RAWA continued fighting against the Afghan Islamic fundamentalists and their international backers till today.

RAWA still work underground in most parts of Afghanistan but faces enormous difficulties. The Jihadi leaders, warlords with bloody pasts of horrific crimes, are in control of the current government and parliament, and have their separate kingdoms in different parts of Afghanistan. Abdullah Abdullah, the CEO of Afghanistan, is one of these Jihadi leaders who belongs to the criminal gang of Shorae Nizar. This creates a dangerous situation for us as these thugs our biggest enemies who do not hesitate in hindering our work and harming us. In other parts of Afghanistan where the Taliban fundamentalists are in control, RAWA faces the same oppression. All our members use pseudonyms for protection and we can never go public with our work. Despite these obstacles, it is still possible for us to continue our political activities in most parts of the country due to our contact with locals and the fact that their hatred for these criminals translates into support for us.

Our political activities include publishing our magazines and articles, and mobilizing women to get this consciousness and join our struggle. We collect and document the killings, raping, pillage, extortion, and other crimes of these warlords in remote parts of Afghanistan. Our social activities are providing education to women (not just literacy classes but social and political awareness as to their rights and how to achieve them), emergency aid, making orphanages, and health-related activities.

2. What is your analysis of patriarchy? In what ways is it linked to the state, imperialism and capitalism?

Patriarchy is constantly supported and nurtured by reactionary feudal, capitalist and imperialist governments all over the world mainly to erase the role of women in the society, especially in politics. Governments of all kinds, especially feudal governments tied to imperialist colonizers like Afghanistan's, see the strength and consciousness of women as a serious threat to their domination and have used different means to stop their growth and consciousness. Considering such governments are anti-people by nature and can only last by oppressing the masses and their struggle, the suppression of women is their prime target. By strengthening feudal misogyny and culture, they deprive women of all their rights and thus cripple half the society and can be assured of no struggle and resistance from it. These governments never take any steps for the emancipation of women, rather they tighten the chain around women. Today Afghan women's situation is more disastrous than ever. The US invaded Afghanistan under the pretext of 'women rights' but the only thing it brought on our women in the past eighteen years is violence, murder, sexual violence, suicide and self-immolation, and other misfortunes. The US brought to power the most vicious enemies of Afghan women, the Islamic fundamentalists, and committed an unforgivable treachery against our suffering women. This has been its tactic for the past four decades. By nurturing Jihadi, Taliban and ISIS which are all Islamic fundamentalist elements and not just murderous criminals, but misogynists as well, the US has practically oppressed our women.

3. In what ways do you link women's liberation to the resistance against occupation?

We see the liberation of Afghan women in their liberation from imperialist colonizer, Islamic fundamentalists and the puppet government. The freedom of women is directly tied to the resistance and revolutionary struggle of women against the main cause of their suffering and misfortune, meaning occupiers and their internal lackeys. We believe that fundamentalists and murderous and corrupt groups involved in killing, looting and other crimes and treacheries have no source of support except for foreign powers, without which they would not survive a day. By raising the political consciousness of women and by exposing these people as the root cause of their misfortunes, we want to organize women in a resilient struggle against them who will be as readily annihilated as they were created by their foreign masters.

4. Afghan women's rights have been instrumentalized especially by US imperialism to justify and legitimize the invasion of Afghanistan. In what ways did this narrative undermine your women's activism on the ground?

The US is a master at diverting revolutionary and political struggle of people, especially women. In the past eighteen years, in addition to supporting the most anti-women elements all over Afghanistan and ensuring that these elements remain untouchable, the US has introduced a stream of educated women into the government and other institutions, NGOs, civil society, and women's networks. This has a dual purpose. First, it uses these women to deceive the world about the real situation of Afghan women and presents them as its achievement in its tiring war. Second, by taking such educated women under its wing, it makes sure that they don't join the revolutionary struggle, thus depriving the women's movement of valuable people. Recently, a group of sell-out, power hungry women from 'Women's Network' met with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar as 'representatives' of Afghan women. Gulbuddin is one of the most bloodthirsty misogynist criminals who is well-known for throwing acid on the faces of women in his younger days and these women went to meet him to whitewash his misogynist Islamist party, all for fame, power and money. Women like Fawzia Koofi, Habiba Sarabi, Sima Samar, and others sit with Jihadi and Taliban criminals every other in exchange for money and power, and treacherously introduce themselves as representatives of the oppressed women of Afghanistan. These women ignore the flogging and stoning of women by the Taliban and point to their 'good' programs for women if they join the government! These women stand next to the ruling powers as traitors to our suffering women and have no ties or sympathies to the Afghanistan women.

5. **Why did RAWA decide to stay in Afghanistan or in the region, instead of moving its activities to Europe/Western countries? What do you think about the increasing NGO-ization in Afghanistan and other countries in the Global South, sponsored by western institutions?**

RAWA believes that it can only turn into a powerful movement with the backing of the masses, and this backing comes by staying and working in Afghanistan, even if the situation is hell-like. People only trust revolutionary organizations that stand by them in practice and are active inside the country. Our experience has shown that organizations that have clipped their roots from Afghanistan and moved to Europe and other countries have been dissolved shamefully. One of the reasons RAWA has lived for this long and continues its struggle is because we chose to stay in Afghanistan despite the bloody situation.

NGOs are a major part of the backbone of imperialism in our country. NGO-ization, we believe, is almost as dangerous as the formation of the puppet government of Afghanistan. The NGOs formed in Afghanistan are almost all through the funding of the US and other Western powers. They are a hotbed for recruiting youth to form the future puppet governments of Afghanistan which will have the appearance of a modern, democratic government, but whose heads will be brainwashed to serve as much more loyal lackeys of these powers. NGOs are also used to suck out nationalism and revolutionary struggle out of the heads of our youth by giving them huge salaries and lives abroad. It is well-established that none of these NGOs serve the people and women and are simply giving out slogans of 'reconstruction' and 'aid for people' to hide their true purposes.

6. **Afghanistan has been invaded, exploited, attacked and severely damaged by imperialist forces over the past decades. This has affected women in particular. Although RAWA has led campaigns to put the Taliban's systematic sexual violence before justice, we have seen misogynist corrupt people rise to high political positions with the support of the US. How do you analyze sexual violence in war? In what ways and with whose support has sexual violence been used as a tool of war in Afghanistan? And what does justice for Afghan women look like in your perspective?**

Like in every conflict in most of history, women and children have been the prime targets in the war and conflict of Afghanistan. They have been the most vulnerable targets of fundamentalist groups that have ravaged our nation for almost three decades now. Rape and other forms of sexual violence became common after the Jihadis, created, nurtured and backed by the US, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan, came to power in 1992 after the defeat of the Soviets. The different factions of Jihadi warlords divided on the lines of ethnicity led by Gulbuddin Hekmatary, Burhanuddin Rabbani, Abdul Rab Rasool Sayyaf, Karim Khalili, Ahmad Shah Masood and Abdul Rashid Dostum, looted and raped the people of Kabul, door by door. Women were abducted and kept in basements and empty buildings and repeatedly raped and tortured. Most were eventually killed with their mutilated bodies found after the faction members left a particular area. The accounts of such women are stories of horror and nightmares.

Justice for women can only be achieved by the complete annihilation of the present government composed of Islamic fundamentalist elements and other US sell-out. Leaders of Islamic fundamentalist parties involved in war crimes particularly against women need to be prosecuted and punished. Once our women accomplish this task, we can say that justice has been served.

7. **In war-torn countries, women are often victimized and silenced during war and peace alike. It seems as though their agency, will power and political demands are sidelined at all stages of conflict, even in peace-making efforts. In rare instances, women are essentialized in a tokenistic manner as crying, helpless victims, incapable of speaking for themselves. What is Afghan women's role for peace and justice?**

For Afghan women peace can only be achieved by justice and justice can only be attained by freeing Afghanistan of foreign occupation and Islamic fundamentalism. The removal of these traitors and murderers from power, and their persecution and punishment is the justice women are seeking for peace, prosperity and real democracy. And this is on attainable by an organized struggle of conscious women.

The peace talks that are ongoing between the US, Taliban and several prominent Afghan figures, including women, is salt on the wounds of our women. The phony women claiming to represent women are their worst enemies and they are negotiating with the most dangerous enemies of women to give them more power and money than they already have.

8. What is the kind of society that you are struggling for? What efforts do you make to realize your utopias in the here and now?

We are struggling for an independent, free and democratic society run on the pillars of social justice, and where women and men are equal in every aspect. The path to this is a long and hard one and it is a huge task to mobilize and organize women into a large movement, but we believe there is no other option for attaining these values.

9. What does women's freedom mean to you and your movement?

Women's freedom for us is our participation in every sphere of the society built on independence, democracy, secularism and social justice. It is our complete equality with men in every aspect. This freedom and equality is tied directly to politics and society. Only a society free from occupation and the fundamentalist misogynist virus, where democracy and social justice are implemented can break the chains of violence against women and accommodate the complete freedom and rights of women.

10. As the Kurdish Women's Movement, we know that RAWA values internationalism as an important aspect of resistance and liberation. Women in Afghanistan have taken to the streets in support of the women's revolution in Rojava. What are your thoughts on the women's struggle in Rojava or in Kurdistan more generally? What can we learn from each other?

The struggle and sacrifices of the lionesses of Kurdistan have been an inspiration and source of strength for us. Their struggle against ISIS and other medieval-aged criminals have given us huge lessons. We know that no force on earth, not ISIS and its superpower backer and other countries in the region, can stand in the face of true resistance from the masses. We know, for the millionth time, that no struggle can succeed without the participation of women. We understand the sacrifices we have to make in order to attain our dream society. When we hear the name of ISIS in Afghanistan we associate it with the resolute and brave women of Kurdistan, not with the terror it is waging in our country. We believe they are defeatable and don't stand a chance in the face of a genuine women's movement. While we obviously believe these things as we have set foot on this path, this struggle is a luminous proof of our beliefs.

11. In terms of women's global struggle for freedom, what do you think is the way forward for us to be working together in common fights against patriarchy and other systems of violence and oppression?

RAWA believes international solidarity with independence-seeking, freedom-fighting, democratic and progressive organizations and parties as a vital part of our internal struggle. Our struggle converges with the Kurdish people's struggle as most of our enemies are similar in nature. We are fighting imperialism and their fundamentalist mercenaries. On this point, we have to share our experiences and lessons so we can better go through this arduous struggle.

Let the fires blaze: Women workers and MeToo in China

Posted at chuangcn.org on August 13th, 2019

#MeToo in China was hardly a hashtag popularized by celebrities; it was an expression of the post-Feminist Five generation¹ finding new ways of organizing within the context of emerging social tensions across the country. Creatively reinterpreting “Me Too” in the face of online censorship with the similar sounding MiTu (米兔: literally “rice rabbit”), during 2018, ninety-four universities were petitioned by more than 9,000 people in total. This was enabled by years of secretive organizing on college and university campuses, in small community organisations and in some NGOs.

While most of the media attention on MeToo in China focused on students and alumni, this post highlights struggles among industrial workers that have also been going on in the industrial zones. As in other parts of the world, China’s MeToo moment is indicative of a developing language that describes and refutes gendered violence as something required by the present system to extract labor and shape the ways that people relate to each other.

At the beginning of 2018, a first-person account of sexual harassment written by a worker at the Shenzhen Foxconn plant² was published on Chili Tribe (尖椒部落), an online platform oriented toward women workers. The article (see here for an English translation) called on other workers to protest.

Of course, it’s not like I don’t know how to resist. I’ll berate the male workers who drape their arms over my shoulders and grope me, and I’ll fire back at those who make dirty jokes at my expense. But can I solve any fundamental problems by doing this? Obviously not.

The piece shifts gears from personal account into collective action, proposing mechanisms to deal with grievances at Foxconn and announcing that a group of women workers would be delivering these in a letter to company management. References to the, then growing, MiTu moment are noted: to Luo Qianqian, a former Beihang University student, who had denounced her former professor’s attempts to push her into sex³ and also to the anti-sexual harassment campaign launched by a number of prominent Chinese feminists.⁴

Following MeToo’s peak in China, last August Tootopia⁵ & Xiao Meili⁶ simultaneously published “Let the fire against sexual harassment blaze in the industrial zones.” That essay, translated below, describes the organizing processes happening among industrial workers and small NGOs seeking to support them. Provocative, lucid and mundane, the article weaves anecdote through reflection on ways that gendered violence might be overturned. The authors conclude that gendered violence can’t be untangled from the exploitative social relations lived in capitalism, and to overturn these relations we must start to talk about the mundane violence that women experience.

Within a few hours of publication, the article was blocked and the two WeChat feeds that published it were suspended, but screenshots of the article continued to be widely reposted.⁷

Serious tensions: China's reproductive labor regime in flux

China's #MeToo moment took place at a time when the broader regime of reproductive labor has been in the spotlight. The policy crux of this is the implementation of the two-child policy in 2016. While ostensibly focused on household and familial relations, the policy shift is clearly bound up with concerns over the ageing population⁸ and forecast labor shortages.⁹ By some reports, China's population could start to shrink as early as 2026.

Tellingly, the introduction of a two-child policy for the majority of the population has not resulted in the spike in births anticipated by the Party.¹⁰ Recently, the outspoken natalist National People's Congress Representative, Huang Xihua, has spoken out against the Party's population policy which outlaws single women from accessing IVF and other antenatal care, and taxes them heavily for having a child. But far from being pro-choice, Huang is critical of abortion and wants to lower the legal marriage age to 18 years. MiTu, as a movement refusing patriarchal power, therefore coincides with a refusal to bear the brunt of reconfiguring the regime of reproduction to shore up future accumulation in China.

But struggles over the division and control of reproductive labor shouldn't be reduced to the issue of birth rates alone. Family values have been central to both 'Xi Jinping Thought' and Hu Jintao's 'Harmonious Society'. For fragmented and brief periods during the socialist developmental regime women were pushed into collective production and yet remained as the primary laborers for household reproduction: the fabric of the traditional welfare regime largely remained intact.¹¹ Today, as in most of the world, intergenerational property transference and therefore welfare is secured through the marriage contract. Marriage is the lever by which free labor, performed primarily by women, can be secured. If not for this, then there might be more pressure on the CCP to improve redistribution mechanisms to appease a deeper crisis of caring labor.

These conservative impulses from the CCP might be seen as an expression of its losing grip over Chinese society's changing social composition. On one hand, the regime seeks growth in its service markets based in the commodification of aspects of reproduction, but on the other it needs to maintain the conditions by which some labor is extra-exploited. The tension is currently highlighted in at least two clear examples: the emerging care and surrogacy industries serving China's wealthy, and also the contestation over urban space seen in the major cities.

For the relatively wealthy, the ability to outsource aspects of reproductive labor is a significant driver of the new service economies in the major cities. Responding to this, the CCP last year brokered a special visa class for 300,000 Filipino workers to work on the mainland.¹² Like the Hong Kong model, targeted jobs are almost entirely those that serve and subsidize the costs of social reproduction, such as English-teaching nannies, nurses and eldercare workers. No doubt in the future we will see growing resistance from workers in these new wings of the service industry, as is already being seen among teachers (see also most recent protests by hundreds of teachers in Sichuan)¹³ and among workers in the new food delivery platforms.

For low-waged workers such as the women whose voices are captured in the following article, frictions over how reproductive labor is organized are currently expressed in efforts to settle infants and elderly parents with their kin in urban areas – something out of reach for the vast majority of migrant workers. Compared with earlier generations of migrant workers, today's workers are more intent on making a life in the city.¹⁴ Yet in the first-tier cities with spikes in evictions and demolitions, affordable housing stock is shrinking. While the hukou (China's national household registration system) still rules out longer-term urban resettlement for the vast majority of migrant workers, this too is showing signs of changing in order to support regional development.

Because the double burden of labor remains firmly squared on women's shoulders, when living conditions for migrant workers who make up significant proportion of the urban population are subject to various constraints, there are particular ways that women are affected. One pointed affect is sexual violence, and this seems to be

one of the reasons why Chinese feminists have particularly focused on sexual harassment in recent years. The corresponding strategies that people develop to deal with gendered violence, as the authors argue below, need to be shared openly as a broader strategy of feminist movement building.

The response from the censors to this article shows how serious the tensions over reproduction and population growth are for capital accumulation in China. But it also points to the challenges faced by workers struggles as they seek to articulate themselves. As in other recent repression of workers and labor activists has shown, as soon as links between students and workers appear publicly, repression has been swift.

Women Workers and MeToo:

Let the fire against sexual harassment blaze in the industrial zones

By the “Group for Giving Voice to Women Workers” (女工发声助力小组)

*Tootopia, 6 August 2018*¹⁵

The time has come for MeToo to move into all those spaces where the oppressed have yet to make their voices heard.

Today, sexual harassment and other gendered problems faced by women workers (女工)* are as thorny as ever. These workers are subject to an astonishing degree of sexual harassment, yet the opportunities for recourse are extremely limited.

In 2013, two Guangdong-based service organizations for women workers each published the findings of their respective investigations into sexual harassment among female factory workers. They found that the portion of female workers who had suffered sexual harassment was as high as 69.7% and 71.2% respectively. Despite roughly 70% of those who were harassed expressing disgust with the treatment, nearly half (46.6%) of those who spoke up received no meaningful resolution. Only 10% reported that the harassment stopped after they raised objections, and merely 1% reported that their harasser was dismissed from the factory as a result.

Even more unfortunate, women workers in China are in a role that is often hidden from view. Facing sexual harassment at any time, they are denied both effective means of resisting and channels for speaking up.

Their stories aren't there to be read: Between overtime work and the household labor required of them after clocking out from the job, women workers don't have time to write their own *First Love Paradise*.¹⁶

Neither are their stories there to be heard: Their disparate social circles and class positioning means that women workers aren't able to jump on Weibo or Wechat to add their voices to the chorus of MeToo's.

Nor are they given the least consideration: Though factory management is willing to install endless surveillance cameras to monitor worker productivity, it is beyond the pale for them to consider arrangements to protect the rights and interests of their female employees.

But it's the softest of murmurs that most need to be heard. It's the deepest, darkest corners that are most in need of light. With the fires of MeToo blazing brightly across academia, the media and NGO circles, now is the time when women workers who have also endured sexual harassment must be paid attention to. Now is when their

experiences must be understood. It is our belief that the time has come for MeToo to move into broader and wider spaces — into all those spaces where the oppressed have yet to make their voices heard.

Recently we had a conversation about sexual harassment, MeToo and other issues with four women workers' service organizations. Over the course of our long-term work, we've built up intimate relationships with women workers, developing a deep understanding and analysis of the gender-based struggles that they face. Their stories are presented here in two parts. We hope these stories can be taken as a primer that will drive more people to overcome class barriers and understand the gender issues and conditions that women workers face on the job.

The reason we speak out is not to simply make a sound, but to forge links. We believe that voicing these experiences can breathe new meaning into MeToo. As a movement, MeToo's importance does not simply lie in awakening womenkind by airing the experiences of those who have been harmed. Rather, it lies in appealing to women as victims of society's structural injustices to become a conscious whole and in opening a new window onto solidarity and unified action.

Chili Tribe: Using Media to Shatter the Invisible Fortress

In January this year, several female Foxconn workers in Shenzhen presented factory management with an open letter demanding the establishment of a mechanism to combat sexual harassment. It called for providing managers with relevant training, adding such training into the orientation process for new hires, setting up a special purpose channel for receiving reports of sexual harassment, and so on.

Their demands were posted on the women workers' information platform Chili Tribe (尖椒部落), as well as on Weibo under the hashtag "Women Workers' MeToo" (女工 MeToo), where it received nearly 600,000 views, along with thousands of re-posts.

In terms of online viewership, these might not sound like particularly shocking numbers. But in the eyes of Chili Tribe this represents a massive breakthrough among workers: The shattering of invisible social barriers through action and advocacy.

Through our efforts, Chili Tribe has come to understand that the issue of sexual harassment is both one that innumerable women workers are faced with, and also one that is extremely concealed.

We are a web platform concerned with and in touch with women workers of various ages, in various cities. In our offline activities, we deal mostly with female factory workers between the ages of 18 and 30.

Beginning in 2016, we started providing free online legal consultations. The majority of inquiries we received had to do with domestic violence and labor law, with relatively few requests for help with issues of sexual assault or harassment. Sometimes we would get one or two, but even then, the reports were more often than not made "on behalf of a friend." And because the reports were so vague, it was difficult to give appropriate advice.

But in our day-to-day contact with women workers, we came to realize that the issue was more widespread than we had ever imagined.

From time to time, a woman worker would contribute a piece of writing to our platform, with accounts of her experiences with sexual harassment. Some described being followed home after getting off the nightshift, sometimes to the point that they were grabbed from behind and only able to break free after crying out loudly for help. Others described being subjected to extended periods of verbal harassment until finally breaking down and reporting the abuse, only to be criticized by those around them for "doing harm to others by making them

lose their job.” Still others described finding themselves in workshops full of the crass vulgarities so-often excused as part of “male culture” and choosing to object, explaining on the spot that such language constituted a form of sexual harassment, only to earn the mocking nickname of “Ms. Sexual Harassment” as a result...

One case in particular left a profound impact on us. A women worker who suffered sexual harassment at the hands of her male colleague decided to complain to her superiors. But the management’s response leaves us unsure whether to laugh or cry. The factory decided to post a notice in the workshop: “Putting arms around each other’s shoulders (勾肩搭背¹⁷) is forbidden.” This empty slogan could be seen as a small victory, but its vagueness in who it was directed towards and its lighthearted phrasing show that the management truly did not take the matter seriously. In place of an effective mechanism for combatting sexual harassment, there was only a blank void.

These workplace experiences reflect the inescapable quandary faced by women workers in the face of sexual harassment. On the one hand, they may try all kinds of methods of redress, like reporting their harasser to factory management or to the police, but the results are far from ideal. On the other hand, the pressure from the surrounding environment is enormous, and when the topic involves “sex” many women workers are too shy to speak up. Moreover, when the harassment comes from above, resistance becomes even more difficult.

What if the harassment takes place in their everyday lives? What if it comes from male friends, or takes the form of a sexual assault from a boyfriend? These are all problems that nearly every woman faces at some point. More often than not, when women workers try to speak up, they don’t have a sufficient support network.

But the power of “sisterly camaraderie” (姐妹情谊) can’t be ignored. While their outcry may be a soft one, women workers haven’t abandoned their bonds of unity or their voice.

Take for example the open letter from Foxconn’s women workers. Although the factory has yet to respond officially with any meaningful steps, this MeToo action on the part of women workers has managed to attract no shortage of reports and attention from the media. As a result, the community of women workers, who are so often silenced and smeared by mainstream voices, have demonstrated to society their enormous capacity for action. To a certain degree, they have brought the discussion of workers’ issues into the public eye.

Furthermore, away from the view of the public, women workers have never relented in their fight for spaces where women can exist. In small groups, women workers sit together to discuss how the patriarchal culture of the factory can be confronted and share advice. When women workers on the assembly line are harassed by male foremen (技术员), nearby workmates will speak up to help. There are even those who walk through the factory campus holding placards about sexual harassment in order to help spread their message, inviting male workmates to take photos in support.

We suspect that all this is merely the beginning.

Green Wild Rose: Confronting the Complex Predicament of Gender Head-on

There’s an “old pervert” known by everyone in the workshop. I remember that no matter what a woman worker would say, this man would always reply, “Yeah, and last night I touched your cunt, too.” This made everyone furious, but what could we do. If anyone tried to speak up, others would say, “You’re all grown and married women. Why put on airs? It’s not like your husband doesn’t see it every night.”

This was a story recounted to Green Wild Rose (绿色蔷薇) personnel by a woman worker. It's one of many similar tales that they've heard more than their share of. Green Wild Rose is a women workers' service organization rooted firmly in the community. Compared to Chili Tribe, the women they are in touch with are generally older. Many of them have already been married for years and have their own children. They're the sort of women that workmates call "elder sister".

This sort of women worker has the double duty of conducting herself as a "supermom" in the home and being seen as experienced and respected members of the community. But it is precisely these factors of age and family status that makes fighting sexual harassment such a difficult path for them to walk.

The issue of gender-based oppression is one that Green Wild Rose has investigated carefully and is working hard to unravel.

In our community, one can find women workers from all walks of life. There are female employees in electronics factories. There are housekeepers working by the hour. There are also workers from the service sector. Our sisters who are employed as irregular workers are especially numerous. They watch over their children at home, all while sitting at the doorstep busying themselves with handicrafts: cutting flowers, assembling zippers, making toys, or stuffing cotton. The vast majority of these women have all encountered sexual harassment.

It is extremely common for men to tell dirty jokes on the assembly line. Especially when paired on the production line with older women, these male workers become particularly unrestrained. There's also an unspoken rule in many factories: If a group leader or shift manager thinks a girl on his shift is pretty, she's his to date. I myself have encountered this kind of scenario at a factory I used to work at.

One story left me with a particularly strong impression. There was a woman worker who became pregnant. The man involved made her promises but, in the end, he was only playing games. Before long he was ignoring her altogether. She grew despondent and lost her peace of mind. Later, she would often wait for him by the factory gates, sometimes all through the night. Other people had no way of getting through to her. Later, I saw that her belly had once again grown big. It turned out some guys had raped her, which got her pregnant again. After suffering so many repeated traumas, her psychological problems just became worse and worse.

Even outside of the factory setting, sexual harassment can happen at any time: at the hands of someone subletting them a rented room, on the streets at the hands of a flasher, or on public transit when hands and feet start to "wander."

But despite having suffered sexual harassment, many women only mention it in passing. They don't take the initiative to seek out help in these matters explicitly. Perhaps, in the eyes of women workers, the struggle to simply survive is a much more important one. There are too many hardships in their lives. They give so much of themselves, both to their parents' household and to their husband's. They're left with no personal space of their own and are constantly put down. They carry the trauma of the sexual harassment they've faced. But since the endless tasks and concerns of their daily hustle and bustle are so great, they have no choice but to bury it deep inside, simply in order to survive.

After all, compared to domestic violence or intimate partner violence, sexual harassment appears almost "light." When spoken out about, few will take it seriously. But that doesn't mean it's not a problem. Simply that it's been overshadowed and suppressed by even greater hardships.

So if a MeToo movement for women workers is to take shape, the path will not be easy. The key question will be, once the taboo topic itself is broached, how can real change be pushed forward?

In the MeToo movement as it stands, we see celebrities, students and various kinds of professionals all telling their stories. Their targets are clear. The men they accuse are of a certain social status—often to the point of being public figures. To one degree or another, the pressure of public opinion can have impact on their lives and careers.

But for women workers, who is the target? If their perpetrator is a male workmate, then there's no social standing to speak of. The guilty party has no cause to fear the impact of public opinion. We're left with no way to censure him and even fewer means to bring him to justice.

And if the company has no mechanism against sexual harassment, or if existing complaint channels prove ineffective, how are we to proceed? How can we establish a system to combat sexual harassment in the factory? When sexual harassment takes place in our communities, where does the responsibility to investigate lie? Can we simply chalk it up to the fact that our communities are “unsafe,” or should we instead be considering a system to change that fact?

Establishing a system for fighting sexual harassment will take time. So does that mean that giving an account of these matters is in and of itself a good thing for those who have experienced them? Not necessarily.

When sexual harassment occurs, it is often perceived as a personal problem—especially at sites of extreme gender inequity, like the factory. When a young woman has been harassed, people's first thought is to wonder whether she was dressed too revealingly. And if an older married woman is harassed, or subjected to catcalls or vulgar language, people say she ought to take it as a compliment.

Women workers haven't failed to recount their experiences, but they have failed to get the change and support they deserve. Instead, they are attacked by the world around them. Their families may look at their coming forward as a loss of face, while others repay their forthrightness with mockery and ridicule. These kinds of consequences are themselves a form of secondary trauma.

Clearly, adapting the MeToo movement to the realm of women workers is truly a difficult task. So, does that mean that there's no point in them even trying to fight sexual harassment, and that we, as a social work organization, are equally powerless?

Of course not. We cannot give up our efforts simply because the challenges are many.

In our view, the MeToo movement is actually best seen by women workers as a kind of example. These cases help them realize that the sexual harassment they face is not simply a personal problem, and that things like this occur at every social stratum, in every sort of person's life. It also lets us see that many people actually harbor supportive attitudes when it comes to calling out sexual harassment. Instead of blaming the woman, they hold the perpetrator responsible, making him liable to full extent the law.

In the course of our work, we discuss these social issues with our fellow female workers and analyze the structural issues behind them. We also discuss the meaning of safe and equitable sex. Women workers are able to recount their past harms anonymously in the form of stories. Even if—for the time being—they are unable to change anything, at least they are able to find a sense of strength and support from our community.

In terms of our longer-term plans, we would like to spread these stories in the form of theater or music. We have in the past used theater to tell women workers' stories of lifetime of gendered hardships, or the story of the woman worker Xiaoying from the Zhili Factory Fire.¹⁹ Everyone felt that, in music and on the stage, they could see and hear their own stories and voices.

These are things that can't be seen in the cultural mainstream. If we can make them visible, turn them into something that can be discussed, then we are already making change. We must encourage these women to slowly make their voices heard and their stories known.

A MeToo for Women Workers: Our Proposal

When we discuss the gender question, we must be aware that it doesn't exist in a vacuum. Rather, it is always interwoven with class, nationality (民族), race and other social categories.

It is precisely in this way that we are able to see the presence of the gender question in each of society's different spheres, and how different female bodies express its impact in different ways. It is also why we can't expect the gender question to be thoroughly resolved on its own, but rather as part of a comprehensive effort.

Therefore, we call for an all-out effort to shatter the class barriers and other obstacles that obstruct our horizons and block us from action, and to support women workers in their fight against sexual harassment and other gendered problems.

1. Support women workers in their struggle for mechanisms against sexual harassment in the workplace, including explicit channels for reporting incidents and clearly defined punitive measures for perpetrators.
2. Support women workers in their struggle for equal-pay-for-equal-work, a raise in base wages, sufficient overtime pay, maternity leave protections (including pre-natal, post-natal and breastfeeding phases), social insurance payments and other labor rights.
3. Support women workers in establishing "women's departments" within existing labor unions, to promote the principal of solidarity among women workers and safeguard their rights. Support women workers in their efforts to form unions at workplaces that lack them.
4. Support women workers by speaking out and holding space for public discourse on the issues they have exposed in their work and private lives.
5. Support women workers and other friends by establishing women workers' service organizations in working-class communities, factory areas, etc. in order to provide women with help and support in the realms of law, culture and health, while also beginning to develop gender education geared towards men.

We also call on the youth who are speaking out online to step up their actions, to build real world connections. We call on the intellectuals who are closeted away in their studies to step into the realm of practice, to become acquainted with society through experience, experimentation and cross-pollination. We call on feminists to reflect more broadly on how women of different social classes can all make immense contributions to the advancement of human civilization.

A comprehensive and thorough feminism requires the masses of women workers to carry out a process of self-liberation. History has already proven their power. And now, they are once again writing history anew. Indeed, it is only through the course of this process, that each of us can achieve our own liberation.

***Note [from the original Chinese text]:**

Broadly speaking, 'women workers' are simply females who undertake employment. But it is used here in the narrow sense to mean low-level workers employed in secondary production (like industrial manufacturing and construction), and some sectors of tertiary production (like domestic labor, food service, and commodity transport). This definition does not include women of the managerial class, or what's often called the 'urban workforce'/white collar workers.

According to national statistics, China's female workforce in 2016 was 334 million, accounting for 43.1% of all workers nationwide. 65.18 million of these women were employed at urban workplaces (城市岗位). Female migrant workers numbered 97.19 million. Therefore, the number of women in the country who fit our aforementioned definition of 'women workers' is, by a conservative estimate, no less than 100 million.

So, women workers' resistance concerns 100 million people, and it also concerns us all.

About the authors:

Chili Tribe (www.jianjiaobuluo.com) is an online platform geared towards ordinary women workers. It's dedicated to providing fellow workers with information on their rights and interests, and daily lives. From a perspective at the intersections of gender and class, Chili Tribe presents theory in various interesting ways and strategically spreads knowledge about the situation that Chinese women workers face.

Shenzhen's Green Wild Rose Social Work Service Center formally registered with the municipal government's Civil Affairs Administration in July of 2015. It's a social work center specially geared towards servicing migrant women and children. Green Wild Rose is concerned with migrant women's health and improving their communities. It includes an activity area for children, a free lending library and classes for various interests, like performing arts and sewing classes. The goal is to realize women's self-empowerment and autonomy through building skills, promoting community engagement and arts performances. By combining our social forces we hope to facilitate migrant women and children in improving their living environment

Iranian women risk arrest: Daughters of the revolution

Posted on March 6th, 2018 at theconversation.com, written by Homa Hoodfar

In the lead-up to March 8, I am sometimes asked whether we really still need an International Women's Day (IWD). Though my greatest hope is to see a day when gender inequity and gender injustice are social artefacts of the past, that day feels nowhere near.

I celebrated March 8, 2016 in Tehran by walking in the streets, riding the Metro to attend a discussion group and reading some Happy Women's Day greetings on social media. In my heart and mind, I celebrated these Iranian women in the women-only train compartments in their colourful outfits and loose scarves, resisting the regime's attempt to control their bodies and eliminate their choices.

I celebrated their incredible entrepreneurship, which has turned the women's sections of the busy Tehran Metro into platforms for public discussion on matters that concern them and a shopping mecca full of women from all walks of life, shopping for an incredible variety of goods despite ongoing pressure from the authorities to shut down their informal and innovative methods of boarding and exiting the trains to sell their kitchen equipment, clothing, makeup, sports gear and other goods.

On a high note, I went to sleep that night feeling optimistic as I prepared to leave Iran on the 10th. But on the evening of March 9, as I was packing, my apartment was raided by Revolutionary Guards. I was eventually

arrested and ultimately sent to Evin prison, charged with “dabbling in feminism and security matters” — a crime that does not actually exist.

Knowing that my incarceration was just one tiny incident amid a huge history of women’s struggles helped keep my spirits up for the 121 days I was in prison. So did the songs that played in my head: The feminist anthem of my youth, *Bread and Roses*, and the Iranian song *Zan* (Woman) by Ziba Shirazi, telling Ayatollah Khomeini that women are softer than flower petals and stronger than iron, do not try to veil us, reminding him that he and all other men owe their very existences to women.

Unified global voices

This March 8, as we remember the struggles that have brought us closer towards gender equality, we also must consider the social and legal inequalities women continue to face worldwide. While women’s quests for gender equality, dignity and justice are arguably universal, strategies and solutions vary widely under a vast range of social, cultural and political conditions and constraints. Not recognizing this multiplicity has undermined feminist solidarity and has prevented a diversity of strategic solutions.

As an Iranian woman, I well know the fragility of gains women have made. I recall my pain and frustration in the weeks following the 1979 revolution, when Ayatollah Khomeini and others in charge passed Shari’ah laws in conjunction with practices straight out of the Middle Ages, and rendered Iranian women second-class citizens. In Pakistan, President Zia ul-Haq soon followed Khomeini’s lead.

These developments encouraged Algerian Islamists who kidnapped and sexually enslaved women throughout the 1980s. They harassed unveiled women, and women working and studying outside the home. A similar story unfolded in Sudan. In Afghanistan, beginning in 1994, the Taliban, once considered U.S. allies and championed as freedom fighters by western media, took the oppression of women to new levels.

Throughout the 1980s, Amnesty International — then the most prominent of human rights’ organizations — refused to campaign for jailed and tortured gender activists, insisting they were not political activists and so outside their mandate. Amnesty also refused to condemn governments that ignored non-state actors’ violations against women. Among feminists and within women’s organizations, frustration and disappointment with Amnesty deepened.

This disappointment, spurred the emergence of a truly transnational women’s movement. At that time, I could not imagine Amnesty would one day take the lead in campaigning to free me from Iran’s Evin prison 25 years later.

But that was during the 1990s, and well before Amnesty’s change in mandate. The internet and social media, and even affordable international telephone connections and fax machines, were not yet a reality.

Determined to establish women’s rights as human rights through the development of global legal tools and political and social structures, women formed networks such as Development Alternatives with Women for a New Era (DAWN), Women Living Under Muslim Laws and the Women’s Global Network for Reproductive Rights.

Advocates of all ages, nationalities, religions, gender orientation and political affiliations mobilized to research, and collected thousands of testimonies of violence against women: Second World War rape survivors; German women raped by Russian soldiers; Korean women used as sexual slaves for Japanese military personnel; Bangladeshi women raped during the 10-month Liberation War of 1971; Bosnian women raped as part of the “ethnic cleansing strategies.”

The data was presented at regional meetings, national and international tribunals and finally at the UN Human Rights Committee in June 1993 that established women's rights are human rights with the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women. The global demand for gender equity and justice is also reflected in the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action signed by U.N. members at the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing.

These declarations provided women around the world a framework for working towards gender justice and for holding their national governments accountable in the process. But even though change continues to ripple, the full achievement of the goals laid out 30 years ago are far from realized.

The North America-based #MeToo and #TimesUp movements are among many ongoing fights against the commodification and victimization of women as sexual objects and the gendered power differentials that persist in ways that gravely constrain the lives of girls and women everywhere.

Though it may seem obvious to younger generations, the ideas of "women's rights as human rights" is only 25 years old, and is still frighteningly tenuous in many contexts.

1979: Imposition of the hijab

As an Iranian, this is not a hypothetical issue for me. In 1979, I saw how easily the limited reforms and modest gains that Iranian women had previously struggled for were annulled within two weeks of the end of the Revolution. As post-Revolution generations of Iranians have learned, without protection and nurturing, rights perish.

In the early days of the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI), leaders decided that women would collectively symbolize the Islamicization of the nation to Iranians and the world. On March 7, 1979, the IRI imposed a compulsory hijab for women. The next morning, coincidentally the 8th of March — a day not normally marked or noticed in Iran — thousands of women all across the country poured into city streets to protest compulsory veiling.

The vociferous opposition took the new leaders by surprise and they temporarily retreated. Over the next two years, however, the regime used the rhetoric of patriotism to gradually reimpose veiling, first for government employees, then for any woman accessing government offices and buildings, then for students.

Ultimately, public veiling was imposed for all females, Muslims or not, over the age of nine. The state claimed that unveiled women caused men's immoral thoughts — a persistent trope in the history of female diminishment and male impunity.

Extreme political suppression in the early years of the IRI and the bloody and costly Iran-Iraq war (1981-88) made organized, collective action for women's rights impossible. Yet various strategies for resistance continued. For example, many women refused to wear the all-enveloping black chador (literally *tent*) favoured by some conservative groups and promoted by the Republic, arguing that the black chador did not exist at the time of the Prophet.

Instead, they wore scarves and '*manteaux*.' They challenged the government's colour restriction as well, (brown, white, navy blue and gray), arguing that even the most conservative interpretation of Islamic text fails to even hint at colour restrictions, and that the Prophet's favourite colour was pink.

In those early years, many women, myself included during my visits, wore the very bright and shiny colour known as Saudi green, which annoyed the regime to no end, but which the morality police were at a loss to address since green is generally considered the colour of Islam. Within a few years, women started to appear in public in other bright colours.

The hijab was also intended by the regime to demonstrate national pride in opposition to the alleged Western hedonism of fashion popularized by the previous government. Iranian women continued to subvert the regime's intentions by styling "traditional" attire in new ways, donning bright-coloured ethnic patterns that nevertheless completely conformed to Islamic codes of modesty.

Thus the morality police and other state agents had no easy justification for arresting women for dress-code violations, and tactics for expressing agency and opposition by this first generation of women living under the IRI continued.

Daughters of the revolution

Over time, among many demographics, successive generations of girls born and raised in the IRI have worn increasingly shorter and tighter tunics over their leggings; their scarves have become ever smaller and looser. Older women, claiming as a result of age to no longer be seductive, have allowed their head coverings to slip lower as they moved through their cities and towns going about daily business.

Despite the state's investment of massive resources to employ hundreds of thousands of paid and volunteer morality police, and almost 40 years of school curricula designed to inculcate "Islamic" values as defined by the regime, the regime has not accomplished its goals.

The world has been surprised recently by a new wave of women's activism in Iran. Bareheaded Iranian women climb on platforms and benches in public spaces, white scarves tied to the ends of poles, waving their hijab flags to protest compulsory veiling.

Alone and silent, the women can hardly be charged with mobilizing against the state or disturbing the peace — the usual justifications for arresting demonstrators. While some have been arrested for baring their heads in public, often the authorities are generally looking away to avoid escalating tension, drawing attention to the women and fuelling the movement.

But videos and images of these actions are shared widely on social media, bringing a new sense of empowerment to women in Iran and drawing increasing interest from media elsewhere.

The young protesters are being called "daughters of the revolution." The movement has taken the regime by surprise; there has been no coherent response and the number of women making flags of their headscarves in public spaces is increasing. There is no organized, central orchestration of these actions, though they have attracted many supporters.

Rather, we see an organic civil movement manifesting the widespread dissatisfaction of large segments of both the male and female population, including many women who will wear the veil regardless but object to the compulsory hijab.

There has been at least one instance of a woman in full chador climbing onto a platform on a busy street and waving a scarf to protest her lack of bodily autonomy. The struggle is not about a piece of cloth on a woman's head, it is about the gender politics that cloth symbolizes, and its use to silently and broadly communicate a rejection of state control over women's bodies.

The political aspect of the struggle over the veil can be perplexing to outsiders, who wonder why some groups of women in Turkey and Europe fight for the right to wear the veil while in Iran many women — including some devout women — have fought for almost four decades for the right to remove their veils. In all cases, women are demanding state recognition of bodily autonomy as an essential step to recognition of their full personhood and citizenry rights.

And so, I continue to both protest and celebrate on International Women's Day.

We need this day of conscious connection to the long, sometimes violent history of women's struggles for personhood; a day to reflect on the rights we have gained; and a day to recognize the vigilance required to retain those rights — rights women of many nations and contexts have yet to achieve. This I know from personal experience.

The 8th of March is a day for global, collective reflection on that history and on the conditions we must continue to challenge that create barriers to women's full, free and fearless participation in all facets of human social life.

Iranian feminists 'are engaged in a global conversation'

Posted on March 7th, 2018 at dw.com, interview by Keivandokht Ghahari

What can women's rights activists in the West learn from the struggle of feminist movements in Iran? DW spoke with researcher Janet Bauer, who has extensively studied women's issues in different cultural contexts.

DW: As an anthropologist who lived in Iran before the 1979 revolution and studied women's issues there, what first drew you to the country?

Janet Bauer: As a student I traveled to the Middle East and I was struck by the contrast across different Muslim-majority societies. I wanted to understand more about the diversity of traditions and practices across the Muslim world, but particularly how this affected women. I chose Iran because of its rich cultural diversity and history.

What has your research indicated about the difference between women in pre-revolutionary Iran and today?

In pre-revolutionary Iran, women had access to all kinds of new information. I noticed that even working-class women in the provinces participated in the circulation of new ideas and new practices.

It was my experience that women from all classes and locations had aspirations for themselves and their children, but not all women were in the right circumstance to access education, to travel or to have a profession. I saw that in villages or in working-class areas of Iran, women had ways of circumventing or going around the social rules or limitations by pressuring their families. Then with urban migration, women found those traditional means of achieving their goals were no longer as effective.

Young women today have more access to education and information than earlier generations did. At the same time in Iran, remnants of patriarchy and male privilege remain obstacles to young women achieving their goals. And I know that men often struggle to accept women as equals in public spaces, either socially or professionally, without objectifying women or demeaning them.

What can you tell us about different forms of protest from Iranian women?

As it has become more difficult to sustain organized efforts in Iran towards achieving gender equity, women's protests have moved toward small public actions like sitting on the subway or moving one's way freely on the street.

Historically across different cultures, actions like this are met with resistance. But with some persistence, women in many places have been able to increase their legal and political positions by engaging in individual acts of resistance.

Unfortunately, I think that the social retribution or public shaming that young women encounter in taking public action against gender inequality will also dissuade many of them who might want to join, but are reluctant because of social and legal consequences.

How do educational institutions affect gender equality issues in different cultural contexts?

I have focused a lot of attention on voluntary organizations and informal educational programs that provide women access to information they need to assert themselves. In Iran, the importance of informal educational settings, as well as formal institutions, was evident before the revolution.

I saw that women coming from provinces and resettling in cities often learned from other family members or women's meetings in the cities, attending literacy classes or joining women's organizations in Iran at that time.

Looking at refugee women from many places in the world, I have found that, contrary to the perceptions that people in the West might have, they are not passive. They are strong advocates for themselves and their families. Given the right tools, they will continue to learn and assert themselves.

How do women's movements in different countries influence each other?

Historically, women's rights activists, including activists in Iran, were in communication with each other, through conferences, direct communication or reading each other's work.

I think that women's movements in many different societies have been entangled in each other's histories and have affected each other in different ways.

However, women approach activism from their own cultural experience. There are many misperceptions among women's rights activists in terms of nationality, class background, ethnicity, race and education.

These are still obstacles that women's movements across the globe need to overcome in communicating with each other. With respect to Iranian women's movement, I see a lot of room for work across generations and communicating more with each other to create a broader rights movement for Iranian women.

What is the future of the Iranian women's rights movement?

I want to argue that we should view the Iranian movement, or "non-movement," as trans-local. Women inside and outside Iran are situated globally in terms of their desires and their engagements with women's freedom and choice.

I am using Iranian scholar Assef Bayat's definition about the Iranian women's movement as a "non-movement" right now — as there is no centrally organized women's movement. I am making an argument

about seeing the movement as trans-local, to include young Iranian women who are already looking outward or accessing information outside of Iran.

Through social media, women's rights activists inside and outside of Iran are engaged in a global conversation and have information about what is happening around the world about women's issues and struggles.

Some young women I have talked to mentioned that in trying to cooperate with older generations of Iranian activists, they feel perhaps that they have less in common, or they are less informed. I think this calls for more intergenerational dialogue on women's empowerment and emancipation among Iranian women's rights activists.

Janet Bauer is an ethnologist and an associate professor of international studies at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Bauer has researched Iranian women's rights movements for over 40 years.

Latin America

“Un Violador En Tu Camino” and the Virality of Feminist Protest

Posted on December 27, 2019 at nacla.org, written by Verónica Dávila and Marisol LeBrón

How does a song about the ubiquity of sexual and gendered violence perpetrated by the state against women become an earworm?

On November 25, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, hundreds of women gathered around the Chilean capital of Santiago to denounce gendered violence. The women danced to a synchronized choreography while declaring with one voice, “*¡Y la culpa no era mía, ni dónde estaba ni cómo vestía!*” (And it was not my fault, or where I was, or how I was dressed!) Shifting the blame away from women who experience sexual violence and onto the state, they pointed to functionaries such as police, judges, and the president declaring, “*¡El violador eres tú!*” (The rapist is you!) Pumping their fists in the air the women chanted, “*¡El estado opresor es un macho violador!*” (The oppressive state is a male rapist!). The protest, named “*Un Violador en tu camino*,” went viral.

The performance was the brainchild of *lastesis*, a feminist collective founded by Dafne Valdés, Paula Cometa, Sibila Sotomayor, and Lea Cáceres, four women from Valparaíso, Chile. According to the founders, the collective uses performance in order to translate feminist theories to the public, such as those of anthropologist Rita Segato, whose work on sexual violence as a political phenomenon inspired “Un violador en tu camino,” and Marxist feminist Silvia Federici. In addition to being a form of popular pedagogy that uses performance to make feminist theory more accessible, “Un violador en tu Camino” speaks to the violence that women participating in the Chilean anti-austerity protests encounter at the hands of the police. They wear blindfolds as a nod to the widespread blinding of protesters. At one point, the performers squat down to mimic the stance women are forced to assume upon arrest. “During the protests there exists the possibility that the police will torture you, that they strip you naked or they rape you,” the members of *lastesis* explain. Indeed, Human Rights Watch has documented widespread police abuse, including sexual assault, during the Chilean protests against austerity.

Although the song speaks to the particularities of gendered violence arising from the recent protests in Chile, the song has struck a chord around the globe, spawning performances in Peru, the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Spain, France, Germany, England, Mexico, Lebanon, and India, just to name a few. Recently, women from the Republican People’s Party (CHP) performed a rendition of the song in the Turkish parliament, banging on their desks and holding pictures of 20 victims of femicide while denouncing gendered violence as well as widespread political repression. The song and accompanying performances have become viral sensations with videos getting millions of views on various media platforms. Congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez recently tweeted about the performances and declared her solidarity with feminists in Chile. As the performance started to circulate like wildfire, one Twitter user joked, “Confirm that you all also have ‘y la culpa no era mía, ni dónde estaba ni como vestía’ stuck in your heads,” while another said, “If I don’t hear “El Violador Eres Tu” w that Pitbull beat under it at the club before the year is out I’m gonna riot.” How does a song about the ubiquity of sexual and gendered violence perpetrated by the state against women become an earworm?

The answer is simple: “Un violador en tu camino” has gone viral and become a global phenomenon because violence against women is a global phenomenon. The song is ubiquitous because harassment, exploitation, rape, and other forms of violence against women are ubiquitous. The virality of “Un violador en tu camino” is not only about solidarity with the people of Chile, and especially Chilean women, as they confront a brutal neoliberal and increasingly authoritarian state, but also indexes the key demands and concerns of a transnational feminist movement that emerges from and explicitly centers the Global South. The catchiness of the song and the emphasis on public performance is not a mark of frivolity but rather a commitment to a popular pedagogy and praxis that seeks to educate the public and reveal the often invisible ways that women are globally made vulnerable. The song and performance position gendered and sexual violence not just as something that happens at the hands of individuals, but as something that the state actively facilitates and condones. “Un violador en tu camino” points the finger at the state for its role in brutalizing women and promoting policies and ideologies that accelerate their premature deaths.

Similar to how the performance of “Un violador en tu camino” intervenes in public spaces, forcing passersby to confront the violence that women endure, the virality of the recorded videos causes it to erupt in social media feeds, making users engage with the spectacle of protest. “Un violador en tu camino” went viral not only through the circulation of videos but also through memes and social media repetition. Following the tradition of comic strips, banners, graffiti, and other forms of protest art, this year’s global protests have used memes not only to make light of detractors and satirize tyrannical leaders and politicians, but to offer pedagogical lessons. Global alt-right and fascist groups have long used memes to mock and undermine leftist and liberal demands. Despite of—and possibly, due to—this, young activists, amongst them feminists, have re-politicized memes as another form of engagement that, beyond showing discontent, strengthens the work of protesters on the ground and counters the disparagement produced by conservative groups. In the case of the Chilean feminist protests, the memes related to “Un violador en tu camino,” which often remix the song, remark on the infectiousness of the chant and transform it into an object of popular culture.

On social media, women have also broken down the lyrics in order to share moments when they have experienced sexual violence, sharing their ages, where they were, and what they were wearing in order to challenge the idea that the abuse they suffered was somehow their responsibility. The strategy of copy and pasting the lyrics in order to share these experiences and say “me too” creates a sense of solidarity and reminds women who have experienced sexual violence that they are not alone. Social media’s adaptation of “Un violador en tu camino” becomes a mode for resignifying norms around how gendered and sexual violence are conceptualized: Rather than a private problem of morality and comportment that is shameful and must remain hidden, it is a problem of a state apparatus that participates in and facilitates violence against women at a variety of scales that must be confronted in the open. This resignification on social media becomes a skillful strategy that places the song and its message into wider circulation. If memes are by definition a continuous hijacking of ideas and content in a way that makes them recognizable and instantly relatable, we can read the viralization of “Un violador en tu camino” in Chile and other sites around the globe as a feminist appropriation of protest performances that reframes and enhances the original discourse to amplify local struggles.

In Puerto Rico, for instance, feminists have capitalized on the virality of “Un violador en tu camino” in order to bring attention to the ongoing local struggle against femicides and colonial exploitation and to advocate for education with a gender perspective. At least three performances have taken place in different sites of San Juan, including in front of the Capitol building and on Calle Fortaleza, the street leading to the Governor’s Mansion where thousands of protesters gathered to demand #RickyRenuncia during the summer of 2019. Like their Chilean counterparts, these performances worked to reorient the narrative about sexual and gender-based violence from an interpersonal one to one of state violence. The first performance, organized by The Colectivo Educativo por la Perspectiva de Género (CEPG) took place on November 29, and implicated Governor Wanda Vázquez, the Senate, and U.S colonialism as culprits in the perpetuation of violence against women by adding lyrics specific to the Puerto Rican context: “**¡Son los puercos, es el Senado, es la colonia, es Wanda Vázquez. El Estado opresor es un macho violador!**” (It’s the pigs, it’s the Senate, it’s the colony, it’s Wanda Vázquez. The oppressive state is a male rapist!)

During the most recent iterations, which were organized by the choreographer Petra Brava and performed on December 20, protesters used the lyrics to address collaboration between government and religious organizations to silence discussions of gender and sexual difference and block education with a gender perspective. Together, the state and religious conservatives create policies and norms that devalue the lives of women: “**La culpa es del silencio y una mala educación, la culpa es del gobierno, las iglesias y su infierno.**” (The silence and bad education, the government, the churches and their hell, are to blame.) Beyond the added lyrics, these Puerto Rican performances connect the Chilean women’s embodied articulations of violence with long-standing feminist struggles in the archipelago through specific public usages of the body. These adaptations of “Un violador en tu camino” are particularly poignant as they come after the release of a report implicating the police and local government in the high rate of femicides in Puerto Rico.

The performance has spread throughout the archipelago have integrated popular Caribbean rhythms such as bomba, plena, and reggaetón into these actions of public pedagogy and activism. Some smaller performances have incorporated traditional Puerto Rican plena music, which has become a staple of recent feminist protests thanks to the musical collective Plena Combativa. The December performances in front of the Capitol and governor’s mansion utilized bomba music, an Afro-Puerto Rican musical tradition with deep historical connections to anti-racist activism. This musical detail acknowledges the interconnectedness of feminist struggles with racial and class ones. After the recent performances, women have danced and moved their bodies to reggaeton as a way to lay claim to public space and make demands on the state. This “perreo combativo,” or combative reggaeton dance, is now famous for being one of the unique ways in which Puerto Ricans demanded the former governor’s resignation, and further ties the feminist chant to larger protests against corruption and colonialism taking place in Puerto Rico. But incorporating these dances also amplify the original chant’s denunciation of rape culture and victim blaming by enacting women’s joy and pleasure through Afro-Caribbean music. The performances provide Puerto Rican feminists with an opportunity to articulate dissent and defiance

by arranging their bodies in both choreographed and extemporaneous gestures that weave together a wide range of social and political movements.

In the initial Puerto Rican adaptation of “Un violador en tu camino,” CEPG altered the original concluding lines from a critique of the “*carabineros*,” or Chilean police, to one aimed at girls who might see the performance or hear the song: “*Duerme tranquila, niña inocente, sin preocuparte del charlatán, que por tus sueños, dulce y sonriente, donde te encuentres las feministas vamos a luchar.*” (Sleep peacefully, innocent girl, without worrying about the charlatan, because wherever you are, for your sweet dreams, us feminists will fight.) The adaptations and virality of “Un violador en tu camino” circulate not only as a demand for accountability from the state but as a promise to women and girls that together feminists will fight for a future free from gendered and sexual violence. The virality of “Un violador en tu camino” has benefited local feminist activism worldwide by placing regional groups under the public eye. The demands of feminists from the Global South can gain strength not only through the symbolic solidarity that these assemblages provide, but by calling attention to the specific structural conditions that affect women, causing the performance to resonate in the first place.

Machista Media Get it Wrong on Feminist Protests in Mexico (Interview)

Posted August 26, 2019 on nacla.org

As Mexican activists protest injustice in cases of gendered violence, a new collective criticizes the media’s failures to adequately cover violence against women and urges newsrooms to adopt a gender perspective in reporting on feminist issues

Women in Mexico protesting the alleged rape of a 17-year-old by four police officers and authorities’ inaction in the face of rampant gender violence have begun to call out another cog in patriarchal machine fueling their outrage: mainstream media coverage that routinely silences their demands while vilifying the feminist movement.

In a statement titled “Our protest is not violence” published August 17, a newly-formed collective called Mujeres+Mujeres criticized recent coverage for giving more attention to material damages sustained in the protests than to the abuses that sparked the marches in the first place. The collective also urged media outlets to improve their coverage by adopting a “gender perspective” in their reporting.

“The protests seek to reclaim the ultimate purpose of our public institutions: to impart justice,” the statement reads. “Media have a clear responsibility to help break the normalization and silence that surrounds conditions of violence women face in our country.”

Protests under the banner “They don’t take care of us, they rape us” kicked off earlier this month in response to two cases of police allegedly raping underage girls in Mexico City. In one of the cases, a 17-year-old accused four police officers of abducting and raping her on August 3. The abuse by law enforcement officers stung particularly deeply in a country where killings of women statistically are likely to go unpunished, and where several states and municipalities have declared gender alerts in recent years over crisis levels of gendered violence and femicide.

Demonstrators marched in the capital on August 12 and clamored for a meeting with the city's district attorney. Some protesters smashed the glass doors of the district attorney's office and hurled vibrant pink and blue glitter inside, scrawling the words "justice" and "not one more" with it on the floor. Others doused the city's security chief in pink glitter.

The glitter and broken glass quickly became the focal point of media coverage and other responses to the march. Mexico City mayor Claudia Sheinbaum dubbed the acts a "provocation." The district attorney, who did not answer activists' call for a meeting, announced an investigation into the vandalism, sparking sharp criticism that authorities seemed more willing to probe and punish those responsible for graffiti and shattered windows than the perpetrators of rape.

Fueled by authorities' dismissiveness, another march hit the streets on August 16. Once again, media coverage framed the protest as violent and vandalizing, honing in on graffiti splashed across the Angel of Independence monument, as well as an incident of a man punching a male reporter. Women's voices remained absent.

NACLA spoke to a Mujeres+Mujeres spokesperson, who asked for responses to be in the name of the collective, about the call for an end to media coverage that normalizes rape culture in favor of more thorough, responsible, and non-discriminatory reporting.

NACLA: Let's start with what most of the coverage of these protests did not give attention to. Most headlines focused on material damages, but not on the events that provoked the march. Why did women protest?

Mujeres+Mujeres: A big part of the anger that arose after the march and the coverage of the march on Friday [August 16] is because it reproduced almost exactly what motivated the march. Initially there was a protest against the rape of a minor on August 3 by four police officers. A group of women demonstrated in front of the district attorney's office in Mexico City, and some threw glitter at people with the district attorney. The next day, the news in the media was about just that: the glitter. So it seemed that the fact that some women had thrown glitter was more important and meaningful and in some way more of an affront to society than the fact that a girl had been raped.

When that happened, the march [on August 16] was organized, and the surprise and frustration came about because the next day, the news once again focused on everything but what was important. What's important is that there is systematic abuse of women in this country from economic to physical as well as many other types of violence, and these don't get coverage, they don't get a voice. And what the majority of headlines did address was the vandalism and the incident of violence against a male reporter committed by a man. This outrages women and the feminist community because once again, the problems and injustices that women face are not reflected.

In fact, an organization called Data Pop reviewed the media coverage from August 3, which is when police raped the 17-year-old, to August 20, and they found that on average, there were seven news articles every day in national media outlets on the topic of rape. In contrast, from the day of the march to [August 20], there were 50 news articles on average about the Angel of Independence monument and vandalism. So we're talking about seven times more importance given to material concerns than to women's issues. And that is somewhere that we are not willing to tolerate. That's why Mujeres+Mujeres emerged as a call for deeper coverage and more accurate representation of the feminist movement in the media.

NACLA: When and with who did Mujeres+Mujeres form?

Mujeres+Mujeres: Literally on August 17. Those of us who now makeup Mujeres+Mujeres are women, activists, academics, journalists, and citizens who already participate or have participated actively around issues of gender, violence, reproductive rights, human rights, media, and journalism. Some of us are journalists, some

of us are activists, other people are in the public sector, but we are all linked to women's issues. And when the coverage came out on Saturday [August 17], we got together to comment on it, and it was very natural and very necessary for us to make a public statement that this kind of media coverage cannot continue.

NACLA: In the statement the collective published, you called on the media to disrupt the normalization of gender violence and to give voice to women using a gender perspective in their reporting. What does it mean to report with a gender perspective?

Mujeres+Mujeres: Fortunately, there are mechanisms and tools some media are using and recommendations from other organizations about how to produce coverage with a gender perspective. For that reason it is relatively simple for media to apply it. The difficult part is that it implies a structural change in how media define and represent themselves.

What we mean by gender perspective has to do with defining protocols for reporting explicitly that takes the needs, perspectives, and presence of women into account. It involves training reporters—women and men—and editors on gender issues. It involves being committed to giving a voice to women who live with and protest violence, without blaming them or questioning their actions. At the same time, it also involves going out to find topics, because currently the majority of news stories published on matters of violence against women are stories that the media receive, whether from the police or some kind of press release, but there needs to be an active search for this information.

On the other hand, it also involves reporting all kinds of violence that women experience, beyond physical and sexual violence. Economic violence is one of the most common forms. National media rarely touch on political violence. It also involves questioning authorities on their actions to decrease rates of violence and crimes against women. Because media almost always report on the marches, but there isn't a sense of media seeking accountability from authorities, and that also needs to happen.

And finally, not disclosing the personal information or appearance of women who have been violated, which is what happened in the case of the 17-year-old who four police officers allegedly raped. The Mexico City government released her personal information, and the media published it. There must be clear lines for media to say they will not continue normalizing this situation and will question how and why the information is being shared.

NACLA: One typical characteristic of mainstream coverage of gender violence is that it blames women themselves for the violence they suffer. Do you see the coverage of these recent protests as an extension of this tendency, accusing women of being violent when they express their rage in the face of cases of violence against women?

Mujeres+Mujeres: Definitely. And not just that. The media representation was as if women's outrage was irrational. It is so important to reiterate that women are angry for clear reasons. We are not irrational, nor are we overly emotional. Our outrage is well documented in the atrocities that women endure daily. We are talking about a country where seven in 10 women have experienced harassment. And of course this makes us angry, and of course when there is no response to grievances made through legal avenues, then through peaceful means, then through many demonstrations and formal petitions, you have to look for alternatives.

This isn't to say that we're justifying the violence committed by women by any means. But yes, we have to say that certain expressions of anger, like graffiti, are very valid when they are being ignored by authorities. Also, this isn't a singular case for women. Graffiti and so on are historical examples of demonstrations seeking an expansion of freedom of expression and human rights demands.

NACLA: You already mentioned the fact that violence is often understood with a narrow definition and that it is important to recognize structural and symbolic violence as well. Do you consider this kind of media coverage as another form of violence against women?

Mujeres+Mujeres: More like a mechanism that perpetuates violence against women. There is plenty of distorted coverage of women. When women are sexually objectified, or when they are blamed for the violence they suffer, this is of course a reproduction of the very violence they already experience. But it is also a way of perpetuating that violence because it does not explain why women face violence and because women often end up being victim-blamed in media coverage.

Take for example headlines like “Woman killed for infidelity.” It’s as if the woman provoked the violence against herself. This kind of framing must end because instances of violence against women will not be addressed in this way. If the media, which shapes most public opinion in society, share the prejudice and the idea that women are responsible for the violence they suffer, then they are perpetuating the conditions that give rise to that violence.

NACLA: When media incorporate gender perspective in a comprehensive way, does this perspective also go beyond providing adequate coverage of issues normally considered women’s issues, like femicide and gender violence? How can gender perspective also function cross-sectionally across all kinds of coverage to give visibility to women, especially marginalized women, in the context of a range of issues such as migration, corruption, the environment, and so on?

Mujeres+Mujeres: Of course. The media have so much information within reach to be able to explain the situations women experience, which as you say doesn’t necessarily have to be related to physical violence, femicide, and so on. In part, this is an issue with the very composition of media today—who’s in charge, who does the reporting, and the variety of topics they can cover. On one hand, it’s about highlighting the spaces where women are lacking, and on the other, exposing the typical reasons as to why women aren’t in those spaces.

Here’s an example. Oxfam Mexico just released an excellent study called “Because of my race I’ll talk about inequality” where they prove through statistical and mathematical models that women of all socioeconomic standings, races, skin tones, and income levels are more likely to face discrimination, lower income, and so on. This kind of information undoubtedly reaches media outlets, so they need to create space for it. Women’s experiences are relevant for society as a whole.

And a gender perspective doesn’t mean only talking about women’s situations. There are topics from a gender perspective that affect men and that affect people who do not identify when one of the two traditional binary genders. These topics also need to start to permeate media because they [gender non-conforming folks] are underrepresented on a daily basis.

NACLA: What has been the response to the statement “Our protest is not violence”? Have any media or journalists responded?

Mujeres+Mujeres: Yes. First, more collectives and more individual women joined us. And in response to what we published, six media outlets have contacted us and interviewed Mujeres+Mujeres spokespersons, and three of those outlets have asked for some kind of course or discussion about how they can incorporate a gender perspective in their daily operations, which we’re really pleased about.

It’s not enough for us to put out a statement. Our idea is to open ourselves up to media so that we can cooperate in some way to make these tools more accessible.

NACLA: Obviously the collective is very new, but what will the next steps be to keep exposing machista discourses and challenging media to integrate a gender perspective?

Mujeres+Mujeres: We see three priorities. One, to keep highlighting the problems with media coverage. Two, to keep linking up with more women and more collectives that are interested in the issue and with whom we can develop a working group of interested parties. Three, to think about how we can cooperate with the media to start resolving this situation through workshops, for example. We're exploring. We're very new. The idea is to take advantage of existing knowledge and practices, and make ourselves available to the media for collaboration.

NACLA: Members of the collective are also part of the feminist movement that has participated in these protests, and the protests themselves have been met with a non-response from authorities. What are the demands of the movement now? Is it now about more than the specific cases of the young women raped by police?

Mujeres+Mujeres: For the feminist movement in general, yes, it has always been broader than that. But the reason why this case became particularly relevant and why it galvanized the entire country so quickly is because it has to do with an act perpetrated by the very authorities who are meant to protect us. That fuels the outrage. The fact that the person that should be investigating crimes against women is the perpetrator, it's the peak of absurdity. And it is very discouraging because of course we as women are waiting for authorities to respond, yet what we actually find is that they continuously rape us, and that causes a huge gap in trust about what might happen when we take our grievances through traditional channels. And this is a reality that must be addressed.

And in Mujeres+Mujeres, we are trying to focus a lot on how we can help make the media improve their representation of women. As long as more of the community knows and understands what problems women face and what our demands are, it starts to put a lot more pressure on authorities to fix them. Authorities definitely have a debt to women in the country. Authorities owe us attention, they owe us action, they owe us justice. That's a demand that's not going to stop.

“Green Tide” Reaches Mexico as Oaxaca Decriminalizes Abortion

Posted on October 3, 2019 at nacla.org, written by Cecilia Nowell

Oaxaca's monumental decision last week to decriminalize abortion is part of a larger "Green Tide" movement across Latin America.

The chambers of the state legislature in Oaxaca, Mexico, exploded with shouts of joy and rage September 25 as the region voted to decriminalize first-trimester abortions in a 24-10 vote. In the gallery, Catholic protesters chanted, “Assassins! Assassins!” while awaiting the vote. But when the decision was announced, feminist activists, clad in the green bandanas that have become the symbol of the Latin American pro-abortion movement, broke out in shouts of “Latin America will be entirely feminist.”

The vote exemplified the division between Mexico's deep Catholic, traditionally anti-abortion roots and its growing feminist movements. This tension was on full display in the chambers. Feminist activist Patricia Matus was one of the women celebrating in the legislature when the vote was announced. “The environment was

horrible,” she said, describing pro-life demonstrators holding mass outside the state building, a verbal argument between male and female representatives that nearly delayed the vote, and shouting in the gallery.

“We, who are not accustomed to silencing ourselves, kept silent,” Matus said. But, “when we counted the votes in favor, our silence burst into shouts of joy.”

Latin America has some of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world, with only Uruguay, Cuba, Mexico City, and now Oaxaca guaranteeing the procedure in the first trimester for any reason. Abortion is legal in cases of rape across all of Mexico, but each of the country’s states makes its own laws beyond that. In 2007, Mexico City decriminalized abortion before 12 weeks of pregnancy, regardless of a woman’s reason for requesting the procedure. Elsewhere, such as in Chile, Argentina, and Colombia, abortion is available in specific circumstances, including rape, incest, fetal deformity, or risk to the mother’s health. In El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua abortion is completely banned.

But a growing pro-abortion movement across Latin America has seen countries revisiting their abortion laws this past year. That feminist activism, combined with the support of Mexico’s MORENA party representatives, may see changes to abortion laws across the country beyond Oaxaca.

A Wave in Oaxaca

Abortion activists across Mexico were as shocked as the women at the state house when the news broke on social media.

“It was only in the last two weeks that we started to see this possibility, but honestly we did not think it was possible,” said Veronica Cruz, a member of Las Libres, a feminist organization working on issues of reproductive rights in the state of Guanajato, Mexico. “We understand that local feminists and representatives strategized to keep a low profile so as not to draw the attention of the anti-rights groups when they saw that they would have the votes to legalize.”

Matus explained that a network of feminists had organized an abortion rights movement in Oaxaca. Some of the activists approached MORENA representatives, members of President Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s social-democratic party, to bring the abortion debate to the state legislature.

Although the president has not explicitly prioritized women’s rights or abortion access, his government did tweet its congratulations to the state of Oaxaca: “Our democracy is strengthened by the extension of rights and the recognition of women's autonomy to decide about their own bodies.”

A Larger Tide

To maintain the force of the pro-choice movement in Mexico, activists will have to adapt strategies that worked in Oaxaca to each of Mexico’s 32 states. Specifically, gaining the support of friendly state representatives, like the members of the MORENA party who supported the bill in Oaxaca.

“The abortion movement in Mexico is very focused on local and regional battles” because abortion laws can be approved by state or federal governments, said Daniela Tejas, co-coordinator of the Mexico City-based abortion fund Fondo MARIA. Now that Oaxaca has decriminalized abortion, “we have to see what the reaction is going to be and encourage other states,” Tejas said. “In addition, and more importantly, we have to be able to replicate the support that was given by the MORENA party in other states.”

The Latin American pro-choice movement, or so-called “green tide,” started in Argentina in the summer of 2018, when feminists took to the streets outside the country’s congress as the nation’s house of representatives and senate debated a bill to legalize abortion. Though the bill narrowly failed in the senate, abortion became less taboo: Women now wear the green bandanas of the pro-abortion movement every day in Buenos Aires. One of the senators who did support the bill in 2018 was former president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner, who is now running for vice president. Although Kirchner did not support abortion during her presidency, she has cautiously supported it as a vice presidential candidate. As presidential elections approach this month, Argentine feminists are likely to favor the Fernández-Fernández ticket over the more conservative incumbent Mauricio Macri.

Argentine feminists continue the fight to legalize all abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy, and the pro-choice movement that they sparked spread across the continent. In mid-September, pro-choice activists protested in Quito when the Ecuadorian national assembly voted against a bill that would have expanded abortion access to all women who have been raped. But the green tide hasn't reached all of Latin America. In El Salvador, Evelyn Hernández was a teenager when she was sentenced to 30 years in prison for a miscarriage that prosecutors said she forced. Although she’s been released, the state is still pursuing a case against her. Meanwhile, in the Dominican Republic, the case of 16-year-old Leukemia patient “Esperancita” sparked debate when doctors refused to treat her with chemotherapy at risk of ending her pregnancy. In 2017, Dominican lawmakers considered and then halted a bill which would have allowed women to legally access an abortion in cases of rape, incest, fetal impairment, or risk to the mother’s health.

The opposition to abortion remains strong across Latin America, even in places like Oaxaca. Pro-life organizations have publicized the names of MORENA representatives who voted to legalize abortion in Oaxaca and are compiling the names of senators and representatives in other states who may support abortion. Thousands of pro-life, Catholic Mexicans gathered at the Mexico City Metropolitan Cathedral to pray on September 28 while feminists demonstrated for International Safe Abortion Day.

The green bandanas that Mexican feminists wore in Oaxaca’s state congress September 25 reflect the transnational bond of the green tide. In Argentina, the bandana reads “National Campaign for the Right to Legal, Safe, and Free Abortion: Sexual Education to Decide, Contraception to Not Abort, Legal Abortion to Not Die.” Chilean feminists wear green scarves that read “Liberated, Safe, and Free Abortion: The Three Causes Are Not Enough,” referring to the Chilean government’s decision to legalize abortion only under three circumstances—rape, fetal deformity, or risk to the mother’s health. In Ecuador, feminists wear green scarves that say “Liberate Abortion Ecuador.”

And, in Mexico, the green bandana depicts the intertwined hands of two women, one tattooed and the other wearing Argentina’s green bandana, alongside the popular pro-abortion slogans “Legal Abortion Now” and “Legal Abortion for All Mexico.”

Youth activists, from children accompanying their parents to crowds of high school students and recent graduates, turn out in mass to pro-abortion rallies in Latin America. Spray-painting slogans like “motherhood will be desired or it will not be” and chanting “legal abortion in the hospital,” young activists reinvigorated a pro-choice movement that has roots in the United Nations’ World Conferences on Women of the 1970s and 80s.

“From Argentina, a young and feminist movement called the green tide was revived,” said Cruz, acknowledging that Latin America’s feminist movement is not new, just newly popular. “The feminist movement in Mexico has fresh air and above all more energy with the entry of many young people.”

A Reinvigorated Movement

That fresh air reanimated the feminist movement in Mexico beyond solely pro-choice activism. In March, the #MeToo movement hit Mexico in full force when women began posting their stories of assault and harassment on social media. The movement came in waves, as women from different professions began denouncing men in each industry: first the writers, then professors, doctors, lawyers, and more.

The #MeToo movement represented an important shift in Mexican feminism. Mexico has historically seen incredibly high rates of gender violence. In 2018 alone, the United Nations recorded 898 femicides, the second-highest number for a Latin American country. Sexual violence is its own beast: In a 2016 report, Mexico's National Institute of Statistics, Geography, and Information reported that 4.4 million women were victims of childhood sexual abuse, 32.8 million had experienced mistreatment from obstetricians, and 41.3 percent of those surveyed were survivors of sexual violence.

Unsafe abortion is also the fourth leading cause of maternal death in the country, according to the Information Group on Reproductive Choice. The top five causes of maternal mortality worldwide are hemorrhage, sepsis, unsafe abortion, eclampsia, and obstructed labor.

“There is definitely a positioning of feminist themes on the public agenda,” Tejas said. “However, there is also a rebound from the groups that oppose the feminist struggle and we have to fight with great attention to our security.”

This weekend, just days after Oaxaca decriminalized abortion, thousands of Mexican women took to the streets for demonstrations on International Safe Abortion Day. From Veracruz to Monterrey and Mexico City, women gathered together to hold their green bandanas aloft at symbolic *pañuelazos*. The hashtag #GritoGlobalPorAbortoLegal (A Global Shout for Legal Abortion) trended on Twitter alongside #AbortoLegalYa (Legal Abortion Now) and #AbortoLegalParaTodoMexico (Legal Abortion for All Mexico).

If this week is any indication, Oaxaca may be just the first ripple of the green tide's arrival in Mexico. As Cruz said, “I think that on this same wave and the next we will see more states doing the same as Oaxaca.”

Four walls won't hold us: Honduran women are breaking free

Posted on March 8th, 2018 at opendemocracy.net, written by María Luisa Regalado

We want freedom, not four walls. We see a future without violence and impunity. Without impunity, the violence could be investigated; the murderers and abusers would be jailed. Our struggle is against the patriarchal system

I come from a very large and very poor, rural family. We all worked on a big farm without pay, and because of the conditions under which we were forced to live, there were times when I would rebel; I was always quite rebellious.

My dad was a very imposing figure in our lives; a real patriarch. He never hit my mum but he was violent in his words and attitudes and it made me very angry. I recall when I was young hoping that my dad would die first so that she could live her later years in peace. It was not to be.

I grew up resentful of exploitation, always ready to resist. Because I had to work I never went to school, no one in my family did. I was 22 years old when I learned to write my name

My mum died first and was closely followed by my dad. I was left behind with two sisters, aged eight and twelve and my brother who was fifteen. I had to finish bringing them up: a child raising three children.

I grew up resentful of exploitation, always ready to resist. Because I had to work I never went to school, no one in my family did. I was 22 years old when I learned to write my name. I really wanted an education so when my parents died, I joined the church. Out in the countryside it was the only option.

There was a progressive priest there named Father Factomia. He was a very committed man, very critical of militarisation and the regional impact of intervention by the right-wing paramilitary Nicaraguan contras. When I met him, he was openly denouncing the war that in El Salvador and was very supportive of the refugees. He coordinated voluntary work in the community and the refugee camps. When I wasn't caring for my siblings, I was helping him.

Father Factomia was the first person to teach me about the social justice work. In 1982, he was forced into exile in Mexico because the military wanted him dead. The new priest only knew how to pray, so I left soon after he did.

A feminist in Honduras

If it had not always been, by now my path was set. I joined the first peasant organisation for women, The Federation of Honduran Women Peasants. They were part of a Christian worker's federation, which was marred by deep political tensions between progressives and conservatives. The leadership thought we were making too much noise with "leftist issues" – so now it was my turn to be driven out. Along with two other women, I was expelled.

Undeterred, we formed our own peasant organisation to work closely with what was to become Honduras' Trade Union Congress. I participated in its founding but was soon exhausted by the continuous internal struggles. A part of me wanted to go back to my village and build a life there; but I was too tied up in the fight, too wedded to the idea that justice was possible. So, I stayed in the capital, Tegucigalpa. Together with my compañeras, we founded what CODEMUH is today: a feminist, anti-establishment, anti-imperialist organisation. That was in June, 1989.

As a women's organisation, we soon discovered that feminism was considered an even more dangerous topic than anti-imperialism.

The 1980s were the height of anti-imperialist struggle in the capital. In the villages and barrios though, people still thought it was a dangerous discussion to be having. They were afraid of being associated with us because of the military repression. So, in the early 1990s we renamed ourselves Colectiva de Mujeres Hondureñas: the Collective of Honduran Women (CODEMUH): a feminist name. Back then, we didn't understand the pillars of feminism but we knew we knew that was our true identity.

As a women's organisation, we soon discovered that feminism was considered an even more dangerous topic than anti-imperialism, even in the city. We were striving to work with women across society, from peasant women like me to students, trade unionists and civil servants. But we found that women weren't very interested

in speaking about gender, much less feminism. Often, women would ask us what the point was. "Let's free the country first," they'd say, referring to the struggle for national independence. "The other transformations will follow, only after the country belongs to the people."

We knew this wasn't right, that we needed to understand and confront gender violence in our communities, here and now. An independence movement which does not recognise the voices, perspectives and work of women will never bring us freedom. Likewise, the Honduran movement against economic imperialism - the struggle for true independence - would be fatally weakened by the exclusion of women, who make up half of the population.

Until 1955 women were not even citizens in Honduras, we had no right to vote, no political or human rights whatsoever. All the gains made since then had come from our own work.

Until 1955 women were not even citizens in Honduras, we had no right to vote, no political or human rights whatsoever. All the gains made since then had come from women's own work. We know that to assert our beliefs and have our rights respected, we need to be part of the political struggle.

We also have to educate each other, because we need a women's movement that thinks critically and sees clearly the root causes of our oppression. Without that vision, the problems facing our society look very different and so do the solutions. I am often offered money for labour rights work by corporate funders. We will sit and talk with them, but we cannot take money from the same corporations that are failing to guarantee the rights of women in the workplace, or paying us fair wages, or supporting better conditions for us.

They fear us

In the beginning, these commitments cost us dearly. Eomen left and in the end just three of us remained to build what CODEMUH is today: a women-led grassroots organisation that has survived for 20 years to fight for the empowerment and rights of women workers. It is run by feminists seeking change in society that allows women to realise our potential, free from exclusion and discrimination.

Today we have 150 members organising women in factories across the garment factory sector. Our greatest achievement has been to take women out of the world of four walls: the four walls of the kitchen and the four walls of the garment factories - so that their faces our recognised and their voices heard.

Another success has been that women take ownership of their own liberation and find courage to publicly denounce abuse at work, by the state, in the media and around the world. This includes taking legal action through the courts. We also play a vital role in raising awareness to have conditions like occupational musculoskeletal disorders, which are caused by corporate exploitation, recognized as occupational diseases. CODEMUH is an international benchmark for its expertise in labour law.

I am thankful that CODEMUH has grown strong, but time has proven our original perspective right in the worst possible way. Under the past two administrations, the cause of women's liberation has been pushed backwards into a defensive war.

Women and their bodies have become the battlefields of the big organised crime gangs.

The coup of 2009 and the global financial crash threw us into a political crisis. The gangs, drug trafficking and organised crime escalated, all with links to the political establishment. Women and their bodies have become the battlefields of the big organised crime gangs.

CODEMUH also lost many sources of funding. We were forced to cut staff and it was a terrible time. We only survived thanks to the resilience of the women organising our outreach groups, who really stepped up and developed as leaders.

Instead of moving to protect the women of Honduras, the state sits back and justifies violence against us by saying that women are involved in the drug trafficking and crime. Women are routinely accused and stigmatised without investigation. The public money spent on security is wasted through corruption. The killers know they can murder with impunity and sleep with their doors open. 97 per cent of the time when a woman is murdered, no one is punished.

Those in power would have women return to the world of four walls. Many political campaigns that claim to represent women's interests offer only conciliatory gifts designed to keep us at home. Several government proposals to implement tortilla microenterprises are designed to send women back into the kitchen. When women are injured in street protests, the authorities say: "it's her fault for being on the street and not where she should be."

But we want freedom, not four walls. We see a future without violence and impunity. Without impunity, the violence could be investigated; the murderers and abusers would be jailed. Our struggle is against the patriarchal system, which is not only against abuse by men but the system that justifies it and the state that offers no justice for women.

Now we are taking to the streets, demanding our human rights: our rights as women and workers, they fear us. We are pushing back against domestic violence, sexual harassment and killings; against those who see women as things and not as people. This is our fight, beyond the world of four walls, to dismantle the structures of the patriarchy. It is a lifetime's struggle. But it belongs to us.

Women Prisoners' Hunger Strike in Argentina

Posted December 21st 2019 at rustbeltradio.org

My name is Liliana Cabrera. I'm a member of Yo No Fui. We are a feminist collective of women and non-binaries who work in different artistic and productive workshops inside the Argentinian jails, and outside too. This organization began with poetry workshops in 2002 with Maria Medrano. She is now our general coordinator of the organization. We are a cooperative venture since 2014.

I knew Yo No Fui in 2006 when I arrived to Ezeiza prison. In the first place I was in unit 3 so in that place I heard a lot about Yo No Fui. Everybody talks about the women who helped us with the papers for the hunger strike. And later I was transferred to unit 31. In that place I joined the poetry workshop. I passed eight years of my life in that place doing my sentence. That poetry workshop was the place where I discovered the sense of writing. I always say write is like a window to myself. A window I didn't know.

In 2014, I recovered my freedom. So I joined Yo No Fui full time. And I consider it as my militance place.

The situation in Argentinian prisons is awful. Really, really very violent. Violent by the state. The people suffer the violations of their human rights, even the most basic. They don't have access to a decent food or medical care in timely manner. They don't have access to education. And we are talking about constitutional rights.

Now a lot of prisons in Argentina, in Buenos Aires and the rest of the country are in hunger strike. The hunger strike began in December 5th in some prisons from Buenos Aires. The awful conditions about the medical care, the food, and overcrowding in the Buenos Aires jails and the slow legal proceedings that have a delay in materializing were part of the claims.

A few days ago, the Supreme Court of Buenos Aires, through resolution 3341, prioritized progress on the current problems in judicial practice that are generating the constant increase of detainees and highlighting the role of judges in the face of the crisis, and say to the magistrate that they should maintain prohibition of the accommodation in police stations for the pregnant women, minors, and sick people. And prioritize the emptying of closed judicial dependencies. Now we all hope that there is a political will to respond to their claims. The people in there are suffering a lot of arbitrary transfers away from their families. Like a punishment. It's serious. The people in jail and their families expect an answer from the new Buenos Aires governor, Axel Kicillof, and our new President Alberto Fernandez.

Historically, the jail in Argentina was pretty invisible for the different governments. A lot of thing happens. A lot of violence exists behind the walls whose perpetrator was the Penitentiary Service –federal and from the different states in my country. No distinction in those two systems.

We are very worried for the people in there. The conditions are awful. We, the persons who are outside the whole society, has to look the prison like part of itself.

Now, I go back to that place in a different way — like a professor. I go back like a teacher to the poetry workshop in unit 31- the same place I was. And in the unit 47 too. Both in Buenos Aires. A lot of us are going back in that role and that made me very proud of ourselves.

The hunger strike blew up because the situation was terrible. For example, in unit 47, the governor, Maria Eugenia Vidal, who left the charge a few days ago , now it's Axel Kicillof in Buenos Aires government, stopped to pay the catering who give food, like meat or vegetables, to the people in prison. They only give small portions of white rice and noodles. All the time. That was an urgent situation. That can't happen in a state governed by the rule of law. It's against the human rights don't give food. So simple like that. Other claims of the hunger strike have to do with the bureaucratic slowness of judicial proceedings when people are still in process without a sentence and also when they have a sentence but are expecting for different judicial instances. Like conditional release or temporary leave regime or house arrest.

And also we can say, that people in jail, the men and women and non-binaries who is doing the hunger strike didn't have a clear tactic, even strategy, for figuring this a good moment for a hunger strike. In fact, it's not. Because we have a new government who is in charge now. The other government left. And we will spend some days in a very unclear zone with not valid interlocutors. No one who give them a quick answer. So now a lot of prisons are doing the hunger strike. And the people need the solution to the issues.

In our country, the Penitentiary Service behaves like a hit force administrating the violence. Their vertical structure is very similar to a military force. So they have many issues of the military dictatorships. They behave...their secrets... the criminal torture they have over people who is in prison... We think is strictly necessary a permeability of the democracy in the different levels of the Penitentiary Service. Now the prisons are literally torture place.

We think that prisons are useless. Are good for nothing. Only break and destroy the lives of the people who is in there. It's very important the connections between the outside and the inside. The ties between the woman and non-binary member of Yo No Fui between who have recovered their freedom and who have another experience is very strong. Because in this exchange we can form all the violence that offer the system in another way to connect us very deep.

Many of us found feminism in our workshops outside and inside. We not only talk about poetry, photographs, built cameras, paintings or sewing machines. We talk about issues that cross our life. We have a commitment with us and this new way to understand the system. Behind and in front the walls.

All the boys and girls who don't die in the poor neighborhoods die in jail. It's part of a violence circle. They are commodities or merchandise for the capitalism. Start to conceptualize this kind of thinking, our experience, the debate, is very important to us, and what we do.

Colombian militants have a new plan for the country, and it's called 'insurgent feminism'

Posted July 3, 2017 at theconversation.com

When Victoria Sandino, a long-time fighter in the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), joined the guerrilla organisation's peace talks with her country's government in 2014, she never imagined that she and her comrades would end up launching a new women's movement.

It's called "insurgent feminism", and, while still nascent, this philosophy may turn out to be one of the Colombian peace process' most enduring – and least expected – political contributions.

Between 2014 and 2016, dozens of female FARC combatants travelled to Cuba's capital Havana to participate in a gender subcommittee created to ensure that the peace accords would reflect women's perspectives and needs. Sandino stayed in Havana, becoming an emblematic figure of the demilitarising Marxist insurgency.

Having completely disarmed as of June 26, the FARC will reconstitute itself as a political party in the next few months. Insurgent feminism is part of its platform.

Betting on change

Gender roles remain rather traditional in Colombia, where women are largely relegated to the domestic sphere, especially in rural areas. The country ranks 95th in the UN's gender equality index, below neighbouring Brazil (79th), Peru (87th) and Ecuador (89th).

Since its founding in 1964 as the armed wing of the Communist Party, the FARC has sought to abolish hierarchies. For many Colombian women – particularly those from the countryside – joining the guerrillas offered an escape from poverty and sexual oppression.

Patricia, who joined the insurgent group when she was 17 years old, says that feminism wasn't a theoretical debate within the FARC; it was a practice. "We always performed equality," she told me. "Men and women have the same rights and the same duties, and we undertake the same missions."

Combatant life necessarily induced a change in gender relations. Men and women shared quotidian tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, and fought shoulder-to-shoulder. And though the FARC's forced abortions and contraception remain controversial, female fighters have long enjoyed access to sexual and reproductive rights that were – and many cases still are – legally denied to other Colombian women.

Still, the FARC was no gender paradise. Women never reached its highest ranks, and the nine-member leadership team remains all male – and all white.

Women “weren’t protagonists” in the group, Sandino would assert when explaining why the FARC was due for a feminist awakening.

The unconventional women of the FARC have spent part of their lives on the front lines in the jungle, and they are now returning to civilian life with great expectations.

After more than 50 years, the FARC became the world’s first Marxist insurgency to declare itself an “anti-patriarchal” organisation.

Walking the talk

In February, FARC female combatants from the gender subcommittee, including Patricia, participated in a feminism workshop at a demobilisation camp in La Elvira, in the Cauca Valley. The event, organised with international support and participation, gathered *guerrilleras* from different camps across the country.

Afterwards, Patricia acknowledged that “there are concepts that we do not yet have a grasp of” but reaffirmed the FARC’s plans to continue building awareness about feminism within its rank-and-file soldiers.

“We’ll need them to build our arguments,” she said.

Since January, several such workshops have been held in other places across the country. According to Laura Cardoza, a 31-year-old Colombian helping to facilitate the program, the aim is to instil feminism within all the FARC’s troops.

Earlier this year, Patricia took her turn at leadership, too, coordinating a gender session with the men and women of the centralisation zone where she lives, in remote Arauca, near the Venezuelan border.

What is insurgent feminism?

In post-conflict countries, female combatants’ lack of visibility and exclusion during the reconstruction phase tends to make them vulnerable when they reintegrate. Colombia’s recent experience, for instance, has shown that women returning to civilian life experience high rates of violence and social discrimination.

This was one of the issues that the gender subcommittee of the Havana peace talks was intended to tackle. But it soon became something more, a kind of feminism workshop in which FARC delegates, Colombian government representatives, international actors and women’s organisations shared their knowledge and experiences.

“For the first time in 24 years,” Sandino told El Espectador newspaper in September 2016, “I’m seeing that women feel the need to rise to positions of power.”

Women began pushing the leadership to include feminism in its future political platform. They weren’t talking about traditional third-wave feminism (sometimes dubbed White Women’s Feminism), nor had they exactly adopted the language of intersectional feminism, with its focus on race and privilege.

Insurgent feminism draws on the FARC’s anti-capitalist ideology, linking women’s emancipation to the class struggle. For these Leninist-inspired fighters, Colombia’s political and economic system can never fundamentally change if patriarchal culture continues to be reproduced in everyday life.

Insurgent feminism exhorts all people, including men, to seek a transformation of gender relations among people of all identities and sexual orientations, and promotes a non-hegemonic concept of masculinity that breaks with traditional Colombian machismo.

All of this together could end the social and political exclusion of minority groups, say Sandino and her comrades. In this way, the philosophy establishes continuity between a revolutionary past of armed struggle and a future of political fights.

From paper into practice

There was resistance to making this philosophy part of the FARC's political agenda. The insurgent group may have practiced gender equality, but it never talked much about feminism.

Sandino and her cohort kept up the pressure and, eventually, their higher-ups agreed. The FARC has now declared its commitment to feminism and, in its party literature, is explicitly linking women's empowerment with the fight against capitalism.

FARC feminists are trying to build bridges with other women's movements, both at home and abroad – a critical step if insurgent feminism is to gain traction.

On June 23 2017, Sandino and other FARC feminists presented their policy proposals, which included preventing violence against women, reconceptualising parental roles and deconstructing the social construct of gender, to a group of Colombian feminists from various sectors.

A seven-member panel of women – representatives of Colombian women's organisations – will be in charge of supporting the implementation of gender-based components of the peace accords, which offers FARC women some useful networking opportunities.

But many feminists are likely to be reluctant about get involved with a group that many Colombians still revile. Collaboration with pacifist organisations, such as the Pacific Route of Women, which is avowedly anti-violence, is difficult to envision.

Nor is it yet clear how high on the party's agenda central insurgent feminism will be. According to FARC documents, the new party will have a "gender department". What is its mandate? Who will run the office, and how well funded will it be?

Some veteran Colombian feminists, such as Catalina Ruiz-Navarro, are coming around to the FARC's new vision. Their rhetoric "shows that the FARC understand that feminism is a decisive, critical issue in contemporaneous politics," she told the news site *Pacifista*.

The coming months and years will determine whether the men in power are also true believers.

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