

LATIN AMERICA & HAITI WEB SITE

Ronald F. Coburn, Editor
Lawren S. Bale, Webmaster

LatinAmericaHaiti.com
Volume 005 Fall 2009

A ***QUARTERLY JOURNAL*** that describes life in different Latin American countries and Haiti; these include human-interest pieces, political analysis, discussions of US relationships. We will emphasize pieces about indigenous peoples, labor and human rights. We will publish literary pieces. Many of our articles will be reprinted from other sources. **WE WILL CONSIDER SUBMITTED MANUSCRIPTS.**

CONTENTS

2. Editor's Note

LATIN AMERICA

3. Donna Goodman,

"The Struggle for Women's Equality in Latin America"

GUATEMALA

16. Roselyn Costantino,

"Violence Against Women in Guatemala: The Old and New in the Struggle for Justice in Guatemala"

LATIN AMERICA

31. Amnesty International USA,

A Tribute to Mexican Journalist Lydia Cacho Ribeiro

33. Our Authors

LATIN AMERICA

Editor's note: Donna Goodman's article is the first in this issue of our Quarterly Journal that is publishing articles on women's human rights in Latin America. We selected this article because it gives the best summary we have seen of the recent expansion of political and economic rights of women in different Latin American countries. This is followed by an article by Roselyn Costantino. Costantino writes movingly about several women living in Guatemala. The terrible situation in Guatemala is not a new topic for this journal. See articles in Volumes 3 and 4. The final article in this issue gives tribute to a Mexican journalist - Lydia Cacho Ribeiro.



The Struggle for Women's Equality in Latin America

by Donna Goodman

(This article was originally published in *Dissident Voice*, March 13, 2009)

A political transformation is taking place in Latin America that is improving the status of women throughout the region. More than half the 20 or so republics in the Western Hemisphere where Spanish and Portuguese are spoken have moved toward the political left within the last decade.

"A political transformation is taking place in Latin America that is improving the status of women throughout the region."

A sign of these times is a phrase from Venezuelan president Hugo Chavez, who refers to himself as a feminist: "True socialism is feminist." Progressive Ecuadorian president Rafael Correa named "gender justice" — the end to discrimination against women — as part of his vision for 21st century socialism. And at the recent World Social Forum in Brazil, the Assembly of Social Movements issued the following declaration:

"The social emancipation process carried by the feminist, environmentalist and socialist movements in the 21st century aims at liberating society from capitalist domination of the means of production, communication and services, achieved by supporting forms of ownership that favor the social interest: small family freehold, public, cooperative, communal and collective property. "Such an alternative will necessarily be feminist since it is impossible to build a society based on social justice and equality of rights when half of humankind is oppressed and exploited."

LATIN AMERICA

"This article revolves around the question: to what extent have conditions for women changed as a result of the left trend in Latin American politics?"

This article revolves around the question: to what extent have conditions for women changed as a result of the left trend in Latin American politics?

The U.S. has had interests in Latin America throughout the 1800s (the acquisition of much of Mexico being one of them), but Yankee domination throughout the region began in earnest with the Spanish-American war in 1898. It continued, despite Cuba's breakaway in 1959, for a full century, but is now declining as progressive countries assert their independence. In the process have come economic and social reforms, a number of which have benefited the women of Latin America.

In 1998, leftist Hugo Chavez won his first term as democratically elected president. Brazil elected Worker Party founder Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in 2002. In Bolivia, the poorest republic in South America, unionist Evo Morales was elected in 2005 after mass rebellions forced out three presidents in two years. Daniel Ortega, who led the Nicaraguan Sandinista revolution in the 1970s and '80s, was democratically voted back into office in 2006. Progressive governments have been voted into office in Ecuador, Paraguay, Chile and Argentina. Chile, the country once ruled by the fascist regime of Augusto Pinochet, is now headed by a female Socialist Party member, Michele Bachelet. The government of Argentina is also headed by a woman, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner.

Women in all regions of the world suffer subordination to men, in economic, political and social life and in the home. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, which is composed of the advanced

LATIN AMERICA

"Social inequality is pronounced in countries with low female literacy rates."

capitalist democracies, Latin American women suffer less total gender discrimination — in ownership rights, civil liberties, family codes and physical integrity — than other regions of the world except for the OECD states. This isn't to suggest women have achieved equality in Latin America (or in the OECD states), but they enjoy certain rights denied their sisters, particularly in portions of Africa and Asia.

OECD data also show that there is an important correlation between social institutions and the economic role of women. Female participation in the workforce is low in areas where discrimination is high, for example. Women who are denied ownership rights can't start their own businesses. Social inequality is also pronounced in countries with low female literacy rates. Infant and maternal mortality rates are a measure of health care available for women.

Women constitute 40% of the Latin American workforce, but many of the economies cannot absorb all the women seeking work, especially the poorest. Also, many women who want to work in the economy are hampered by child care and housework responsibilities. In addition, many women work in the informal sectors or at home and have no access to worker safety nets. Women's average wages are 60%-70% of men's, averaging 64% as of 2007. (In the U.S women earn 77 cents to the male dollar.)

Most Latin American states have passed laws guaranteeing property rights for women, but because men often have more resources, women's holdings are likely to be smaller.

LATIN AMERICA

Nearly 90% of adults in Latin America and the Caribbean can read and write, but many are at a low level of literacy due to inadequate educational systems. Yet Latin America has made more progress in literacy than many other developing regions.

Reproductive rights are a key indication of women's rights. In most of the region, largely because of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church, abortions are a crime. But the abortion rate is far higher than in Western Europe or the United States with more than four million abortions each year and tens of thousands of resulting deaths. Only in Cuba is abortion legal on demand. A few other countries permit it for extreme circumstances. In the most recent abridgement of women's rights, Nicaragua last year outlawed abortion without exception, including to save the life of the mother, the only exception formerly allowed. Many Latin American women are agitating for legalizing abortion in all or some circumstances. The recent lifting of Washington's global ban on abortions in health facilities funded by the U.S. may help move this forward.

"Only in Cuba is abortion legal on demand."

"Violence against women is a serious problem in Latin America."

Divorce is now legal throughout Latin America. The last country in the region to legalize it was Chile, in December 2004. (Now only two countries in the world ban divorce — the Philippines and Malta.)

Violence against women is a serious problem in Latin America, as it is in most of the rest of the world. Approximately one in three women in Latin America and the Caribbean has been a victim of sexual, physical, or psychological violence at the hands of intimate partners, according to survey data collected by the Pan American Health

LATIN AMERICA

Mourning survivors

“Women have been formidable opponents of tyrannical governments.”

Page 7



Organization in 2006. Since the 1990s, a majority of the countries in Latin America have taken some action to outlaw violence against women. However, conservative courts often choose not to rule for women, especially in cases of domestic violence. The region's

women and their allies have given a name to the worst crime of violence against women: femicide.



This is defined as the murder of women by men because they are women.

The existence of an active women's movement is an important factor in winning rights for women. Within the region, there have been active struggles for women's rights throughout the 20th Century to the present, even under the most oppressive regimes. Women have been formidable opponents of tyrannical governments, such as the dictatorships in Chile and Argentina. The

LATIN AMERICA

“Movements of indigenous women are helping to transform the politics of the region.”

indigenous women’s movement played an important part in Bolivia’s progressive gains. Women voted in large number for Venezuela’s Chavez, and supported the revolution in Cuba.

There are some tensions within the Latin American women’s movement as there are in such movements around the world. Women’s movements are often separated by social class. They have different goals, different needs, a different orientation, and they can’t always unite on gender. In cases of economic hardship, poor women’s struggles are more likely to unite brothers and sisters of the same class than they are to unite sisters across class lines. Similarly, there is often disunity between movements of indigenous women and European-descended women.

Where the interests of class, race and gender do intersect, there are different orientations about what to fight for. Very broadly, one polarity sees the fight for equality with men as meaning that focusing on traditional women’s work (child care, housework) will lock them into these gender roles. The other polarity begins by fighting where women are now (mothers, housewives) and wants rights and benefits right now for this women’s work: paid maternity leave, stipends and social security for housework, free and readily available daycare. The benefits women have won to date are in both realms.

Movements of indigenous women are helping to transform the politics of the region. Women account for nearly 60% of the 50 million indigenous people in Latin America and the Caribbean, and they face triple discrimination as women, as indigenous and as poor. Also, much of the

LATIN AMERICA

Cuba

"Literacy in Cuba is 100% for women and men."

"The Cuban constitution grants women equal economic, political, cultural, social and familial rights with men."

ecological devastation of Latin America is taking place on indigenous land, and women are in the forefront of the battle for natural resources.

Here is more detail on a few specific countries:

CUBA: Literacy is 100% for women and men, and women are 65% of university graduates; pay equity is embedded in law; nearly 40% of women are in the labor force, constituting 46% of all workers and half of all doctors; some 43% of deputies in the National Assembly are women, the highest percentage in Latin America and among the highest in the world; maternal mortality, at 34 per 100,000 is extremely low; infant mortality of six per thousand births is the lowest in Latin America. Abortion is free, as is all health care.

The Cuban constitution grants women equal economic, political, cultural, social and familial rights with men and prohibits discrimination based on race, skin color, sex, national origin, and religious belief. These rights are further supported by provisions in various laws, including the Family Code (1975), which requires men to participate equally in domestic labor, guarantees equal rights to women and men in marriage and divorce, and equal parental rights; and 1979 and 1984 revisions to the Penal Code, which provide additional penalties for violations of sexual equality.

The women's movement has been important in furthering women's gains. Women took part in the revolution, including in leadership roles. The Federation of Cuban Women (FMC), a non-governmental organization with close ties to the government, is the national agency responsible for the advancement of women and is involved in every

LATIN AMERICA

Venezuela

"Women especially poor women, have been a very large part of President Chavez's base in election."

facet of society in promoting equality. Crimes of violence against women, especially rape and sexual assault, are severely punished in Cuba. The Federation of Cuban Women travels the country to find out if there is hidden violence and to set up mechanisms for reporting and for community intervention.

VENEZUELA: Women, especially poor women, have been a very large part of President Chavez's base in elections, in the street to oppose the U.S.-backed coup, in the recall referendum in 2004, and in supporting his programs. With a majority of people living in poverty and 65% of households run by single women, Chavez's social welfare programs are widely supported. These include adult education, free health and dental treatment, and care for women who have suffered domestic violence. There is also a high level of participation at the organizational and community level. But Venezuela also has its share of right-wing women, primarily from the middle class, who constitute the majority of demonstrators in opposition to Chavez.

The 1999 Venezuelan constitution guarantees total social, political and economic rights to all citizens. It clearly states that women are entitled to full citizenship, and it addresses discrimination, sexual harassment, and domestic violence. In addition to guaranteeing full equality between men and women in employment, it is the only constitution in Latin America that recognizes housework as an economically productive activity, thus entitling housewives to social security benefits.

In 2000, Chávez established the National Institute for Women by a presidential mandate, in accordance with the Law of Equal Opportunities

LATIN AMERICA

for Women. The institute educates women to defend and expand the political, social and cultural rights they have achieved. It serves as a watchdog on the government and as a strategy for educating women about their rights, including how to report domestic violence.

Venezuela has set up Banmujer, the Women's Development Bank of Venezuela. The only national financial institution of its kind, Banmujer gives small, low-interest loans to women in order to help them form business ventures. The economic and social needs of women are also being met by a set of development programs called "social missions" that began operating in 2003 using oil revenues. These include a nutrition and food distribution program, adult literacy and education, and free healthcare clinics primarily in economically depressed areas. Such programs have helped to raise the standard of living significantly, contributing to a 27.6% drop in poverty rates since the missions began.

Bolivia

BOLIVIA: When Evo Morales was elected president in Bolivia in December 2005, 70% of the population of just under nine million was living below the poverty line. Morales's incoming cabinet consisted largely of indigenous people, trade unionists, and women. His cabinet also included the first woman to head the interior ministry — in charge of intelligence, the police, migration issues and the fight against drugs. Women were also at the head of the Ministries of Economic Development and of Health. All of these appointees have progressive pro-woman programs.

The just-ratified new constitution contains provisions that strengthen women's rights. It

LATIN AMERICA

prohibits discrimination based on sex, gender identity, or sexual orientation, as well as familial and gendered violence. It guarantees equal pay for men and women with the same job. It also requires equal participation of women and men in Bolivia's Congress.

However, reproductive rights are not available to most women in Bolivia. Abortion is illegal except for victims of sexual assault or to prevent a life-threatening pregnancy. In fact, Bolivia has one of the highest abortion rates in the world — up to 80,000 procedures annually in a small-sized country, according to the UN. Many are relatively safe procedures performed in more than a dozen clinics around the country. But the average \$150 fee is prohibitive to most women, driving many to seek alternative methods, resulting in at least one death a day.

Chile

CHILE: Under the Pinochet dictatorship, from 1973 to the 1990s, grassroots women's movements sprang up, partly in response to extreme poverty and to survive economically. Women formed buying and craft cooperatives and communal kitchens. They also created organizations to reclaim women's rights and basic human rights, and to search for the disappeared. This organizing transformed women into social activists.

Chilean women are well represented in government and political life. They also have advanced social benefits. When elected, Michele Bachelet named a cabinet with an unprecedented equal number of men and women – making good on a campaign promise. Bachelet administers a program of limited social democracy but with a good record on women's rights, particularly in the areas of welfare,

LATIN AMERICA

"Violence against women reflects what is going on in the rest of the region."

Mexico

Page 13

public pension benefits for women over 65, free childcare for working mothers, anti-discrimination legislation, and affirmative action to increase political representation. Starting in July 2009, all women 65 or older will receive a pension bonus for each living child they have. Women without a history of paid employment will receive public pensions.

Abortion is illegal in all circumstances and is the nation's highest cause of maternal deaths. But the Bachelet administration did institute a program of expanded access to contraception. One of these measures was a policy to distribute the morning after pill free in public health clinics. The country's high court outlawed this policy last April. Following this ruling, 10,000 people marched in the streets and hundreds engaged in a mass "apostasy," renouncing their membership in the Catholic Church.

Violence against women in Chile reflects what is going on in the rest of the region. Last fall Chile's Chamber of Deputies passed a bill that would recognize femicide as an official crime and increase punishments for violators. The bill also calls for new safe houses to be constructed for women who are victimized by domestic violence. This is now waiting for Senate approval.

MEXICO: Women in Mexico have won some important victories. Probably the most groundbreaking legislation was passed by Mexico City lawmakers (though not in the rest of the country) in April 2007, legalizing abortion during the first trimester. This was upheld by Mexico's supreme court. Since the law was passed, 5,845 women have had legal abortions in the capital city. Mexico

LATIN AMERICA

“Domestic violence claims the lives of 14 women a day in Mexico.”

City has also implemented a policy aimed at reducing sexual harassment of women in public transport by placing women-only buses on the street. Still in the works is a law that will make it easier to prosecute those found harassing women in public spaces. Other important measures include the granting of paternity leave, which will not only promote gender equality, but will also aid in raising awareness of the need for men to participate in child care.

At the same time, in Ciudad Juarez there is an epidemic of rape and murder of young women – more than 600 since 1993. Domestic violence claims the lives of 14 women a day in Mexico, but the law in eight states does not consider domestic violence a crime and 12 do not penalize rape in marriage.

We can't discuss women in Latin America without mentioning migration. Because of the vastly unequal trade arrangements between the U.S. and Mexico, for example, workers are driven off the land to the cities to find work. Many others are forced to try their luck in the U.S., leaving families behind to depend on remittances and on the low salaries of peasant and poor women. In other cases, couples or families migrate together. Not only do they suffer poverty but also poor working conditions, pesticide poisoning, violence and death.

As we asked in the beginning: are women's conditions changing as a result of the left trend in Latin America? The answer is yes, but there is still a long way to go, as in most of the world. In Latin America we've seen a striking transformation of many political, legal and economic rights.

LATIN AMERICA

Social rights and changes in mind-set and culture will take longer. But the left trend — from social democracy to the movements toward socialism — has made significant progress so far and there will likely be more to come.



"A WOMAN IS ENDOWED WITH CERTAIN
INALIENABLE RIGHTS, ALL OF WHICH SHE
MUST FIGHT FOR."

GUATEMALA

Femicide is not simply the murder of females but rather the killing of females by males.

"Guatemala's institutional structures are proving incapable of protecting women."

Page 16

FEMICIDE, IMPUNITY, AND CITIZENSHIP: The Old and New in the Struggle for Justice in Guatemala

by Roselyn Costantino

Violence against women in Guatemala is not a new story; the staggering increase in the number of crimes and level of violence against women, however, is shocking. Since 2000, the Guatemala National Civil Police records document 2,170 murders of women; in 2005, the average was forty-eight deaths per month (Trujillo 2006). These killings manifest a systemic denial of women's most basic human rights and a culturally embedded misogyny that expresses itself in the brutalization of women. This violence inflicts a generalized sense of fear and intimidation on a society still not healed from the atrocities of the thirty-six-year internal conflict (1960-1996) marked by genocide of civilians, mostly indigenous, by military and clandestine security forces. Despite the efforts of the 1996 Peace Accords, Guatemala's institutional structures and traditional communal systems are proving incapable of protecting women. They fail to act upon the network of forces that function within strategies for power that target women who live in relative obscurity and extreme insecurity in this mostly rural country, which is 25 percent smaller than the state of Illinois, with a population of about 13 million, a high percentage of whom are indigenous. In spite of national and international efforts to stabilize Guatemala, it remains one of the world's poorest and most insecure nations.

The new level of brutality against women exposes a strained, complex web of social, political, and economic relations; the tensions are borne on women's bodies at a moment when women have begun to conceptualize and construct a social agency and identity that were rare a few decades ago.

GUATEMALA

"I share observations about femicide and women's actions in Guatemala."

Widows of the 35 year intense armed conflict. (Photo taken by Roselyn Costantino)

Page 17

Although the murders of women are underreported, *Guatemaltecas* (females of Guatemala) collaboratively strategize to transform their lives, their communities, and the country. Through creative, organized responses to the conditions in which they live, Guatemaltecas are redefining the concept of citizenship. They face globalizing forces that simultaneously further oppress them yet offer new resources in their individual and collective efforts to alter the reality of their lives. For women in all areas of Guatemala, femicide forms part of their daily existence.

In this essay, I share observations about femicide and women's actions in Guatemala, the result of numerous interviews with individuals and organizations conducted in March 2005 when I had the opportunity to serve as a member of the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA Women's Right to Live Delegation. Our investigation into violent deaths of women quickly revealed a familiar intersection of complicit dominant groups' interests. Our interviewees signaled a web of power relations that, while not explicitly creating the cultural



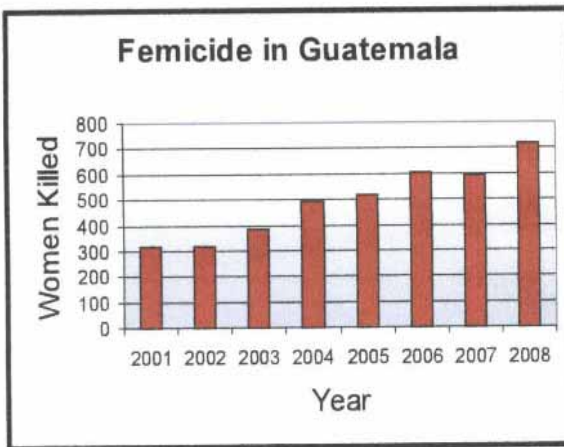
attitudes and sociopolitical factors that target women, nevertheless, directly or indirectly, generates the circumstances that permit the physical

and psychological violence against them. Among those responsible, the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA (GHRC/USA) identifies the

GUATEMALA

National Civil Police (PNC), military and paramilitary forces, and sanctioned private security forces that exert increased control of public space and suppress public expression. The military, supposedly decommissioned by the 1996 Peace Accords, is rebuilding and reintegrating into the civic arena and, by a variety of measures, delaying the prosecution of or punishment for decades-old crimes of genocide it committed. Government inaction and financial commitment allow an inefficient and intimidated judiciary system to remain unfixed; impunity and incompetency continue unabated. Structural failures, such as the lack of a central federal medical or health agency, or of a coordinating mechanism to handle the evidence gathered in these cases, constitute a barrier to justice for the murdered women. At the same time, instability increases when neoliberal economic policymakers oversee the privatization of public

resources and strategize public relations efforts to attract international investment while drug traffickers and organized crime operate relatively



freely outside the law. As of late 2005, the courts had convicted and sentenced to prison only twelve men in the 1,227 cases of women murdered between 2002 and 2004; only another twenty cases were then pending. These factors foment a climate of intense, palpable fear for women and society at large. The immediate situation remains dire for the individuals and

Figure taken from Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA Fact Sheet

GUATEMALA



The murder of Maria Isabel



groups who fight against these crimes and for human and gender rights. While in 2004 the number of violent deaths rose in general in Guatemala, murders of men increased by 36 percent while those of women went up by 56.8 percent; in that year, 527 women were reported kidnapped, missing, tortured, and murdered. In 2005, the average was forty-eight deaths per month. A high percentage of the women are between thirteen and twenty-two years old, although a number are over forty-five. They come from different social, economic, and ethnic groups from around the country, although the majority reside in Guatemala City. The murdered women constitute Guatemala's most vulnerable, among them, internal and international migrant women, maquila and other low-wage workers, and sex workers. These are women who, because of migration, geographic location, or employment, lack close family or community ties, have limited access to the legal system, or work in public spaces that cultural values still mark as masculine.

To put a human face on these statistics, I recount the story of Rosa Franco, a working-class single mother making her way through legal studies, and her fifteen-year-old daughter, María Isabel Vélez Franco, a quiet, religious teenager, dedicated to her family and her studies, with dreams of attending college. Through their story we see both the brutality of these crimes and Guatemalan women's refusal to react to fear tactics but rather to act against them. In the late afternoon on 16 December 2001, unknown assailants kidnapped María Isabel as she left her part-time holiday job in a boutique in Guatemala City. Three days later, a supposedly anonymous phone call directed authorities to her body, which her killers had deposited in a black plastic bag in a *predio baldío*, a no-man's land, on the outskirts of Guatemala City, near areas known for drug trafficking and gang violence. Her body showed familiar signs of torture: her feet, hands, and

GUATEMALA

throat had been tied with barbed wire. They had fractured her bones. She had a deep knife wound below her heart. María Isabel died of a severe blow to the back of her head, which her assassins then wrapped in a green towel. When authorities found her, María Isabel's arms and hands were frozen at a 90-degree angle, in a position of begging or protecting herself. The firefighters (not the police) called to the scene found her clothing there, covered with blood and large amounts of semen.

María Isabel's mother, Rosa Franco, learned of the discovery when she flipped on the television news after work and saw her daughter's naked, mutilated body on the screen. Although in shock,

Rosa fought authorities for the right to see her daughter. When she finally gained access to María Isabel's body, an officer handed Rosa a bag



Rosa Franco with a photo of her murdered daughter. (Photographed by Roselyn Costantino.)

filled with Isabel's clothes and belongings—an obvious mishandling of evidence. Rosa made repeated requests for DNA testing of the semen on her daughter's clothes, but local officials initially refused. When they finally tested the blood on María Isabel's clothes, they confirmed that it indeed was hers. They refused to test the semen that, due to the quantity, Rosa and her lawyer, Hilda Rosales, believe came from several men. Adding humiliation to emotional pain, assistants at the police station laughed at Rosa, suggesting María Isabel wore skirts too short,

"The police refused to follow leads and repeatedly delayed questioning suspects."

GUATEMALA

"Despite their efforts to date no one has been charged or even questioned by officials."

was a loose girl, a *puta*, probably a gang member, asking for it.

As Rosa pushed for a proper investigation, suspicious-looking men (whom she later learned were associated with the police) showed up at her place of employment. The officials' stories of how the firefighters (even less qualified than the police to investigate a crime scene) found María Isabel's body made no sense in the face of the evidence. The police refused to follow leads and repeatedly delayed questioning suspects, including Isabel's boyfriend, whom Rosa believes had ties to drug traffickers and who Rosa discovered to be in possession of María Isabel's cell phone after her disappearance. In addition, the case was assigned to a different station from where the crime occurred. A photo of a police officer at that station appeared in local papers. He had been arrested on various corruption charges. The irregularities in this case are too numerous to list here; they nonetheless confirmed for Rosa that her daughter's murder was not a random act of violence.

María Isabel's case, unfortunately, follows a pattern of many reported murders: the duration of the violence before the body is dumped, the torture (strangulation, stabbing, or beating), and rape by more than one person. What distinguishes María Isabel's story from those of other Guatemalan women is the amount of evidence secured. Rosa had been studying law at the time of her daughter's murder; she knew the proper procedures for investigating a crime and handling the evidence. Losing two jobs in order to pursue the case, Rosa has forced local authorities and government officials to at least hear her. She has done this at the cost of personal harassment, stalking, and death threats against her, her younger son, and her elderly mother. This strategy to block prosecution by fear and intimidation is endemic in Guatemala. In the face of these tactics and the generalized incompetence, corruption, and impunity of the

GUATEMALA

Contributing
factors
to femicide

local police, Rosa has worked for more than four years, following leads and suspects that the police refused to investigate. She located María Isabel's cell phone and cell-phone records. She followed up on eyewitness accounts and a note with an address and phone number left on Maria Isabel's work desk. These led Rosa to neighborhoods of suspected drug traffickers and gang members. She walked up to the door of the home of a trafficker, to police stations, to the Rigoberta Menchú Foundation, to national government officials' offices and, eventually, to the office of human rights lawyer Hilda Morales Trujillo of La Red de No Violencia. Morales Trujillo took on Rosa's case, enabling her to testify before the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the GHRC/USA. Despite their efforts to date, no one has been charged or even questioned by officials, and Rosa feels no closer to justice for her daughter. Yet, María Isabel's case is exceptional, due to the preparation and commitment of Rosa Franco to fight for justice. In most cases fear, intimidation, and lack of funds prevent family members from even reporting the crime, let alone pursuing its investigation.

For insight into femicide in Guatemala, I turn to the assessment of individuals and groups whom we interviewed as part of the GHRC/USA Women's Right to Live Delegation in March 2005. The people who spoke to us during more than twenty-five hours of interviews agreed on basic issues regardless of their geographic location, job, or organization's mission. The main contributing factors, they posit, include:

- the general devaluing of women in Guatemala, especially in rural areas, inscribed in cultural and legal codes. The crimes evidence a backlash against women now visible in public life. The lack of accountability for them somehow further validates the idea that women deserve the treatment they receive.

GUATEMALA

"The increase in numbers, visibility, and purview of the armed forces relates to an environment safe for multinational investors."

- remilitarization of the country and the buildup of the security forces responsible for mass disappearances, torture, and genocide of the civilian population during the armed conflict. This tactic is a carryover of the rage and cruelty that characterized these groups' actions during the internal conflict directed specifically at indigenous populations and women.
- continued lack of resources for and oversight of the infamously inefficient and corrupt police system. There were no forensic units to investigate these murders until the summer of 2005 when Argentine and European units arrived to train Guatemalans and also absent was the independent judiciary to prosecute.
- dismissal of gendered crimes by scapegoating youth gangs. Disenfranchised youths have become targets of security-force sweeps and of social cleansing by unnamed sectors of the population, even though very few of the women's murders have been attributed to them.
- groups of untouchables. These include power players, such as military officers, drug traffickers, and state-sanctioned private security forces, who, for complex reasons, remain outside the law.
- continued marginalization of and racism toward indigenous Guatemalans.
- pressure from foreign interests to make Guatemala safe for intensified foreign investment, especially in light of many Latin American governments' movement to the left.
- Central American-Dominican Republic Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA, translated as *Tratado de Libre Comercio* or *TLC*): the recently brokered and U.S. House-approved neoliberal economic agreement. Guatemala's congress approved CAFTA after intense pressure from forces within and without, particularly the United States.

GUATEMALA

"The violence continues with virtually no prosecution."

The approval came despite widespread, vocal, and at times violent rejection of CAFTA by the Guatemalan populace.

Government officials and the U.S. Department of State Attaché for Labor in Guatemala told us that the police forces historically have been ineffective. They note that even though responsibility for public safety shifted to the police from the military with the 1996 Peace Accords, the police have yet to receive the necessary resources to carry out their job. The fact that no additional funds are allotted reveals the true lack of political will to build a civil police force. Guatemalans interviewed repeatedly cited the suspicious coincidence of the resurgence of the military and private security forces in the role of internal policing. Government officials with whom we spoke claimed this a necessary step in the battle against drugs and gangs. Human and women's rights organization members, miners, religious leaders, still-in-hiding witnesses against the genocide, and ex-guerrillas of the internal conflict assert that the increase in numbers, visibility, and purview of the armed forces relates directly to the establishment of an environment safe for multinational investors. In addition, a directly to the establishment of an environment safe for multinational investors. In addition a generalized privatization of security forces has occurred: Guatemala has 300,000 police and 120,000 private security guards. Since the 1996 Peace Accords ordered the dismantling of the armed forces (reduced from 27,000 to 15,000 active members), many officers founded private security firms to keep well-to-do Guatemalans safe as crime in general has skyrocketed. The private and public security forces feed each other: the intense level of insecurity and crime goes unchecked—or worse, is fostered by the police, thus increasing demand for the National Security Forces. The violence continues with virtually no prosecutions. Public outrage brings calls for better-trained police.

GUATEMALA

"They contend that CAFTA will break the already weak public health care system because pharmaceuticals have brokered a five year extension on their drug patents."

Officials and much virtually no prosecution. Public outrage brings calls for better-trained police. Officials and much of the media blame the gangs, the drug dealers, and enraged abusive husbands. The populace watches as impunity reigns. Most people cannot afford private security. Their frustration and fear, unfortunately, block historical memory and, by complicity and default, the army becomes the only body capable of putting an end to this violence. The army was never truly disempowered, human rights activists contend, but rather sits on the sidelines waiting to be called into action. National Security Forces are visible on the streets, openly supporting local police in joint operations during marches and public demonstrations. U.S. officials weigh in with their support. After almost a decade of withholding monies from the Guatemalan Army because of its human rights record, during CAFTA negotiations in early 2005, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to restore funding. The provision was rescinded in late 2005, after an organized letter-writing campaign by individuals from around the country and world. Nonetheless, Guatemalan Army generals and other officers, some charged with genocide and crimes against humanity, still move freely through the halls of political and economic power.

According to our interviewees, neoliberal economic policy plays a large part in the murders, the lack of prosecution and conviction of the perpetrators, and the increased militarization of Guatemala. The relationship among these factors is complex and is complicated by recent friction between the United States and Latin American countries. The United States negotiated unilaterally with each country, diminishing the power these countries might have exerted as a bloc. The opposition railed against CAFTA, believing it would increase the number of maquilas, bring more strip mining, take more land from indigenous communities or individuals through privatization, and perpetuate

GUATEMALA

"Thousands of CAFTA protestors had also assembled on the streets of Guatemala City."

(Photo taken by Roselyn Costantino)

the horrific record of abuse of workers (particularly women) who have no rights to organize and no enforced protection from sexual discrimination, harassment, or abuse. They contend that CAFTA will break the already weak public health care system because pharmaceuticals have brokered a five-year extension on their drug patents, including some already available in generic form. At first, I was uneasy with a narrow interpretation of the role of the army and neoliberal policy in the femicide, except for the fact that Guatemalans from around the country repeated it almost verbatim. They highlighted the links in our conversations and reiterated them in the banners used in the International Women's Day march in Guatemala City, 8 March 2005, such as this one, which



states:

"The lack of legislation is also a form of violence. There are many ways to kill a woman."

The International Women's Day march

manifested the indomitable energy and vision leading women to collaborate locally, nationally, and internationally across gender, class, and ethnic lines. Their actions constitute a redefining of civic participation. Women are minimally represented in government offices at any level and are unequally protected under the law or public policy (Federación 2006, 30–31). As a consequence, they have formed networks across the country in which women from the local level identify problems and come together at a central

GUATEMALA

Photograph
taken by
Roselyn
Costantino

location to meet with other women, some trained in the field, to strategize responses to issues ranging from family planning, child care, and domestic violence to unequal wages, harassment in the community or at work, and psychological trauma from present and past events. Successes are slow in coming, but, as Sandra Morán of Sector Mujeres (Quetzaltenango) noted in an interview, the empowerment of women is essential in the face of the structural failures throughout Guatemalan government and society that the Peace Accords could not fix.

During the International Women's Day march,



participants demonstrated how neoliberal economic policy weighs in on a myriad of social issues. The march brought thousands of women to the capital both

to celebrate women's achievements and to mourn and decry the seemingly unfettered violence against them. Women, children, and some men—indigenous, mestizo, and working- and middle-class people—demanded recognition of their place in Guatemalan society and protested the impending passage of CAFTA (the discussion of which, coincidentally, was to begin that same day in the National Assembly). Because of the scheduled debate—which never materialized—thousands of CAFTA protestors had also assembled in the streets of Guatemala City, on a different route from the women's march, but also headed toward the government buildings downtown. Occupying public space, citizens attempted to have their voices heard in response

GUATEMALA

"Using water tanks, the police and army officials sprayed blue-dyed water on protesters marking them so that they could arrest them."

to the sham of a so-called public debate inside the National Assembly. In the police- and national guard-lined streets, public sentiment was obvious: NO to changing the law protecting the availability of generic drugs; NO to protection for the workers of the maquilas; NO to the pressures of foreign/U.S. interests and to placing the needs of multinationals ahead of the populace; NO to neoliberal economic policy, to renewed strip mining and environmental devastation, and to the privatization of national resources.

The messages of the Women's Day march made most clear the connection women draw between economic policy formulated in the stratosphere of international capitalist boardrooms—a more recent version of globalized imperialism, in their words—and the violence against women. "TLC foments migration and social disintegration," "I am a maquila worker, and I say no to the TLC," and "This body is not for sale" read long purple banners hanging from sewing machines mounted high on a flatbed truck. "I sustain this country," "I have rights to happiness and pleasure," and "I should decide" were among the hundreds of signs displayed by a multitude of organizations that included regional indigenous women's health networks, women in wheelchairs, lesbian coalitions, human rights groups, and schoolgirls in uniform. The government response to the protests was firm. Using water tanks, the police and army officials sprayed blue-dyed water on protestors on the route, marking them so that even if they ran, officers could arrest them. I met a sixty-year-old woman who had taken a five-hour bus ride to get to the demonstration. Her friend, a woman of the same age who had never before participated in any such public activity, had been sprayed and, five hours later, was still missing. In the following days, the anti-CAFTA protests and standoff intensified around the country. In Huehuetangango, security forces used live ammunition, injuring one protester and killing another. The public debate never happened.

GUATEMALA

"Do they place much hope on such displays of public resistance as a tool for change?"

Legislators were holed up in the assembly building for more than twenty-four hours, afraid to go home. CAFTA sailed through the vote; the U.S. Congress approved it in the fall of 2005.

Reading the reactions of Guatemalans to this latest show of force by their government was difficult. Do they place much hope on such displays of public resistance as a tool of change? Perhaps the real benefit is the creation of the opportunity for physical connection of human beings in a nation where public space is monitored, insecure, and violent. It is the presence of live bodies that gives testimony to the past and present, that stands as a reminder to participants and to power elites alike of the strength of those bodies, of the community that is forged, no longer only imaginary but palpable. Visibility, I have argued elsewhere, is not a trap as some might suggest, but an opportunity for self-affirmation, for connection to a broader agency beyond the limits of one's own body (Costantino 2000, 2002).

The public displays we witnessed on 8 March 2005 constitute a manifestation of such community. Some participants were members of the more than 400 Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in Guatemala. They include human rights activists, legal assistants, experts working with women in the rural areas to develop strategies for sustainable economic activity and against domestic abuse and racism against indigenous peoples. They are professionals who train midwives; conduct workshops to develop consultative, collaborative, and nonhierarchical leadership skills; and run the only shelter in the country for battered women and children. They are mental health providers who aid widowed grandmothers whose husbands and children were disappeared and murdered during the armed conflict and who now, despite threats of kidnapping or even death, organize and oversee the exhumation of bodies from mass graves

GUATEMALA

“Guatemalan women are reformulating their roles”

remaining from the thirty-six-year internal conflict. They include union-organized miners who work with scientists gathering evidence in their fight against the opening of more mines that devastate the environment and pose major health and safety concerns. Instead of the slave wages they receive, workers are demanding living wages. Together, all decry the impunity that has survived the armed conflict, the Peace Accords, and now the unimaginable crimes against women.

Guatemalan women are reformulating their roles, their participation, and their position in the relations and structures that affect their individual and collective lives on a daily basis. The circumstances are both familiar and new. Their challenges are as life-threatening as ever; their responses, however, have become empowering and life affirming. Our challenge is to name the injustices they—Rosa Franco, María Isabel, Hilda Morales, and Sandra Morán and thousands more women face, to learn to read their efforts to reform their society, and to give visibility to the forces that threaten their physical wellbeing and dignity.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London and New York: Verso.

Costantino, Roselyn. 2000. “‘And She Wears It Well’: Feminist and Cultural Debates in the Performance of Astrid Hadad.” In *Latinas on Stage*, eds. Norma Alarcón and Lillian Manzor, 398–421. Berkeley: Third Woman Press.

Costantino, Roselyn, 2002. “Uncovering and Displaying our Universes: Jesusa Rodríguez in/on Mexico.” In *The Color of Theater*, eds. Roberta Uno and Lucy Burns, 144–156. New York and London: Continuum Press.

Federación internacional de los derechos humanos. 2006. *Informe* 444, no. 3 (April): 26–39.

GUATEMALA

Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA. <http://www.ghrc.usa.org/Actions/HumanRightsReview2005.htm>.

Morán, Sandra. Personal Interview. Sector Mujeres Quetzaltenango (13 March 2005).

Trujillo, Hilda Morales. 2005. "Violencia contra las mujeres: un problema grave en Guatemala." Essay accessed 8 May 2006 online at the Guatemala Human Rights Commission/USA.

MEXICO

"An investigative journalist and a specialist on gender-based violence."



A TRIBUTE TO MEXICAN JOURNALIST LYDIA CACHO RIBEIRO

(This article was taken from the Amnesty International USA web site, March 8, 2007.)

An investigative journalist and a specialist on gender-based violence, Lydia Cacho Ribeiro founded and directs the Refuge Center for Abused Women of Cancun and is also the president of the Center for Women's Assistance. These centers do not turn away any woman or child seeking protection. Many of these women and girls are fleeing from violent criminals. Consequently Cacho faces threats and danger on a daily basis. In 1999, Cacho was raped at a bus station in an attempt to intimidate her and stop her work. This incident only emboldened her further to protect and

MEXICO

"She became the first woman in Mexico to file a federal suit against a governor, district attorney, and a judge for corruption and attempted rape."

advance the rights of women and children in a country where impunity for crimes is widespread and commonly accepted as part of daily life.

Cacho's 2004 book, *Los Demonios del Eden: el poder detras de la pornografia infantil* (The Demons of Eden: the power behind child pornography) prompted repeated threats against her life and judicial harassment to silence her effort to give voice to the victims. On December 16, 2005, Cacho was arrested and denied access to her lawyer and medicine. She spent the night in prison and was then released on bail of \$9,900. In response to the intimidation tactics, Cacho filed a counter-suit for corruption and for violation of her human rights. She became the first woman in Mexico to file a federal suit against a governor, district attorney and a judge for corruption and attempted rape in prison.

Cacho said, "To expose the criminals who destroy the lives of women and children is not enough; it is imperative to challenge the powers that be in order to stop impunity and corruption in Mexico. We do not ask for revenge, but rather for accountability for the criminals and the politicians that manipulate the justice system for money, thus sacrificing human rights and human lives.

Although Cacho's life is repeatedly threatened and she has to travel with armed guards, she continues to champion the advancement of human rights for all children and women through her writing and advocacy work. In recognition of her human rights work she was presented the Amnesty International USA Ginetta Sagan Award in 2007.

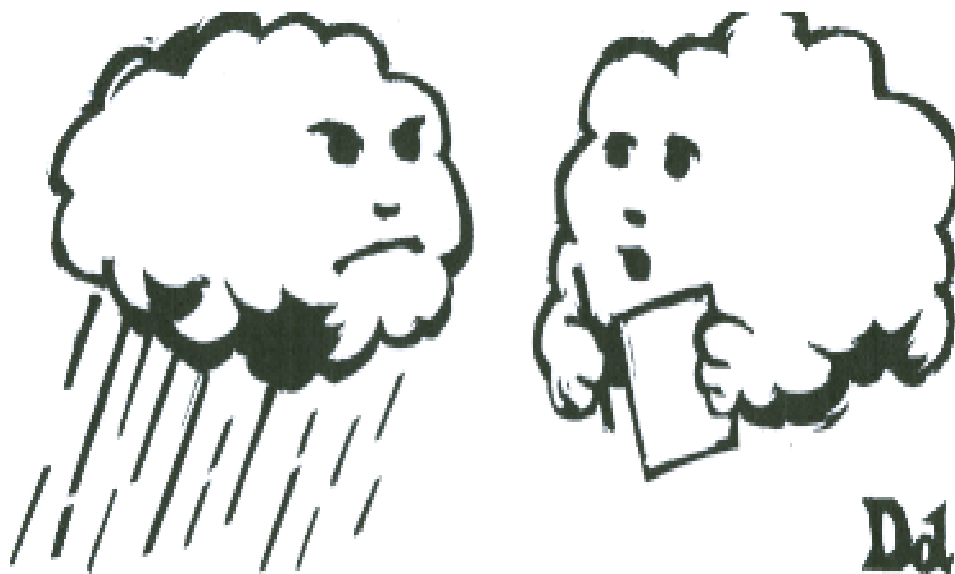
OUR AUTHORS

Donna Goodman

Donna Goodman is a member of the Caribbean and Latin America Support Project steering committee and an activist in New York's Hudson Valley on peace and union issues. She can be reached at: donna0726@earthlink.net

Roselyn Costantino

Dr. Roselyn Costantino received her M.A. from Montclair State University (1988) in Spanish Peninsular Literature with a focus on 19th-century Spanish and Latin American narrative, and her Ph.D. from Arizona State University (1992) in Spanish with specialization in Latin American theatre and narrative; Latin American Studies; and Women's Studies.



"I've learned to express my anger through my writing instead."