

Inter Pares

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Resisting Control, Reclaiming Dignity

There were thousands of people in the streets of Khulna that day – singing, laughing, arms linked, strong. The banners they carried shouted the words, “No To Shrimp Farming!” And they chanted, “This is our land!”

The demonstrators had come from villages along the coast of Bangladesh to commemorate the life of Karunamoi, a young woman killed in her efforts to protect her land from those threatening to steal it and convert it to shrimp cultivation. In the eight years since her death, this annual commemoration has become a celebration of the growing strength of a people’s movement that has succeeded in declaring large parts of the region free from the environmentally-destructive and economically unsustainable practice of shrimp farming. Equally important, it was a celebration of their collective efforts to shape and determine for themselves how best to develop and sustain their communities.

In protesting, the villagers were resisting one element of control exercised over them. But this control, and resistance to it, takes many forms. Indeed, one face of human history is the history of control – of people’s labour, movement, reproduction, livelihoods. It is the story of slavery, armed repression, forced relocation, and ethnic genocide – of the brutal exercise of power of one group over another.

But another face of human history is the history of resistance – of people’s courage in the face of tyranny, resistance in the face of injustice. It is the story of their determined efforts to survive, to seek peace, joy and security, the promise of something better. This Bulletin offers one glimpse of the rich character of that struggle – of the persistent and varied nature of people’s efforts to resist control.

Though the stories of marginalized peoples are unique in detail, place and circumstance, common threads weave them together in a coherent, complex



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tapestry. Indeed, this tapestry traverses history and geography to link seemingly disparate tales – of the annihilated Arawak peoples of the Western Caribbean, of the Africans who toiled as slaves on the plantations of the American South, of First Nations peoples forced onto reserves and their children into residential schools, and of the Filipina women who today work the red light districts of Japan.

This tapestry includes those who, in their ceaseless drive for wealth and power, reduce human beings to exploitable and expendable resources. It reveals the common story of stolen land and expropriated resources, of people pushed and pulled from their homelands to serve the economic interests of others, of the systematic devastation of Third World people’s livelihoods and traditions, and of the abdication of responsibility by governments for the welfare of their citizens. In the end, it tells the story of the subordination of human dignity and life itself to the explicit drive for wealth and all the power that accompanies it.

But this story is equally about marginalized people’s efforts to resist, of their shared refusal to submit to the control of an elite. It is about countless

public protests, and the quiet daily resistance, and about people’s determination to create fair and just alternatives. It is about the persistence of migrant workers to secure their livelihoods and futures, and about the determination of women to control their bodies and protect their health. And it is about the thousands of farmers and fishers marching in the streets of Khulna, steadfastly regaining control of their local resources and of the development of their communities.

To be sure, with every attempt to resist has come a redoubling of mechanisms of control – new laws to further restrict the movements of people across borders, stronger armies to back authoritarian regimes, new rhetoric to defend governments that continue to abandon their citizens. The forces arrayed against the world’s poor are indeed considerable. But people’s will to resist and to transform their world – to reclaim dignity, rebuild communities, reestablish livelihoods and secure futures – is ever resourceful, creative, persistent and hopeful.

For more than 20 years Inter Pares has worked with Third World organizations supporting people in their efforts to create change and to gain control of their lives. This Bulletin describes some of these efforts.

Preserving Humanity: *Women are not for sale*

Children as young as eight working in brothels in Calcutta and Mumbai. Thousands of Nepalese girls coerced into crossing the border of India, where they are forced into sexual slavery. Burmese girls, fleeing war in their own country, being taken to work in the red light districts of Thailand or India. Thousands of young Caribbean women, lured by the promise of a more secure future, trapped as sex-workers in the tourist enclaves. Young Filipino women recruited overseas to places such as Tokyo and Toronto, only to discover the sordid reality of the "entertainment" they are expected to provide.

These are all examples of how girls and young women are seen as mere commodities to be bought and sold in the international marketplace. Many are trafficked across borders where they have no legal status, no right of residence or right to protection. They are stateless, vulnerable not only to those who control their bodies and their lives, but also to judicial systems that treat them as illegal migrants or outright criminals.

In every society on earth, women and girls have always been subjected to abuse and sexual exploitation. This vulnerability is intensifying as a result of economic processes that are marginalizing increasing numbers of people, and especially undermining the productive roles of women. In South Asia, for example, women have always played key roles in agricultural production. Modern agriculture, with its emphasis on cash crops, high-yielding seeds and other imported inputs, is diminishing the central role of women so that women and girls are becoming superfluous to these economic processes. For many girls and women, the only option is to migrate in search of work; the result is that many become tradable commodities in the marketplace of men.

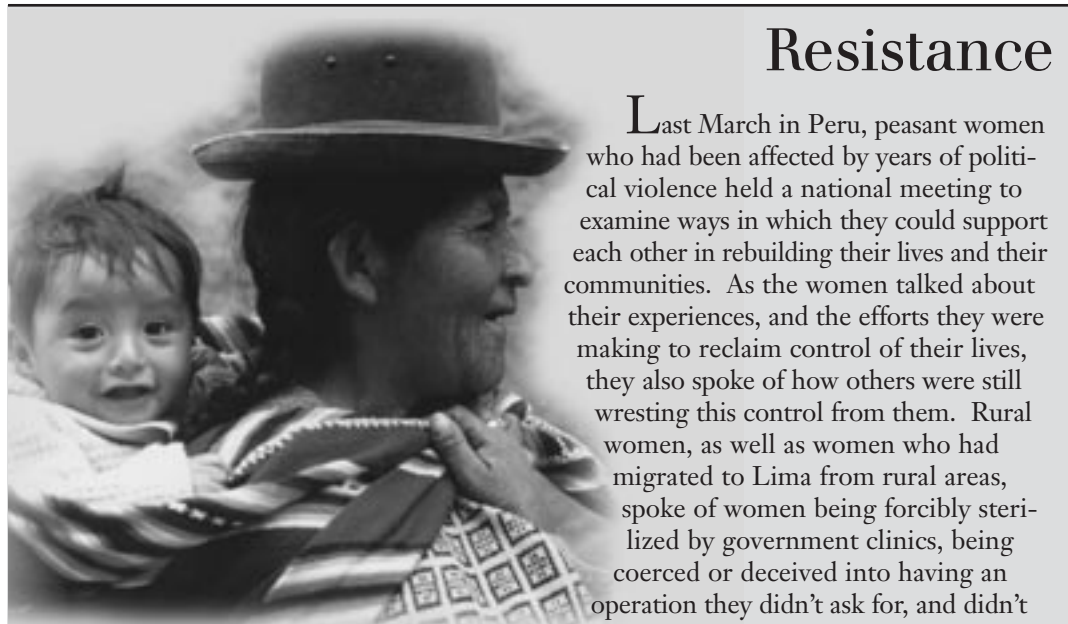
Human rights and social justice organizations around the world are trying to understand these socio-economic processes and the impact on women, children and their communities. For example, with the support of Inter Pares, the *Instituto Latinoamericano de Servicios Legales Alternativos* (ILSA) and the Caribbean Association

for Feminist Research and Action (CAFRA) recently sponsored a number of studies in several South American and Caribbean countries to uncover and analyze some of these realities. This was followed by a conference in Jamaica in July 1998 which brought together researchers, human rights activists, government officials and sex workers to look at ways of protecting the basic human rights of girls and women.

In South Asia, groups from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Pakistan came together to research the problem of trafficking in the region. Since 1997, these groups have lobbied for a convention against trafficking with the Heads of States meeting at the South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation. So successful have been these lobbying efforts that the prime ministers and presidents of all the coun-

tries in the region have agreed to the development of a regional legal framework against trafficking. The groups are now involved in drafting the convention itself, which will be presented for ratification at the next Heads of State meeting.

These groups know that the sexual exploitation of women and children will not be stopped by new criminal codes alone. These groups are also advocating development strategies which explicitly aim to strengthen the economic, social and political roles of women. Until women take their place as fully equal citizens, they will remain vulnerable to a grotesque division of labour, robbed of the possibility of leading lives of hope, dignity and security. Inter Pares intends to continue to support these efforts to challenge human trafficking and promote the dignity and rights of all persons.



Resistance

Last March in Peru, peasant women who had been affected by years of political violence held a national meeting to examine ways in which they could support each other in rebuilding their lives and their communities. As the women talked about their experiences, and the efforts they were making to reclaim control of their lives, they also spoke of how others were still wresting this control from them. Rural women, as well as women who had migrated to Lima from rural areas, spoke of women being forcibly sterilized by government clinics, being coerced or deceived into having an operation they didn't ask for, and didn't want. They spoke of how clinic workers

often deceive women about possible side effects of long-term contraception, and about the complications and illnesses that occur in the absence of health care.

Not only in Peru, but also around the world, thousands of cases of forced sterilization have been documented, in which people's most private and personal decisions have been violently and traumatically taken out of their control. There are many more cases still of women being given inaccurate contraceptive information, and inadequate health follow-up. Our colleagues in these countries tell us that the targets of this violence are always poor people. Of these, almost all are women. And the perpetrators are government clinics, or private organizations contracted to carry out population control programs. Why does this happen?

Rural economies are being dismantled all over the world, and lands that once were held in common are being enclosed and taken over to produce goods for export – large-scale agriculture, mining, lumbering, shrimp farming. People who live in these areas either risk

Cairo Plus Five: *The voice of women*

Five years ago, women's groups believed they'd scored a major victory when they succeeded in getting gender issues on the agenda of the United Nations International Conference on Population in Development in Cairo, Egypt. The Cairo Plan of Action reflected the influence of these groups by including the language of reproductive rights and reproductive health, and de-emphasizing narrow population control approaches of the past.

Not all participants, however, saw the Cairo meeting as a success. Many women's organizations, particularly from the South, argued that while the language of Cairo had become more gender sensitive, the theory and practice of population control remained the same. Although Cairo was supposed to be about development as well as population, issues of over-consump-

tion in the North, and a global economic system that continues to destroy environments and impoverish the majority of the world's people – especially women – were not given serious attention. To the extent that issues of women's education, employment and political power were addressed, they were discussed as a means to decrease fertility rates.

The Cairo conference may have been a step forward in its recognition of gender issues, but the bulk of the financial resources required to implement the Plan of Action – \$17 billion – calls for twice as much investment in birth control as in reproductive health.

Inter Pares has long argued that access to safe and effective family planning methods is essential – indeed a basic right; but family planning must be offered within the context of a health care system where proper

testing, treatment and follow-up are provided.

Five years after Cairo, we know from our Southern colleagues that coercive, demographically-driven population programs are still being imposed, poor women are still being recruited for risky sterilization procedures and contraceptive use in the absence of basic health services. Primary health systems have not improved and maternal mortality has not been reduced. New and dangerous methods of birth control and sterilization are being researched, tested or used on Third World women – including the anti-fertility “vaccines” and the sterilizing agent, quinacrine.

A “Cairo Plus Five” process is now underway which will include a series of activities culminating in a Special Session of the UN General Assembly in June, to review implementation of the 1994 Plan of Action. A special NGO Forum will be held in February in the Netherlands to assess successes in and obstacles to achieving the Cairo agreement.

Inter Pares, in collaboration with our Southern counterparts, has been involved in a range of actions on the eve of “Cairo plus Five”. These include public workshops to share information on dangerous contraceptive and sterilization methods; research comparing the delivery of health services to the delivery of population control programs in rural Bangladesh; and advocacy with the Canadian government and parliament to emphasize programs that address women's basic health, social and economic needs.

We have been working to ensure that the critical voices of women are not lost in the “Cairo plus Five” process, voices which advocate moving away from demographic approaches to controlling women's fertility and towards social justice approaches to women's health and well-being. Programs that give women greater control over all aspects of their lives must guide future efforts to ensure reproductive health and freedom. Only then can we consider the policy process begun in Cairo in 1994 a success.

and Choice

their lives to resist, or migrate to the cities to find a way to feed themselves and their families. In Peru, government officials openly express alarm at the numbers of “surplus” rural poor, and are concerned that rural people are migrating to the cities. Rather than recognizing the destructive effects of their own economic policies on communities and local economies, they identify the people themselves as the problem, and try to control their movement, and their lives.

And ultimately, our own governments in the North collaborate with and reinforce this attitude, while taking no responsibility for our part in global economic policies that make human beings “surplus”. While Northern governments formally require that the family planning programs they fund be voluntary, they also express dissatisfaction when the figures for sterilization and long-term contraception do not reach the targets they have established. When the targets focus on numbers of sterilizations and long-term contraception use, the inevitable outcome is programs that are blind to people's knowledge about their own situation, and rob them of human dignity. It has been demonstrated time and again that successful family planning programs provide information and services that allow women and men to safely and freely make their own decisions about the number and spacing of children.

As part of their action plan for rebuilding their lives and their communities, the peasant women in Peru have demanded that women who had been forcibly sterilized be given physical and psychological care and economic reparation for the violation done to them. They have also demanded that integrated health care programs be established which include, as one element, adequate counselling and information about family planning to allow women to decide and plan for themselves.

In Peru, and in other countries around the world, Inter Pares provides financial and policy support to organizations such as the Peruvian peasant women's group in their efforts to resist these violations, and to ensure that women and men have access to information and services that allow them to make their own decisions about when and how many children to have. And we act with others to challenge economic policies that make human beings “surplus” – mere burdens on an economic system over which they have no control, and in which they have no place.

Migration: *Challenging Frontiers, Creating Horizons*

Movement is inherent to the human condition. Since the beginning of time, human beings have taken to the road. Whether on a pilgrimage, in search of a better life, or simply to survive, people leave their homes, abandoning the familiarity of their daily lives, their loved ones, their world, to face the unknown. Whatever the reason, departure uproots the individual, and brings profound change to the host society.

The onslaught of information about recent events in the world may lead some to believe that migration is a relatively recent phenomenon, and a threat to Northern countries. A careful look at the statistics, however, reveals a far more complex reality. In fact, contemporary migratory movements differ from their predecessors mainly in size and countries of origin. The two world wars gave rise to unprecedented displacements of populations. For political and economic reasons, many moved within Europe, while a great number emigrated permanently to the Americas and Australia. Political arrangements which accompanied decolonization also led to population shifts, as was the case in the separation of India and Pakistan. Today, the frequency of armed conflicts and food shortages continues to create refugees, the majority of whom are taken in by bordering countries. Very few of these thousands of refugees make it to the nations of the North.

Other factors also force people to emigrate. The capitalization of agriculture increases the concentration of land in the hands of a privileged minority, further weakening the capacity for subsistence of entire populations. For its part, monoculture, favoured by the priorities of export economies, contributes to the eviction and dislocation of small landowners. These factors, exacerbated by growing economic liberalization, often lead to the destruction of the environment and rural ways of life, forcing more peasants into congested shantytowns to sell their labour. Furthermore, women and children make up the majority of migrants today. We are witness-

ing a feminization of migration and poverty, with poverty itself often being both the cause and consequence of displacement.

Economic disparity has always dictated the destinations of migrant workers. Hence, many “guest” workers shuttled between their home countries and Europe before settling as the borders became more closed. The determination of the developed economies to

enriching their social, economic and cultural life. This contemporary reality has seen the increasing disappearance of traditional sign-posts. Like movement, territoriality has always been a human trait. The rhetoric of globalization promises the disappearance of physical borders, while paradoxically calling for tight control on the movement of people. But migration, whether emigration or immigration – especially when immigra-



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control movement has led to a tightening of immigration laws in countries of the North. As a result, Mexican workers, for example, who – following the seasons – have always migrated to the United States according to the law of supply and demand, are now being forced into clandestine labour. The tightening of borders, while still allowing for a supply of cheap labour, denies these workers any hope of recognition of their most basic rights. In the name of a kind of development that profits only a few, those who are seen to stand in the way of “progress” are excluded. It is no longer possible to avoid the responsibilities incumbent upon us as human beings – in a more and more integrated world, the problems as much as the riches must be shared.

In Canada, we are in a position to benefit from the rich diversity which is the heritage of the citizens who make up this country. The same is true of most of the great cities of the world today, characterized by an ethnic and cultural diversity that is capable of

tion is conceived as a policy of “nation building” – leads to the emergence of a new culture. In this sense, immigration presumes the erosion of frontiers of the mind. It prompts and encourages openness. Through the diversity it creates within welcoming societies, immigration is a constant reminder of the existence of “the other” who, from now on, always appears both nearby and far away, and is no longer one whom it is possible to ignore.

Immigration imposes an apprenticeship in openness, both for those who arrive and those who receive them. Even in a nation of immigrants like Canada, cultural diversity constitutes an important challenge through which the very idea of citizenship acquires true meaning: an inclusive citizenship, synonymous with a commitment to a society in which cohesion is based on acceptance of all those who find themselves within its borders. If we trust in this shared humanity as our common bond, diversity – with all the dynamism and renewal it brings – can only enrich our own society and other societies in which it is allowed to flourish.

