

No. 76/77 - Fall/Winter 2008



Women & Environments

international
magazine

WOMEN AND TOXINS

**Mercury
Research
Bears Fruit in
the Amazon**

KELLY HAGGART

**The Exposure
of Bedouin
Women to
Waste Related
Hazards**

ILANA MEALLEM
DR. YAAKOV GARB

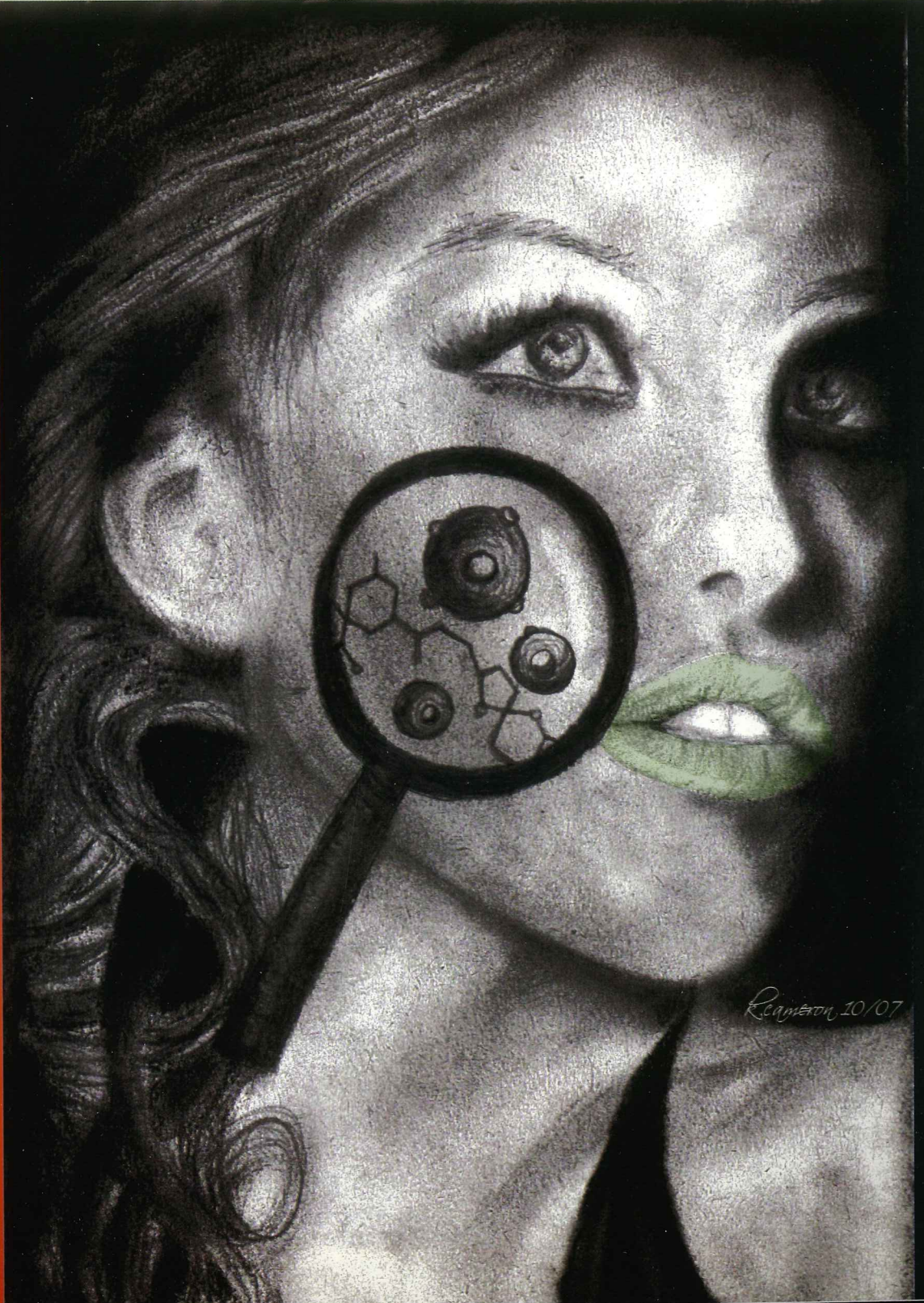
**What in Tar
Nation?**

MAYA ROLBIN-GHANIE

CND \$5.95 US \$3.95



DOUBLE ISSUE



Reamston 10/07

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Karla Orantes, Issue Editor with Kathleen Gamble, Anna Stanley, Olga Speranskaya, Jennifer Gartner, Sonja Greckol, Laura Gass, Sharmila Shewprasad, Mildred de Leon, Christina Sit Yee

Design: Dinah Greenberg, NOMAD Design

Logo designed and donated by artist Elizabeth Forrest

Cover Art: "Underneath It All" by Kristina R. Cameron

Editorial Board: Kathleen Gamble, Krista Johnston, Sybila Valdiveso, Olga Speranskaya, Laura Gass, Anna Stanley, Karen Caballero, Mildred de Leon, Sharmila Shewprasad, Karla Orantes, Jen Gartner, Devyani Srinivasan, Christina Sit Yee

Mission Statement:

Women & Environments International is a unique Canadian magazine, which examines women's multiple relations to their environments — natural, built and social — from feminist and anti-racist perspectives. It has provided a forum for academic research and theory, professional practice and community experience since 1976. Produced by a volunteer editorial board the magazine contributes to feminist social change. The magazine is associated with the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, and has been previously associated with the Women and Gender Studies Institute.

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Address all correspondence:

Women & Environments International Magazine
Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University
HNES Building, Room 234,
4700 Keele Street, Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3 Canada

T: 416-736-2100 x 21055

F: 416-736-5679

e-mail: weimag@yorku.ca

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ON THE COVER

Kristina R. Cameron is a first year student at York University working towards an honours double degree in Communications Studies and Psychology. She hopes to pursue a career in advertising and takes great interest in environmental issues. Kristina's dedication to the creative arts continues to progress, and she hopes to apply her skills further and gain more experience.

This charcoal piece is entitled 'Underneath It All' and aims to inform women of the daily hazards of applying makeup that contain toxins and harsh chemicals, which can lead to an annual buildup of 5lb. The issue is magnified for those who fail to see the repercussions.

Thank You

The Women & Environments International Magazine, Editorial Board and Issue Editorial Committee acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada through the Publication Assistance Program (PAP) towards our mailing costs. We appreciate the ongoing support of the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada. Women & Environments International Magazine is grateful for the generous support of the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University.

Canada

WEI would like to thank web designer Mary Pat O'meara for creating the new WEI website. Her generous contribution to the magazine is greatly appreciated.

Women and Global Climate Change Issue Launch Thank You's....

WEI would like to thank the following places and performers for their support with for the Climate Change Issue Launch. Their generous contribution to the Magazine is greatly appreciated!

Places:

Just Us! Café, www.justuscoffee.com

Terra Naturals, www.terranaturals.com

The Big Carrot, www.thebigcarrot.ca

Elixir Organic Spa, www.elixirspa.ca

The Spice Trader, www.thespice trader.ca

Performers:

Aztec Dancers of Toronto

Stacey Berenson (singer/songwriter)

Lila Rose (singer/songwriter/guitarist)

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WE Speak

Changing Times:

The WEI Legacy Continues

Kathleen Gamble

"When patterns are broken, new worlds emerge." This quote is one of my favourites, and since the past few months have seen many exciting changes for WEI, I thought that it would also be an appropriate way to start this issue, which happens to be the first for many new board members (including me).

The past few months have seen many transitions for the Magazine. After an extensive search for new board members, we are happy to announce that our Editorial Board is up and running, with an improved organizational structure and many new members. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the long-term board members who have guided us through this transition — especially Reggie Moldich, who has been an invaluable source of information.

We are also particularly excited to be returning to the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) at York University, and would like to express our heartfelt thanks to FES for their crucial generous support of the magazine. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Institute for Women's Studies and Gender Studies at the University of Toronto for many great years of collaboration and support.

I would also like to take this time to announce that Canada's International Development and Research Centre (IDRC) has agreed to provide WEI Magazine with financial support for the 2007-2009 period — and many thanks go out to not only the IDRC, but to our fundraising co-ordinator, Olga Speranskaya, whose hard work greatly contributed to the success of WEI's application to IDRC.

The topic for this issue is Women and Toxins, and one of the many joys of working with such a topic is the dynamic nature of the term 'toxins'. The focus of this issue is not only women affected by harmful substances, but also ways in which the health of women (and their families) can be protected from such environmental risks. The contributors to this issue have provided us with extremely thoughtful submissions on the impact that environmental contaminants have on women's health — our thanks goes out to them for their contributions.

Finally, this issue would not have been possible without the incredible work of our issue co-ordinator, Karla Orantes. For many of us 'newbies' the putting together of this issue proved to be a bit of a learning curve, and without Karla's knowledge and organization, this issue might not have been possible. So, Karla, thank you from myself, and the entire editorial board. In addition, I would also like to thank Laura Gass for the incredible work she did on advertising for this issue. Laura, your inside knowledge about publicity was much appreciated — thank you!

We hope you enjoy this issue of WEI and, like us, look forward to become involved in future issues! ☘

Putting This Issue Together

Kathleen Gamble is a first year PhD student at York University in the School of Women's Studies. Kathleen has a B.A. (Hons.) from McMaster University and M.A. from the University of British Columbia. Her research interests focus primarily on women and health issues, with a particular emphasis on HIV/AIDS. Other areas of research interest include, critical race studies, post-colonial theory, and cultural studies.

Jennifer Gartner is a Queen's University graduate with a B.A.H. in English Literature. A former member of the Queen's Feminist Review, her research interests include feminist and queer theory, with a specific concentration on the reciprocal nature of binaries.

Laura Gass graduated with an M.A. in Scottish literature from Edinburgh University. After graduating, she travelled extensively throughout the South Pacific, Australia and the United States. Laura gained her publishing training through the certificate program at Toronto's Ryerson University. In 2007, she was awarded the Rosemary Shipton Award for Excellence in Editing. Currently, Laura is a communications officer for the Fields Institute, a math research think-tank affiliated with the University of Toronto. She is managing editor for their newsletter and annual report. She also sits on the Editorial Board of Women & Environments magazine and is an active member of the Edinburgh University Club of Toronto.

Sonja Greckol's expertise is in Equity and Diversity, evaluation methodology and, of course gender equity in organizations. She has served on WEI's "Young Women and Work" Issue Editorial Committee. But: "closest to my heart — in the summer in particular — in writing poetry... I'm also an ace editor but not such a good proof reader."

Karla Orantes completed an Hon. BA at the University of Toronto in Political Science and Ibero-American Studies. Her area of interest is social development and has worked in Mexico, Cuba, Belize, and Guatemala in issues migration, social justice and popular education. She has been involved with WEI Magazine since 2005 and was the Editor for the magazine's last issue on "Women & Global Climate Change".

Christina Sit Yee is the Director of Development at the Toronto Reel Asian International Film Festival. She graduated from the Schulich School of Business at York University with an International Bachelor of Business Administration. Her interests include feminism, environmentalism, and HIV/AIDS activism, international development, social justice and the arts.

Sharmila Shewprasad is a community-based researcher at a health centre in Toronto, where she works from an anti-racist and anti-oppressive perspective. She has an undergraduate degree in Women's Studies and a masters degree in International Development Studies.

Olga Speranskaya graduated with a MA in geophysics from Moscow State University. She received her doctorate in geophysics from the Institute of Water Problems of the Russian Academy of Science. She is a Steering Committee member of the International POPs Elimination Network and cooperates with the Women in Europe for a Common Future, Global Anti-Incineration Alliance and other environmental and health organizations world wide. She participated in moving forward global agreements on toxic chemicals and is the author of educational materials on chemicals, environment and health.

Anna Stanley is a Post-doctoral Fellow in the geography department at the University of Laval in Quebec City, and Visiting Scholar in science and technology studies at York University in Toronto. Her research has examined colonial geographies of resource management, the political economy of the nuclear fuel chain, and First Nations experiences of the nuclear industry, and touches on themes related to imperialism, racialization, and environmental justice. Anna has worked with a number of First Nations and First Nation advocacy organizations as a policy analyst and on issues related to experiences of nuclear industries. She received her doctorate in geography from the University of Guelph in August 2006 where she has also taught courses in environmental impact and contemporary theory.

Features

Mercury Research Bears Fruit in the Amazon

Kelly Haggart

In a small village beside a river in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon, 26 women keep a conscientious daily record of everything they eat for a year. They also let their hair grow. By the end of the year, they have produced detailed food diaries and long strands of hair for the Brazilian and Canadian scientists investigating high levels of toxic mercury in the region.

The women provide so much information through their enthusiastic record-keeping and hair-growing that it takes Brazilian doctoral student Carlos Passos six months to enter it all into a database. But when the results are analyzed, the researchers are intrigued by a finding of potentially wide importance: Fruit consumption has influenced mercury levels in the women's hair. Could fruit turn out to offer some protection from the mercury contaminating the fish that they eat?

"Hair grows at the rate of about a centimetre a month," says biologist Donna Mergler, emeritus professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal who has studied toxins such as mercury for 40 years. "So we cut the strands of hair into centimetres and examined the relationship between what the women had eaten and their mercury levels. And we found that those who ate more fruit had less mercury, for the same amount of fish.

"This was very exciting, and it was a new finding that we could not have found without the participation of the women of the village. There's no way a scientist can get data like that any other way," she says. "And it's obviously a very important finding, not only for the Amazon but for everywhere, if we can find the mechanism."

Her fellow mercury researcher Marc

Lucotte, a biogeochemist who heads UQAM's Institute of Environmental Sciences, also credits the unflagging food diarists for the success of the study. "This formidable database is absolutely extraordinary, and has helped us draw the conclusions that we've drawn," he says. "It would have cost us a lot of money to do this ourselves, to go from one family to the next and make sure we knew what they were eating."



Members of a family are cleaning fish for their own consumption.

Halfway through the year, Elizete Gaspar, a Brazilian graduate student working with Dr. Mergler on the food survey, asked the women if they had wearied of the effort. They insisted they enjoyed it, that gathering at 4 p.m. every day at the health clinic had become a pleasant social event. They ticked off items on a checklist and then wrote in details, such as which of the 40 local fish species they had eaten in the past 24 hours. The village midwife discussed their entries with them, and helped those who had difficulty writing complete the form.

"And the women told Elizete," Dr. Mergler recalls, "that 'doing this also makes us realize the relationship between the food that we eat and our health. So no, no! We want to continue!'"

On the Mercury Trail

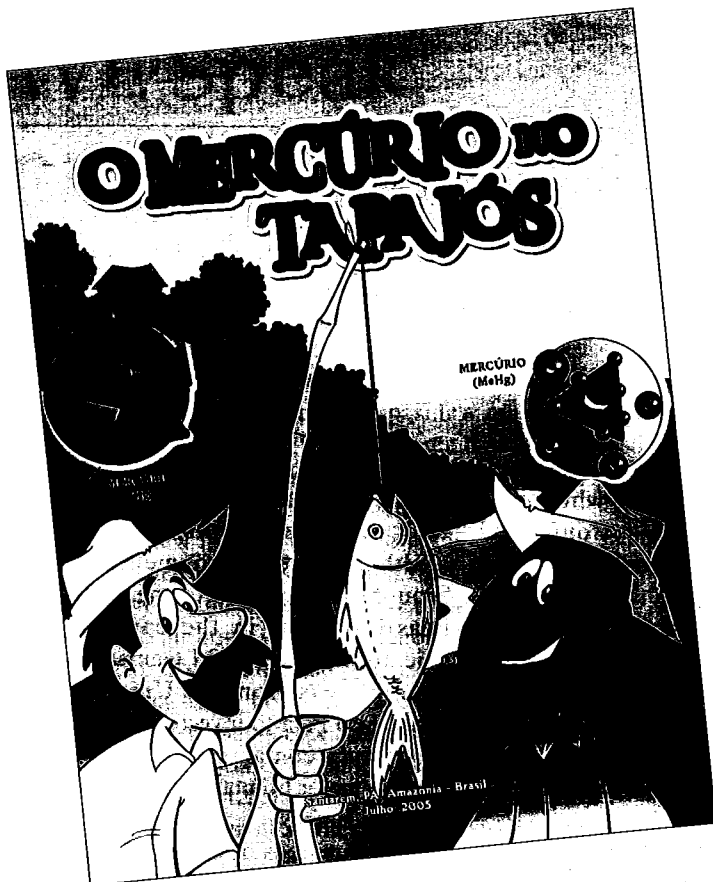
It was the connection between food, health, and the environment that first brought researchers to the village of Brasília Legal in the early 1990s. Scientists from UQAM teamed up with counterparts from the Universidade Federal do Pará to investigate the source of mercury contaminating the Tapajós River, a major tributary of the Amazon in northern Brazil.

The hundreds of thousands of small-scale miners who converged on the area after a gold rush began in the late 1970s were thought to be the chief culprits. These garimpeiros use mercury, which combines easily with other metals, to extract gold from river sediment. But for every kilogram of gold obtained, the process releases into the environment an estimated kilogram of mercury, one of the most poisonous natural substances on earth.

The researchers trundled up and down the river in boats that became their temporary homes and field labs, testing mercury levels in soil, river sediment, water, and fish. They were startled to discover that mercury levels were relatively constant along the river, even hundreds of kilometres downstream of the main gold-panning areas. This evidence led them to identify another, even bigger cause for concern: "slash and burn" agricultural practices that were causing widespread erosion. As new settlers streamed into the region, the rainforest was being cleared for pasture and farmland at a rapid rate. Tropical downpours washed topsoil from the newly deforested land into rivers, eroded riverbanks — and unleashed terrestrial mercury on a massive scale.

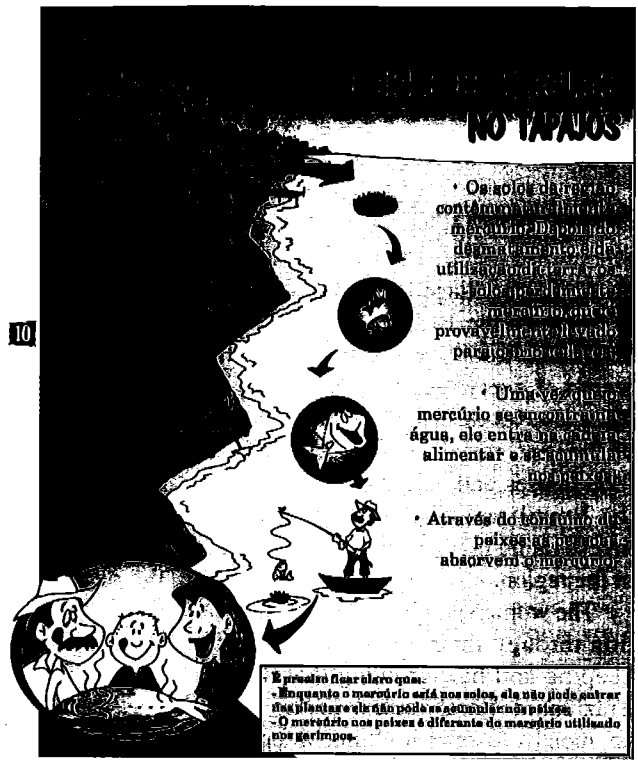
Mercury in soil is usually harmless,

PHOTO: FREDERIC MERTEENS, THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE



Passos CJ, Sampaio da Silva D, Mergler D, Mertens F, Guimarães JRD, Saint-Charles J, Lucotte M, Lemire M, Fillion M, Farella N, Davidson R (2005) O mercúrio no Tapajós. Gráfica Brasil.

O CICLO DO MERCÚRIO



because most plants can't absorb it, but it becomes hazardous once it enters aquatic systems. "Tropical soils contain very high levels of natural mercury," Dr. Lucotte explains, "but when you cut down the forest, this mercury is released into the river. Then it's transformed by bacteria in the water into what we call a "bioavailable" form, which gets into the food chain." Fish take up some of this methylmercury, as this most toxic form of the element is called, through eating plankton. However, it is the carnivores, the fish who eat other fish, who are most contaminated as the mercury travels up the food chain.

Canada's International Development Research Centre, a Crown corporation that supports research in developing countries, began funding the Tapajós mercury studies in 1994. Thus began a long-running project called Caruso, which expanded beyond Brasília Legal and spawned numerous offshoots as it evolved over the years. It drew in researchers from a variety of disciplines and from other institutes,

including the Biodôme de Montréal and the Universidade do Rio de Janeiro. It also provided a rich training ground for a sizable number of Brazilian and Canadian graduate students, more than half of whom have been women.

"People are sensible"

None of the residents of Brasília Legal were showing signs of severe exposure to mercury, which attacks the nervous system and brain, and can be fatal. However, the researchers were taken aback to find that villagers with hair mercury levels of 15 parts per million (ppm) did exhibit early symptoms of mercury poisoning, such as problems with co-ordination, manual dexterity, and vision. This was well below the 50 ppm deemed safe by the World Health Organization, suggesting that mercury could damage health even below this internationally accepted threshold.

In studying the mercury content of the local fish, the researchers found that

predatory species were much more contaminated than plant-eating varieties. The villagers were involved from the outset in seeking solutions. At a community workshop, a suitably positive slogan for a fish-dependent population was worked out: "Eat more fish that don't eat other fish." Villagers also felt posters would help spread the message. Three white fish were displayed against a red, a yellow, and a green background to represent the descending order of hazard. (Later, a cartoon booklet would also prove effective in communicating the message.) The "red" category contained the predatory fish best eaten infrequently, while the "green" group included herbivores that could be consumed 10 times as often as carnivores. "Fish don't have the amount of mercury stamped on their forehead, so this allowed a notion of quantity that was helpful," Dr. Mergler says.

The results were spectacular. In 1995, the researchers tested the mercury levels of 47 people and recorded their fish con-

sumption for the previous week. When the same people were tested five years later, they were eating the same quantity of fish as before but their mercury levels had fallen by 40%. "People are sensible," Dr. Mergler says. "It shows that when people are part of a research project, they can appreciate the findings."

Soon afterward, the 26 women who kept the year-long food diaries brought to light the potential importance of including fruit in the mix. The same finding was confirmed in a larger-scale study in the region undertaken by Carlos Passos, who is now doing post-doctoral research into the possible reasons. More research on fruit and mercury needs to be done, and in other parts of the world as well, before a protective effect can be clearly established and declared universally valid.

The Invisible Power of Women

Women were key in communicating the crucial message about modifying fish consumption, both to their families and other villagers. For a start, they tended to be less skeptical than men about the threat posed by mercury. Women also made most family food decisions and were at the centre of most social webs in the village. The researchers found that the real focal points in the village — the "opinion leaders" whose views carried the most weight on important matters pertaining to health and environmental degradation — were often women, rather than the official village chief or local priest one might have expected. In her PhD thesis, Elizete Gaspar calls this "the invisible power of women."

UQAM communications professor Johanne Saint-Charles worked on an exhaustive study of village "discussion networks" in collaboration with Frédéric Mertens of the Universidade de Brasília. Already a biology professor, Dr. Mertens had become so fascinated by social networks that he decided to focus on them in doing a second PhD. The researchers charted the communications pathways linking the 158 adult residents of Brasília Legal, which had a total population of 544. They mapped who talked to whom about mercury, fish, and health, later expanding the study to five other villages.

They found that men mostly talked to other men, and women to other women, about these issues. But the men who did list their wives as being among their "discussion partners" were the ones who actually changed their fish-eating habits. "Those wives were also the women who had more education," Dr. Saint-Charles says. "In Amazonia, this means that they had some high school." For women, the correlation between power and education is found almost everywhere in the world, she says, though the same does not hold true for men.

The researchers also found that women act as intermediaries, allowing different groups to communicate with one another, especially about eating habits. Even in a small community, factors such as work and socioeconomic status, location in the village, and religious affiliation had created distinct "discussion networks." More often than not, women were at the hub of the networks, and provided links to other groups.

Among men, the "opinion leaders" on the mercury issue were those who earned a living from fishing. Among women, teachers and health workers were especially influential, particularly the village midwife. "She gets to know, all the women and has access to most of the houses," Dr. Saint-Charles says. "And since medical help is far — it's not easy to get to the nearest town — she has a lot of influence in the community."

Other women whose views were widely respected included those who grew medicinal plants in their backyards. "People go and ask for those — a lot of trading of plants goes on in the community," says Dr. Saint-Charles, who for the past year has headed a centre based at UQAM known by the acronym CIN-BIOSE. (Co-founded 20 years ago by Dr. Mergler, the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Biology, Health and the Environment specializes in training women scientists. "We don't specifically study gender," Dr. Saint-Charles says, "but gender is part of whatever we study.")

From science to action

The dazzling successes of the Caruso

project also brought home its limitations, Dr. Lucotte says. "I was so frustrated to be doing all this nice work in one village of 500 people, when all around the system was collapsing. In the 15 years I've been working in the Amazon, I've seen so much degradation, so much virgin forest cut down, so many more poor people living there. It was extremely frustrating to see that we could do great things, but with a limited number of people."

He was also frustrated not to be tackling mercury problems at home in Canada with the same comprehensive, interdisciplinary approach. He finally did get that chance when he received funding to investigate mercury contamination in four Canadian communities, in Quebec, New Brunswick, and Labrador. This recently completed five-year project was done under the auspices of the Collaborative Mercury Research Network (COMERN), which Dr. Lucotte leads, drawing on lessons learned in the Amazon. In three of the four case studies in Canada, he says, "we were pleased to find virtually no problem with mercury." However, he does advise recreational fishers in Abitibi, Quebec, to moderate their consumption of the big predatory fish they like to catch in the summer, which expose them to high levels of mercury.

Earlier this year, the researchers learned that their work in the Amazon can continue to evolve, thanks to a new Canadian fund supporting global health research, which is administered by IDRC. Dr. Lucotte is the lead Canadian researcher in a Brazilian-Canadian team that has received one of the first Teasdale-Corti grants, worth \$1.6 million over four years. In a program called "Poor Land Use, Poor Health," they will work with communities throughout the Tapajós watershed to get to the root of the mercury problem by encouraging land uses that promote reforestation. Dr. Lucotte enthuses about this opportunity "to go from science to action, and not only to witness the degradation of the land and say, 'The mercury in your fish comes from cutting down your forest,' but to be able to say, 'Why don't we plant some useful trees, which will also keep the mer-

cury in the soil from leaching into the aquatic system?"

The new program also seeks to combat Chagas disease, a debilitating and sometimes fatal illness that affects 16 million to 18 million people in Latin America. The disease is transmitted by an insect that reproduces in palm trees, which are one of the first trees to grow back after tropical forests have been cleared by burning. Although palm trees have many uses, providing cooking oil and roofing material, they are best kept at a distance from homes. Other varieties, which can provide fruit, nuts, or wood for canoes, can be planted more safely close to houses.

"The idea is to find good reasons for people not to destroy the forest," Dr.

Lucotte says. "It should be a win-win situation: better health, less mercury, less Chagas disease, and more wealth now that they have these useful trees." The researchers and villagers have a long list of species to choose from in this region of high biodiversity. One of the favoured trees may turn out to be the ingá, an indigenous species that produces a fruit that figured prominently in the food diaries kept by Brasília Legal's 26 tireless volunteers.

"The first step now is to identify not only the communities to work with but also the key people in those communities, who will help us talk to other communities," Dr. Lucotte says. "It's almost a caricature, but it's true: Women talk more than men. It's interesting that in all our social networks, we always identify more

women than men who are 'opinion leaders.' So probably, once again, women will play a very important role." ❧

Kelly Haggart is a Senior Writer with the International Development Research Centre in Ottawa. In the 1990s, she edited *Panoscope*, a magazine on development and environment published by Panos London, and *WDM in Action*, publication of the UK campaign group World Development Movement. She also taught journalism in China. khaggart@idrc.ca

Further Reading and Resources

CARUSO: www.unites.uqam.ca/gmf/caruso/caruso.htm

COMERN: www.unites.uqam.ca/comern

CINBIOSE: www.cinbiose.uqam.ca

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The Toxic Treatment

Harmful Chemicals in Canadian Cosmetics

Madeleine Bird, McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women and Breast Cancer Action Montreal

Sandra Madray

Moisturizers, conditioners, hair dyes, lipstick, nail polish, perfumes and soaps: all of these are cosmetics and some are hard to avoid. Canadians spend approximately \$5.3 billion on cosmetics annually, and yet we give very little thought to the long-term health effects of the ingredients in our morning lather.

It is not difficult to argue that the cosmetics industry benefits greatly from women's wallets. Women buy and use more cosmetics than men. On the average, women use approximately 12 beauty products with 168 unique ingredients daily, some of which may be associated with cancer, reproductive toxicity or hormonal disruption. Compared to men's average daily use, 6 products with 85 unique ingredients, women are potentially more at risk for adverse health effects from cosmetics. Despite claims of "healthy-feeling" hair or skin, daily, we support an industry that generally does not consider our long-term health, nor have they been required to do so.

In late 2006, mandatory cosmetic labeling instituted by the Canadian Federal Government required all cosmetics to have labels disclosing most of their ingredients. The labeling names harmonize with those of the European Union (EU) and the US. While this is a positive step in consumer right-to-know, many women are still unaware that a cosmetic may contain toxic substances or contaminants harmful to their health.

Manufacturers claim that their products are safe because, they argue, low levels of toxic ingredients should not affect human health. Perhaps cosmetics are safe for the short-term, but mounting scrutiny of the

cosmetics industry, along with scientific evidence of long-term health effects of some cosmetic ingredients, are telling us to take a second look at the pretty jars that line our bathroom shelves and the regulations that govern them.

Our Exposure

The skin, our largest organ, does not discriminate. It easily absorbs cosmetic ingredients, safe or toxic. Repeated low-level exposures may accumulate through a woman's lifetime. Troubling is the fact that we are allowed to be exposed to possible human carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, possible human reproductive or developmental toxins, neurotoxins, allergens or sensitizers through the use of cosmetics containing such toxins.

Girls often start experimenting with cosmetics at a very young age, thereby increasing lifetime exposure. Puberty is a critical development time for both girls and boys and exposure to reproductive and/or hormonal toxins often start before puberty.

Toxic chemical exposure during the child-bearing years is also a concern. Some toxic chemicals found in cosmetics, such as phthalates, have been found in the cord blood that nourishes a developing fetus. The continued usage of products with ingredients that are hormone disruptors and developmental or reproductive toxins may put newborns at risk for developing cancer later in life.

We should not forget the myriad of other chemicals that are part of our daily exposure, such as those from plastics, car exhaust, household chemicals, pesticide residue on food and trace chemicals in water. Also, chemicals have the potential to interact with each other by way of the addi-

tive effect or synergy. Given the gross lack of data on the long-term or combined health effects of the majority of cosmetic ingredients, low concentrations of toxic chemicals should not be reason for their approval.

Regulations and Trade Secrets

Health Canada regulates cosmetic ingredients through The Cosmetic Regulations under the Food and Drug Act and a "Hotlist" containing more than 500 prohibited or restricted substances for cosmetic use. By comparison, the EU banned more than 1100 such ingredients, but the US, only 10.

Manufacturers are required to send Health Canada a list of ingredients only 10 days after a product goes on the market. The Canadian government keeps a database of all cosmetics and their ingredients sold in Canada. If the "Hotlist" is amended, companies with non-compliant products are contacted by the Cosmetics Division and may be advised to take measures as simple as changing the packaging to as far as removing a substance. Companies have six months to send an outline of how they plan to respond to the advisory. The Product Safety Bureau does random inspections which may include product verification of notification, labelling review and product testing. Just how transparent is this system? It is unclear.

The new labelling system was heralded as effective consumer right-to-know. However, it may give us a false sense of security. One loophole within our cosmetic regulation protects the disclosure of ingredients that are considered trade secrets. Toxic substances could be lurking under this cloak of secrecy. It is not uncommon to have solvents and phthalates or other

Table 1 — Toxins Found in Cosmetics

Ingredient	Usually found in	Health risks	Hotlisted
1,4 Dioxane (as a residue product) — not listed on labels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shower gel • Bubble bath 	Possible human carcinogen A,B,C,D, Immune system toxicant ^f	Yes
Acrylamide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial moisturizer • Conditioner • Skin masks 	Possible human carcinogen ^{A,B,C,D}	No
Amines (Ex. Triethanolamine, Diethanolamine — DEA)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial products • Lipstick • Mascara • Shaving gels • Body wash/cleanser • Foundation • Anti-aging cream 	Limited evidence of carcinogenicity ^A , Skin toxicant ^h	Depending on type of amine — prohibited, restricted, or not listed
BHA (Butyl hydroxy anisole)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many cosmetics 	Possible human carcinogen ^{B,D} , Possible endocrine disruptor ⁶	No
Formaldehyde	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nail products • Hair dye and bleaching • Mascara • Styling gel 	Known human carcinogen ^A	Yes
Lead acetate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progressive hair colour • Dandruff shampoo (considered a medication) 	Neurotoxin ^E , Human reproductive and developmental toxicant ^{B,C} , Possible human carcinogen ^{B,D}	Yes
Parabens (Ex. Methylparaben, Ethylparaben, Propylparaben)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facial moisturizers • Eye make-up • Many other cosmetics 	Possible endocrine disrupter ^J , other health effects — under evaluation	No
PDD (p-phenylenediamine)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hair dye 	Immune system toxin ^{E,I} , Skin toxicant ^h , Neurotoxicant ^E	Yes, with restrictions
Petroleum distillates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perfume • Make-up • Facial moisturizer • Eye make-up remover 	Possible human carcinogen ^C	No
Phthalates (Ex. di (2-ethylhexyl)phthalate — DEHP; Dibutylphthalate — DBP; Diethylphthalate — DEP)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nail products • Perfume • Hair spray 	Possible endocrine disruptor ^F , Possible human reproductive or developmental toxin ^{B,C}	No
Toluene	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nail products 	Possible human developmental or reproductive toxin ^B	Yes

Health Risks References:

- A: International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC)
B: California Environmental Protection Agency Proposition 65
C: European Union — Classification and Labelling
D: National Toxicology Program Report on Carcinogens, 11th Edition
E: Grandjean, P. & Landrigan, P.J. 2006. Developmental neurotoxicity of industrial chemicals, *The Lancet*. 368(9553): 2167-2178
F: BKH/ European Commission, 2000; G: Japanese National Institute of Health Sciences, 1993 H: Cosmetic Ingredient Review
I: National Library of Medicine HazMap
J: Routledge, J., Parker, J., Odum, J., Ashby, J., Sumpter, J.P. 1998. Some Alkyl Hydroxy Benzoate Preservatives (Parabens) Are Estrogenic, *Toxicology and Applied Pharmacology*. 153(1):12-19.

toxic substances hiding under the umbrella term “parfum” or “fragrance”. The presence of carcinogens, known or probable, mutagens, endocrine disruptors and reproductive or any other toxins are not required to be identified by any particular labeling.

Also, our mandatory ingredient labeling for cosmetics does not require that unintentional ingredients, such as impurities, be listed or revealed. One such contaminant is 1,4 Dioxane, a probable human carcinogen, which was discovered in many bath products — both for adults and children.

Claims to safe products fall flat because the Canadian government or another independent body does not require pre- or post-market safety testing of cosmetics. Industry may test their products, yet trade secrets block any transparency of the purpose, methodology and results of the testing.

Between under-regulation and trade secrets, the Canadian cosmetics industry is running the show. For information on ingredient safety, the Canadian Cosmetic Toiletry and Fragrance Association rely on data from the Cosmetic Ingredient Review (CIR), a financial dependant of the American Cosmetic Toiletry and Fragrance Association. In its thirty year history, the CIR reviewed the safety of only 13% of the 10,500 ingredients used in cosmetics.

Toxic Ingredients: Their Health Effects

Current Canadian statistics reveal that one in every 2.6 women will get cancer in her lifetime and 1 in 9 will develop breast cancer. These are not encouraging statistics. Emphasis on personal lifestyle choices like drinking, smoking and diet often overlook the fact that we are exposed to many toxins and cancer-causing sub-

stances in our daily lives without our knowledge or consent.

Long-term responses to toxic cosmetic ingredients can be insidious. Scientific evidence found that prenatal exposure to phthalates, a chemical found in some nail polishes and perfume, can cause genital birth defects in baby boys. The babies had smaller penises, shorter distance between their anus and penis, and incomplete testicular descent. According to the study, one-quarter of American women have higher concentrations of phthalates in their bodies than those needed to cause birth defects.

Parabens, a common, mildly estrogenic preservative used in most cosmetics was found intact in breast cancer tumours. It is unknown whether the parabens were implicated in the tumour development. However, we do know that there is widespread exposure to parabens from cosmetics products, and that they can build up in our bodies. Concerning short-term reactions, Health Canada statistics indicate that unlabeled cosmetics cause 900,000 adverse reactions a year.

Though not totally exclusive to these products, Table 1 gives a sampling of toxins present in some beauty products and their potential health effects.

Beauty: An Occupational Hazard

It is not uncommon to hear of workers in hair and nail salons complain of dizziness, shortness of breath, headaches, allergies and dermatitis. Hair salon professionals are exposed to an extensive array of chemicals on a daily basis. Usually underpaid and overexposed, the majority of these workers and their clients are women. One study showed that occupa-

tional exposure to permanent hair dye increased the risk of bladder cancer five-fold among colourists. The same study reported a twofold increased risk of bladder cancer among people who dyed their hair on a monthly basis.

There is a predominance of young South East Asian women employed in nail finishing. They are usually in their childbearing years and are exposed daily to toxic substances. Some of them wear dust masks which give them little or no protection from volatile vapours and some particulate matter.

There is a clear need for hazard awareness and risk reduction through substitution with safer products in the nail finishing business. It is currently an under-researched area, however, occupational exposure to volatile vapours not only affects the employees' health, but also the health of their children whom they often bring to work for lack of affordable daycare.

Women of Colour: Some Risky Products

American cancer statistics indicate that African American Women have a 20% higher death rate from all cancers combined as compared to whites and most troublesome is the higher incidence rate of breast cancer in young African American women. While similar statistics are not available for Canada, it is recognized that there are many factors contributing to this divide.

We cannot ignore some beauty products that target a similar population in Canada. These include hair products with placental extracts that can potentially cause hormone disruption at a very early

age. Breast development and pubic hair growth have been reported in girls between 2 and 7 years of age.

Beauty, although it is in the eyes of the beholder, can be perceived as having a "light" complexion. While skin brighteners can be used by individuals with freckles, aging spots, hyper-pigmentation, etc., women of colour are the targeted audience. In Canada, consumers can purchase, without a prescription, skin brighteners containing hydroquinone up to 4% but illegal are those that contain mercury and corticosteroids.

Hydroquinone-based skin brighteners have been banned in the EU and other countries because of health concerns. The Canadian government is currently reviewing all uses of hydroquinone. In 2006, the US Food and Drug Administration announced that products containing hydroquinone pose health risks and proposed a ban on selling them without a prescription. These products are available through internet sales.

Tiny Trouble: Nanotechnology

Engineered ingredients using the science of nanotechnology have found their way into cosmetics. A nanometer (nm) is one billionth of a meter. For comparison purposes, a human hair cell is 80,000nm wide and a red blood cell 7,000nm. It is not uncommon for particles in nanotechnology to be 100nm or less.

There is emerging concern that nano-engineered ingredients are capable of penetration deep into the lungs and may be absorbed through the skin and then into the bloodstream. Unfortunately, there is very little available safety data on nano-engineered materials for cosmetics, yet they are allowed in some products. Because of their size and possibly other physical properties, they do not exhibit the same characteristics as similar materials with a larger particle size. Manufacturers are not required to identify the use of the technology anywhere on cosmetic products.

Beauty Needs a Detox

Not all cosmetics contain toxic chemicals. Positive examples exist right at our

fingertips. Now, the goal is to ensure that a truly healthy body, not just "healthy-looking" become a priority for the beauty industry and the regulations that govern it.

There are more ways than one to push the beast out of beauty. A creative smear campaign from women and environmental groups pushed for the reformulation of a popular salon nail polish. Women's groups, health and environmental non-governmental organizations, and politicians, can be instrumental in bringing about changes to ensure that we have safe cosmetics.

Ways to Promote Change Include the Following:

- **Inform yourself.** Assessing Health Canada's "Hotlist" is one way of checking ingredients in cosmetics but comprehensive warning labels on cosmetics are the ideal tool. Another way is by searching the cosmetics safety database created by The Environmental Working Group. Thousands of cosmetics, their ingredients and safety levels are available at www.cosmeticsdatabase.com.
- **Simplify.** Use fewer cosmetics daily and find safer alternatives.
- **Speak up.** Let companies know that toxic chemicals should not be cosmetic ingredients. Challenge them to innovate for safer products.
- **Strengthen Regulations.** Communicate with Health Canada (Federal Government) and your Member of Parliament to voice your concerns for structural change and stronger regulations regarding cosmetics. Encourage the use of the precautionary principle. Meaning, erring on the side of caution when assessing toxic cosmetic ingredients.
- **Ask for warning labels.** All carcinogens, endocrine disruptors, allergens, toxins and nano-produced ingredients should be accompanied by clear warning labels.
- **Demand safety first.** Transparent safety testing of cosmetic ingredients must be done before they are permitted for use in cosmetics.
- **Encourage fair treatment.** Canada should be encouraged to comply with stricter European Union standards for cosmetics safety, and systematically restrict

ingredients based on their inherent toxicity as information becomes available. ❧

Madeleine Bird coordinates the Health and Environment Awareness Project, a partnership between The McGill Centre for Research and Teaching on Women and Breast Cancer Action Montreal. The project works to raise awareness about toxic chemicals in our environment, their health effects, their regulations and solutions to the problem.

Sandra Madray is responsible for Research and Education for Chemical Sensitivities Manitoba and raises awareness of chemical sensitivities through education on the health and environmental impacts of toxic substances, safe chemical substitution and regulatory measures. She is also involved with other environmental and health NGOs.

Further Reading and Resources:

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Cosmetics & Personal Care, Consumer Product Safety, Health Canada. Available at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/person/cosmet/index_e.html

List of Prohibited and Restricted Cosmetic Ingredients (The Cosmetic Ingredient "Hotlist"), Consumer Product Safety, Health Canada. Available at: www.hc-sc.gc.ca/cps-spc/person/cosmet/prohibited_e.html

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During (9)

Clean fill wanted

Towns like a spongy face virus
No eyelashes and a pitted surface

you must both
enter
and exit
through

The slight mercantiled arch
of the fur trade, the wood years, the salt war
glories, &

now a booming trade in solids.

Clapboard shine we aren't.

Inbound, out the train window
The dock piling's dropped pants
Stiff with lilies and scum

That's the ancient lake down around its ankles.

We're living on a Layercake
of spontaneous unmatched socks of waste.

Every solid place a part of three broken others.

Each with its parachute of failing,
its tidalite acids fluctural and
pale mushroom growths start up
on the trapped wet bits of string.

What seems to be needed most is
the kind of thing that leans in toward another
and clutches it

a slag meld, or

sintering of carrot peellings, bitumen and suitcases.

Eventually one metal turns out to be harder than
another.

Clean fill wanted.

They asked nicely
Lumps of solid matter
like ice cream scoops

Dished out right onto the water table.

Boxes not welcome
They hide what collapses.

They

Un/

Earth

The old lake is never far below our foot falls setting
down.

Seabirds fly at waist-level.
A heron stands neck deep in rust.

Karen Houle teaches at the University of Guelph in the
Department of Philosophy. Her first book of poetry, **BALASI**,
was published by Anansi in 2001.

WE Research

Breast Cancer

The Link With Pesticides

By Meriel Watts, PhD
Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific

Introduction

Breast cancer is the most common form of cancer in women throughout the world, and it exacts a tragic toll: an estimated 1.15 million women got breast cancer, and 411,000 died from it in 2002. There are an estimated 4.4 million women alive who have had breast cancer diagnosed within the last 5 years.

Breast cancer incidence rates continue to climb in all age groups almost everywhere. Over the period from the 1970s to the 1990s reported breast cancer incidence rose 30-40 percent in most countries, but more rapidly in developing countries.

Some reviewers have linked this trend to synthetic chemicals, noting that the increasing incidence of breast cancer has paralleled the proliferation of synthetic chemicals since World War II. Pesticide use began in earnest post-World War II in western countries, with dramatic increases in use first of organochlorines, then of organophosphates, and more recently in synthetic pyrethroid insecticides: there is evidence that all of these may be implicated in the global increase in breast cancer. Strikingly, these pesticides did not come into prominence in Asian countries until the excesses of the Green Revolution (1970s-80s), during which pesticide usage soared, and after which breast cancer rates began to follow suit.

Known and Suspected Factors in Breast Cancer

Eighty percent of breast cancer is thought to be associated with environmental factors that include exposure to contaminants, lifestyle and diet. Factors affecting the ovarian hormones oestrogen and progesterone, and particularly the

cumulative lifetime exposure to oestrogen, are regarded as the best-established contributing risk factors. Breast development depends on an interplay of oestrogen, progesterone and other growth factors, and it undergoes continuous change under the influence of cyclic hormonal interplay from birth to death.

Lifestyle factors that affect the ovarian hormones and are believed therefore to increase breast cancer risk — such as hormone replacement therapy, oral contraceptives, alcohol, lack of physical activity, and higher body mass index after menopause — are thought to underlie less than 50 percent of the cases of breast cancer, and the remaining more than 50 percent of cases are regarded as being unexplained.

There is now significant international concern that some of the estimated 70,000 synthetic chemicals in our environment may be making a major contribution to

that “unexplained” more than 50 percent of breast cancer cases. Some chemicals have been identified as either mammary carcinogens or likely to be contributing to breast cancer because of their influence on oestrogen levels — chemicals such as flame retardants, solvents, dyes, benzene, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, bisphenol A, phthalates, parabens, styrene, and organochlorine pesticides like DDT.

How Pesticides Might be Contributing to Breast Cancer

The role of pesticides in breast cancer is controversial. The debate generally focuses on epidemiologically studies that have, or have not, demonstrated a link between residues of DDT or its metabolite DDE in women, and increased risk of breast cancer. Early studies tended to show such a link, but later studies have frequently not supported a link. Reviewers

Eighty percent of breast cancer is thought to be associated with environmental factors that include exposure to contaminants, lifestyle and diet.



have tended to interpret these findings as indicating that DDT does not play a role in breast cancer.

However many of these studies, and the subsequent interpretation of the findings, have been flawed and the conclusion that DDT is not involved in breast cancer cannot be supported. Flaws include small sample size, problems in determining exposures, use of women with benign breast disease as controls (yet there is evidence that benign breast disease increases the risk of developing breast cancer) failure to control for confounding factors, and failure to differentiate between ethnic groups. Many studies have measured the metabolite DDE as a surrogate for determining past exposure to DDT. But in countries such as the USA that banned DDT many years ago, the DDE in women's tissues most likely came from DDE residues ingested in food, rather than as a metabolite of DDT. DDE is substantially less oestrogenic than DDT so measures of DDE are an inaccurate reflection of the breast cancer risk posed by DDT. Additionally many studies relied on tissue/blood samples taken near the time of diagnosis, even though breast cancer is believed to have a long latency period. A study "DDT and breast cancer in young women: new data on the significance of age at exposure" is the first to measure blood levels of DDT in young adulthood, taken during the period of exposure — and it found a 5-fold increase in the risk of breast cancer among young American women who were under the age of 14 in 1945 when widespread use of DDT began in the USA, and mostly under the age of 20 when that use peaked. The median time to diagnosis was 14 years. This finding alone threatens the whole mass of reviews that dismiss DDT as a possible cause of breast cancer, and this is very timely given the resurgence of support from some in the western world for use of DDT in Africa against malaria.

Perhaps as a consequence of this controversy over the real impact of DDT on breast cancer, there has been comparatively little analysis of evidence that other pesticides — and especially those that are still commonly used on our food and in

our homes — might be contributing to the escalating breast cancer statistics.

Because of the inherent difficulties in determining links between historical exposure to pesticides and onset of breast cancer through epidemiological studies, it is essential to identify mechanisms by which pesticides might plausibly influence the development or progression of breast cancer and, on that basis, which pesticides are likely to be increasing the risk of breast cancer in the context of multiple contributing causes.

Pesticides May Increase Breast Cancer Risk:

- Because they are *mammary carcinogens* — initiating cancer through mutations in a gene or causing other damage to DNA. Pesticides associated with increased incidence of mammary tumours in rats and/or mice include alachlor, captafol, clonitralid, 2,4-D, DBCP, dichlorvos, endrin, ethalfluraline, ethylene dibromide, ethylene dichloride, ethylene oxide, folpet, malathion, mancozeb, oryzalin, parathion, paraquat, PFOS, propylene dichloride, sulfallate, and toxaphene.
- Because they are *tumour promoters*, i.e. promote the growth of breast cancer cells and hormonally sensitive tumours. This is the primary effect of oestrogen in breast cancer, and pesticides that also have this effect include allethrin, chlordane, cypermethrin, deltamethrin, dicofol, DDT, dieldrin, endosulfan, fenarimol, fenvalerate, lindane, methoxychlor, monocrotophos, omethoate, permethrin, sumithrin, and the adjuvant nonylphenol.
- By affecting *mammary gland development* in ways that increase susceptibility to carcinogens or hormonally active agents. Atrazine, DDT, endosulfan, methoxychlor, and permethrin all have this effect.
- By compromising the *immune system* and reducing the body's defences against cancer — DDT, chlordane, endosulfan, and heptachlor reduce the ability of Natural Killer T-cells to destroy tumour cells; atrazine suppresses the tumour necrosis factor — alpha that

helps kill off tumour cells.

- By interfering with *communication between cells*. "Gap junction intercellular communication" plays an essential role in the regulation of cell proliferation and differentiation, and hence also in the growth of tumours. Pesticides that affect this type of communication between cells include cypermethrin, DDT, deltamethrin, fenvalerate, heptachlor, lindane, permethrin, and toxaphene.
- By disrupting the *endocrine system* in ways other than promoting tumours or affecting the development of mammary gland tissue (see below).
- Other mechanisms may also be involved — *intrauterine growth retardation* has been shown to increase susceptibility in later life to breast cancer.

Endocrine disruption

Oestrogen and progesterone affect breast cancer risk by affecting rates of breast cell proliferation or by supporting the growth of oestrogen-dependent tumours. Similarly, hormonally active pesticides that enhanced breast cell proliferation can also play critical roles in the development of breast cancer. There is strong evidence from laboratory tests that oestrogen-mimicking chemicals promote the growth of human breast cells.

There are many ways in which pesticides disrupt the hormonal system, including:

- mimicking oestrogen, binding to and activating oestrogen receptors, which then increase the oestrogen-dependent transcription of target genes and promote breast cancer cell proliferation and tumour growth — e.g. chlordane, chlordecone, DDT, heptachlor, lindane;
- binding to a hormone receptor but not activating it and preventing it being normally activated, e.g. androgen receptor antagonists-fenarimol;
- stimulating the manufacture of more oestrogen receptors;
- binding to proteins in the blood that transport natural hormones, altering the amount of natural hormone that can circulate;
- interfering with metabolic processes

Pesticides that may increase the risk of breast cancer

<p>Organochlorines</p> <p>aldrin chlordane chlordecone DDT/DDE dicofol dieldrin endosulfan endrin HCB heptachlor lindane methoxychlor mirex toxaphene</p> <p>Triazine herbicides</p> <p>atrazine cyanazine propazine simazine terbutometon terbutylazine terbutryn</p> <p>Synthetic pyrethroids</p> <p>allethrin cyfluthrin cyhalothrin cypermethrin deltamethrin fenvalerate flucythrinate permethrin pyrethrins sumithrin</p> <p>Organophosphates</p> <p>bromophos-ethyl bromophos-methyl</p>	<p>butamifos chlorpyrifos cyanofenphos dichlofenthion diazinon dichlorvos EPN ethion isofenphos isoxathion leptophos malathion methyl parathion monocrotophos omethoate parathion phenthoate phosmet pirimiphos-methyl prothiophos quinalphos tolclofos-methyl</p> <p>Carbamates</p> <p>aldicarb methiocarb pirimicarb propamocarb</p> <p>Other herbicides</p> <p>alachlor chlornitrofen 2,4-D diclofop-methyl diuron ethalfuraline fluazifop-butyl oryzalin paraquat pendimethalin</p>	<p>prosulfuron silvex sulfallate thienylchlor tribenuron methyl triclopyr trifluralin</p> <p>Fungicides</p> <p>biphenyl captan captafol dodemorph fenarimol folpet mancozeb maneb triademefon triademenol triphenyltin vinclozolin</p> <p>Other pesticides</p> <p>bromopropylate chlorobenzilate chloropropylate clonitralid DBCP ethylene dibromide ethylene dichloride ethylene oxide PFOS propylene dichloride</p> <p>Inerts</p> <p>nonylphenol</p> <p>Contaminants</p> <p>1,4-dioxane</p>
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involved in the breakdown of natural hormones, such as the cytochrome P450 enzyme complex; e.g. chlordane, heptachlor;

- increasing the activity of the enzymes that catalyze the formation of oestrogen;
- interfering with other hormones, such as prolactin, melatonin, prostaglandins, and growth factors.

In summary, there are many different

mechanisms through which pesticides might increase the risk of breast cancer. Their effects on the hormonal system are complex and not yet fully identified. For most pesticides, most of the potential mechanisms by which breast cancer risk might be increased — including endocrine and immune effects, effects on **gap junction intercellular communication**, and even carcinogenic mechanisms — remain unexplored. Until such time as they are

fully explored, it is not possible to give a “clean bill of health” to any pesticide regarding its relationship to breast cancer.

Critical exposures

Criticism of the theory that pesticides might be implicated in breast cancer usually hinges on the belief that the levels to which women are exposed are too low to have an adverse effect. But this criticism ignores four vital factors:

- for genotoxic carcinogens (those that damage genes), there is no safe level of exposure — the lowest level can cause a carcinogenic effect;
- for hormonally active substances, it is not always the highest dose that causes the strongest effect (a positive-dose response); the strongest effect may occur at a low or medium dose, not a high dose;
- mixtures of chemicals at levels too low to cause an effect individually can cause an effect when combined together — in one study a mixture of 10 oestrogenic chemicals caused proliferation of human breast cancer cells at concentrations 10-fold lower than those required to produce an effect when given alone;
- there are critical periods of rapid breast cell proliferation during which the breast is more vulnerable to the influence of chemicals, and at these times exposure to even extremely low doses can cause permanent damage — prenatal, early childhood, menarche, first childbirth and perimenopause. During these periods there appears to be greater propensity for undifferentiated mammary cells to bind with carcinogens, triggering DNA damage. Prenatal exposure appears to imprint breast cells, making them more sensitive to subsequent exposures to carcinogens and hormonally active compounds. Exposure to carcinogens and hormonally active substances can lead to modifications which result in what is now called *epigenetic* changes to **mammary gland development**: they can increase the susceptibility of cells to malignancy in succeeding generations. One study found that the fungicide vinclozolin increased the risk of breast cancer over at least four generations.

Conclusion

No pesticide can be claimed to not cause breast cancer until the mechanisms summarised here have been fully explored for each pesticide. Yet there is institutional inertia surrounding this subject. Players by and large remain hooked on figuring whether DDT does or does not cause breast cancer whilst ignoring the very much more important daily exposures of the vast majority of women and girls in the world to low (and sometimes high) doses of mixtures of pesticides that are carcinogenic and or hormonally active —through food residues, household use and occupation exposure.

Ninety-eight pesticide active ingredients, plus one adjuvant and two contaminants of pesticide formulations have been identified as having the potential to increase the risk of breast cancer. Current pesticide regulatory processes by and large do not take account of most of the identified mechanisms, and so fail to evaluate pesticides for their potential role in breast cancer. As a result many of them are widely available in numerous countries. This negligence, together with the permissive attitude that promotes the mistaken belief system that unless pesticides can be proven to cause breast cancer they can be assumed not to, results in widespread exposure. Yet women, and especially pregnant women and young girls, should

not be exposed to these pesticides.

The burden of responsibility for proving the adverse effects of these pesticides should not be left to public interest organizations and independent scientists to provide sufficient evidence before action is taken. Regulatory processes need to be improved so that they incorporate all mechanisms by which pesticides can contribute to breast cancer; the precautionary principle must be applied to the accumulated evi-

dence, and the substitution principle implemented so that those pesticides that have the potential to contribute to breast cancer are replaced by safer alternatives. ❖

Dr. Meriel Watts is a scientist with Pesticide Action Network Asia and the Pacific and a consultant to Breast Cancer Network New Zealand. She has worked on behalf of the public and the environment on pesticide issues for 16 years, including as a member of New Zealand's pesticide registering authority.

Further Reading and Resources:

For the references for all the material in this paper and more in-depth reading on pesticides and breast cancer :

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The U.S. Nail Salon Industry

Booming Business, Growing Concern

Dori Gilels, Alexandra Gorman, Priscilla Huang, Julia Liou, Anuja Mendiratta, Dawn Philip

In the United States, the beauty industry is booming in response to increasing consumer demand for nail, skin, hair, and other personal care services. "Mani/Pedis" are all the rage as customers want to be pampered with the latest nail colours and designs. The number of nail technicians in the U.S. has jumped 374% over the past decade to more than 380,000 nationwide, with women making up 96% of the industry's workforce. However, health and safety concerns for nail salon workers have been overlooked until recently. Nail salon workers are exposed to a variety of toxic chemicals daily with the potential for a variety of negative health impacts. Advocates, workers, scientists, and agencies are now working together to advance greater health and safety in nail salons and to demand that cosmetics manufacturers produce and market safer products.

Asian and Pacific Islander Women — Workforce Demographics & Unique Challenges

Behind the counter, workers who meet the growing demand for nail services are overwhelmingly women of colour, and many are of reproductive age. Asian and Pacific Islander (API) women dominate the nail salon industry as both owners and workers. The industry estimates that approximately 42% of all nail technicians nationwide are Asian. The sector is comprised of 39% Vietnamese and 2% Korean women. California is home to 21% of the entire national population of nail technicians, where an estimated 60-80% of the workforce are Vietnamese immigrant women.

API women, particularly Vietnamese immigrants, are attracted to the nail salon industry for a number of reasons. First, because the nail sector has seen significant economic growth in recent years,

“You can't imagine how many chemicals are being used by workers in nail salons everyday. Most do not have any knowledge about the health hazards of the products they are using.”

— Connie Nguyen, a California cosmetologist who has suffered respiratory problems from working in beauty salons for 13 years

there has been a substantial increase in the number of Vietnamese-owned shops and instructors in beauty schools, which in turn attract many immigrant women to the profession. Second, the required training to become a nail technician is relatively short and inexpensive. Finally, the profession does not require English proficiency to carry out job responsibilities. For immigrant and refugee women with limited education, training, and English skills, the nail salon industry represents an accessible entry point into the workforce and an immediate way to earn money for their families.

Although some salon workers earn more at high end salons, most tend to earn less than \$16,000 a year and derive their only source of income from this profession. Further, many do not have access to health care coverage and lack understanding of U.S. legal and health care systems. Nail technicians are generally not formal employees of salons, but instead rent stations from shop owners. Many salon owners and their family members also work as technicians. A survey of Asian nail workers found that they believe that the products they use have adverse health consequences, but do not feel that they can challenge owners to change workplace practices or products, or report their occupational concerns to government officials because of the vulnerability of their positions. Lenh Tsan, Community Advocate with Asian Law Caucus argues that:

There is not enough linguistically tailored education for nail workers about the different chemicals they work with and how to take health precautions. Workers trust that their products are safe; most workers do not recognize exactly why some of the health effects they are suffering from are coming about.

Health Hazards Associated With Chemical Ingredients in Nail Products

On a daily basis and often for long hours at a stretch, nail salon technicians handle toxic solvents, chemical solutions, glues, cosmetic products and other substances containing chemicals, some known to be carcinogenic and others suspected to cause reproductive harm or other health impacts. These chemicals may be inhaled or absorbed through the skin, some accumulating in the body over time. Childbearing women may also pass these toxins to fetuses or to newborns when breastfeeding.

Three top ingredients of concern in many nail polishes are toluene, formaldehyde and dibutyl phthalate, which have been linked to reproductive harm including miscarriages, infertility, and birth defects, as well as cancer. Several strong solvents such as acetone and alcohols are also regularly used to remove nail polish. Exposure to these solvents can lead to immediate side effects such as nose,

throat, lung, skin and eye irritation, as well as headaches, dizziness and confusion. Acrylic nail application leads to exposure to nail dusts and acrylic polymers such as methyl methacrylate (MMA) and ethyl methacrylate (EMA). Both EMA and MMA have a very strong odor even at low concentrations and are irritating to the eyes and respiratory system. They are also sensitizers, so individuals exposed over time often become allergic with reactions that include asthma and dermatitis.

Health Studies and Air Monitoring

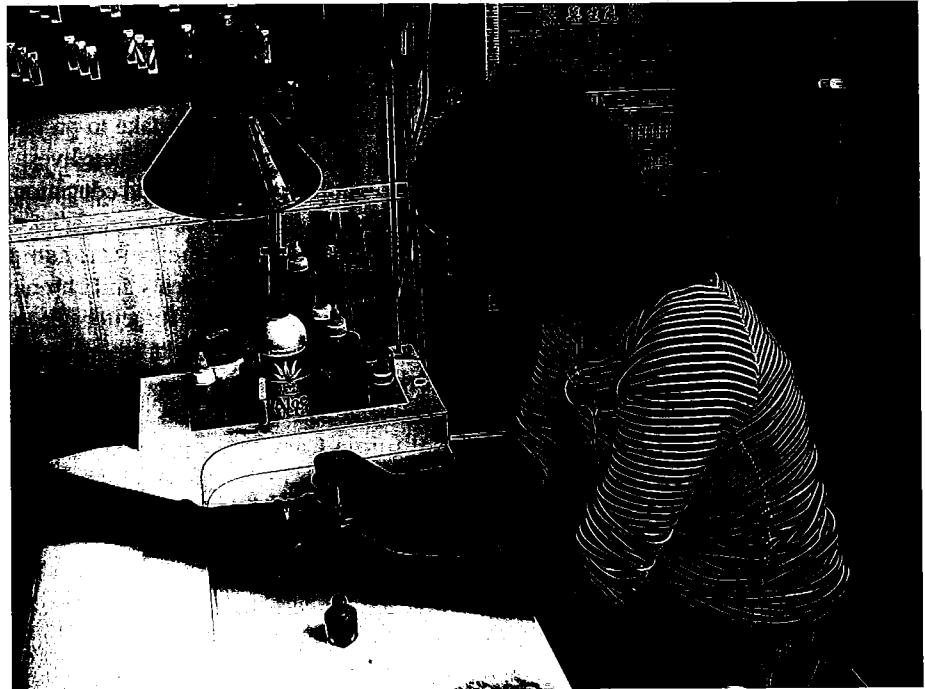
Despite tremendous growth in the nail salon industry, there is a paucity of descriptive data, human health studies, and other research examining chronic health effects related to the exposure of nail salon workers to environmental toxins. The few preliminary studies that have been conducted tend to focus on acute health effects, showing significantly increased adverse health outcomes including decreased attention and processing skills, occupational asthma, complaints about memory and learning, and effects on sense of smell. Self-reported data from nail salon workers include complaints about odors associated with acrylic nail glue and other products which they attribute to work-related nausea, headaches, skin, and respiratory problems.

To date, there have been no published studies examining chronic health outcomes, such as birth defects, infertility, or cancers, specifically in nail salon workers. Even in the absence of such studies, many API nail salon workers — recognizing the potential health threats to their unborn children — report that they plan to quit their jobs when pregnant to avoid toxic exposures.

While studies that quantify toxic exposure in nail salons are wanting, many of the chemicals of concern have been detected by air monitoring in salons. Unfortunately, the federal Permissible Exposure Limits (PELs) for these chemicals, established by the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration, have serious limitations for protecting public health. PELs do not take into considera-

tion the combined effects of multiple chemicals or the long-term chronic effects of exposure on endpoints such as asthma, cancer, or reproductive harm. In addition, these limits are restricted to inhalation exposure and do not account for absorption through the skin, another potential route of exposure for salon workers.

Thu Quach, epidemiologist with the



Northern California Cancer Center notes:

Given the multitude of compounds — including carcinogens and endocrine disruptors that may increase risk of cancer and other chronic illnesses — that nail salon workers routinely handle, there is a real need for additional research to examine the long term health effects of working in this industry. The intent behind new research would be to understand the relationship between occupational exposures in this industry and health problems, rather than to penalize workers or owners, who depend on nail salons for their livelihood. We must work with workers and owners to reduce exposures in order to reduce their health risks.

Advocates and scientists such as Quach are increasingly calling for additional research. Biomonitoring projects, indoor air studies, cumulative outdoor air studies, and longevity studies by specific health outcomes are all needed to address data gaps and advance an overall understanding of the health impacts associated with this sector's workplace exposures.

Regulatory Inadequacies

The nail industry uses a multitude of different chemicals in its products. Of the more than 10,000 chemicals used in personal care products, 89% have not been tested independently for their safety or impact on human health. Moreover, there is very limited governmental regulation or review of the chemicals used in cosmetic and personal care products. By law, nail products sold in the U.S. must be free of poisonous or deleterious substances that might harm users under normal use. However, the U.S. Federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has no authority to require that cosmetic products be tested for safety before they go on the market. Instead, cosmetics manufacturers are only asked by the FDA to voluntarily report any adverse reactions or health risks. The FDA also lacks the ability to require recalls of products found to be harmful.

and thus any recalls are voluntary actions by the manufacturers themselves.

In the absence of governmental regulation and review of cosmetic ingredients, manufacturers "police" themselves through an industry panel call the Cosmetics Ingredient Review (CIR). The largely self-regulated industry routinely fails to adhere to its own safety panel's advice or to heed the health warnings in cosmetic safety standards set in other countries. Thus far, the CIR has only managed to review 11% of all ingredients found in cosmetics.

Advocacy: What Are We Doing About It?

There are a growing number of coordinated efforts across the U.S. advocating the protection of workers and owners and building greater awareness about the complex health, safety, and labour issues facing the nail salon sector. In recent years, the nail salon community's working conditions and exposure to chemicals has received greater attention by public and environmental health fields, and the scientific, advocacy, and API communities.

In 2005, a group of advocates, community-based groups, nail salon workers and owners, and public agency allies came together to form the California Healthy Nail Salon Collaborative. The Collaborative's mission is to advance a preventative environmental health agenda to assure the health and safety of the nail salon and beauty communities in California.

Through an integrated approach employing policy, outreach, and research strategies, the Collaborative directly engages local leadership, workers, and owners in identifying issues of concern. In developing solutions, the Collaborative challenges manufacturers to remove the most toxic ingredients from their products, and identifies practices and policies that benefit both workers and small businesses. Collaborative member, Asian Law Caucus, has been promoting increased awareness about occupational health hazards and preventive strategies to reduce exposures to the toxics in nail care products among workers and owners in the San Francisco Bay Area. "My community has been suffering silently," says Connie

Nguyen, a Vietnamese immigrant and salon worker who assists the Caucus with its outreach efforts.

Another Collaborative member, Asian Communities for Reproductive Justice's POLISH (Participatory Research, Organizing and Leadership for Safety and Health) project organizes two key constituencies: teenage Asian consumers and Vietnamese nail salon workers, which connects the issue of toxins in personal care products with the nail salon industry. Both groups meet regularly to learn about what precautions they can take to protect their health on the job and in their lives.

In addition to outreach and education, other Collaborative members are endeavouring to quantify the relationship between cosmetic chemicals and chronic diseases such as cancer. To better understand the breast cancer risks among salon workers, Asian Health Services, a community health center, and the Northern California Cancer Center, a non-profit dedicated to cancer research, have partnered in a pilot study of Vietnamese nail salon workers to begin this year.

Similar organizing activities are underway across the U.S., as other groups and communities identify concerns regarding the high number of API salon workers of child-bearing age who are chronically exposed to dangerous chemicals. Work is being done to establish model "green" nail salons that will use the least-toxic products available on the market today. The Pioneer Valley Project, a multi-racial community organizing effort in Massachusetts, is focused on building a nail salon that will feature safe and affordable chemical management and reduction practices. Following suit, the Environmental Coalition of South Seattle recently received an Environmental Protection Agency grant to work with over seventy Vietnamese-owned nail salons to increase awareness of safer alternatives and reduce exposure to toxic chemicals.

There are signs that the industry may also be ready to develop healthier alternatives. At the urging of consumers and activists with the Campaign for Safe Cosmetics, international nail products manufacturer, OPI Products, reformulated

its nail polish in 2007 to remove the hazardous solvent toluene. Leading manufacturers including Sally Hansen, OPI, and Revlon have also removed other chemicals banned by the European Union from nail polish in recent months.

Efforts such as those in California, Seattle, and Massachusetts have prompted the California Collaborative, the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum (NAPAWF), and Women's Voices of the Earth (WVE) to establish a national alliance to connect efforts across the U.S. focused on nail salon worker health and safety. WVE recently released a groundbreaking report entitled "Glossed Over: Health Hazards Associated with Toxic Exposure in Nail Salons," which outlines several health hazards associated with toxic exposure in nail salons and provides recommendations for improving conditions for all nail salon employees and customers. NAPAWF also released a policy brief to elevate the understanding of key issues and to engage the API community, policymakers, advocates, nail workers, and others.

The National Healthy Nail Salon Alliance's challenge lies in convincing U.S. federal agencies to hold the beauty and personal care industry to a stricter standard to assure better protection for workers, owners, and the general public. The 2005 passage of the California Safe Cosmetics Act, which requires for the first time that cosmetic manufacturers disclose if their products contain chemicals that cause cancer or birth defects, is an encouraging step forward. Ultimately, the bottom line for advocates is clear: workers and owners alike should not have to choose between their health and their livelihood; instead, manufacturers, with government oversight, should produce and market the safest products possible based on the best available science.

Alisha Tran, who worked in the nail salon business for sixteen years, experienced dizziness, constant headaches, and other health problems, issues she attributes to the fumes from the chemicals she worked with on a daily basis. "The best solution," Alisha feels, "would be for the manufacturers to decrease the amount of harmful chemicals in their products."

Recommendations:

U.S. advocates, nail salon workers, scientists, and others are coming together to develop a multifaceted platform to support the removal of harmful chemicals from nail salon products to assure greater worker health and safety. Below are the key short- and long-term recommendations for reducing exposures to toxic chemicals by nails salon workers and owners.

Short Term:

1. Manufacturers must reformulate nail products to eliminate known toxic ingredients.
2. Nail salon technicians should be provided with better safety information and training on toxic exposure.
3. Ventilation in many salons should be improved to decrease toxic chemicals in the ambient air.

Long Term:

1. Work to secure the passage of a national legislation to prevent the use of toxic chemicals in cosmetic products.
2. Give the U.S. FDA the authority to regulate cosmetic ingredients.
3. Conduct more research on the long term health effects of chronic low-level exposure to toxic chemicals found in nail salon products.
4. Develop safer/greener chemicals for use in nail salon products that currently have no non-toxic alternatives. ❧

Dori Gilels is Executive Director at Women's Voices for the Earth. Dori holds a Masters degree in Education and has worked in the environmental and social justice movements for more than 12 years and has experience with grassroots organizing, market-based campaigns, program management, media relations, fundraising and policy development.

Alexandra Gorman is the Director of Science and Research at Women's Voices for the Earth. She is the co-author of the report **Glossed Over: Health Hazards Associated with Toxic Exposure in Nail Salons**, which is available on WVE's website.

Priscilla Huang is the Policy and Programs Director of the National Asian Pacific American Women's Forum, an organization that works to advance social justice and human rights for APA women and girls. She has worked for several women's rights orga-

nizations around the U.S. and holds a law degree from American University.

Julia Liou is the Planning and Development Manager at Asian Health Services, a community clinic in Oakland, California. Julia has a masters in public health from UCLA and is the co-founder of the California Healthy Nail Salons Collaborative.

Anuja Mendiratta is an independent consultant, freelance writer and co-founder of the California Healthy Nail Salons Collaborative. Anuja has a masters in environmental studies from York University and works with nonprofits, foundations, and community groups on a range of environmental and social justice issues.

Dawn Philip is originally from Los Angeles and is currently the Reproductive Justice Project Director at NAPAWF.

Further Resources & References

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Mercury, Fish and Childbearing

What Every Woman Should Know to Protect Children and the Planet

Genon Jensen, Executive Director, Health & Environment Alliance

Karolina Ruzickova, Health Care Without Harm

Diana G. Smith, Communications, Health & Environment Alliance

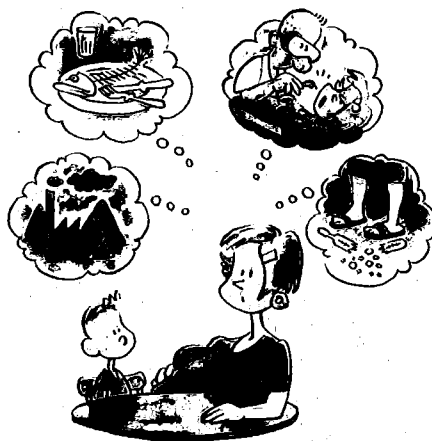
Survey findings, published in the campaign report entitled "Halting the child brain drain: Why we need to tackle global mercury contamination", demonstrated women's current levels of mercury as a concrete example of low-level exposure to an environmental toxic.

Exposure to mercury in the diet and perhaps at work may significantly harm the health of her unborn child. Mercury has been scientifically shown to harm human health even at low doses. It is especially dangerous for the mental development of the child when exposure takes place in the womb.

An environmental health campaign by the Brussels-based Health and Environment Alliance and the global coalition Health Care Without Harm represents an example of a women-centred, local and global advocacy, research and information project on an important, emerging issue in women's health. Results from the "bio monitoring" of women's hair for mercury provided a key advocacy tool for raising awareness within the European Parliament and in the media worldwide.

In some parts of Europe, current mercury levels in fish are so high that if a pregnant woman consumes too much of certain types, such as swordfish and tuna, the future development of her unborn child can be impaired. The problem is of greatest concern in fishing communities where large, predatory fish make up a major part of the diet. Studies by Harvard University Professor Philippe Grandjean in the Faroe Islands (Denmark) have clearly demonstrated that children's mental abilities are damaged by their mothers' fish consumption during pregnancy.²

Mercury in fish is a result of widespread mercury pollution from industrial sources such as chlor-alkali plants (producing raw materials for the chemicals industry) or coal combustion facilities. Half of all mercury emissions come from man-made sources, such as industrial and power plants. Mercury is also used in a variety of medical products, which can also result in human exposure. For example, women and young children may be exposed to broken thermometers containing mercury and nurses in healthcare facilities handle mercury blood pressure devices that may be leaking. Dentists are exposed to mercury vapours because dental fillings are often made of mercury



amalgam. When the mercury from broken or discarded products is not properly disposed of, it ends up in the environment through wastewater and evaporation into the atmosphere.

Once this toxin enters the environment, microorganisms convert elemental mercury into the more toxic methyl mercury, which aquatic plants and animals ingest or absorb. Methyl mercury has the capacity to bio-accumulate (collect in organisms rather than being excreted) and to bio-magnify (increase in concentration at each level of the food chain). In this way, mercury builds up in seafood and contaminates humans through fish consumption.

Women-centred Participatory Research

The Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) launched the participatory research project in early 2006. More than 50 environmental, health and professional groups, mainly led by women, were approached. Mainly women representatives in 21 countries volunteered to take part. Each organised mercury hair sampling sessions with women in the reproductive age group. The hair samples and questionnaires completed by participants were sent to Belgium for analysis, and results were sent back to the groups to be shared and explained to those who had taken part.

Some of the coordinators agreed to participate because they were worried about their own risk of exposure, for example as a nurse or technician in a hospital. They knew their colleagues would also be motivated to have a hair sample tested. Others agreed to set up hair sampling sessions because they knew many women were worried about the effects of mercury on their health, and felt that joining the campaign would increase access to clear and reliable information.

The overall aim of the campaign was

Taking part improved access to information

"As one of the national coordinators in this project, I learnt how worried many women are about exposure to mercury. Some were worried about what fish to eat, others about their dental fillings or exposure at work. They felt they did not have enough information. We were overwhelmed by the number of women wanting to participate in this survey. Women have the right to be informed so that they can protect themselves and prevent any effects on the foetus during pregnancy."

*Sascha Gabizon,
national coordinator for the
campaign in Germany and
international director of Women I
Europe for a Common Future
(WECF).*

to highlight the risks from methyl mercury exposure faced by women in their reproductive years and to provide local, national and global policy solutions to reduce these risks. Each national coordinator returned an average of more than 10 hair samples and completed questionnaires. The analysis showed that levels of mercury in hair samples from more than 15% of the 266 women tested were above recommended levels. Although the sample size was small, the results echoed estimates in a recent European Union assessment of the health impact of mercury.³

The European report, published in 2005, had indicated that 1-5% of the general population in Central and Northern Europe and people in coastal areas of Mediterranean countries have levels of mercury in their bodies around the US National Research Council reference dose (a protective limit of 1 ug/g), and that a percentage of this population, notably Mediterranean fishing communities and the Arctic population, had levels ten times as high as this recommended norm.

Results of the project bio monitoring of the hair samples showed 42 women had levels above what is considered safe by the US National Research Council, the

Figure 1: Hair sample results: mean values per country

Origin country	Number of participants	Mean value [ug/g]
Armenia	11	0,13
Poland	24	0,25
Argentina	8	0,16
Macedonia	19	0,16
Bulgaria	6	0,17
The Netherlands	8	0,22
Slovakia	9	0,26
Germany	17	0,29
Sweden	5	0,3
Belgium	36	0,65
Czech Republic	10	0,33
Ireland	18	0,35
India	10	0,37
Belarus	11	0,43
South Africa	3	0,53
UK	12	0,54
Cyprus	9	0,55
France	8	0,57
Croatia	10	0,66
Philippines	9	0,92
Spain	9	2,18

most protective limit defined by an international authority. (The World Health Organization puts its "benchmark value" ten times higher.), However, the safety level at which it is recognised that mercury can cause harm has fallen steadily over the years.

A table in the campaign report showed the results in terms of country-by-country mean values of mercury in hair samples. (See Figure 1) The results of individual women's hair samples were not made publicly available.

Capacity Building for Advocacy

The campaign process involved women at all stages. The aim was to encourage their contribution and to provide them with an opportunity to be part of an effective campaign to put across key messages on environmental health to policy makers and the media.

The first step was to share information about mercury and health. Over 50 groups

What is a safe level of mercury?

"The evidence that a mother's exposure to methyl mercury can affect the neurodevelopment of her unborn child is not disputed. What is still debated is the level of environmental mercury contamination, which causes documented harm. Over time, our techniques have improved and we have been able to identify harm to humans at lower and lower levels. In time, it is likely that the scientific consensus will conclude that there is no safe level of foetal exposure."

*Peter Oatis,
MD, MPH, FACP, FACOEM,
Professor at University of Illinois at
Chicago School of Public Health*

were contacted. They were mainly based in Europe and most were members of HCWH or HEAL. Groups that volunteered to take part were mainly based in Europe, some represented doctors' associations and women's groups and three were based in countries outside Europe, namely the Philippines, Argentina and India. Toxics Link, India is an NGO with a strong track record in toxic campaign work.

Each group expressing interest was encouraged to review materials produced by the campaign, translate and disseminate the information produced, and organise the hair sampling. Once individual results had been shared with women participants, the overall findings could be officially released as part of an effort to raise awareness about the issue.

The report was launched at an event organised by HEAL and HCWH in the European Parliament in Brussels on 10 January 2007. The meeting was addressed by leading women health and environment advocates, politicians and other key figures in European health and environment policy. For example, the Zero Mercury Campaign, which aims to minimise mercury in the environment at EU level and globally, addressed participants

Many of the national women coordinators were brought to Brussels to attend the meeting and network with others in the campaign.

Conveying a convincing and urgent message

"Even if we stopped all mercury production and spills and emissions today, our global food supply would still be contaminated for years to come. Yet we face a future of mercury-contaminated fish, a valuable source of nutrition particularly for pregnant women, with no real end in sight.

If we have to ask women to eat only certain types of fish, and we do, we must also ask how quickly we can stop using mercury and change industrial processes that contribute to mercury contamination.

We hope this campaign transmits to leaders and industry worldwide, the silent but increasing health damage of mercury to our children, and the urgency of acting today, not next year or the year after."

*Genon K. Jensen,
Executive Director, Health &
Environment Alliance*

Journalists interviewed some of the national coordinators who came to Brussels. Media coverage included a feature in the early evening news on EuroNews, a television station broadcast in seven European languages, and in a dispatch from Associated Press news agency that was published by numerous newspapers and websites. Some national coordinators organised local press conferences with national representatives recommending specific measures for protecting women mercury exposure and asking for national legislative measures to reduce mercury pollution. Where necessary, coordinators were supported in their efforts to work with national media.

A special effort was made to involve national coordinators in sharing the key messages from the report with environmental groups and experts. For example,

a representative from Women in Europe for a Common Future presented the campaign and distributed copies of the report at discussions on mercury policy at the Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in Nairobi, Kenya in February 2007. UNEP is continuing to investigate the damaging environmental and health mercury effects and preparing discussions for a globally binding legal agreement to restrict the use of mercury in 2009. Feedback from the presentation indicated considerable interest, especially from policy makers who were previously unaware of the extent of the evidence of harm to health from low-dose exposure to mercury.

Multiplier effect of networking

The entire research and communication initiative was a highly collaborative process aimed at reaching as many people as possible. The materials produced were disseminated to the groups who then themselves shared the materials. The project documents included fact sheets, frequently asked questions, press releases, guidelines on hair sampling, and hints on working with the media.

Many groups further extended access to information by translating materials into local languages. Campaign materials are now available on partner NGO websites in 10 languages, providing a resource for visitors and for non-English language journalists contributing to articles in the press in more than a dozen countries.

Several hundred women became advocates themselves representing groups and organizations worldwide or simply as a result of having their hair tested. A considerable number spoke to the media either in Brussels or in their own countries. They described both their own concerns and the necessary policy changes required to control mercury pollution. Some had provided testimonies for the international report that were later used in articles in newsletters and journals.

Creating top-profile spokeswomen

The campaign involved many women politicians and health professionals thanks to the wide-ranging contacts of HEAL,

HCWH and participant groups.

A key political leader on environmental issues at the European level, Belgium MEP Frederique Ries, who is a member of the European Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, addressed the Brussels meeting and spoke to the media about the campaign. She drew further attention by putting photos of herself having a hair sample taken on her official website.

German Green MEP, Hiltrud Breyer has said publicly that she appreciated the campaign. She said it highlighted scientific research that underlined the message on the need for a ban on mercury.

Many doctors and nurses took up the messages at a policy, professional and personal level. A major hospital in Grenada, Spain now features the risks to health from mercury on their website. In Croatia, the

Flagging the latest science

"Recent studies have once again confirmed the detrimental and irreversible effects toxic substances like mercury have during phases of a child's brain development. A brain is unique and cannot be replaced. It is highly regrettable that the new EU-chemicals legislation REACH does not adequately protect humans and the environment from dangerous chemicals. I hope the EU will take the lead for a global ban, which is long overdue. This report from the "Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury" campaign underlines these arguments."

*Hiltrud Breyer,
Member of the European Parliament,
Greens/EFA, Germany*



campaign coordinator became a high-profile spokesperson after she organised a press conference that sparked a national debate on mercury and health.

Achievements

Assessing how effective a campaign has been is never straightforward. However, some evidence suggests that the campaign did contribute to the EU Parliament adopting a ban on mercury in measuring devices in July 2007. Healthcare institutions can no longer buy mercury thermometers, and the Commission is committed to producing a report in 2009 about the use of mercury blood pressure devices in healthcare. This report will address the alternatives and their availability and, once the review is complete, HCWH believes the Commission will have an unanswerable case for prohibiting the sale of these devices as well.

The campaign also helped convince those responsible for the planned EU bio monitoring project that mercury should be one of the chemicals to measure in women in their reproductive years. The European Commission is also currently investigating the viability of restricting dental amalgam use, and various EU authorities are debating the scope of a proposal to ban the export of mercury from Europe to countries of the global south.

The campaign made more information materials available. For example, it provided groups in hospitals in Europe and in Philippines, India and Argentina, with more appropriate materials to advocate for policies to eliminate mercury from hospitals and healthcare sector.

The "Halting the Child Brain Drain" report provided women with information about how they can be exposed to mercury in food and other products, and how they can protect themselves. Campaign fact sheets provided guidance on fish consumption, alternative mercury-free products, information on what to do in case of mercury spill and even an overview of current research regarding the still controversial uses of mercury in vaccines and dental amalgam. Women were also given guidance on how to take precautionary mea-



asures and to ask the right questions of their doctors and politicians so that they could become spokespeople for their children, families and communities.

HEAL and HCWH take pride in the fact that hundreds, perhaps thousands, more women now know about the risks of mercury to health, how to take personal action to protect their children, and how to convince others of the need for local policy change and a global ban. All these women are aware of which fish to avoid, when, in what quantities, and what needs to be done at the global level to reduce exposure to mercury.

Conclusions

The health effects from low doses of mercury, which are recognised by scientists, clearly indicate that mercury should not be in our bodies, nor our children's, even at low levels.

Existing research on levels of exposure in some populations, while still insufficient, nevertheless gives us reason to be concerned about society's vulnerable groups. Although the risk from low doses of mercury may be low at an individual level, this does not mean we should be reluctant to take appropriate action. Developmental effects on children today will impact on the whole population in the future. The World Health Organization should show leadership by prioritising mercury as a serious health hazard, particularly in raising awareness in the global south and among vulnerable groups.

All sources of mercury emissions need to be addressed systematically. In healthcare products, the use of mercury

inevitably leads to its release into the environment and contamination of the food chain. A global ban on mercury thermometers is a first step. Unless concerted action is taken to substitute mercury with safer alternatives in the health care sector, the relative importance of its contribution will increase as other sources of mercury are addressed and phased out. The historic and continuing use of mercury in dental amalgam will be a growing source of mercury emissions as it escapes into the atmosphere in smoke expelled from crematoria.

Considerable scope exists for reducing the use and emissions of mercury globally. In Europe, regulatory measures adopted so far have begun to make a difference to the amount of mercury emitted into the environment. Positive proposals by the EU and the possibility of a global legal instrument on mercury are both significant steps towards reducing man-made sources of mercury into the environment. However, they need to be supported by financial assistance from developed countries. Globally, emissions may still be rising and action taken must be swift and targeted at ultimately phasing out the use of mercury completely. If mercury continues to be used in products and processes, it will continue to be emitted and added to the "global pool" where it can re-circulate again and again in the global environment. Indeed, even if all uses and emissions of mercury were stopped immediately it is not known how long the contamination of the food chain would continue.⁴

Future action is essential on two levels; first, policy change is needed to phase out the use of mercury globally by substituting it with safer alternatives, and second, education and communication is needed to ensure that people are better informed about how to prevent the build up of mercury in their bodies, in order to protect the health of future generations.

The Health and Environment Alliance (formerly European Public Health Alliance Environment Network (EEN)) is an international NGO that advocates greater protection of the environment as a means to improving the health and well being of Europeans. It brings together

How much is safe?

The European Commission suggests that women who might become pregnant, women who are pregnant or are breastfeeding and young children should not eat more than one small portion (less than 100 g) per week of large predatory fish, such as swordfish, shark, marlin and pike. If they do eat a portion of this fish, they should not eat any other fish during the same week. Nor should they eat tuna more than twice per week.

The Swedish recommendation is the most stringent (and therefore the most protective) in the European Union. It advises: "Women who are pregnant or thinking of becoming pregnant and breastfeeding should NEVER eat large halibut, cod liver, eel, shark, swordfish, or tuna, fresh or frozen."

Source: Mercury and Fish Consumption Fact Sheet available at www.env-health.org/IMG/pdf/Fish_consumption.pdf

over 50 citizens', patients', women's, health professionals' and environmental organizations across Europe, and has a strong track record in increasing public and expert engagement in EU debates and in the decision-making process. ❖

Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH) is part of an international coalition of 450 hospitals and health care systems, medical and nursing associations, community groups, health-affected constituencies, labour unions, and environmental and health organizations, working to protect health and the environment by reducing pollution and the use of toxic chemicals in healthcare. The coalition believes that nothing bought, built and used in healthcare should create conditions, which make people ill.

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1. "Halting the child brain drain, Why we need to tackle global mercury contamination", Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury, a joint campaign by Health & Environment Alliance and Health Care Without Harm, December 2006. The report is available on HEAL's campaign website at www.env-health.org/r/145

2. Prenatal Exposure to Mercury From a Maternal Diet High in Seafood Can Irreversibly Impair Certain Brain Functions in Children, 6 February 2004, www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/2004-releases/press-02062004.html

3. European Commission, SEC (2005) 101 Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Community Strategy Concerning Mercury, Extended Impact Assessment (COM(2005) final) 28.1.2005, page 78.

4. European Commission, SEC(2005)101, op.cit., p 15.

Resources:

The Stay Healthy, Stop Mercury report, "Halting the child brain drain, Why we need to tackle global mercury contamination", plus press packs, fact sheets and translated materials are available on the campaign website. Visit: HEAL's campaign website at www.env-health.org/r/145

Fact sheets cover the following issues: mercury and health, health care, fish consumption, vaccines, mercury spills, substituting mercury in sphygmomanometers, and dental amalgam.

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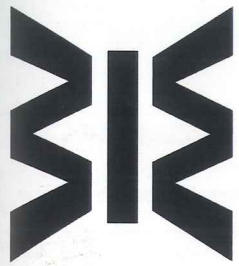
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Women & Environments



international
magazine

GENDER AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

**"Women must do it
for themselves"**

Organizing Working Women
into SORWUC (1972-1986)
JANET NICOL

**Women and the
Arab Spring**

A Window of Opportunity
or More of the Same?
FATMA OSMAN IBNOUF

**It's bigger than bling
bling and the banks**

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activism at mining sites
TRACY GLYNN

**Social Movements
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An Interview with
Noël Sturgeon
LOIS KAMENITZ AND
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Design: Dinah Greenberg, NOMAD Design

Logo: Elizabeth Forrest

Cover Photography: Kevin Konnyu

Contributors: Caroline Andrew, Kyle Archibald, Anushka Atallahjan, AWID, Tina Biello, Judy Bowman, Pamela Caro, CAWI-ITVF, Christine Charette, Michelle Chen, Saumya Dave, Pat Davitt, Jeff Denomme, Suzanne Doerge, Julie Drolet, Greg Duke, Beatrice Fantoni, Kim Goldberg, Tracy Glynn, Kelly Haggart, Jarral Hodge, Fatma Osman Ibnouf, Rochelle Jones, Lois Kamenitz, Fran Klodawsky, Janna Klostermann, Cathleen Kneen, Kevin Konnyu, Carole Glasser Langille, Jazzmen Lee-Johnson, Marilyn Lerch, Dalia Levy, Jenny Lo, Cecelia McGuire, Nele Michiels, Kim Nelson, Janet Nicol, Marni Norwich, Ruth Roach Pierson, Public Services International, Jean Rands, Shirley A. Serviss, Reena Shadaan, Nabil Shash, Janet Siltanen, Noël Sturgeon, Sandra Tam, Maju Tavera, Nayani Thiagarajah, Sybila Valdivieso, WECF, WEDO.

Editorial Board: Dayna Scott, Sharmila Shewprasad, Olga Speranskaya, Sybila Valdivieso.

Editor in Chief: Sybila Valdivieso

Managing Editor: Sharmila Shewprasad

Academic Liaison: Dayna Scott

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Address all correspondence:

Women & Environments International Magazine
Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University
HNES Building, Room 234,
4700 Keele Street,
Toronto, Ontario, M3J 1P3 Canada
Telephone: 416-736-2100 x 21055
Facsimile: 416-736-5679
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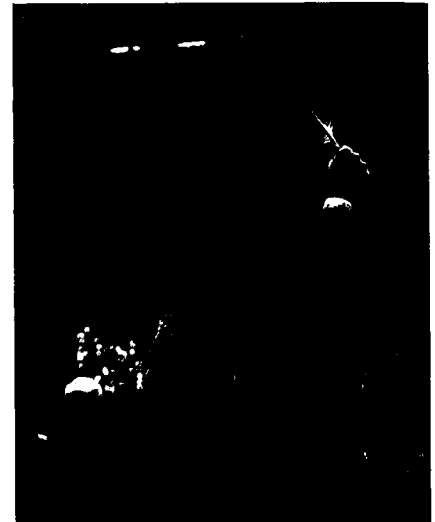
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Canada

ON THE COVER



Title: Of a Feather

An Indigenous woman raises her fist holding an eagle feather during an Idle No More round dance at Dundas Square in Toronto, Canada on January 11, 2013. On that day, the Idle No More movement called for an international day of action to coincide with a meeting between Canada's Prime Minister, Stephen Harper, and members of the Assembly of First Nations. The actions carried out that day were also in honour of the one-month anniversary of Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence's hunger strike on Victoria Island, a short distance from Parliament Hill. Chief Spence's sacrifice for her community galvanized support for the Idle No More movement — in Canada and around the world. Attawapiskat remains a community abandoned and betrayed by the Canadian government. Most recently a fire has devastated the community, creating an even more precarious situation for many people.

Photographer: Kevin Konnyu

Kevin Konnyu is an independent photographer committed to helping provide a visual narrative for social, economic and environmental justice protests and communities in resistance. He helped found Canada's first Indy Media Centre at the Windsor OAS (Organization of American States) protests in 2000. He has been documenting protests ever since, and is well respected in a diversity of activist communities. His work, which he often provides free of charge to social justice organizers, has been featured in publications across the country. Over the past year and a half, he has focused extensively on the Idle No More movement. His work can be seen via the Toronto Media Co-op or at www.flickr.com/fifth_business.

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WE Speak

A Word from WEI

This has been a challenging year for WEI and as a result this issue, on the topic of gender and social movements, comes to you later than we intended. When we thought of this theme for WEI we wanted to explore the issue of gender in 'social movements' particularly in new and emerging movements for progressive social change because such movements create spaces to challenge power and power relationships. In the last few years, we have seen new movements emerge out of social protest against economic austerity, inequality and political exclusion and women are, and continue to be, at the forefront of many of these movements.

Our contributors weigh in on these issues from various perspectives. While being interviewed, Sturgeon tells us that the connection between environmental issues and feminist social justice issues is the connection we need to make in order to create change. In her article *Women and the Arab Spring: A Window of Opportunity or More of the Same*, Ibnouf states that the 'Arab Spring' has created a space for women to initiate dialogue and to pressure states, and its actors, to respond to their concerns.

Klodawsky, Siltanen and Andrew's article provides an example of how local feminist organizations may work with local government to create a more inclusive city and to promote gender equality during challenging times. Nicol, in telling us about the *Service, Office and Retail Union of Canada*, reminds us that unions are an important channel to address women's rights. Glynn explains that 'praxis', where ideas are put into practice, is what is needed in progressive social movements to make change. Caro shares the strategies used by women in the CLOC-Via Campesina movement in Latin America to ensure gender issues are addressed.

From Khartoum in Sudan to Santiago, Chile and as reflected in the writings, poetry, films, and art of our contributors, women in progressive social movements face many challenges as they continue to challenge the *status quo* and to disrupt political and gender norms both within and outside those movements.

We thank all the contributors to this issue who shared their ideas, thoughts and perspectives with us. We also wish to extend a special thank you to Sharmila Shewprasad, WEI's Managing Editor. We hope you will be engaged and informed as you read this issue of WEI! ❧

Sybila Valdivieso,
Editor
weimag@yorku.ca

Putting This Issue Together

Genevieve Drouin has a Masters in International Development and over nine years of experience in the non-governmental sector. She has worked with community based organizations in South America and Africa and with global and environmental education programs in Canada. Her interests include urban development, gender equality, food security, and environmental sustainability. She currently works as a Program Manager with Canadian Feed the Children.

Ilana Divantman is a Toronto-based artist, painter and curator. Working mostly with figures and portraits, Ilana's work disrupts time as figures and faces are caught in moments of awareness. She is a co-founder of stimulate-us, an art event created through the support and love of friends and co-workers. The event brings together various artistic fields and draws on core issues of the Canadian immigrant experience, present and future. She worked as WEI's graduate assistant during the 2012-2013 academic year.

Sharmila Shewprasad has managed development programs in Asia, Africa and the Middle East for the past seven years. Her areas of specialization include women's sexual and reproductive health, gender, human rights, and refugee and migration issues. She has an MA in International Development Studies and has been the Managing Editor of WEI magazine since 2010.

Amanda Vega is a long time friend of WEI magazine. She holds a BA in Women Studies with a concentration on Gender and Media Studies from MIT and an MA in Social Policy from the University of Pennsylvania. She has a particular interest in gender bender issues in social media. She lives with her partner and children in Montreal, Canada.

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Features

“Women must do it for themselves” Organizing Working Women into SORWUC (1972-1986)

Janet Nicol

As feminist ideas began to ignite women to action during the tumultuous 1960s, several Simon Fraser University students formed the Vancouver Women's Caucus in 1968. Two years later, the group came down from the mountain campus and invited working women and “housewives” in the city to join the conversation on women's rights.

Feminism wasn't just about middle-class women's concerns, some caucus members argued. Working-class women wanted a living wage and workplace equality too. And so the Working Women's Association (WWA) was born. The WWA actively supported women on picket lines. They discussed the problems arising from the fact women in the workforce made half the wages of men and 80% of working women in British Columbia were not in unions.

The association examined the sexist attitudes which kept women in low wage, gender-segregated occupations in offices, restaurants and department stores. Women only worked for “pin money,” was the prevailing notion. Marriage and motherhood were their true vocation. But in reality, many married women were “one paycheque away from poverty” and single mothers were financially better off on social assistance after daycare costs were factored in, than working in “pink collar” jobs.

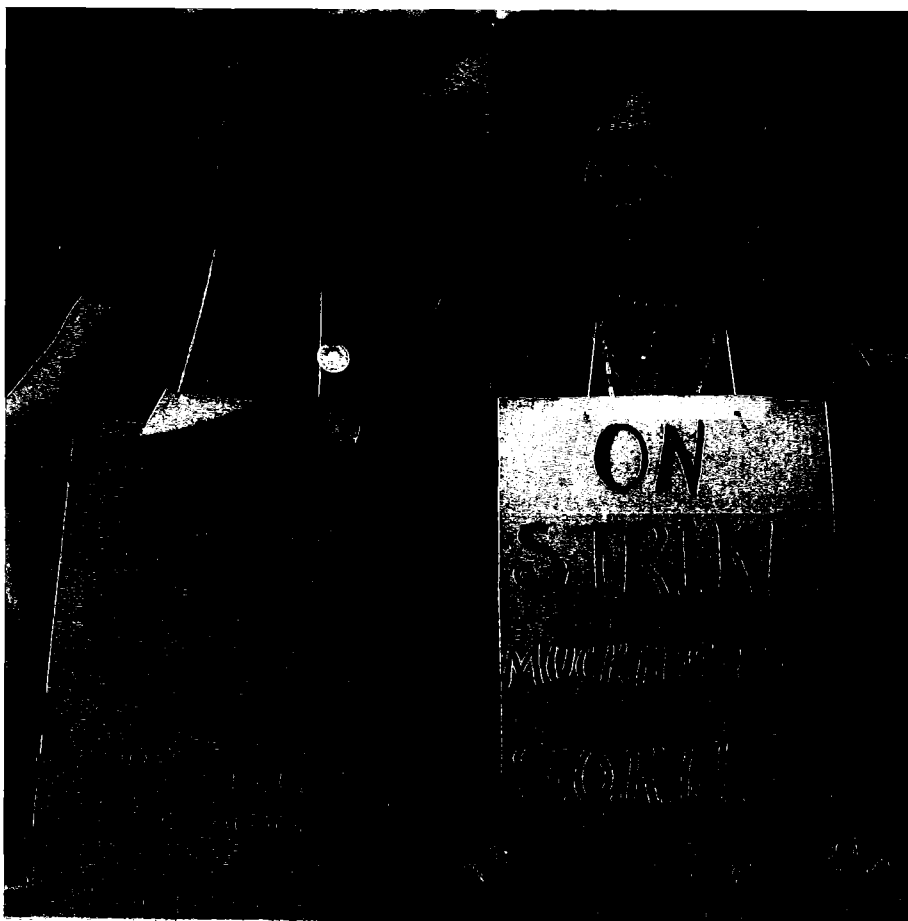
Unions offered a vehicle to make real changes in women's lives. In 1972, 24 women formed the Service, Office, and Retail Union of Canada (SORWUC). The group drew up a uniquely democratic union constitution that gave members control over leadership positions and set limits on terms of office and wages of paid representatives.

“We decided to organize independently

mostly because the overwhelming majority of women are not organized and the existing unions haven't done much about it,” Jean Rands, a clerical worker and SORWUC founder, told the media, in 1972. “Established union leadership has become conservative. They're not prepared to fight.” As for international unions, Rands said a union leader in New York shouldn't have the power to decide whether workers in Vancouver could strike. “This is a new union that the members will control.”

Some of the founders of SORWUC

(including Rands) had worked at the University of British Columbia (UBC) and helped organize an independent union of clerical and library workers into the Association of University and College Employees (AUCE). Other college and university workers in Vancouver began organizing into their own AUCE locals. Workers controlled negotiations and the results were impressive. AUCE's first contract at UBC in 1974, gave the group of mostly female employees a \$225 per month wage increase.



Two First Nations women striking on the Muckamuck restaurant picket line in 1975.

PAT DAVITT

"Existing unions have done nothing to organize female workers," Rands believed. "Women must do it for themselves."

Organizing women into SORWUC

SORWUC volunteer organizers spent many early mornings handing out leaflets to women on their way to work in downtown offices. Activists also offered free lunch time workshops at the YWCA and the library. By 1975, SORWUC had organized 15 workplaces and had 150 members, most women working in offices, daycare centres and social services.

Dealing with the "office wife syndrome" was an issue SORWUC confronted. Women were often required to get coffee for their (mostly male) bosses or run personal errands, such as buying gifts or picking up dry cleaning. Secretaries in a small law firm who organized into SORWUC negotiated a ground-breaking contract clause which guaranteed they "will not be required to do work of a personal nature for the employer."

"The big unions were making no serious effort to organize working women, especially those in small offices of under ten employees," Pat Barter, an office worker and SORWUC organizer told a newspaper reporter in 1976.

Organizing in the restaurant industry

Margot Holmes was employed as a waitress at Bimini's neighborhood pub on Vancouver's west side. She was among twenty full and part-time workers unhappy with the wages and the scheduling procedures. In 1976, Holmes and some of her co-workers contacted six unions before choosing SORWUC to organize their workplace.

"The decision was based on the fact that we could write our own contract..." Holmes said, "...and they (SORWUC) let us do the organizing."

On January 24, 1977 workers at Bimini's were certified as a union and began negotiating with the owner. The employer was particularly adamant in opposing a 'closed shop' — a vital contract clause which ensured all employees joined the union.

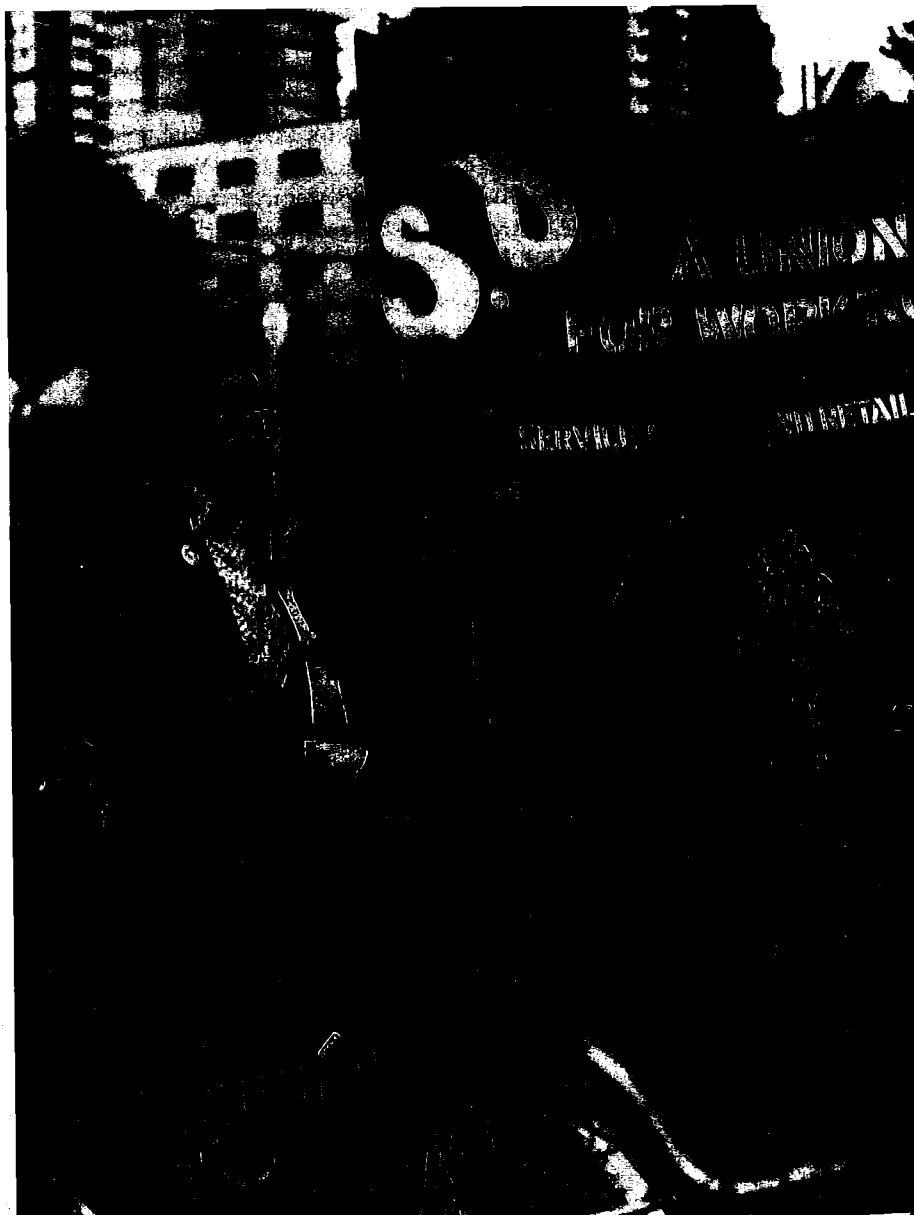
In October, the staff voted 13 to 7 in

favor of a strike — the first by pub employees in the province. The employer hired strike breakers to keep his business operating while staff, along with SORWUC activists and supporters, formed a picket line at the pub entrance. Strikers gained public support, discouraging potential customers from entering.

A month into the strike, a representative of the international-based Hotel, Restaurant and Bartenders Union (HRBU), Local 40, crossed the Bimini's picket line and signed up strike breakers. Outraged, more than 50 SORWUC strikers and sup-

porters picketed the HRBU headquarters.

A HRBU official defended his union and accused SORWUC of "splitting up the industry." He argued restaurant workers had been under HRBU jurisdiction "since 1900." The official also considered SORWUC a "women's liberation" organization rather than a trade union. The British Columbia Federation of Labour disagreed and threatened HRBU with expulsion if they did not withdraw their certification application. HRBU complied but still complained to the press over SORWUC's "encroachment."



Jean Rands (far left), one of the founders of SORWUC, stands by others in front of SORWUC banner while setting up for an annual Vancouver peace march.

JEAN RANDS

"They claim they have had jurisdiction since 1900," Holmes countered, "which means that they've had 77 years to organize women. And where were they?"

After a ten week strike, the employer agreed to bargain. The parties reached a one-year agreement, following binding arbitration on some issues. Wages increased from \$3.75 an hour to \$5.00 and benefits were substantially improved too — but the union had to accept a modified union shop. This meant strikers and strike breakers would work together.

Two months went by with a divisive staff coping under the new contract, when the employer applied to decertify the union. The British Columbia Labour Relations Board (LRB) complied, despite the union's best efforts to argue against the application. Only five of the original 23 staff were left working at Bimini's at this point. It came as no surprise when the majority of workers voted to decertify. Management had "won."

"I think the LRB was really negligent in allowing the vote to take place when the whole history of Bimini's has been one unfair labour practise after another," Holmes told the press.

Despite the bitter outcome, Holmes did not regret the experience. She noted workers at Jerry's Cove neighborhood pub, also on the city's west side, organized with SORWUC and achieved fair contracts, without intense acrimony.

"SORWUC encouraged us to take an active role in our lives," Holmes said, "and taught us how that made us more confident about standing up for our rights. And for others' rights."

Ethel Gardner was among the 21 aboriginal women and men working at the Muckamuck Restaurant in downtown Vancouver, cooking and serving First Nations cuisine. Her employer was comprised of three Americans, who also had investments in art galleries and other restaurants in British Columbia and California.

As Gardner tells the story:

"A few incidents occurred which got the staff upset. The cook was charged for getting the soup burnt and I was fined for leaving the bannock out overnight. ...Incidents such as these led a few of us to

go to the Labour Standards Board where we were told we needed a union in order to enforce our grievances. I went back to the employment agency (which had connected Gardner to this job) and said I wanted to quit, that the employer was racist. The counsellor said, "Why don't you join a union?" She told me about SORWUC's organizing efforts at Jerry's Cove and Bimini's. I called SORWUC and met with two union reps. They talked about the union and suggested we talk to the unionized employees at Jerry's Cove, which we did."

The workers signed union cards and were certified on March 20, 1978. When the employers received the union notification, "all hell broke loose," as a Muckamuck employee told the Vancouver Sun newspaper:

"The primary union organizer was fired the day that management was notified of the application for certification. Since then six more of us have been fired or intimidated into quitting. All seven are union members, most quite active."

Unfair labour practises followed, along with attempts to begin contract talks. Management contacted First Nations leaders in an attempt to act against the union workers and tried to bring in the HRBU to "raid" SORWUC. They also circulated

anti-union literature in the neighbourhood.

With relations in complete disrepair, the restaurant workers took a strike vote. The majority voted in favour and on June 1, a picket line formed in front the restaurant. After closing for the first six months of the strike, management re-opened with strike breakers, many deliberately hired from the First Nations community. Now called the "Chilcotin Bar Seven", the business had a 'cowboy' theme. Verbal and physical abuse on the picket line was pervasive and 'counter pickets' by strike breakers created confusing 'street theatre' for passers-by.

The first of three applications by the employer to decertify the union was made in January of 1979. The second was August 25 of the same year and the third, May 14, 1980. Remarkably a majority of the original staff remained steadfast, testifying at each hearing that they supported the union and were prepared to return to work when the dispute ended. In all three applications, the LRB ruled in favor of the union.

Few customers crossed the picket line and by the spring of 1980, management was operating the restaurant on weekends only. Soon after, they shut down. On April 25, 1981, the LRB finally responded to SORWUC's unfair labour applications. The main finding was that the Muckamuck



SORWUC bank workers and supporters protest firing of two bank workers at an organized bank in Gibsons, British Columbia.

management had not bargained in good faith. A year and a half later, the LRB applied remedies which included that management owed the union \$10,000 in compensation. SORWUC was never able to collect the money as the owners had withdrawn all assets from BC and moved back to the United States.

Gardner spoke of the positive aspects of a challenging experience, "Looking back now, I see how we took it upon ourselves as a group of Native workers to make a statement that we weren't going to be run in that way. So I think it was a success. We learned a lot, gained a lot and it was empowering."

Organizing Bank Workers

Bank tellers frequently worked involuntary and unpaid overtime. This provoked employees at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce (CIBC), at Vancouver's Victory Square branch to join SORWUC in 1976. They formed a local within the union called the United Bank Workers (UBW). Over the ensuing months several other BC bank employees, repre-

senting four of the five Canadian chartered banks, were signing union cards too.

"The wages are below those of waitresses and maids," Jackie Ainsworth, a CIBC teller at Victory Square, told the press. "That's the reason unionizing is happening in the banks."

"Our office is swamped with calls," said Ainsworth's co-worker Dodie Zerr, President of the UBW. "And no wonder, when we compare our wages to bank profits. The base rate for workers, most of whom are women, varies from \$500 to \$600 per month while bank profits were up 46% from 1974."

SORWUC had a major legal challenge to overcome before contract negotiations could begin. The employers argued a single bargaining unit consists of all branches of a bank across Canada. They took this claim to the Canadian Labour Relations Board (CLRB). SORWUC countered, stating the banks' position was unreasonable, preventing workers from exercising the right to unionize. Each bank branch comprises a bargaining unit, the union affirmed. After lengthy deliberation, on

June 14, 1977, the CLRB ruled in SORWUC's favor.

It was a landmark legal victory that gave unions the go-ahead to organize, branch by branch, Canada's 145,000 bank workers, three-quarters of whom were women. Over a two year period, 700 bank workers joined the United Bank Workers of SORWUC.

But the logistics and legal costs of organizing was pulling SORWUC under. Financial donations by supportive union locals, individuals and community groups still didn't cover expenses. SORWUC also had to fight harassment, layoffs and other unfair labour practices.

Carol Dulyk and Eileen Quigley, bank workers at the CIBC branch in Gibsons, a town on BC's Sunshine Coast, were fired for joining SORWUC. In a show of support, SORWUC organized 100 supporters to picket outside their branch. "The Bank of Commerce in Gibsons has to realize it cannot get away with firing union organizers," Sheree Butt, a bank worker and organizer, told the press in 1978.

SORWUC requested financial help



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from the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC), but were unwilling to accept their terms. To make matters worse, the CLC's affiliated union, the Office and Technical Employees Union (OTEU), was undermining SORWUC's efforts by instigating its own bank drive. The greatest blow came in the spring of 1978, when bank employers froze wages among staff in unionized branches, while giving non-union branch employees wage increases and improved benefits. SORWUC filed a complaint before the labour board — and lost.

"We are taking on some of the most powerful organizations in the country," Heather MacNeill, a SORWUC organizer told the media, "and we know that psychologically we need the support of the trade union movement. We need all the support we can get."

"The CLC said we couldn't win but we went in there, we fought the legal battles and we organized like hell. We didn't worry about costs."

Unable to gain the financial and moral support of the broader labour movement, and after exploring all tactical options, SORWUC reluctantly withdrew from branch-by-branch negotiations for the 22 branches in B.C. and two branches in Saskatchewan. "We were sad, angry and exhausted," an organizer later recalled.

Wins and losses

Women workers knew their efforts had made a difference, despite the loss, and a group came together to write a book called "An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers (SORWUC)." A second effort to organize banks was tried four years later, but the momentum could not be re-captured. In 1986, SORWUC disbanded.

"The reason for the creation of AUCE and SORWUC is the same as the reason for the creation of the present women's movement," a group of feminist activists wrote in 1982. "We learned that in the trade union movement, as in the male-dominated left and in society at large, our concerns (as women workers) are treated as secondary."

SORWUC shook up some of the toughest industries to organize — including

banks and restaurants — and challenged the union movement's complacency, holding up the ideal of independent unions, controlled by its membership. The efforts of the bank workers inspired employees at a number of small banks and credit unions across Canada to unionize and improved overall working conditions. The lessons of the SORWUC still hold today. Only when greater numbers of women working in these industries organize, will substantial changes occur. ❧

Janet Nicol is a teacher, writer and former SORWUC activist. She contributed as a researcher to a series about Working People and Labour history in British Columbia, produced by Landrock Entertainment Inc. for the Knowledge Network. The series began airing in 2013.

Further Reading:

An Account to Settle: The Story of the United Bank Workers: SORWUC, Press Gang Publishers, Vancouver, by the Bank Book Collective, 1979

Getting Organized in the Feminist Unions, an article by Jackie Ainsworth, Ann Hutchison, Susan Margaret, Michele Pujol, Sheila Perret, Mary Jean Rands, Star Rosenthal in **Still Ain't Satisfied: Canadian Feminism Today**. The Women's Press, Toronto, 1982.

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Municipal Politics in a Feminist and Community-Based Register

Lessons from City for All Women Initiative/Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes (CAWI-IVTF)

By Fran Klodawsky, Janet Siltanen, Caroline Andrew

"The CAWI-IVTF women ... signaled that the standard approach to citizen consultation in the City of Ottawa could not capture what the women needed to convey: that cities profoundly affect lives, especially when the texture of those lives is 'different.' The women were keen to establish that life is also about singing and caring and recognizing that culture is an integral part of what a city should be about."

The above quote from Andrew and Klodawsky's 2006 *In the Field* report on "New Voices: New Politics" (WEI 70/71) spoke to the unusual methods being used by the women of City for All Women Initiative / Initiative: une ville pour toutes les femmes (CAWI-IVTF) to get the attention of and convey their messages to the City Council in Ottawa, Canada. CAWI-IVTF is a community-based organization that describes itself as "a unique collaborative of women from diverse communities, organizations, and academia working with municipal decision makers to create a more inclusive city and promote gender equality" (CAWI-IVTF, 2011). Eight years later, we want to report the trajectory of such efforts but also to share some of what we have learned in the process of conducting action research with the organization, with the support of a Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council award.

Updates

Ironically, in 2012, CAWI-IVTF finds itself stronger than ever in terms of member support, an effective volunteer struc-

ture, and good working relations with City of Ottawa staff and politicians. Yet, its financial challenges also have never been greater. Similar to many other equality-seeking community organizations that are trying to survive on project funding, CAWI-IVTF is currently rallying its supporters to help raise funds on a variety of fronts, ranging from individual donations to applications to national foundations.

The situation is one where "mission drift" is all too common. CAWI-IVTF has recognized the dangers of mission drift and has tried to stay true to its principles despite a funding environment that is less and less interested in promoting marginalized women's empowerment as civic political actors. CAWI-IVTF's mission is threefold: first, it is to promote attention to the position of women throughout the Ottawa region, particularly women from marginalized communities; second, it is to promote greater and more encompassing gender equality within all aspects of municipal service delivery and governance at City Hall; and third, it is to bring marginalized women in the city of Ottawa into the political process as active and

knowledgeable agents of change. Since its inception CAWI-IVTF has promoted the importance of hearing from and responding to the voices of community women in all of their diversity.

Throughout its history, this mission has manifested itself in a two-fold manner. On the one hand, CAWI-IVTF is formally a partnership with the City of Ottawa. By order of Council, two mid-level members of staff have been part of the Steering Committee and this involvement has been formally recognized in job descriptions and workplans. In 2007, CAWI-IVTF led an initiative to develop a gender equality lens for municipal managers, and as a result of its achievements during a pilot phase, was invited to lead a process of developing a multi-focal lens — the Equity and Inclusion Lens — for managers throughout the municipality on a fee-for-service basis.

On the other hand, CAWI-IVTF has also maintained itself as an autonomous community-based organization, accountable to Ottawa's women and particularly to those at risk of marginalization. In this regard, a core program element has been civic participation training. It is a 9-month training program that consists of 4-5 full day workshops, as well as opportunities for participants to apply their learning to municipal election campaigns, the city budget process and other areas of concern such as public transit, child care and recreation. As part of their training, they have strategized on how best to intervene, written and delivered statements (as well as songs and plays) to municipal politicians, and they have also debriefed after such efforts in order to become more effective.

Since 2004, 150 women from commu-

nities at risk of marginalization (such as Aboriginal women, women living in poverty, newcomers to Canada, women with disabilities, and women who are racialized) have participated in civic participation training, thanks to financial support from a wide range of funders (such as Status of Women Canada, the Ontario Trillium Foundation, United Way of Ottawa, Community Foundation of Ottawa).

Yet, as of December 2012, there are insufficient funds in place to initiate the next round of such training. The closest CAWI-IVTF has come to finding a new opportunity to further empower women to engage in local politics is quite indirect: through a City of Ottawa initiative called the Community Development Framework, CAWI-IVTF is helping to train community facilitators to promote community members to become further engaged in their neighbourhoods. A proviso of CAWI-IVTF's involvement is that explicit attention is given to the importance of gender equality but there is only limited opportunity to highlight structural barriers or to actively nurture women's empowerment.

While CAWI-IVTF's future remains an open question, we want to use the rest of this article to share some of what we have learned about the organization's diverse efforts to engage in local politics through the empowerment of marginalized women, because we think their approach offers some potentially important insights for other municipally oriented feminist organizations.

CAWI's Political Practices: The Value Of The Prefigurative

In the earlier discussion of CAWI's political agendas, we explored the manner in which CAWI-IVTF helped shape "new subjectivities" and "new spatialities" among the women who were its members, and within their broader networks. In that article, we examined CAWI's effectiveness in contributing to a progressive politics of place. Our conclusion presented the view that it is possible, with effort and intention, for feminist engagement with the local state to avoid cooptation and be effective in enhancing positive social developments.

A follow-up discussion has built upon this idea by looking more closely at strate-

gies and orientations that help a small feminist organization take on relationships and partnerships with a more powerful local state in order to effect change, and yet manage to maintain its community-base and critical edge. We have concluded that an over-arching characteristic of CAWI is that it has strategically positioned itself as both inside and outside the local state.

Looking further at other defining characteristics of CAWI, we see a strong orientation to focusing on *process*, on *doing rather than demanding*, and on *promoting the importance of everyday experience and knowledge*. We see also that within each of these areas CAWI has worked consciously and with effort to prefigure within the organization the kind of values and relational political spaces that it would like to see in diverse venues outside of the organization. By prefigurative, we mean efforts to put into practice activities and interactions that anticipate desired futures (in Mahatma Gandhi's words, "to be the change we want to see"). We have argued that this prefigurative orientation within the organization is what helps it to successfully occupy a border position of working with the local state while maintaining an active, critical approach to its initiatives.

In Table 1, we present a matrix that encapsulates our current understanding of how CAWI engages the local state, by mapping the full range of CAWI-IVTF's urban political activities. We show that CAWI-IVTF participates in the city's traditional representative political practices and priorities, while at the same time engaging in expanded participatory and prefigurative interventions that attempt to challenge and change them. Within its day-to-day activities, there are multiple political practices and pushing this analysis further, we identified these multiple political practices as more or less 'alternative', linked to different approaches to collaboration and contestation in CAWI-IVTF's relations with the city.

Three modes of political engagement with the local state are most prominent — those connected to the widely understood, mainstream politics of representation; those expressing a more expanded participatory approach; and those enacting pre-



A delegation of CAWI-IVTF at City of Ottawa Council Chambers



Book Launch — Community Facilitation Guide

figurative possibilities. First, by representational politics, we mean standard approaches to urban decision-making, and the limited ways citizens are incorporated into these structures, such as for example, as voters, or as participants in tightly controlled delegations to council. Second, by an expanded participatory politics, we mean those activities directed at and fitting into the business of City Hall but pushing at and challenging the standard opportunities for involvement as defined by the dominant political frame of reference described above. Third, by prefigurative politics we refer to practices that enact in the present aspects of the future that the organization would like to usher into being.

CAWI-IVTF's prefigurative orientation within the organization helps it to walk the tightrope between being inside and outside the local state. Here we see that these more expanded political enactments are also present in CAWI-IVTF's direct relations to and within the local state. To the extent that CAWI-IVTF is able to engage in these *alternative* enactments of the political in its relations with the state (the participatory and especially the prefigurative), it is able to keep its distance from the status quo politics of representational democratic structures. In other words, CAWI-IVTF's attention to prefigurative processes that could be

incorporated more widely into the everyday doing of municipal politics is one way of moderating just how far 'inside' the local state it goes.

Table 1 encapsulates how our mapping of three modes of political engagement — representative, expanded participatory and prefigurative — connect with the three prominent approaches that CAWI adopts: *process, doing (rather than demanding) and valuing everyday experience and knowledge.*

To illustrate our argument, we will briefly describe recent efforts by CAWI-IVTF to enhance the capacity of women at risk of marginalization to engage in local politics. By reconciling funders' demands to do something 'new' in each funding cycle with the intent to maintain and expand opportunities for civic participation training, CAWI-IVTF has identified 'facilitator training' as a new way to support its core mission. Facilitator training is seen to enable: 1) engaging new members in a practical activity that offers the possibility of Canadian experience and skills development to newcomer women and those without recognized credentials and, 2) providing a practical rationale for women who were civic participation graduates to remain involved in the organization.

Facilitation training emerged organically as a strategy and it illustrates how CAWI-ITVF incorporates the three modes of political engagement identified above. The core of the idea began when CAWI-ITVF was approached to contribute to the development of the City of Ottawa's new Recreation Master Plan. CAWI-ITVF's extensive links with members of under-represented communities were recognized as being of value to the City, to ensure that its stated commitment to participation was reaching beyond the 'usual suspects' to more properly represent the City's residents with regard to recreation services. CAWI-ITVF used this invitation to expand the meaning of participation and negotiated short term contracts for civic participation trainees and graduates to act as facilitators for consultations in their own and in other marginalized communities. The contract included resources to help prepare the women for this activity and the outcomes were evaluated in order to confirm the

Table 1: CAWI-IVTF's Approaches to Political Engagement

Activist focus	Political enactment	Example of relevant activities
Attention to process	Representative	Participates in the governance structures of the city and is respectful of its rules and procedures
	Expanded Participatory	Readies members for participation in city governance processes, and in doing so, builds capacities that are more generally applicable to participatory interventions in other arenas within and beyond the city
	Prefigurative	Adds to typical processes by enacting alternative ways of presenting/hearing/debating issues (disrupting understandings of what is possible/desirable) Identifies success in different terms (voicing alternative values and demonstrating alternative practices to do with inclusion and respect for difference)
Focus on doing not demanding	Representative	Responds to city priorities
	Expanded Participatory	Tries to maximize specific opportunities for its own purposes (to expand and/or re-direct city priorities) Brings in broader mix of people
	Prefigurative	Models possibilities for expanded and genuine consultation about city priorities through active connections with marginal communities Models the possibility of working with difference
Values everyday experience and knowledge	Representative	Identifies the diversity and significance of women's everyday experiences for city priorities
	Expanded Participatory	Provides channels for marginalized women to speak about their lives as city residents and to identify what would be a good solution to issues facing them
	Prefigurative	Cultivates capacities for 'deep listening' so as to understand the challenges faced by others Provides experiences of recognition, empathy and value Identifies everyone as subjectivities who all have more to learn and something to teach

anecdotal impressions that both the City of Ottawa and the women facilitators had benefited from this initiative.

During a strategic planning session that followed soon after this event, CAWI-IVTF women and particularly those who were graduates of civic participation training used this incident to emphasize their wish for more advanced training that also might lead to enhanced employability. Out of these examples of "doing" and recognizing the processual nature of engagement, came programming ideas that were prefigurative insofar as they captured a wish for women's skills in meaningful community activities to be validated in the labour market.

Closing Thoughts

This article updates WEI readers about the activities and challenges of an innovative community-based organization in Ottawa as well as the action research-based insights of academics who have been involved in the organization since its inception. Our analysis illustrates how one organization — CAWI-IVTF — has struggled to avoid mission drift in a climate of

increasingly problematic funding and other challenges. CAWI-IVTF has worked hard to promote the capacity of diverse Ottawa women and especially those who are at risk of marginalization by incorporating innovative approaches to political engagement, including representational activities, expanded participatory approaches and prefigurative visioning, to maintain, albeit with difficulty, an inside-outside relationship with the City of Ottawa.

Caroline Andrew is Director of the School on Governance, University of Ottawa. Her research interests are in the relationships between community-based equity seeking groups and municipal social policies. She is on the steering committee of City for All Women Initiative and on the Board of Women in Cities International.

Fran Klodawsky is Professor of Geography, Carleton University. Her research interests are in urban-based, equality seeking community-based initiatives, particularly in the areas of housing and local services. She is on the steering committee of City for All Women

Initiative and on the Board of Women in Cities International. ✉

Janet Siltanen is Professor of Sociology at Carleton University. She has a long-standing interest in gender and politics that stretches back to a 1984 book on Women and the Public Sphere. Recent publications include **Gender Relations in Canada: Intersectionality and Beyond** (OUP 2008), currently undergoing revision for a new edition.

Further Reading:

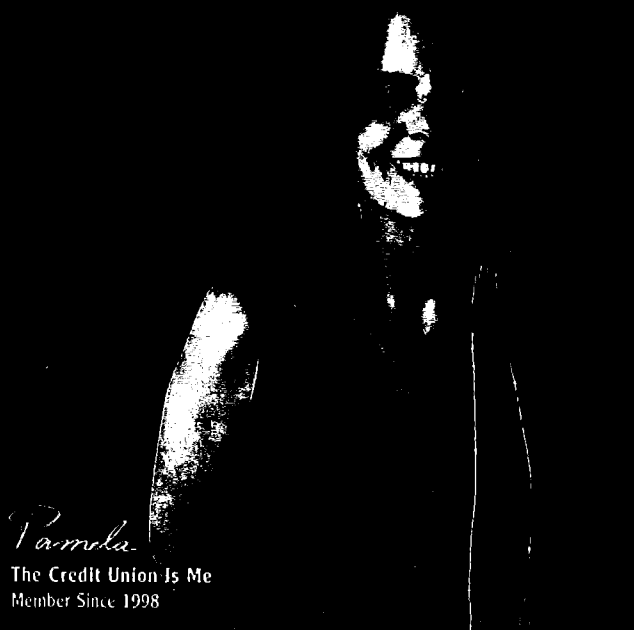
Klodawsky, F., J. Siltanen, C. Andrew, forthcoming 2013, **Urban Contestation in a Feminist Register, Urban Geography**

Siltanen, J., Klodawsky, F., Andrew, C., unpublished manuscript, She is quiet but loud at the same time — An experiment in feminist organizing for a more equitable and inclusive city

Website for CAWI:
<http://www.cawi-ivtf.org/>

Website for SSHRC funded research project: Learning through difference: Multiscalar forms of feminist community organizing: <http://womeninvolved.wordpress.com>

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Social Movements and Feminism

An Interview with Noël Sturgeon

Noël Sturgeon is the Dean of the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES) at York University. She joined FES as Dean in August 2012. She is an interdisciplinary feminist scholar specializing in environmental justice cultural studies, feminist theory, social movements and anti-racist and environmental movements. Her work has focused on questions of social change, cultural representation, and policy shifts arising from multi-issue movements such as anti-militarist and anti-nuclear direct action, ecofeminism, and environmental justice, in a range of cultural and historical contexts. Therefore, this was an opportune moment for WEI to talk with Noël about this issue's theme, her thoughts and ideas.



FACULTY OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES, YORK UNIVERSITY

WEI: In the past, you have described yourself as an ecofeminist. What does ecofeminism mean to you? And do you believe the label is still relevant today?

Noël: Firstly, I think that the links between environmental issues and feminist social justice issues are crucially important. It is *the* connection we have to make in order to make change. Feminist practice has been one of the most important ways in which we have been able to successfully make change.

In terms of using the specific label “ecofeminism,” the term has acquired a problematic association for academic feminists because it has been associated with essentialism — meaning the idea that women are closer to nature and that they are more naturally prone to protecting the Earth. That is problematic because of the ways in which dualistic assumptions of this kind have often been used to keep women ‘in their place’ and to assign women domestic work. And it is problematic because it tends to be universalist: it lumps women together in one category as

though they are all the same, and of course it does not allow for a critique of racism, homophobia or colonialism within any group of women.

I call myself an ecofeminist strategically. I also use other terms, like environmental feminist. In my last book, I came up with the unwieldy term “global feminist environmental justice” to describe my analysis. In academic contexts, I see more and more of the people who do feminist environmental theorizing using the term ‘feminist environmental justice’ to make it clear that they are also thinking about race and colonialism.

W: You have called out ecofeminism for having a tendency to essentialize gender and race. You also argued, in *Ecofeminist Natures*, that it is often practically beneficial to organize moments of — what you call — “strategic essentialism.” What does this mean?

N: The “ecofeminist” label got tagged with an essentialist description in the 1980s when anti-essentialist critiques were important to academic feminist theory. In my first book, I tried to puzzle out

what that meant for activists, because I was an activist in the feminist anti-nuclear, anti-militarist movement in the United States during that period. What I saw was that there was a lot of theorizing in activism about racism and homophobia, colonialism and disability — a kind of intersectional theory that had been generated from previous feminist activism. Academic critiques of essentialism really come from activist locations but that is not always recognized. As a result, I felt that the academic critique of essentialism unfairly targeted activists and that the effect of those critiques was the separation of theorists from activists — particularly from women of colour activists and from indigenous activists who were sort of cast aside as though they were not theoretically complex and analytically adept.

When you are doing activism, you have to mobilize people. And academic arguments might educate people — they are really important — but they will not mobilize people. And when you mobilize people, you tend to try and bring people together. To do that, you create what might

be seen as essentialist identities. But if your movement is committed to participatory democratic practice and to thinking about questions of power and diversity, you are going to bring together people from very different places and with different forms of privilege and experience of oppression. Those essentialist constructions used for mobilization are momentary because they are going to be contested within the movement if it contains diversity and is democratic. The result, unfortunately, of this positive aspect is that movements are often fractured. This can be very frustrating for the people who want to make change, but I see it as part of the process of making sure that the kinds of strategies and analyses we are using pay attention to inequalities.

W: In your work, you express concerns around the environment and gendered oppression. Environmentalism can be uncritical of gender inequality, at times viewing it as a matter of personal prejudice rather than a structural problem. How can feminists mount successful interventions within social movements, such as environmentalism?

N: In my first book, one of the things I was trying to do was to get social movement theorists to start understanding movements as interrelated. Ecofeminism is, in part, a repeated intervention in activist spaces that might be called environmentalist. Feminism is one of the major places where intersectional theory and practice have been developed. So it is an ongoing effort to make sure that those things are being used to understand power, to understand the way movements are operating. And why are we surprised if it is an ongoing effort and sexism is still operating and connected to economic exploitation, to environmental exploitation? It is going to be a constant struggle. How do you do it? You just keep working at it.

One of the things that I think is of concern to me is the way in which feminist practice and thinking in movements continually gets obscured. For example, the Occupy movement is using tactics and methods that go way back to feminist peace camps, where ideas like consensus process, affinity groups, nonviolent occu-

pations, were fine-tuned for purposes of direct action. These structures and practices can be traced back through the Occupy movement to the global justice movement and to the anti-intervention and anti-nuclear movements. Feminist theorizing and organizing were the backbone of these movements, and that history is obscured. Even so, in many cases, within Occupy there was still a struggle over whether women were going to be treated equally, and whether gender was going to be used as a category of analysis, and whether intersectionality was understood as an important thing to be thinking about.

Nonviolence is important because it is effective: it has been shown to be effective over and over again. It is the only effective way to make change. So, in saying "militant nonviolence," I am trying to make people rethink what nonviolence is and how it works. It's very important to see it as strong, confronting, and effective.

W: In respect of transnational feminism, what can feminist activists learn from recent Indigenous women-led movements like *Idle No More*?

N: This question is constructed as though activists in *Idle No More* are not feminists or transnational activists. It may be that indigenous activists do not want to use the term feminism, for some very good reasons, because of the way it is associated with white Western practice, but that doesn't mean *Idle No More* activists aren't using gendered analyses and aren't precisely reaching across transnational borders. Indigenous activist practice is one of the important places gendered analyses come from. So we can learn to recognize that origin and respect indigenous activism as a form of feminist practice. It is very important to do that. Everyone should be learning and listening, without insisting that indigenous activists use the words or

labels non-indigenous political thinkers and activists use.

As for the transnational part of this question, it's a bit unclear to me what it means in this context. A transnational analysis and practice is not always the same thing as a Nation-to-Nation negotiation. To indigenous people, a Nation-to-Nation negotiation is really important because it is a legal context and framework around which they need to operate in order to protect their rights, their culture and their people.

W: You have made the following point, "nonviolence is the key to social change, to feminist environmentalism, but it must be a militant nonviolence." To some the word militant conveys a masculinist idea of power and therefore militant and nonviolence are contradictory. How do you respond to this?

You have also said "we must insist on the importance of a difference between human beings and property, and not give in to the idea that all protest is violence, that non-violence is never angry, never furious, never militant, never causes discomfort." In the context of recent protest movements, does the insistence on "militant nonviolence" still seem important today?

N: I believe that nonviolent practice is extremely important in order to produce lasting social change and effective protest. In my activist experience, many left (often male) activists argue that nonviolence is ineffective; that it is too gentle, that it isn't confrontative enough. This is a gendered way of describing nonviolent practice. To argue that violence is always more effective than nonviolence is a masculinist argument, I think.

So, what I am partially saying in the passage you quote is that nonviolent activism can be quite effective and powerful. I would argue that it is much more powerful than any action that is read as violent because — and this goes back all the way through the history and theory of nonviolent practice, from Gandhi, to the civil rights movement, to Gene Sharp, etc. — violence assumes that you are defeating your opponent whereas nonviolence is the act of changing your opponent. You cannot really make long-lasting social change by defeat-

ing an opponent: that just leads to murdering your opponent. I'm saying this in stark terms but that is the reality behind it.

Why would you put yourself in a position where violence is the only way to make change? When movements make the decision that the only way to win is by eliminating their opponent, they are simply establishing themselves as another authoritarian power. They are assuming that some human beings are not worthy of respect, that such human beings are irretrievably evil. But feminist analysis shows us that inequality and power are structural, not personal, though certainly personal privilege and power flows from one's location in those social structures. A further complication around this issue is that some activists argue that as long as we do not hurt people it is okay to attack property. Then you get the folks who want to break windows and wear black masks. I understand the arguments that property should not be treated the same way as people, but the fact remains that this practice has delegitimized movements. This has been problematic over and over again. In addition, it is often the case that the people who make those arguments are often not in any movement; they are the people who wish to delegitimize the movements — police agents, provocateurs.

Nonviolence is important because it is effective: it has been shown to be effective over and over again. It is the only effective way to make change. So, in saying "militant nonviolence," I am trying to make people rethink what nonviolence is and how it works. It's very important to see it as strong, confronting, and effective.

W: In these times of increasing insecurity, war, and environmental destruction, what message of hope do you have for feminists working in social movements?

N: For me, what is hopeful is to understand how effective our movements have been, and that there is more and more connection between various kinds of movements against inequality, exploitation, and environmental destruction. I grew up in a time when movements were kind of working on separate issues, and more and more they came together. The kind of analysis that has evolved — particularly I would

say intersectional transnational environmental feminist analysis — has put these pieces together. So I feel very hopeful in the sense that I think the ways in which people are making connections in various movements means that we have a lot of power to make change.

And, yes, we're dealing with very serious issues. But the world has been full of pain and struggle for many, many years. I am very concerned about the terrible violence happening all over the world, and the environmental destruction that is going on, but I have also lived in a time — and we are still living in such a time — where we faced destruction through nuclear war, for example. Threats to health, peace, and well-being are constant. Yet, I have seen the most amazing changes. I have seen people being able to do things that I never imagined they would have been able to say or do.

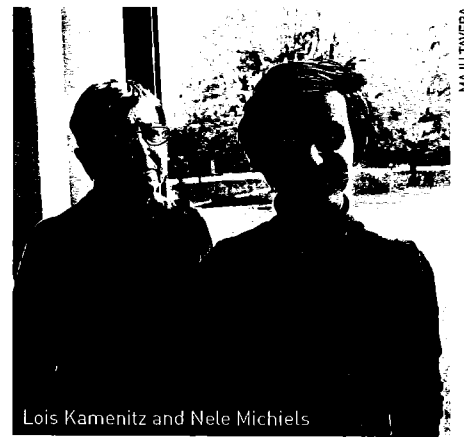
I really like the quote from the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci that 'we have to have pessimism of the intellect and optimism of the will.' In a way, left thinkers and activists, because we are so critical — and our criticality is very important to making these kinds of connections — often get caught up in our own critical perspective and we think that the achievements we have made are never complete. It's never enough. But then we forget to celebrate and appreciate what we have accomplished. And that's fine by those who want to paint us as ineffective. We have to recognize the successes that we have made because they are enormous. And because doing so can empower more people to struggle.

Again, one of the most powerful hopes that we have is in the connection between environmental issues and feminist social justice issues. This is *the* connection needed to make change.

W: Thank you Noël for your time, insight and inspiration. ❧

This interview, and its related preparation, was conducted by Lois Kamenitz and Nele Michiels, two graduate students at FES currently working with WEI Magazine.

Lois Kamenitz has 45 years of experience, behind her, as educator, mental health services provider and consumer health



Lois Kamenitz and Nele Michiels

librarian. She is pursuing another graduate degree, this time at FES. As a result of being refused entry into the US in 2010, her CV now includes 'activist' for those with mental health issues who face discrimination.

Nele Michiels is completing her Master's degree in Environmental Studies at York University. Her research focuses on the diverse ways in which activism and social movements politicize women's trauma. She has volunteered for a variety of feminist organizations and organizes with other activists in the city of Toronto.

Recommended Reading by Noël Sturgeon:
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Women and the Arab Spring

A Window of Opportunity or More of the Same?

By Fatma Osman Ibnouf

The Arab Spring Revolutions showed the importance of a more inclusive approach to transitional processes. The Arab uprisings enhanced the ability of women to involve themselves and to make better use of their capacity and their full potential to contribute to change. For example, the success of the Arab uprisings in Tunisia, Egypt, Yemen and Libya during 2011 could not have been possible if not for the women (Von Rohr 2011).

Women activists of the Arab Spring have come from all social classes. From my experience, they were well-organized and actively participated in Arab uprisings — some came to protest with their children — to demand change. Thousands of men joined the demonstration out of solidarity with the women. During the revolutions, women's participation side-by-side with their fellow male protestors helped in creating a sense of equality and lessened gender differences. Women have made their voice heard in the Arab Spring revolutions at many levels; however, the 'gains' for women in terms of gender roles can be lost in the post-revolutions period, when 'going back to normal' is the priority.

Women need to explore the political, strategic and analytical dimensions of the uprisings if they want to ensure that when democracy works, it works to the present and future benefit of all women and men. It isn't a question of women 'winning' over men but being given equal footing with men. In the wake of the Arab Spring, there is an emergence of new opportunities for the mobilization of women. Women's involvement in transitional processes will contribute to the advancement of women's rights, to giving a voice to voiceless women, to initiating legislation that concerns their gender, as well as to pushing for law reforms and justice in the society. For this to be sustainable, the

changes should develop alongside practical strategies to empower women and build their leadership capacity.

Women in Transitional Processes

Democratic systems can be stable and legitimate only if all the segments of a society are represented with a commitment to gender balance. In the wake of the Arab Spring, a number of Arab countries are now experiencing political transitions from revolution to democracy. However, the Arab Spring countries are not all at the same stage of transitional processes; they take on different forms in each country. Generally, emergency laws are lifted, constitutions are drafted, elections are held, and interim governments are formed. The transitional process does not need to be a competition for power but can rather be a partnership between men and women. In such a process women need to keep working on many fronts. To ensure that women's diverse needs and interests are taken into account, they should be part of the policy and lawmaking, implementing, monitoring and evaluating.

The participation of women in the transitional processes means more progress in laws that affect gender equality and policies that address key women's human rights concerns. Women's involvement in transitional processes is a window of opportunity for women to challenge the policies and laws that violate their human rights. It also offers the possibility of challenging gender discrimination and gender stereotyping which oppress women and continue to reinforce their subordinate position. Further, there is the potential to challenge entrenched gendered practices, those deep-rooted structures that are not easily changed. Despite real and significant needs, the realization of women's human rights has not been made a bench-

mark of success in transition phases, which tend to have poor female representation. Attainment of the basic rights of women politically, socially and economically is of paramount importance to the future security and development of the Arab world. Thus, women at all levels must collaborate and organize joint actions because this will secure more support from the community; it is the best way to secure the critical mass capable of influencing the decision-making processes of leaders and officials.

Currently women make up nearly half of the population in Arab Spring countries but very limited numbers are in positions of power where they can make or influence change. However, already women's access to some key positions has proven to contribute to women's empowerment and advancement with positive, but limited, results. Some of their achievements include the increased awareness of the importance of gender equality and an increase in girls' enrolment in primary and secondary education to some extent.

Making the Most of the Climate of Change

Women's involvement does make a difference and at least increases the chance that women's issues will be on the agenda. Women need to preserve the gains they made and they should work hard for equal rights and refuse to be sidelined and marginalized in the aftermath of the Arab Spring.

I believe that another Arab Spring revolution is not likely to happen again in the foreseeable future. Change does not happen overnight, but is a process that takes place gradually over time. In the transitional processes women need to be better included not only in politics, but in education, economy, social and all levels of public life. At present gender is a dimen-

sion that is routinely added on as a component to most programs, partly because international agencies have come to insist on its inclusion. The first action priority is promoting women's human rights and mainstream gender equality at various levels. Women's involvement in these processes is essential for lobbying to establish institutions, such as women's affairs ministries, to address women's direct concerns.

Changes need to be made: laws addressing violence against women need to be enacted, many family laws need to be modified, gender equality needs to be mainstreamed in policies and legislations at all levels, gender-responsive budgeting needs to be adopted and the number of women in elected bodies need to be increased. There is an urgent need to adopt laws prohibiting marriage before the age of majority and laws to criminalize female genital mutilation (FGM). Lobbying for the reform of legal and social rights and policy and promoting gender equality can challenge patriarchal practices of societies and states. All these can best be sorted by women; therefore women's involvement in transitional processes would make a difference for the better.

The Transition Phase: A Unique Opportunity to Introduce Gender Mainstreaming

Moreover, transition phases offer a unique opportunity for transforming institutions, structures and relationships that hinder gender equality and justice. Women's involvement in the transitional process is essential to dealing with issues of women's oppression and exploitation in a number of ways. There are real opportunities for women to demand change in their respective countries so as to take their rightful place alongside men in all tiers of democracy.

During the past decade, women's and human rights 'language' has moved from the margins to the 'mainstream' of international law and politics. For example, the fifth UN Secretary General Javier Pérez de Cuéllar recognized that: "Where women's views and experiences are absent, the political process remains incomplete" (see Ibnouf

2012). Gender perspective is therefore a vital element for the success of any strategy designed to promote social justice, and gender mainstreaming can have a significant influence on the future of women's status in and contribution to societies.

Successes and Failures During the Transition Phase

First, there should be room for accepting and learning from failures. Every action, no matter how small, can inspire others and move others to act.

Some progress has already been achieved. For example, women in Egypt have begun to push for an equal rights amendment to the constitution, but there is still more work to be done before there will be equality for all citizens in the con-

During the past decade, women's and human rights 'language' has moved from the margins to the 'mainstream' of international law and politics.

stitution, regardless of gender, race, or religion. Similarly in Tunisia, the draft constitution guarantees non-discrimination on any grounds, including gender (Munn and Cleminshaw 2013). Protests continue over the implementation of Tunisia's Article 28 which describes women's roles in the family as "complementary" to those of men's (Munn and Cleminshaw 2013).

Another change that I have perceived in the wake of the Arab Spring is that the image of the Arab woman appears to be undergoing a remarkable transformation. Ordinary women protestors challenged their traditional gender roles on the front lines of the revolutions. These images challenge old images of Arab women and some misperceptions the world might have about women in the Arab region. Women have therefore started to break some of the traditional barriers that exist in the traditional structures of most Arab Spring societies.

Women and Political Representation

More than 50 years have passed since

Egyptian women won the right to vote (in 1956 — third in the region after Lebanon and Syria in 1952), and the first Arab woman elected to parliament was in Egypt in 1956 (Soufi, 2009, p. 256). However, so far, the current transition has not been inclusive of women as is evidenced by the recent Arab Spring.

According to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in 2012 Arab States still had the lowest representation of women in Parliament, with women holding only 13.2% of parliamentary seats throughout the Arab region. In the Sultanates of Oman, Qatar and Saudi Arabia, there was no female representation due to the absence of elected parliaments in these countries (Soufi 2009, p. 258).

The Inter-Parliamentary Union also found that the January 2012 parliamentary results in Egypt saw a dramatic drop of 10 percentage points from the 2010 results, with only 10 women out of 508 members (2%) gaining seats. Libyan women were largely excluded from politics during the previous regime; at present, in Libya in the National General Congress elections, women won 33 seats out of 200. There are currently 59 women in the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly out of the 217 members. Women have only three out of 72 seats in the new Syrian Opposition Coalition. That means the number of women in national parliaments and cabinets in the transitional governments is significantly smaller than that in the pre-revolution governments. Nonetheless, I am of the opinion that women still have a fighting chance for achieving both better positions and justice.

The Major Challenges

Women in the Arab Spring countries face many challenges. This situation of gender injustice and inequality has been perpetuated so far because of the current laws, the patriarchal nature of the Arab society, and the continuous violation of women's rights.

The conventional approach of treating people as individuals with equal rights under the law does not suffice when women still face violations of their rights socially, politically, and economically.

The first Arab Human Development Report in 2002 indicated that the lack of women's rights, lack of political freedoms and poor education are the main factors that hindered progress in the Arab region.

The gender inequality of access to education has led to the widening of all existing forms of socio-economic inequalities between men and women. Studies have also shown that women's lack of access to education and health services hinders attempts to alleviate poverty (See, for e.g., Bentley 2004). The World Health Organization (WHO) published a foundational module on poverty and gender, in which it was noted that the current understanding of poverty indicators includes multidimensional aspects such as education, health, and political participation (WHO 2007). However, the rights to education and health, which are fundamental human rights, are frequently denied to females due to social policies and the prevalence of gender-biased traditions in societies.

According to a World Bank report in 2013, women in the Arab world have the lowest rates of employment of any region. Female illiteracy rates are high in the Arab world; in 2006, UNESCO found that women accounted for two thirds of the region's illiterate population. It was estimated that gender parity in education in the Arab world stood at 0.69 percent in 2004, one of the lowest rates in the world (UNESCO 2006). UNWomen has said there is no legislation in place that prevents violence against women (VAW) in Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen; the only exception is Egypt (UNWomen Report 2011). This is notwithstanding the fact that all these countries have ratified the Convention to Eliminate All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) (Weiss 2003). The challenge is therefore not to make new commitments but to distil a more consistent framework from what already exists and to encourage action accordingly.

Women and the Law

Legal provisions relating to the family in most Arab countries regulate marriage, divorce, maintenance, inheritance, custody and citizenship rights. Many provi-

sions are detrimental to the interests of women. For instance, in some Arab countries such as Syria, Jordan, Egypt, Libya, and Lebanon, men and women who are married to non-nationals are treated differently (Tabet, 2005; Equality Now Report 2011). Men married to non-national women enjoy the full protection of the law and their children are granted citizenship rights whereas children of women married to foreign nationals are not citizens and are accordingly not entitled to socio-economic or political rights and privileges (Equality Now 2011).

A woman is legally obliged to seek approval from her closest male relative — be that a father or a husband — for some decisions concerning her life, which is contradictory to international human rights standards. In Saudi Arabia, for example, the law prevents gender equality

This gender inequality is not sanctioned by Islam, although the patriarchal attitude is usually fed by sanctimonious claims in the cloak of religion.

by restricting women's freedom to travel, to education, and to work by requiring the agreement of a male relative (Vidyasagar and Rea 2004, p. 262). These practices are widely-known as 'male guardianship rules.' On the basis of family law, in most Arab countries the age of marriage is ranged between 13 to 15 years for girls and as young as 10 years in Sudan (Sudanese Personal Status Law of 1991, Article 40-2). In Sana'a, Yemen, girls may be married as early as 12 or 13 and sometimes as young as eight years old (Gender Development Research Studies Centre). In 1999 the government of Yemen made the situation worse by removing the legal minimum age for marriage — which had previously been 15 years old.

In Egypt, Tunisia, Libya, and Yemen women are victims of cultural and deeply rooted social practices that are regarded by many as legitimate practices, such as domestic violence, female genital mutilation (FGM), honor killing and child mar-

riage (Douki et al. 2003; Faqir 2001; Shalhoub-Kevorkian 1999). Studies indicate the prevalence of FGM in Upper Egypt is among the highest worldwide and the law has not succeeded in adequately decreasing, let alone eradicating, its prevalence despite the fact that FGM was made illegal in Egypt in 1997 (Hassanin and Shaaban 2013).

In almost all Arab countries there is the absence of a specific law protecting women from violence, including intimate violence, and there is a lack of prosecution and punishment of perpetrators of violence against women (Equality Now 2011). Crimes committed in the name of honor continue to be treated differently from other violent crimes in terms of investigation and prosecution, as well as prevention efforts. Perpetrators of "honor crimes" often benefit from a reduction of penalty under laws in most Arab countries (Equality Now 2011). Moghaizel (1986), who examined a number of legislative measures dealing with crimes of honor in Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Syria, and Tunisia, found that while the penal code condemns the perpetrator of intentional homicide to punishment as serious as execution, provisions concerning the crimes of honor may permit a full or partial excuse which could reduce the penalty or even totally exempt the murderer from punishment.

This gender inequality is not sanctioned by Islam, although the patriarchal attitude is usually fed by sanctimonious claims in the cloak of religion. It is rather attributed to Arab traditions that maintained a hierarchical order in the family, where the dominance of male over female is a normal attitude (El-Islam, 2000). The 2005 Arab Human Development Report found that there was no relation between religion and any erroneous practices towards women; describing the state of our Arab society as one where 'custom has triumphed over worship, and discrimination towards women has no basis in either the noble Quran or the sound Hadith.'

Men and Women's Rights

Human rights arguments alone are often not enough to achieve change in

patriarchal communities. It is not easy to battle entrenched norms, beliefs, practices and power relations. It is convenient for men to keep women disenfranchised, because they feel threatened when women seek to enforce their rights, or look to take up decision-making positions. The attitudes of men to any reforms introduced will remain a big challenge for women. Without the wider change in social attitudes, discrimination remains. However, women must realize that building a gender-sensitive society is a long-term process.

Unless men contribute to promoting women's rights, equality between men and women will be strongly resisted at the level of the household and the community, if ever being accepted. It will be a bit trickier to get men over the border, but it is most definitely possible. There is a light at the end of the tunnel. The majority of populations in Arab countries are youth (ages 15–24), comprising about 60% of the current population (Khalifa 2009). These younger people are better educated than older counterparts. Thus they hold the potential to challenge the patriarchal society and should therefore be included as an integral part of the social changes.

Time to Seize the Opportunity: 'Agents of Positive Change'

Women can act as agents for transformation and empowerment in the transitional process as it moves forward. They need to cooperate and coordinate their activities regardless of their divergent interests, ideologies and political affiliations. To push for a reform within the area of women's rights, women need to work with each other rather than against each other. They should embrace the concept of "more numbers more voices", increasing the possibility that they will be heard.

One way forward is the formation of political parties by women, which would lead to a gradual but continuous change, address women's direct concerns, and contribute to adequate representation in legislative and decision-making bodies. Even at this preliminary stage, such political parties would promote avenues for increased female participation in the political process.

Another way women can act as agents of change is through civil society organizations. There are already a number of women's rights organizations, activists, advocate groups, and even individuals working on women's issues in transition countries. The demands of the various groups differ in terms of approaches, collaboration and, in some circumstances, competition. Women's issues are too complex for any single group or organization. For real change to take place there needs to be cooperation between those at the grassroots and upper and middle class women. Thus, a broad coalition that unites a variety of different women's groups and organizations and individuals needs to be established for maximum success in this transition phase. As a coalition works together and agrees on a common way to deal with the issue and on common goals, they are much more likely to make headway. They can therefore advocate for reforms that have so far been elusive.

Using the Media to the Advantage of the Women's Movement

Women's movements during the Arab revolutions received wide publicity, through television coverage and websites. Women must not miss any opportunities to further utilize these effective instruments. Women have the opportunity to advance their interests and benefit from social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook. They can share and discuss their concerns with other women around the world, learn how other women confronted and responded to similar problems and exchange innovative practices. Women can also initiate dialogue with policymakers and officials, which can act as a pressure tactic whereby the state is forced to respond.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the rest of the world can learn from the experiences of women in the Arab Spring. However, if women do not seize the opportunities offered to them in the aftermath of these revolutions, then they will lose the chance to gain empowerment and participation. Thus, they will remain grounded on the same terrain.

During the phase of the fighting for independence, women came out in large numbers and participated actively. However, afterwards, the position of women differed sharply from the active and purposeful role they played and they were once again rendered invisible and marginalized. There is now the possibility of bringing women's concerns to the forefront of society. It is only by doing so that we can make the most of this chance to ensure that history does not repeat itself. ❧

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Fatma Osman Ibnouf is an Assistant Professor at the Development Studies and Research Institute (DSRI), University of Khartoum, Sudan. She holds a PhD degree from the University of Wales Swansea, United Kingdom. She has published in the areas of gender and food security and women's studies in peer-reviewed international journals. Her book, "Violence against Women in Sudan: Reality and Challenges" is in press.

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It's bigger than bling bling and the banks

Invoking an anti-capitalist praxis in feminist activism at mining sites

By Tracy Glynn

Mining has historically been and continues to be a male-dominated industry. Disturbing stories of women affected by mining demand our thoughtful analysis and action. Women continue to resist the onset of mining and its various impacts but their resistance and self-determination are hindered by the capitalist global economic system and patriarchal ideologies that serve to reinforce capitalism. Global campaigns and networks supporting communities affected by mining have emerged over the past decade to highlight atrocities and demand reforms. Invoking an anti-capitalist praxis in the activism supporting mine affected communities, including efforts to combat violence against women, challenges activists to go beyond limited albeit noble reforms to act in a way that names, examines and seeks to dismantle the economic system and accompanying ideologies that are responsible for the problems.

Women struggle with a deeply rooted patriarchy that is expressed in male views dominating decision-making at mine sites, in communities and at all levels of governance. Women are further oppressed by structural classism and racism. As Carmen Mejía, a 25 year old Mayan activist against the Goldcorp mine in Guatemala, daughter of peasants and the single mother of a five year old remarked in May 2010, "We are not heard because we are women, we are indigenous and we are *campesinas*."

Several academics and non-governmental organizations argue that mining disproportionately affects women. Some of the documented impacts of mining on women noted by historians and activist networks such as the International Women and Mining Network (RIMM) include: restricted access to and loss of liveli-

hoods; restricted access to and loss of sources of drinking water and food; increased workload; increased economic dependency on men; forced precarious work like prostitution; workplace discrimination and sexual harassment; and sexual, physical and emotional assault (Mercier and Gier, 2006).

There are many stories across the globe of women at the forefront of courageous struggle against harmful developments. In Guatemala, women are part of local councils organizing "consultas" that allow community members to vote on whether a large industrial project, like a mine, proceeds in their community (Yagenova & Garcia, 2009). In the 1990s, Innu women, using civil disobedience and the courts, temporarily halted the opening of one of the world's largest nickel mines in Labrador (Lowe, 1994). In Ecuador in 2009, Lina Solana was charged with public disorder and arrested for protesting the Canadian-owned IAMGOLD mine that she said would destroy protected Amazonian forests. Solana was quoted in *The Guardian* on Oct. 13, 2009, saying, "There is a lot of verbal aggression from the police towards females protesting against the mines. They call us sluts and smelly Indians."

Women's activism against mining in Guatemala

Guatemala, a country characterized by extreme poverty and violence against women, has suffered 300 years of colonialism followed by severe repression and fear imposed by the country's oligarchy and its military, foreign governments such as the United States, and foreign companies such as American banana king, the United Fruit Company (now Chiquita) and Canadian nickel giant, Inco (now

Brazilian-owned Vale). The conditions of mine-affected communities are directly related to this history of colonialism and capitalist interventions.

Mamá Maquín and an estimated 50 others were murdered in the town square of Panzós in eastern Guatemala as they protested nickel mining by Inco on their land in 1978. Mamá Maquín, a 60 year old grandmother and community organizer, led the march in Panzós on the day of the massacre. She was there with her daughter, grandson and granddaughter. Only her granddaughter, María, survived the march (Sanford, 2000). María told an audience in Guatemala City in May 2010 that the killers of her mother, brother and grandmother live in her community today. Despite fearing for her life, she is not giving up her quest to bring the masterminds behind the massacre to justice.

In recent years, different companies have taken over the original Inco concession in Guatemala's nickel-rich hills near Lake Izabal. In early 2007, about 700 armed men, including the police, private security and the army, evicted five Mayan Q'eqchi' communities while the concession was held by Vancouver-based Skye Resources. Homes and crops were burned to the ground. Tear gas canisters and shots were fired into the air (Paley, 2007). The people of one of the razed communities, Lot 8, had nowhere else to go after the eviction, so they returned to their lands to rebuild. Eight days later, hundreds of police, army and private security also returned and found only women and children. The community's men were off in the fields (Imai et al., 2012; Wells, 2012).

Elena Choc Quib has told Canadians wanting to act in solidarity with her to share her story. On January 17th, 2007,

she says she was beaten and raped by eight armed men carrying out the eviction. She says she miscarried the child she was eight months pregnant with at the time. Ten other women are coming forward saying they were also raped in the eviction, some gang-raped, by the security forces for the mine (Imai et al., 2012). Another Canadian mining company, HudBay, later took over the nickel project from Skye. Angelica Choc is taking HudBay to court in Canada for the gruesome murder of her husband, Adolfo Ich Chaman, a beloved teacher and vocal mine opponent. The women who say they were raped are also taking HudBay to court in Canada (Imai et al., 2012).

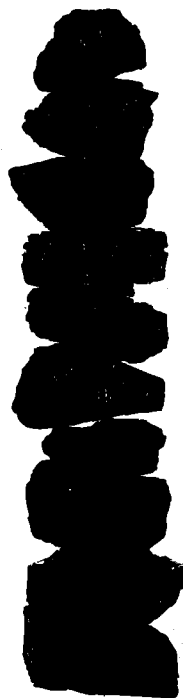
Feminists note that sexual assaults are used against politically active women to curb their involvement in protests. Angela Davis, in her 1983 book, *Women, Race and Class*, calls sexual assaults, "One of the telling dysfunctions of the present-day capitalist society." Guatemala is not the only country where stories of rapes at mine sites are achieving mainstream media attention. As reported in an investigative piece by the *Toronto Star* on Nov. 29, 2009, Harvard law professors are testifying at Parliamentary Committees that women in Papua New Guinea have been raped, many gang-raped, by Barrick Gold's security guards. The women say they are being forced to swallow the condoms that the men use in the rapes (Whittington, 2009).

Women at the forefront of resistance to the Goldcorp gold and silver mine in the San Marcos highlands of western Guatemala fear for their lives because of their opposition to the mine. Crisanta Perez has become the face of resistance to the Goldcorp mine. She cut power lines to the mine that were placed on her plot of land. She was charged and when women came to her side to support her, they were also charged and became known as the Goldcorp 8. The mine has pitted family members against each other. Days after the Guatemalan government, under international pressure, called for the shut down of the mine in June 2010, a Mayan-Mam woman resisting the mine, Diodora Antonia Hernández Cinto, survived being

shot in the face in her home. When asked if she will leave her plot of land and give up, Cinto said, "I am firm as a tree. Standing I am, and standing I will remain" (Rodriguez, 2011).

Invoking an anti-capitalist praxis in feminist activism at mine sites

Praxis, a reflective process in which ideas are practiced, is needed in movements for social transformation. Praxis, the marrying of theory and practice, involves acting with a strategic purpose. Though they have created and perpetuated numerous inequalities along lines of gender, ethnicity, class and international hier-



In periods of bust in capitalist economies, policies that squeeze workers and oppress indigenous peoples are claimed as necessary but in reality only serve to maintain accumulation of private sector wealth.

archies of states, colonialism and capitalism have been wilfully ignored. The failure to act in a way that acknowledges and actively challenges and dismantles the profit-driven economic system has plundered the natural world and its resources and dehumanized women, men and children in countless corners of the earth.

In periods of bust in capitalist economies, policies that squeeze workers and oppress indigenous peoples are claimed as necessary but in reality only serve to maintain accumulation of private sector wealth. Theft and destruction of indigenous lands and culture are defended by

appealing to the racist notion that indigenous people are incapable of their own development or for national state interests.

Women, young people, oppressed minorities, and marginal workers serve to fill the ranks of what Karl Marx called capital's "reserve army of labour," where people have no other choice but to toil in unsafe conditions. Thousands of miners die in mining accidents each year. According to China's State Administration of Coal Mine Safety, 2,631 miners were killed in the country's coal mines in 2009, down from 6,995 in 2002, the deadliest on record (CBC, 2010). In 2011, 35 year old Jason Chenier and 26 year old Jordan Fram were killed in the Vale Stobie nickel mine in Sudbury, Ontario. Today, Wendy Fram, mother of Jordan, chairs a group called MINES (Mining Inquiry Needs Everyone's Support). MINES is lobbying the province of Ontario to conduct an inquiry on mining practices (Mulligan, 2012). Mines are in some ways just as dangerous for workers as they were in my great-grandfather's time when he did not come home from a shift in a coal mine in Minto, New Brunswick in 1950.

Host countries facilitate the exploitation of their mineral rich lands by foreign and domestic companies for foreign exchange or paltry royalties. The role of governments in host countries has been to play the obedient caretaker for mining capital through passing mining-friendly laws, weakening environmental, labour and health standards and privatizing natural resources, including minerals and water. National governments also undertake structural reforms under pressure from international financial institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, including rewriting their mining laws to be more friendly to foreign investors, privatizing state-controlled mines, and granting individual land titles over collectively-owned land. The schemes have paved the way for companies to gain easy access to land and rich mineral resources.

When communities protest, violence is exercised by state police, army, paramilitaries and the company's private security guards to instil fear, subjugate the population and break social movements.

People critical of mining in Ecuador, Tanzania and elsewhere have been charged and detained because their acts of dissent are equated with acting against national state interests.

Sixty percent of the world's mining companies are registered in Canada. The *Toronto Star* reported on Nov. 24, 2009 that claims of abuse committed by Canadian mining companies exist in at least 30 countries (Poppowell, 2009). The Canadian government is opposing calls to regulate mining corporations at home and abroad and mining companies benefit from Canada's exertion of power and influence in foreign countries. Canadian mining interests are openly defended by Canadian government officials, embassy representatives and trade councils, as seen in Mexico, Guatemala and Colombia.

Banks, international financial institutions, ethical funds, publicly-funded export credit agencies and pension funds like the Canadian Pension Plan are targets of protest and reform because of their financial backing of controversial developments across the globe. Members of the United Church of Canada and the Public Service Alliance of Canada who support communities affected by Goldcorp were shocked to learn that their pensions were invested in Goldcorp. Colourful protests are an annual occurrence outside shareholders' meetings of companies such as Goldcorp and Barrick.

Partnerships between universities and mining companies like Memorial University of Newfoundland's partnership with Inco (now Vale) and the University of Toronto's partnership with Barrick Gold's Peter Munk have been protested by students and faculty because of the companies' human rights track records.

Consumer-based campaigns like Earth Works' No Dirty Gold attempt to educate consumers about "where the gold in their products comes from, or how it is mined." Jewellery retailers like Tiffany's and university students buying class rings have been targeted for purchasing "unethical gold." Walmart's fair trade line of Love, Earth jewellery was supposed to be sourced responsibly but a story reported on Jan. 6, 2011 in the *Miami New Times*

revealed that Love, Earth's gold comes from Utah and Nevada mines that are responsible for widespread pollution (Friedman-Rudovsky, 2011).

Feminist scholars and activists addressing women's oppression, gender inequality and violence at mine sites demand gender analysis and planning in all phases of mining. They demand pay equity and the smashing of the glass ceiling so more women occupy higher positions in organizations. They demand justice for women who have been physically and sexually attacked at their work place or in their community by one of many security apparatuses used by a mining company.

John Bellamy Foster, an American sociologist and author, argues that the intention of proposed reforms and campaigns are noble as they aim to promote social and environmental justice, but that, "such proposals seek to strike an accord with neoliberal institutions while leaving the underlying logic of the system intact" (2003). Sociologist Murray Smith argues that our attention on free trade and economic nationalism has deflected attention away from structurally-rooted crisis tendencies of advanced capitalism, and argues for a renewed commitment to class struggle informed by Marx's critique of political economy (2000).

Marxists argue that divisions of workers along lines of gender, ethnicity and international hierarchies of states serve to maintain the exploitative class system. A class-based approach is key to informed and effective action geared towards eliminating the inequality and subordination faced by all workers including women miners and women affected by mining.

Efforts towards ending violence against women and enacting better social welfare, more stringent environmental regulations and anything that betters workers' lives are important. However, powerful forces are opposed to reforms that hinder private accumulation. The ruling elite control not just the economy but also the state, courts and media, making it extremely difficult for the masses to effect fundamental changes that the powerful minority opposes.

Reforms remain limited and during economic crises are rolled back in the

name of austerity and the need to balance budgets. While working on reforms that better the lives of workers, the ends must never be abandoned: production under workers' control and a global planned economy that wipes out all social inequalities, frees workers and meets the needs of every human.

An anti-capitalist praxis invoked by Domitila Barrios de Chúngrara, founder of the Bolivian Housewives' Committee, a labour leader, feminist and author who died of lung cancer in 2012, broadens the horizon of what is possible in a world organized to meet the needs of every human being. She argued in 1978, "My people are not struggling for a small victory, for a small wage increase, a small answer there. No. My people are preparing themselves to get capitalism out of their country forever, and its domestic and foreign servants, too. My people are struggling to reach socialism." ❧

Tracy Glynn has spent over a decade engaged in research and activism supporting communities affected by mining, particularly in Indonesia, Guatemala, Colombia and Canada. She studies mining and women as a doctoral student at the University of New Brunswick. She teaches environmental praxis at St. Thomas University and sits on the board of Mining Watch Canada.

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Climate Change and Disasters

Organizing for transformative social change

By Julie Drolet

There is increasing evidence that community organizers working in unions, environmental groups, women's groups, Indigenous groups, and the student and youth movement, are organizing for transformative social change. As the environment is linked to social justice and human rights issues, important connections are also being made to gender, poverty, race, colonialism, ability, and capitalism. For example, 'PowerShift' is a convergence of passionate youth from across Canada who are mobilizing on climate and environmental justice issues for transformative change (Peters 2012). New conversations are bringing together diverse voices such as the 'Idle No More' movement. The 'Idle No More' movement calls on all people to join in a revolution which honors and fulfills Indigenous sovereignty rights and acknowledges that colonization continues to attack Indigenous rights to land and water. The movement acknowledges the need to repair these violations and to live the spirit and intent of the treaty relationship, to work towards justice in action, and to protect Mother Earth (see <http://idlenomore1.blogspot.ca/>).

Globally, there is a pervasive concern that one in five people on this planet, or over 1 billion people, still live in extreme poverty. The world's population is projected to exceed 9 billion by 2050 with an estimated two thirds living in cities. More holistic approaches to social and sustainable development are urgently needed. There is a critical role for social movements that seek to integrate a more complex understanding of holistic approaches for sustainable development, that include gender, race, class, sexuality and disability analyses, in the struggle to eradicate poverty, hunger, preventable diseases, and mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change and disasters.

As a social work academic researcher involved in community-based research with women's groups on climate change and disasters in British Columbia (BC), it is fascinating to participate in events and engage in discussions with different groups on specific issues and challenges that our community is struggling with and working on. These events, and the opportunity to interact with community members, activists, and groups, inform an evolving understanding of the challenges and opportunities before us. They also help shape a clearer vision of what a holistic social and sustainable development approach means to women from a gender perspective.

In 2007, the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) concluded that evidence of global warming is unequivocal: that it is caused by greenhouse gas emissions from human activity and that it is threatening ecosystems, societies, cultures and economies worldwide. Rising sea levels, increased heat waves and drought occurrences, and increased extreme precipitation events have the potential to devastate our quality of life. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change defines climate change as,

"...a change of climate which is attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is in addition to natural climate variability observed over comparable time periods" (Article 1.2).

Climate change is a global issue, but the impacts and needs differ across communities, countries, and regions. New research is exploring the human and social dimensions

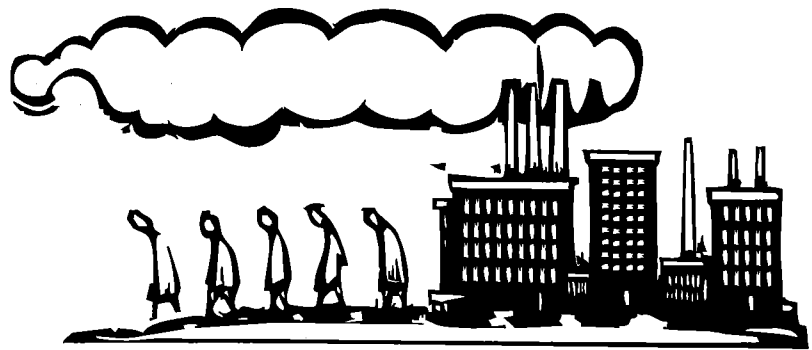
of climate change that include gender, race, class, sexuality, and disability perspective, for transformative social change.

In a recent study conducted in partnership with the Kamloops Women's Resource Group Society titled "Climate change, disasters, and sustainable development," it was possible through community narratives to better understand the gendered impacts of climate change on men and women living in the Interior and Northern regions of BC (Drolet 2012). A community-based participatory action research approach was used to empower members of communities to become active participants in the project in order to better understand women's realities in smaller communities. A sample of 121 participants, including community leaders, government officials, practitioners, activists, policy makers, First Nations', women leaders, and environmentalists was drawn. The results show that community actions to address the impacts of climate change are already being implemented, but more support is needed for long-term sustainable development that includes social, economic, gender, and health dimensions to promote adaptation, mitigation, and community resilience. Through a series of community and public outreach events, the findings from the study were shared and activities and strategies were discussed to promote sustainable development that included women's perspectives and gendered approaches for social change. While many of the research participants expressed a need for more information on climate change and disasters, a new online toolkit is being developed to better share information, network, and support organizing efforts in diverse communities (see <http://juliedrolet.sites.tru.ca/>).

There are many structural and social factors from a gender perspective that present barriers for women. Women continue

to face higher unemployment and lower levels of education than men (at a global level) due to their domestic and caregiving responsibilities in the home with inadequate childcare services and limited supports. In smaller communities in BC, women are struggling to meet the needs of their children and families when livelihoods tied to the natural resource sector are failing. Integrated and transformative social movements must consider the gender dimensions of inequality to be effective. Improving understanding of local community contexts and their unique social, cultural, economic, and demographic characteristics, and risks due to climate change and disasters, are a key component of designing sustainable and long-term interventions.

Local communities around the world are struggling with environmental change, and the impacts of climate change and related natural disasters. For a long time, the humanitarian and development communities have been struggling with the continuum between a humanitarian crisis



and development — how do these two processes come together, how do we make them better come together? For a long time, the humanitarian and development communities have been struggling with the continuum between a humanitarian crisis and development — how do these two processes come together, how do we make them better come together? — how do these two processes come together, how do we make them better come together? — how do these two processes come together, how do we make them better come together?

and development — how do these two processes come together, how do we make them better come together? What kinds of methods and projects need to be implemented to facilitate a transition? And where does the funding for this come from? Many practitioners emphasize the need to link disaster risk reduction more strongly to climate change adaptation and

sustainable development in a new framework. Consultations are underway to enhance understanding of these linkages in order to strengthen the mainstreaming of both disaster risk reduction and adaptation into development planning and practices so as to reduce the vulnerabilities of communities.

There is great promise in social pro-




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tection initiatives for transformative social change. Social protection offers a human rights approach to advocate for essential services and social transfers, in cash and in-kind, paid to the poor and vulnerable in order to provide a minimum income security and access to essential health care. The right to social security has been developed through universally-negotiated and-accepted instruments that proclaim that social security is a fundamental societal right to which every human being is entitled, found in Articles 22 and 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; Article 9 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; and the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). Recommendation No. 202 was adopted on June 14, 2012, also known as the

Since the global financial crisis, there have been new efforts to organize for social protection in many countries to secure a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of people and their families, including food, clothing, housing, education, medical care, and social services.

Social Protection Floors Recommendation, and brings together the commitment of United Nations' member states towards national social protection floors and recommendations on implementation. Since the global financial crisis, there have been new efforts to organize for social protection in many countries to secure a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of people and their families, including food, clothing, housing, education, medical care, and social services. The adoption of Recommendation No. 202 on social protection now occupies center stage.

Adaptive social protection is a term used to better understand how social protection can reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change and disasters. Climate change and disasters present many challenges to sustainable social and economic development. Adaptive social protection instruments can enhance individuals' and households' resilience, reduce poverty, and stimulate human capital development, and be delivered on a large scale in support of disaster risk management. Funding for

disaster risk initiatives and programs continue to be debated, from both humanitarian and development perspectives. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) that have development and humanitarian teams need to bring these perspectives closer together. With the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Hyogo Framework for Action both set to expire in 2015, there is a need to get organized for a new and improved framework. The lack of political will, contrary economic interests, and a deadlock in global negotiations, climate change presents no shortage of challenges.

The impacts of climate change are already intersecting with existing vulnerabilities, and affect people's abilities to cope. It is important to understand the differentiated social impacts of climate change based on diverse factors such as

gender, age, disability, ethnicity, geographical location, health status, livelihood, and migrant status. I believe there is great promise in local community development efforts to organize for transformative social change. The interrelationship between civil society, academics, and politicians is essential to create relevant knowledge, to support social movements, and to engage in political involvement. While there have been many efforts to achieve sustainable development, and some examples of progress, more organizing is needed that bring these actors together. Women, children, disabled people, and Indigenous peoples are often the most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and disasters therefore policy responses must take into account the experiences of these groups and adopt more equitable approaches. While the environment, sustainable development, social justice, and human well-being are being considered in new ways, organizing to address the fundamental causes of social injustice is imperative. ❧

Dr. Julie Drolet is Associate Professor in the Faculty of Social Work at the University of Calgary's Central and Northern Alberta Region's campus in Edmonton. She is principal investigator of the study "Rebuilding Lives Post-Disaster" and Adjunct Professor in the School of Social Work and Human Service at Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops, BC.

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Gender equality and women's rights in the CLOC-Via Campesina movement

By Pamela Caro

The CLOC (Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Organizaciones del Campo — CLOC Vía Campesina) — the Latin American Coordination of Rural Organizations is the Latin American continent's space for coordination as part of the international social movement Via Campesina (signifying 'the peasant's way or road'), founded in 1993. Via Campesina interconnects the social struggles of community-based organisations in four continents, grouping 150 organisations from 70 countries. As a movement, it is made up of organisations of peasants, small and medium sized agricultural producers, indigenous people, the landless, young people, migrants, afro-descendants and agricultural workers. Via Campesina was born out of the need to develop a common vision for rural peoples facing the negative consequences of globalisation in governmental agricultural policies and agro-industry. It came about in a historical context between 1989 and 1992 when Latin American organisations linked up through the continent-wide campaign "500 years of indigenous, black and popular resistance."

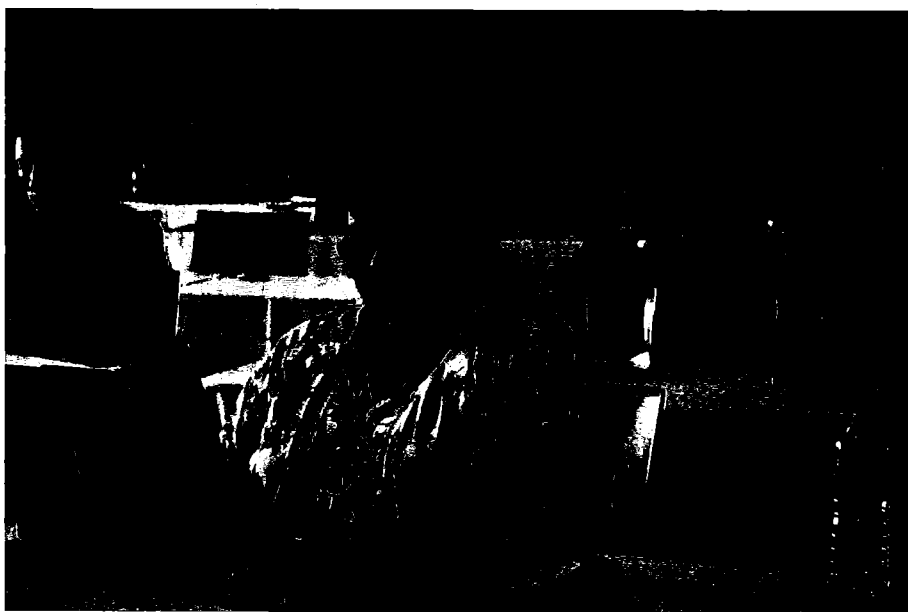
The CLOC is representative, legitimate, independent and plural. It was constituted in 1994 to bring together and strengthen the identity and particular demands of rural peoples from Latin America, involving 84 organisations from 18 countries. Of these approximately nine are rural women's organisations and the vast majority are mixed-gender. The CLOC is against neo-liberalism and its key focuses are food sovereignty and integrated agrarian reform. Its organisations explicitly defend access to land, territories, water and seeds, as well as women's rights and gender equality.

The CLOC and gender equality

In 1997, CLOC's first Women's Assembly was held as an initiative of women leaders, in order to place on the table the particular problems and demands of peasant women. At this meeting an agreement on gender parity was signed, which meant that 50% of those in decision-making spaces must be women. In 2001, at the second Women's Assembly, held before the 3rd CLOC Congress, the Continental Women's Network (Articulación Continental de Mujeres) was established as an organic part of the CLOC structure. This network groups together all of the women from the different member organisations. Its aims are to defend rural women's rights and to promote the inclusion of a gender focus in all of the movement's documents, proposals and actions. It acts as a team made up of women leaders, two from each sub-

region (the Andean region, Southern Cone, North America, the Caribbean and Central America). Two women from this group represent the network in the Political Commission of the CLOC-VC.

In the mid 2000s in Latin America, an alliance was made with the World March of Women (Marcha Mundial de Mujeres - MMM) as a result of the search for affinity, consensus and block positions in the international committee of the assembly of social movements for the World Social Forum, and in the campaigns against ALCA (Acuerdo de Libre Comercio de Las Américas), Free Trade Area of the Americas-FTTA and the World Trade Organisation. In 2007 this worldwide alliance was strengthened when Via Campesina and World March of Women jointly organised the first Forum for Food Sovereignty "Nyeleni", in Mali.



Francisca Rodríguez, founder and international spokesperson for the National Association of Chilean rural and Indigenous women (ANAMURI).

PAMELA CARO

In CLOC-VC's fourth Women's Assembly in 2010, held prior to the fifth CLOC Congress, the women delegates took on board the concept of feminism, using the slogan "*without feminism there is no socialism*", as a gateway into the egalitarian socialist project they aspire to build. But even with continuous and frequent debate, the slogan is accepted with mistrust and fear by the different strata of the wider organisation.

The changes experienced by women in the rural world are undeniable. Their greater economic autonomy results in greater participation in social organisations and within the rural popular movement. Whereas "before, women just made and served the coffee", (Interview with Francisca Rodriguez, National Association of Rural and Indigenous Women, ANAMURI, Chile) they are now a central force in today's mixed movements; their work is legitimised and they are key in political decision-making. Women have risen up and the majority of the organisations now have women on their boards of directors. Gender equality is incorporated in the international agenda of the CLOC-VC movement and its women leaders are seen as perseverant, daring and creative peers, with their own creative thinking and proposals in times of crises.

Successes

One strategy used by women to acquire visibility and to be considered as equals by male leaders, communities and institutional authorities, has been to form autonomous women's organisations and spaces within the mixed organisations that are members of the CLOC-VC. This work in building and strengthening women's opinions has enabled them to gain greater voice within the movement. They are also supported by mutual solidarity and stronger ties between women leaders, young leaders and other social groups who all have something in common; they are not part of traditional power structures in the movement.

Another strategy used by the Women's Network within the CLOC-VC has been to organise training schools for women, inviting women from outside and from member organisations to address the strategy of

Another challenge is that in indigenous and rural communities in Latin America it can be hard to talk about feminism and the word gender is not properly understood. It is often criticised by using an inappropriate term common to the rural world associating feminism with lesbianism.

linking gender equality with class equality. Through this process, women also recognise each other as subjects of rights, make themselves visible, empower themselves and do away with their fears and mistrust. In mixed groups the emblematic women leaders act as role models for other women's empowerment processes, and they train others in how to confront discrimination or abuse and to do public speaking. In this sense, the movement is an ongoing training school, and the "teachers" are part of the same school (Interview with Lourdes Huanca, Federation of Peruvian Rural, Indigenous and Black Women).

At present the women of CLOC-VC are working together to build the contents of their proposal for rural popular feminism. This proposal transgresses the status quo of their communities, since it questions traditional sexual mandates and is unpopular with people who defend masculine and patriarchal ideas and practices.

In this process, engagement with local feminist agendas and struggles for gender equality has been strategic. Actions have been carried out on International Women's Day and the International Day for Non-Violence against Women, using creative media such as theatre and cinema with political content to address issues ranging from sexual harassment to land tenure. These actions have been organised on local levels in rural communities and open spaces in the cities, involving other social groups too.

The main gains over the last 15 years are: the visibility of the Women's Network; gender parity established in 1997; the increase in women members; a clear posi-



tion against sexual harassment within the movement; and the campaigns promoted initially by women, "From Seeds", "Food Sovereignty" and "Enough Violence", later taken up by the whole organisation. Access to the internet has been an area of opportunity for staying connected and informed, and has even helped some women to participate, link up and grow stronger.

Tasks and challenges ahead

Beyond these considerable gains, women face difficulties, the most visible of which are in the mixed organisations. Masculine organisational models persist and these limit advances made in achieving gender parity, and reproduce discriminatory practices towards women and expressions of explicit sexism. For example, according to the majority of the women interviewed, there is still a difference in the way opinions are valued, and "*in mixed spaces it is very difficult for women to speak and put their problems on the table — men restrict women's dialogue*" (Interview with Mirta Coronel. MOCASE. Santiago del Estero Peasant Movement, Argentina). In other words, there are still practices that exclude. Gender parity ensures participation but not the role of women as protagonists or women's empowerment. Men's words continue to be worth more and women are seen as 'complementary.'

A second difficulty faced is that adult males do not recognise themselves as in need of training, as they consider themselves to have greater knowledge than women and young people. Since there are more women participating in the gender training school, the debate on equality

between men and women is being postponed to a certain extent. The view still exists that gender is secondary to class struggle, and the tendency is to subsume women's grievances in more general demands. In theory the male leaders "accept" the gender proposals, but they have not managed to put into practice the specific platforms necessary to question inequalities and the traditional sexual division of labour.

Another challenge is that in indigenous and rural communities in Latin America it can be hard to talk about feminism and the word gender is not properly understood. It is often criticised by using an inappropriate term common to the rural world associating feminism with lesbianism. Some of the women interviewed pointed out that they still face comments in their communities in reference to feminism saying that it will destroy the family and the heterosexual couple and that this will affect family-based agricultural production (Interview with Esperanza Carmona, Honduras; Mirta Coronel,

Argentina; and Cinthya González, Paraguay). It is also a challenge to resolve the tension between gender equality and the duality or complementary roles in indigenous *cosmovision*, which has been used to value the ancestral such as respect for the family and the *Pachamama* (Mother Earth), but that exclude development for women. These dual notions need to be revised, in a search of the connotation of equality.

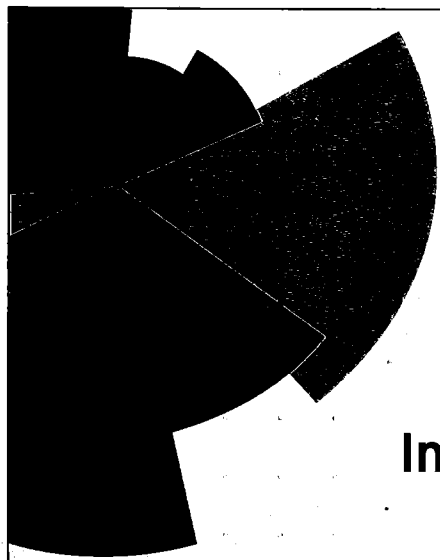
Strategies and recommendations for the future

In closing this article the author presents the CLOC women leaders' main strategies as well as recommendations arising from the process of writing this case study. CLOC-VC's Women's Network has come to consensus on concrete actions to take in advancing towards gender equality, some of which have already begun and others which remain as aspirations.

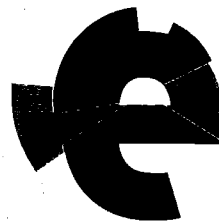
For the women leaders, rural popular feminism is a proposal for building politically within the movement. It should not be

seen as an imposition. It implies self-acceptance as women who are proud of themselves, want equality and are struggling to overcome abuse. They are giving themselves the opportunity to think differently, not feel inferior, value themselves and demand respect. All these elements are important in building a new society, taking the debate into organisations, defending and resisting. Rural popular feminism is not against men; rather it is against the patriarchal and capitalist system.

Since patriarchy is a long standing problem, the Women's Network aims to raise awareness that will enable people to see the inequality that is naturalised at present in cultural constructions of the family, in organisations and in society at large. This means denouncing injustice and transforming daily behaviour such as unbridled male sexuality, expressed in crude comments and other forms of sexual harassment. It also means addressing the sexual division of the world and hence questioning the non-democratic use of speech in meetings; since men generally



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speak first, they often mark out the conditions for debate.

Looking to the future, CLOC-VC still faces the challenge of taking its declarations from discourse into concrete practices. Organised rural women are convinced that the future is promising, as there is no possibility for going backwards on their advances and triumphs, much less in women's awareness. Gender equality leads to other equalities, "as a domino effect", and for this reason it must always be present in all training and organisational processes.

The challenges mentioned by the women leaders interviewed have implications in terms of acquiring the experience, learning and pedagogical methods needed to be able to turn their communities around on gender equality. This means training men, incorporating them in debates with women and young people so that they manage to understand that women only want access to the same choices. These choices include women being in both the private and public spheres, working and generating their own income, having elected positions in their organisation, educating their children, ensuring the inclusion of equality as a genuine priority and not as a response to momentary issues, valuing the territorial sovereignty of the body, speaking of sexual and reproductive rights and defending the right to diverse sexual orientations (Interviews with Lourdes Huanca, Peru; Loyda Olivo, Ecuador; Adriana Mezdari, Brazil; Esperanza Cardona, Honduras; and Cinthya Gonzalez, Paraguay).

Finally, based on this research it seems that CLOC-VC is a movement that has managed to incorporate the demand for gender equality into the Latin American rural world, even when it was not included in its original definitions. This change has come from systematic, constant work by visionary women filled with conviction, who have progressed enormously but who have no doubt in recognising the challenges that remain. These future challenges faced by the movement have implications in both internal and external dynamics. To confront patriarchy "from within" means to recognise that masculine

superiority is a myth, and that the ability to be generous and let go of privileges needs to be developed. Until now women have taken on leadership in circulating this vision and raising awareness among men and women leaders, but this struggle requires the equal involvement of all.

The main recommendation for the internal workings of the movement is to educate in small groups for joint reflection in order to give political depth to this approach. This can be an alternative that enables people to take ownership of the issues that have been difficult to address in large assemblies. This means holding workshops, informal conversational events, forums and more personalised communications actions, as well as chatting around the fireplace or stove on a daily basis.

In the external work of the movement, we need to ensure that gender is a cross-cutting theme, making strong links between the focal issues of the movement, such as food sovereignty, agrarian reform and agro-ecology, and the principles of equality between men and women, identifying obstacles and revealing inequalities in practices and in discourse. For example, the agenda for recognising the important role of women in conserving seeds must advance towards an agenda of co-responsibility, genuine integration and equal opportunities and rights. In issues of land tenure it is important to denounce the non-involvement of women, something addressed by the women of CLOC-VC's slogan: "With women home to stay, agrarian reform is delayed."

The key to change lies in preparing men and women for wide ranging debate, while giving them a diversity of tools to do so. Some recommendations include, for example, recuperating rural women's history in order to value it; designing an alert system for practices that exclude or discriminate against people; and incorporating men into the teams that lead campaigns opposing violence against women. Since everything is in a permanent process of construction, the women of CLOC-VC are open to hope and change, leading men in the movement towards raising, with similar conviction, the banners of gender equality and equal opportunities. ❧

This study was carried out using as a source the perceptions of ten women leaders of national member organisations of the CLOC Vía Campesina in Honduras, Peru, Paraguay, Argentina, Brazil, Chile and Ecuador. The women interviewed were: Loyda Olivo, Ecuador; Adriana Mezdari, Brazil; Esperanza Cardona, Honduras; Cinthya Gonzalez, Paraguay; Mirta Coronel, Argentina; Lourdes Huanca, Peru; Francisca Rodriguez, Alicia Muñoz and Florencia Aróstica, Chile. Interviews were also held with three male leaders from a mixed Chilean Rural Confederation (Confederación Campesina) and with Nalú Farias of the World March of Women.

This research was developed as part of the BRIDGE Cutting Edge programme on gender and social movements.

Information available at <http://socialmovements.bridge.ids.ac.uk>

Pamela Caro is a social worker and the director of the Centro Cielo at Santo Tomas University in Santiago Chile. She can be reached at pamecaro@cedem.tie.cl

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In the Field

Mahila shakti aa rahi hai...phool nahi chingari hai!*

Celebrating Women-Activists

Rashida Bi, Champa Devi Shukla and the Chingari Awards

By Reena Shadaan

The Chingari Awards are a significant yet little known effort to honour women-activists fighting corporate environmental/human rights abuses in India. Also significant yet little known is the story behind the Chingari Awards — that is, the story of Rashida Bi and Champa Devi Shukla, two of the most prominent voices in the ongoing struggle for justice in the aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster.

Rashida Bi and Champa Devi Shukla began their activist careers in the labour movement. In the aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster, the state government proposed an economic rehabilitation plan, which included the construction of 200 work sheds to train and generate employment for gas-affected women.

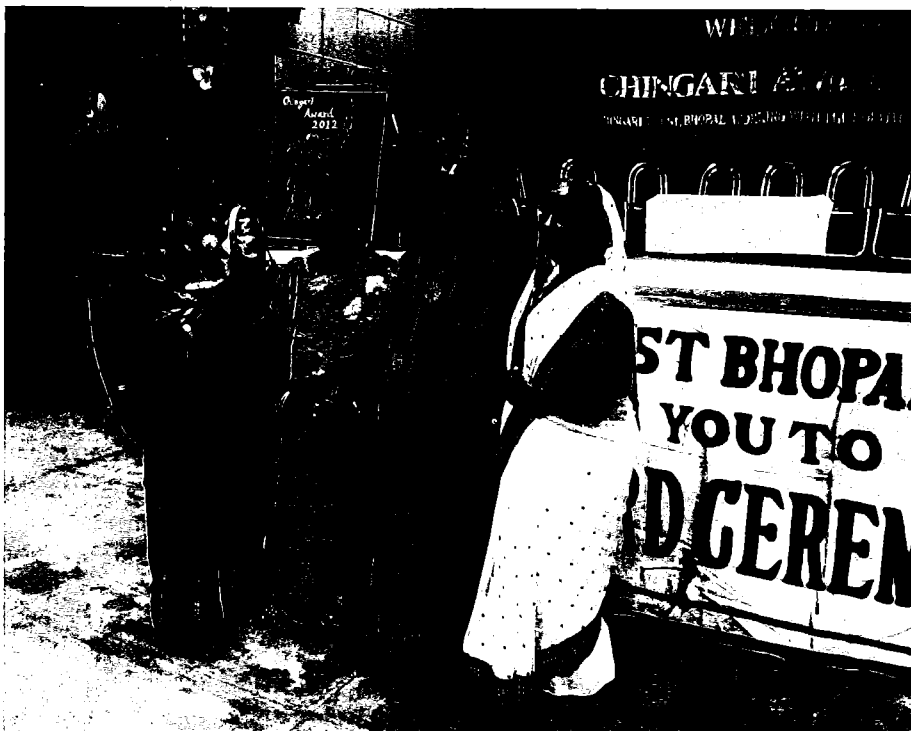
The shift into the workplace (outside of the home) was a significant change for many gas-affected women who were unaccustomed to venturing beyond their households/immediate communities due to cultural/religious norms. However, widespread death and illness amongst male breadwinners forced many women to seek employment outside of their homes. Rashida Bi shared her story stating,

After the gas tragedy, my father got sick. My husband used to do sewing work. He then started having pain in the bones of his legs, so it became difficult for him to stitch... I used to roll *beedis* [in my home], but it was quite difficult for me to sustain and run the house, as the money that I was earning after rolling *beedis* was not enough... I had not even come out of the house... I heard that

there were talks about giving jobs to gas victims... After considering the financial and other problems at home, I said to [my family] that I am also going. I will look for some kind of job... I came out of the house on November the 25th 1985 (2010).

Rashida Bi's story is not unique; it is the story of countless gas-affected women across Bhopal. She soon gained employment under the state government's economic rehabilitation plan. Rashida Bi, Champa Devi Shukla and 98 other gas-affected women were to receive training

at a stationery production centre. However the women did not receive any training at the centre and after three months, they were told that their "training" was complete. This turbulent moment marked the beginning of the *Bhopal Gas Peedit Mahila Stationery Karmchhari Sangh* (BGPMSKS) [Bhopal Gas Affected Women's Stationery Worker's Union] — one of the first movement groups led and comprised entirely of gas-affected women. It is also the moment that catapulted Rashida Bi and Champa Devi Shukla — two women with no prior experience in activism — to union leaders.



Rani Dasan, Thenmozhi Manickam (Koodankulam anti-nuclear activists) honoured alongside Vandana Shiva and Champa Devi Shukla. Not pictured: Rashida Bi.

...after three months, we were told that our training was over... We said, "We are gas victims... We do not have breadwinners in our house, so where would we go?"... We said, "We want work... We are not begging. We will work hard and earn money and bring up our family"... Then they told us to talk to the [District Magistrate]. I and Rashida were together [in the stationary centre] for three months, but we did not know each other well... When it came to talking to the [District Magistrate], all the women said, "Aapa [Rashida] from here and didi [Champa] from there will speak (Champa Devi Shukla, 2010).

Rashida Bi continued,

I then said, "I do not know how to talk, I haven't talked to any man [outside of my family] ever until today"... Then *didi* [Champa] said, "Even I do not know how to talk." Then all [the women] said talk to him in a way you both can. Say anything to him, but talk to him... So ever since that day we have been speaking for the women (2010).

In 2004, Rashida Bi and Champa Devi Shukla were awarded the Goldman Environmental Prize for their lengthy struggle for justice in the aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster. This is not limited to their activism as BGPMSKS union leaders; they are also leaders in the coalition group, the International Campaign for Justice in Bhopal (ICJB). A portion of their prize money was put towards a yearly fund for women-activists fighting corporate environmental/human rights abuses across India. This is the Chingari Awards.

The reason behind the award we give every year is to have women involved... They are from rural areas and are illiterate... but they can understand that what poison is. If a company is coming here...

The importance of the Chingari Awards is tremendous. It is a celebration of Indian women's leadership in peoples' movements that are challenging corporate environmental/human rights abuses.



they will ruin our country, state and our village — they will ruin everything. So Chingari presents an award to the woman who raises her voice for this... We add those women to this fight so that the fight of Bhopal and their fight can be strengthened... Also so that companies wake up and come to know that the world is aware now... The public can't be betrayed by corporations. It does not even matter how much support they have of governments. Even governments lose when the public raises their voice and it is necessary for public to raise their voices (Rashida Bi, 2010).

Past winners of the Chingari Awards include Mukta Jhodia, an *adivasi* leader of the fight against the Utkal Alumina bauxite mining project in Orissa, and Dayamani Barla, an *adivasi* journalist/activist fighting against the acquisition of 12,000 acres of forest in Jharkand by Arcelor-Mittal.

During the 28th anniversary of the Bhopal gas disaster, I attended the Chingari Awards. The chief guest was eco-feminist

and seed activist, Vandana Shiva; a titan of activism herself. The recipients were the women-activists of Tamil Nadu, who are engaged in a non-violent struggle against the Koodankulam Nuclear Power Plant. Representing these thousands of women-activists were anti-nuclear activists; Rani Dasan and Thenmozhi Manickam.

The importance of the Chingari Awards is tremendous. It is a celebration of Indian women's leadership in peoples' movements that are challenging corporate environmental/human rights abuses. Moreover, the emergence of the awards is significant. Rashida Bi, in particular, went from being a woman unaccustomed to venturing beyond her household to a leading voice in the struggle for justice in Bhopal. The work these women do in honouring other women engaged in anti-corporate struggles is all the more noteworthy in the context of their own her-stories. ❧

* The first part of the title for this article is a slogan sometimes used during Indian women's protests and it translates roughly as "Women's power is coming. We are flames, not flowers."

Reena Shadaan recently obtained an M.A. in Development Studies from York University, where her research focused on Bhopali women's activism/empowerment in the aftermath of the Bhopal gas disaster. She has engaged in solidarity work around the ongoing struggle for justice in Bhopal since 2006.

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Toward a Complex Unity

Lessons from Occupy Toronto

By Nele Michiels

"We talk about the importance of building a movement that is inclusive, from recognizing that the unity of the 99 percent must be a complex unity"

— Angela Davis, speaking at Occupy Philly

Great Expectations

It is October 15th, 2011, in Canada's largest city — a day many have anxiously been waiting for: the Global Day of Action, voicing a growing demand for global change. In an impressive launch of Occupy Toronto, thousands of protestors march from the heart of Toronto's financial district, at King and Bay, to St. James Park. After months — *alright, years* — of barricading myself inside feminist safe spaces, I have tentatively come out for a mass-appeal movement. As part of the marshal team, I walk up front, linked arm-in-arm with other marshals to pace the march, as we make our way through the streets. The mood is exuberant and, as they say, palpable. Just the previous day, the Canadian Bankers Association had told its members to "prepare for the worst, hope for the best." Imagine that: they might actually be afraid of us. I like that. As we snake indirectly toward the as-of-yet unannounced destination at St. James Park, curiosity and excitement increases. The crowd chants continuously: those heartwarming and wishful slogans, "*The people united will never be defeated!*" "*Whose city? Our city!*" ... And, of course, everyone's favourite to problematize: "*We are the 99 per cent!*"

My heart is rising in my chest. As you can probably tell from my language, I have always been a bit of a romantic, so I permit myself to drop the experienced cynicism and allow my mind to wander. *We really are united. We can do this. I*

imagine the days to come, the joys of camping out in the sun, surrounded by like-minded people, reclaiming our public spaces. As these glorious visions are reaching their peak (all set to an appropriately rising sound track), everything comes to a halt for just one uncomfortable moment. In that moment, someone behind me decides to ... well, grope my butt. It doesn't take much for my childish visions to come crashing down around me, for my weariness to return, for the discussions I've been having with other concerned parties to start replaying in my mind. *It is always like this. We are not prepared.*

Why Discuss Occupy?

With the movement of the self-described 99% in full swing, messages of unity, solidarity, and common cause made their way into occupied parks around the world. The prominent narrative favoured a globalized description of events — linking the inspiring revolutions of the Arab Spring to the *indignados* in Spain, and in turn to Zuccotti Park in New York City. The intention was clear: Occupy was a forum for people to realize their common grounds — to come together across traditional definitions of class, race, sex, age, and so on. Given the sheer enormity and power of the systems the movement sought to topple, such boundary-defying unified protest may sound naïve to many, but it may also be practically necessary. Because such wide resistance narratives have always held a certain appeal, and

indeed are arguably becoming ever more popular with grassroots organizers, it is important to discuss our experiences of them, and learn from our mistakes.

Occupy Toronto

Occupy is commonly understood as a grassroots protest movement against the spectacular income disparity between the super-affluent and the rest of us. It is also associated with a particular set of images — tents in parks, the Guy Fawkes masks related to hacktivist group Anonymous — as well as a particular set of practices — notably, the adoption of General Assemblies, and the occupation of public spaces.

Occupy Toronto (OT), in turn, had its own situational particularities that proved to be very interesting and can teach us valuable lessons for future organizing, as well as raise pressing questions. My own involvement occurred largely before and during the physical occupation of St. James Park. At different points, I was overwhelmingly organizing with the OT logistics committee, facilitation committee, and the on-again-off-again anti-oppression committee. Other committees included media, marshaling, sanitation, police liaison, and food. At its peak, OT had about five hundred people present in St. James Park, many of them camping out, with a significant number of the more dedicated participants being homeless. We garnered large-scale support from both the public, in the form of copious amounts of clothing and food donations, as well as from various organizations. Seven Ontario unions lead by OPSEU (Ontario Public Service Employees Union) took respectful roles as allies in part through the financial backing of generators, yurts, porta-potties (the importance of which cannot be understated), and a portable kitchen.

A popular way of belittling the park

occupants (affectionately referred to as "the occupiers") was through accusations of laziness and unwillingness to work — accusations often leveled against homeless people. However, despite many shortcomings that could have validly been raised regarding OT, this one could be no further from the truth. Anyone visiting St. James Park would have encountered an industriousness far exceeding the energy most of us dedicate to wage-rewarded employment. People worked all day — often well into the night — in self-organized shifts and assignments, including the cleaning of those notorious porta-potties. The message was clear: we love to work, if we feel this work is done for our own communities, and for our own empowerment. OT's critiques of capitalist relations, thus, had little to do with laziness.

This general observation, I believe, exemplifies some of the positive aspects of what held OT together: a remarkable work ethic that was perhaps surprising to some. In addition, OT created spaces to discuss disparity, and demanded public conversation take place (quite literally in public spaces). It taught many new activists the feasibility and skills of community organizing, and confronted many experienced organizers with every-day realities. In short, OT comprised a necessary experiment in how to live differently. The question, however, remains: Were we, ultimately, living all that differently? And: What was the quality of the spaces OT created, given the diversity of people affected by economic and structural inequalities?

The Creation of a Toxic Environment

Like many activist spaces, OT's St. James Park was often envisioned as a sanctuary from the "outside" world, including that world's dynamics of sexism, racism, ableism, and other forms of intersecting oppressions. Of course, since problematic behaviour and structures *did* exist within OT, this common attitude ended up enforcing an unhelpful tendency toward blindness and inaction regarding these problems. This was exemplified, for instance, in claims to "colour blindness:" the idea that by refusing to see race, racial oppression becomes irrelevant

Sexism in OT manifested itself in a variety of ways often found in other grassroots organizations as well. For instance, there was the idea that by not acknowledging, as a community, our problems with sexism, these problems would simply disappear. In this framework, those who mention the issues are widely viewed as being divisive, creating negativity, and ultimately subversive of the group's "important" goals. This interpretation was facilitated by the inherent invisibility these issues had prior to vocalization. In addition, as in the "general public," sexual harassment and assault is perpetrated in resistance communities, and often targets women and those who are seen as gender variant or gender non-conforming.

to an interaction. It was beliefs such as these that arguably fueled opposition in the Assembly and Facilitation Committee to the introduction of an anti-oppression and equity "policy" during the occupation. In this article, I want to focus in particular on some of the problematic gender dynamics in OT, because it is useful to examine how particular environments, *even* those created by activism and social movements, can produce narratives that facilitate oppression. Unfortunately, the existence of such deep-rooted problems within progressive forces is not widely recognized. My aim here is to help facilitate an understanding of how OT-specific structures and narratives, ironically enough, replicated a system in which the few were able to assert a disproportionate amount of control over the decision-making and social environment of the many.

Sexism in OT manifested itself in a variety of ways often found in other grassroots organizations as well. For instance, there was the idea that by not acknowledging, as a community, our problems with sexism, these problems would simply disappear. In this framework, those who mention the issues are widely viewed as being divisive, creating negativity, and

ultimately subversive of the group's "important" goals. This interpretation was facilitated by the inherent invisibility these issues had prior to vocalization. In addition, as in the "general public," sexual harassment and assault is perpetrated in resistance communities, and often targets women and those who are seen as gender variant or gender non-conforming. In addition, as in other movements, well-positioned men perpetrating some of these behaviours used their other contributions to OT to shield themselves from accountability; at worse times, these efforts were supported by dismissive attitudes around police intervention.

Perhaps worse was the way in which many identified with the perpetrators' concerns, through an insistence on a widespread glorification of "radical inclusivity," which failed to realize that by "including" such perpetrators and failing to hold them to account, other participants (often rendered invisible) were inevitably and decidedly excluded. OT's belief systems and structures, derived from those of the "outside world," made it much easier to continue the invisibility than to confront these important issues. Aside from some of these important ways in which sexism

reared its ugly head in OT, there was of course the occasional objectification of female activists as hot commodities rather than activists in their own right. There was also the division of labour along gender lines, sometimes causing the isolation/disconnection of women from the more glorified tasks of speech-making and media interaction.

Another important question regarding OT, which gets at some of the ways in which Occupy-specific rhetoric was used to bolster oppressive structure, is: whose voices were prominent, and whose were silenced? In OT's practice of direct democracy, in large part mediated by the General Assembly (GA), certain voices were structurally excluded, largely through a refusal to adjust facilitation for the realities of inequity. Especially during the occupation, OT displayed significant disdain toward the idea of developing common messaging and values. In part, this was motivated by Occupy Wall Street's stance against hegemony. While this attitude is derived from a positive emphasis on democratizing our organizing, when

taken uncritically, it led to a refusal to see the necessity of uniting under banners of common decency and anti-oppression. For instance, it was not uncommon for meetings of the Anti-Oppression Committee to be interrupted by speakers who felt it important to impart the information that oppression simply did not exist. Rather than relegate such views to the sideline, the importance of appearing "democratic" took precedence, giving such views "equal" weight as direct experiences from the margins. Of course, in real life, the scales are already tilted one way, and therefore such practice of democracy reinforced very harmful structures, and bolstered resistance to the introduction of any sort of safety nets or truly equalizing facilitation methods. This belief in a "level" playing field justified blindness and inaction toward some of the very real ways in which social inequalities — the very same to which OT professed to be calling attention — played out in practice.

Here, it is helpful to take a more detailed look at how these few voices came to dominate speech in OT. As an

example, we can look at how the GA conceptualized consensus — a definition with wide-ranging consequences. In order to make a decision, the GA needed to reach consensus, with a decision-making rule set at 100%, we called it "100% consensus" — in other words, everyone needed to agree. While this may sound like a worthy goal to some, it was not based in any thorough understanding of consensus building (further bolstered by a distrust of expertise from other organizations), and in fact promoted the opposite. Predictably, a few vocal individuals realized that they could hold up the entire process by blocking every proposal. Alternately, people would become so wary of lengthy decision-making that every proposal would be passed. It was a recipe for frustration and disaster.

Significantly, this structure survived as long as it did because of the ideas of "radical inclusivity" and "radical democracy," which were interpreted as 100% consensus by a majority of the organizers, even if such organizers had a distaste for the disruptive forces, and were "personally" all for anti-oppression and similar structur-

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ing/facilitation of the environment. It was not until post-eviction that many grew exhausted by the situation, and allied with others in the realization that OT found itself in a highly problematic, disturbing, and toxic stalemate. I was not the only one who walked away feeling worn and wounded through the daily struggles of attempting to validate one's experiences and political goals in an excessively hostile and systemically exclusive environment.

Occupy Toronto and Identity Politics

We can also frame some of the problems in OT in terms of its stance on identity politics. In social movement contexts, identity politics can be understood as organizing based in a common interest group. In progressive politics, such an interest group is often founded in socio-economic location. Thus, there is a sense in which the "identity" (for instance, "women") is both constructed by activists *self-identifying* as such, and is socially constructed by the oppressive systems that support the institutions of gender. Identity politics has received somewhat of a bad name in academia, based on the idea that we would not want to "essentialize" ourselves: i.e. freeze ourselves into categories that assign inherent characteristics to women, or other identities. Some feminists, for example, proclaim as their ultimate goal the abolition of gender and identity politics. This makes sense if we look at gender as the discursive and material structures that support sexism. At the same time, however, we do not live in a post-identity world, and as such, self-aware organizing that is identity-aware is in many cases practically useful or even necessary. For instance, by self-identifying as women (in the sense that we strategically choose to organize together) can reveal the structural aspects of oppression, widen our base for building power and demanding change, and call attention to problematic dynamics in wide-range solidarity groups through methods like the formation of women's caucuses.

It is significant that OT did not start as a solidarity movement among existing identity-aware groups. Rather, OT started with a broad-based call for the 99% to

come out in all its diversity. Based on this intention, OT continued to identify as "the 99%," despite lack of representation from many "traditional" identities and interests. While OT did well in avoiding a fixation on identity, it took this politic too far through the illusion that the Park embodied a post-identity world, without any work being done to actualize that world. This lack of addressing identity issues led to a *de-facto* dismissal of the complexities and intersectionalities within the 99%. There was an emphasis on spontaneity that failed to recognize that a lack of conscious organizing does not mean a lack of patterned habits and organization. Rather than opting to sit down together and consciously shape our patterns, OT remained partial to suppressing topics of identity and structure.

Conclusion: A Complex Unity

Under threat of increasing environmental and economic insecurity and injustice, we must build our voices and actions by organizing in wide-ranging solidarity movements. However, as can be seen from some of the issues we encountered at Occupy Toronto, such "united" organizing can take on different forms, and can also facilitate the creation of toxic environments for women. We must be self-aware and take an active role in structuring our movements to be healthier and more effective. At Occupy Philly, Angela Davis asked the question of our times: how can we come together in a unity that is not simplistic and oppressive, but complex and emancipatory? There are no easy answers to this question, but as feminists we must support unpopular efforts of self-examination.

There already exist many identity politics and issue-based ways of organizing that have tried to create meaningful change by confronting sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression. It is also clear that we as a society would benefit from large united movements, which are currently gaining a lot of media attention. We must address the problems encountered by these movements, as exemplified in the popular Occupy protests. Based on my experiences at Occupy Toronto, I feel that we *cannot* let these issues take a back

seat: we *must* base our movements in a complex unity. One avenue is by increasing our efforts to build solidarity between existing identity-conscious organizations. Another is to take strong measures to actively structure and educate our movements about issues of diversity, equity, and oppression. All too often, activists are willing to attack but not to build. A true search for alternatives, such as the one intended at Occupy camps, would include ways of organizing ourselves consciously and equitably. For how else could we call ourselves true community organizers? As feminists, we must demand active efforts and relentless dedication to building structures that create accountability, equity, and diverse representation. ❧

Nele Michiels is completing her Master's degree in Environmental Studies at York University. Her research focuses on the diverse ways in which activism and social movements politicize women's trauma. She has volunteered for a variety of feminist organizations and organizes with other activists in the city of Toronto.

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