



Women & Environments

international
magazine

WOMEN AND LABOUR

The Impact of Austerity on Women in Greece

Interview with Dina Vaiou
REGGIE MODLICH

First Nations Women Rising

Aboriginal Women and
Union Solidarity
JANET NICOL

Climate Change Impacts on Rural Women's Unpaid/ Paid Labor in Nepal

SABRINA REGMI

Cooperatives Boost Opportunities For Moroccan Women

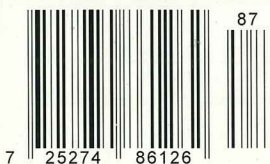
GERRY TOOMEY

Building Visibility

Challenges and
Opportunities Facing
Women Construction
Workers in
Contemporary India
BIPASHA BARUAH



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DOUBLE ISSUE



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international
magazine

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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. It is published by a volunteer editorial board and 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, University of Toronto.

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CORRECTION to Vol. 84-85

At page 23 of the last issue "Women, Ageing, Poverty & other Constraints" Vol. 84-85, Fall 2010/Winter 2011 the following copyright notice should have been included with the article entitled "Information Brings Progress to Vietnam's Communes" by Michele Hibler: ©International Development Research Centre 2011; Author Michele Hibler.

ON THE COVER



Artist:
Mahwish Hamdany

Name of Image:
Endurance

The meaning of this piece is what a woman has to endure to make ends meet. This painting is not simply about the work a woman has to endure in the scorching

heat while her children lay starving and waiting anxiously for her return. The painting also symbolizes a hidden pain behind her eyes where there is fear for her children and for the uncertainty of tomorrow yet there is courage for a better today. She has a will to live her life for herself and her family and her eyes and her posture speak unspoken words "I am, I can and I will survive."

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IN THE FIGHT FOR EQUAL RIGHTS, AN ORDINARY WOMAN ACHIEVES SOMETHING EXTRAORDINARY.
BASED ON A TRUE STORY

"YOU CAN'T STOP CHEERING! SALLY HAWKINS IS IRRESISTIBLE IN THIS FUNNY, TOUCHING AND VITAL SALUTE TO WOMEN. MIRANDA RICHARDSON IS SENSATIONAL."

"NIGEL COLE SPINS A FIERCE TALE. A DAUNTLESS SALLY HAWKINS LEADS THE CHARGE, MIRANDA RICHARDSON STEALS HER SCENES AS A WILY POLITICIAN, AND BOB HOSKINS SOOTHES THE STARTLED CHAPS."

"SHAMELESSLY PERFECT. THE WHOLE ENSEMBLE CLICKS."

"EXCELLENT! A CROWD PLEASER WITH A HEART, MIND AND SOUL."

"SOLID, ENTERTAINING, EVEN INSPIRING!"

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4 BRITISH INDEPENDENT FILM AWARD NOMINATIONS

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Upcoming Issues

For information about Editorial Guidelines, Calls for Submissions and more visit the "Write for WEI Mag" section of our website at www.weimagazine.com.

To make a donation, please make it out to Women & Environments International Magazine, Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University, 4700 Keele Street, Toronto, ON M3J 1P3.

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Canada

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WE Speak

A Word from WEI

In May, WEI Magazine celebrated its 35th anniversary with an event at the Toronto Women's Bookstore. It was a chance to reflect on the role and impact of the magazine in promoting dialogue on feminism and environmental issues.

We continue this celebration in 2011 by tackling such topics as urbanization, women's space and feminist organizing and note that the magazine's themes have been rooted in women's labour. As the environment changes, women's social and political roles shift. Within the spaces of these changes, often facilitated by sudden or gradual environmental transformations, women find opportunities for organizing or encounter new gender-based barriers.

In this issue, the editorial team has approached the issue of women's labour from a multi-faceted perspective, incorporating women's paid, unpaid and even emotional work, taking a broad view of the impact of natural and social environments on labour. The contributions by a variety of authors show that many women continue to work in non-traditional sectors, such as the construction sector in India or in gold mines in Ghana, and Baruah and Renne (including fellow authors) show how women both disrupt and are constrained by these gender norms. Unions have undoubtedly been an important point of organizing for women, and Nicol explores Aboriginal women's labour organizing and the role of unions. In the construction sector in India, trade unions also play a crucial role in advocating for the rights of women workers, as Baruah discusses.

A large portion of the work that women do every day is unpaid. Liu focuses on immigrant women's emotion work as a settlement and adaption response, while Khanom shows that women's unpaid labour increases dramatically when communities are under stressed environmental conditions. The art, poetry, research and writing for this issue underscores the complexities of gender and labour. They show that every day, women negotiate gender roles and norms in their work, and use their work as an avenue to create change in their lives. ❧

Sharmila Shewprasad,
Managing Editor



ARTIST WITH RESPIRATOR

Louisa Krátká is a multidisciplinary artist, graduate of the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design and currently a masters student at the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University where her research focus is environmental health and toxics in the visual arts.

The inspiration for her illustration comes from a personal experience of illness resulting from exposure to toxic chemicals at art school. Having been exposed and sensitized to chemicals such as solvent vapours, soldering fumes and various pigments containing heavy metals used in print-making and jewellery, the experience with multiple chemical sensitivities has also motivated Louisa's commitment to a healthy and non-toxic arts practice. Recognizing that visual artists, as an occupational group, are under-represented in occupational health studies, often unprotected by health and safety regulations as self-employed workers, and sometimes at an economic disadvantage in finding safe, affordable studio space, Louisa's research aims to raise awareness of these health and occupational/environmental justice issues within the visual arts industry. More information may be found on her blog at <http://sick-of-art.blogspot.com>.

Putting This Issue Together

Ellen Sweeney is a PhD student in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University. She received her MA in Social Anthropology from Dalhousie University where she also worked as a Research Associate and Project Coordinator in the Departments of Sociology and Social Anthropology, Community Health and Epidemiology, and the School of Health and Human Performance. Ellen's areas of research interest include environmental health, policy analysis, and disease prevention.

Jasmine Nouredin was born and raised and lives in Toronto with her husband and two children. She holds an Honours BA in English and Political Science and an MA in Political Science with a focus on Theory and International Relations. Her current work involves managing community programs as well as conducting research and promotions for community and faith-based schooling. She also engages in consultations on community development and integration.

Sharmila Shewprasad holds an MA in International Development Studies from Dalhousie University and a BA in Women's Studies from York University. She has worked internationally for several years on issues such as women's sexual and reproductive rights, human rights and refugee resettlement. She has also engaged in community organizing within marginalized communities in Toronto and Halifax.

We also thank **Jocelyn Herbst** and **Sandra Tam** for their contributions to the Editorial Team.

Editorial

Women and Labour: A Natural or Compelled Relationship?

By Jasmine Nouredin

As my first experience editing for *Women and Environments International Magazine* is coming to an end, I am left in the odd position of not only reflecting on the physicality of the issue itself but also on the fact that I represent the subject matter of this issue in my very presence as a volunteer editor. I, along with the other volunteers who make up the editorial team and board, belong to the constantly expanding web of women who are perpetually weaving between their various roles of labour. As mothers, daughters, wives, students, union representatives, or managers — simply breathing — we are intrinsically tied to the notion of work and labour. Our very existence is measured relentlessly against our ability to adhere to our labour roles. We are judged as successful if we complete “our work”, whether that work is a chosen occupation or a gendered view of a woman’s familial position.

Gender and labour, though separate ideas, are intrinsically intertwined to the extent that they often signify the same thing. So the question needs to be undoubtedly asked: Wherein lies the difference between women’s work and the work of men? There are stereotypical gender roles that individuals feel pressured to adhere to within the boundaries of cultural and societal conventions. Women and men juggle these roles in their every day lives, both in their occupational and familial labour.

However, after reading the many pieces sent in response to our call for submissions, it became evident that feelings of guilt and a sense of duty seem to play a significant role in how women both perceive their own labour and the way their labour is perceived by others. We see from this issue of WEI, that women, either by choice or due to gendered expectations and due to a mixture of feelings relating to guilt and duty, merge all

their various roles and responsibilities into one vast idea of what work is: to be a successful woman.

In relation to labour, “success” tends to be measured as the sum of all the tasks a woman undertakes in her quest to fulfill her sense of duty. Many women consider themselves successful only if all of their roles combine and intertwine into one successful whole. Women tend to see themselves as successful mothers, daughters, wives and employees only if they are able to juggle each role in a balancing act where each “job” they hold works in conjunction with the others and no one job suffers as a result of another.

The sense of guilt plays an enormous role in this formula of success because it pushes a woman into feeling that she has to take on everything in some sort of supernatural performance that ensures she will always be meeting her labour expectations in each role she plays and that each indi-

vidual role is as successful as the others.

The notion, whether due to natural inclination or social compulsion, that women are defined by their labour and that the success of each depends on the success of the other is a commonality between all the articles in this issue of WEI. This notion also seems to transcend all cultures, ages and professions as it is echoed by the level of diversity demonstrated by our contributors.

In response to my reflections regarding myself and the team at WEI, I admit that despite having to deal with several other, but equally important responsibilities, be they professional or personal, I felt compelled to ensure my contributions to WEI were just as significant as my contributions to any other work I do. Was it stressful? Of course! But whether this drive is instinctive or not, I know I can speak on behalf of the entire team here at WEI when I say that as a woman, I wouldn’t do it any other way.



From the story “Women’s Work, Health and the Environment in a Small-Scale Mining Site in Northeastern Ghana” (see page 13). In the area near the stream (“the sea”), women and men pick over sand and rocks looking for gold, Kejetia mining site, June 2010.

Features

The Impact of Austerity on Women in Greece

Interview with Dina Vaiou by Reggie Modlich

Greek indebtedness has recently been in the news a lot. Speculations about the end of the Euro and with it the possible fragility of the European Union have been blamed on Greece and on its government and people. The lack of systematic and enforced taxation and a degree of corruption have been contributing factors. Yet, where can we say that tax evasion and corruption do not exist? Many of the loans that led to the current situation were hatched in the international corporate headquarters of Goldman and Sachs, Siemens, military industries, the IOC etc. among others. Is there a neo-liberal government that has not bailed out its financing and major industries with billions of dollars, let alone financed wars with trillions of working and middle class taxpayers' money — not to mention with the lives of their sons and daughters? All of these governments are now introducing “austerity” measures to reign in these debts on the backs of — you guessed it — their working and middle classes.

While “gender” is never considered in these situations, *Women & Environments International Magazine* (WEI) is fortunate to have a long time contributor in Greece to shed some light on how women in Greece have been affected by this crisis. Dina Vaiou is a professor of Urban Planning at the National Technical University of Athens. She is someone who has also developed a profound feminist perspective. I recently had a chance to ask her some pointed questions on what is happening in Greece and on the impact for women.

Reggie Modlich: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is asking Greece to cut 150,000

public service jobs among many other austerity measures hitting working men and women. Would the jobs in question be primarily women's jobs?

Dina Vaiou: At first glance, in the past two years the effects of the crisis on employment have affected men more than women. There have been dramatic job losses in construction, manufacturing and commerce which are male dominated sectors of employment and which have led to an 8% increase in unemployment among males and to a 1.4% increase in female unemployment (November 2008 to November 2010). However, these developments are inscribed on what is already an unequal scene, that is, female unemployment figures are still significantly higher than male figures, 17% versus 13%, although the gap is smaller now than in 2008, 11.6% vs. 5.2%. (Recent data published by Maria Karamessini, Professor of Labour Economics, in an article in *Epochi*, March 6, 2011).

We had several decades of continuous improvement for women's educational achievements where half of women employed had a permanent and continuous job, and one in four women was employed in the public sector, one of the few sectors with job security and good working conditions for all. Moreover, women were and continue to be concentrated in the areas of public sector employment which have been hit most by this crisis such as health, education and social infrastructure. In this context, it can be said that the cuts in public sector jobs will impact women more than men. For example, 60% of women with higher edu-



“48 Hour General Strike — Let's take our lives into our own hands! Shut down Parliament! Everyone into the squares, everyone into the streets! Down with the government of the Troika [IMF, EU and the European Bank] and their political system! Down with deadlines and deals! Now we speak! Direct Democracy, now! The People's Decision-making Forum”

cation degrees work in the public sector compared to 40% of men with the same level of education. There are also concerns about how this will impact job opportunities for young women who are highly qualified.

At the other end of the job market there are also many female dominated work sectors such as cleaning, textile and clothing industry work which have been impacted by the collapse of employment rights, lack of job security, pressures from employers and there has been an explosion of “flexible” and informal employment where there are no set contracts, no social security, no health insurance or any kind of basic entitlements. This is particularly prominent in the sectors affecting migrant women as well as migrant men where there have been large job losses in construction, small manufacturing and where many migrant women remain the



"Let's stop focusing on bankruptcy; let's get together and discuss."

sole income earners of their respective households thereby being placed at greater risk.

RM: Are social services being cut? Such cuts tend to affect women in two ways: women are the majority of service employees and represent most recipients of services. Can you comment?

DV: Social services are indeed being severely cut, both, directly through school closures, the shrinking of health centers, the cuts in services for drug addicts and for the homeless, as well as indirectly through cuts in relevant subsidies such as reducing the number of citizens who are entitled to certain services and via personnel cuts etc. These cuts and the ensuing deterioration in education, healthcare, the care of children as well as the care for the elderly and the disabled has led to a dramatic increase of domestic and caring labour. The loss of income among middle income households also reduces the possibility and opportunities to employ care givers, a sector that has been dominated by migrant women since the early 1990s, and this creates added pressures for non

migrant women. Whether this labour will be performed by women alone or shared with men remains to be seen and negotiated but the crisis undermines the economic basis of male domination and at the same time it stops the process of improvement of women's position. In this sense any forecast of what will happen is premature.

RM: Are women who are forced out of the labour force replacing the immigrant women whom they have been able to hire to do service jobs such as care giving, cleaning etc.?

DV: Such a tendency has not yet been recorded.

RM: Is there a return to rural areas and islands from cities?

DV: Newspapers report individual stories indicating that until now such activity is marginal. I am not sure it could be called a "return" since it involves mainly young households and those who have grown up in cities but who decide to move to rural or island areas where they have families and perhaps family property. However, the deterioration of public services pri-

marily in education and health is a major disincentive.

RM: Is the anger and frustration by unemployed Greeks and immigrants being turned against women thus increasing violence against women?

DV: Probably, but this would need to be studied in some detail.

RM: How are low-paid immigrant and refugee women faring? Is anger and discrimination directed against them? Are they forced to return to their countries of origin?

DV: The general deterioration of incomes and working conditions affects migrant women who have been established in Greece for the past two decades. The majority of these women work in cleaning and care giving. Their job situation is becoming more precarious which is already a serious aspect of violence. Pensions have been cut so the elderly cannot afford to pay for a care giver. Salaries have been cut and many households cannot afford paid help at home.

Unemployment is very high among young people, 47 to 50% among 20-24 year old women. This means more family members are dependent on decreasing family incomes. All these features increase the precarious job and family situation of migrant women. Since 2008, there is clear evidence of ultra-right wing, fascist and xenophobic groups taking action against immigrants and often against Greek citizen groups that support immigrants. These acts affect mainly recent immigrants from Afghanistan and Pakistan, usually men and young boys, who are trapped in Greece by the Dublin II treaty. This treaty is increasingly being used to return refugees to the country of first entry into the Euro Zone. Greece with its many islands is the easiest and closest European country for most African and Asian refugees. These fascist groups receive huge media coverage and have managed to establish a kind of "territoriality" in some neighbourhoods of Athens. The media coverage of violent acts, for which they are never persecuted, obscures a wealth of experiences of co-existence and neighbourliness that has existed in Athens and all over the country but these experiences are not reported in the media.

Women do not appear to be targets of direct violence of this kind. But there are many victims of trafficking, a type of violence that goes beyond the current crisis and that relates more to the role of Greece as a port of entry for refugees

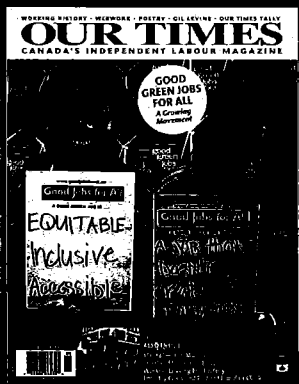
RM: What role do women play in the current protests? Is there an international solidarity forming across borders between women from other countries such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland?

DV: There are feminist meetings on Syntagma square. Feminist groups and individuals meet there regularly three days per week and debate and elaborate on women's participation in the protests. There are also protests about women's exclusion as well as about sexist practices and language among protesters. I do not know of any cross-border solidarity network.

RM: Thank you Dina for sharing your knowledge and views. We hope that women and men in Greece and elsewhere will organize to ensure that their hard earned living standards are not to be sacrificed at the altar of international financial machinations. ❧

Regula (Reggie) Modlich, MES, is a retired urban planner. She has been a pioneer in the feminist critique of urban planning and the built environment. As such she was a founder of Women Plan Toronto and its successor Toronto Women's City Alliance. For many years, she served as WEI's Managing Editor and Board member.

**Best Wishes from
to
our sister in the struggle.**



• SUBSCRIBE •

POEM by Jane Spavold Tims

Grim Women

1.
the crows burden the trees
gather their iron grits
criticize one another

they slip through gaps
in the matrix
and are gone

their wings are bruises
on the afternoon

their wind is deliberate
and desperate
hardened to the goal

2.
in black
grim women
watch one-another
hide the key
beneath the doormat
and glide
towards the town

Jane Spavold Tims lives in a rural area of New Brunswick and has worked for 33 years as a homemaker and mother, and as a biologist with the New Brunswick Department of the Environment, so the demands of women's work are familiar to her. She has published poetry in various literary magazines, including the *Fiddlehead*, *The Antigonish Review*, the *Pottersfield Portfolio*, and *Wheatstone*.

First Nations Women Rising

Aboriginal Women and Union Solidarity

By Janet Nicol

"I grew up experiencing foster care and residential schools. I also experienced the trauma of rape. The sexual abuse started when I was five. I was told I was an Indian and that somehow this was okay. I moved from home to home to home and never had medical attention or therapy. I am left-handed and this wasn't accepted in school — and I was Aboriginal to boot."

Sandra Lockhart, North West Territories
Public Service Alliance of Canada Aboriginal
Peoples Committee, Yellowknife

The Aboriginal Women's Community may not have the resources of other communities, but they have something to say," says Holly Page, equity and human rights officer for the British Columbia Government and Service Employees Union (BCGEU). "It has been very difficult for these women to get their messages out." Page says many Aboriginal people don't see unions as their allies either.

"There are myths and misconceptions about unions and debates within some communities about whether unions are beneficial. Unions need to do some relationship building." Page should know, she is both Aboriginal and on staff with a union representing 65,000 members across B.C. And what are the messages? A top concern is the continued violence against Aboriginal women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside; along the "Highway of Tears" in northern B.C. and in communities across Canada.

Aboriginal women have organized several "Walk 4 Justice" events and the February 14 Women's Memorial March.

"It's been grassroots and our union can help," says Page. They are demanding a government inquiry into the more than 580 Aboriginal women and girls who have gone missing or who have been murdered across the nation. In fact, Aboriginal women are five times more likely to be murdered than other women in Canada. "Unions aren't just about contracts" Page says. "They are a jump-start for social justice. Union members are community members and they care about their community."

"We can come together, regardless of background" says Lorene Oikawa, a Japanese-Canadian and BCGEU member. Oikawa has been with the union for 25 years and is now in her second term as Vice-president. Oikawa recalls her work on a committee to commemorate the historic Oppenheimer Park in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. "There are connections with the Japanese-Canadian, First Nations, and even the labour community," Oikawa says about the historic park "Freedom of speech was fought for by union members." Cherry trees (Sakura)

planted by first-generation Japanese-Canadians were at risk of being cut down by city officials. Oikawa and others protested and now the trees remain, unlike the Japanese-Canadians who were removed from the neighbourhood and sent to internment camps during the Second World War. "It was decided to move one of the cherry trees to another area of the park" Oikawa says. "A First Nations drumming group volunteered to sing a song to the spirit of the tree. Japanese and First Nations cultures identified with the uprooting of their cultures in this symbolic gesture," Oikawa says. Residential schooling resulted in a painful uprooting of First Nations culture and identity and Oikawa says the BCGEU supports the ongoing reconciliation work to bring healing to the community.

Poverty is another hardship for Aboriginal women, pushing them into high-risk situations, including homelessness and the sex trade industry. "Women of colour and Aboriginal women are not getting full pay" Oikawa adds. "Aboriginal women face gender and racial discrimination. It's a double battle." Statistics confirm this, as the average annual income for an Aboriginal woman is \$13,300, compared to \$18,200 for Aboriginal men and \$19,350 for non-Aboriginal women. "We support First Nations initiatives within our union and we encourage participation," Oikawa says. "The union provides a safe and welcoming place to express our concerns. It's about building trust, which is a process. We don't assume we know the answers and there is still more to do. The union is strengthened when all members are stronger."

"We are all sisters and an attack against one woman is an attack against us all," Oikawa believes. "We think we don't have power but when we get together, we do."



Aboriginal people have organized over the years to demand justice for murdered or missing Aboriginal women in Canada. This picture was taken during the Walk 4 Justice gathering on Parliament Hill in 2008.

"I would hear that the union is bad because it's an institution like the government. I knew nothing about it. When I became a nurse, I was placed into a union. I had no choice and I was angry. But my husband was excited that I was in the Public Service Alliance of Canada. He said they recognized who we are. But I had been traumatized. It takes years of recovery. I had shunned who I was. It is still painful to admit this. It is important to educate non-Aboriginal people and our own people. We must tread carefully because we are all born into a racist society. It is a systemic problem."

Sandra Lockhart

Darla Leard is Métis and a Canadian Labour Congress representative for the Prairie region. She was on the Saskatchewan Federation of Labour Aboriginal Committee in 2001 when it commis-

sioned the development of the course "Unionism on Turtle Island." The committee worked closely with designers Barb Thomas and D'Arcy Martin and the result was a ground-breaking course that is offered in a variety of versions at various union education programs across Canada.

"We break down assumptions by examining cultural values — both union values and Aboriginal — in order to experience another way of seeing, being and doing," says Leard. At the SFL's annual Prairie School for Union Women, a version of the course, called "Union Women on Turtle Island," is frequently one of the workshops offered. In this course, says Leard, "participants explore both the historical role of Aboriginal women and then more contemporary issues and, finally, aim to work towards strategies to build sisterhood." "There can be misconcep-

tions," Leard observes. "We discovered people who lived their whole lives in Saskatchewan and knew nothing about Aboriginal people. These workshops really started to break down barriers between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people."

Leard acknowledges that trade unions have not always been inclusive, but points out that it was oppressive government policies over generations that laid the groundwork. She also points out that many Aboriginal women have not been in the workforce very long, and so have not had a long history of union participation. "Aboriginal people were excluded from segments of society. But the demographics have changed. The faces of our unions are changing. There is more diversity," she says. "And, in fact, unions have a long history of fighting racism. Equality for all is fundamentally what unions believe in."



"Union members are community members, and they care about their community," says Holly Page, equity and human rights officer for the BCGEU. Violence against Aboriginal women in Canada is a growing concern.

Leard says the Aboriginal committee supports both the broader issues in society, such as health care, the long-gun registry and pensions, and also focuses on issues that have a direct impact on Aboriginal people, such as access to clean water on reserves, poverty, and violence against women.

"We need to ask what our collective responsibility is," says Leard. "How can we support Aboriginal women and the community? How can we bring the bigger issues to the local level?" Leard says significant changes have been made within unions to make Aboriginal issues part of their mandate. "After hundreds of years of systematic discrimination, it is our duty to help rectify these problems."

Women make up 54 per cent of the CLC membership, Leard points out, and Aboriginal women are the fastest growing segment. "Aboriginal women are getting

more education and are in greater numbers in the workforce," she says. "They are a force to be reckoned with."

"When I got involved in PSAC's North Aboriginal People's Committee I started to understand unions. A collective agreement is like a treaty. PSAC is supportive of treaties, land claims and employment equity. People have to understand that we are all treaty people. We are putting our nationhood at risk if this isn't acknowledged (by Canadians). Life doesn't start and stop at work — we are part of society. We have to support all people moving forward to achieve human rights. This is what got me involved in my union. I can educate within my union and in society."

Sandra Lockhart

When Gladys Radek and Bernie

Williams put on their walking shoes and left Vancouver in 2008, they had two stories to deliver to the Prime Minister. Radek's story was about the loss of her niece, who disappeared in 2005 along Highway 16 in northern B.C. (known as the Highway of Tears) and Williams' was of crimes against her mother and two sisters. Arriving in the capital city some months later along with supporters, they had gathered hundreds of stories from families of missing or murdered Aboriginal women across Canada.

Radek wants more effective social safety nets to assist women and children in poverty. She says Aboriginal women experience greater risks when they move to cities. "They fall between the cracks," she says. "They can lose their children; they can lose their lives."

The walk had 13 on-going participants, Radek says, with more women

joining and leaving the walk at different points along the Vancouver- Ottawa route. "It was a community-driven effort. Funds were used for gas, food and accommodation. The unions were great, providing campsites and hotel accommodations for us." These determined women gathered stories and pictures from the families of victims along the way and brought a significant amount of data to Parliament Hill.

And what was the Prime Minister's reaction? "It was a zero response," Radek says. But she also points out that other politicians, at all levels, have been supportive. At the root of the overall inaction, Radek believes, is racism and classism. "Aboriginal women are not loved and valued. We are vulnerable targets," she says, adding: "We are not afraid to use the word 'genocide.'" Radek is also critical of the government's withdrawal of funds to Sisters in Spirit, an important group building a database of missing and murdered Aboriginal women.

Radek is a believer in coalitions and building bridges. She points to the recent success of including Vancouver police in the planning process for the annual Valentine's Day vigil for the murdered and missing women of the Downtown Eastside. All these strategies build bridges between the community and the police, Radek says.

"My union recognizes who we are as Aboriginal women in Canada. We need allies - this is a key word for us. We want our allies to co-exist with us. Too many groups have been providers rather than allies. We know how to help ourselves. Advocacy keeps us centered as women. We keep our balance with men and are allies with them, too. Our work is for the whole. We don't break it up."

Sandra Lockhart

Ellen Woodsworth is on the outside looking in as a concerned non-Aboriginal woman. But, as a Vancouver city councillor with an extensive background as a social activist, she has listened keenly to First Nations concerns. Woodsworth believes municipal governments have a responsibility to support status and non-status First Nations people. "We can help

with job training programs, hiring policies and human rights initiatives," she says. "At the National Conference for Women Transforming Cities, we have discussed how Aboriginal women are targeted and discriminated against." Woodsworth supports the demand for an inquiry into missing and murdered women and says people must continue to show up for the annual February 14 vigil. "We, as a city, need to get police to support the concerns of Aboriginal women. We need to use our full resources to fund Aboriginal women's organizations and support affirmative action in hiring." Several reasons account for the vulnerability of Aboriginal women in Vancouver, Woodsworth says. "They are women, they are Aboriginal, they are poor, and they are separated from their communities. These women gravitate to the Downtown Eastside because there is already a community there. But, unfortunately, they are also preyed upon."

"Aboriginal women have been outspoken about the violence they experience. They have led the call and organized marches," Woodsworth adds. "They are the leadership." She says Aboriginal women have also taken the lead on issues of clean water, affordable housing and poverty. "If we pay attention to these issues, this will be better for all women. It is the responsibility of government and unions to listen and respond to what Aboriginal women are saying."

Positioned in Ottawa, the heart of political power in Canada, Patty Ducharme believes more women, including Aboriginal women, need to become involved in government. The Ottawa-based trade unionist has made many trips "to the hill" to protest on behalf of Aboriginal women's rights.

Ducharme also happens to be a Métis, and the national executive vice-president of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. "We have to make room for people to participate at all levels," Ducharme says. "From the number 2 seat in my union I still see people marginalizing people." She says it is to a union's detriment when members stereotype and don't see all a person can contribute. "Unions are one of the last democratic institutions left," Ducharme asserts. Ducharme urges unions and other

institutions to make space for Aboriginal women; to provide the tools and training; to become good listeners; and to respect the process. "PSAC is doing that," she says, "and so are some other unions."

Among PSAC initiatives are regionally based Aboriginal peoples' circles. In December 2010 members marched on Parliament Hill to support Sharon McIvor's fight to eliminate gender discrimination in the Indian Act. "We also participated in vigils conducted by Sisters in Spirit," Ducharme says. The union also pushes for employment equity practices, even within its own structure. "We have to be a good employer, too," Ducharme says, "We shouldn't accept the wage disparity for Aboriginal women, we all have to take responsibility. There is still a huge amount of work to be done." ❧

Janet Nicol is a Vancouver-based freelance writer, high school teacher, and a member of the British Columbia Teachers' Federation.

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 **Women &
Environments**
International

Women's Work, Health and the Environment in a Small-Scale Mining Site in Northeastern Ghana

By Elisha Renne, Niladri Basu, Erin Gager, Elizabeth Koomson, Bianca Lee, Shuriah Lee, Aimee Leeth, Douglas Manigault III, Mozhgon Rajae, Ayesha Sajjad, Monique Smith, and Allison Yee.

The Site Called Kejetia

Around 1995, registered concessions were granted to five small-scale mining groups (Hilson 2010) and the Kejetia mining site named for the prosperous market in Kumasi, Ghana was organized by eight men. According to one miner, the site had "around 15,000 people in 2000. There was a huge gold rush at that time, which has since reduced because you need equipment now to reach the gold." An official with the Minerals Commission estimates that the general population living in Kejetia in 2010 is about 2,500 people, although he conceded that "it's hard to tell how many people there are." People leave the site during the rainy season when mine pits flood making it impossible to work. However, during the dry season, work at the site attracts many women.

Kejetia has come to resemble a town with small houses, food shops, beer parlours, a butcher's shop, stalls selling packaged foodstuffs, everyday amenities, and a range of clothing and electronic items. The area is dominated by gold mining—there are places where deep mines have been dug that are surrounded by heavy equipment, pumps, diesel electric generators, and drilling equipment. Areas around a nearby stream have been used for surface gold mining. Throughout the site, there are abandoned pits—some partially filled in, hoses carrying water from deep wells to the surface, and obsolete equipment.

The Kejetia mining site was established on unpopulated and undeveloped savannah, and basic infrastructure such as wells, roads, electricity, and sanitation continue to be non-existent. After 15

In the small-scale gold mining community of Kejetia, in the Talensi-Nabdam District of the Upper East Region in northeastern Ghana, women are engaged in mining-related work, small-scale commercial enterprises and reproductive activities. Women experience the health and environmental consequences of living in a small-scale mining site, particularly exposure to mercury, dust, physical hazards, infectious disease, and contaminated water. In particular, this study finds that women living and working in Kejetia experience high rates of miscarriages which may be linked to environmental exposure to mercury.

years, there are still no government services, although a small primary school has been built. The stream is the primary source of water for cooking, bathing and washing, although petty traders sell small plastic pouches of drinking water brought to the site by taxi. Housing consists of mud-block structures in various states of construction and repair, and some enclosed within large walled compounds. Electricity is only available in a few compounds whose owners have purchased generators. The impermanence of Kejetia, which is dependent on the vagaries of gold mining and gold prices, has discouraged compound owners from building more permanent sanitation facilities such as pit latrines; thus "free range" open defecation at the site boundaries is commonplace.

Women Living at the Mining Site

In May-June 2010, a study of women's

work and health was conducted at Kejetia, focusing specifically on exposure to mercury as a consequence of working and living in a gold mining site. At that time, 60 women were interviewed concerning a range of topics, including work, education, reproductive histories, health, and diet. Women's education levels ranged from no education to completion of secondary schooling, although the majority of women (42%) had no education. Many of the surveyed women living at the site have come from the immediate area, with 75% identifying themselves as Talensi, the main ethnic group in Talensi-Nabdam District. Some women resided in compounds with as many as 14 residents, although most lived in households with three to ten people; two women lived by themselves.

Of the 60 women surveyed, 50 had been pregnant or had given birth. Of these women, 56% had one or more children liv-



Women may use masks while shanking [sifting] powdered rock-gold mixture to protect themselves for dust-related illnesses, Kejetia mining site, June 2010.

ing with them at the site suggesting that childcare was an important part of the work day. While some older children are engaged in mining work, other children attend a private elementary school nearby. Most of the children at Kejetia were born outside of the site. Of the 50 women who have given birth (or are pregnant), all but two have attended at least one antenatal session, although the lack of public transportation and condition of the roads make these trips a time-consuming and arduous undertaking. Yet having children is extremely important for these women and, as will be seen, much of their productive work at the Kejetia site is similar to the types of work they do in raising their families.

Women's Work at the Mining Site

While many women at the site participate in some aspects of gold mining, others work as food purveyors, *pito* (sorghum beer) brewers and sellers, shea nut butter producers, petty traders, and bath house operators. Some also have infants and small children with them at the mining site and thus are involved in processes associated with social reproduction: fertility, childbirth, and childcare.

Almost half of the women at Kejetia are

engaged in food preparation and sales, providing meals for male miners working at the site, particularly for younger or unaccompanied men. One woman, Hawa, makes *red-red*, a popular dish from southern Ghana made of beans and fried plantains. Other women, such as Gifty and Agnes, sell *tubani* which is made from ground beans steamed in folded banana leaf packets. One elderly woman sells mangoes which she purchased in Bolgatanga, a nearby town. Similarly, other women have small stalls where they engage in petty trade, selling canned and packaged food-stuffs, water, soft drinks, and utensils.

Stella, a Guransi woman, owns several buildings which she uses for brewing and selling *pito*. She employs several women, some of whom bring buckets of water from the stream, while others tend to fires heating large pots of boiling beer in the brewing house (Figure 1 – High levels of arsenic were found in *pito* samples taken in June 2010 compared with WHO Drinking Water Standards [Mozhgon Rajae, Analysis; PowerPoint Presentation, 24 September 2010]). In addition, 2010 data for a range of water sources at the site indicated the presence of several toxic metals in the local water supply [Basu et

al. 2011]). After boiling for several hours, women strain the beer through baskets and the remaining sorghum flour mixture is dried and sold as animal fodder. Other women purchase prepared *pito* and sell it at informal beer parlours in other parts of the site.

A few women also combine these trades with hairdressing and sewing. For example, Lucy is a single mother who owns and operates the sole hand-powered sewing machine in Kejetia. She frequently travels to Bolgatanga for cloth to mend and create new garments for sale. Lucy also sells water pouches to miners from a small cooler.

Ayepoka, an older Guransi woman, works at the site producing shea nut butter. Early in the morning, she gathers fallen shea nuts. After removing the edible outer skin, the seeds are cooked, dried and pounded to remove the hull, revealing the inner nut (Figure 2). After heating, it may be ground into butter, using a grinding stone. If Ayepoka harvests many nuts, she may send them to her husband where he will have them ground by machine and sold in Bolgatanga. Other women also grind nuts and sell shea butter at stalls at the mining site. This labour-intensive process of collecting, hammering, grinding, washing, and heating are paralleled in the artisanal production of gold at Kejetia.

Women's Mining Work

Of the 60 women surveyed at the site, slightly more than half were engaged in various aspects of gold mining. By far, the most common form of work was known as "shanking the sand" (Figure 3), which refers to sifting finely ground stone (*kon zuom*) that contain traces of gold in preparation for the amalgamation process. This processing of gold-bearing rock consists of several steps. First, rocks are excavated from deep mine shafts by blasting and removed to the surface by hand — solely by men. Men and some women then crush the rocks using grinding machines or by hand, after which smaller rocks are ground into a fine powder for the shanking women to sieve. These steps are necessary so that when mixed with water, the gold easily combines with liquid mercury added to this mixture. The resulting gold-



Woman adjusting fire for brewing pito, Kejetia mining site, June 2010.

mercury amalgam is then heated, the mercury vaporizes, and the remaining gold is washed, refined and sold. Women sift the powdered stone-gold mixture for men who are the main users of mercury.

Payment for these women's work was not regulated or formalized. As compensation for their labour, women either received broken pieces of rock from secondary extraction or rocks that have been milled into powder, with very little gold left in them. According to one woman, "men only give what they are ready to offer." Women seemed powerless to contest these payments.

Three of the women surveyed were

involved directly in amalgamation work, one as someone who burned the amalgam and two others who described themselves as supervisors or buyers, both of whom, by virtue of burning or buying, owned the resulting gold. For example, Christine and her husband have been prosperous members of the Kejetia community for 15 years as supervisors of a group of gold workers. Within a private walled compound, she supervises the processing of large rocks into fine powder and provides workers with equipment and food. She is solely responsible for this operation, which includes the burning of mercury amalgam from which pure gold is produced.

Nine other women involved in shanking and grinding work also mentioned "handling amalgam" which meant that they worked with the liquid mercury-gold mixture. While handling mercury is considered to be less of a threat to health than breathing inorganic mercury vapor or ingesting food such as fish which are contaminated with organic mercury through bioaccumulation, it belies the problem of mercury contamination. This appears to affect women's reproductive health, mainly through problems during pregnancy.

Women's Work and Health Problems at Kejetia

Of the 50 participants who had pregnancies or had given birth, 16 reported experiencing miscarriages. Organic mercury ingested from fish by pregnant women can cross into the placenta, which may affect fetal neural development and can also lead to miscarriage (Appleton et al. 2005), although extended breathing of mercury vapor may also exacerbate problems with women's pregnancies. Ten of these women were involved in gold mining and five reported handling amalgam. This includes one woman who burned amalgam and the two women buyer-supervisors.

Six other women in Kejetia also experienced miscarriages, which may be the result of more general environmental hazards associated with gold mining, namely eating fish obtained near the mining site that is mercury-contaminated, chronic inhalation of dust and particulate matter, or drinking water that may contain multiple toxic elements. The remarks of one gold miner support the importance of considering mercury-contaminated fish when considering the rates of miscarriage among women surveyed in this community:

There is a stream that floods after heavy rain that drains from the White Volta, we call the area "the sea." When the water in the area is high and fish have been flushed down, we used nets to catch fish, which include tilapia, mudfish, and sardines. When the fish are first flushed downstream, they are alright to eat.

But the fish that remain for several weeks, they are contaminated with mercury and are not safe to eat — although



Woman removing outer shells of shea nuts using a wooden tool known as a sampan, part of the process of shea nut butter production. Bath house stalls may be seen in the background. Women provide water for bathing and manage bath houses of which there are two in the Kejetia mining site, June 2010.

many people don't mind and just eat the fish. One man ate a lot of fish from this place; after a while he became very sick and lost control of his limbs so we sent him back to his village.

The source of this mercury contamination at "the sea" is this. Miners sometimes come to the edge of "the sea" to look at the sand, to look for stones with gold (Figure 4). If they find small stones or sand with gold, they will test it, mixing it with mercury to check the gold content. This mercury-gold amalgam is burnt there, so that any mercury drops or liquid may enter the stream edge and accumulate there, [thus entering the food chain].

Hair samples taken from surveyed women showed mercury levels which were consistently higher among women who reported miscarriages, as compared with other survey women living at the site who were also pregnant. While the survey data is not sufficiently detailed to indicate precisely how long women had been at the site prior to having miscarried (ten of the women reported having miscarriages in the past three years) nor exactly what their fish consumption patterns were, it does suggest linkages between the mer-

cury contamination and women's reproductive health.

Conclusion

The Naa's [Chief's] son told us that one day some men were burning gold [amalgam], the smoke was going one way so they adjusted the fire so that the smoke went against a [cool] wall. In the process of doing this, the mercury condensed as it hit the wall and they could see it. So the chief's son said it was true, that the mercury was a problem just as those coming to them said, "that it's in the smoke and it can come down on us, on our fields, and food."

Researchers have noted that those involved in small-scale gold mining may not be aware of the significant health consequences of working and living in small scale gold mining communities. Yet this chief's observation about mercury and its effects on local fields and streams, as well as the miner's observation about the physical disorder of the man who frequently ate fish suggest that people in the Kejetia community are aware, to some extent, of the hazards of mercury use in small-scale gold mining. Indeed, both women and men at Kejetia were anxious to have hair and urine sample taken so that they might know whether they have unsafe amounts of mercury in their bodies. However, it is unclear whether women are aware of the problems of eating mercury-contaminated fish or consuming alcoholic drinks such as *pito* which was found to have high levels of arsenic during pregnancy. For women at the Kejetia site, the com-

plex linkages between gold mining work, unpaid domestic labour, inadequate health care, and environmental degradation, appear to have had consequences for their pregnancies. ❧

This study grew out of an earlier work in 2009 (described by Paruchuri et al. 2010) by faculty and students from the University of Michigan.

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Born to Log

legend of broken treaties
wounded trees
wounded land
chaka chaka
lumberjack(al) iron paws
corporate armie(ies)
wages war on sacred territory

keepers of the faith
lay their bodies on the line
levity's breath steals
across lines
a rueful landscape of plunder
sylphs rustle with leaves

an ex-hippie sprinkles her blessings
obn the land and apologizes;
"mother earth, Trees... forgive us
I am so sorry"

the government proclaims;
"With our laws and our armies
we must defend the logging companies right
to destroy everything in sight
they've paid for it
and they create jobs jobs jobs?"

a protestor prays aloud
dragged away chaka chaka
"For all the things on earth
that cannot speak
cannot defend their lives
the wild ones
the wolves, trees, insects
for all the tiny things
orgisms unknown..."
and a logger yells;
"get them away... I have to do my job
like I do everyday
this is my work my livelihood"
as if to say ...
born to log

the old woman naturalist amzed
"What a destiny ?
to chop down virgin forests"
saw his heart
chain saw chaka chaka

and the poets chant;
"jobs won't solve all our problems
we should hug old grandma grandpa trees
not log them"

From **Women Do This Every Day**, Women's Press, 1993

Lillian Allen is a writer, pioneering Dub poet, activist, cultural strategist and Creative Writing Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. Her albums of dub poetry laced with reggae rhythms and world beats, **Revolutionary Tea Party** and **Conditions Critical** both won Juno awards in Canada. Her poetry is also published in book form; **Women Do this Every Day**, and **Psychic Unrest**.

WE Research

Building Visibility

Challenges and Opportunities Facing Women Construction Workers in Contemporary India

By Bipasha Baruah

Women make up more than half of the construction labour force in India. Bipasha Baruah, in collaboration with the Self-Employed Women's Association, investigates the opportunities and constraints faced by women in construction.

The construction industry is one of the fastest growing sectors in India with an annual growth rate of 10% (Construction Industry Development Council 2000). It is the second largest sector generating employment after agriculture. It is estimated to employ about 30 million Indians, of whom 51% are women. The construction sector contributes to about 5% of the country's GDP and about 8% of the country's capital formation.

However, unlike other industries, where women are increasingly employed in semi-skilled and skilled occupations, they are engaged almost exclusively as casual manual labourers in the Indian construction industry. They are mostly head-load workers, who carry bricks, cement, sand and water from one place to another. Alternately, they clean, dig, mix mortar or break stones. Groups of women carrying loads of bricks that weigh up to 35 or 40 kilograms on their heads are a common sight on construction sites in India. Very rarely do women in India gain access to opportunities to acquire skills in more lucrative, but predominantly male-dominated trades such as carpentry, masonry, plumbing and electrician training.

The Self-Employed Women's Association (SEWA) is a trade union founded in 1972 in the western state of Gujarat to organize women in the informal sector for better working conditions and social secu-

rity provisions. Several surveys were conducted in collaboration with SEWA to understand the priorities and needs of women engaged in construction work in the city of Ahmedabad. SEWA carried out two surveys of 250 individuals in 1998 and 2003. Another survey of 193 female construction workers was carried out in 2007 to assess the impacts of the construction training programmes implemented by the SEWA Mahila Housing Trust (MHT) since 2003.

Women in the Indian Construction Industry

Women's exclusion from — or marginalization within — skilled construction trades can be viewed as a global phenomenon. It presents special challenges for women in countries experiencing rapid integration with the global economy, accompanied by technological shifts in construction methods. Depending on the type of construction activity, economic liberalization and mechanization are estimated to have reduced the overall deployment of manual labour anywhere from one-fifteenth to one-fiftieth of earlier numbers in India. The mechanization of the Indian construction industry is expected to lead to a reduction in employment of 1.5 million — mostly unskilled — workers every year (Jhabvala and Kanbur 2002).

While the demand for unskilled labour

is dwindling, the demand for skilled construction workers is growing dramatically. This is especially true in urban India with its significantly higher demand for specifically skilled labour over unskilled or even generally educated labour. In such an environment, unskilled manual workers in general, and women in particular, will increasingly be eliminated from construction sites.

Organizing Women Construction Workers in Ahmedabad

With a population of over 5 million in 2006, Ahmedabad is the largest city in the western state of Gujarat and the seventh largest metropolis in India. Historically, the city's economy was almost solely based on the cotton textile industry which collapsed in the mid-1990s. Large numbers of men and women displaced from the textile mills entered the construction sector as unskilled and semi-skilled labourers. Construction workers are now the largest group of manual labourers in Ahmedabad. In 2000, there were an estimated 500,000 women engaged in the construction industry in the state of Gujarat with approximately 50,000 based in Ahmedabad.

The membership of SEWA has grown dramatically over the decades. By 1995, it had 55,000 members in Ahmedabad alone, making it the city's largest union (SEWA 1995). SEWA started organizing construction workers into a union of their own in 1996. By 2006, 11,230 construction workers in Ahmedabad were SEWA members.

SEWA's organizing, mobilizing and advocacy efforts have led to a few noteworthy policy changes at the state level,



It is not only "Men at Work".

including issuing of identification cards that entitle female construction workers to a small maternity benefit, advocating for a tax on the construction industry aimed at creating a welfare fund for construction workers, and the SEWA Insurance Cooperative started a special Accident Insurance Scheme for construction workers in 2002. SEWA has also opened 25 day care centers at construction sites or near the homes of workers.

However, despite these efforts, working conditions in the construction sector have continued to deteriorate. A major earthquake hit Gujarat in January 2001 resulting in the government imposing stricter laws and zoning regulations on the industry. The more local economic recession following the earthquake rendered construction work-

ers more vulnerable to poor working conditions and underemployment.

One of SEWA's major accomplishments is training and certifying women in cutting-edge construction skills and connecting them with sustainable employment opportunities. The SEWA Mahila Housing Trust (MHT) was established as a sister organization in 1994 to meet the housing and infrastructure-related needs of poor women in the informal sector.

The Karmika School for Construction Workers

MHT established the Karmika School for Construction Workers in Ahmedabad in 2003 based on one of the strongest recommendations that emerged from both the 1998 and 2003 surveys: the need to

upgrade, diversify and certify the skills of women in new technologies and emerging standards in the construction industry. Closely related were recommendations to provide women with on-the-job training at construction sites, the need to link women to large-scale employment opportunities in the public and private sector, and the need for state- and national-level policies that enable women to translate their training and skills into sustainable employment opportunities.

By 2007, Karmika was equipped to provide a specialized comprehensive three month training module in the following trades: masonry; painting; plastering; tiling; plumbing; electric wiring; carpentry; welding; roller operation; excavation operation; rubble masonry; bar bend-



Women at work.

ing and lab technician training. MHT's training modules also include training in functional literacy skills and life skills such as conflict resolution, bargaining and negotiation with contractors and other employers.

MHT partnered with the Construction Industry Development Council to undertake testing and certification so that workers receive certification in their trades. MHT has also forged linkages with private-sector building firms in the construction industry. When these firms first heard about the Karmika School, they approached MHT to request a steady stream of trained and trainable construction workers for their projects. Recruiting groups of Karmika graduates for on-the-job training and employment on construction sites served the dual purpose of fulfilling the builders' needs for a sustainable supply of skilled labour and MHT's commitment to link skilled women to employment opportunities.

Opportunities and Constraints Faced by Women Construction Workers

SEWA Academy (the Research and Documentation Unit of SEWA) conducted a survey in 1998 to learn more about the opportunities and constraints faced by

women in the construction industry. A total of 250 questionnaires were administered randomly to 125 men and 125 women at 50 kadiyanakas in different areas in Ahmedabad. Kadiyanakas are sites where workers assemble in the morning to be recruited by contractors and the vast majority of casual construction labour is hired from these sites in the state of Gujarat.

Lack of Specialized Skills and/or Opportunities to Perform Skilled Work

Ninety two percent of the women surveyed identified themselves as being "unskilled" although a small number were engaged in semi-skilled tasks. While 68% of women served as manual head-loaders on construction sites, only 37% of men were engaged in load carrying. The majority of men were involved in semi-skilled or skilled work such as masonry and tiling. A nominal 10% of women were employed as semi-skilled labourers, usually assisting male masons in tasks such as plastering or concrete mixing. Despite performing semi-skilled tasks, such women were often paid the same wages as unskilled female workers.

Ninety three percent of the women did

not have training in construction work, but had learned on the job. However, 64% of women and 60% of men mentioned that they were from families that were traditionally employed in construction. Some had become construction workers after migrating to the city from rural areas while the rest took up construction work after losing other employment opportunities.

Lower Wages and Lack of Employment Security

At Rs. 128 (US\$3.20) per day, the average male wage for manual labour was more than twice that of the average female wage of Rs. 60 (US\$1.50). Ninety eight percent of men surveyed and 90% of women said they were casual labourers who were hired by contractors on a daily basis from the kadiyanakas. The remaining 2% of men and 10% of women indicated that while they were working as casual labourers at the time of the survey, they had occasionally secured longer-term contracts.

Both men and women stressed the lack of job security. Only 12% of the women had heard of unions and 95% expressed their willingness to join SEWA once they were told about the organization. Eighty five percent of women surveyed wanted more regular work and other favourable changes in their working conditions.

Injuries and Lack of Basic Amenities

The incidence of physical injuries on the worksite was much higher for women than for men. Of the men surveyed, 13% had sustained physical injuries on the work site as opposed to 51% of women. Also, a higher percentage of women than men said that they had physical problems associated with their work such as chronic backache.

While 48% of male workers also complained about the lack of basic amenities other than drinking water on the construction site, 55% of surveyed women specifically mentioned being inconvenienced by the absence of both child care provisions and toilet facilities. Provision of accident insurance, basic sanitation and first aid facilities were not provided at the majority of construction sites.

Shifting Roles for Women Construction Workers

In 2003, SEWA Academy carried out a repeat survey, based on a random sample of 125 male and 125 female workers at 50 kadiyanakas in Ahmedabad. Five years later, the number of workers gathering each day at the kadiyanakas had increased dramatically. Whereas around 200 workers used to assemble at the two largest kadiyanakas in 1998, anywhere from 500 to 1,000 workers assembled every day in 2003.

Shift in Caste Composition

In the 1998 survey, 100% of the construction workers were from the Scheduled Castes (SC) and Scheduled Tribes (ST), Indian communities that are explicitly recognized by the Constitution of India as requiring special support to overcome poverty resulting from centuries of discrimination by mainstream Hindu society. In the 2003 survey, 85% were from SC/ST communities and 15% were from Upper or Forward Castes. Although the survey did not specifically ask female respondents why they entered the construction sector, it is unlikely that Upper Caste women may also have been forced to enter the paid labour force for the first time due to unmet household needs resulting from the decline or loss of male breadwinner wages.

Increased Preference for Skilled Workers

The proportion of skilled workers on the construction site increased considerably from 24% to 39% in the years between 1998 and 2003. Workers with multiple skills were in very high demand in the 2003 survey.

Changes in Earnings

Depending on the type of work, the wages for skilled labour — masonry, carpentry, plastering, cementing, tiling, electrical wiring, plumbing, and painting — had increased in real terms anywhere from 30-50% between 1998 and 2003. However, the earnings of unskilled workers — those who prepare and carry bricks, cement, sand and other building materials

— remained the same or decreased slightly. In 2003, skilled construction workers earned between Rs.100 (US\$2.50) and Rs.150 (US\$3.75) per day while unskilled workers earned an average of Rs.50 (US\$1.25) per day.

Decline in Employment Opportunities Overall

Female workers got an average of 16 days of work per month in 1998 versus 11 days in 2003. Sixty one percent blamed the decline in employment opportunities on the contractors' preference for migrant workers from poorer states, who worked for lower wages and often lived on the construction site. Another 34% blamed the decline on the mechanization of the construction industry. Digging and lifting machines have replaced manual labour while other equipment has displaced skilled workers who

I used to be the first mason to show up on the construction site. In the beginning, the contractors simply refused to hire women. My husband and sons were not very supportive when I was doing the training so in addition to not being able to bring home any money, I had to put up with their taunts.

used to do plastering and related tasks. A significantly smaller 6% of workers noted a general decline in the construction industry due to price hikes, water shortages, lack of funds and the general post-earthquake economic slump.

Impacts of Training for Women Construction Workers

MHT had trained a total of over 5,000 people in the state of Gujarat by 2007. A survey was conducted in 2007 of 193 trained women in the Karmika programme in Ahmedabad.

More working days: Following completion of training, 40% of women reported receiving 21 to 30 days of work per month while only 26% indicated receiving the same amount of work before training.

Higher incomes: Eighty percent of trained women reported higher incomes after training. While only 20% of the women had received Rs.70 (US\$1.75) to

Rs.100 (US\$2.50) before training, 70% of the women surveyed did so after training. The incomes of trained women rose by between Rs.10 (US\$0.25) and Rs.50 (US\$1.25) per day.

More women employed as masons: All the women surveyed had previously worked as unskilled labourers. After training, 30% worked as helpers to masons and 20% worked as masons. Four of the women surveyed had become independent contractors.

Ability to do skilled work and higher confidence levels: Many women reported higher confidence levels in doing skilled construction work. After training 45% reported being able to do any type of construction work. Eighteen percent were able to produce better finishing effects and 25% were able to do plastering and masonry. Women also reported experienc-

ing higher status within their families and better bargaining skills.

Contractor behaviour: Many women spoke of experiencing sexual harassment and rude behavior by contractors. Women usually go in groups to look for work to avoid sexual harassment. Most women mentioned staying at home or looking for other work if no one could accompany them to the kadiyanaka. After training, 85% of women reported that contractors were quite respectful towards them. Only 7% of the trained women reported sexual and verbal abuse as compared to 24% before training.

It may be overly simplistic to suggest that contractors are less likely to harass trained and certified women. However, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a combination of skills training and certification as well as training in conflict resolution, negotiation and assertiveness render women less vulnerable to sexual harassment on construction sites.



Contemplation and safety.

Constraints faced by the Karmika programme

Through its continued efforts to train construction workers since 1999 — and especially with the establishment of the Karmika School for Construction Workers in 2003 — MHT has succeeded in planning, developing and implementing an explicitly pro-women training programme that few other NGOs can lay claim to. Although MHT has enjoyed considerable successes, it has also faced significant constraints at the local, state and national level.

First, the Karmika programme provides a daily stipend to its trainees. As a result of an interest in earning a stipend, many women will bring their daughters for training. However, post-training they have no intention of allowing their daughters to actually pursue construction work

as a vocation.

Second, despite its proven competence in training women and the success trained women have enjoyed in finding quality employment opportunities, MHT has struggled to find sustained funding for the Karmika School. Entrenched prejudices against women in non-traditional occupations may be partly to blame.

Third, MHT needs more technical and financial support to purchase new and advanced machinery for performing different tasks in construction. Maintaining services like mobile vans, cranes, road rollers, bulldozers and other heavy equipment is expensive and requires, at least initially, strong financial backing. Other challenges like teaching women to drive heavy vehicles — with all their associated socio-cultural impediments — would also

have to be addressed.

Fourth, despite a promising start with private builders, MHT's success in putting skilled women to work on large infrastructure projects is very limited. While women have gained income and considerable experience by working on local projects, the larger and more lucrative infrastructure projects such as highways, freeways and metro systems remain virtually untouched.

Fifth, there are significant opportunities to scale up training programmes within and outside Gujarat. Beyond its ability to replicate similar training programmes in other parts of India, there is a tremendous role that MHT — with all its collective in-house experience — can play in building the capacity of other NGOs interested in embarking upon similar activities.

The Challenge of Persistent Prejudice Against Women

There is certainly reason for guarded optimism that women will be able to translate their training into sustainable employment opportunities. However, it is also necessary to exercise caution in this regard. Much evidence suggests that it is easier for women to acquire the skills than to subsequently find employment as skilled workers as women face tremendous social and cultural barriers in entering the traditionally 'macho' construction industry. Despite MHT's efforts in training and advocacy, women construction workers face challenges including ridicule from family and friends, pervasive gender discriminatory practices within the construction industry, and their own diffident attitudes and lack of confidence.

The private sector builders that sought to collaborate with MHT repeatedly demanded male workers because they were convinced that women could not build as efficiently as men. Most have agreed to accept women into the on-the-job training programmes only because of the current shortages in skilled labour in the construction sector. MHT had to convince the builders to accept a 30% to 70% female-to-male ratio of trained workers for their construction sites. MHT Coordinator, Bijal Bhatt, stresses that if a different organization could provide a similar number of skilled men to the builders, their entrenched prejudices would no doubt motivate them to select skilled male workers over female Karmika graduates.

I used to be the first mason to show up on the construction site. In the beginning, the contractors simply refused to hire women. My husband and sons were not very supportive when I was doing the training so in addition to not being able to bring home any money, I had to put up with their taunts. I went from construction site to construction site looking for work. Finally, I offered to work for free for one contractor. I told him that he didn't have to pay me if he didn't like my work. He made me work for three weeks before offering to pay me half of what he paid the men even though my work was

cleaner and more efficient from the beginning. Also, I didn't take frequent chai [tea], bidi [hand-rolled Indian cigarette] and gup-shup [gossip or banter] breaks like the men. I worked for that contractor for almost a year at half of what he paid the men. It took many years of perseverance before I could get a higher wage. I still don't earn as much as male masons but it is more than I earned from vending vegetables. My husband and sons have more respect for me. I like to joke to my friends that these days I am a mistry [mason] and my husband does the istry [ironing clothes].

Conclusion

A small number of women in the construction industry in India are breaking down some entrenched social and cultural barriers, albeit largely due to serendipitous and unpredictable changes in the national and global economy. Whether Indian women will be able to build incrementally in the future upon the gains they have made will probably depend on a number of factors. These include continued support from NGOs and other civil society organizations, providing access to training and certification to larger numbers of women across the country, and wider policy intervention at the state and national levels to ensure that women are not easily rendered jobless by changes in the economic climate of the country.

Within the construction industry, employment discrimination based on gender is pervasive but complex. Experiences narrated by women attempting to enter previously male-dominated occupations strongly suggest that gendered discrimination practices and gender-based wage differentials cannot be overcome by simply improving education and training for women. This is especially true since women frequently need to "prove" themselves to be as capable as men and are easily prevented from entering certain types of employment, usually on the grounds of physical weakness, inability to produce at the same rate as men, moral danger, or lack of facilities for women workers. To ensure that women are able to translate their training into equal

employment opportunities with men, it is imperative that organizations like SEWA demand affirmative action policy responses from central and state governments that make it mandatory for public and private sector builders to give preference to trained women if they are available.

Legal interventions and policy reforms do little or nothing to challenge the underlying social norms and customs that inhibit women's participation in the construction industry. Education and consciousness-raising initiatives about women's equal entitlements to quality employment are just as crucial as policy reforms and state actions that protect women's interests and facilitate their agency. ❧

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Emotion Work Among Recent Chinese Immigrants to Canada

By Lichun Willa Liu

Fang is a mother with a college-age daughter. During the first few months in Canada, Fang's daughter felt very lonely, and insisted on going back to China. Although she herself did not have any friends and felt isolated and extremely stressed due to the difficulty of finding a job, Fang attended to her daughter's emotional needs by encouraging her to work hard at her studies, and by discussing with her the job prospects in Canada, and the benefits of getting a Canadian college education. Through long conversations and consistent reassurance, Fang gradually cheered her daughter up.

Emotion work is embedded in many household activities such as listening to someone else's problems or worries, giving advice or guidance, showing warmth and appreciation, and helping one's partner by sharing housework and childcare (Strazdins & Broom, 2004). Emotion work acts as the "glue" that holds families together (DeVault, 1999), and helps build intimacy and closeness between partners and between parents and children (Seery & Crowley, 2000).

Discussions about housework tend to focus on instrumental tasks such as cooking, cleaning and care giving. However, emotion work is another important facet in family life. Though emotion work can be seen as stemming from the concept of conventional "love", it differs in that it tends to include a level of "extra" or "optional" acts of affection not deemed necessary but seen as beneficial. This extra/optional level of affection is classified as "work" because it requires the administrators, whom in this article are the women of the household, to go beyond what they understood as their traditional roles as mothers, daughters and wives in order to keep their households at a functioning level.

I interviewed 20 recent immigrants from Mainland China about emotion work, and found that it is an indispensable part of household work, as many household tasks involve providing emotional care and support and managing negative emotions among family members.

Emotional Support for Children

Many Chinese parents with teenage children reported providing emotional support for their children to reduce their stress in adjusting to a new culture and school system. For example, Hua, a woman in her mid-40s, said she helped her teenage daughter in overcoming language barriers. "When we first arrived in Canada, my daughter couldn't understand English. She just cried. So I talked to her and spent a lot of time helping her with her school work."

Emotion work involves attending to both the physical and emotional needs of others. However, emotion work is different from childcare in that emotion work focuses on the "expressive" aspects of childrearing, whereas childcare pays more attention to the "instrumental" tasks.

Rong, a mother with a 14-year-old son, talked about how she helped her son adjust to the cultural shock he experienced during the initial stage of immigration to Canada. Rong was called to school one day and was advised by the teacher to take her son to see a psychiatrist because he was too quiet. As a mother and a paediatrician prior to immigration, Rong knew that the problem with her son was more cultural than psychological. "In China, when the teacher talks, students just listen. In China, my son was often criticized for being overactive in his class, but here in Canada, he is seen as too quiet, not talking or participating in class activities." To help her son adapt to the new culture, Rong adopted a cat for her son, then she hired a tutor to help him with his French, and later enrolled the

whole family in a badminton club. Gradually her son became more active, regained his confidence, and improved his school performance remarkably.

Women in this study are predominantly responsible for providing emotional support and care for their children. Men focus more on the instrumental tasks such as helping their children with their school work rather than on the affective dimension of childrearing found in emotion work. Immigrant mothers discussed the challenges and conflicts they encountered with parenting in a Canadian context, especially the compromises they made on a number of issues concerning their children's studies, making friends, and dating, whereas the Chinese fathers rarely mentioned any issues of conflict in their childrearing and parenting practices.

Emotional Care for the Elderly

Chinese culture's emphasis on filial piety (xiao) requires that adult children support their aging parents, both physically and financially. However, due to the restrictions of Canadian immigration policies, all the Chinese immigrants I talked to came to Canada only with their nuclear families, leaving their elderly parents in their home country. Largely due to the absence of extended families in Canada, eldercare for the recent Chinese immigrants is more emotional than physical, and usually conducted through long-distance telephone calls.

Mei's story well illustrates this point. During the three years prior to the interview, Mei said that she had travelled back to China several times, first to take care of her seriously ill mother, and later her father who had lung cancer. Yet, a significant amount of her eldercare responsibilities were conducted "virtually," through regular telephone calls. She says, "I call my brother regularly and ask him about my father's condition and make arrangements for his surgeries, check on the med-

icines they use on him and the treatment they give him. I flew back immediately whenever I learned that his condition was getting worse."

For Mei, transnational elderly care involved physical, mental and emotional efforts. Her emotion work was embedded and interwoven with housework and care work, as part of her weekly routine phone calls to China also included instructions to the live-in caregiver on the housework tasks to be completed during that week.

Far away from home, most of the new immigrants viewed emotion care for their elderly family members as the only way to fulfill their filial piety in a transnational context. Many talked about calling their parents regularly, usually once a week, to check on their health and wellbeing. Ying, a woman in her mid-40s and a medical doctor before immigration, talked about calling China every week to speak with her mother who had heart disease. "In China,

For Mei, transnational elderly care involved physical, mental and emotional efforts. Her emotion work was embedded and interwoven with housework and care work, as part of her weekly routine phone calls to China also included instructions to the live-in caregiver on the housework tasks to be completed during that week.

I took (physical) care of my mother. But here I can't. But I am worried about her. At the moment, my niece is looking after my mother. If my mother has some problem, I will call back home right away."

Ming, a man in his late 30s, described how he provided emotional support for his elderly father, "my father is old and is now living with my sister in Shanghai. He is old and has got some mental illness. Every time I call, I will talk to him. That makes him feel very happy. I always try to encourage him to do exercise to keep healthy. (I say) 'If you cannot keep healthy, you cannot come to visit me in Canada.' That's the way I encourage him to keep doing exercise and to overcome his illness."

Many interviewees said they also called their parents regularly because it is much cheaper to do so from Canada than from China, "I call my mom in China every weekend," said Hua, a woman in

her mid-40s. "If I forget to call her, she will be just waiting there by the phone, so I can talk to her."

These examples suggest that eldercare takes on a new form for the Chinese immigrants after immigration. As very few people can afford to visit their parents regularly or to bring their parents to Canada due to financial constraints and immigration policies, much of the eldercare activities are emotional care or support conducted through telephone calls, either directly to their aged parents or to relatives who are living with or taking care of the parents.

Emotion Management

Studies on Asian immigrant women indicate that an increase in immigrant wives' economic role and the persistence of their husbands' traditional patriarchal ideology, as well as the concomitant decline in their earning power and social

status has resulted in marital conflicts and tensions (Min, 2001). However, little attention is given to the ways or strategies that immigrant women employ to resolve their marital conflicts. Many women in my study reported managing their negative emotions as ways to handle and resolve spousal conflicts. Yun, a woman in her mid-40s, said that she changed her way of resolving spousal conflicts after immigration through learning to cooperate and by becoming more understanding:

"When I was in China, I used to go to stay at my parents' place if I had a fight with my husband. Then, my husband would come, apologize, and take me home. Now, I don't have a place to go, I have to stay home and face the problem. I am becoming more tolerant with him now and showing more respect for his self-esteem. Whenever there is a conflict between us, I would give in, just to save

his face. I would say, 'Okay. If you don't change, then I will change.'"

Relying on themselves to solve conflicts and making compromises to avoid overt conflicts were echoed by several other women, either because they do not have the resources they used to have or because they are afraid of jeopardizing their marital relationship. For example, Mei admitted that she used to yell at her husband for not doing any housework, but now she learns to control her temper through adapted coping methods. Jie, a woman in her mid-30s, used a similar strategy for emotion management and offered an explanation for the change in her conflict resolution strategy: "I used to shout at him [her husband] when I didn't feel happy. It is because there is more life pressure here than in China. I think I become more understanding of his situation, and his feelings." Several women also claimed that they have learned to cherish family more than before, and desired to have a harmonious spousal relationship, as they have to rely on each other for mutual emotional support.

Fang, a woman in her late-50s, said that she learned to strengthen her spousal relationship by learning to express her love more overtly to her husband. "In the past, I used to think that we needn't say any warm words to each other, as we are an old couple. Now I've learned to express my concern for him. I will say 'drive carefully' when he is going out, and 'you must have had a hard day' when he comes back home. I will remind him to go to bed earlier as he likes to stay on Internet late."

Women used different strategies to reduce and/or resolve marital conflicts, which in turn, enhance their families' survival capacity in their new host society. However, the interview with Fang also indicates that the changes in her way of conflict resolution were in part related to her changed gender role and identity, as well as shifted gender power relations after immigration. "I was a college professor in China, but here I am a housewife," said Fang. "In China, I was financially independent, but here I have to depend on my husband to support me." In addition,

Fang found that the lack of a paid job put her at a disadvantage in her marital relationship. There was a loss of her negotiation power for housework allocation, and the power in family decision-making.

Emotion work is a highly gendered process, where women perform the bulk of emotional care and support for their children, elderly family members, and spouses. Furthermore, women also tend to compromise as a means of emotional support, while men do not seem to do the same when conflicts arise. Consistent with other feminist scholars (Erickson, 2005; Starazdins & Broom, 2004), this study showed that though unpaid, emotion work is work, as it requires time, effort, and skill to build positive emotions and closeness or to repair and manage negative feelings and interpersonal conflicts.

Emotion work is not "naturally" feminine but rather it arises from gendered processes of socialization and through the daily performance of household work. For some women, the process of learning to do emotion work is also the perception of

learning to be more traditionally gendered and even subordinate to their male counterparts as was seen with the examples of Asian wives living abroad.

Emotion work is an integral part of housework and carework. However, unlike housework and carework, which emphasize the instrumental or material tasks, emotion work focuses more on the expressive or affective aspects of tasks which renders it even more invisible. Incorporating emotion work in the study of household work helps us understand not only the complexity of household labour, and but also the influences of gender on the meaning and allocation of family work, and on the social construction of gender roles and gender identities. ❧

Lichun Willa Liu looks at immigrant women's work in relation to children, the elderly, and their spouses. Women's emotion work supports the family through the stressful resettlement and adaptation process.

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To Dream A Redwood

Last night I dream I was a Redwood
on the mountain side
a thousand three hundred years old
breathe out pure oxygen
working morning and night
for this beautiful planet
all for life

I dream people love and admire me
say how wondrous this world
trees animals, persons and things
can all live

I wish you were a Redwood
How great we would understand
the love and care it takes
to appreciate this land

I dream you were beside me
standing tall and strong
the air we share
flesh dirt and spirit
is our bond

Oo oh to be a wise old Redwood
a great big heart of wood
oh oh to be a Redwood
dreaming
dreaming tales

From **Women Do This Every Day**, Women's Press, 1993

Lillian Allen is a writer, pioneering Dub poet, activist, cultural strategist and Creative Writing Professor at the Ontario College of Art and Design University. Her albums of dub poetry laced with reggae rhythms and world beats, **Revolutionary Tea Party** and **Conditions Critical** both won Juno awards in Canada. Her poetry is also published in book form; **Women Do this Every Day**, and **Psychic Unrest**.

Women's Labour under Stressed Environmental Conditions in Bangladesh

By Sufia Khanom

In Bangladesh, women's labour practices change as waterlogging increases the soil's salinity. Women work for longer hours, but stressed environmental conditions provide a space for women's autonomy as under such conditions traditional norms and values about women's labour become flexible.

Minor changes in climate result in major changes in people's livelihoods in Bangladesh, a country known for its environmental vulnerability and frequent climate-related disasters. Its geographic location, high population density and overwhelming dependency on natural resources for livelihoods are all contributing factors. Southwest Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to the intrusion of saline water, sea-level rise and tropical cyclones. The result alters traditional patterns of livelihood and adds environmental stresses to communities.

In rural communities in the Beel Dakatia-Bhabadaha region in southwest Bangladesh, women are engaged in reproductive activities which include caring for domestic animals, collecting fuels and water, maintaining households, and looking after children and sick family members. In addition, women also provide supporting activities for the production system. Under stressed environmental conditions, women have to take more responsibility or spend more time on reproductive work.

Waterlogging is prevalent in most parts of southwest Bangladesh and results in an increase in the salinity of soils and reduces the productivity of land. In the Beel Dakatia-Bhabadaha area in greater Khulna and Jessore, long-term stressed

environmental conditions have restricted the accessibility and availability of land and water which are the most important components of livelihood activities. This disruption in livelihoods affects all socio-cultural and economic aspects of communities including the conservation of biodiversity, food security, land-use patterns, occupational patterns, energy use, and nutrition status.

Four consecutive reconnaissance surveys were conducted to observe shifts in livelihood patterns as a result of waterlogging. Three categories of villages were observed in this study: first, *non-stressed* villages, which are communities that were not waterlogged; second, *stressed* villages where livelihood patterns have not yet adapted to the waterlogging; and third, *stressed* villages where livelihood patterns have tentatively adapted to the waterlogging and individuals are exploiting natural resources such as the land and water for their livelihood support. This field study shows that awareness about environmental conditions among women is higher in *stressed* villages.

Women's Contribution to Food Security

While women's work in the household does not have an immediate market value, work associated with reproduction

occupies most of women's days. These activities increase as a result of *stressed* environmental conditions. Women's participation in income generating activities also increases, in addition to their normal reproductive roles.

Women's contribution to household food security is significant and it is inversely related to their husband's socio-economic condition. In agrarian households, women participate in post-harvesting activities such as threshing, winnowing, storage and management of seeds. They are also involved in land preparation, seed sowing, fertilizing, weeding, tillage and planting. On average, about 68% of women surveyed work directly in the agri-field up to two hours per day, 21% work for three to four hours per day, and 11% work for five to nine hours per day.

Women work for longer hours in waterlogged villages than in *non-stressed* villages. There is more "return" (such as crop production, total income of the household, etc.) for activities in *stressed* villages and women are working harder in these villages. Therefore, adapting to *stressed* environmental conditions means more work from women and the crop production directly increases with women's contribution of hours of work. There is no variation in gross return when women work for less than two hours a day; however, gross return increases as women's labour increases. The study found that return was highest in the *stressed* villages where women worked for about nine hours per day.

When comparing women's labour in crop production to men's labour, the variations are extreme. However, the variation is relatively less in *stressed* villages suggesting that women are involved more in crop production in *stressed* villages com-

pared to *non-stressed* villages. It is evident from this discussion that women's contribution to agricultural activities is more significant in waterlogged villages where it helps to enhance total production.

Women's Contribution to Collection of Fuel

Biomass fuel is very limited in waterlogged villages and the fuel used by waterlogged households is of low heating value. Collection of fuel is a part of the daily domestic work for women in this area. Dung provides a significant contribution to total household fuel requirements. Time required for collection and preparation of fuel for cooking by a woman per household is two hours in *non-stressed* villages and three hours in *stressed* villages. The travel time and distance is longer for fuel sources in *stressed* villages compared to that of other villages.

Women's Contribution to Land Use

In the majority of cases in the study area, upon marriage, husbands manage women's inherited lands and thus women have less land and autonomy regarding land management. Women's main contribution to land use is their physical involvement in agricultural activities. Women's contribution to land use depends on a variety of factors such as the rate of crop production, economic status of the household, relationship among the household members, physical fitness, and proper knowledge and experience of land management.

While women's participation in agricultural activities is higher in *stressed* villages, most of the women do not have the decision-making power over land, except in the case of male out-migration in the waterlogged villages. Out-migration by men means that women carry out all the productive, reproductive and community activities in absence of their husbands.

Those women having gheer or ponds adjacent to their homestead spend more time on agricultural activities than their male counterparts. A significant number of women participate in different stages of the processes involved in both crop and non-crop agriculture (such as aquaculture or fisheries, handicrafts, etc.).

While women's participation in agricultural activities is higher in *stressed* villages, most of the women do not have the decision-making power over land, except in the case of male out-migration in the waterlogged villages.

Women's Mobility

Women's mobility reflects the traditional attitudes of a society. The purdah system prevalent in the study area and its accompanying conservative attitudes are an important context because they dictate social norms and cultural practices, including women's ability to work outside of the home.

The number of women working outside the homestead is highest in *stressed* villages (about 30%), where women work to ensure the household's food security. The attitudes that restrict women's movement outside the home are more prevalent in *non-stressed* villages. The unrestricted movement of women as a result of *stressed* environmental conditions is encouraged, as it plays a significant role in production and community roles. Under waterlogged conditions, traditional attitudes become more flexible and women are able to transgress the restricted cultural norms and social practices which provide them a form of empowerment.

Women's contributions to household and agricultural activities in *stressed* envi-

ronmental conditions in southwest Bangladesh are crucial as women are key to the household's adaptation to environmental stresses. *Stressed* environmental conditions provide a space for women's autonomy as under such conditions most traditional norms and values are more flexible. ❧

Sufia Khanom works for the Bangladesh Institute for International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) as a Research Fellow in the Non-Traditional Security division. She has a Bachelor of Science in Environmental Science and a Master's degree in Gender and Development Studies. Her research interests include competition over natural resources management and gender issues in developing countries. This study is based on Sufia Khanom's undergraduate thesis paper in Environmental Science at Khulna University in Bangladesh. The original title of the paper was 'Occupation and Migration Patterns under Stressed Environmental Conditions: A Case from South-West Bangladesh'. The study was conducted in 2002. However, the waterlogged conditions are still persistent in the southwestern part of Bangladesh and will likely increase in the future due to rising sea-levels and the intrusion of salinity as a result of climate change.

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Ryan Higgitt is working toward a doctorate in sociology at Queen's University in Kingston, Ontario. His interest in issues of gender and poverty have taken him to Latin America and South Asia. In Bangladesh, Ryan worked for nine months with local human rights NGO, Nagorik Uddyog.

HEAVY LIFTING

This photo was taken May 30, 2008, at Hazaribag, Dhaka. Having come from Rangpur in northern Bangladesh three years ago seeking better income, Jarina, her husband and three small children work in the Hazaribag brickfield by day and, by night, sleep in a one-room shanty with an elevated bamboo floor near Dhaka's Baribad dam. Jarina and the other women working in this brick field carry baskets of smashed brick on their heads to a large, beautifully painted truck, which in turn will haul a three-ton load to a nearby cement factory. This employment is unregulated — 'If you carry all these pieces of brick to the truck, I'll give you a few taka. If you do it again tomorrow, I'll give you a few more.' With little social welfare, families do what they can to get by.



BRICK BREAKING

The photograph was taken October 6, 2008 at Baribad Brickfield, Gabtoli, in Dhaka. The brickfields on the western side of Dhaka City cover a vast area. Many Bangladeshi families, poor, propertyless and illiterate, come to these fields from Bangladesh's rural districts looking for work. Earning about 1,200 taka (\$18) a month, Anwara, a recent widow, spends twelve hours a day, seven days a week, smashing bricks into small pieces with a hammer and large stone anvil. A jug of water and tattered umbrella are her only relief from the searing heat. She has no gloves but strips of leather wrapped around her fingers offer some protection from sharp chips and misdirected hammer blows. Her eldest son, 14, is a rickshaw puller, but her three other children stay by her side all day. The eldest daughter, Neela, 11, is vital to Anwara. Neela breaks as many bricks as she

can to help bring in extra money while also helping her mother watch over the two little ones.

Bangladeshi widows, like Anwara, tend to be highly marginalized; receiving very little service or support from any persons other than her own children. Lack of education and firmly entrenched patriarchal norms in Bangladeshi society severely restrict their ability to engage in income-earning activities other than low-skill, low-pay labour.

The Silent Health Care Worker

The Experience of Racism among Personal Support Workers
in Toronto Hospitals

By Vincenza Spiteri DeBonis

QUOTES FROM 10 PERSONAL SUPPORT WORKERS WORKING IN THREE TORONTO HOSPITALS

Voices of the Silent Health Care Worker

You want me to tell you my story?
Let me tell you how it is so.

We work hard, very hard

We do all the little things you know
Let me say this is your grandmother
I comb her hair
I wash her face, her hands
I wash her private parts
I wash her feet
I change her bag, change her dressings
Then I dress her so, Sit her so

You look to me with bias on my race
I don't look at it
Dis is the 21st century
So you want to go back, you want to look at it, to go backwards
I know it's there, it's underneath, you feel it here
Hmm it's hard to say what it come from, it's so hard to detect,
You really can't come out and say well it's so and so.

It's a tsunami I tell you
I may tidy you but I must be tidying your room too.
We are invisible.
S'e is the nurse, s'e cannot see me
S'e minds me, s'e said "S'e's jus' a PSW"
We do the tasks, they have the skills, Well yes, we have the skills too
They look on to you and make a face as to be sicken'

I look to how we work together
But then you get cast out as an outsider
Workin' together, that makes the day good

Sometimes you have to hear bad names about you
From when we have the slurs, the verbal language, abusiveness
They might kick
They might punch
That's okay, it's jus' the sickness
The best part of my day? the patients they make me happy

We do all the little things
I comb your hair
I wash your face, your hands
I wash your private parts
I wash your feet
I change your bag, change your dressings
Then I dress you so, Sit you so
I hold your hand, I listen

The successful lawsuit of six nurses against Northwestern General Hospital in Toronto in 1994 catapulted the issue of racism in nursing to the foreground. Prior to their complaints, racism against nurses of colour was denied, ignored and hidden. The courage and resolve of the six nurses paved the way for a number of subsequent inquiries and complaints of racism. The significance of their struggle is that the discussions shifted from the individuation of racism to systemic racism. Since then the experience of racism in the hospital workplace has received limited attention and has focused on the nursing sector. There is no published research in Canada examining the experience of racism among hospital Personal Support Workers (PSWs). My research is intended as an introduction to probing the impact of race, class and gender on the work life of PSWs. It also interrogates how power operates within hierarchal, patriarchal organizational cultures of unions and hospitals constructing and informing the marginalization and discrimination of PSWs.

This qualitative research took place between April and September 2010 and included ten semi-structured interviews with PSWs working in three Toronto hospitals. Key informants included Service Employees International Union staff, two Nursing Practice Leaders and one hospital administrator. The demographics of the Personal Support Workers in this study indicate that the majority of the population are first generation non-European, multi-lingual immigrant women, ranging in ages from 30 to 59.

What is different about the "immigrant struggle story" and the "racialization of the immigrant struggle story"? Perhaps the greatest difference is the long term outcomes or socio-economic progress of the two groups. International deregulation of labour has created the perfect storm of what Galabuzi (2006) refers to as "Canada's economic apartheid" and others have named the "colour coded vertical mosaic" (Armstrong 2003; Li 2007). Hospital workplaces can be viewed as 'racialized, gendered and classed spaces,' (Razak, 2002) in effect, a micro-

cosm of the current Canadian workplace landscape.

The role of Personal Support Workers is relatively new in Ontario hospitals and replaced the role of Nurse's Aid. PSWs assist registered nurses and registered practical nurses carrying out non-regulated tasks including patients' personal hygiene, changing urine and colostomy bags, feeding, lifting and mobilizing and in some settings administering oral medication. Nomenclature informs status particularly in hierarchal systems like hospitals. The removal of the word 'nurse' diminishes

The role of Personal Support Workers is relatively new in Ontario hospitals and replaced the role of Nurse's Aid. PSWs assist registered nurses and registered practical nurses carrying out non-regulated tasks including patients' personal hygiene, changing urine and colostomy bags, feeding, lifting and mobilizing and in some settings administering oral medication. Nomenclature informs status particularly in hierarchal systems like hospitals. The removal of the word 'nurse' diminishes the importance of the professional contribution of PSWs; thereby work is defined as menial personal care rather than health care.

the importance of the professional contribution of PSWs; thereby work is defined as menial personal care rather than health care. Within this context, systemic and organizational covert racism shape the work life of the PSW. Through their stories I have endeavoured to unravel the complex racialized, classed and gendered power relationships, and engagement in organizational culture and patient care.

It is reasonable to assume that PSWs are unaccustomed to sharing their perspectives on work with researchers. Despite this, and the highly sensitive nature of the research topic, the participants were both candid and passionate. Each participant said they had been referred to as "just a PSW," underscoring the disdain experienced by PSWs. Their professional contribution is not valued, and perhaps the most disturbing aspect is

the demoralizing and deep disrespect they feel. They told me of disappearing full time permanent positions, and the prevalence of precarious part time and casual work despite the ever increasing patient population due to aging and chronic long term health care needs. The implications and impact of this shift on the socioeconomic status and health of PSWs are significant as articulated in their stories which tell us:

a. They experience everyday classism and racism, systemic, organizational, and individual discrimination;

b. Their work is informed by the contradictions of being both part of and apart from the health care team;
c. Their relationships with patients are very important and give them great job satisfaction, although they experience racism from patients; and
d. Resistance and resilience elevate their struggles from survival to transformation and change.

Stories of Everyday Racism

The participants' stories support research which indicates that racism in the hospital workplace is experienced through social formation patterns of everyday racism (Das Gupta, 2009). Meanings of everyday racism involve the racial underpinning of "legitimate" behaviours (Essed, 1991). These behaviours include scapegoating, excessive

monitoring, infantilization, bias in work allocation, blaming the victim, underemployment, and denial of promotion. The quotes below respectively illustrate how masked racism profoundly impacts recipients:

- My worst day, is when I come in and someone start to make some fuss of me, mind me that I didn't do something I shoulda done even I did, and it's all on me.
- Sometime dey t'ink you dumb. One day I got yelled at so much that I go to hide and I cried. I cried like a baby because she talked to me like I am a baby, even so I do this work good and I be here many years and I work so hard.
- Yeah, so one time I came to work to get on the [10th] floor assign and they give it me all the heavy patients. I did that day a little bit angry.

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Status in health care teams comes from being a regulated health care professional. PSWs are often reminded of their non-regulated status. "I have been trained. I have a certificate. I wish we could get more recognition. I wish they would embrace us a little more. You know, don't throw us out as outsiders."

- Yuh, because I tellin' you in my country I work before as a manager overall. I started from the bottom, because I tellin' you, dere the manager help you, teach you the things. In Canada it's different, you don't have that chance.

Everyday Classism

Classism in this research refers to the hierarchal status and value placed on the various roles within the health care team (Essed, 1991). The notion of everyday classism emerged as a surprising, yet consistent result. All the PSWs shared the experience of everyday classism and often the discourse was racialized. Frances clearly connects race, ethnicity, and class.

But then again, being that what play into things, the higher you go in management, the less colour you see and when you have the administration jobs, the top jobs, there is no colour. They are all from the same country and they are all white.

Everyday classism is reflected in different types of experiences including team work, supervision, discipline, and patient relationships. "Some people when they gonna see a PSW they say in this way makin' a funny face as they wanna be sicken." Stories of classism are not unusual or limited to certain people. "There are days I get treated really bad. You get disrespect by your team, by people you work with, by patients, by the families being considered stupid or taken for granted." There are many different settings and circumstances in classism stories which are part of everyday common work life.

"We were all three in the elevator and the one nurse she say to me 'Good morning,' so I gave her a greeting too. Then the

other nurse say to her, 'Se's jus' a PSW, eh.' What is the connection to giving me a greeting and to say 'Se's jus' a PSW?' It doesn't matter where you will be walking, how you will be working, people always see that you are not a nurse, or a RPN so they look a little down to you and even so they may need you."

Status in health care teams comes from being a regulated health care professional. PSWs are often reminded of their non-regulated status. "I have been trained. I have a certificate. I wish we could get more recognition. I wish they would embrace us a little more. You know, don't throw us out as outsiders." This small sample research clearly indicates that the pathways of training and certification are as varied as the designated role names and job descriptions indicating the importance of collective dialogue with the ministry, the hospitals, the colleges and unions on what is most valued in the PSW role. Standardization of training, certification and regulation would address many concerns related to class and provide a mechanism for the PSW to navigate and negotiate within the rigid hospital hierarchal culture.

Conclusions

It is in the naming and articulation of racism that we find encouragement and can move forward in the spirit of resistance. Among the PSW workforce the voices naming racism in the broad discourse are but whispers. To raise their voices and break through the veil of covert systemic and everyday racism, the PSWs need a platform where labour and professional regulating bodies bolster their acts of resistance in strategically sustainable ways. Ultimately what remains

as the defining barrier to equity, anti-racism and anti-classism is the patriarchal, hierarchal culture of government, hospitals and unions which uphold the dominant ideologies. Perhaps an alternative trajectory is needed to deconstruct, disrupt, re-imagine, and recreate the complex power relationships. The professions of nursing, PSWs, teaching, child care, and social work are all "caring" work that is gendered and considered "women's work." In working towards workplace equity we can challenge the dominant ideologies through the lens of gender equity. The core of the PSWs' stories is that they want to be valued, respected and honoured for the work they do. Their work is perhaps the most intimate and least valued within the health care field. Bathing, changing diapers, feeding, and mobilizing patients is not glamorous work, but it is fundamental to the well-being of patients. By deeply valuing women's work we ultimately value the most vulnerable members of our society, i.e. the children, the elderly, and the marginalized.

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 Additional references on page 50.

The work life of PSWs is defined by marginalization, discrimination, difficult working conditions, and precarious employment agreements. Yet in spending time with the PSWs, I did not meet victims, but rather, committed, proud and courageous people. I found myself compelled to be in deep respect of the acts of daily resistance that transform survival into resilience. ❧

Vincenza Spiteri DeBonis lives in Toronto. Her MES degree at York University included the research referred to in this article. Her work includes anti-oppression capacity building among marginalized communities in the Northwest Territories, Nunavut and non-clinical Toronto hospital workers. She is Vice-Chair of the Health Equity Council Board of Directors.

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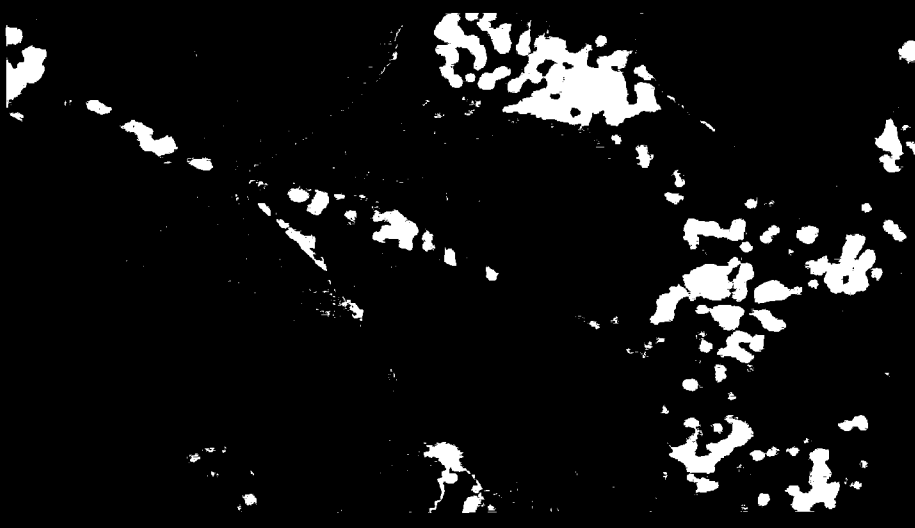
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Running Water

We'll run water all through the house
We won't call it flooding.
It will be called work.
Clean work.
Up and down, pipes in every direction.
Though horizontal poses more of a problem than you'd think.
As rivers do this effortlessly.
But today in Mexico people are swimming away from their homes.

The tea making, hibiscus growing, the dishwashing, floor soaping, icecube freezing,
toilet flushing, all these will stop.

We will run water through the house.

Muddy water.

Fish swim into dragnets.

Mangrove swamps are disappearing, their hold on us has loosened.

Rice seedlings are unmoored, tugged away.

Yes, that gold cufflink will be lost, the single memento from your great-grandfather.

Also your beautiful sweater handknit in Newfoundland.

You can slip radio batteries into a plastic bag.

Your eyes will sting as you swim away.

You can rest on someone's roof.

Your grip on those you love might falter.

This may not happen in warm weather.

We rely on the weakness of the sun at critical times.

Watercolour painting, bean steaming, morning showers and the bath oils of the richly-scented,
percolation and pressure cooking will stop.

We'll sacrifice our cufflinks and carpets, our oysters and codfish, our fog meadows and
ice floes.

We recall how the Inca, one brief moment each June, studied the Pleiades, the seven sisters'
storehouse of rain in the sky.

Can we find hope in their knowledge, how many times can we recover?

Maureen Hynes is a past winner of the Gerald Lampert Award and the Petra Kenney Poetry Award (England). She has published three books of poetry, **Harm's Way, Rough Skin**, and a third collection, **Marrow, Willow**, just released from Pedlar Press. Maureen is poetry editor for **Our Times** magazine.

In the Field

Climate Change Impacts on Rural Women's Unpaid/Paid Labor in Nepal

By Sabrina Regmi

The 2007/2008 United Nations' Human Development Report underlines the heightened threats posed by climate change to the rural livelihoods of the poor in underdeveloped countries. The report further highlights the inequalities in the capability and capacity to cope with these threats, emphasizing gender inequalities in relation to adaptation risks.

The rural society of Nepal is highly prone to climate changes and consequently, climate change impacts such as deforestation, soil erosion, flooding and drought. With its poor infrastructure, technical support systems and remote mountainous location, the population of rural poor are the most vulnerable in facing the direct impacts of these climate changes. Nepal's rural society, which thrives in the agricultural subsistence economy, was hardest hit by the drought of 2008/2009 and as documented by Bhadra and Shah, women, being the highest number of agricultural laborers (90%, both paid and unpaid), inevitably carried the disproportionate burden on their shoulders. With drought and uncertain rainfall predictions, women in Nepal faced hardships in feeding their families.

The climate change impacts in rural Nepal over the recent years have aggravated drought conditions causing changes within rural labor systems. Moreover, the co-existing impacts of armed and political conflicts have also contributed to poverty, displacement and vulnerable labor movements both internally and externally. 2009 Studies by Oxfam and Brigitte Leduc show both external and internal male migration to be higher compared to females as a result of the traditional breadwinner roles men have in the soci-

ety. With the traditional gender divisions of labor, women's crucial roles in the reproductive sphere more often than not compels them to stay at home, looking after the children and elderly while waiting for remittance from their husbands' paid labor.

With the conflict and poverty induced migration of men, unavailability of remittance at critical times as well as the negative consequences of climate change induced drought on the subsistence economy, the rural livelihoods, of whom a majority of women and children live within, has been threatened. The disproportionate impact of these environmental factors on women's labor is very noticeable in the rural parts of far eastern as well as central Nepal. Suffering from food shortages and

Suffering from food shortages and both economic and mental hardships, with uncertain rainfall, women's labor became intensive as they had to plan adaptation strategies in order to cope with these environmental impacts.

both economic and mental hardships, with uncertain rainfall, women's labor became intensive as they had to plan adaptation strategies in order to cope with these environmental impacts.

In the year 2009, I conducted interviews with women in the villages of Kavre district, which was one of the rural areas affected by the lack of rainfall and consequent drought. A number of women in the villages of Kavre district were targeted by entrepreneurship and development programs. After interviewing partic-

ipants in these programs, it became clear that many of the women's entrepreneurial ventures did not last long and faced loss due to inadequate training, information and credit provisions. There was also a lack of monitoring and follow-up, causing the participants to lose interest, especially as their businesses started to fail. Many women with failing businesses tried to cut their losses by sharing and merging with others in the same situation. Most of the women shared similar views on their take on entrepreneurship ventures; "We are farmers and we need information and support in our farm activities, but we are told by the officers in our village that we can earn money through business startup and not through subsistence farming. In the start they pretended to support us but later

on, they do not provide any support and asked us to rely on our own knowledge; how can we rely on our knowledge when we lack proper training and information? We also cannot borrow enough money to start a good business."

Although some women were able to have some success in their home-based businesses, the seasonal nature of their products and the reliance on environmental circumstances did not allow for consistency and thus could not help them in their struggles for food security leaving

them both physically and emotionally distraught. Out of desperation, the women returned back to their rural lifestyles of working their barren land with hopes that the drought would end soon. Additional hardships re-emerged with the traditional gender division of agricultural labor with women consumed doing most of the work such as weeding and planting and men doing the physically demanding work such as ploughing along with the marketing of the products. However, due to the large amount of male migration, women along with their small children had no option but to take up the traditionally male oriented workload in addition to completing their own time consuming and physically demanding work. They were left both physically and mentally burdened as a result of engaging in both paid and unpaid labor coping with the consequences of the drought.

In general, women in the villages of Kavre are also cast in the position of providing unpaid care labor to their children, the sick and the elderly. They also engage in paid labor such as petty wage labor and petty home-based business which leads to meager and limited economical security. They are also seen as the sole workers of several unpaid tasks ranging from agricultural work to fetching water from the forest, collecting firewood and fodder, taking care of livestock and other household chores such as cooking and cleaning.

Women in some of the villages became so desperate to cope with the consequences of the drought that they ploughed their lands naked at night and danced tirelessly in the hopes of pleasing their God of Rain, Indra, offering prayers to end the drought with rain shower. Additionally, several other religious ceremonies related to the myth of rainfall were performed by the male priests in collaboration with other male members of the community, where women provided unpaid labor by cooking food, hosting people and cleaning the mess left by the priests and gatherers of the ceremonies. Women also took the responsibility of their children's health and survival solely upon their shoulders. For them, being a mother meant being a provider and protector to one's children. They also

shared why they had to take the religious guilt upon themselves, "We are living in harmony with the forest and crops, we believe that since we women give birth and life to our children, we should also ensure their survival, otherwise who will? We cannot see our children starving; if there is no rainfall and we cannot provide food to our children then it is our responsibility to please our God of Rain to bring rainfall so that we can till our land, grow food and fill our children's empty stomachs."

With the increasing insecurity women face as they perform both paid and unpaid work in uncertain economical conditions, climate change has only brought on increased negative impacts on women's labor conditions in rural Nepal. Attention is needed from both environmental and labor policy makers and the multifaceted nature of women's labor must be acknowledged before their well-being can be ensured. ❧

Sabrina Regmi is a researcher from Nepal. Currently, she is working on a research project related to gender and entrepreneurship development that looks at the impact of entrepreneurship development projects on women's paid and unpaid labor in relation to gendered roles and relations in rural Nepal. She has also conducted research on gender and climate change issues in Nepal and Japan.

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Cooperatives Boost Opportunities For Moroccan Women

By Gerry Toomey

In southwestern Morocco, research to conserve and develop a valuable but threatened forest resource — argan trees — has helped to dramatically boost the income of indigenous Amazigh (or Berber) women. Organized into small cooperatives, the women produce and market argan oil using a mix of traditional and modern methods. At the same time they learn to read, write, and manage a business.

“Belonging to the cooperative has brought me many benefits,” says Fatima, 38, a widow and member of the Taitmatine Cooperative in Taroudant province. “I’ve been able to pay my children’s school fees, I’ve learned to read and write, and we have the chance to attend awareness-raising sessions on all aspects of family life and running a cooperative.”

Argan oil is the most valuable product of the argan tree, a hardy, long-lived, drought-tolerant species that grows only in Morocco. Prized for its light, nutty flavour, the honey-coloured oil is used as salad dressing and cooking oil, as a complement to honey and bread, and as a final touch on North Africa’s famous dish, couscous. With three times the vitamin E content of olive oil, argan oil is also coveted for its medicinal and cosmetic properties.

Blending Old and New Technologies

The Taitmatine Cooperative is one of about 50 argan oil-producing women’s cooperatives that have been set up in the past 15 years in southwestern Morocco. The champion and catalyst for improving argan oil production techniques and launching many of these cooperatives is Zoubida Charrouf, a chemistry professor at Mohammed V University in Rabat.

Charrouf is also founder and president of the Ibn Al Baytar Association which



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Left: Cracking the argan nut is still done manually, but other parts of the argan oil-making process have been mechanized.

Above: Argan oil is produced from kernels found inside the hard nut of the argan fruit.

Right: Zoubida Charrouf

promotes research on medicinal plant species. With a four-year research grant from Canada’s International Development Research Centre (IDRC), she worked in collaboration with the association to develop and improve argan oil production and business management.

“We worked on mechanizing some of the tedious production tasks, such as grinding the nuts and pressing the oil,” Charrouf explains. This not only sped up the operation, but also improved the quality of the oil, doubled its shelf life, and reduced waste. A key task still being done manually is cracking the nuts between two stones. Because the number of kernels in the nut varies, this operation is difficult to mechanize.

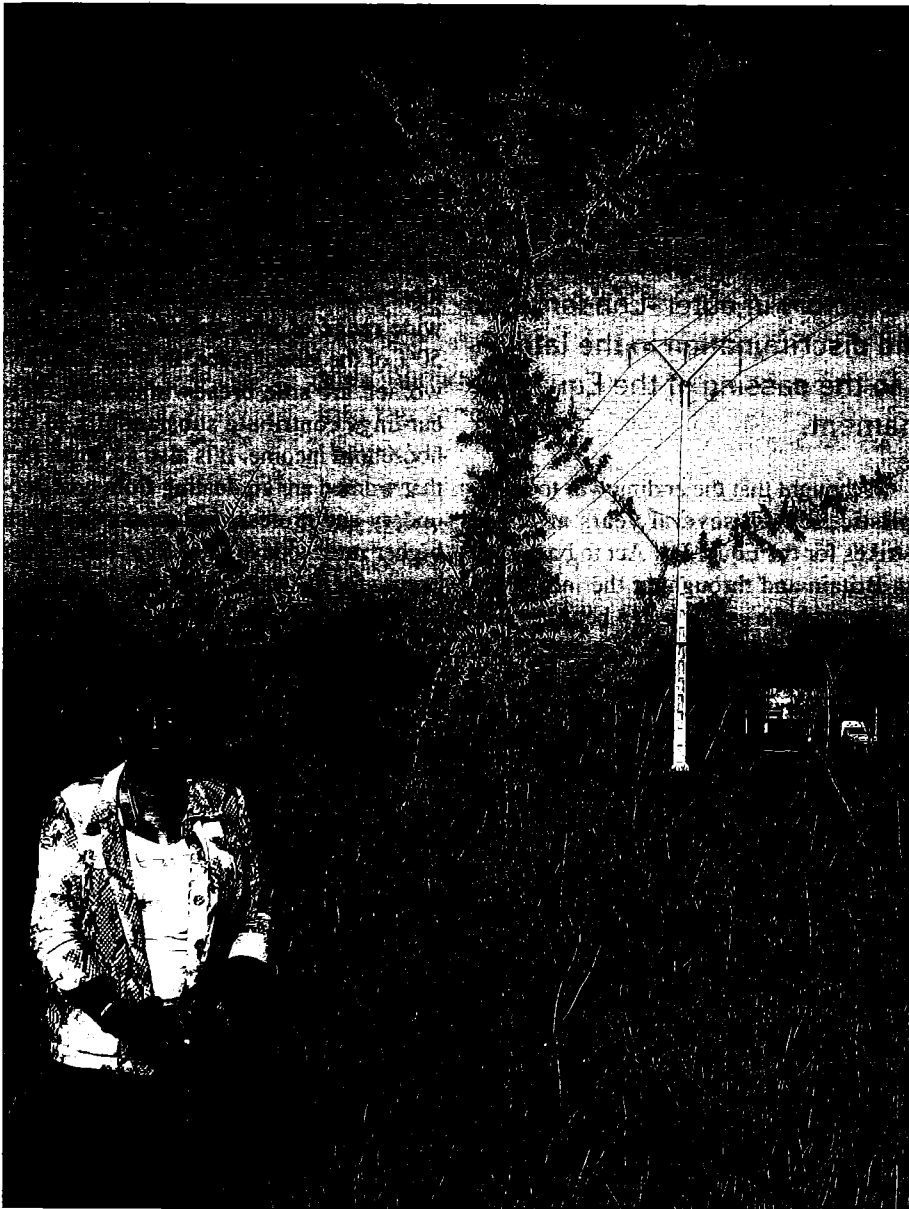
From Problem to Opportunity

Charrouf’s initial interest in the argan tree was largely environmental: how to protect an endangered tree unique to

Morocco, a species long considered a “green curtain” against the desert. “At the time, we were losing more than 600 hectares of argan forest each year. But we also wanted to convert this ecological problem into an economic opportunity,” she says.

Before approaching IDRC, Charrouf says she knocked on many doors, “but no one believed in my project. Even though IDRC didn’t fund all the work, it did support the basic link in the chain, and now argan oil is known around the world.”

“What I presented to IDRC focused on the tree’s main product: the oil,” she recalls. “We wanted to improve the extraction technology, improve its conservation, and develop new ways of presenting the product to make it more attractive.” At the same time, she says, the goal was “to organize the producers into cooperatives, train them to use the new technology, and train them also so they know how to run the



cooperatives — administration, management, marketing, all aspects.”

Through the cooperatives, argan oil has emerged as a high-value specialty product on the international market, as both a cosmetic and edible oil. Just as olive oil is famously linked to a healthy Mediterranean diet, argan oil is becoming associated with the “Amazigh diet.” This is a major facelift for an artisanal product that was formerly sold and consumed almost exclusively locally, produced inefficiently, and not well known outside Morocco. Argan oil is now certified internationally as a Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) product, a labeling sys-

tem developed by the European Union. PGI status was granted to Moroccan argan oil in April 2009, making it the first product on the African continent to receive such protection.

Cooperative Benefits

Women of all ages reap the benefits of membership in the argan cooperatives, which generally have 35 to 40 members, though a few are considerably larger. Members now earn about CA\$8.60 a day — more than 10 times their income a few years ago. Substantial support for argan oil development continues with a CA\$17 million grant with half the funding from

Substantial support for argan oil development continues with a CA\$17 million grant with half the funding from the European Union and half from the Moroccan government.

the European Union and half from the Moroccan government.

Says one 29-year-old member of the Taitmatine Cooperative: “Being part of the cooperative freed me from tedious domestic work in people’s homes. Now I’m learning to read and write, and I’ve learned how to ensure the quality of the argan kernels. The cooperative has made me more independent. I’ve been able to visit other cooperatives in other provinces. I’ve seen how girls and women like me have been able to shape their own destiny and move ahead to develop their cooperatives.”

“The young women really liked learning to read and write,” Charrouf says. “They’re very happy and proud. In fact, one of the really interesting results for us is that as soon as they learned that you have to know how to read and write to manage a cooperative, they all sent their children to school. And that’s terrific — they’re investing in the future by sending their kids to school. For us, that’s sustainability.”

Charrouf’s steadfast work to protect the argan tree and improve women’s lives has earned her a number of national and international distinctions, most recently Italy’s 2011 Viverein Prize for chemistry, environmental conservation, and women’s emancipation. She is founder and president of the Moroccan chapter of the international Slow Food movement, and has co-authored a new book about the argan story, *L’arganier et l’huile d’argane*, published in France by Editions Glyphe. ☞

Gerry Toomey is a freelance writer based in Chelsea, Québec. ©International Development Research Center 2011; Author Gerry Toomey

In Film

Emanuela Heyninck, Ontario's Commissioner of Pay Equity Talks About "Made in Dagenham" Interview by Sandra Tam

The film "Made in Dagenham" tells an engaging, true story of determined seamstresses in a Ford factory in outer-London who fought against sexual inequality and discrimination in the late 1960s. Their efforts eventually led to the passing of the Equal Pay Act of 1970 by the British parliament.

Since the 1980s, almost all Canadian jurisdictions have dealt with equal pay and pay equity in some manner. In Ontario, equal pay for equal work is covered by the Employment Standards Act and equal pay for work of equal value is specifically dealt with in the Pay Equity Act that was passed in 1987. Both laws address gender discrimination in pay.

In this interview, the province of Ontario's Pay Equity Commissioner, Emanuela Heyninck, shares her reflection on issues raised by the movie.

What was the most memorable moment in the film for you?

One memorable moment was at the coffee shop when Albert was convincing Rita to take on the cause of equal pay. He told her that "You'll always come second" and that bosses will pay women less simply because they can, which was the truth of the situation then... and is the truth of the situation now.

What was your least favourite moment in the film?

I thought that the ending was too simplistic. It took several years after the strikes for the Equal Pay Act to be passed in Britain and throughout the industrialized world, the earnings gap between men and women continues to exist despite the passage of laws aimed at redressing the imbalance. It would have been more appropriate for a footnote to point out that the problem has not yet been eliminated.

Since "Made in Dagenham" is about women and equal pay, why would anyone but women go to see this film?

It would be unfortunate if people only see this as a movie about women. It touches on a number of other family, societal and economic themes that should make it attractive to men and women, seniors and young people. It is as much a movie about trade unions, corporate behaviour, political machinations and family and friend relationships as it is about women marching for their rights.

How much progress do you think has been made in the West since the Dagenham strikes?

It is pretty much accepted now that most women work outside the home in a wide range of jobs and make up almost 50% of the labour force. In some families, women are sole breadwinners, or their earnings contribute substantially to the household income. It is also a known fact that women are graduating from post-secondary and professional schools at much higher rates today. Therefore, there is no excuse for the wage gap between men and women to be as wide as it is in a society where money is an indicator of value.

How important is it that films on the history of women's rights continue to be made and shown?

I think it's very important that the film be accessible to as many audiences as possible and that the history of women's rights be celebrated in the mainstream and social media. It would be especially good if the movie were shown to high school students, both as a teaching tool but also as a reminder of how important it is to stand up for one's own rights. I hope the story will inspire young adults to think about their career choices and what may be awaiting them as they enter the working world.

Sandra Tam works at Toronto Public Health.

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three women, hurrying

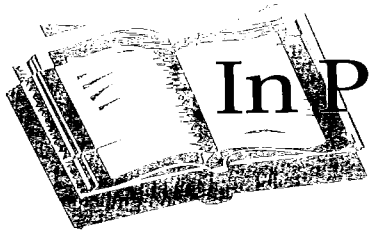
(after seeing the bronze Caughnawaga Women,
by Marc-Aurèle de Foy Suzor-Coté, 1924,
National Gallery of Canada)

their bodies lean
into the wind
they hurry
baskets packed
with bread
and other foodstuffs
safe from rain
under the bronzed
stiffness of cloth

parallel to storm
they hurry
downcast eyes
each a solitude
her cloak gripped
to her throat

three women
hurrying
one always
a little behind

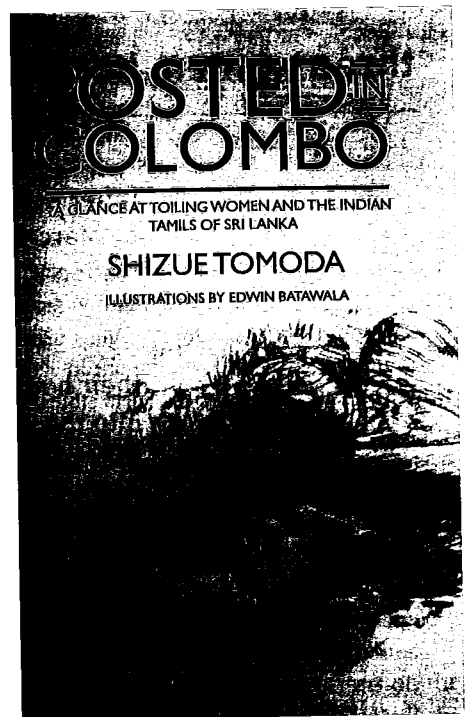
Jane Spavold Tims lives in a rural area of New Brunswick and has worked for 33 years as a homemaker and mother, and as a biologist with the New Brunswick Department of the Environment, so the demands of women's work are familiar to her. She has published poetry in various literary magazines, including the **Fiddlehead**, **The Antigonish Review**, the **Pottersfield Portfolio**, and **Whetstone**.



Reviewed by Sheela Subramanian

Posted in Colombo: A Glance at Toiling Women and The Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka

By Shizue Tomoda, with illustrations by Edwin Batawala, published by Charleston: Createspace in 2010, 316 pages, list price \$18.48 CAD.



Shizue Tomoda's third book is both a memoir and an exploration of labour issues facing Tamil women in Sri Lanka. *Posted in Colombo: A Glance at Toiling Women and the Indian Tamils of Sri Lanka* chronicles Tomoda's experiences as director of the Colombo office of the International Labour Organization (ILO) from December 1997 to her return to Geneva at the start of 2001.

Following a 25-year career with the ILO which included postings in Geneva, Jakarta and Colombo, Tomoda wrote two very different books: *Sachiko* (2007), a novel about a young Japanese woman in the United States, and *Taro and Tomi: My Feline Son and Daughter* (2007), a non-fiction volume about her close relationship with her two cats. Despite setting out to capture Taro and Tomi's Colombo adventures in a third book, Tomoda felt compelled to address the serious issues encountered in her professional and personal life in Sri Lanka.

Posted in Colombo is the result, an easy-to-read non-fiction work that weaves together detailed personal stories with an analysis of labour and other socio-economic issues. The book unfolds through Tomoda's relationship with her domestic worker, Devi, a Sri Lankan Tamil woman

who has migrated to the city from a tea plantation to find higher-waged work. Tomoda's narrative of Devi's life clearly illustrates the cascading everyday impacts of socio-economic marginalization and its complex roots, including issues of colonization, the exclusion of Tamil Sri Lankans through post-independence policies, tea plantation management and wage systems, and labour market policies and practices. Through Devi's journey, the reader learns about the historic and contemporary role of Indian Tamils in the Sri Lankan tea plantation system. Worker representation and plantation sector bargaining have resulted in very low wages, prompting many Tamil women to leave their families and search for domestic work in urban centres and abroad. As the author visits Devi's husband and children at their plantation line home, she comments on the marginalization that residents face.

The use of Devi's narrative is engaging, but results in an unresolved tension. While the book clearly highlights issues of gender and ethno-racial inequities, it does not explore the evident power dynamics in Tomoda and Devi's own relationship. For instance, Devi's wage is raised whenever she learns new skills useful to the household, such as Japanese

cooking and eventually, Shiatsu massage. Although Tomoda is willing to return the massage, her offer is never accepted because of, it is surmised, Devi's reserved nature or discomfort with the employer-employee relationship. The use of Devi's narrative to "glance at toiling women" raises a question critical to post-colonial contexts of who can and should speak for whom, and what we might learn if Devi was doing the glancing.

When Devi's family is evicted from plantation housing, and is ineligible for government home ownership schemes, Tomoda helps to purchase land and build a house. The book would be strengthened with a discussion of how these structural inequities could be addressed, and what role could be played by governmental, non-governmental, private sector, labour and other actors, especially international organizations like the ILO. ❧

Sheela Subramanian is a Toronto-based writer with expertise in anti-racist feminist research and community engagement. She recently authored *A Diagnosis for Equity: An initial analysis of South Asian health inequities in Ontario* (Council of Agencies Serving South Asians, 2010), and is a policy analyst in the community mental health sector

In the News

Women Aloud Videoblogging for Empowerment a.k.a. WAVE

30 Women 30 Regions
Videoblogging Everyday
Wave is our collective voice
for Positive Change



WOMEN ALOUD
VIDEOBLOGGING
FOR EMPOWERMENT
aka wave

WAVE is “a unique digital platform for young semi-urban Indian women to voice their perspectives on issues that matter through video blogs.”

One young woman was selected through non-government organizations and colleges from every state in India for an innovative 9-month mentorship program, and provided with video equipment, intensive training and monthly stipends for participating in the project.

With this first-of-its-kind citizen journalism program, their aim is to share compelling videos that start conversations and builds bridges across global boundaries to enable the exchange of novel solutions. They hope this new video material from areas as far as Aizawl and Trivandrum will not only inspire action within the community, but also engage individuals and organizations working towards development, academics, researchers, and social investors.

WAVE’s philosophy is that young women in India need to be heard and encouraged to analyze the problems in their communities and go on to become leaders who provide effective solutions in order for society to become socially and economically empowered.

WAVE, which was an inspired idea of Sapna Shahani (Director) and Angana Jhaveri (Mentor), took flight when their proposal won a grant from 2009 Digital Media and Learning Competition sponsored by the MacArthur Foundation and HASTAC in the U.S. In India, Point of View, a non-governmental organization in Mumbai, that works to promote women’s views through media, is their fiscal sponsor. To see their introductory video go to www.waveindia.org.

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FACT SHEETS

The following fact sheets on gender and decent work were prepared by the Canadian Labour of Congress and the Feminist Alliance for International Action (FAIA) for the fifty-fifth session of the 2011 meetings of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women held in February and March. The theme of the session was "access and participation of women and girls in education, training, science and technology, including for the promotion of women's equal access to full employment and decent work."

Women and Decent Work in Canada

Women and Decent Work in Canada

JOB CREATION

Canada's Record

- stimulus spending geared to the construction industry, where women represent less than 20% of employees.
- relief delivered through tax breaks, when 38% of women have income so low they do not pay taxes.
- no skills development geared to getting women in the trades.
- lack of safe, affordable and accessible child care.
- inadequate minimum wages laws and continued wage disparities between women and men.

Canada Needs

- investments in social infrastructure equal to the investments in physical infrastructure.
- safe, affordable, and accessible child care.
- investments in sustainable green jobs.
- skills development programs for women, including in non-traditional and green sectors.
- minimum wages that provide full-time workers with incomes above low-income cut-off levels.

RIGHTS AT WORK

Canada's Record

- minimum age laws in all Canadian jurisdictions continue to fall below ILO standards, some dropping as low as 12 years of age.
- Canada lacks proactive pay equity legislation in most jurisdictions.
- the recommendations of the Government's 2004 Pay Equity Task force have not been implemented.
- the 2008 *Public Sector-Equitable Compensation Act* makes pay equity for public servants subject to market forces.

Canada Needs

- to ratify ILO conventions on the *Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining*, *Minimum Age*, and *Forced Labour*.
- legislation that protects right to free collective bargaining.
- proactive pay equity legislation.
- effective employment equity legislation in all jurisdictions.
- workplace violence legislation.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Canada's Record

- 33% of unemployed women qualify for employment insurance.
- only 20% of child care services in Canada are regulated.
- lack of access to safe, affordable housing and public transit impedes women's security and capacity to enter the labour market.
- in 2008, 7.6% of women 65 and over were living in poverty compared to 3.6% of men.

Canada Needs

- better access, improved benefits and a longer benefit period for unemployment insurance.
- safe, affordable and accessible child care, housing and public transit.
- increased benefits for public pensions and other social protections for seniors, people with disabilities and other low-income Canadians.
- improved maternity and parental benefits and compassionate leave.
- full protection and a clear path to citizenship for workers admitted under the Temporary Foreign Worker Program and Live-in Caregiver Program.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Canada's Record

- stopped gathering data on unpaid work.
- eliminated the mandatory long-form census survey.
- removed funding for research and advocacy from the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

Canada Needs

- to establish a tripartite task force made up of labour organizations, government and employer's organizations to monitor the implementation of national actions on jobs and the promotion of gender equality.
- to support civil society led research, policy development and advocacy promoting women's access to decent work.
- to collect gender-disaggregated data on paid and unpaid work.
- to re-instate the mandatory long-form census survey.

WHAT IS DECENT WORK?

Decent work sums up what people hope for in their working lives:

- equality in employment, remunerations, opportunity and treatment.
- rights, voice and recognition.
- family stability and personal development.
- public health and well being.
- fairness and equality.

www.canadianlabour.ca www.faia-afai.org

Education for Aboriginal Girls, Decent Work for Aboriginal Women

EDUCATION FOR ABORIGINAL GIRLS IN CANADA

- Only 3 out of 10 children on First Nations reserves graduate from high school.
- Federally-funded schools on First Nations reserves receive 25%-50% less funding per student than do provincially-funded schools off reserve.
- Since 1998, funding for on reserve education has been capped at 2% annually, while provincial education funding has increased by 6% to 7% on average.
- Unlike provincial schools, the federal government does not provide equal funding for developmental tools such as libraries, computers, extra-curricular activities, and culturally appropriate curriculum.

"Everyone has the right to education"

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26)

CONDITIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

Economic Security:

- 36% Aboriginal women (including Métis, Inuit, First Nations) live in poverty.
- 49% of off reserve First Nations children under 6 live in low-income families, compared with 18% of non-Aboriginal children.

Housing:

- More than half of all Aboriginal female single-parent households live in unaffordable, unsafe or inadequate housing.
- 43% of Inuit children live in situations of overcrowding, six times the proportion among Non-Aboriginal children.
- As of December 2010, there were 117 First Nations communities with drinking water advisories.

Physical Security:

- Up to 75% of victims of sex crimes in Aboriginal communities are female and under 18 years of age, 50% of those are under 14, and almost 25% of those are younger than 7 years of age.
- In 2006, parents of 21% of First Nations children living off-reserve perceived that violence was a problem at their child's school.

"No child should ever have to beg of fight for a good education" Shannen Koostachin

Shannen Koostachin had a dream — that all children should be able to go to what she called the big "comfy" schools — schools that gave them hope and inspiration. The 400 children of Shannen's Attawapiskat First Nation on the James Bay coast went to school in portable trailers in a toxic field. Shannen knew this wasn't right. She and the youth in her community began to organize to make the government live up to their commitment to the children. In 2009, while studying off reserve, Shannen Koostachin passed away in an automobile accident. www.shannensdream.ca

ABORIGINAL WOMEN IN THE WORKFORCE

- In 2009, 12.7% of Aboriginal women were unemployed compared to 6.9% of non-Aboriginal women.
- The unemployment rate of Aboriginal female youth was about 2.1 times higher than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.
- Only 37.4% of Aboriginal women without a diploma or certificate participate in the workforce in 2006, compared to 51.3% of Aboriginal men.
- Most Aboriginal women with jobs work part-time and/or part-year; 60% are concentrated in low paying occupations.
- An Aboriginal woman working full-time during a full year makes only 46% of earnings as a male full-time full year worker.
- 36% of Aboriginal women live in poverty compared to only 9.4% of their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

EDUCATION AND INCOME:

In 2006 the median income for Aboriginal peoples was \$18,962 — 30% lower than the median income for the rest of Canadians. However, there is a strong correlation for a higher income and a higher level of education in regards to Aboriginal women and girls. A 2010 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives report demonstrated that the income gap disappears when Aboriginal peoples attain a university degree. Aboriginal women with university degrees surpass their non-Aboriginal counterparts. An Aboriginal woman with a Bachelor's degree earns \$2,471 more, and a Master's degree yields \$3,321 more than a non-Aboriginal woman. Unfortunately less than 15% of Aboriginal women have a university degree or higher. Only 1% of Aboriginal women have a graduate degree.

Canada needs to act now!

In 2008 the UN called on Canada to: "develop a specific and integrated plan for addressing the particular conditions affecting Aboriginal women, both on and off reserves... including poverty, poor health, inadequate housing, low school-completion rates, low employment rates, [and] low income."

www.canadianlabour.ca

www.fafsa-afaf.org

Women's World 2011

A workspace of reform and dialogue for the world

By Elizabeth Littlejohn

"I know why it is called grassroots... since I began to garden, I know that when you pull up the roots, if a small piece remains, more grass will grow."

b!wilder, spoken word artist

Nearly 2,000 international delegates, grassroots activists, academics, and policymakers congregated for the 30th anniversary of the Women's World Congress in Ottawa from July 4 to 7.

With plenaries translated simultaneously into English, French, Spanish and American Sign Language, each day's sessions were based upon the themes Breaking Cycles, Breaking Ceilings, Breaking Barriers and Breaking Ground, under the broader theme: "Inclusions, exclusions and seclusions: Living in a globalized world."

With delegates from 92 countries, this is the largest conference with the broadest range of issues, and the most complex event-management logistics, I have ever attended. I send heartfelt kudos to the co-chairs of WW 2011 co-chairs Caroline Andrew, of the University of Ottawa, and Rianne Mahon, of Carleton University. Six years ago, when they began to organize this conference, they were determined to focus on the rights of Aboriginal and disAbled women, and to ask the international community of feminist educators for help against systemic discrimination in the North. It was a very clever concept of the organizers to include delegates working across the feminist spectrum, from academics to those working on the frontline, to discuss international commonalities, and strategically plan for transnational to translocal initiatives through interweaving concepts from academia, grassroots activism, NGOs, ICTs and policymaking.

As I ran from the Ottawa Conference Center to the University of Ottawa campus, I asked delegates along my route to

tell me about other sessions through sound bites. Often there were four or five sessions in a single time slot that interested to me; my personal preoccupation was with the undermining of civil society through funding the military and the manufactured crisis of "austerity measures" constructed to explain these expenditures for media dissemination.

With billions earmarked for the military in Canada, and cuts coming for health, education and the environment, our civil society is going to become much, much poorer in the coming years, robbed of its cultural and social resiliency for research and innovation. Women's groups have been the first to be affected. When Rona Ambrose, federal Status of Women Minister, introduced the conference, some delegates turned their back on her, frustrated by her blatant misrepresentation of the Conservative government's support in funding women's programs — witness the red "not" amended to CIDA funding for \$7 million earmarked for church-backed group, Kairos, by International Cooperation Minister Bev Oda, and PM Harper's cut in funding to eleven women's groups just before the 2010 G-8 Summit, which focused on maternal health.

It was a miracle of organizational tenacity that this conference was able to be held in Ottawa at this time; three Nigerian participants were unable to present their papers because the Canadian government held up the processing of their visas and they did not arrive at the conference until Wednesday, the day before it ended.

I knew I was home when Raewyn Connell, an Australian transsexual academic and activist, author of the sociology primer 'Masculinities', asked her plenary how many women participating were teachers, and 80 per cent raised their hands. Many at the conference were



attempting to build leadership within their own communities to enable a matriarchal economy, in which the rights of children, community-building through microfinancing of women's enterprise, and sustainability of resources for future generations are prioritized over the international trend toward militarization.

According to Professor Connell, schools have both emancipatory and repressive capabilities. When we talk about education, we talk about the will of the people to change the system. The vast majority in the audience who raised their hands represent a "workforce of reform," she said. As the neoliberal agenda, guided by transnational corporations, turns to attacking unions and teachers, it is clear that their objective is to quell the alternative, potentially sustainable, thinking of a maternal economy. "Studying up," understanding the flow of economic and political interests from the masculine perspective as part of large-scale social dynamics, will enable grassroots activists to work with policymakers to put pressure on the government through co-opting techniques of transnational corporations as jujitsu moves for resistance. I had not known of Professor Connell's writings, and "know thy opposition" startled me; it was so obvious in its simple brilliance.

During Thursday morning's plenary, Queen's University law professor, and LGBTIQ activist, Kathleen Lahey, spoke of her research on tax reform, and how taxation affects the personal on every level. Never has so much been taken from so many, with so little return through government tax policy, she said, and no longer is the right to support a family and have children prioritized in Canadian economic policy. Professor Lahey urges her law students to take a course in business management to understand corporate tactics. Focusing her research on how taxa-

tion policy is currently being re-written in favour of the corporate-state, she is concerned about the speed at which the Conservative government is enacting these tax policies behind closed doors.

Wednesday evening, Abigail Disney, granddaughter of Walt, showed her documentary 'Pray the Devil back to Hell'. The story of Liberian mothers who worked to end a bloody civil war by wearing white T-shirts and protesting at their local fish market through song and dance, the title is based on one of the activist's quote about the persuasive power of Liberian president, Charles Taylor. Due to the mothers' insistence, when the warlords and leaders finally meet for six weeks in a hotel to negotiate a truce, the warlords 'wearing Ghanaian cotton and sleeping on clean sheets' outside of the bush, the men extended the negotiations for six weeks, enjoying the high life.

The film shows mothers organizing a hundred protesters to block the hotel's hall, and a warlord attempts to throw himself out the conference room's window in shame. Upon one of the protest leader's

threat of taking off her clothes — considered the last shred of dignity for a mother in Liberia — and bringing back a thousand protesters next time, the politicians and warlords get serious, and reach a resolution within two weeks.

Disney had to search for home footage of this mother's threat; media coverage of the Liberian civil war was of bloodshed; there was little of non-violent resistance. Disney said 875 million guns are in circulation post Cold War, and the guns are passed from conflict to conflict, and from country to country. This compares with 1.5 million guns in use during the First World War. She urged the audience to consider the gun trade and redistribution of weapons, and that war should also be considered from a woman's perspective. The five part series called 'Women, War and Peace' will be broadcast on PBS in the fall. As for us, Canadian arms exports have tripled over the past seven years; our country has added significantly to this gun trade.

As Feministing.com's executive director, Samhita Mukhopadhyay noted during the final plenary, that she could only

speak from her unique, personal perspective, constructed from the multiplicity of her selves as a south Asian, hip-hop loving, fashionista and blogger. Once she understood that was OK, she was able to move forward as a feminist, speaking about transnationalism, and how "feminist movements have a different meaning to women throughout the world" beyond the Western liberal movement.

With blisters on my heels, and my head reeling from the commonality of our shared conference experience, I have tried to do justice to the historical importance of this gathering of women. It felt almost impossible to fully cover it in terms of doing justice to its scope and vision, so these are just the intellectual snapshots of an environmental activist, pacifist, and sustainable systems analyst who is preoccupied with war, peace and civil society.

This article was published on rabble.ca July 14, 2011

Elizabeth Littlejohn blogs at Railroaded by Metrolinx and is a professor of new media.

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Upcoming Events

**The Third Global Conference,
Women Deliver 2013
Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
May 28, 29 and 30, 2013**

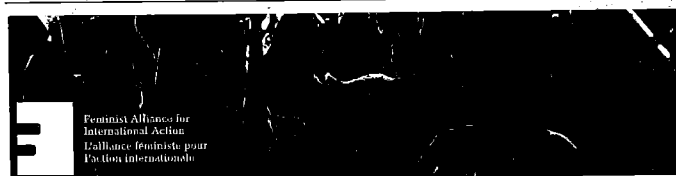


The third Global Conference, Women Deliver 2013, will be held in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on May 28, 29 and 30, 2013.

Women Deliver was launched at a groundbreaking conference in 2007 and works around the world to generate political commitment and financial investment to fulfill Millennium Development Goal #5 which aims to reduce maternal mortality and attain universal access to reproductive health. This initiative builds on commitments, partnerships, and networks began at the 2007 conference, fighting to end preventable deaths that kill approximately 350,000 girls and women from pregnancy-related causes every year. Women Deliver identifies maternal health as both a human right and a practical necessity for sustainable development.

At the opening of the Women Deliver 2010 conference UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said "Women Deliver 2010 was critical in showing that investing in girls and women is not only the right thing to do, it is also sound economics" and in reference to the 2013 conference he stated "the commitment by Women Deliver to convene a global conference in 2013 offers an opportunity to keep up the pressure and to affirm our plans for the period ahead. By giving mothers-to-be the services they need before, during and after pregnancy, and by providing quality health care to all women, we can save lives, prevent suffering and accelerate progress toward all the Millennium Development Goals."

For more information visit www.womendeliver.org.



**Transforming Economic Power to Advance
Women's Rights and Justice
The 12th AWID International Forum
Istanbul, April 19 to 22, 2012**

The 12th AWID International Forum will be held in Istanbul on April 19 to 22, 2012 and will gather nearly 2000 women's rights leaders and activists from around the world.

The Association for Women's Rights in Development is an international feminist membership organisation that works to strengthen the voice, impact and influence of women's rights advocates, organizations and movements internationally to effectively advance the rights of women. The 2012 forum will explore how economic power is impacting women and the planet and will facilitate connections among diverse groups working on these issues from both human rights and justice approaches in order to contribute to stronger, more effective strategies to advance women's rights and justice. The forum is both a conference and a call to action. For more information visit www.awid.org.

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Featured artist **Mahwish Hamdany**



Servitude

Mahwish Hamdany is a Pakistani artist settled in Montreal. Her exposure to the eastern and western cultures allows her to bring perspective and uniqueness in all that she creates. She has a passion to relate the untold stories of life through the strokes of her brush. Her paintings reveal the deeper messages in life, and by using a myriad of colours, textures and mediums she defines the inner emotions of her subjects and their surroundings. All her ideas, thoughts and dreams exist in the world of canvas. For Mahwish, there is nothing more real than capturing the imagination, allowing her to glimpse the fabric of her inner being in her artwork.

Her inspiration comes from travelling and coming across different cultures, and different people from all walks of life. Her empathic ability allows her to tell their stories in her paintings.

Mahwish has displayed her work at exhibitions in Pakistan, Canada and the Middle East and done custom pieces for private collections and corporate events. She continues to explore new ways to showcase her talent. Some of her recent work can be viewed on Facebook group La Vie Du Mahvi. She can be contacted at mahvz@yahoo.com

Name of Piece: Servitude

With the fire of the Earth under their feet and the scorching fireball over their heads, the village women tread down the muddy rocky path towards a home of unfed and parched mouths. As they watch their grief and pain reflected in the eyes of their loved ones, the village woman becomes weak inside and tougher on the outside. They are chained to a life of hardship in the feudal world with broken backs and broken hearts and they become blind to a life outside the boundaries of their village. There is no other life, no dreams, and no peace of mind. Only a sliver of hope to live another day.



Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement

Journal of the Motherhood Initiative for Research and Community Involvement

MOTHERING AND THE ENVIRONMENT: THE NATURAL, THE SOCIAL, THE BUILT

Spring/Summer 2011
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