

Free

selections on

WOMEN AND VIOLENCE

from Against the Current



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Women's Experiences of War

By Dianne Feeley

GEORGE W BUSH'S "State of the Union" speech was the closest thing possible to an open declaration of war. For the past twelve years, crippling sanctions against Iraq have had especially devastating effects on the health of women and children — due to Iraq's inability to restore water infrastructure and import medicines in particular.

These sanctions resemble a medieval siege in slow motion, reducing the population to unbearable misery, and mirroring Saddam Hussein's expropriation of the Iraqi people's resources for his police-state apparatus.

The official outbreak of the war will drastically speed up this ruinous process. According to a secret UN memo, leaked to the press, a war could be "devastating" for the population.

The evolution of modern warfare has brought on a disproportionate share of suffering for women. From time immemorial women have been "prizes" of conquest; it is only in the last century that they have become a major bearer of direct casualties.

A hundred years ago war meant sending soldiers off to fight battles that would lead to death and/or victory. Today war means massive civilian dislocation, starvation, the trafficking of women and children, fields sown with land mines.

Whether civilians are killed by "smart" bombs dropped from on high or humiliated, raped and murdered by soldiers, war fuels acts of violence. This glorification of aggression is particularly harmful to women and children.

Women have the right to defend themselves against invasion and occupation, including through armed struggle. Today's global reality, however, is a panoply of wars of aggression and domination in which the United States is playing a major role — although countries such

as Russia and Israel are also involved.

Around the country small organizing committees of Women in Black are springing up. These local networks of women oppose the use of violence and terror as a means to political ends. They wear black in the spirit of Women in Black of Israel and Palestine, who call for the restoration of human rights of the Palestinian people, and of the Argentine mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, who gathered to demand that the military regime be held accountable for the “disappearance” of their children.

Other women have claimed pink as their color — playing off the U.S. government’s terrorist alert, “Code Red,” with a “Code Pink.” A coalition of women’s organizations wear bright pink to symbolize their preemptive strike for peace, a determination to maintain civil liberties as well as a celebration of life, not war. They have maintained a vigil in front of the White House since last November, and confronted various pro-war spokeswomen.

These various vigils and marches in opposition to state-sponsored violence are a visual expression of the solidarity that binds women globally.

Many Faces of War

War in the form of an occupation is being waged on the Chechens and Palestinians. Checkpoints, military raids and curfews are the daily reality, trapping people in their homes, preventing them from going to school or work and reducing their ability to find food. Look at the photos of Jenin, Nablus or Grozny and see how armies have reduced cities and towns to rubble.

War in the form of U.S./UN sanctions has been waged for over a decade in Iraq, destroying the country’s infrastructure and escalating infant mortality. There are hospitals and doctors, but no medicine. It is a country with enormous oil resources, but a stagnating and deteriorating infrastructure.

War as civil war and ethnic conflict is being waged in Colombia, the Sudan, in the Congo and has been unleashed in the Ivory Coast. Only too recently it burned hot in Kosova and Bosnia. As in the case of occupation, the “other” is to be captured, subjugated, humiliated, raped, tortured, forced to flee or exterminated.

War in the guise of “liberation from the Taliban” has been imposed in Afghanistan since September, 2001. A society that has been torn apart by foreign intervention (United States, USSR and Pakistan) and civil war is being propped up by the presence of U.S. and UN soldiers. How long is the population supposed to live in shells of bombed-out homes, without work?

These wars have been justified as necessary in the name of democracy or liberation — or even, in the case of U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, in the name of women’s rights. Yet on closer inspection we hear a U.S. general’s infamous statement during the Vietnam war, “we had to destroy the village in order to save it.”

Let us count the ways war and militarism undercuts the ability of women to have the right to control their lives:

1. War — and its aftermath — kills the civilian population.

Despite the hype of “surgical” operations, war kills the civilian population, the majority of whom are women and children. The “smart” bombs of the 1991 Gulf War killed people in the Amerriyah air raid shelter in Baghdad and during the Afghanistan war U.S. planes bombed a Red Cross building, a wedding, a UN building.

During the 1991 war against Iraq an estimated 100,000-150,000 Iraqis — mostly civilians — and 184 U.S. soldiers were killed. The bombing destroyed Iraq’s water and sewage treatment plants, its electrical production plants and pharmaceutical supply facilities.

But the aftermath of the war, with the UN-imposed sanctions, resulted in at least one million Iraqi deaths, half of them children.

UNICEF reports that every month over 5,000 Iraqi children under the age of five perish from causes related to the sanctions.

More Iraqi children die each month than the total number of people killed on 9/11! (Several thousand U.S. soldiers who fought in the Gulf War have also died from cancers and other medical complications related to the war.)

The war continues after the bombing through the laying of land mines and uranium poisoning caused by the use of “depleted uranium” ore in warheads (used to maximize the effectiveness and strength for precision bombing). High concentrations of uranium have been found in the civilian (and military) populations of Afghanistan, the Balkans and Iraq.

Kabul, a city of 3.5 million people, suffered the highest number of fixed targets during the 2001-02 “Operation Enduring Freedom.” Preliminary samples taken in the city of new-born infants reveal twenty-five percent are suffering from congenital and post-natal health problems.

These are most likely associated with uranium contamination. Such infants are lethargic, develop skin rashes, have large heads in comparison to body size and undeveloped muscles.

Clearly the world arms market — almost half of which is controlled by the United States — poison the land and sea, causing miscarriages, birth defects, cancers and other long-term health problems.

We will never know the exact body count of the Israeli attack on Jenin refugee camp, in the West Bank, last April. First-hand reports indicate hundreds dead, bodies lying in the street — some shot at close range; buildings reduced to rubble with people trapped inside.

Hundreds of men were rounded up and taken away to unknown interrogation and detention camps. While women were left trying to find out whether their husbands, fathers or sons were alive or

dead, they also had to shoulder the task of finding food and shelter for their families. UN Special Representative Terje Roed-Larsen, after touring the camp, reported “colossal destruction . . . horrifying beyond belief.”

The Israeli army blocked entry by humanitarian aid convoys, journalists, and human rights investigators; subsequently the Sharon government with U.S. support successfully blocked a UN investigation.

2. War increases the aggressive violence against women.

In times of war, rape is a method of terrorizing the civilian population. Whether the rape occurs in an isolated setting or takes place in front of the woman’s family, its purpose is to demonstrate the complete domination of the warring party over the woman and her people. She is the symbol of her society.

Gang rape, sexual mutilation and the deliberate attempt to impregnate a woman and confine her so that she must bear the unwanted child are all practices militarism imposes on a subject people.

During the war in Bosnia a decade ago rape was used as a weapon of political terror. An estimated 20,000-30,000 Muslim and Croatian women and children were raped, often cruelly and repeatedly. Many rape survivors — held by regular or irregular soldiers until their pregnancy was beyond the second month — were forced to bear unwanted children as a form of “ethnic cleansing.”

Rape and massacres also prepare the population for wars to come. Last March 2,000 Muslims were killed in Gujarat, India in what was a state-sponsored program by Hindu fascists. Muslim women were stripped, gang raped and then burnt alive. And that is the preview of things to come. With more than 150,000 Muslims forced to flee their homes and businesses, the right-wing Hindu movement claims the right to demolish mosques, rewrite schoolbooks and murder those who stand in their way.

The rape of girls by U.S. servicemen on Okinawa and the murder of three women at Fort Bragg, NC shortly after their husbands – “special operations officers” — returned from duty in Afghanistan are the tip of the iceberg.

Soldiers are trained to be killers — to judge in an instant and automatically pull the trigger. Aggression is not something easily turned on and off; it is more likely to become part of a culture of domination that is reproduced again and again.

3. War restricts women’s freedom of movement in daily life.

Restrictions enforced by the military have a devastating effect on women, reducing their access to food, resources, work and the larger social interaction that comes from going to work or to the market. They see their children becoming malnourished, unable to live a normal life or even attend school. They do not have access to medical care.

The situation of Palestinian women has been well documented by human rights and UN agencies, revealing that in the last two years twenty-two women and sixteen children have died while stopped at Israeli checkpoints.

Although in labor, over fifty women were unable to get past the checkpoint. Forty-three babies were born there while an additional nine were stillbirths. These checkpoints are yet another source of dehumanizing the Palestinian population.

4. War forces the civilian population to flee from their homes.

During the twenty-five months of Israeli incursions in Palestinian territory, over 9,750 homes were demolished in the West Bank and another 2,349 in the densely populated Gaza strip. Although collective punishment is a violation of international law, Israel has destroyed more than a thousand Palestinian homes following military or municipal decision.

Palestinian villages near Israeli settlements have faced constantly escalating attacks from armed settlers. Settler harassment, military house-razing policies, confiscation of traditional Palestinian lands in the name of security, occupation and unemployment have convinced 150,000 Palestinians to leave.

Since 1999 — when Sudan became an exporter of oil — the ongoing civil war has taken on a new level of brutality. With oil revenues the government has been able to obtain more lethal weaponry, displacing the civilian population in areas where oil is extracted and where further oil exploration is being carried out.

In the western Upper Nile region more than a hundred thousand civilians have been expelled from their villages. Helicopter gunships first attack from the air and then troops swoop in to carry out a mop-up operation involving mass executions, rape and abductions.

The soldiers mine the cattle feed sites and herding paths to insure that the population is unable to return. Children are forcibly recruited into soldiering.

Since the start of the civil war twenty years ago, 5.5 million Sudanese have been forced to flee their homes, with one million currently living in exile. An additional two million died from the war or the famine that periodically follows.

In the current phase of Colombia's civil war more than two million Colombians — particularly the Afro-Caribbean population — have been displaced, forced to move from their rural homes to cities and towns within the country, or abroad.

Most have been displaced by the paramilitaries. Yet under the banner of fighting terrorism and the narcotics trade, the Bush administration is pouring \$470 million a year into "training" Colombian troops (who have close links to the paramilitaries) and police.

More than 160,000 Chechen civilians have been displaced by the

civil war, with at least 20,000 living in tent camps in Ingushetia where conditions are primitive but safe. Although it was winter, last December the Russian authorities closed one of the six camps in Ingushetia — and cut off its gas and electricity.

Pressuring the displaced population to “voluntarily” return to Chechnya, the Federal Migration Service use both the carrot (promising non-existent, or already occupied or uninhabitable accommodations) and the stick (threats to close the other camps).

Meanwhile in Chechnya human rights organizations continue to document extrajudicial executions, forced disappearances and torture of noncombatants by Russian troops as well as assassinations by rebel troops (of Chechens working with the Russians).

The 1991 Gulf War created 1.5 million Iraqi refugees. How many will flee this time?

During bombing campaigns or invasions, civilians able to escape the war area do so, and usually with just the clothes on their backs. With men often off at war or forced into hiding, the task of resettling falls to a great extent on women.

The need to replace community networks that have been destroyed places an enormous burden on women, struggling to overcome acute trauma even while finding a way to house, feed and protect all of their children.

Whether the civilian population ends up in camps within the country, flees over a border to refugee camps or are ultimately able to migrate to Europe, Australia or North America depends on many factors: their level of education, whether other family members are already settled in other countries, their host country’s willingness to accept them.

In 2001 there were an estimated 14.9 million refugees and at least 22 million internally displaced persons. More than two-thirds were

from Afghanistan, Angola, Burma, Burundi, Congo-Kinshasa, Eritrea, Iraq, the Palestinian territories, Somalia and Sudan.

War reinforces global poverty and racism, disrupting and destroying the infrastructure of the Third World, including schools, scarce medical facilities, water supplies. Yet today even the countries built on migration — Australia, Canada and the United States — place severe limits on the number of refugees they are willing to accept.

The UN High Commission for Refugee statistics for 2001 reveal that of the top ten countries receiving refugees, not one is in the advanced capitalist world!

5. War continues for refugees who are not welcomed once they reach “safety.”

Women refugees have often fled their homes because of sexual violence only to find themselves once more in a potentially violent situation. Anytime an army is sent to “keep the peace,” the trafficking of women — usually involving coercion — develops or is intensified.

Dependent on others for help, refugee women often find that male officials in the camps demand sexual favors in return for food and shelter. Last year incidents of sexual abuse by humanitarian aid workers surfaced in refugee camps in Zimbabwe and West Africa.

Women have also been molested, raped and even sold into prostitution by smugglers, including the police. It is estimated that the trafficking of humans is a \$7 billion-a-year business. In Asia and the Pacific region alone more than 30 million children have been traded over the last three decades. The victims are usually teenager girls who end up working in brothels or sweatshops. The sexual trafficking of women and children is directly related to the wars and civil wars taking place in their countries.

According to Amnesty International, women seeking asylum in the United States have been also detained without adequate food

or medical care, forced to undergo strip searches and treated in demeaning and humiliating ways, including sexual assault.

In a world where there is free movement of capital, the movement of people is more and more constrained. Last year we saw the refusal of the Australian government to allow Afghan refugees — in desperate condition — the right to land on their territory.

The governments of the European Union are developing common and draconian border policies; the United States has expanded its border patrol, building a fence along the southern California border and demanding that Canada adopt strict policies.

Despite the fact that the legal right to asylum has been ratified by 140 countries, today refugees are subjected to arbitrary arrest, detention, denial of social and economic rights, closed borders and forcible return to their country of origin.

Women refugees have often fled their country as victims of sexual assault, or have particular gender reasons for seeking asylum. Yet gender-based claims for asylum were rejected until the early 1990s. Gender-based assaults were treated as “private” not public matters.

Canada became the first country to recognize gender-specific forms of persecution. Since that time women refugees have successfully sought asylum for sexual violence in situations of conflict as well as for protection against “honor” crimes and female genital mutilation. Yet states have not accepted the right of women to asylum for situations of domestic violence, no matter how brutal.

In the United States, since eighty-five percent of immigrants are people of color — and like all new immigrants have a higher fertility rate — anti-immigrant propagandists paint a picture of immigrants looking for a “free ride” and who will overwhelm the country’s economy.

As a result, passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work

Opportunity Act in 1996 particularly targets immigrants. Almost half of the expected “welfare reform” savings came from cuts to immigrants’ benefits, including cutting non-citizens from the food stamp program.

6. War and the militaristic culture it imposes prioritizes weaponry over human services.

No society can afford to fund war and social programs. The United States military budget is not only the highest of any country in the world but surpasses the combined spending of the next eight countries — Russia, France, Japan, the United Kingdom, Germany, China, Saudi Arabia and Italy.

Last year President Bush proposed a 2003 budget that would raise “defense” spending by nearly thirteen percent. This is the greatest increase since the Cold War era and is justified in the administration’s National Security Strategy paper as maintaining forces “strong enough to dissuade potential adversaries” from the dream of ever “surpassing or equaling, the power of the United States.”

The military budget eats up one-third of the federal budget. Yet faced with persistent unemployment and a sluggish economy, the Bush administration blithely states “we” can afford the coming war and calls for yet another round of tax cuts for the rich.

As more troops and military hardware pour into the Middle East here at home almost every state budget is projecting draconian budget cuts that will affect libraries, schools, recreation programs, medical care — all the programs that effect the quality of our lives.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 33 million people live below poverty (many of them the working poor). The poverty rate in 2001 stood at 11.6%, with the percentage of Black and Latino poverty double that rate.

This year we celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of Roe v. Wade,

the limited victory of U.S. women's reproductive rights. Despite the Supreme Court decision legalizing abortion, most counties across the United States have never established abortion services.

Since the beginning of the Bush administration the cultural battle against women's rights continues to chip away access to abortion. But the whole range of reproductive rights issues — ranging from addressing sterilization abuse, improving pregnancy programs, campaigning to lower infant mortality rates or aiding women after the birth of their children through the establishment of federally funded, quality day care — are not issues the administration prioritizes.

Through executive orders, legal briefs and delegations at various international conferences, the Bush administration has revealed its deeply anti-women positions. While scientifically accurate information about contraception and abortion has disappeared from federal government web sites, federally funded sex education programs preach abstinence as the only solution to pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases.

At last year's United Nations Special Session on Children the Bush administration delegates opposed efforts to help young girls who are victims of rape under wartime conditions and request abortion. The administration has frozen millions of dollars of funding for programs run by the United Nations Population Fund and the World Health Organization to advance reproductive health and combat HIV and AIDS.

While the "State of the Union" address trumpeted funding for AIDS treatment in Africa, at a United Nations-sponsored conference in Bangkok last fall the Bush delegates attempted to block endorsement of condom use to prevent AIDS. President Bush has also withdrawn his support for Senate ratification of a treaty that requires nations to remove barriers of discrimination against women in areas like legal rights and health care.

At the approach of this year's International Women's Day, we

think back to the women socialists who first called a coordinated campaign to win rights for working women — particularly the right to vote — in the early years of the 20th century.

We also recall the 1960s, when the second wave of feminism germinated and then blossomed out of the mass antiwar and civil rights movements. At the beginning of the 21st century a campaign against war, racism and poverty is central to the well-being of women, children and all human beings.

This is a campaign to oppose the various trade policies that privatize water, electricity, social security and even seeks to privatize education. It is a campaign that must reject the reactionary call to build fortresses of wealth which leave the majority in abject poverty.

It is a campaign that sees through the phoniness of “humanitarian intervention” and calls for solidarity in the face of war and globalized capital.

ATC 103, March-April 2003

After 9/11: Whose Security?

By Johanna Brenner and Nancy Holmstrom

SINCE 9/11 THE United States has been obsessed with “security” in a very particular sense—protection from intentional threats to our safety and well being, as in “Office of Homeland Security,” “our national security,” “the conflict between civil liberties and security considerations,” “security was tightened,” or, more mundanely, “security guards.”

In the 1980’s and ‘90s the racist “culture of fear” that fueled the rise of the U.S. prison-industrial complex amplified crime into an ever-present threat. Now, it is “terrorists” and “rogue nations” that justify the expansion of a new arena for profit-making, the security industry—a major growth business here and in many other parts of the world, and an increasingly high-tech one.

Our daily lives have been transformed as people have to carry, even to wear ID cards, big concrete blocks line the sidewalks of many of our streets, and our access to countless public buildings is tightly controlled by phalanxes of security guards and video monitors. But most of us pay little attention: the possibility of terrorist attacks has been normalized.

Yet protection against intentional threats to our safety is not the only way “security” is understood. We have “security blankets” when we’re babies and “social security” when we are elderly—things that protect our safety and well being both in material and emotional ways. This is security in the broader sense—safety and well being, both of an objective material and a subjective emotional kind.

Threats to security, in this broader sense of the word, are understood to go far beyond intentional acts by individuals or groups. Generally speaking, however, most Americans’ concern today that is posed in terms of the word “security” is about intentional threats from people—the narrower sense of the concept.

These two very different understandings of the word “security” and threats to security are highly gendered. When we talk of security in the narrow sense, as in “our national security interests,” we know that it is men who will be defending us against other men who are attacking us—and it is men who will be deciding when, where and how to attack or defend us. Although the sexual division of labor is amazingly variable through human history, one thing that does not vary is that men are responsible for warfare. Even though women are now soldiers in the United States, on the ground and piloting planes, the pattern is basically unchanged.

In photo after photo of ordinary soldiers, military leaders, “experts” and politicians, women are out of sight—except for the occasional photogenic exceptions, like the good girl Jessica Lynch and her bad sister of Abu Ghraib.

The higher up you go, the more male it is. The civilian militarists of the arms industry and politicians are even more overwhelmingly male. And today’s warfare is a very high tech affair, another masculine domain.

On the other hand, if we think of “security” in the broader sense of security blankets and social security, then women immediately enter the picture. The other invariable piece of the sexual division of labor is that women do the bulk of caretaking—of the young, the old and other dependents, so that women around the world are providing the bulk of the ongoing material and emotional security that everyone needs.

This is not high-tech but simply caring labor, usually on top of other labor. When the market threatens this security by not providing enough for a family’s needs, women pick up the slack; when public goods are cut back women’s burden increases.

In general, we could say that far more people are harmed by threats to their security in this second sense. Far, far more people die from lack of health care, from poverty-caused malnutrition, from

government inaction to prevent the spread of deadly disease, from pollution of the environment by industry, than from acts by individuals or groups who intend harm.

Yet in the face of this clear truth, it is the threats to security from intentional acts that capture attention and drive political action. What might explain this focus on intentional acts rather than the really widespread and pervasive threats to our lives, health and well-being that are not intentional?

One answer might be that it's because intentional acts do more harm—but that's definitely not true. So our focus on the narrow kind of security can't be justified on these objective grounds. To take just one example: around 8.5 million people were killed during the four years of World War I, but more than twice that many—20 million people—died from the flu pandemic in 1918-19.

Perhaps, then, the focus on intentionality has moral roots? All societies have laws against harming people—and these reflect our moral judgment that harm done intentionally is the worst kind (except when the government does it in wars or in capital punishment—“state terrorism” doesn't count).

Despite opposition from the United States, we are moving closer to having international laws and courts that can judge and punish these acts. So perhaps we focus on intentional threats to security because we think that there are already, or will be, effective deterrents to prevent intentional acts of terrorism as well as judicial institutions to deal with them if they do occur.

Perhaps we could extend this explanation and say that we focus on threats to our security from human acts for practical reasons, because they are potentially under our control, whereas other threats to our security, like natural catastrophes, are out of our control. This sounds reasonable; what is the point of focusing on threats that we can do nothing about?

Well, it is true that some natural catastrophes are out of our control—but only some, and certainly not all. The human causes of global warming are well documented and now obvious. But many other apparently natural threats to security are also products of human action.

The recent cholera epidemic in South Africa, called a natural disaster by the government, was in reality due to the privatization of water that forced people to get their water from polluted rivers. Or consider the drought in many parts of Africa, or the sand storm that came over Beijing a couple of years ago, both caused by cutting down too many trees.

Moreover, even natural threats that are not caused by human action might nevertheless be controllable by human intervention—as diseases are controlled in the richer parts of the world. Thus some natural threats, like global warming or drought, which are clearly side effects of our economic system—collateral damage, one could say—are potentially under our control.

But we are all too prone to see the economic system as being like nature rather than constituted by human relations and countless human acts. We listen to the stock market report in the same way we listen to the weather report, as something that happens to us, that we're powerless to affect, rather than something we do. This distorted way of looking at the world is related to what Marx called "commodity fetishism," the appearance of relations among people as if they were relations among things—which he saw as a very central aspect of the ideology of capitalism.

So long as we believe that something is out of our control, then it is. The focus on intentional acts has the effect of shielding the economic system of capitalism from scrutiny, and from being exposed as the major cause of insecurity for millions of people around the world.

Why doesn't this suffering and insecurity become a focus of concern? Is it because it appears to be the result of acts that do not

intend to do harm?

Yet in most people's thinking about morality, doing harm unintentionally but with reckless disregard for the harmful consequences is considered almost as bad as it is to do harm intentionally. This conviction is embedded in our legal system—a drunk driver who kills may be charged with manslaughter rather than murder, but still punished heavily.

Certainly doing harm “unintentionally but with reckless disregard” would apply to the ordinary workings of global corporate capitalism. So there is little basis for saying that the focus on threats to our security from intentional acts is due to their being so much worse, from a moral point of view, than threats to our security from acts done with willful disregard for their impact on the vast majority of the people of the globe.

Perhaps also we're more afraid of intentional threats to our security for psychological reasons. Perhaps we are afraid, most basically, of someone trying to hurt us; this is more hurtful psychologically because it is a conscious deliberate rejection of who we are.

Also, with intentional acts, the danger tends to be sudden, to hit all at once, so there is no time to get used to it; the fear of the surprise also intensifies the fear of the harm and so when it occurs we experience shock. Some researchers have suggested that the stress of waiting for the blow to fall explains why sometimes victims of domestic violence seem to provoke the violence.

The shock of the totally unexpected blow was multiplied many thousand times in the attack on the World Trade Center where so many people were killed all at once. In contrast, the damage done by the absence of goods to satisfy basic needs tends to hit far more slowly; people suffer and die from malnutrition little by little over a very long time.

This makes slow starvation quite unsurprising; in fact, it just seems

“natural.” As Amartya Sen points out, in some contexts women suffering malnutrition seem not even aware that they are hungry.

Or, finally, perhaps the crucial issue explaining the focus on threats to our security from intentional acts is that when we speak about security, we have to ask “whose security?”

Perhaps it is mainly those of us who are fortunate enough not to have to worry about catastrophic threats to our safety and well being from nature, or from the everyday workings of the economic system, who focus on the dangers of people intentionally trying to hurt us, whether they be ordinary criminals or terrorists.

Thus it is especially North Americans, Europeans and the elites of the developing world who focus on security in the narrow sense. Of course, people in war anywhere have to focus on those dangers; if they’re not alive, they won’t have to worry about clean water. But ordinarily, poor people have more basic worries such as “food security.”

Whatever explains our narrowness in thinking about threats to our security—perhaps all of the above factors contribute—the effect is the same: We miss the most crucial threats to global security in the long run, and the best way to defend ourselves. The focus on intentional acts is simply too narrow to provide genuine security, certainly for poor people everywhere in the world, but increasingly for the rest of us as well.

Everyone knows the rough figures on the deaths from the WTC attack: upwards of 3000 people were killed. Some of us know that at least the same number, perhaps more, civilians have been killed in Afghanistan by our forces (to say nothing of tens of thousands of Iraqis).

But few people are aware of the effects of the economic downturn brought on or exacerbated by the attack. According to the World Bank, in countries without a social safety net, the downturn is

estimated to be responsible for increased disease and malnutrition among children to the extent of causing an additional 40,000 more children to die than would have died otherwise.

More attention has been paid to how the economic and political forces of capitalist globalization create global insecurity than to the ways that patriarchal social institutions and cultural norms are also responsible for the threats to our security.

In the Global South, structural adjustment programs, including the privatization of formerly public services (health care, education, water, etc.) have the largest impact on the lives of women, who as family caretakers are most reliant on the state for security.

Patriarchal gender norms that encourage men to pursue sexual encounters outside of marriage, while loading onto women all the responsibilities for caregiving, undermine men's ties to their wives and children. When forced to migrate to look for work men find new sexual partners, creating new liaisons, even new families, and abandoning wives and children.

The ranks of single mothers are growing all over the world. Meanwhile, without opportunities to earn money to support their families, many of these single mothers themselves migrate to seek work, sending back money to their own mothers and other women kin who care for their children. In the Philippines, for example, remittances from women working abroad are the largest source of foreign currency, far surpassing exports.

Since 1995, women have outnumbered men among new immigrants to the United States; they come to work as caregivers not only for children but also for the ill, the disabled and the elderly. Even with all this inexpensive immigrant caring labor, threats to well-being, security in the broader sense, are building here too. Women in the United States want and need to work for wages—and are doing so for more hours a week and more years of their lives than ever before.

At a time when women need more help than ever with the caring responsibilities that patriarchal social arrangements place primarily on their shoulders, the neoliberal (“free market” and privatizing) assault on public services is reducing that help, making their lives more difficult and the lives of their families more insecure.

The more insecure people become, the more they have to rely primarily on themselves, then the more vulnerable they are to sexist, heterosexist and racist ideas about who is the cause of their problems, who is a threat to their well-being.

So the real, but relatively small, threat that terrorism represents gets magnified as it carries all of the insecurity that people are experiencing. It is far easier to imagine military solutions to external threats than to imagine challenging the power of the corporate system.

This displacement of everyday fears onto an external enemy is also encouraged by the pervasive racist “Americanism” that regards non-European cultures as less civilized, even barbaric.

Left to their own resources, without being able to rely on government or on their own communities, people feel that they have to compete with others to survive. This sense of isolation is made worse as fewer people, in fact, participate in any kind of collective political activism—in unions, or community or neighborhood organizing projects, for example—where they could see themselves as connected to other people and having the power to challenge the corporate agenda, to change things for the better.

Thus their response to rising insecurity is not to join with others, to protect themselves through collective action, but rather to look elsewhere for a powerful force that can protect them. They look for a strong leader—a powerful father—who can take care of them—not least by harnessing the awesome violence of the U.S. military.

This desperate search for a protector pulls people away from the

new ideals of masculinity that had begun to emerge out of feminism's critique of patriarchal culture, and instead reinforces the hyper-masculinity that underlies super-patriotism and nationalism.

It also fuels opposition to LGBT rights, because the LGBT movement challenges narrow definitions of gender, requires us to value "feminine men" and "masculine women," even begins to force people to acknowledge that gender is somewhat fluid and in some sense unstable. This is a frightening recognition if you feel that your safety and security depends on men who are hypermasculine, powerful figures who will protect you.

Conservative sexual politics joined with nativist anti-immigrant sentiment increases political support for the strategy of all-out militarism and preemptive war that is the centerpiece of U.S. response to terrorism. Even in terms of providing security in the most narrow sense—protection from intentional threats—this policy can only have the opposite effect, to make us less secure.

Militarism, of course, has been part of U.S. history since our country's inception, and a powerful military-industrial complex has been a driving force in politics since the 1950s. But there seems to have been a significant quantitative and qualitative change in the past few years—the development of what Chalmers Johnson describes as an empire of bases (rather than the old empires of territory).

It is difficult to get an accurate count of how many U.S. bases there are, since many are secret, or not official ("informal leases," etc.). But the official count is 725 bases in 38 countries. Whom do these bases protect?

In the Persian/Arabian Gulf the bases have two main functions—surveillance and guarding the oil. The oil companies that raced into the new independent countries around the Caspian Sea were quickly followed by the construction of military bases to protect their installations. (Chalmers Johnson, 2004, *Sorrows of Empire*, 156-169, 216)

So oil company profits are made more secure by our empire of bases, but what about people? Well, there are certainly groups who do benefit from military bases, which is one reason there are huge vested interests in preserving and expanding them. But most people around the world of course do not benefit—since the U.S. military presence protects the corporate interests and supports the policies that have increased the global gap between rich and poor.

And contrary to the rhetoric of security that views the arms budget as simply the price “we” have to pay to defend ourselves against intentional threats, the government’s all-out aggressive militarism creates more enemies by the day. It gives thousands of people real grievances against us—and our arms industry supplies them with the means, including small nuclear weapons, to do us great damage, though 9/11 showed what could be done simply with box cutters.

The growing antiwar movement, protesting preemptive war, the occupation of Iraq, the state terrorism unleashed on the people of Afghanistan and other militaristic policies, does argue that the Bush administration’s strategies are making us less, rather than more, secure.

But we think it is also important to extend this challenge, to insist that security means much more than protection from intentional acts. We propose to bring feminist politics into antiwar politics by arguing not only against militarism and empire, but also for government policies that secure our well-being by valuing caring work and supporting those who do it.

Too often, when people talk about the link between the global neoliberal corporate agenda and terrorism they focus on men. They argue that unemployed and underemployed men are the terrorists, the organizers of fundamentalist movements, the social base for anti-Americanism.

If men had jobs and roles of authority in their communities, they would take care of women instead of being rootless and violent. In

other words, to reduce terrorism, the government should pursue economic development that would restore men to the patriarchal positions in family and community that capitalist globalization has undermined.

We would make the link in a different way. The exploitation of women's labor globally, their forced migration to provide cheap labor in the developed countries, may not threaten us physically, but does call upon us to act. The struggle against "sweat shop" labor urges working people in the United States to join with workers in other countries to improve pay and working conditions.

Similar bonds of solidarity can be built in the global justice movement by organizing to challenge the neoliberal policies that are so harmful to women and children in the global south. We can support efforts by women in the global south to improve the conditions under which they do unpaid caregiving labor and struggle to meet the needs of their families and communities.

We can demand an end to the structural adjustment policies that force governments there to dismantle the welfare state and public services, and argue for abolition of the crushing debt burden that requires deep cuts in government spending.

The same neoliberal policies that are undermining the conditions of women's work as caregivers around the globe are increasing the insecurity of our own lives. Here at home, the sweeping attack on government and public programs are aimed at forcing everyone to depend on the market, to make us all ever more desperate so we'll work for less, demand less, expect less.

By forcing us to rely on the market for help with our caregiving responsibilities (and by contracting out public services to non-profits and for-profit companies), these policies have created a vast market demand for cheap labor—a demand filled by women working for low wages, without health benefits and pensions.

These women workers—immigrant and native-born—as well as the vast majority of women who use the services that they provide as individual care givers or as workers in the service sector, deserve well-being instead of the increasing economic insecurity that now defines our lives.

Real homeland security requires a reversal of spending on the military and the tax giveaways to the rich, investment in public education and in a whole range of new public institutions—day care centers with high paid workers who are respected for their skills; a home care system for elderly people that is well-funded and pays home care workers a living wage, paid parental and family leave so we can spend time with those we love and care for.

Until people realize that the sense of security with which we are so obsessed is an extremely narrow one, supported by hyper-masculine ideology and capitalist interests, the majority of the world's people will day by day continue to become radically insecure, in both definitions of that term.

ATC 115, March-April 2005

State-Sponsored Violence Against Women

By Julia Perez Cervera

THE WORDS OF Latin American women continue to have no value to those who legislate, govern and administer justice. The permissiveness and omissions of state laws, institutions and functionaries in response to the violation of women's rights are part of gender violence. The advances have been minimal and the need to dismantle this theater of illusions is urgent.

A couple of weeks ago I was in Mexico presenting a project to help women whose rights had been violated. While I was waiting for it to be received, I ran into a woman recognized for her work with social organizations and who has held important posts. Among other things, she asked me how the proposed modification of Mexico City's Law for the Prevention of and Response to Intra-family Violence was going.

I replied that it was going badly, in fact it wasn't going anywhere; that it was tough due to the composition of the legislative branch, the limited strength of its Gender Equality Commission, the political parties' lack of interest in the issue...In short, I told her about the difficulties that are repeated in every country when it comes to making or reforming certain laws.

So she said to me, in what I believe was a well-intentioned way: "Look, the problem is that you've got the strategy wrong. Women's NGOs can't go alone to fight with legislators for the kind of modifications they want. If you like, I could get together with some important people (Carlos Monsivais, Paco Cervantes, the president of the PRD fraction) and ask them to talk to the legislators and propose the needed modifications to the law as if they were their own. They aren't even going to listen to you and as some of you are feminists to boot, they won't so much as look at them."

Maybe our political strategy is wrong, but I'm personally convinced that the mistake is to continue letting ourselves be represented and spoken for by people who deny women's value as people, who deny the value of women's words, who don't recognize any truth that isn't spoken by people of the same class, ideas, sex or rank. In short, as the end did not justify the means, I didn't accept her proposal.

I want to look at the issue of violence against women in Latin America in a little more detail, and specifically link it up with the value of women's words. Because the fact is that despite decades of denunciation by women's organizations, for the governments of Latin America the problem of violence against women is a relatively recently discovered issue of limited relevance.

In some cases, they are only just learning about the different kinds of violence exercised against women; and in others, not all of the violence exercised against women just for being women is talked about so the issue is limited to family, domestic or intra-family violence, as it is variously referred to, depending on what they want to acknowledge. The true dimensions of family violence — understood in its diverse ways and still not very well at that — are only now beginning to be plumbed in Latin America.

Physical violence is recognized in some countries and both physical and psychological violence in others. Yet others are beginning to recognize economic violence. In almost all Latin American countries this acknowledgment always comes conditioned, with qualifiers or limitations: i.e. only when it is repeated and ongoing, when it happens between cohabitants, when it happens within the family residence... or, in the case of Puerto Rico, when a couple that has been living together for less than five years can prove they intend to continue living together. I wonder what it would be like to go and denounce your partner for violence against you and be asked to prove that you want to continue living with him in order to be attended.

I sometimes feel that what's proposed in the laws aimed at dealing

with violence is just a sick joke; that the idea is precisely to render non-viable any action that really could start putting the brakes on male domination.

The fact is that state violence, which no country anywhere recognizes, seems to assume that women can be violated, beaten or humiliated every now and then. Could that be because it's thought that we must be corrected or that it's good for us to know who's in charge?

Most of the laws promulgated to respond to or prevent violence against women, which up to now have been limited to the domestic sphere, require before intervention by government institutions that the woman must have suffered violence repeatedly, continuously and in her own home, and that the violence must have been serious or led to her death. And curiously enough, when a woman dies as the result of violence, it is not labeled homicide; it's just family violence. At least in Mexico, this is what they would have the world believe in the case of the women murdered in Ciudad Juárez.

I think that this state violence is precisely what generates gender violence, the violence against women that includes family violence, rather than the other way round. When a law defines family violence only as "repeated violence," what else is it saying than: "You can hit your partner, but be careful not to do it every day and try not to let things get out of hand so it won't be considered a crime. If not, it won't be so easy for us to help you."

And when a law limits its definition of family violence to violence committed within the home, it is saying: "We still consider it a private matter, and not some huge quarrel. The male partner continues to hold sway over his house, his woman, his children, his family. It's no big deal: we're not going to get involved, we're not going to throw stones in our own glass house."

When a law like the one recently approved in Guanajuato says that the main objective of an anti-violence law is to preserve the family

and that after two sessions the man and woman have to sign a conciliation agreement, it is effectively telling women to “Grin and bear it because this is all the protection the state has to offer you.”

They Sign, Then Don't Comply

I've been reviewing the legislation of the different Latin American countries, and to tell you the truth I don't think any country has a real political willingness to eliminate violence against women, or even reduce domestic violence. I don't believe they're really bothered about violence against women. What's more, I believe that they're actually worried that it might come to an end. Then how would they maintain their power, their position; how would they defend their interests?

All of the Latin American countries — although I'm not sure about Venezuela — signed the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women somewhere between 1980 and 1995. With certain reservations, maybe, but they've signed it. Yet fewer than half of them have signed the implementation protocol, and those that have only did so in recent years.

Something similar happened with the Belém do Pará Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, which was adopted in 1994. None of the countries has complied with what it signed, and in certain cases they openly contradict it, for example by excluding common-law wives, divorced women, women who have not had sexual relations with their partners — as in the case of Puerto Rico — or women subjected to violence outside the conjugal home.

Latin American countries have certain legal common denominators regarding violence against women:

* Faced with the “political necessity” of creating a law related to violence against women, all, without exception, have established the same backdrop, the same basis and the same limits: namely, the

family in its most archaic, conservative and machista conception, which must be sustained even if through violence.

* The goal of most of the laws and programs is “conciliation,” understood as the signing of a contract in which the men promise to be less violent in the future. It is a contract that in most cases has to be signed after only a couple of sessions or chats with a staff member from the violence treatment center. And incidentally, the staff member is not necessarily even trained in this field, much less a specialist, and in some cases is a university volunteer.

* None of the countries have resources for these programs or centers.

* Most of the personnel related to the attention provided — judges, public prosecutors, expert witnesses and the like — have no sensitivity to or knowledge of the topic, which explains why they generally suggest that the women put up with the situation, make excuses for not pursuing the charges or simply shelve the cases.

* They either avoid writing punishments into laws or define laughable sanctions for the aggressors. And when real punishments do exist, they look for ways not to impose them, explicitly establishing proposals such as plea bargaining or a waiver if, for example, the accused presents a certificate of previous good behavior or an evaluation by two psychiatric or mental health doctors named by the public prosecutor’s office, as happens in Panama.

* Official research and statistics seek to minimize the problem, or violence is justified with arguments as crass as the one found in a study by Mexico’s Inmujeres: that it’s brought on by female wage earners’ economic independence.

These are just some of the common points in Latin America’s different responses to violence against women. But for me, this isn’t the important point.

Institutional Mockery As Violence

I'm more concerned about the fact that violence against women has been made invisible, diluted in the false notion that violence is given and received without distinction by all family members, that men and women are responsible for an equal percentage of violence and for the same reasons.

Violence against minors, family violence and violence against older people or those with different capacities have been lumped together as if all these were the same.

There's no desire to understand the different causes and consequences of the different kinds of violence. I worry that there is talk about important advances when every day I see that the governments and legislative and judicial branches are making such a great effort to deny reality, to avoid any kind of punishment for those who have either committed violence against women or allowed it to be exercised on a daily basis for years whether to save them from themselves, compensate for their own insecurity, provide an identity and/or preserve a form of power that depends on the use of force.

Violence against women is being used as an electoral campaign platform. Rather than help guarantee women's rights, the theatricality set up around this problem — considered to affect just a few women — only hinders the exercise of women's rights and subjects women who suffer violence to yet another of its forms: institutional mockery.

Some say that the very fact that family violence is being talked about openly is an advance in itself, because at least women know it isn't normal and should be rejected. This might be true, but I have my doubts.

I'm going to explain my point with some real examples to provide a clear understanding of why I question that thesis.

Ana, a 17-year-old girl, came to the office where I work with an eight-

month-old baby, having been convinced to come by her mother. She told me that to escape from her stepfather, who treated her badly, she left home when she was 16 with a 40-year-old neighbor, who, as always, promised to treat her like a princess. This man took her out of the city and kept her in a small-town motel. Whenever he went out he left her locked up with no money and nothing more than a nightgown to wear.

Evidently the sexual relations were forced and involved physical violence and threats when she said no. While he brought her food and even bought her a radio, he also showed her a gun and swore to kill her if she dared try to escape. She tried anyway and returned home, saying that she had spent a few weeks with a girlfriend because she was afraid of how her stepfather and mother would react if she told the truth.

Two days later the neighbor turned up with his pistol and took her away again. She wanted to die. When she got pregnant, she hid it until the seventh month and when she could hide it no longer, she escaped again. This time she told the truth to her mother, who encouraged her to press charges.

That is what she did, but neither the rape nor the false imprisonment was treated as a crime because she went with the man “voluntarily.” The violence has not been prosecuted because she hasn’t been able to prove the blows, the insults or the threats, as demanded by the law.

The lesser charge of “abuse of minors” is being considered by the authorities because, according to the expert’s testimony, “Ana is a very sexually mature woman who tends towards promiscuity.”

We’ve been involved in this process for a year now, and in the latest appeal we managed to get the man arrested, although we’re afraid he might be released because the authorities are currently deliberating why Ana went with him a second time and we haven’t been able to demonstrate that he threatened her with a firearm. We’ve asked for

different expert opinions and contended everything we could, but to no avail.

Ana is still terrified and at times wants to give it all up, particularly when she has to tell yet another doubtful-looking psychologist how it all happened, why she returned, what she felt like when he was raping or hitting her, or what she was thinking when she heard him arrive, something that's impossible to rationalize.

The Risks In Denouncing Violence

So we're back where we started: women's words have no value. Presumption of innocence works for the rapists, who only have to say that it wasn't them.

The chief crime suspect is always the women's body. It is presumed that women lie and men tell the truth. In such cases statistics are absolutely inoperative and nonexistent. It means nothing that 90% of gender violence is exercised by men against women, frequently their partners or wives. It means nothing that violence against women is exercised in closed spaces with no witnesses, because that's how the law defines it.

If you want the state to intervene, you have to prove it, to take photos in which the fist in front of your face can be clearly seen, and you have to carry a tape recorder to prove the insults and threats. And if possible, when you're just about to be hit, you need to ask for time out to call a few witnesses.

For a while, there were campaigns to get women to denounce family violence. It always seemed a bit irresponsible to me to invite women to denounce violence when the laws are still fundamentally protecting the aggressors. I particularly questioned those campaigns that made it seem as though the women were to blame for keeping quiet. Several women had to die before it was understood that it isn't just a question of pressing charges.

Unfortunately, certain government institutions — women’s institutes, councils and secretariats — continue to promote the same thing, although the emphasis is now on prevention.

It’s not that prevention is bad, but I can’t help wondering whether a campaign “For a Culture of Peace” really does any good against the reality of “If you hit your wife without leaving any marks, don’t worry; she won’t be able to prove it.” I wonder about the use of a campaign or law against violence when it doesn’t even consider violence as grounds for divorce; in fact it forces you to negotiate, to conciliate.

What’s the use of having a unit to treat cases of violence if they treat you like the aggressor when you go there? Isn’t this just more violence, and from those who should protect the victims above all, but instead dedicate themselves to defending the aggressor’s presumption of innocence?

Doesn’t it amount to violence that the only way the state offers to guarantee a woman’s life is by making her leave her house, her work, take her children out of school and shut herself up with them in a shelter as if they were the guilty ones?

Why don’t they make the shelters or refuges for the aggressors? It would be much cheaper and wouldn’t affect the children so much. In addition, now that they’ve seen the light and found that you need to educate the aggressors, what better place to do it than in a shelter, after work, thus avoiding absurd restraining orders and better protecting the lives of the rest of the family?

Why are those who suffer punished instead of the aggressor? Why do battered women have to leave their home and hide with their children, knowing that in three or four months they’ll have to leave the shelter and knock on the door of the very person who beat them up for no good reason?

Many women see this as progress, but I’m not one of them. Hiding women away, terrified, without knowing whether they’ll live tomorrow

or not, on the silencing argument that “there are laws protecting them now,” seems to me to be torture, an ongoing violation for all women, even those who have so far managed to free themselves — ourselves — and think that liberating oneself from male violence is a personal matter.

We can’t talk about progress: I know very well how these things are being handled in Latin America and to be quite honest the laws that are being applied are a trap, a trick. In some cases they actually put women at greater risk. And generally speaking, they’re a farce.

For many people, talking like this makes me a radical feminist who’s overly critical. Maybe it’s because I can’t stomach them telling me that a lot of progress has been made when, for example, marital rape is considered neither rape nor violence.

Maybe it’s because I can’t understand where the progress is when family honor is placed above my right to personal integrity. Excuse me, but I find it very hard to accept that there has been progress when a women who is beaten and kept under lock and key by her husband only has access to her rights if she herself dares press charges, because violence is only treated as a crime if the interested party files suit.

I recognize that it’s not possible to change in one fell swoop an almost perfect state of slavery for women that has taken twenty centuries to construct. But I believe that the way to achieve these changes is to point out the deficiencies, the gaps and the injustice that remain.

It’s true that many women no longer view their partner’s violence as natural, and that’s a good thing. But I can’t sit back and be happy with that. I don’t want to play the game of the governments or public powers or wise men who continue defining my life according to their interests. I don’t like concessions being made with my rights or diplomatic games that cost women their lives.

Costs, Problems and Shortcomings

It's easy for the state to sign agreements and for legislators to change Constitutions and declare that all people are equal in dignity and rights. But at the end of the day, nobody calls to account those who decide women's lives through laws and decrees pushed through with no knowledge of the cause or, what's worse, without even caring.

I don't belong to any government, party or religion; I'm simply a person who feels obliged to say that there's a long way to go before the right to integrity, to a dignified life are part of women's everyday life in Latin America. The special rapporteurs and high commissioners on violence, human rights and extra-judicial deaths have repeatedly stated the shortcomings, problems and consequences of not taking serious and adequate measures in response to the problem of violence against women.

As corresponds to the particular interests they defend, the Inter-American Development Bank and the World Bank have pointed out the high costs of violence: 14.2% of the world GDP, which amounts to around US\$170 billion spent on programs related to the problem, on medical care for victims and on police services. But states never have the funding for any decent programs for women. Moreover, if the budget has to be cut, those programs are precisely the ones that get the axe.

Perhaps I'm very influenced by the fact that I deal with women who suffer violence every day and have to tell them: "Before pressing charges look for somewhere to go and how to survive because you're not one of the priorities for the laws or the rule of law."

If only: If only inclusion of the issue of violence against women in the three Summits of the Americas could help the efforts to ensure normative and public policy changes to overcome the serious shortcomings in fulfilling the Belém do Pará Convention's objectives in Latin America. There are considerable obstacles with respect to

information and registry, access to justice, provision of treatment and protection for the victim and educational training.

If only the proposals to create a specific follow-up mechanism for that convention were implemented and could actually contain the underlying violence. Fifteen countries in the region have expressed their commitment to these proposals: Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, the United States, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, St. Kitts and Nevis and Uruguay.

But once again, due to “limited financial and human resources,” both the countries and the OAS are voicing concern that the proposed mechanism will increase the funds and commitments required for its long-term sustainability. Ten countries have still not named a representative for this mechanism.

And now we are faced with femicide, another unquestionably more serious problem that I can't leave unmentioned. Ciudad Juárez triggered it off, but in reality it's just a small sample. To give you some figures, Ciudad Juárez has only the fifth highest homicide rate for women in Mexico, below the states of Mexico, Chiapas, Morelos and Guerrero. And increasing numbers of women are murdered in Guatemala.

Nothing is known about femicide in Honduras — which doesn't mean the problem doesn't exist there — and it's being researched in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. It's probably best not even to imagine the number of women disappeared right now. No, I'm sorry, I can't talk about progress. I can only repeat that if we want to assert our own rights rather than those they want to grant us, we can't let the academics, the jurists, the secretaries and the judges continue defining what constitutes violence against women.

We've already been through the idea that it's a public health problem, an educational problem, a problem of family de-structuring, and we've already been “vulnerable groups.” Enough already! Enough of accepting patches, or palliative campaigns. Enough of shelters

and preventive measures.

The Most Urgent Point

I accept that as men are generally stronger, the only defense possible against gender violence would perhaps have to be too definitive. But I therefore demand that the state comply with its obligation to protect my rights, my life and my liberty. And my rights can't be traded off against my liberty or my liberty against my life. All of my rights are valid and aren't negotiable with time periods or conditions.

The state's permissiveness and omission toward the violation of women's rights also constitute violence against women. And that's the first, most urgent point in Latin America. This official permissiveness and omission is what is maintaining the rates of violence against women, allowing it to be reproduced and turning the efforts of organizations, programs and plans to eradicate it into a permanent, seemingly endless battle.

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