



# International Women's NEWS NOUVELLES Feministes Internationales

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Journal of the International Alliance of Women



## REFLECTIONS by Young Feminists

Young feminists

Who are they? What are their aspirations?

What are they fighting for?

This edition presents a selection of articles on topics individually chosen by a group of young women some of whom have worked as interns with IAW

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# CONTRIBUTORS

## **Alice Vigani**

Alice Vigani is a 24-year-old woman from Italy. She worked as an intern with the President of International Alliance of Women in Athens, Greece, while completing a Master in Social Sciences at the University of Helsinki, Finland. Her academic research work has focused on cross-cultural conceptualizations of well-being, stereotype reduction, and active participation of migrants and refugees in the receiving society, with attention to the implications for policy making and policy reform.

Over the years, she has worked as a volunteer alongside local partners in a number of projects aimed at improving the conditions of children, youth, women and men living in vulnerable conditions in different areas of the world, including in rural areas across Albania, Romania and Moldova, in the slums of Nairobi, Kenya, and in refugee camps and shelters in Greece.

Her main interest is to work toward the social, political and economic integration of indigenous, migrant and other vulnerable groups and individuals into the society, adopting a gender-sensitive and human rights-based perspective.



## **Christina Sykaki**

I'm a psychologist, living in Greece. I currently work as a music teacher and I volunteer at the YWCA of Greece. I'm an activist defending women's rights through various projects and my areas of interest are: sexual harassment at the workplace, domestic violence, minorities and the rights of children. I would also be interested to be more active on the LGBTQ community because I believe that all people should not be judged by their colour, religion, sexual orientation or gender.



**Elena Tognoni** holds a BA in Communication Sciences and a Masters degree in History with a special focus on International Relations and Gender Issues. She recently graduated from the University of Milan, Italy with a Masters thesis on the entanglements between women's movements and animal liberation. She lived in the USA between 2010 and 2011, where she had the opportunity to study at Harcum College (PA) and to successfully complete a Gender Studies class. In 2016 she was selected as one of 50 young feminists from all over Europe to participate in the Feminist Summer School of the European Women's Lobby in Brussels, where she delivered a workshop about Ecofeminism. Her feminist activities during the last 10 years include volunteering at women shelters and organizing workshops in schools about Intimate Domestic Violence, Gender Stereotyping and the History of Women's Rights. Her approach to activist work is intersectional, as she continuously tries to identify and analyze the interconnections among apparently different oppressive systems.



# CONTRIBUTORS



## **Jessica Orban**

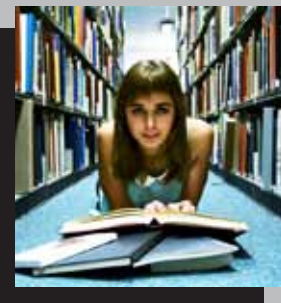
I have just completed a Master's degree in Environmental geography and territorial planning, with a specialization in water resource management and local development at the University of Nanterre, in Paris. I spent my undergraduate years at the University of York, in the UK, where I studied Politics with International Relations. Here, I took particular interest in political ecology and chose to focus on environmental justice and its intersections with racism and sexism. This led me to want to take a slightly new direction in my studies in order to focus both on environmental and spatial justice issues. Within my Master's degree, I wrote a first thesis on a case study of traveller communities living in an environmentally protected area in the greater Paris region, which was particularly interesting in shedding light on the links between marginalized communities, environmental vulnerability and urbanization in Paris' green belt. My second thesis was based on fieldwork I conducted with the University of Cần Thơ, in Vietnam, on mangrove preservation and rehabilitation, nature governance and sustainable shrimp farming in a southern coastal province of the Mekong delta.

I grew up in London, Toulouse and Paris in a bilingual and multicultural background and am particularly sensitive to issues surrounding multiculturalism and identity, and its intersections with feminism in today's politics.



## **Lea Börgerding**

A young feminist and a former intern at the International Alliance for Women in Athens, Greece. After graduating from the University of Oxford with a Masters in International Relations, she moved to Vietnam for six months where she worked on gender issues during an internship at the Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ).



## **Roberta Sadauskaite**

Roberta received her BA in International Politics and Development Studies at Vytautas Magnus University (Lithuania) and this autumn will start her MA in International Development at Sciences Po (France). During her studies, she has also studied abroad at Tbilisi State University (Georgia), University of Glasgow (the United Kingdom). As well as she has done internships at the Embassy of the Republic of Lithuania to the Italian Republic (Italy) and International Alliance of Women (Greece). Interested in human rights, development and education, after graduation she hopes to pursue a career in a non-governmental sector.



## The courageous new world of young feminists

Our organization is very much interested in young people as they represent our future. We hope they will be able to create a better world than the one we did. In particular we want to know their views about gender equality and feminism. Are they interested in feminism or are they politically apathetic. How do they view the fight for equality.

It is for that reason we have dedicated this issue of our journal to them. We asked a number of young women who have worked as interns or volunteers with the IAW or are friends of IAW to write an article on feminist issues of their interest.

The feminism that earned women the right to vote, the right to higher education, the right to work, the right to move on up the professional ladder remains as strong as ever but the movement has changed since '60s and '70s.

A basic approach of the current feminist movement is that it seeks to address the needs of all women, particularly those who are members of marginalized groups such as poor women, transgender women, black women. Feminism has to be inclusive and able to work for all women. Another critical point for marginalized women is the interconnected nature of inequalities. The new focus of feminism is intersectional. In other words, it takes into account how oppression, sexism, inequality impact on different people depending on their identity.

Young feminists take a wider view of oppression. They will not vote for a woman just for the sake of her being a woman. It is not only gender they care for but much more. They see feminist issues as inseparable from and deeply intertwined with sexism, racism, colonialism, classism, patriarchy, LGBTQI issues, poverty and all forms of oppression.

Young feminists understand that isolating social issues and movements can impede sustainable change from happening whereas collaborating across these issues can only allow for more justice.

Many young feminists organize right around the globe to dismantle power structures and to resist, often in the face of violent backlash and discrimination, in order to increase alternatives and create space for activism.

At the same time feminism continues to address many of the issues that have plagued women for decades – domestic violence, sexual assault, wage inequality, barriers to reproductive rights.

Most of these groups are fairly new. Many have informal structures and work without physical space office or staff. Being a formal organization is not compulsory any more in order to make a significant impact on society. This signals a push against NGOs and bureaucratic structures and systems.

The challenge now is to recognize the legitimate contribution of these groups to social change and to provide them with resources so that their ideas can flourish.

Another characteristic of these groups is a shift in their projects and their work from the traditional development approach, that often represents women as victims, to one that represents them as agents of change.

Young feminists work to transform society into a more equal and just one, using inspiring and innovative tools. They use technology, community radio, collective learning, music, dance, theatre, poetry and other forms of activism.

Finally, what is very important is the contexts within which these groups are organizing and working. Increasing fundamentalism and discrimination against women, girl and LGBTQI people are even more dangerous for these groups as they work within informal structures on often controversial issues; their work is very visible and they have minimal access to funds. So they experience lots of insecurity but they have the courage to experiment and to challenge the old systems.

They seem more determined than ever not just to continue the feminist argument but to win it. In my view, this new generation of young feminists will certainly be the most brilliant feminist generation. They are smarter and more informed than we are. So let us focus on what we can learn from them and encourage the creation of spaces where all generations can meet and work together.

We will continue to support this very promising generation by publishing more articles by young feminists to promote their ideas and to encourage broader discussion.

This issue of IWNNews featuring Young Feminists has very interesting contributions. Roberta Sadauskaite and Lea Börgerding are focusing their articles on ongoing feminist issues.

Roberta examines sex selective abortion, its impact on society and what measures governments should take to change attitudes and stereotypes concerning girls and balance sex ratios.

The contribution by Lea is focused on women's economic empowerment in Vietnam and the need for Vietnam to translate its growing legislation on gender equality into policy and also to take seriously the pervasive gender stereotypes that shape Vietnam's society. According to Lea, Vietnamese women continue to suffer from a widening gender pay gap, discrimination at the workplace, often precarious working conditions, and the additional burden of unpaid care work.

Alice Vigani, in her article "Why we all need a strong feminist social movement and civil society?", presents an overview of the constraints that civil society actors are increasingly subjected to as well as some examples of successful women's movements. She is also trying to answer questions like "Why is Feminism important today?", "How can feminist initiatives adapt to today's struggles and go from mobilization to social change?"

Christina Sykaki focuses on inter-generational cooperation among women feminists, why it is needed, and on what principles it should be based.





Elena Tognoni, in her article “Humans, non-humans, nature: the intersectional challenge of feminisms” is adopting the intersectionality approach. She is trying to answer the question “How can we bring an end to different forms of inequalities and oppressions including gender inequalities?”. According to Elena, all social inequalities are linked. The biggest challenge for feminism is to rediscover a wider and more inclusive perspective to oppression and violence that finally includes living beings of all species and reconnects humans, non-humans and nature in a peaceful and kind world for all.

Finally, Jessica Orban, in her article “Urban diversity and women’s rights to the city: a case

study of La Chappelle neighborhood in Paris 18th district”, also adopts the intersectionality approach in her analysis of the controversy around two petitions that had to do with verbal and physical street harassment taking place in La Chappelle. She shows how this controversy led to the instrumentalisation of feminism and in this case, the issue of women’s access to urban space, to further stigmatize non-white populations living in this neighbourhood. The subject of gender space and of the norms which shape and define its creation in cities like Paris is placed in the background rather than being at the centre of the debate and disappears progressively only to remain completely unaddressed.



# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S NEWS IN BRIEF

## 72<sup>nd</sup> Session of the General Assembly Side Event: Civic space at the UN Tuesday, 17 October



This will bring together the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, State representatives, UN bodies and civil society to discuss how each, individually and collectively, can more effectively promote and protect civic space in the UN system through the development of responsive and inclusive UN mechanisms and processes. [Refer *International News Vol 112 No 1 - Evaluation of CSW 61*]

### **IAW 37th Congress - 20-28th October 2017 - Nicosia, Cyprus**

*Hosted by the Pancyprrian Movement Equal Rights - Equal Responsibilities, the 37th Congress*

Congress has a very full agenda to consider, the host organization has arranged a seminar and an excursion. The Board will meet pre-Congress and a meeting of the new Board elected by Congress will take place immediately after Congress.

Major items for consideration include: Findings of Working Groups; Programme of Action for the Triennium; Revision of Constitution; Applications for Membership; CSW 2018 - IAW will commence discussion on its preparation:

*Priority theme: Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls. Review theme: Participation in and access of women to the media, and information and communications technologies and their impact on and use as an instrument for the advancement and empowerment of women (agreed conclusions of the forty-seventh session)*



**IAW President: 1996 - 2004**

### **Vale - Pat Giles, 1928-2017**

*IAW Congress 1982 Finland - Women's Electoral Lobby Australia admitted to affiliate membership, represented by Pat Giles and Pat Richardson who were elected to the Board.*

**WHO Global Commission on Women's Health : Chair 1993 - 1996**

**Australian Senate 1981 - 1993 : Senator for Western Australia (WA)**

**Women's Electoral Lobby Australia (WELA) : founding member of WA Branch in 1972**

**Women's Health Care House, Perth WA 1993 - 1999**

**Inter-University Centre for Research for Women : Board Member 1993 - 2006**

**The Patricia Giles Centre**, named in her honour, was established in 1989 in Perth WA to provide counsel, shelter and support for women and children subjected to domestic violence.

The photo shows Pat Giles and a small group of women outside the UN building in New York during CSW February 2003. Their signs say 'NO WAR' in a valiant but futile protest against the coming war in Iraq. Later that year, despite recent back surgery and having to move around in a wheelchair, Pat was able to preside while Vice President Rosy Weiss chaired the Board meeting



held in the Dominican Republic. Sadly that was her last IAW appearance due to another fall in 2004. In her final message as President to the 2004 Centenary Congress, Pat looked back at the history of the Alliance, noting a comment from its inauguration in 1904: "Its voice was too loud, its hair was too red, it was premature and was unlikely to survive." She went on to say, "That red-headed baby has grown and matured. It seems, indeed, to be ageless. It has used its loud voice to excellent effect, will continue to do so and is thriving very nicely thank you." This was a timely observation as, during Pat's term, the Alliance had moved to a closer and more inclusive involvement with its membership; observers were welcomed at all its meetings; a viable communications network had been set up to present an active website and a monthly newsletter.

After qualifying as a nurse and midwife, Pat took on community leadership in health, education and parents bodies. This led on to active roles in the trades union movement and to being elected to the Australian Senate. In **2010** Pat was appointed a **Member of the Order of Australia** for service to the community through organisations and advisory bodies that promote the interests of women, and to the Parliament of Australia. During her last years Pat developed Alzheimer's disease and lived in a very comfortable care home. Despite a loss of memory, she always graciously welcomed visitors.

**On 10 August 2017 the Australian Parliament honoured the memory of Pat Giles.** The House of Representatives stood for a minute's silence. Condolence tributes were given by the Attorney-General, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate; the Deputy Leader of the Opposition; the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and other MPs. References were made to Pat's vocal advocacy for legislative reform on issues such as abortion, contraception, access to child care and gender equality; also the ratification of CEDAW which led to the Australian Sex Discrimination Act 1984 and Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986. One MP who was elected to the Senate before Pat retired, described her as "courteous and polite and not overtly aggressive but focused, determined and very persuasive" – many IAW members will fondly remember those attributes.





### IAW supports a Peace Treaty on the Korean Peninsula

*Your Excellency Secretary-General António Guterres*

International Day of Peace, September 21, 2017

**The way of building confidence is a challenge: a peace treaty between the Koreans?**

Via the UNSC the International Alliance of Women is calling the U.S. Government, to sign up for a package of security guarantees which makes possible to scale back or suspend the U.S.- South-Korean military exercises and to delay the deployment of new U.S. military equipment such as the THAAD missile to South-Korea. The International Alliance of Women is persuaded that this would open a way for direct negotiations in order to avoid a nuclear disaster. If the international community really wants to solve the tensions on the Korean peninsula and to give the North-Korean people a chance to return into the community of states, then a peace treaty which gives North-Korea the security it needs for their survival, would be the first and not the last step to do.

In 2015 30 women crossed together with “Women cross the DMZ” in a peace march on the South-North-Korean border and led a conference with 250 North-Korean women. They asked: Why are there no discussions about negotiations for a peace treaty with North-Korea? They concluded that a peace treaty would be the key for peace on the Korean peninsula.

The International Alliance of Women fully agrees and joins this conclusion.



President  
International Alliance  
of Women



### HUMAN RIGHTS, FUTURE GENERATIONS & CRIMES IN THE NUCLEAR AGE

[www.ippnw.ch](http://www.ippnw.ch)

Preamble: Basel Declaration on human rights and trans-generational crimes resulting from nuclear weapons and nuclear energy

The participants in the international conference ***Human Rights, Future Generations and Crimes in the Nuclear Age***, held in Basel from September 14-17, 2017, affirm that the risks and impacts of nuclear weapons, depleted uranium weapons and nuclear energy, which are both transnational and trans-generational, constitute a violation of human rights, a transgression of international humanitarian and environmental law, and a crime against future generations.

We are convinced that the energy needs of all countries can be met by safe, sustainable, renewable energies, and that the security of all countries can be met without reliance on nuclear weapons.

*Link to the full Declaration [www.events-swiss-ippnw.org/program/](http://www.events-swiss-ippnw.org/program/)*

#### 2017 Nuclear-Free Future Award Laureates

Making the world safe from nuclear weapons and nuclear power is in our hands! 2017 Nuclear-Free Future Award to honour individuals who help get us there.

The laureates are Almoustapha Alhacen from Niger, Janine Allis-Smith and Martin Forwood from Great Britain, Hiromichi Umebayashi from Japan, Jochen Stay from Germany and “The Dedicated”: Switzerland’s Anti-Nuke Movement.

### Intergenerational Cooperation in Women's Organizations

by Christina Sykaki

It is well documented that every generation employs different ways to react to contemporary challenges, communicate its needs and desired goals, and form and express opinions on priority issues. That being said, while respect and consideration is always expected from the younger generation, this doesn't apply both ways. Children are raised to be "courteous" towards elders, to not "talk back", to always listen and never doubt. And while it is true that during childhood parents, aunts and teachers are indeed the authority figures that set the rules, there comes a time, during puberty and early adulthood, when people are expected to rebel against the norms and restrictive rules enforced by their elders in order to bring positive change. A rebellion is never courteous, silent or submissive. And herein lies the problem. We need the enthusiasm, newly acquired knowledge, innovative ideas and fearlessness the young generation brings to the table. But we also need the maturity, wisdom and experience only the older generations can provide. It is a delicate and intricate "dance" that must be performed willingly by both parties.

Women generally have to fight twice as hard as men to achieve half the privileges men enjoy and their success seldom comes without a price. Women are overlooked at job interviews, disregarded for promotions and pay rises, and daunted when planning to take maternity leave. There seems to be an unspoken rule that if a woman wants a successful career, she'll have to sacrifice her wishes to use her reproductive rights to have a family. Moreover, women are discouraged from claiming equal access in power structures and decision-making processes at all levels. It is, therefore, of the utmost importance that women should support each other in the workplace, in the social and political arenas and in their day-to-day life.

Feminism relies on the fundamental belief that all people are created equal, regardless of their sex or gender; feminists emphasize the importance of solidarity among women who face discrimination and are being oppressed by patriarchal social structures and patterns. Despite its dramatic accomplishments in raising consciousness and promoting equal rights in the past, there is no longer a mass women's movement in Europe. Although the causes have yet ceased to exist, young women's interest and participation declined following the dire financial straits the world faces and the overall scepticism

concerning activist movements. Thus, initiatives like AGORA, the first ever European young feminist summer school introduced and supported by the European Women's Lobby, can contribute immensely in mobilizing and involving young women in the efforts to promote gender equality [1].

In order for any movement to succeed, there must be continuity and effective successorship. It stands to reason that intergenerational cooperation is an irreplaceable tool in empowering and revitalizing the women's movement. While young feminists must take the reins, it is paramount that they are properly trained and ready to assume the task. By its definition intergenerational cooperation determines that older generations mentor, cooperate, encourage, guide, admonish even when necessary, and generally teach younger generations all the necessary skills in order to advance and bring positive change. This takes courage from both sides. The previous generation might feel threatened by the critique and changes the new generation brings and younger people tend to have an arrogance that comes with high ideals, enthusiasm and lack of maturity. The truth is that women of all ages need a lot of work and some "aces in the hole" to succeed. For example, *"Young workers often have different skillsets, usually including a better understanding of IT and technology. This knowledge can be used to help older workers upskill."* [2]

For the YWCA, one of the oldest international women's organizations in the world of which I am a proud member, the issue of intergenerational cooperation has been a vital and ongoing goal since 2005. According to GLA Friday Mailing, *"the YWCA realized that in order to be a strong and sustainable organization, young women needed to be involved in the programming and governance of the organization. This clause provides that the YWCA (nationally, regionally and locally) will engage and involve young women in the decision-making process. Young women's voices will be heard and considered."* Consequently, every Board of Directors in any given local Centre or National YWCA must have 25% young women under thirty as members. That percentage is expected to rise up to 50% in the coming years. World YWCA builds and supports the capacity of all Member Associations to implement intergenerational and transformative shared leadership using a human rights-based approach in order to empower women globally to be champions and change agents



advocating for social, economic and environmental justice [3].

World YWCA has created several programs to reach out to young girls, with mentoring being a key element of every action that tries to include young women. YWCA's members trust that, despite their immaturity, young girls can bring fresh ideas, newly obtained knowledge and, from my personal experience, can be bold and quick to act. Of course, these specific characteristics and potentials can become a "double edged sword". The zeitgeist demands quick decisions and responses to the escalating challenges of the new era. We can't afford to lose any given opportunity! On the other hand, irrational and hasty reactions can do more harm than good to an organization. Mentors, therefore, have a lot of holding back to do but also it is of great importance to be able to reinforce their will to take action.

Effective intergenerational cooperation must take into account some considerations. Older women possess experience and a solid grip of the history of the organization (a vital element because *"those who forget their history are doomed to repeat it"* George Santayana. Young girls and women possess valuable ICT skills, are responsive and maybe not as jaded as older members who can experience burn-out due to their long-term commitment and overwhelming efforts. YWCA employs simple steps in achieving effective intergenerational cooperation:

- **Reach out to young girls and women.** I personally started my volunteer work at YWCA shortly after I graduated from university. Honestly, as a young woman in search of a job (in the field of psychology) I needed to build my resume. But 8 years later, while running a Conservatoire (utilizing my other degree in music), I volunteer because from the moment I joined the organization, I was welcomed, respected and crafted to reach my full potential.

- **Broaden your network.** Being introverted will never help an organization achieve change. Social media can be a fantastic, quick and cost-free way to bring in new members.

- **Mentoring as a form of education.** In order to have volunteers that the organization can be proud of, new members must be advised, educated and encouraged to reach their full potential. We all are

resistant to change, but forming alliances can have a huge impact on the daily lives of women, whether it's in our homes, our community or the workplace, even in the political sphere.

- **Every person is different.** While one volunteer may respond to a firm comment, another one may take offence. Alienating young volunteers simply because the older generation refuses to create the safe space needed for young women to work is never the solution.

It is not always easy for women to support women, regardless of age. Certain stereotypes have women starting "catfights" and stabbing each other in the back. It is an "ingenious" idea that men have, in order to divide us. From my personal experience, every women's organization gives a sense of solidarity we seldom find elsewhere as women. It is sometimes tiring and difficult, because every person is different and we must learn to work together, setting aside our differences, our personal beliefs and ambitions.



In my experience, it can work. We all struggle but in the end, when all is said and done, common trust and openness overcome all obstacles. And together, we shall overcome.

[1] <http://www.womenlobby.org/-AGORA-?lang=en>

[2] <https://healthy-workplaces.eu/sv/news/intergenerational-cooperation-good-workers-good-business>

[3] <http://www.worldywca.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Strategic-Framework-2016-2019-English.pdf>



## Why we all need a strong feminist social movement and civil society right now

by Alice Vigani

Right-wing populism, extremism, racism, sexism. These “isms” that we know all too well are now experiencing a surge in popularity all over the world, and in particular in North America and Europe, places which used to take pride in their efforts to battle these phenomena. In this panorama, tensions and anxieties are heightened and exploited by sensationalist news and politicians. A mix of complex factors – political, economic, media – has brought about an atmosphere characterised by fear of the other, with catastrophic consequences for the most marginalised and vulnerable.

We women feel the consequences everyday on our skin. The chances for women and girls to really enjoy equal rights and equal structural opportunities are being constrained in these still male dominated societies. The situation described above coupled with the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology has caused a proliferation of austerity measures and policies tightening the provision of services and support. Cuts to healthcare and childcare, major steps back on sexual and reproductive health and rights, the general lack of gender-sensitive policies aimed at promoting equal opportunities for representation, participation, employment in both the public and private sectors. While we still have a long way ahead on the road to gender equality, these measures and policies are slowing us, if not taking us back from the advancements and achievements that human rights’ defenders have fought for in the past.

In these dark times, a free and vibrant civil society is needed more than ever. Feminist mobilization in civil society has been reported to be the biggest driver of policy change on violence against women. Increasingly, local women’s groups are touted as potential changemakers in countering violent extremism and radicalization. Civil society can also serve the fundamental function of keeping political authorities accountable in a world where decisions are increasingly governed by austerity principles deepening the economic gap, whereas more equal societies actually perform better on key indicators of social wellbeing. Moreover, chronically unfair societies enshrine habits of ‘structural violence’ - exclusion - that harm those who are excluded, and thus implicitly condone the idea that some members of society are allowed to do harm to others. This is why limiting for example the rights of LGBTQI people or the freedom to associate and speak up for minorities is not just bad in itself, but because it can also legitimise other forms of violence.

Yet despite proven results, the possibilities for civil society actors to impact the situation are being

limited by governments, restricting their access to and influence on decision-making processes, making it more and more difficult for organisations and individuals to move freely, have their voice heard and fight against inequalities. In recent years, there has been a rise in attacks on civil society actors, a proliferation of laws that limit freedoms of expression, association and peaceful assembly, growing restrictions on associations’ ability to access resources and fundings, an increase in bureaucratic harassment of civil society, politically motivated prosecutions of human rights defenders, violent dispersal of peaceful demonstrations and a surge in illicit surveillance of activists.

The number of reports documenting physical assaults and killings has also spiked: for many, demanding equal rights for women or simply being a woman activist can be life threatening. This is especially true for those who challenge societal gender and social norms. These can include norms relating to reproductive rights, sexuality, freedom of expression, or the right to dress a certain way. Those who are themselves gender non-conforming are particularly targeted both for their advocacies and their identities. In general, politically active women are far more likely than men, even in peaceful societies, to be subjected to violent and sexualised intimidation, ranging from verbal or physical abuse to gender-based violence, abduction or death.i

This is leading to widespread and pervasive pessimism concerning the possibility to obtain a better future taking ahold of people of all generations, unable to imagine a world with less injustice and fewer structural constraints to equality. The gradual loss of collective efficacy – that is, the shared belief that one’s group or community has the ability to successfully affect the situation – together with the decrease in trust and solidarity, and the presence of societal norms supporting the maintenance of the status quo are all factors that research has correlated with difficulty for social movements and the civil society to be able to lead to actual, enduring change.

Today’s feminism should be able to learn from these research findings as well as from its history, which both show how change can be reached even under the most unthinkable conditions. Once, the role of the woman seemed fixed, static, unchangeable, yet many women’s human rights defenders and activists have proved how one’s voice and actions can lead to powerful results with consequences for all women and society at large.

Indeed, the answer to today’s challenges should





# WHY WE ALL NEED A STRONG FEMINIST SOCIAL MOVEMENT AND CIVIL SOCIETY RIGHT NOW

and cannot be to desist but to resist. In spite of the obstacles posed by governments and economic powers, feminism is not dead: women's movements keep coming to life and attempting to mobilize. Think of "Ni una menos", the movement against gender violence and femicide which quickly spread from Argentina to gain support all over the world. Or think of Europe-based movements "Repeal the 8th" and the "Black Monday" women's strike. The former against the 8th Amendment to the Constitution of Ireland which threatens women's access to full reproductive health services, including abortion, and the latter a mass protest against the proposal to ban abortion in Poland. In the US, the election of Donald Trump was followed by a highly participated Women's March on Washington, replicated in many cities of the world, whose organisers are still vocal on different pressing issues, such as the US travel ban targeting citizens from Muslim countries.

Those initiatives share the characteristic of being born out of indignant reactions to events and legislation that had woken up public consciousness. They managed to mobilise many, across borders of nationality, class, age, gender and ethnic identity. However they differed in one central aspect - their impact, the extent of their ability to go from mobilization to social change. The "Black Monday" protests actually led to the rejection of the tightening of the already strict Polish abortion laws. On the other hand, other initiatives, while promoting awareness, have not been as effective.

Gender violence is still a very real phenomenon in South America and all over the world. In Ireland the 8th Amendment is still under debate; Irish women continue to face barriers to the enjoyment of their rights and risk their health and safety due to the illegality of terminating unwanted and clinically dangerous pregnancies in their own country, in disregard of best medical practice and international

human rights norms. Also the situation of US women seems to deteriorate, with Trump's attacks on their bodily autonomy and healthcare provision by denying federal money for birth control, STD testing, pregnancy care, and breast and cervical cancer screenings to any clinic that also provides abortions.<sup>ii</sup>

Why are some movements effective and some aren't? Awareness of injustice is the first step but it is not enough. Feminist social movements and organisations should unmask, point out and challenge the existing connections between the injustices suffered by women all over the world and the political responsibilities that determine them, at a local, national, and international level.

Feminism today must regain its transformative potential. In order to do that it also needs to regain and reinvent its meaning. Feminism today is too often used as a buzzword void of real life significance. To go back to being a powerful political instrument, we need to apply its historical contributions to today's reality. In my opinion, that can only translate into an inclusive feminism, meaning that it should embrace the multiple and diverse voices all struggling towards a more equal world, opposing divisions and marginalizations. Only by including the voices of all women and their allies - from Indigenous to LGBTQI communities, from displaced to disabled persons, from powerful decision-makers to those who work in the world's fields, industries, homes - feminism can understand the unique and diverse struggles of all individuals and properly address them through systemic change.

Finally, in these times we all need feminist movements to keep their heads up and face the present challenges. On our side, we have the precious tools provided by feminism's past. Now we must learn to use those tools in novel ways to forge a different future for all women, together.

<sup>i</sup>The section on civil society restrictions and attacks is based on information from 2015 report by a group of UN Human Rights independent experts on the role of civil society for the Post-2015 Development Agenda and from the State of Civil Society Reports 2016 by CIVICUS

<sup>ii</sup>To stay up to date with the progress of the women's initiatives mentioned in the article, visit their official pages Ni una menos, Repeal the 8th, Women's March





## Turning words into Action: Towards Women's Economic Empowerment in Vietnam

by Lea Börgerding

*Over the past decades, Vietnamese women have actively contributed to Vietnam's economic success. Today, however, they continue to suffer from a widening gender pay gap, discrimination at the workplace and often precarious working conditions. To achieve an inclusive growth model and guarantee women's economic empowerment, the author argues, Vietnam needs to translate its growing legislation on gender equality into policy and take seriously the pervasive gender stereotypes that shape Vietnam's society.*

When I first arrived in Hanoi, I was stunned by the busy activity of Vietnam's capital. What I also noticed was that wherever I went, I saw women who were taking part in everyday working life, occupying all types of positions: I saw female xe om drivers, shop owners and street vendors. I drove past female traffic officers who regulated the rush hour flood of motorcycles and female construction workers, wearing blue uniforms, who removed shop canopies and door steps in a governmental effort to create more public spaces. At the office, most of the national staff was female, had studied and added to their family's income.

### **Vietnam's economic growth and female labour participation**

In 1986, a decade after the end of the devastating war with the United States, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam introduced a set of historic economic reforms. Known as Doi Moi or the "renovation", these reforms aimed to create a socialist-oriented market economy and to promote large-scale open-door policies, including foreign trade expansion, financial market liberalization and market economization.

Soon after implementation of the Doi Moi reforms, Vietnam was heralded as a story of economic success. In fact, much like its neighbouring country China, Vietnam's market opening stimulated rapid economic growth and transformed the country from one of the world's poorest nations to a lower-middle income country by 2010. In 2016, withstanding the impacts of the 2008-09 global financial crisis, its growth continued at a staggering rate of over 6%. As such, and despite concerns about stagnating productivity and rising inequality, Vietnam economic development is said to defy the overall trend of a regional slowdown in South-East Asia and is often considered a model of economic progress for its ASEAN peers.

Vietnamese women have contributed significantly to Vietnam's economic growth performance over the past decades. According to the International

Labour Organisation (ILO), over 72% of Vietnamese women are part of the labour market – a number that exceeds the ASEAN average of 65.6% and that of most other countries elsewhere. Moreover, women dominate the workforce of some of Vietnam's most productive industries. For instance, they make up over 80% of workers in garment and textile production; an industry that is key to Vietnam's economic growth due to its important export manufacturing potential.

### **A female workforce ≠ women's economic empowerment**

Unfortunately – and contrary to my initial expectations – Vietnam's economic growth and its high levels of female workforce participation did not translate into gender parity. Despite their ubiquity in the labour market, women in Vietnam do not benefit economically in the same ways as Vietnamese men currently do.

When it comes to accessing equal income, there exist vast gender disparities. In 2013, women's wages in Vietnam only amounted to about 75% of those of their male counterparts, not considering differences in education or job experience. While the so-called "gender pay gap" is by no means unique to the Vietnamese context, the ILO issued an explicit warning in 2013 claiming that Vietnam was one of few countries globally in which the gap was still widening. The report highlighted an almost 2% increase in the gender wage gap in the period of 2008-2011 compared to the period of 1999-2007. It also found that this trend even applied to those industries in Vietnam that are traditionally female dominated.

The working conditions of women in Vietnam are also on average more precarious than those of Vietnamese men: gender segregation of the Vietnamese labour market locates women in low-skilled, low-paying, and flexible occupations. Studies estimate that more than half of the female workers in Vietnam are unpaid family workers and that over 80% of women who work do so in the informal sector, in largely "invisible" areas of informal employment as migrant domestic workers, homeworkers, street vendors and in the entertainment industry. According to the Asian Development Bank, the percentage of women employed as unskilled workers between 2012-2015 was at 68%, compared with 57% for men.

Finally, many Vietnamese women suffer from sexual harassment at the workplace. While there is very limited statistical data on the phenomenon (due to a lack of systematic studies and the stigma of





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reporting instances) a 2013 study by the ILO and the Vietnamese Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs (MOLISA) suggested that sexual harassment was common in Vietnam and that the majority of victims of sexual harassment at work were female, 78.2 per cent against 21.8 per cent of male victims.

## **The downsides of Doi Moi and economic liberalization**

Arguably, the precarious working conditions that Vietnamese suffer from today are intimately connected to the policies of the Doi Moi period. Though widely praised, the reforms of the 1980s were accompanied by the downsides of economic liberalization: Businesses and state enterprises had to become both more cost effective and internationally competitive. The adverse impacts were most strongly felt by women: On the one hand, these trends resulted in significant job losses and unemployment reaching its peak amongst young women. On the other hand, to attract foreign capital and remain competitive in exports, sectors started to implement lower wages. At the same time, female employment shifted precisely to those informal and low-wage sectors, such as the garment and textile industry, where health and social security standards are generally lower.

## **Pervasive gender-based discrimination**

Aside from the adverse impacts of rapid economic liberalization, the reasons for the lack of female economic empowerment in Vietnam are also socio-cultural: Vietnamese women have to work against centuries of Confucian tradition that places women below men in the social hierarchy.

In general, Vietnamese society assigns a lower status to women's work. The belief that men are more productive than women is widespread, affecting the numbers of women getting higher wages or being hired for managerial positions. Gender-based discrimination therefore stops Vietnamese women from realizing their full economic potential.

Traditional gender roles in families present another obstacle to women's economic empowerment and to fulfilling their full social potential. Hoang Phuong Thao, country director of ActionAid Vietnam, argues that women are expected to take over all care responsibilities at home. Just like in many other patriarchal societies, women are currently subsidizing Vietnam's economy by taking over the disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care and domestic work. Not only does this limit their capacity to follow other economic opportunities and to engage in paid work, it also perpetuates existing power dynamics within households.

## **Advancing Vietnam's legal framework to further gender equality in the work place**

As a communist state, Vietnam has a progressive legal framework in place regarding gender equality and has made significant progress on the issue in recent years. The equality of women to men in all respects is deeply enshrined in Vietnam's first constitution of 1946 and as early as 1982, Vietnam acceded the CEDAW - the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women. Like every other signatory country, it is thus required to monitor its progress on gender issues in a report every four years.

Since the implementation of the Doi Moi reforms, the issue of women workers' rights has mainly been promoted by the Vietnam Women's Union (VWU), a highly influential mass organization with strong links to the government as well as international donors and NGOs. In the early 2000s, Vietnam also made considerable progress on legal provisions that target gender discrimination in the labour market. The Gender Equality Law was adopted by the National Assembly of Vietnam in 2006 and moreover, extended specifications of women's labour rights were introduced in the 2012 Labour Code.

However, women's rights activists in Vietnam correctly point out that despite progress on paper, equality before the law does not yet translate into gender equality in the Vietnamese labor market. To give an example, the new Labour Code for the first time prohibits sexual harassment at the work place. Yet, to this day, it neither clearly specifies what sexual harassment is nor what the sanctions are. This makes persecutions extremely difficult and renders the legislation practically ineffective.

## **Conclusions: Turning Actions into Policies**

Women are highly represented in Vietnam's work force. Yet, their economic participation is mostly limited to lower level, poorly-paid jobs and to the informal sector. Vietnamese women suffer from gender-based discrimination, harassments and the additional burden of unpaid care work.

To achieve gender equality in the Vietnamese labour market, a lot remains to be done: social norms and pervasive gender stereotypes must be taken seriously, talked about and targeted. International cooperation initiatives and national unions that promote women worker's rights, such as the Vietnam Women's Union, must be strengthened to shield them from the effects of economic globalization after Doi Moi. And finally, Vietnam's legislation on gender inequality must now be translated into effective policies.



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## Sex-selective abortion

by Roberta Sadauskaite

Sex-selective abortion is described as the practice of ending a pregnancy on the ground of the predicted sex of the child. This practice prevails in areas where sons are more valued than daughters, mostly in parts of East Asia and South Asia (namely, in the People's Republic of China, India and Pakistan), Caucasian countries and the Western Balkans. Currently it is believed that around 117 million girls have not been born in Asia and Eastern Europe due to sex-selective abortion. As a result, there have been up to 25 per cent more male births than female births in some of the affected areas since the 1990s.

The scope of sex-selective abortion is rather extensive. For instance, even though in the UK sex-selective abortion is illegal, data from 2014 revealed that the practice had become so prevalent there that it was believed between 1,400 and 4,700 females had been aborted.

There are several ways how sex selection is done. It might be done before a pregnancy is established, during pregnancy through prenatal sex detection and selective abortion, or following birth through infanticide or child neglect. Technologies for the early determination of sex have also provided an additional method for sex selection.

One of the main reasons for a sex-selective abortion is the prevailing cultural norms. First of all, in many societies there is a patrilineal inheritance which puts a bigger significance on men. Moreover, sons are more valued than daughters as they are believed to provide economic support and to ensure security when their relatives get older. Furthermore, there is a tendency for the family size to decline, sometimes due to stringent policies restricting the number of children people are allowed to have, thus contributing to the fact that sons are valued even more. Therefore, a significant number of women feel pressure from both their family and society to give birth to a son. Not being able to do so might even lead to drastic consequences such as violence, rejection by the family or even death in some instances. In some cases, women might have to continue becoming pregnant until they give birth to a son, thus risking both their health and life.

A major outcome of sex-selective abortion is that it influences the overall ratio of boys and girls at birth for a regional population. For example, China and India have an imbalance in gender ratios. Some

research claims that the expected ratio is 103 to 107 males to females at birth. Therefore, countries with birth sex ratios of 108 and above, and 102 and below are perceived to have a significant number of practices of sex-selective abortion. It has been noticed, however, that there is a general trend for sex ratio imbalances to rise as birth order increases. This means the ratio is more skewed among second, third or higher birth-order children in comparison with the first-borns. For example, in China, while the sex ratio at birth was close to normal for first-order births, it increased significantly for second-order births (reaching levels of 174–212 in one province) and for third-order births (over 200 in four provinces) (Zhu, Lu & Hesketh, 2009). A similar trend has been noticed in two northern states in India (Guilmoto, 2007b).

The issue of sex-selective abortion is controversial; some claim that it can harm both the baby and the mother's mental health. This is also a violation of the rights of women and girls under international human rights laws. In 1994 more than 180 countries signed the Programme of Action of the 1994 Cairo International Conference on Population and Development, which suggests the elimination of "all forms of discrimination against the girl child and the root causes of son preference, which results in harmful and unethical practices regarding female infanticide and prenatal sex selection". This agreement calls on governments to "take the necessary measures to prevent infanticide, prenatal sex selection ... " and claims that "leaders at all levels of the society must speak out and act out forcefully against patterns of gender discrimination within the family, based on preference for sons ...". The increase in sex-selective abortions reveals the persistent low status of women and girls. Also, the gender imbalance caused by this practice negatively affects societies since it contributes to the increase of sexual violence and trafficking.

Countries are also obliged to make sure that women would not be exposed to the risk of death or serious injury by not providing them with the needed services such as safe legal abortion. The lack of these services might lead to a further violation of women's rights to life and health which are guaranteed in international human rights treaties and declared in international development agreements. This idea became even more relevant after a proposal to decriminalise terminations



passed the first hurdle in the House of Commons in the UK in 2015. Nowadays it is illegal for a woman to have an abortion after 24 weeks where there are no medical reasons to justify it. In order for a procedure to go ahead, it has to be signed off by two doctors. In 2015 UK MPs voted in favour of the Reproductive Health Bill, which would remove criminal sanctions for women and doctors in the UK and replace regulations with professional bodies.

There are many measures that governments in affected countries should take in order to tackle the issue of increasing sex-ratio imbalances. Firstly, laws to restrict the use of technology for sex-selection purposes and in some instances for sex-selective abortion should be passed. In Armenia in 2016, for instance, new legislation made sex-selective abortions illegal. Under this new law, in order to have this procedure done, it is obligatory for a woman to attend a counselling session with a doctor and then wait for a three-day “period of reflection” before the abortion. However, it is important to realise that these laws cannot have a significant effect without broader measures to address current social and gender inequalities. Some legal and policy measures to address inequalities between boys and girls have been passed in some countries. Examples include laws for more equitable patterns of inheritance, direct subsidies when a girl is born, scholarship programmes, gender-based school quotas, financial incentives or pension programmes for families which have only daughters. Furthermore, these efforts have been followed by campaigns to raise awareness and change society’s attitudes towards girls.

Despite what has already been achieved to tackle the issue of sex-selective abortion, there is still a lot to be done, including efforts to address the deeply rooted gender discrimination against women and

girls which causes sex selection. First, there should be more reliable data on both the real extent of the problem, on its social and health consequences, and on the effects of possible interventions. This would give a solid evidence base for carefully planned policy development and action. Second, guidelines should be developed on how to ethically use relevant technologies. These should be developed and promoted through health professional associations. Third, supportive measures for girls and women should be established. These should include improved access to information, health care services, nutrition and education; improved security; incentives to families with daughters only. Fourth, it would be a good idea for countries to develop and promote enabling legislation and policy frameworks to address the root causes of the inequalities that cause sex selection. More specifically, there should be new policies relating to inheritance laws, dowries, and financial and other social protection in old age, while also ensuring that human rights and gender equity are written into laws and policies. Finally, advocacy and awareness raising activities that stimulate discussion and debate within social networks and, more broadly, within civil society, should be supported by governments to help strengthen and expand consensus around the concept of equal value of both girls and boys.

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*Sex imbalances at birth: current trends, consequences and policy implications (UNFPA)*

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## Humans, non-humans, nature: the intersectional challenge of Feminisms

by Elena Tognoni

I consider feminism as something deeply concerned with oppression. Any type of oppression. My first approach to feminism was linked to the history of women's rights and women's movements around the world. Back then I didn't yet know how inclusive and how revolutionary feminisms can be. Throughout history, basic human rights have been denied to so many based on the Western notion of 'human being' and 'citizen' being male, white, heterosexual and rich.

In some Western countries, oppression and discrimination towards women are nowadays less evident and less immediate than they were 50 or 60 years ago: women can vote, can work, can have access to practically all kinds of professions and are guaranteed all the so called "human rights". At first sight, it might seem that a feminist movement is no longer needed but this is exactly what the system wants us to believe.

We have to thank black feminism for making us aware of how different levels of oppressions and discrimination need to be recognized in order to be properly addressed: black women are not only discriminated against because they are women but also because they are black, and this is a very typical example of interconnected and intersectional discrimination that the first wave feminists failed to recognize. But if we go deeper, and widen our perspective, the challenges today are bigger than ever, and the key expressions are "interconnected oppressions" and "recognizing privilege".

In order to have feminism that is really inclusive and intersectional we need to go back to the very beginning: Feminism started out as "the radical notion that women are humans too". The issue is that that very notion of "humanism", of "what defines human" was never challenged and questioned. Feminism has presumed the correctness of the Western notion of 'human'. It is not sufficient to redefine women from being less-than-human to human, what we have to do is to disturb the notion of what human is and to question the notion of human being at the top of the hierarchy. Feminism of the third wave recognizes that the issue with human societies (and especially Western ones) is the 'binary concept' which creates a dynamic of hierarchy and privilege: male/female, white/black, culture/nature and human/animal.

### ECOFEMINISM: AN INTERSECTIONAL FIELD

I started out this article by saying that feminism is something concerned with oppression, in all its possible forms. One specific feminist school of thought since the very beginning has challenged the notion of human, and that has deepened and widened the struggles of feminists all over the world, creating an inclusive view on all oppressions and on all oppressed living beings: this is the so-called "EcoFeminism", or better put "EcoFeminisms" as this cannot be consider a standard and homogeneous category, rather one that brings together many different theories and approaches.

Ecofeminisms directly challenge the 'binary concept' and bring the concept of 'intersectionality' (for which -I want to underline again- we have to thank black feminists and their deep analysis of the structures of oppression and discrimination) to a new level: not only sex, race, class but finally adding the category of human/non-human, which is to say the category of "species".

To use the words of the most famous ecofeminist of the movement, Carol J. Adams: "Equality isn't an idea; it is a practice. We practise it when we don't treat other people or other animals as objects".<sup>1</sup>

Feminisms had (and still have) the great merit to have problematized, discussed and uncovered many privileges. Ecofeminisms finally challenge the archetype of all oppressions: human privilege. This is particularly interesting as, throughout different moments in history, men have used the category of 'animals' for many different beings, including 'human' beings (think of the narrative around slavery and people of colour) underlining once more how oppressive categories are harmful in the way they can be used and interpreted. All those that have been identified with 'animals' were oppressed, discriminated against and killed. This is how ecofeminisms challenge a culture built on killing and violence.

The perspective is revolutionary because it requires feminists to be concerned not only with the human species but to widen the reflection to all living beings, including those of 'other' species. There is one single and powerful example that has struck me since I discovered it (and I can surely say that finding this out has changed

<sup>1</sup> Adams Carol J., *The Sexual Politics Of Meat*, Continuum, New York 1991



# HUMANS, NON-HUMANS, NATURE: THE INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGE OF FEMINISMS

my life as a woman, an activist and a feminist): how can I consider myself a feminist, fighting to end oppression and discrimination if I don't care about (and worse, if I take part in) the system that manipulates, abuses and exploits the reproductive bodies of non-human animals which get impregnated just so we -humans- can get their products and their flesh on our tables as food? I deeply believe that reproductive rights and reproductive bodies of non-humans being exploited for the privilege of humans is particularly problematic from a feminist perspective, a perspective that has rightly been concerned with the freedom of female bodies, with the fight to unlink female bodies from their reproductive potential. We kept saying "We are more than that"; "This does not define me as a woman".

Angela Davis, arguably one of the greatest black feminists, theorists and activists of all time, has recently released an interview in which she says: "What is it like to sit down and eat that food that is generated only for the purposes of profit and creates so much suffering?"<sup>1</sup>

This is how we enter into a specific ecofeminist field, that is Eco-Vegan-Feminism: my feminist fight to end oppression includes the choice to stop harming and killing animals, the choice to stop viewing them as food.

## HISTORY OF THE MOVEMENT

We might be thinking that this is a very new feminist wave, and that was also what I thought when I first encountered the work of some ecofeminists, such as Carol J. Adams, Marti Kheel, Greta Gaard, and the revolutionary work of Amie Breeze Harper, the forerunner in the field of black ecofeminism with her groundbreaking work "Sistah Vegan". But when completing my Masters in History and writing my thesis on the history of this movement, the real surprise came out: the entanglements between the feminist and the animal liberation movements have very deep and old roots, coming directly from the origins of both movements back in the 1850s within the UK Suffrage movement. I found out, for example, that suffragettes were fighting for both their right to vote and to end vivisection. Some of them were vegetarians, organizing vegetarian dinners to raise money for their campaigns and organizing their meet-ups in the very first vegetarian restaurants in London. What is interesting is that these women realized their situation as having a lot in common with the situation of animals:

"Seeing this sheep seemed to reveal to me for the first time the position of women throughout the world. I realized how often women are held in contempt as beings outside the pale of human dignity, excluded or confined, laughed at and insulted because of conditions in themselves for which they are not responsible, but which are due to fundamental injustices with regard to them, and to the mistakes of a civilization in the shaping of which they have had no free share".<sup>2</sup>

It's the history of the fight to end vivisection that sees women and feminists in the very first rows of the movement.

## AND THE ENVIRONMENT?

Just as harming animals is a feminist issue, harming the environment is a feminist issue too. I see that many feminist organizations take this topic very seriously, adding it to their action lists and concerns, and working towards a higher level of awareness. These organizations highlight how harming the environment is having a greater impact on women all over the world, and especially on those who live in the poorest areas of our planet.

It's a pity that, once again, the concern with the environment is engaged in a human-to-human perspective: I still wait to see the website of a feminist organization (and in general of an organization that works to protect the environment) that, when talking about the activities that are harmful for the environment, make a clear and direct link to animal-product-consumption: animal agriculture is responsible for 18 percent of greenhouse gas emissions, more than the combined exhaust from all transportation.<sup>3</sup> Agriculture is responsible for 80-90% of US water consumption.<sup>4</sup> 2,500 gallons of water are needed to produce 1 pound of beef.<sup>5</sup> Animal Agriculture is responsible for 20%-33% of all fresh water consumption in the world today.<sup>6</sup>

2 Leah Leneman, "The awakened instinct: vegetarianism and the women's suffrage movement in Britain" in *Women's History Review*, p. 279

3 "Livestock's Long Shadow: environmental issues and options". Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Rome 2006

4 "How Important is Irrigation to U.S. Agriculture?" USDA: Economic Research Service. 12 October, 2016

5 Dr. George Borgstrom, Chairman of Food Science and Human Nutrition Dept of College of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Michigan State University, "Impacts on Demand for and Quality of land and Water."

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# HUMANS, NON-HUMANS, NATURE: THE INTERSECTIONAL CHALLENGE OF FEMINISMS

Livestock covers 45% of the earth's total land<sup>1</sup> and animal agriculture is responsible for up to 91% of Amazon destruction<sup>2</sup>. This means that with what we grow to feed animals we could feed the starving populations all over the world: we are currently growing enough food to feed 10 billion people<sup>3</sup>.

By harming and killing animals, we are harming and killing the planet. How can feminism ignore these facts? Feminism should NOT be scared to tell the truth, as it never was: to uncover and to challenge what is considered "normal" is our mission. Let's not forget it, and let's be, once again, that revolutionary movement that can change the world.

## CONCLUSION

Eco-veg-feminism brings the proof of how different forms of exploitation and oppression are

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interconnected and interrelated. We cannot end one form of oppression or another; we cannot choose to care just for one -Women? Animals? Environment? We have to realize that by identifying the roots of these systems, all oppressions will be addressed.

This is, I believe, the biggest lesson:

"All social inequalities are linked. Comprehensive systemic change will happen only if we are aware of these connections and work to bring an end to all inequalities – not just our favourites or the ones that most directly affect our part of the universe. No one is sidelined by our actions or inactions; by our caring or indifference, we are either part of the problem or part of the solution."<sup>4</sup>

I see this as the biggest challenge for feminism: to rediscover a wider and more inclusive perspective to oppression and violence, that finally includes living beings of all species, and reconnects humans, non-humans and nature in a peaceful and kind world for all.

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4 Michelle R. Loyd-Paige, one of the ecofeminists included in the book "Sistah Vegan"

## Urban Diversity, Inclusivity and Women's Right to the City: A case study of La Chapelle neighbourhood in Paris' 18th district

by Jessica Orban

On May 19th 2017, an online petition was signed by a group of residents of the 10th and 18th Paris districts (or "arrondissement") as well as two local non-profit organizations called SOS La Chapelle and Demain La Chapelle ("Tomorrow La Chapelle"). It denounced serious incidents of both verbal and physical street harassment taking place in La Chapelle, a neighbourhood located in the north of Paris, in its 18th district. The petition was named La Chapelle & Pajol: Women, an endangered species in the heart of Paris and addressed public authorities by asking them to take security measures against increasing illegal trading and street hawking in the neighbourhood. It also mentioned that women and children both are scared and feel unwanted in the neighbourhood due to growing male domination of urban spaces. In the context of the petition, the neighbourhood was named "La Chapelle-Pajol", after the Pajol street, where the petition said part of the harassment was taking place, along with other areas in the neighbourhood such as Philippe de Girard and Marx Dormoy streets, respectively located at the intersection of and parallel to Pajol street, La Chapelle square and the small Louise de Marillac park, both located just next to the underground station, the La Chapelle boulevard on which the underground station is located, as well as two local cafés.

*Le Parisien* newspaper had already published a first article on the topic on May 18th. Several female residents of La Chapelle-Pajol neighbourhood were said to have been victims of verbal insults and physical aggressions and, as a result, to have had to alter their daily habits such as the way they dress and their usual routes. The article described a real change in the neighbourhood's physiognomy and said it has, for the past year, been largely dominated by "dozens of single men, hawkers, dealers, migrants and smugglers". On May 19th, the day the petition went public, *Le Parisien* published a second article about how the mayor of Paris Anne Hidalgo, the police department and Valérie Pécresse, the current head of the regional Île-de-France council<sup>1</sup> as a member of the Republican party, reacted to the situation. Along with other members of the Republican party, Valérie Pécresse immediately joined a local demonstration taking place that same

day to support the local non-profits and victims of harassment who had co-signed the petition. On May 20th, a third article by *Le Parisien* mentioned an "action plan" of the Paris city council and its police department consisting of: on a short-term basis, an increasing number of police check-ups; on a mid-term basis, sensitization of local shopkeepers as well as initiation of dialogue between local residents; and on a long-term basis, the potential creation of a group aiming at tackling delinquency.

On May 19th, when the local demonstration which the Republican party representatives joined in support of female residents took place, a counter-protest was organised by other female residents. One of their slogans was "Feminism is not racism". According to the counter-protesters, the petition was no more than an excuse for the media and political sphere to legitimise institutional racism. Countless news articles were published after this, thus creating a sort of panic in the media and triggering a debate with two opposing sides. One side supported the petition at the risk of being accused both of racism and of being feminist only when it suited them and especially when it served to stigmatise minority ethnic groups. The other side questioned the real intents behind the petition, put the facts into perspective, opened up the debate and was consequently accused both of questioning the victims' voices and avoiding addressing the core issue, in the name of political correctness and anti-racism.

The La Chapelle neighbourhood is largely working-class and inhabited by many families of immigrant background. It is also located very close to several migrant camps which are progressively being torn down by local authorities. Just 1 km from the La Chapelle underground station is located a centre for asylum seekers. Additionally, in a nearby neighbourhood called "Porte de La Chapelle" – literally meaning "La Chapelle's door" and referring to an exit from Paris to its outskirts – a humanitarian centre for migrants was established in November 2016 in response to the increasing number of migrants sleeping in the city's streets in appalling conditions. The centre is designed as a reception centre for migrants just arrived in Paris where they are given access to legal and administrative information regarding asylum seeking processes in France. The centre includes a temporary shelter exclusively for adult men (other solutions apply to

<sup>1</sup> The Île-de-France region is composed of Paris and 7 other departments surrounding the capital. Its regional council is its elected assembly.



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under-aged migrants depending on their circumstances) which can welcome up to 400 people for maximum stays of 10 days, during which the State is expected to offer them a more permanent living solution. Another centre exclusively for women and families opened in January 2017 just outside Paris in Ivry-sur-Seine, a town located southeast of the city. Both centres were established by Paris' city council but are run by Emmaus with the support of other charities. One of the major issues with the centre at Porte de la Chapelle is that it cannot keep up with the number of migrants coming in and seeking help. Consequently, many men live on the streets in the surrounding neighbourhoods in order to wait their turn. In addition, once their stay in the centre has reached its end, if they are not given an adequate living solution, they have no other choice but to return to living on the streets. While Paris' city council established the centre in order to prevent informal migrant camps in the city's streets, the latter are still very prevalent and are still being torn down with insufficient alternative living solutions.

In 2015, after one of the migrant camps located next to the La Chapelle underground station was torn down, a group called "La Chapelle fights [back]" ("La Chapelle en lutte") was created in support of migrants and refugees. After the petition was published in May, the group published a text of solidarity:

*"We live in a working-class neighbourhood that we love. We do not deny that there is sexism, but no more than in any other neighbourhood. All over the world, men are abusive of women. We live in a neighbourhood where solidarity is strong, this is why migrants take refuge here for lack of somewhere to live, in proper housing. We live in a neighbourhood where what you call « illegal trading », we call survival. For the past few years, little by little the bourgeoisie has been settling in our neighbourhood, and it wants to transform it to its own image by pushing misery out of sight. This is why the police are constantly occupying public space, to hunt down the poor, and to push them further and further away from a Paris which wishes to be sterilized. We are against the instrumentalisation of feminism for racist and anti-poor means, with an electoral campaign taking place in the background. It's too easy to remember women when it's about kicking out foreigners and the poor. Once again, it's using them, it's using US! We will not let you."<sup>1</sup> – La Chapelle en lutte*

<sup>1</sup> This text was personally translated and adapted to the format of this article. The original version was published as a poem on the group's blog and can be found at the following address: <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/la-chapelle-en-lutte/blog/240517/nous-femmes-du-18eme-la-chapelle-pajol-barbes>



The timely manner in which the controversy unfolded in May undeniably begs the question of the instrumentalisation of feminism – and in this case the issue of women's access to urban space – to further stigmatize minority ethnic groups. The members of the Republican party who joined the local demonstration on May 19th in support of the petition were in fact running for office in the local constituency for the legislative elections on the 11th and 18th of June. In December 2016, a very similar petition initiated by the same non-profit SOS La Chapelle described the area as a "no-go" or "lawless" zone in which local residents were no longer able to freely walk through the neighbourhood. While the petition mentioned occurrences of physical and verbal aggressions directed at women, the topic of women's right to the city wasn't exclusively correlated to that of delinquency, street hawking or illegal trading and selling of goods, nor did it appear in the petition's title. There were significantly less signatures and very little media coverage or political debate stemming from its publication.

In the case of the second petition, not only was the first *Le Parisien* article published before the petition even went public, a second article was published no later than the day after, and in spite of the busyness of an electoral campaign, the Republican party team was able to meet local residents in person that same day. During the demonstration, Valérie Pécresse told these residents she was ready to support and raise subsidies for local non-profits like SOS La Chapelle and stated later in a report that gender equality was one of the regional council's priorities. In 2016 she had, however, voted for a considerable reduction (almost 30%) of government subsidies for a public institute tackling gender discrimination and violence against women. When she went to La Chapelle the day the petition was published, she said to local residents: "Don't worry, the neighbourhood will be cleaned out". It's hard not to hear an echo of Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy suggesting in June 2005 that he would "clean out" a housing estate with a Kärcher after Sid-Ahmed Hammache, an 11-year-old child, had been shot dead in front of his building in La Courneuve, a town located just northeast of Paris in the department of Seine-Saint-Denis.

The stigmatisation of minority ethnic groups is blatant in the context of this petition and the controversy that followed. The individuals which the authors of the petition take issue with are conveniently associated in *Le Parisien* articles with pictures of non-white men. Moreover, it's important to stress that while street hawking, illegal trading and dealing, smuggling and migrants' access to urban space are all distinct issues with their



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respective causes and contexts, here they are all placed within one seemingly homogenous category of issues to be “dealt with” by governmental authorities. Finally, and above all this, the debate on issues concerning working-class neighbourhoods and their residents triggered by the petition only serves to derail the conversation from the core issue here, that is the question of women's access and right to public spaces. The subject of gendered space and of the norms which shape and define its creation in a metropolis like Paris is placed in the background rather than being at the centre of the debate and disappears progressively, only to remain completely unaddressed.

Since last May, the action plan put forward by Paris' city council and its police department in response to the petition has to a certain extent materialised. Demain La Chapelle, one of the non-profits behind the petition, reported on its social media accounts an increasing amount of police check-ups and a decrease in activities such as street hawking in the neighbourhood. Early July, a public meeting with local residents was organised in order to further discuss the creation of a pedestrian trail along the La Chapelle boulevard to declutter and reclaim the urban space. This project was initiated by Paris' city council in 2014 but is said to

be facing delays due to the presence of migrant camps. Since May, however, the issue specifically of gendered space and women's right to the city has barely been readdressed. Anne Hidalgo, Mayor of Paris, has stressed that the city council is pursuing the work on gender equality in Paris it has undertaken since she took office in 2014 by funding research on violence against women, by helping city planners to better integrate gender in the way they conceptualise public spaces, and by starting campaigns against street harassment. However, little on the subject has been readdressed or even mentioned again by local residents, groups or local non-profits. The police check-ups as well as the regular presence of riot police in the neighbourhood are said to have largely improved the situation. While this type of solution is highly questionable not merely because it is only short-term but also because of the violence it triggers, co-founder of the French think-tank “Gender and City” Chris Blache argues it is yet another way in which male domination and authority is forced upon public space.

In light of all this, it's safe to say our cities are in crucial need of an in-depth, structural and inclusive reflection on how to create safer and more equal public spaces.



## 1 “SAY NO TO MIGRANT ROUND-UP AND DEPORTATION!”

Let's block the police | Let's open our doors and protect migrants from tear gas and the use of police batons | Let's get organised!”

## 2 Let's have a conversation about our city, about our neighbourhood. Let's create spaces which allow us to live together.

[...] Let's have more open spaces, which are easier to walk through. **Let's push aside the walls and the fences. Let's stop gentrification and protect the poor and all our communities. Let's plant lots of trees and create shade**, widen public spaces, get rid of the concrete and return to cobbled streets. Let's slow down traffic. **Let's find the earth whilst staying very urban, let's let the grass grow in between the cobblestones, and start composting. Let's create anarchy. Let's use public spaces to create political spaces we can debate in, discuss in, share thoughts in.** Let's not privatise these spaces. Let's widen the pavements, the working spaces. Let's define without hesitation a neighbourhood of communities. Let's stop hunting down the poor; Black people; Arabs; and immigrants. **Let's acknowledge that migration has always defined our neighbourhood.** Let's create a more productive, ecological and recycling city.





**Sizani Ngubane** is the founder and director of the **Rural Women's Movement (RWM)**, which she has built up from the ground into a vibrant movement of rural/indigenous women/girls, creating space for them to have their voices heard, to have food security for their families and communities, security of tenure and access to land in their own rights as women and girls. The movement was initiated in the 1990s and officially launched by Sizani and a group of 250 indigenous/rural women and youth in November 1998. The Commission on Gender Equality, Commission on Human Rights, National Land Committee as well as the Centre for Applied Legal Studies based within the Wits University were also represented at the event. RWM is now a coalition of some 501 Community Based Organizations (CBO) with a membership of approximately 50,000 women. The members work together across ethnic lines. They work at the village level but also work with their sister organizations at provincial, regional, national and international levels.

## RWM beliefs and working methods

RWM's mission is to attain gender equality in a democratic South African society. Efforts are focussed on promoting the social, educational, economical and political development of indigenous women and girls, including advocating for women's rights, eliminating discrimination against women including GBV, advancing women's capacities and leadership skills, promoting their participation in the decisions that affect their lives and amplifying their voices for peace and security at provincial and national levels.

## What led to this outstanding achievement?

At 10 years of age, Sizani saw at firsthand the detrimental effects of gender bias and the unjustified strain it puts on women. Her father worked about 680 kilometres away and was only able to visit his home once a year. His brother demanded the house and land, the family was forcibly ejected, the local chief refused help to women and they moved into an aunt's house.

Sizani listened to the **ANC (African National Congress)** in exile on radio and later worked underground helping many rural people to learn about the human rights they deserved, which were severely limited by the apartheid regime, and recruiting support for the ANC. She became formally aligned to the ANC and in 1990 was appointed to its Peace Committee in Northern Natal in the fight against apartheid. At that time **HIV/AIDS** was affecting increasing numbers of people and following a 1991 exchange programme to Canada under the umbrella of the new National Progressive Primary Healthcare Network, Sizani became passionate about fostering a safe space for those



living with this new and frightening disease.

**The SA Women's National Coalition** was formed and in 1991 Sizani became a Provincial Coordinator, conducting research about what women imagined for a new democratic South Africa. She focused on rural areas knowing too well how easily rural populations are forgotten and that the new democratic government must represent everyone. Subsequently, Sizani was instrumental in providing crucial information about what rural and indigenous women wanted from a new government. This was taken into consideration when the current Bill of Rights within the constitution was constructed.

After working with the National Progressive Primary Healthcare Network, a newly established organization into which she incorporated her HIV/AIDS work, Sizani decided to focus her efforts on girls and women's human rights specifically. She returned to Pietermaritzburg to start work that would lead her to the creation of the Rural Women's Movement. **The Association for Rural Development (ARD)** appointed her as Gender Specialist in late 1994 focussing on issues around human rights and gender equality, especially concerns about land rights, property and inheritance rights of women/girls and increasing women's effective participation in community development. This work assisted ARD and the rural communities it was working with to develop a Gender Strategy. When working with a community Sizani's philosophy is, *"We must not impose but we must walk the journey with them"*.

Sizani started to create her own human rights organization, **Rural Women's Movement**. Its core issues include:

- Mobilising to prevent loss of land and resource rights as a result of corruption, land grabs or mining deals with local elites/traditional leaders;
- Contesting undemocratic and corrupt practices that impact on rural citizen's lives and livelihoods;
- Monitoring the institutions of traditional governance and their impacts on indigenous citizens' rights;
- Mobilising against policies and laws that dilute the rights of rural people and render them as second class citizens/ chiefly subjects;
- Identifying and supporting precedent setting cases for strategic litigation;
- Ensuring land and tenure security rights for all with a particular focus on securing women's rights in land.

The RWM has consistently argued that democratic South Africa has failed to meet key constitutional obligations to ensure security of land tenure for residents of the former Bantustan.

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal where Sizani was born and brought up, customary marriages were not governed by the Bantu Administration Act but by the Code of Zulu law. This law prevented indigenous women from acquiring property in their own names; they were legal minors, subject to their husbands' guardianship. Some of these pieces of legislation have been repealed but its legacy still haunts women and girls, especially in terms of their land and property rights and their right to enter into any contract.

RWM is the only grassroots movement leading an intensive campaign for women and girls' independent land, property and inheritance rights, lobbying National Parliament and policy-makers for policies that are user-friendly to indigenous and rural women/girls, widows, single mothers, married women, LGBTI, women/girls living positively with HIV/AIDS as schoolgirls, survivors of abductions, torture, forced marriages, rape and incest.

## The Future

Sizani's future vision is to assist young women within RWM to build a vibrant Indigenous Young Women's Movement to tackle issues that affect young women/girls for them to be able to strengthen their leadership skills, establish an Indigenous Women/Girls Self-Sustainable, Organic Agricultural Skills Training Centre. She also plans to build RWM to amplify the voice of women/girls in two other provinces (Limpopo/Northern Cape).

**As a human rights defender, Sizani and her family have been subjected to attacks on their lives and have had to move or split up and go into hiding, property has been destroyed and land has been grabbed.**

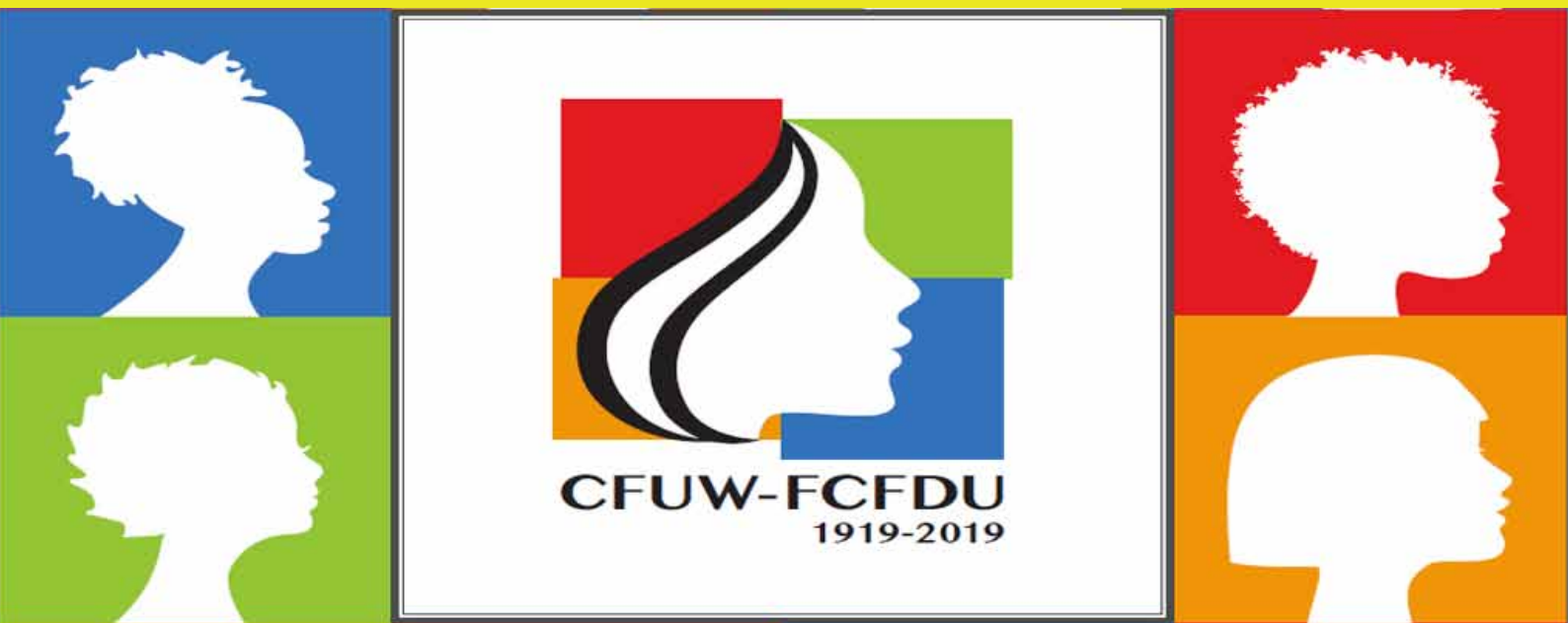
**Nothing can deter Sizani from continuing her work.**

**The IAW salutes Sizani and has nominated her for The Brunet International Prize: promoting Human Rights.**



# CFUW/FCF DU

(Canadian Federation of University Women /  
Fédération Canadienne des Femmes Diplômées des Universités)



CFUW is a non-partisan, voluntary, self-funded organization with over 100 CFUW Clubs, located in every province across Canada. Since its founding in 1919, CFUW has been working to improve the status of women and to promote human rights, public education, social justice, and peace. Every year, CFUW and its Clubs award close to \$1 million to women to help them pursue post-secondary studies. CFUW also provides funding for library and creative arts awards. CFUW Clubs provide life-long learning opportunities and fellowship to members. They offer over 100 lecture series, 200 book clubs and 75 issues groups. CFUW Clubs are involved in community outreach on such initiatives as working to prevent violence against women, child poverty, early learning and child care.

CFUW holds special consultative status with the United Nations (ECOSOC) and belongs to the Education Committee of the Canadian Commission for UNESCO. CFUW regularly sends a delegation to the UN Commission on the Status of Women. It is the largest affiliate of Graduate Women International which represents women worldwide and advocates for women's rights, equality and empowerment through access to quality secondary and tertiary education, and training up to the highest levels.

## **Sustainable Development Goals**

Through its SDG Series, CFUW highlights recognised theme days such as ***International Day of the Girl Child*** (11 October 2017) with the SDG lens and brings the conversation to everyone. This SDG Series provides opportunities to discuss the interconnections between quality education and achieving gender equality to empower all women and girls. CFUW believes change begins with consciousness at all levels of understanding.

September 8 2017 marked the 51st anniversary of ***International Literacy Day*** which UNESCO celebrated under the banner 'Literacy in a digital world'.

***The World Day Against Trafficking in Persons*** draws the attention of the world to focus on human trafficking, including sexualized human trafficking, and to realize that ending this scourge requires the full cooperation of governments at all levels, concerned organizations, and the general public both women and men. CFUW promotes working together to eradicate underlying causes of human trafficking, to challenge the perpetrators, and to create positive change for the victims and their families so that they may walk in freedom.

*Note: The CFUW is seeking Affiliate membership with the IAW and this is on the agenda for Congress 2017 in Cyprus.*





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