

THE JUST WORD



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HUMAN RIGHTS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND RESILIENCE

Anne Sosin, Director, Vizyon Dwa Ayisyen

Nou fenm fanm se wozo, ou met koupe rasin nou men le lapli vini nap repouse anko.

Women are like bamboo. You can cut us down, but when the rain comes we will grow again.

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

For more than two years, they suffered silently as masked armed men forced their way into their homes, raped them, disappeared their husbands, and forced them to flee their neighborhoods with their children. On September 1, 2006, several hundred masked women from Komisyon Fanm Viktim pou Viktim (KOFAVIV) took to the streets of Port-au-Prince to demand an end to violence against women and gender inequality. The march was the first time that women victims had spoken out so publicly against rape in recent years. Along the route, women sang, “Nou menm fanm se wozo, ou met koupe rasin nou, men lè lapli vini nap repouse anko,” or women are like bamboo, you can cut our roots but when the rain comes, we will grow back again.



March held by KOFAVIV in Port-au-Prince on September 1, 2006 to denounce violence against women

This song and the women’s ability to turn an object used to hide the identity of their attackers into a sign of resistance epitomizes the courage and resilience of fanm Ayisyen, or Haitian women, in the face of crisis. In asserting their rights, KOFAVIV has advanced its struggle that poor Haitian women are not only the victims of abuse but are also at the forefront of a struggle for social justice.

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The leaders of KOFAVIV all became victims of political rape during Haiti's 1991-94 military dictatorship. Following the restoration of democracy to Haiti in 1994, the women came together to organize for justice for women victims of human rights violations. When Aristide was again forced out of power following an armed uprising led by former members of the Haitian army, former leaders of the paramilitary group FRAPH (Revolutionary Front for the Advancement and Progress of Haiti), and armed thugs, the women were in the early stages of preparing a landmark legal case against leaders of these groups. If successful, this case would have been the first time women victims of rape achieved justice through the legal system against high military and paramilitary leaders for crimes of sexual violence. The women's hope of achieving justice in a society where impunity is the norm was replaced by fear of again being targeted.

In the months that followed, the capital experienced a surge in human rights violations and a dramatic rise in insecurity. The women of KOFAVIV watched in horror as women from their neighborhoods became victims of the same types of rape as those which they experienced before. Groups of armed men entered the homes of women living in poor neighborhoods and raped all of the women in the household. The perpetrators often killed male members of the household, destroyed personal possessions, and stole commercial goods. The result for women was total devastation. Poor women were left without refuge from the threat of rape. Rapes occurred in broad daylight, late at night, in market areas, transport vehicles, police stations, and private homes.

Even more disturbing was the lack of response on the part of human rights groups and women's organizations to these conditions. Two years



A Haitian woman at the March

ago, the women established KOFAVIV in order to provide support to other women victims. In March of last year, KOFAVIV began a partnership with a local clinic to provide medical care to women victims. Although KOFAVIV lacked the means to provide formal psychological support, the group began holding peer support group meetings with victims in a small school in the Port-au-Prince neighborhood of Martissant. In their meetings, KOFAVIV leaders employed the *Wonn Refleksyon*, or Reflection Circle, methods developed by the organization *Beyond Borders/Limyè Lavi* to encourage non-hierarchical, participatory interaction and dialogue around issues of importance to the women. The organization has also begun to incorporate health training into group activities using the same method.

KOFAVIV Responds

In less than two years, KOFAVIV has grown into a multi-faceted program. The group has provided support to more than 1,000 women victims, and it now has over 300 women victims participating in twelve solidarity groups. KOFAVIV has incor-

porated health education, particularly on HIV/AIDS, into these group activities and has recently trained a group to do women's rights education. KOFAVIV recently launched a new initiative on human rights, which brings together women from grassroots organizations to advocate for the full spectrum of their rights, including the right to health and education.

All of KOFAVIV's work is carried out by a network of twenty-five *ajan kominotè*, or community-based human rights workers scattered throughout poor neighborhood of Port-au-Prince. *Ajan* are responsible for identifying women victims and accompanying them for services, leading peer support group meetings, conducting popular education, and providing support to the women's clinic. KOFAVIV provides training on violence against women, peer education, HIV/AIDS, leadership, and a variety of other topics. This system not only allows KOFAVIV to help poor women overcome the many obstacles that prevent them from accessing services, especially during a conflict-like situation, it also empowers women in the face of crisis. The *ajan*, many survivors themselves, benefit as much from their work as the women receiving services. With the victim-for-victim approach, the women's understanding of themselves as victims is transformed to that of human rights defenders who are actively protecting their rights as well as those of other women.

While KOFAVIV's groups offer a space for individuals with shared experiences and problems to come together, the trauma of human rights violations and continuing threats of violence prevent them from speaking openly about sexual violence and its impact on their lives. The absence of

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a space to address the personal impact of this violence represents an obstacle to women victims' ability to organize at the community level. Rape has a devastating impact on women's physical, economic, and psychological well-being. The normal feelings of loss, shame, grief, and hopelessness that they experience as the result of sexual violence are compounded by a sense of humiliation and powerlessness in being unable to provide for children and other family members. Their trauma has been aggravated by a situation of ongoing violence and absolute lack of human security, which makes women and their families vulnerable to further abuses.

This spring, KOFAVIV learned that the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund had accepted its proposal for funding to support a psychological support program for KOFAVIV. In conceptualizing and implementing the project, it has been important to recognize

the role that KOFAVIV's pre-existing activities play in women's healing and recovery and to build on, rather than devalue, the mutual support women provide one another. KOFAVIV is using this grant to integrate psychological support into its existing activities. As part of the project it is undertaking in partnership with the Martín-Baró Fund, KOFAVIV has hired a part-time psychologist with experience in participatory education to conduct structured group support sessions with the existing Solidarity Groups.

KOFAVIV also recognized that it was important to address the impact of violence on the communities in which women are living in addition to the personal trauma they have experienced. The trauma women experience as victims is not separate from the collective trauma experienced by the communities in which women live. All residents of poor neighborhoods have witnessed

relentless violence and lived in constant danger during this period. Almost all experience symptoms of trauma as a result of these experiences. Human rights violations have had a detrimental impact on community life in poor neighborhoods and have contributed to a situation where all social relations are organized by violence. The result of these interrelated forms of violence has been the erosion of trust, destruction of community systems, and the elimination of spaces for nonviolent expression. KOFAVIV plans to hold community-wide Open Space forums on the mental health impact of human rights violations in poor communities. These Open Space activities will focus on the impact of violence on individual communities and will serve as a space for women to begin to reach beyond their peer groups and to talk with others about how violence has affected women in particular. ♦

EDITORS' NOTE:

Women the world over continue to face human rights violations including rape and physical abuse, as well as verbal and emotional abuse. Women are not only victims of abuse but also serve as strong voices in the struggle for women's rights and social justice. This newsletter focuses on women's resistance in the face of ongoing structural and interpersonal violence.



*"We don't ask for permission to be free."
International Women's Day*



AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN

Winnie Chow is an international student who is currently finishing a MA in Mental Health Counseling at Boston College. She is a volunteer with the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights.

This past summer, I heard representatives from KOFAVIV who were visiting Boston, share their work with members of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund. They spoke at length about the Haitian women with whom they work. Prior to attending the meeting, I had been made aware of the institutional, political and social discrimination that still exists in our society through my professional training and my work with the homeless population in Boston. However, as I listened to Anne Sosin and Dr. Jacklin Saint-Fleur, I found it challenging to realize and accept the degree of human rights' abuses that continue unchecked in today's world. I had not imagined the experiences of violence, abuse, and the gender-based crimes that Haitian women experience on a daily basis.

I was saddened, even frightened, to learn about the ongoing experiences of extreme poverty, violence, and gender-based violations in affected neighborhoods in Port-au-Prince and Croix-des-Missions. Hundreds of women are raped each month. Our guests indicated that some of these violations are reported but many other incidents go unreported. Many of the women who were raped were also robbed, had their homes destroyed, were left alone to raise their children, and were often left homeless.

In contrast, I found it inspiring and hopeful to learn that the group of women gathered through KOFAVIV was tremendously resilient, resistant, and resourceful in the face of ongoing structural, political, and personal violence. They are clearly victims, but they are also survivors and activists. Rather than accepting the status quo and defining themselves as victims, these Haitian women were motivated

strongly believe that respecting and supporting clients' rights is key to my work in providing psychosocial assistance and counseling with individuals who have been marginalized by society. Each of our clients comes with strengths and knowledge, despite their history of human rights abuses. As counselors, we need to be cautious and resist imposing our ideas and biases. Understanding the particular needs and cultural context of our clients is critical. Without this, we can easily become the oppressor, harming rather than helping those who seek us out. We must go beyond the traditional individual client-therapist relationship when working with underserved populations whose rights are violated on a daily basis. It is our responsibility to advocate our clients' rights to social justice. Our clients, similar to the women of KOFAVIV, will guide us, demonstrating how they reclaim their rights and restore their positions in society. ❖



An evening of learning and sharing



Anne Sosin and Dr. Jacklin Saint-Fleur

by their own experiences as survivors of political rape to set up an organization to address the injustices against women and to provide medical care and psychosocial support for other women like themselves. They also work in collaboration with other grassroots organizations. Currently, KOFAVIV has 25 active community workers who reach out to many distressed communities and encourage women victims of violence to seek medical help and counseling to care for themselves in the wake of trauma.

Learning about the women in this amazing group and their struggles in the midst of ongoing violence has further motivated me in my commitment to mental health and human rights. As a mental health counseling student in the United States, I



CENTER FOR IMMIGRANT FAMILIES (CIF)

Herminia Acevedo, Ujju Aggarwal, Priscilla Gonzalez, Yandra Mordan, Donna Nevel, Delsa Rosso, Lucila Silva

The Center for Immigrant Families (CIF) is currently being funded by the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights for its organizing work with low-income immigrant women of color. What follows is a description of their work.

Committed to a holistic vision of organizing, CIF has created an organization that builds upon the multiple identities and roles immigrant women play – as caregivers, economic providers, and the glue that holds their communities together – and has found a way to make women’s voices central to the struggles for justice in their communities, and, through collective action, to enhance our overall well-being.

When CIF was founded in 1997, a number of immigrants’ rights organizations and local community groups were founded to organize against the draconian laws passed in 1996 (welfare reform, antiterrorism, immigration). CIF’s contribution to this movement was to create community and to build support, leadership, and organizing among immigrant women, who were and continue to be the most affected by these right-wing attacks.

CIF sought to build upon Freirian principles and liberatory practices from the Third World to address the multi-layered impact of the challenges we faced as low-income immigrant women of color. The scope of our vision was as large, complex and difficult as our lives. We realized that to carry forward this vision, we needed to begin with a process of reflection that would lead to thoughtful and intentional action.



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Women’s Popular Education Program

CIF’s founding program, the Escuela Popular de Mujeres/Women’s Popular Education Program, and its popular-education based curriculum, is driven by a deep understanding of and faith in the transformational and healing power of sharing stories for individuals and communities. We began by sharing our migration stories, which for us not only signal when we arrived and our cultural heritage but also why we came, who and what we left behind, our expectations for life here, and what we found when we arrived. These stories that are often being told for the first time in the Escuela are being shared with a community of women whose stories resonate with our own. A comment from one Escuela participant echoes so many others: “Here...you share, building friends, and channel the anger and pain from the injustices we face. I feel like a new woman.”

Sharing stories becomes the foundation for developing a collective analysis of why we are here, the nature of the challenges we face in the U.S., and what we can do collectively to address them. Through sharing stories, we come to understand the different issues and challenges affecting us structurally rather than viewing them as personal “failings”. As a result, we are better able to recognize our strength and power and locate our experiences of racism,

sexism, and exploitation within a larger structural and historical context of immigrants’ rights, racial justice, and women’s empowerment. Through a process of personal and collective transformation, we “un-silence” our voices, and a strong community emerges committed to working together for social change.

By emphasizing the relationship between personal and social transformation, CIF’s storytelling workshops enable participants to view our roles within our families and communities differently. The workshops have helped some women to “break the silence” around domestic violence in our lives, while others have talked about how much stronger we feel asserting our rights in different contexts, such as in the workplace, hospitals, and other institutions. CIF members have also come together to challenge segregation in our public schools, using theater of the oppressed and other strategies to “take back” our schools and make them accountable to all families. One CIF member recently commented, “Yes, I still feel lost in this maze, but now I have it clear that we have to struggle and fight, it made me conscious to see so many sisters take control of their lives!”

Through CIF, a powerful community of women has been created in which we find strength, empowerment, and affirmation that, together, we can create real change and hope in our community as we struggle for the dignity, justice, and the respect we all deserve. ❖

IN GUATEMALA: Held Up With a Thumbtack

Colleen Silva, a student at Boston College, spent last summer in Guatemala during which time she visited ACEFOMI, one of the grantees of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund for Mental Health and Human Rights.

If you were a conservatively dressed, young woman walking down any street in Guatemala's capital, you could expect to be sexually harassed by the local men. As an unmistakable *gringa* from the United States, I anticipated an occasional stare but was unprepared for the incessant cat-calls, whistles, and public degradation faced by all women. Unrestricted pornography that glamorizes rape, torture, and murder of women, is openly displayed in the markets between the candy and wristwatch vendors. A culture of *machismo*, that seeks to belittle and dominate women, has taken hold in Guatemala. I was relieved to get away from Guatemala City and into the Highlands where public taunting of women is not so prevalent. Unfortunately I found that throughout Guatemala, women face far more serious dangers because their rights are ignored or nonexistent.

In interviews with women of various ages and occupations I learned of the general abuses faced by nearly all of Guatemala's women. In Panajachel a young mother, Blanca Rosa, explained to me that a wife is left with all the responsibilities of cooking, cleaning, and raising the children while the husband squanders his daily wages by getting drunk after work. Blanca Rosa has recently sepa-

rated from her husband, "because he was abusive and shouted at me whenever I asked him to help me take care of our children. I was already doing everything on my own. It's better now living with my mother." In Quetzaltenango Lucia, a restaurant manager and mother of four, explained to me that in the countryside twelve year old girls are married off to old men that treat their wives as servants and rape them. Although women might be shown more respect in public, it is worse for them in their own homes where they have no authority and live in fear of their fathers or husbands.

One evening in Quetzaltenango a man pulled his car up next to me, started flirting and telling me to get

in while he followed me down the block. It may begin just like this for some of the 500+ women reportedly kidnapped and murdered each year. According to Guatemala's Human Rights Commission Report for 2004, over 3,000 women were raped in that year alone. Prostitution and sexual harassment is not illegal nor will the government even punish any act of domestic abuse unless it results in bruising that last for ten days or more. There is virtually nowhere for these women to turn because the vast array of abuses against women are ignored, if not encouraged, by the government.

What is it that has engendered a society in which femicide is on the rise and where women are severely mistreated in every aspect of daily life? I traveled to Chajul, a remote Mayan village in the region of Quiché, to meet with ACEFOMI, a human rights organization that aims to heal the psychosocial wounds of women that were directly affected by the genocide of the 1980's and war. ACEFOMI's directors, Gaspar Ijom and Ana Caba, explained that, although there are many contributing factors, the widespread oppression of women is a corollary of the war.

A whole generation has been ripped apart by the war. One defining facet of the war was the intent to suppress the indigenous population by erasing their rich cultural history dating back to the Mayan Empire. The horrific massacres, government brutality, and assault on Mayan identity have left the survivors and

returning refugees traumatized. Now the men use drinking as a coping mechanism and violently unleash their sense of pain and chaos upon their wives and children. For some this may construct a feeling of control and powerfulness in a country where extreme government corruption is the standard for justice. Intense cultural discrimination against women is just one of the

many aftershocks resulting from Guatemala's war that officially ended in 1996. ♦



In Quetzaltenango, Guatemala

© Colleen Silva



Mayan woman

© Colleen Silva

Erzulie Coquillon and
M. Brinton Lykes¹

New Orleans, Louisiana, withstood the initial onslaught of Hurricane Katrina as the Gulf Coast of Mississippi took a direct hit in August 2005. But soon after levees surrounding the low-lying city collapsed, flooding devastated the area. In 2004 Federal Emergency Management Association simulations predicted that a Category 3 hurricane would send waters over the levees, causing flooding, and damaging property (Annenberg Political Fact Check, 2005), and yet when the disaster did strike, the national government was slow to respond and unprepared to handle the crisis (http://katrina.house.gov/full_katrina_report.htm).

Hurricane Katrina took a disproportionate toll upon the poor and elderly (<http://www.dhh.louisiana.gov/news.asp?ID=1&Detail=801>) in New Orleans, as well as the African-American population (Sharkey, 2006). During the crisis, reports abounded of rescue efforts and emergency aid that favored the white and privileged. In the wake of the disaster, many have discussed biases that are believed to have contributed both to the lack of a coordinated response to the crisis as well as to the disenfranchisement of the New Orleans African-American population. Commentators as well as citizens criticized responses to Katrina as “ethnic cleansing” of the poor and African-American (Whitney, 2005) and a “massive social engineering project” (Chen, 2005), as those neighborhoods that experienced the worst flooding and have received the least resources since Katrina were predominantly poor and African-American. Yet within this dialogue, and despite significant organizing efforts by women, post-Katrina, media outlets



Uptown garden, New Orleans, January 2006

have been surprisingly silent on the issue of gender and the particular concerns of women throughout both the crisis and the rebuilding process (Vaill, 2006; Everett, 2006).

Women are most likely to be caretakers of vulnerable populations such as the elderly and children. Eighty-eight percent of all households living in New Orleans public housing prior to the storm were headed by women (Vaill, 2006). Much of that housing has yet to be redeveloped, and resources for women and families remain limited (Vaill, 2006). Indeed, activist Shana Griffin, a resident of New Orleans and organizer with *INCITE: Women of Color Against Violence and Critical Resistance New Orleans*, a national activist organization of radical feminists of color concerned specifically with issues of violence against women of color, notes that “one of the biggest post-Katrina challenges is the complete absence of consideration or special provisions to meet the

needs of women....[I]t's not enough to have a solid race and class analysis, because beyond those two, you also need a gender analysis” (Everett, 2006).

The consequences of the flooding in New Orleans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina highlighted a complex nexus of historical racial and class-based discrimination and governmental inefficiencies about which New Orleanians themselves are organizing. Local activists and



Ninth Ward, New Orleans, January 2006

citizens, as well as those in solidarity with them throughout the nation, are challenging this status quo. They have developed a critical lens on the disaster, the forces that anteceded it, and analyzed what this unnatural disaster and its aftermath reveal about New Orleans and the wider United States. Within New Orleans, for example, St. Thomas Clinic, a local multi-service center, has historically addressed both individual and socio-political conditions through group and individual counseling with a liberation perspective. Their preventive and educational work with youth includes workshops on “Undoing Racism for Teens”, “Cultural Awareness”, and “Community Organizing through Creative Writing” (www.stthomasclinic.org).

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The clinic's former Executive Director, Barbara Major, has provided significant leadership in post-Katrina rebuilding in a wide range of local organizing efforts. She, among others, has also called for an inclusiveness in terms of equity and access that New Orleans has never before had.

Additionally, INCITE's local initiatives in New Orleans are challenging both the lack of attention to women's concerns post-Katrina, and the systems of race and class oppression that are particularly harmful to women of color (<http://www.incite-national.org/issues/katrinaaction.html>). Its contextualized approach to the development of a Tremé based clinic, addressing, for example, sexual health and reproductive and environmental justice is one example. Moreover, INCITE activists articulate a liberationist critique, contending that, "Women of color [in the Tremé district of New Orleans especially], because of their location at the intersection of [racism, classism, and the impacts of U.S. imperialism abroad], as well as their roles as caregivers to young, elderly, and disabled people, have been on the front lines of struggles for survival in the days and months following Katrina. However, the needs of low-income women of color struggling against poverty and powerlessness resulting from systemic racism and sexism have not been central to government or non-profit responses" (INCITE, 2006).

A liberation psychology contributes importantly to a critical analysis of the gender, race, and class dynamics of the Katrina crisis and subsequent rebuilding efforts in New Orleans. Critical and liberatory analyses of the psychosocial implications of extreme disasters require both the recognition of the social relationships that are disrupted by traumatic



French Quarter, New Orleans, January 2006

events, such as the separation of women from children in the chaos that followed the flooding, and of the complicated nature of trauma in such situations and its differential effects. Liberation psychologists who accompany communities such as those devastated by Katrina are challenged to situate their praxis within these local efforts in terms of culturally-competent and community-based service. They are called upon to contribute their professional knowledge, human service expertise, and research skills to listen to and document the full range of voices of survivors and their families, as well as to recognize the particularities of New Orleans and the Gulf Coast, and to critically analyze and redress the relative absence of women, Vietnamese, and Central Americans within both the media's dichotomous depictions of a black-white divide and the recovery and reconstruction policies and practices. By joining in survivors' struggles for legal and social justice while critically analyzing the many facets of this unnatural disaster, they can turn their collective knowledge into collaborative action for change through com-

munity-based psychosocial interventions, research, policy development, and political advocacy. ❖

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¹Parts of this article draw on an earlier presentation by these authors at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association in New Orleans in August 2006.

A SPECIAL VISIT FROM A PAST GRANTEE

Maria de Jesus

This past spring, one of our past grantees, Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA) traveled from San Cristóbal de las Casas in Chiapas, México to New England where they visited a number of universities, including Boston College. Members of the Ignacio Martín-Baró Fund had the joy of meeting them, hearing their stories, and sharing a meal together. Later, we had the opportunity to witness a theater performance by the women of FOMMA sponsored by several organizations including Cultural Survival and the IMBF. Wearing masks and authentic clothing, the women enacted one of their popular theater productions depicting the struggles that Mayan women face on a daily basis. As one of the audience members aptly mentioned, “it allowed one to see art that comes from a great commitment—not theory, but action and demonstrated the way that theater can be made with relatively simple and straightforward means.” Following the performance, a question and answer panel ensued, which had the most lasting impact and where we had the opportunity to learn from the women. During this time the women talked about their personal experiences in Chiapas.

It was exciting to see the work that IMBF helped support for three years (2000, 2001, 2002). In part, the grants supported the development and production of FOMMA’s popular theater program whereby the women,



Theater performance, FOMMA

through workshops, learn to write in their own languages, produce, and perform plays about their lives and experiences.

Through the development and preparation of these plays, the women and children share their concerns with their communities, make connections between their problems and widespread human rights issues, and explore creative means for addressing their needs.

The theater production was definitely a crowd-pleaser. For all involved the performance allowed

one to “share with Mayan women” while learning about the “difficult circumstances that many women still face in their everyday life.” Below is a sample of responses from students and professors at the various universities where FOMMA performed:

“I felt that seeing a performance in Spanish, knowing its cultural value, understanding its importance for this community of women, and being able to ask questions were all valuable.”

There were so many lessons! Students made numerous observations about how it impressed them to hear the women talk about their lives during the

question and answer period after the performance. They were also impressed by the women’s positive efforts to effect change in their lives and the lives of other women.

We would like to thank Cultural Survival for providing the above quotes and photos as well as the Mexican Consulate for making FOMMA’s tour in New England possible. ♦



Dialogue between husband and wife

It's now easier than ever to support grassroots human rights and mental health work throughout the world, by contributing to the Martín-Baró Fund online, using your MasterCard, Visa, American Express or Discover Card. Just look for the words "DONATE ONLINE" near the top of any page on our website. Two clicks will take you to our newly-designed, secure contributions page on the website of our fiscal sponsor, The Funding Exchange. You'll get an immediate confirmation, and all contributions are of course tax deductible.

CONFRONTING VIOLENCE: ONE WOMAN'S STORY

Luis Sandoval

Chiapas, México, is known for its natural resources, its extreme poverty and violence, and, recently, for indigenous groups striving to redress injustice. Before coming to Boston, I worked as a psychologist with women in the indigenous communities north of Tuxtla Gutierrez, the state capital.

Doña Maria, a mother of four, was one of those women - and typical of many throughout the region and the country. She makes and sells crafts while tending to her household duties as wife and mother of four children.

Doña Maria, the eldest of six children, grew up in a community in rural Chiapas. Throughout her childhood she was exposed to abuse. She reported that her father *resented the fact that she had been born a girl*, and that he frequently abandoned her, often leaving her alone without food. On repeated occasions he sexually abused her, arguing that he was *the one who put the food on the table - so he gave the orders in the house*. If her mother defended Maria, she too was beaten and mistreated. She resorted to prayer, the only thing she felt she could do for her daughter. When she was 13, Maria escaped, fleeing home.

Befriending a 30-year-old man, Maria had three wonderful months with him. She recalls that she received hot food and that he always had a kind word. His kindness convinced her to accept his marriage proposal. Shortly thereafter she became pregnant and he began to beat her *for being too young, for being a woman, for having run away from home, for not being careful and getting pregnant, for being a stupid girl, a tramp, and for not knowing how to do things the way he wanted them done*. He sexually abused her and when she resisted, he beat her. When her daughter turned four he threatened to abuse her, triggering Maria's memories of her own earlier experiences. She fled the house and the relationship so that her child would not live the horrors she had known.

At the age of 20 Maria found the love of a man with whom she hoped to start a family. She got pregnant shortly after meeting him and a second child, her first son, was born. She was happy, assuming that he would not hit her due to his pleasure at having a son and hoping that as her son grew older he would protect his sister. After two years of marriage and desperate economic conditions, she took a job as a housemaid and, barely two months into the job, was raped by her boss. When her husband found out that she was once again pregnant, he threw her out, beating her so badly that she lost an eye. At the same time, her boss fired her and pressed charges against her, claiming that she had stolen from him. She was forced to hide in the mountains to avoid arrest, caring for her two small children and another on the way.



Indigenous Woman at the San Cristóbal market, Chiapas

Maria tried to find help but she felt powerless. If she went to the police they would arrest her; if she went to her ex-husband, he would kill her; and she had lost all contact with her family. Later, in order to survive, she hooked up with a third man who told her that she could live with him on the condition that she bear his child. Four years later she gave birth to a fourth child. She was relieved to have three sons, hoping that would ensure her safety.

But her 13-year-old daughter's body began to develop and her "husband" wanted to sleep with her. The only alternative Maria could envision was for her daughter to leave the house with her 8-year-old brother and find work as a maid, which they did. Her older children were constantly beaten, because they didn't obey and because they were not her "husband's" children. Maria was constantly tired but she put up with the yelling and the beatings because her "husband" cared for the two younger children, giving her money to support them.

Doña Maria started participating in literacy work-

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shops in a small northeast rural community of Chiapas. She also participated in workshops learning sewing, cooking, knitting, and craftwork. In these workshops she also learned about human rights. She has found support through these workshops, realizing that others have known the physical pain and heartache she has experienced. She no longer feels alone, although this does not stop the hurt and sadness.

Because she now knows how to read and write, she has come to know her individual rights, as well as her rights as a woman. When she was last beaten she went to the police to press charges. She told the group: *I was afraid of what would happen, because he threatened to kill me for sending the police, but it's better to die with a voice than to live in silence.*

Doña Maria's life is a testimony to her belief that if she had been born a male, her life would have been completely different. Hers is a single life and also an exemplar of so many more, of social and gendered injustice and personal resilience, of women's abuse and of women's resistance in indigenous communities in Chiapas, Mexico. ❖



Woman selling handcrafts with her children on the steps of Plaza de Santo Domingo, San Cristóbal, Chiapas

LIFETIME PEACE PRACTITIONERS AWARD

Ignacio Martín-Baró was posthumously awarded the "Lifetime Peace Practitioners Award" at the American Psychological Association Annual Convention in New Orleans last August, 2006. This is the first award of its kind to be offered by Division 48 (Society for the Study of Peace, Conflict, & Violence) of APA. Dan Mayton, the awards committee chairperson and President-elect of Division 48 wrote that "this was a great time to have the award for a practitioner to recognize his fine work ... I will propose that this award become the Ignacio Martín-Baró Lifetime Peace Practitioner Award for future recipients." Several members of the Martín-Baró Fund are members of APA and Fellows of Division 48 which has decided to recognize the Fund's work by presenting us with a plaque to commemorate the award. ❖



COMMEMORATION OF THE ASSASSINATION OF THE JESUITS IN EL SALVADOR, 1989

On Thursday November 16 at 7 pm, the Martín-Baró Fund showed "A Question of Conscience: The Murder of the Jesuit Priests in El Salvador" at Boston College, Cushing Building, Room 001 to commemorate the assassination of the Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter in El Salvador in 1989.

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OUR MISSION & VALUES

OUR MISSION

Through grant-making and education, the Martín-Baró Fund fosters psychological well-being, social consciousness, active resistance, and progressive social change in communities affected by institutional violence, repression and social injustice.

OUR VALUES

- ◆ We believe that the scars of such experiences are deeply seated both in the individual and in society.
- ◆ We believe in the power of the community collectively to heal these wounds, to move forward, and to create change.
- ◆ We believe in the importance of developing education and critical awareness about the oppressive policies and practices of the United States and of multinational corporations.

OUR GOALS

- ◆ To support innovative grassroots projects that explore the power of the community to foster healing within individuals and communities that are trying to recover from experiences of institutional violence, repression, and social injustice.
- ◆ To promote education and critical awareness about the psychosocial consequences of structural violence, repression and social injustice on individuals and communities, while educating ourselves and the wider community about the community-based responses of grantees in their pursuit of social reparation and a more just and equitable world.
- ◆ To build collaborative relationships among the Fund, its grantees, and its contributors for mutual education and social change.

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