Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare had declared a "new era of regional compact" and "new era of regional compact" effort to "safeguard the Islands' state apparatus, effective control of much of the Islands' state apparatus, and maintain its regional dominance." The Solomon Islands' actions, including the deployment of RAMSI, were seen as a "neo-colonial" effort to "safeguard the Islands' state apparatus, and maintain its regional dominance."

Abdelkader Belaouni, a 40-year-old blind Algerian refugee who has been living in sanctuary in St. Gabriel's Church for over two years. Solidarity pickets and embassy visits were also held in major cities around the world but if it can’t see us, who can it see?"

Six Nations leaders have put towns and cities along the Grand River on notice that the land still belongs to the people of Six Nations. The stretch of land, which extends from Lake Erie to the area lying to the northwest of Toronto, was granted to the Six Nations Confederacy in the 1784 Haldimand Proclamation. “There’s no more of this sweeping it under the rug. It’s not OK to steal land anymore and we’re going to make people aware of that,” one representative told the CBC.

Three hundred supporters of Jeremy Hinzman and Brandon Hughey, the first two war resisters to cross into Canada after refusing to deploy to Iraq with the US military, gathered in Toronto calling upon the Canadian parliament to pass a motion allowing them to remain in Canada. The rally was attended by Liberal foreign affairs critic Bob Rae, as well as Toronto NDP MP Olivia Chow. Similar rallies and actions were held in 11 cities across the country. Days before, a rally of 50 Iraq veterans gathered at the Canadian Embassy in Washington urging the Canadian government to provide sanctuary for a Democratic Society UBC (SDS-UBC) to prevent further privatization of public spaces on the UBC campus. SDS-UBC says the University’s development plan’s purpose “is to make the centre of campus a corporate/private space to which students only have access as customers or condo owners/renters.” SDS-UBC is organizing a conference in March entitled “Resisting the University,” which will address “privatization and commodification of education.”

Hundreds rallied and marched in Montreal in support of Abdelkader Belaouni, a 40-year-old blind Algerian refugee who has been living in sanctuary in St. Gabriel’s Church for over two years. Solidarity pickets and embassy visits were also held in major cities around the world but if it can’t see us, who can it see?"
ousted in a parliamentary vote, and replaced with a Sikua-led coalition, which has been enthusiastically current pro-occupation.

Despite Canada’s official stance of non-participation in the invasion of Iraq, another Canadian general has been sent to work with the command group overseeing the US-led occupation and counterinsurgency war. Brigadier-General Nicolas Matern of the Special Forces is the third Canadian general to serve in the command group, as part of an inter-military exchange program. According to a report from the US State Dept., “the governments of the United States and Canada collaborated on a broad array of initiatives, exercises, and joint operations that spanned virtually all agencies and every level of government.”

An anti-Olympics speaking tour visited 18 cities and Indigenous communities, calling attention to destruction caused by development fuelled by the Olympics. “There is an infrastructure being created for 2010 that will result in the further destruction of mountains and valleys that are traditionally Salish, St’át’ímct, and Squamish territory,” said Dustin Johnson. Resistance to “Sun Peaks” development on Secwepemc lands, one of many areas affected by the Olympics, extends back a decade. There have been dozens of initiatives, exercises, and joint operations that spanned virtually all agencies and every level of government.

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Itchy the Bedbug, Creepy the Cockroach, and Chewy the Rat will be the official mascots of Vancouver’s Poverty Olympics. Organizers, who hope to draw attention to Vancouver’s “world class poverty,” decried the lack of funding for social housing and the devastating effect of rapid gentrification on Vancouver’s vast population of poor and homeless.

A recent report estimated that between 8,000 and 15,500 British Columbia residents are “absolutely homeless,” while an estimated 39,000 are “inadequately housed.” BC Forest and Housing Minister Rich Coleman had previously estimated the number of homeless at roughly 5,000.

A Canadian Security Intelligence Service (CSIS) report warned of the possibility of “violent protests” during the Olympic Games in 2010. The heavily-censored public version of the report has raised concerns about “how far CSIS will go.” “We’re more than a little worried about the potential for infiltration of non-profit societies and legitimate protest groups,” a representative of the BC Civil Liberties Association told the Canadian Press. The Anti-Poverty Committee (APC) is one of the groups targeted by police and intelligence agencies. APC representative Mary Claremont said, “This is what we have been protesting... the coming Olympic police state. People thought we were nuts, but look, from 40 kilometers of electric fence, surveillance cameras, civil city, CSIS... it’s here.”

A group of academics and media watch groups filed a complaint with the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC), alleging that media coverage of the attempted deportation of Laibar Singh was “not accurate... or comprehensive”. CBC TV, CBC Radio, CKNW, CTV, and Global TV are cited in the complaint, which states that Singh was falsely said to have come to Canada “illegally” or that he “was illegal” in Canada prior to taking sanctuary. The complaint says that repetition of falsities despite widely available accurate information “fuelled ignorance in the public sphere and has negatively influenced perceptions of Mr. Laibar Singh and all asylum seekers to Canada.”

Security Certificate detainee Mohammed Harkat was seized, then released again by Police and Canadian Border Services agents. Widely referred to in media reports as a “terrorism suspect” Harkat is being held without charges under Bill C-3, “anti-terrorism” legislation passed after September 11, 2001. “I think it’s a political move,” Sophie Harkat told the Ottawa Citizen in an interview, adding that the government seeks to “stir fear” in the leadup to a vote over bill C-3. If the government does not vote to renew Bill C-3 before the end of March, existing security certificates—including the one under which Harkat is being held—will be struck down, in keeping with a Supreme Court ruling that found the legislation unconstitutional.

Alberta tar sands giant Suncor has given final approval for a plan to increase output by 200,000 barrels per day in a $20 billion expansion project. The company says that the increase is part of a plan to double the company’s output to 550,000 barrels per day by 2012.

Energy company TransCanada has moved forward with plans to build a natural gas pipeline across unceded territory belonging to the Lubicon Cree. In a letter to TransCanada, Lubicon legal counsel F. M. Lennarson wrote that the “response of the Lubicon people is that they are the aboriginal owners of the land that TransCanada wishes to violate with this huge new pipeline.” The pipeline will transport natural gas to the tar sands, allowing for expanded tar sands processing capacity.

Ecuadorian officials revoked a total of 587 mining concessions effectiveness cancelling Canadian-based Ascendant Copper’s bid to the controversial Junin Project. The transnational corporation is under intense scrutiny for impacts on local communities and environmental degradation. Human rights lawyers contend that the mere purchase of the mining concession is in breach of community members’ rights, and Ecuador’s constitution.

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Equal Porn for All
The 2007 Feminist Porn Awards

by Max Liboiron

This past June, the second annual Feminist Porn Awards took place at the Gladstone Hotel in Toronto, reminding the public that the porn industry has a creative side beyond mainstream expectations. Chanelle Gallant, the manager of Good For Her, a feminist and trans-friendly Toronto workshop centre and sex boutique, spearheaded The Emmas (named after iconic feminist-anarchist Emma Goldman). “We created [the awards] in response to the difficulty we had communicating to our distributors what we wanted when requesting videos that represented actors of color,” explains Gallant. They weren’t looking for films that portrayed minority actors as sexually fetishized objects of desire, which is what they were getting. Contemporary feminism works to privilege the agency and, in this case, the viable and nuanced sexualities of marginalized groups.

The staff members at Good For Her were frustrated over their inability to point their customers to a decent variety of “sensitive” queer, transgender, ethnic and even mainstream porn. So in an effort to track down and promote the pornography with positive representations of sexuality, gender, body type and ethnicity that they knew must be out there, they inaugurated the Feminist Porn Awards.

By holding pornography up to certain standards of artistic and representational integrity, The Emmas spotlight it as a form of contemporary cultural production. Because the porn industry is usually an invisible and unpublicized system—that nevertheless fulfills the demand of a large, generally un-polled audience—feedback between producers and viewers is difficult. If an enterprising viewer wants to research made-by-women-for-women porn on her own, for example, productive information is hard to come by. Just try googling “good porn.” A viewer has little choice but to muddle through the publicly available options, which tend to be an education in restriction and subjugated gender roles rather than a representation of creative, sensitive, joyful, or empowering sexuality.

Fuelled by the need to establish a standard of ethical representations of women and other minorities in porn, Gallant came up with three criteria for feminist pornography. A film has to meet at least two to be eligible for The Emmas. One: women have to be substantially involved behind the scenes. Two: the film must promote and represent genuine female pleasure. Three: the film must expand on the traditionally accepted range of women’s sexual expression.

As for the opposite of feminist pornography, “any film made with female coercion” would qualify, says Gallant. She stresses that feminist porn is not a genre. You can’t identify it by pointing to certain aspects of storyline, sexual content, or its status as soft or hardcore. Feminist porn does not look like something in particular; it acts like something in particular. Because of this, there really is no “feminist porn community,” and the filmmakers met each other for the first time during the award ceremonies. Gallant hopes the annual event will help foster such a community, or at least collaborations between filmmakers.

For the second annual Emmas, the selections came mainly from Good for Her’s stock, since the store actively seeks pornography that represents minorities without exoticizing them. Gallant says they may post an open call for submissions in the future. The members of Good For Her’s staff, from the cashiers to the manager, served as the judges.

The store’s holistic approach to sexuality also extends beyond its selection of pornography. Not only does it offer transgender and women-
The Girls Who Saw Everything
Sean Dixon
Coach House, 2007

Abode of Love: Growing Up in a Messianic Cult
Kate Barlow
Gooselane, 2006.

O Cadoiro
Erín Moure
House of Anansi, 2007

The Rush to Here
George Murray
Nightwood Editions, 2007

The premise is appealing: the members of the Lacuna Cabal Montreal Young Women’s Book Club will act out The Epic of Gilgamesh. Not everyone who takes part is aware they’ve been given a role. And there’s a robot involved.

What happens when the Luna Cabal attempt to re-enact this epic poem is set alongside Runner Coghill’s story (parents and twin sister dead, surviving little brother) in the detailed account of two members of the Cabal. Because of this meta-fictional approach, the characters seem real and unreal, mature and immature. A quest, a parody, a mildly funny commentary on CanLit, as well as an earnest work of fiction, the book hovers between story and literary feat. Though Dixom draws clever parallels, from mentions of In the Skin of a Lion, which begins with an epitaph from Gilgamesh, to Fall on Your Knees, which examines the bond between sisters, this story’s construction may be too ambitious. The dualities add up to this human notion: “If you happen to walk past a room full of people in mourning, you should probably join them because they’re probably lonely.”

—Sheryda Warrener

The opening chapters of Kate Barlow’s memoir read deceptively like C.S. Lewis. There are rich descriptions of aged aunts and childhood hijinx—climbing roofs and pillering through drawers. You half expect the bored protagonist, on holiday from boarding school, to stumble across an old wardrobe. There certainly is a closet in the household, but instead of Narnia, Barlow discovers the remnants of her grandfather’s failed utopia, a messianic cult. Barlow’s childhood home was also known as “Agapemone,” an abode of love where aristocrats could await the resurrection, having relinquished their possessions to the group coffers. Scandals emerged when Barlow’s grandfather, who claimed to be a Messiah, took a “spiritual wife,” in addition to his legal spouse. Barlow skillfully juxtaposes slices of family life with the broader history of the cult. The information, however, is laid out in snatches that the reader slowly pieces together, as did Barlow herself. It’s a clever device, but it sometimes slows the pace unnecessarily. The level of analysis is faithful to Barlow’s age at the time, but this means a more adult critical examination is occasionally lacking.

—Claire Tacon

O Cadoiro is a book of love poetry. Hard love. The unrequited kind. Moure writes, “I want to speak no ill of love / becomes I am rightly afraid of it.” Further, she writes, “(my heart missing you / its own beast loses heart).” The poems in O Cadoiro are based on medieval Iberian lyric. Often they are presented as translations of Galician and Portuguese songs, but they are very much the “fount” of Moure’s invention. In this book, she is consumed by language’s failure to articulate emotional experience, by “... the nub of lyric poetry: that one thing can stand for another. Not as metaphor...but that concrete experience can distill to ‘mere figure’ or ‘basal significant’.”

Moure tries formal structure, lists, concrete poetry. She mixes French, Galician, Portuguese, English. Throughout, she calls on the reader to witness her failure—which, it seems, is the point. She writes, “Where the lyric fails me, the poem.” And asks: “Can you follow me in the markings we call / words through such liquidity?”

In O Cadoiro, Erín Moure tells reader to suspend their disbelief, for, as she writes, “though poems recuperate, they do not solve.”

—Ben Hart

This new collection of poems from George Murray contains something truly new; he has written a series of sonnets using an entirely novel kind of rhyme. It sounds unlikely, but the results more than justify the floating of convention. The rhymes are sometimes based on sound (as in homophones), but more often centered around meaning—synonyms, antonyms, association, etc. To illustrate from a randomly chosen sonnet, “Lullaby”:


While some writers might be tempted to let the innovation carry the collection, hoping for an audience enamoured of formal poetry, Murray takes the time to craft each poem into something thought-provoking and beautiful, so that a reader unfamiliar with sonnets might still be enthralled. In terms of subject matter, Murray covers a lot of ground—from reflections on parenthood to the implications of quantum physics, from the sex lives of the Devil and the Greek gods to the annoyance of home renovations. The Rush to Here is worth rushing out for.

—Matthew J. Tr Trafford

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Indigenous Rights and the Mayan Victory in Belize

Implications for Indigenous Title Rights in Canada

by Kim Petersen

On 18 October 2007, the Supreme Court of Belize ruled in Cal v. Attorney General that the national government must recognize the indigenous Mayans’ customary tenure to land and refrain from any act that might prejudice their use or enjoyment of this land. The landmark Supreme Court ruling which recognizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to their land was a great victory for Mayan communities in Belize.

The decision is the first judgment rendered with reference to United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (DRIP), adopted on 13 September 2007 by the UN General Assembly. As such, the Belizean Supreme Court judgement could have legal repercussions abroad.

In 2001, the Belize government began giving rights to logging, oil, and hydro-electric concerns on traditional Mayan lands, denying Mayan farmers access to their ancestral land.

The Chief Justice of Belize, Abdulai Conteh, stated that British colonial and subsequent acquisition of land in Belize did not abrogate the Mayan people’s primordial rights to their land.

In his judgement, Conteh upheld that “the Maya people live, farm, hunt and fish; collect medicinal plants, construction materials and other forest resources; and engage in ceremonies and other activities on land within and around their communities; and that these practices have evolved over centuries from patterns of land use and occupancy of the Maya people.”

Conteh found the Maya had a “complex traditional set of land tenure regulations.” Furthermore, “all attempts to divide up the customary village land into arbitrary-sized parcels are doomed to fail to establish a stable land-tenure regime” because the Mayan lifestyle “requires access to a variety of land types in order to grow and gather all the crops and resources they need to survive in any given year.”

Conteh held that Mayan rights to occupy their lands, farm, hunt and fish pre-date European colonization and remain in force today. Conteh noted, “[A] mere change in sovereignty does not extinguish native title to land. ... Extinguishment or rights to or interests in land is not to be lightly inferred.”

Referring to Delgamuukw v British Columbia, Conteh said, “Indigenous title is now correctly regarded as sui generis.” In other words, the very fact of Original Peoples having inhabited a land over time confers land title rights to the Original Peoples.

In his decision, Conteh cited the Belizean Constitution and several international legal precedents that affirmed the existence of Indigenous Peoples’ collective rights to their land, resources, and environment.

While agreeing the DRIP is non-binding, Conteh argued that principles of general international law contained in the declaration should be respected. Moreover, he noted, the DRIP was adopted by an “overwhelming number” of states thus reflecting “the growing consensus and the general principles of international law on indigenous peoples and their lands and resources.”

Conteh focused on Article 26-1 of DRIP, which states: “Indigenous peoples have the right to the lands, territories and resources which they have traditionally owned, occupied or otherwise used or acquired.”

Based on this and other legal law and precedents, he ordered the government of Belize to “determine, demarcate and provide official documentation of Santa Cruz’s and Conejo’s [two Mayan villages] title and rights in accordance with Maya customary law and practices.” He also ordered the government to desist from any logging, mining or other resource exploitation projects on Mayan land.

Although the Canadian government—along with Aotearoa (New Zealand), Australia, and the United States—rejected the DRIP, law students and faculty from the University of Toronto had a hand in Cal v. Attorney General. The UT group worked on behalf of the Mayan farmers researching, gathering evidence, and considering external comparative law. Toronto lawyer Paul Schabas also contributed his expertise pro bono to the Mayan case in 2006.

UT Faculty of Law Dean Mayo Moran gushed, “The faculty of law is proud of the extraordinary commitment that faculty, students, and our law firm partner, Blakes, have made to this case ... The Supreme Court of Belize will now have the opportunity to set an important precedent in the area of indigenous rights of the Maya of Belize and U of T’s Human Rights Clinic will play an important role in the court’s deliberations.”

Also involved were the faculty and law students at the University of Arizona. The UA law professors held that landmark case would probably aid the cause of indigenous peoples elsewhere.

UA College of Law Dean Toni Massaro, like her UT counterpart was proud of UA’s connection to Cal v. Attorney General. Massaro said:

“Ideas that take root in one place can—and often do—migrate. This suit was based on a concept of property rights that has possible theoretical and practical implications for people across the globe, and here in the United States, who analyze property across time, across cultures, across legal systems. I expect many to take notice of the Belize case in the years ahead.”

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Fear, Impunity and State Power
Colombia’s paramilitary regime and social movements

by David Parker

In August of 2007, Paola, a mother, university student and teacher, received a written death threat. She is a member of the Committee for Solidarity for Political Prisoners, a group that struggles for the rights of political prisoners in Colombia. It is a country where state repression has broken the social fabric, where being a human rights defender can have dangerous consequences; since 2002, there have been 955 assassinations committed by the Armed Forces, the highest level of politically motivated homicide in the Western hemisphere.

In a country where repression of social organizations involves selective and collective assassinations, disappearances, detentions and massacres, fear of death is part of daily life. On the bus on the way to the Industrial University of Santander in Bucaramanga, Paola handed me a note sent by the paramilitary organization known as “Aguilas Negras” to 11 student organizers, accusing them of being linked to networks of the FARC and ELN, Colombia’s two largest guerrilla groups. The death threat assured their recipients that their actions were being monitored and their days numbered. “You and the organizations you represent are a problem for Colombia... The plan to annihilate you all will begin with the very next student strike.”

The death threat is a common tactic from this nationwide right-wing paramilitary group. Weeks ago, the local office of SINALTRAINAL, a national union of food workers, received a written death threat under the front door. Fear courses in the veins of the country; a legitimate fear, a well-sanctioned and reasonable fear for the safety of human rights defenders, unionists, peasant leaders, Afro-Colombians, indigenous leaders and community members.

Paramilitary and military forces have honed a method of instilling fear and producing forced displacement throughout the country. Jose Antonio knows this tactic well. An Afro-Colombian peasant, a subsistence farmer until his forced displacement and the theft of his lands in 1997, he and his family have lived it first-hand. As we walked through the African Palm plantations in Choco, Jose Antonio showed me the former location of his community. Ten years ago, under Operation Genesis, the whole region was attacked by air, water and land, a concerted military and paramilitary operation that massacred, tortured, assassinated and forcibly displaced over 4,000 traditional communities living ancestral lifestyles. He showed me the former location of his brother’s small farm, which is now rows of African Palm trees. Jose Antonio pointed to where there used to be a river and said, “Over there, my brother used to fish.”

“He was fishing one day with his four children, when the paramilitaries came to him. They tied his hands behind his back, cut open his chest and removed his innards with their hands. They told his children to leave and not to come back to this land.”

The statistics of systematic violence in Colombia show the endemic nature of the problem. The Union Patriotica, a political party seeking a humanitarian accord between the FARC and the government since the 1990s, have suffered the assassination of over 5,000 members. The highest rates of homicide of indigenous people have been among the Embera Katio, the Wayuu and the Kankuamo peoples, who have suffered 234 homicides since 1999. From 1986 to 2006, there have been 2,515 union leaders assassinated. The National Federation of Municipal Councils (FENACOM) reports 251 council members assassinated since 1985. According to the Colombian Commission of Jurists, between 1996 and June 2006, 31,656 people were either killed or disappeared. Of these massacres, 83.07% are attributed to State forces.

The Consultation of Human Rights and Forced Displacement (CODHES) has stated that between 1985 and 2005, there were 3,720,428 citizens registered as forcibly displaced. According to the Ideas for Peace Foundation, members of the AUC—a former paramilitary organization—have invested in three million hectares of land, while drug traffickers have bought one million hectares. Seventy per cent of landowners are small-scale farmers who possess only five per cent of total land area. The reality of forced displacement by State forces and the subsequent purchasing of large quantities of land by paramilitary members are facts that demonstrate the illegal appropriation of land through violent means. Meanwhile, most
Gender, Race, and Religious Freedom

The Bouchard-Taylor Commission’s Hijacking of ‘Gender Equality’

by Anna Carastathis

Last November, the West Coast LEAF (Legal Education and Action Fund) issued a report based on its Women’s Equality and Religious Freedom Project (WERF). Some of the overarchign questions that the Project explored were “What is the nature of religious discrimination experienced by women of faith? What are the ways in which women balance and navigate the experiences of discrimination and interlocking systems of oppression in their daily lives?” The report also addresses specific areas such as same-sex marriage; polygamy; use of religious arbitration in family law; and immigration law. The full report can be found here.

The Taylor-Bouchard Commission on “reasonable accommodation” in Québec has prompted a great deal of commentary on the relationship between gender equality and freedom of religion. For instance, the Conseil du statut de la femme du Québec (CSF) has recommended that the Québec Charter of Rights and Freedoms be amended so that gender equality is given relative priority over the right to religious expression.

In light of these developments, the Dominion interviewed Harsha Walia, who authored the report based on Advisory Committee discussions, to get an anti-racist and feminist perspective.

The Dominion: Why is religious freedom a feminist issue?

Harsha Walia: This is an important issue because the “religious freedom debate” actually has less to do with religion or secularism than it does with race. Particularly in the post 911 climate, religion is a highly politicized, racialized, and publicly constructed identity. For example, invoking a Muslim identity is not about defining the beliefs of a person of Muslim faith; rather, it is a euphemism for Arabs, Middle Easterners, and South Asians (who may not actually be Muslim). In the context of the “War on Terror” this racialized imagery is very important, as there is a need to have an identifiable ‘enemy’ who is supposedly threatening Western values. The use of such language and imagery is rooted in a colonial legacy; therefore fighting patriarchy is intrinsically linked to fighting colonization and racism.

This is also an issue for feminists because feminism is currently being, as it historically has been, co-opted by imperial and colonizing forces. Historian Leila Ahmed has written, “Whether in the hands of patriarchal men or feminists, the ideas of western feminism essentially functioned to morally justify the attack on native societies and to support the notion of the comprehensive superiority of Europe.” An increasing number of feminists have expressed concerns regarding various state interventions on behalf of the “disempowered foreign woman”. For example, feminists have questioned the use of “protecting women” as a rationale for the occupation of Afghanistan. Similarly, the discourse surrounding human trafficking taps into notions of victimized Third World women and justifies restrictive border controls.

What do you think about the discourse of “reasonable accommodation” that has come to dominate public discussions in Québec?

It is astounding how many people who identify themselves as pro-feminist are expressing the need to ‘save women from the hijab’ and how there needs to be ‘limits to multiculturalism.’

First, it is hypocritical to talk about Canada’s “over-tolerance” of multiculturalism when the very nature of the debate positions racialized immigrant communities as not ‘belonging’ to Canadian society; as Outsiders” who need to be accommodated. It reveals the shallow self-congratulatory nature of Canadian multiculturalism under which rests a fundamentally white national consciousness. Second, such a debate aims to portray a sense of victimization where Canadian culture is being violated by “Outsiders.” This process of demonization, ‘othering’ and racism that targets particular communities for greater scrutiny has very real consequences in the present day context, being used to sell illegal wars and occupations across the globe, and restricting the rights and civil liberties of migrants within these borders.

It is also problematic to talk about secularism in a seemingly neutral way as it ignores the foundations of Christianity within the Canadian state and the violent role that Christianity has played in colonizing and assimilating indigenous peoples for example. It is also ironic that many of those rejecting the “authority” of religion so readily accept the authoritative ideologies of capitalism, consumerism, and liberal secularism, which are far more normalized in Western societies.

The most damaging consequence of this debate is that it removes the capacity for women’s agency by reinforcing the idea that being a ‘Muslim feminist’ for example is impossible; forcing women to accept narrower definitions of self, despite occupying multiple locations across citizenship, religion, class, sexuality, and race. Furthermore, discussions of gender inequality ‘within’ certain religions or cultures renders invisible the universal systems of patriarchy that all women contend with, while homogenizing and fossilizing religions in definitive ways.

In the report, I found your critique of the distinction between polygamy and polyamory compelling.

Can you elaborate?

One of the major problems with the distinction between polygamy and polyamory is that it relies on and perpetuates racist assumptions. While polyamory is used to define a relationship based on mutual negotiation between “independent people,” polygamy refers to a “cultural practice.” Such a dichotomy reinforces assumptions that women in racialized cultures are being more exploited and less independent than “autonomous women” from dominant white cultures.

This is not to suggest that polygamy cannot be critiqued; it is to highlight this double standard and how such differentiations are based on the premise that racialized cultures are inherently more hostile to women. The reality is that the practice of both polygamy and heterosexual polyamory exist within a global context of systemic discrimination against women and girls. The current-day reality is that 99% of polygamous marriages are characterized by men having multiple wives. But it is dangerous to suggest that the roots of polygamy lie in ‘religious culture’ because cultures and religions do not offer homogenous narratives. Various conservative ideologies are on the rise across the globe because that is the socio-political context within which we are operating. Religion can
The Bouchard-Taylor Commission on “reasonable accommodations”, mandated to consult Quebeckers on the practice of accommodating cultural differences, made its way to Montreal after a highly sensationalized tour of rural Quebec. The tour, marred by media attention that mixed issues of multiculturalism, expressions of religious faith, the rights of women, and the alleged dangers to the French language and Quebeccois identity, became a forum where the open expression of racism was normalized. As the commission arrived in Montreal, community groups were ready to introduce the media to a new discourse and organized to oppose the commission they deemed racist.

**Top:** At the door of the commission, protesters unfurled a banner that read “we will not accommodate this racist commission”. Refusing to submit to a commission that is forcing so-called minorities to justify their very existence while ignoring the intolerance and injustice lived by migrants in Quebec, they sought to make their voices heard. **Middle from left to right:** Participants in a demonstration organized by No One Is Illegal make their way to the second floor of the Palais des Congrès; Police charge demonstrators as they leave the building, allegedly hitting participants with their batons. **Above:** A press conference representing over 20 Montreal groups, united in opposition to racism, sexism, and xenophobia.
Canada’s Mining Continuum
Resources, Community Resistance and “Development” in Oaxaca

by Dawn Paley

CAPULÁLPAM DE MENDEZ, OAXACA—It is an open secret that throughout the Americas and the world, people are struggling against the intrusion of Canadian mining companies and their short term “get the gold and get out” strategies. The backlash against Canadian mining companies has, in some cases (particularly in Guatemala and Peru), strengthened broader social and political movements re-vindicating local control over land. In Oaxaca, Mexico, the struggle against a Vancouver based mining company is unifying an isolated Zapotec community, and bringing their struggles to state and nationwide attention.

"Welcome to Ixlán: Our land is communal land, not to be bought or sold," pronounces a rusting billboard just outside the regional centre of Ixlán, 60km north of the Southern Mexican state of Oaxaca’s capital city, Oaxaca de Juarez.

A couple of bumpy, graveled kilometers from Ixlán lies Capulálpam, a remote mountain village flanked by locally owned riverside ecotourism getaways. The town center is but a square block, as the majority of community members are rural indigenous Zapotec farmers, who farm to support their families.

"The whole territory of Capulálpam is communally owned," explains Francisco García López, a member of Capulálpam’s Commission of Communal Goods, standing on a rock above a river valley. He then points down to a series of white buildings, with mining carts on tracks leading to openings into the earth.

"For 230 years, gold and silver mining companies have been exploiting tunnels in the mountains," he explains.

Thousands of people from Capulálpam worked in the mine, until the union was broken in 1993. Only a few hundred people, mostly from the nearby town of Natividad, stayed on. In the last few years, there has been little activity at the mine.

Today, residents of Calpulálpam as well as former miners from the town have agreed that reopening the mine will not benefit the community. "The quantity and quality of our water supplies have been negatively affected by mining activity, that’s the main reason we’re demanding the cancellation of all mining concessions in our communal land," says López.

Skycrocketing gold prices, favorable mining laws and a recent flood of speculation linked financing for junior mining companies have opened the way for Vancouver-based Continuum Resources to buy up the majority of the mining concessions in the state of Oaxaca. The reactivation of the historic "Natividad" site, reportedly Oaxaca’s richest gold and silver mine, has been spearheaded by Continuum, majority owners in a joint venture which started up in 2004 with a Mexican firm. At the Natividad project alone, Continuum holds more than 54,000 hectares of concessions.

Underneath the entrance to the mine, an area where waste rock, chemicals and tailings have been thrown directly into the river below for centuries looks like a sagging black stain on the hillside. But it gets worse. Out of service electrical transformers, once used to power the mining operation, are now generating toxic Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), which community members fear could be entering the water system.

According to López, over the last few years, 13 streams have disappeared completely because of Continuum’s exploration activities. The National Water Commission (Conagua) has confirmed that during the course of their activities, Continuum Resources captured underground water, which resulted in the disappearance of springs. The company maintains that "the mine and the mining activity are not responsible for the disappearance of the springs."

"People in Capulálpam know that mining isn’t sustainable," says Aldo Gonzales Rojas, a member of the Union of Organizations of the Sierra Juarez (UNOSJO), an organization devoted to popular education and farmer-to-farmer outreach. In addition to dried up springs and contaminated water, "people can’t use sand from the rivers anymore because it’s contaminated, nor can we capture the frogs that are part of our diet without leaving our traditional territory," says Rojas.

Roadblock for Negotiation

"All of our complaints to the government were falling on deaf ears," says López, referring to the dozens of attempts by the municipal council and community organizations to...
Placing Curfews on Themselves
Palestinian forces repress their own protesters

by Christine Bro

RAMALLAH—It is a sad day when one observes a Palestinian member of the security force tearing a sign that reads “end the occupation.” This was what took place during the anti-Bush protest in Ramallah. Observing the current situation in Palestine, I admire the will and perseverance of the Palestinian people, who are met with inconveniences and disturbances on a daily basis.

George Bush’s visit to the occupied Palestinian territories on January 10, 2007 illustrated the grim reality on the ground created by Abu Mazen’s takeover of the West Bank. Walking in the streets, many Palestinians remarked that it felt they were under curfew as they were during the days of the intifada.

Most shops and roads were closed and Palestinian residents were cautious to leave their homes. Some could not, even if they wished to. These road closures and curfews were not enforced by the Israeli military, but rather by our very own Palestinian government in cooperation with the United States and Israel. In the main square of Ramallah, known as Al Manara Circle, one needed permission to take pictures. I, along with a young Palestinian student, learned this after our passports and cameras were confiscated.

Neither Bush nor Israel have nothing to worry about. Abu Mazen and his gang are doing a phenomenal job in maintaining order and crushing any form of resistance or civil disobedience in the West Bank. Even before Bush’s arrival, the Palestinian Authority (PA) took precautionary steps to ensure that Bush’s visit would be as smooth as possible. Two days before Bush’s arrival, two helicopters landed in the Muqata’a, Yasser Arafat’s former compound and his current burial ground. The people who guarded the Muqata’a during Bush’s visit came from outside a day or two before, while Palestinian police guarded the outside. Roads were dug and repaved, and every sewer in Ramallah was checked for security purposes.

Residents living around the Muqata’a particularity felt the high security alert and curfews as they were told that for their own security not to open the windows of their homes or climb their rooftops. In case of an emergency, residents were given a number to call in which a helicopter would come and take them from their homes. A curfew was imposed in these closed areas from 3am until 4pm and residents were not allowed to move by car or foot. Some residents in this area were even placed in hotels. When the high security alert was at its peak, the stress and anxiety was palpable in the streets of Ramallah.

Bush met Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) in the Muqata’a, and the Palestinian political elite welcomed him as a man of peace and a president that would help create a viable Palestinian state by January 2009. At the same time, at least 1,000 protesters took to the streets for an anti-Bush demonstration, despite a ban on public protests. Protesters were gathered at Ramallah’s Orthodox Club, not too far from the presidential compound, and attempted to move towards the Clock Square but were violently pushed back by Palestinian security forces.

In addition 25 protesters were seized by Palestinian security forces, of whom ten were arrested and two injured and taken to the government hospital in Ramallah. Bashir Kahiyyi, a senior leader of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PLFP) who served 16 years in an Israeli prison, was treated in the hospital for a fractured shoulder. Another demonstrator suffered from a broken nose while others were being treated in the hospital for tear gas suffocation.

I am a Canadian-Palestinian that has attended countless demonstrations in Montreal, and it was the first time I had attend a protest in Palestine. It was disheartening to see the way the Fatah-allied PA is dealing with its Palestinian citizens protesting Bush’s policies in the region. Demonstrators were met by pepper spray and clubs and security forces began tearing posters and banners. Arguments broke out between the security forces and the citizens. The latter decried the shame of Palestinians denying other Palestinians from their right to protest, and taking over the role of the occupation forces.

The demonstrators remained and continued to chant in Arabic slogans such as “CIA out,” and “Bush not welcome.” For Mahmoud Abbas demonstrators chanted that “Palestine is one nation” and even turned against security forces saying “enough from the police.” Later, Palestinian women sat down in defiance of police demands to move and disperse and instead began to sing national songs such as the Palestinian national anthem among others.

Seeing Palestinian people stand against Bush renewed my faith and re-instilled hope for continued resistance against imperial policies in Palestine and a “peace” forced on the Palestinians that in no way would bring justice to the people. Unfortunately for Palestinians citizens in the West Bank, the Palestinian quasi-state that Abu Mazen is attempting to create already seems to mirror other corrupt Arab regimes in the region that ban its people from protesting. To deny one of the few means of fighting for political and social justice is to jeopardize the very essence of the Palestinian cause and its resistance.
Endorsing Death Squad Economics
Canada's Lightning Speed Trade Negotiations with Colombia

by Jennifer Moore

"Why is it ridiculous to ask that human rights be respected in order to do free trade with Colombia?" asked award-winning Colombian journalist Hollman Morris during an interview on national public radio in Canada a couple of weeks ago.

Morris was reflecting on Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s comments made in Bogotá this past July where he announced the launch of three-way free trade negotiations with Colombia and Peru.

During a press conference with President Alvaro Uribe, Harper said that Canada is prepared to negotiate with Colombia despite facing the worst humanitarian disaster in the hemisphere according to the UN. Alluding to US Democrats currently blocking approval of the US-Colombia free trade agreement, he stated, “We are not going to say, ‘Fix all your social, political and human-rights problems and only then will we engage in trade relations with you.’” His negotiating team has proved its determination to sign a deal and may have wrapped up fast track talks in Lima this week. The negotiations between Colombia and the US took 21 months.

“Prime Minister Harper’s statement is quite offensive,” said Morris, pointing out that “Colombia is the country in which trade unionists are the most endangered in the world [and] in the last couple of years there has been a phenomenon of the dismantlement of trade unions. I’m wondering, is it ridiculous to protect them?”

In 2006, there were 72 reported killings of trade unionists. Over the course of the Uribe administration, four hundred union officers and rank-and-file members have been murdered and of these crimes there have been only seven convictions, says a statement released this month by the Canadian Labour Congress (CLC).

Morris added that Uribe also continues attacks on the press. He says that he has recently “delegitimized journalists [such that] a number have left the country within the last month.” Morris himself has previously been accused by Uribe of having ties to left-wing guerrillas, comments later revoked, but which still put Morris’ life in jeopardy.

Harper’s comments are a strong endorsement for Uribe at a time when his administration faces a grave crisis of legitimacy. The “para-politics scandal” has shaken even his key alliance with the US as a substantial block of US Congress holds up approval of the US-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Forty congress people, including senators, governors and mayors representing the President’s political coalition, are under investigation for alleged relationships with paramilitary chiefs and collusion in elections fraud. Seventeen are already in jail including the former head of secret services under Uribe. As well, marked failures in Uribe’s paramilitary demobilization program have been demonstrated as paramilitaries are observed to be reorganizing, also sustaining their political influence following recent local elections.

Considering what might be motivating the Canadian Government’s lack of concern for the deep rooted corruption, human rights abuses and impunity in Colombia, Morris proposed, “I think what Canada is trying to do is to put pressure on the democrats in the US to support the FTA with Colombia, which fortunately won’t be signed during the Bush administration and we are very happy for this.” In fact, the Harper Index reported in late November that President Bush has indeed been taking advantage of Harper’s policy toward Colombia. Speaking with the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce in October, the Harper Index quotes Bush as having stated, “As Prime Minister Stephen Harper of Canada said, if the United States turns its back on its friends in Colombia, this will set back our cause far more than any Latin American dictator could hope to achieve. By its bold actions, Colombia has proved itself worthy of America’s support—and I urge Congress to pass this vital agreement as soon as possible.”

As to why Harper can get away with such offensive statements despite Canada’s image of itself as a human rights champion, Manuel Rozental says a key reason is that the Canadian public hasn’t really responded. Rozental recently completed a CLC-sponsored, cross-country speaking tour about the trade negotiations, urging Canadians to demand that the deal be stopped until a full debate take place in the Canadian Parliament. In July he commented that “Harper wouldn’t even dare to behave the way that he’s behaving and go to [visit] this regime if there was any political reaction from the majority of Canadian people, but there isn’t.”

Harper’s trip to Bogotá sparked minimal critique within the Canadian press and
Echoes of Revolution (Part I)
Burkina Faso’s Thomas Sankara

by Stefan Christoff

Thomas Sankara, the former president of Burkina Faso, a political leader renowned across Africa as a revolutionary, died 20 years ago in an assassination that sent political shock waves across the continent, marking a critical moment for progressive social movements in Africa.

Burkina Faso, a small western African nation formally known as Upper Volta, was renamed Burkina Faso, meaning “the land of upright people,” after the 1983 revolution that brought Thomas Sankara’s government to power.

As president, Sankara actively appealed for pan-African self-determination, for the full cancellation of foreign national debts across the continent and for liberation from apartheid in South Africa.

“The question of debt is the question of Africa’s economic situation, as much as peace; this question is an important condition of our survival,” Sankara said as president.

“The debt cannot be repaid. If we do not pay, our creditors will not die. We can be sure of that. On the other hand, if we pay, it is we who will die. Of that we can be equally sure.”

In 2007, Thomas Sankara remains a powerful symbol within grassroots social movements in Africa, as the 1983 revolution of Burkina Faso catapulted an alternative vision of African development onto the world stage.

Revolution in Burkina Faso led to a national development model rooted in “self-reliance” and social solidarity.

Burkina Faso presented a radically different concept of development to the charity model common today, strongly promoted by international institutions like the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or fashionably displayed through events such as Live Aid or campaigns such as “Make Poverty History.”

Independently driven development policies and an anti-colonial political platform brought international attention to Burkina Faso, inspiring grassroots social movements across Africa, and won Thomas Sankara powerful political enemies in France, Europe and the US.

Ten years after the death of Thomas Sankara, the Montreal-based Group for Research and Initiatives for the Liberation of Africa (GRILA) launched an international legal campaign into the circumstances surrounding Sankara’s death. In the courts of Burkina Faso, GRILA put forward a controversial legal challenge to the government of President Blaise Compaoré, a close ally of France who organized a coup d’état against Sankara and who has held power since. Compaoré is widely understood as having a direct role in Sankara’s 1987 assassination.

After complete dismissal within the courts of Burkina Faso, GRILA presented Sankara’s case to the UN Human Rights Committee. In 2006, the UN Committee ruled in favour of the International Justice for Sankara Campaign on behalf of Thomas Sankara’s widow, Mariam, and his children, Auguste and Philippe.

Aziz Fall is a member of the Group for Research and Initiatives for the Liberation of Africa (GRILA) and the international co-ordinator for the International Justice for Sankara Campaign. In this interview, Aziz Fall reflects on the case of Thomas Sankara 20 years after the assassination and outlines contemporary efforts to seek justice for the 1987 assassination.

Aziz Fall: First it’s important to say that Sankara’s case remains relevant and critical to the understanding the current debate on ‘African development.’

This year is the 20th anniversary of Sankara’s death and for 20 years the circumstances surrounding Sankara’s death remain unknown. In this context, GRILA recently won a major victory at the United Nations, in establishing a legal precedent against impunity in Africa. Until today, the official death certificate in Burkina Faso claims that Thomas Sankara died of natural causes and this is certainly not true.

It is the first time within the UN system regarding African affairs that in the investigation of a case in the death of a former head-of-state, a UN body has ruled on the side of justice, outlining clearly [in its recent decision] that people have a right to know the circumstance surrounding Sankara’s death and that the family has the right to be compensated.

In the context of the recent UN decision, why is Sankara’s death significant in terms of struggles for social justice in Africa?

Sankara incarnated the last African revolution, the last radical African experience of the 20th century; today, we can collectively reference no other similar political experiences in Africa. In the Burkina Faso revolution, there was the establishment of self-reliant development. Concretely, this meant there was a serious attempt on a national level to ensure that the peasantry would have the correct amount of food crop to supply the national population with nutrition, prior to considering the possibility of exporting...
North America’s Guilt Industry
Sudanese Slavery and the Christian Right

by Jay Heisler

“It’s all about money. They’re exploiting people’s guilt and they’re making a fortune.”

Dan Eiffe, manager of the Sudan Mirror, has been involved in Southern Sudan for decades. Through his work with the Mirror, an English-language paper based in Nairobi, as well as numerous other NGOs and aid organizations, Eiffe has become a well-known voice in Sudan and the international community. A former Irish Catholic priest, Eiffe is especially critical of efforts by fundamentalist Christians from Europe and the United States to stop the slave trade in Sudan.

Slavery, though a scourge in the area since long before Sudan became a nation-state, resurfaced as a serious issue in the 1980s. It became clear that soldiers and militias backed by Sudan’s Northern Khartoum government were capturing women and children from Dinka villages and selling them into domestic servitude. In addition to being a source of profit, this practice served as a weapon of terror against civilian populations, in the same vein as mass rape and scorched-earth campaigns. To this day, Khartoum will only admit to “abductions.”

When the international community learned about the resurgence of the slave trade in Sudan, there was uproar in Western countries. For the first time, Republican Christians like Kenneth Star and African-American activists like Louis Farrakhan had found a cause they could agree upon. However, in their ostensible efforts to free the exploited, many religious organizations ended up practising a different sort of exploitation.

Eiffe explains that there are many legitimate faith-based charities, in particular the Samaritan’s Purse and Voice of the Martyrs, groups which he believes have been “genuinely committed” and should not to be tainted by the less scrupulous organizations. He will not mention the offending organizations by name, saying only that the majority are American fundamentalist churches.

Many of these churches will fly into Nairobi on chartered planes and stay in five-star hotels, before spending a brief amount of time in Sudan filming a documentary that they will use for fundraising at home. Very little of the money they raise ends up back in Sudan. “They have a flying visit. They pay off some corrupt officials within the movement and they have everything organized for them,” Eiffe explains. “They don’t have any programs on the ground. They come here for a week or two and make a movie, then you don’t see them again for 10 years. And people will fill their buckets. Their movie is very dramatic when you show it in affluent communities.”

Most of the donors are elderly fundamentalist Christians. The fact that Khartoum is Muslim and many (but by no means all) of the slaves are Christians is especially highlighted when approaching this demographic.

“It’s actually becoming a business. You can fly to the United States on a big salary and you become a big name. You’re saving slaves in Southern Sudan’s war.”

Eiffe explains that the main way for potential donors to differentiate between good and bad Christian charities is to check if they have any staff, structures, or programs in Southern Sudan itself. Another important step is to check whether they have any other programs internationally, instead of just “picking something sexy somewhere” to ensure donations.

In addition to the financial exploitation involved, many critics suggest that the strategy taken by slave redemption programs actually encourages the slave trade. Many of the Christian charities will pay slaveholders for slaves, quite literally buying them back. This has led to reports of the slave trade increasing and even the possibility of slave prices rising as a result. There are also reports that people will claim to be slaves in order to make money once they are “redeemed.”

There are political dangers as well. Accusations that Southern Sudanese rebels are backed by the United States are given more credence when American Christian groups keep such a high profile in the area. Khartoum is then able to claim to be a victim to Western crusaders and raise support among the Muslim world. This is, of course, unfounded. The Bush administration has made Khartoum an ally in the war on terror. And, just like the world superpowers who play a blood-soaked chess game in Sudan, the Christian Right has been fickle throughout the history of this conflict. Former US President Ronald Reagan gave financial and diplomatic support to Khartoum during the early years of Sudan’s devastating civil war in the 1980s and once visited then-President Jafaar Nimairi with a group of Christian televangelists. The slave trade was active at this time.

There is a silver lining to this cloud, however. As Eiffe points out, the South was fighting a forgotten war, “a forgotten tragedy,” and Christian charities raised awareness in the apathetic West. Although he cautions that an emphasis on the slavery issue ignores the political roots of the conflict and oversimplifies the world’s view of it, he is glad that even a small amount of attention was given to Southern Sudan.

He remembers an NBC journalist who was sidetracked by a wildlife park when coming to investigate the slavery issue. He quotes the journalist as saying: “Americans care more about dead elephants than dead Africans.”
Freedom of Expression in Afghanistan
Restrictive laws, self-censorship keep criticism to a minimum

by Waheed Warasta

After the collapse of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, as President Hamid Karzai came to power, one of the promising things he did was to declare freedom of the media.

Soon a Media Law was ratified ensuring more freedom of the media under which individuals could run independent papers, publications, radios and TVs. But still some of the articles in the Media Law were controversial and could still bring all other articles of the media law under question. Under such articles, no one has the right to write or say anything that is considered against “national interests.” But there is no clear definition of what national interests are that journalists must not touch. In the media law it is also stated that no one can write or say anything that affronts Islam. Such articles can easily be misused by the enemies of free media.

Under the media law a commission was set up to deal with journalistic violations of the media law, however, because the minister of information and culture himself chaired the commission, the decisions of the commission in most cases were biased in favour of those in power. The commission soon came under severe criticism after which some other representatives from civil society organizations were included among its membership. This again did not work due to the fact that the minister still headed up this commission and the independent members were a minority.

The government itself has proved not to be in favour of freedom of expression. Proof of this can be found in the Press Guidelines paper that was distributed to the free media runners last year in which it was stated that no media could run information about suicide attacks of the Taliban on the news headline, nor could they criticize the US-lead coalition, and no one could air and publish news that would decrease people’s morale and spirit.

This letter was distributed by the Afghan intelligence to the media and came under severe criticism after President Karzai, in his speech in Madrid conference, highlighted freedom of the media in Afghanistan as one of the greatest achievement of his administration. Interestingly, the spokesman of the president later claimed that he did not know that the intelligence had issued such a letter. This could mean that there are still fragments of power in Afghanistan and powerful individuals in the government that can unilaterally take individual action against journalists and the free media.

Self-censorship is another big enemy of freedom of expression in Afghanistan, one that prevents writers and journalists from expressing certain things. As an example, recently Afghanistan’s last king Zahir Shah passed away. All private TV channels felt forced to make exclusive programmes about him and in the ensuing round table discussions only people who would speak in favour of the king were invited. No one could utter a word about his negative points. The fear among the media was that Zahir Shah has been declared the Father of the Nation in Afghanistan’s constitution, and those who dared speak against him could be arrested on the charge of insulting him.

I remember a few years ago, when Dr. Sima Samar, the head of Afghanistan’s Independent Human Rights Commission, had spoken of secularism in her interview with a Canadian newspaper. Soon after her interview was made public in Afghanistan, papers belonging to the Mujahiddin denounced her heavily and attacked her in several articles, describing her as the “Salman Rushdie of Afghanistan” meaning the enemy and insulter of Islam in Afghanistan. She could do nothing but keep quiet and wait for the media noise to cool down. Finally, all she could say to the media was that her words have been misunderstood and that she hadn’t meant to insult Islam. Even after this noise died down, she had to keep bodyguards in her presence at all times, and was forced to severely restrict her movements.

As Canada is one of the main countries involved in Afghanistan’s reconstruction, I believe Canadians can play an important role by urging their government officials, particularly those who visit Afghanistan, to keep reminding the Afghan president of his obligations to protect freedom of the media in the country. Such a pressure from the international community, including Canada, can prevent the Afghan government from taking the wrong decisions to repress free media and strangle the throat of freedom of expression.

Waheed Warasta is the Executive Director of the Afghanistan PEN Centre in Kabul. He also served as coordinator of the Open Media Fund for Afghanistan.
Canadian mining financier Frank Giustra was at the center of a political scandal in the United States involving Bill Clinton and a mining deal in Kazakhstan potentially worth tens of millions of dollars. According to the New York Times, Giustra gained access to Clinton’s inner circle after he donated $31 million dollars to the former US President’s foundation. Giustra subsequently accompanied Clinton on a trip to Kazakhstan, where he signed a deal that “stunned the mining industry, turning an unknown shell company into one of the world’s largest uranium producers,” according to The Times.

George Habash, Palestinian leader, and founder of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP), died January 26th, 2008 at the age of eighty-two after six decades of struggle. Habash dreamt of Arab unity and an end to the dispossession of Palestinians. Seen by supporters as “the conscience of the Palestinian revolution,” Habash effected his political treating the poor for free as a medical doctor, and through the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, the largest secular resistance group in Palestine. U.S., Canadian, and Israeli governments have branded Habash as a terrorist for bombings and hijackings during the 1970’s. Many Palestinians, however will remember Habash as a man who “embodied Palestinian and Arab aspirations.”

In Vancouver, 1500 demonstrators effectively paralysed the Vancouver International Airport and halted the planned deportation of 48-year old paralysed Punjabi refugee Laibar Singh on December 10—international Human Rights Day. The vast majority of the supporters were members of Vancouver’s Sikh community, who had been mobilizing and campaigning against Singh’s impending deportation to India for months, while he lived in sanctuary within a Sikh temple. On January 9, a second attempt by the Canadian Border Services Agency to deport Singh was thwarted after officials showed up at the Nanak Sikh Temple in Surrey at 4AM to find 300 of Singh’s supporters blocking the entrance to the temple. Singh’s supporters have argued that he should remain in Canada on Humanitarian and Compassionate grounds due to his medical needs.

Environmentalists have perhaps won a partial victory after the United States and Canada both backed down from their obstructionist positions at the UN Climate Change Summit in Bali. After the summit was extended an extra day, Canadian Environment Minister John Baird, who had been dogged by a delegation of Canadian youth activists throughout the week, reversed his original position against a binding target of 25 to 40 per cent reductions of carbon emissions from wealthy countries by the year 2020. The United States also agreed in the end to endorse the “Bali roadmap,” although only after the section requiring binding targets for all nations to collectively reduce carbon emissions was removed. Some environmentalists have argued that the summit’s key failing was the “single-minded focus on getting Washington on board,” to the detriment of actually achieving firm carbon-reduction targets.

In Haiti, grassroots leader Rene Civil was released after spending 20 months in prison. Civil was a member of the Lavalas party of former Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide and was also a leader of the Popular Power Youth (JPP), a grassroots organization of youth from poor communities. Civil was arrested in August 2006, shortly after organizing a demonstration calling for the release of political prisoners and the return to the country of Aristide. However, another grassroots activist, Wilson Mesilien, acting director of the September 30th foundation, a human rights organiza-
tion, was recently forced into hiding after receiving death threats. Mesilien’s predecessor, Lovinsky Pierre-Antoine, remains at large after he was kidnapped by unknown figures last August. The US and Canadian governments took part in the military overthrow of Aristide in 2004, and Canadian RCMP officials currently head the UN training program for the Haitian National Police, which is accused by Haitians and international observers of human rights abuses including mass murder, sex trafficking and rape.

In Pakistan, in the midst of political turmoil in the week following the assassination of Benazir Bhutto, the United States government announced it would approve the nearly five-hundred million dollar sale of eighteen Lockheed Martin fighter jets to the regime of Pervez Musharraf. Although no definitive investigation has been carried out of Bhutto’s murder (the Pakistani President has refused to allow a UN investigation of the killing), many of Bhutto’s supporters, as well as Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton, have expressed belief that elements of Pakistan’s military may have been behind the assassination, and have criticized the continued sale of arms to the regime.

A new report issued by the Canadian Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade has found that Canadian arms sales reached $700 million, the highest levels ever recorded, in 2003. This figure did not include sales made to the US which, if counted, would have brought the total sales of Canadian arms to over $2 billion. According to Ken Epps, an arms control researcher with Project Ploughshares, many of these sales were made to countries with dubious human rights records, such as Colombia, China, and Saudi Arabia. Epps also noted that the Pakistani military purchased $250 million worth of helicopters from Canada between 2004 and 2005. The Bush administration’s case for war with Iran was dealt a severe blow after sixteen different US intelligence agencies concluded that the country had ended its nuclear weapons program more than four years ago. Despite this, George W. Bush, claimed publicly that he still believed Iran to be a threat to the United States. The completion of the report by the National Intelligence Agency had reportedly been held up and postponed by Vice-President Dick Cheney for two months.

In Toronto, a new report by the provincial government has found that, despite crackdowns, 31,000 people currently receive a “special diet” supplement designed for welfare recipients with medical dietary needs. The supplement, valued at $250 extra dollars for food per month, is an obscure and often overlooked government program. The Ontario Coalition Against Poverty (OCAP) has publicly set up special diet clinics throughout the city and province in recent years, arguing that individuals on welfare live in conditions of state-sponsored poverty, which limits their dietary health. Over the last two years, this campaign effectively redirected over $30 million of provincial revenue into the hands of the province’s poorest residents.

Recent reports from human rights organizations in Chiapas, Mexico indicate that the Mexican government is ramping up its military presence in regions under heavy influence of the indigenous Zapatista Liberation Army. According to the Centre for Political Analysis and Social and Economic Research, a human rights NGO based in Chiapas, there has been a marked increase in the presence of military and paramilitary deployments within this Southern Mexican state which, coupled with an increase in expropriations of land occupied by indigenous Mayan sympathizers of the Zapatistas, has prompted IPS News to dub this escalation “the worst onslaught by state forces in the last 10 years.” Since the 1994 uprising by the Zapatistas, indigenous self-rule has been quietly built within the region, as the Zapatistas have established their own health, education and development programmes, while forming their own governing “caracoles,” or good-government councils.

In Bolivia, clashes continued between middle- to upper-class supporters of the Democratic and Social Power (PODEMOS) political party and the social movements and indigenous communities united under the Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) of current president Evo Morales. Partisans of the right-leaning PODEMOS, which include the governors of four eastern departments, have been staging blockades, strikes, and demonstrations for months against the proposed constitutional changes championed by Morales and the social forces united under the MAS, largely movements of the country’s majority poor and indigenous peoples. The constitution would grant the central government greater control over the country’s rich natural resources, but would also guarantee expanded autonomy for departmental governments and indigenous communities. The opposition disagrees with the limitations on land ownership established in the document, as well as the redirection of departmental gas revenues to a new National Pension Fund for all citizens of the country over the age of sixty. Late last month, the opposition has declared autonomy from the central government for the city of Santa Cruz, establishing a new police force, television station and special ID cards.

The Ontario government finally announced that the province will be returning the Ipperwash Provincial Park lands to the Chippewas of Kettle and Stony Point First Nations. This announcement follows the conclusion of the Ipperwash inquiry into the 1995 Ontario Provincial Police killing of Dudley George last May. The land was originally expropriated from the Stony Point band in 1942 to allow the federal government to build a military base.

First Nations survivors of the Canadian residential school system received their first cheques as part of a $2 billion compensation settlement for the collective experience of mass sexual and physical abuse suffered by indigenous children at Catholic-run schools between the 1950s and 1980s. Eighty thousands First Nations people are eligible for this compensation, which is paid in lump sums, and which amount to an average of $28,000. This amount, however, only accounts for the federal government’s portion of the settlement; The Catholic church is also responsible for paying 30% of the settlement. Although viewed by residential school survivors as an important milestone in the process of achieving justice, the size of the settlement pales when compared to a similar settlement given to Australian aboriginals of the “Stolen Generation,” whose treatment at the hands of their government throughout the twentieth century bears many striking similarities to that of the Canadian aboriginal experience.

In New Orleans, police attacked, tazered and pepper-sprayed public housing residents who had arrived at city hall to take part in a “public hearing” about the proposed demolition of 5000 public housing units in the city. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there remains a homeless population of 12,000 within New Orleans. City Hall and private developers have nonetheless intensified efforts to demolish public housing in order to make way for commercial property and high-priced condominiums. Police had initially erected

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only shopping hours, but Good For Her also hosts the largest number of sexuality workshops in Canada. Besides expected topics like “Muff Diving for Men: The Art of Cunnilingus,” you can also find “From Swinging to Polyamory: Guidelines for Open Relationships,” and “Sex for Survivors: Sensuality and Pleasure,” all on a sliding pay scale. Like the crews responsible for the films featured in The Emmas, the goals at Good For Her make it their business to arm the public in its quest for healthy sexuality.

A sampling of the winners:

**Hottest Group Sex Scene:** Under the Covers. 
Candida Royalle; Femme Productions, USA.

Royalle is the founder of Femme Productions, a member of the American Association of Sex Educators, Counselors and Therapists (AASECT), a founding board member of Feminists for Free Expression (FFE), and also works as a mentor for emerging female directors. Under the Covers is a comedy about women who work and inhabit the sex industry.

**Hottest Trans Sex Scene:** In Search of the Wild Kingdom
Shine Louise Houston; Blowfish Video, USA.

Houston is a lesbian porn producer, the founder of Pink and White Productions, and the only queer woman of color currently with a distribution deal. She made her first film in 2005 in response to the difficulty she had recommending hot women-on-women sex to lesbian customers that wasn’t made for or directed by men while she worked as a sex shop clerk. In Search of the Wild Kingdom is a humorous mockumentary about lesbian sex, complete with a dysfunctional film crew, spoofs on typical “lesbian” porn and “behind the scenes” footage.

**Hottest Bisexual Sex Scene:** 
The Bi Apple
Audacia Ray; Adam and Eve Pictures, USA.

Audacia Ray is a sex-work-rights advocate, the executive editor of $pread magazine, an art curator, a sex worker, and an academic. The movie’s official tag line is “New York girls like boys doing boys who like to do girls,” and includes a scene that illustrates Gallant’s mandate to expand the range of women’s sexual expression, in which a woman clearly derives voyeuristic pleasure from watching two men together in a shower. Both the depiction of male homoeroticism in a film not specifically meant for gay men and the portrayal of a woman being aroused by male homosexual activity while not physically participating are rare in mainstream pornography.

**Hottest Gonzo Sex Scene and Hottest Diverse Cast:** 
Chemistry 1
Tristan Taormino; Adam and Eve Pictures, USA.

Taormino has a degree in American Studies, co-edited A Girl’s Guide to Taking Over the World, and wrote The Ultimate Guide to Anal Sex for Women and Pucker Up: A Hands-on Guide to Ecstatic Sex. Chemistry 1 is another genre-bender, this time in the vein of reality TV. The scenario: seven porn stars have a house to themselves for 36 hours. No script, no stunts and no bad “porn acting.” There are even confessionalists.

For more information and for a full list of winners, you can visit Good For Her online at www.goodforher.com

be used to justify polygamy, but if we recognize that the current practice of polygamy is not about a particular religion or culture (which reinforces racism)–it is, rather, a manifestation of a universal system of patriarchy–then we can more readily reject those “freedom of religion” arguments that are used to prevent discussion about the effects on women in an anti-racist manner.

**How should feminists be addressing the issue of religious freedom as it intersects with the marginalization of racialized, immigrant, and indigenous women?**

We must contend with the reality that culturally-imperialist feminisms are being forced upon women across the world and the narrative of women’s rights serves as a crucial tool in the pro-war and anti-immigrant propaganda machine. Such a theft of feminist principles is advancing everything but genuine equality for women. Instead, we must choose a path that is feminist as well as anti-racist, anti-militarist, pro-immigration, queer- and trans-positive, and class-conscious. This includes questioning and challenging the legitimacy given to state-based responses such as prisons as a solution to violence, border controls as a solution to trafficking, child apprehension as a solution to women and child poverty, and militarization as a solution to third world women’s liberation.

It is important to avoid falling into the racist traps that infantilize racialized women, while at the same time maintaining a basic commitment to gender and sexual equality that cannot be breached by religious or cultural justifications. We must avoid a culturally imperialist feminism that seeks to impose Western notions of gender equality and ‘sameness’ onto other women. This does not imply that we become culturally relativist and begin to support any unjust practice. Cultural diversity or freedom of religion should not serve as a shield to scrutinize against gender-oppressive practices.

“Such a theft of feminist principles is advancing everything but genuine equality for women.”

Walking this line requires us to pay attention to specific contexts, to listen to those women whose rights we purport to stand for, and to understand that we occupy different relationships of power and privilege. All oppressed women equally deplore sexism and misogyny, but women’s liberation movements must be culturally sensitive and relevant so as to oppose patriarchal elements without attacking or destroying non-white cultures, religions, or identities. Women of colour and indigenous women have consistently pointed out that reducing their oppression to their ‘culture’ represents deeply colonial attitudes. The greater oppression that some women face is directly linked to policies of the state, histories of colonization, the nature of capitalism, and the powerful rise of global conservative ideologies. Most importantly, we must walk alongside those women who are on the front lines of their own struggles and who are agents of their own transformation. They do not need pity or charity, but solidarity and our respect for their leadership and agency.

All opinions expressed are of Harsha Walia alone and do not imply endorsement by West Coast LEAF or other participants in the Project.
“Fear and Impunity.” continued from page 10

country, an urbanized population and a burgeoning middle class. Liberal economic journals describe Colombia’s economy as a prosperous, growing market, rich in natural resources and ready for investment. But many Colombians understand the situation as an ongoing civil war. The State apparatus of control and repression—legitimated through impunity and maintained through the consolidation of executive military power in all branches of government and a broken social fabric with violence being a continual threat in all levels of society—has maintained a state of siege and atomized the Colombian countryside. Informants and military and paramilitary forces create local fiefdoms, regional strongholds of ultra-right-wing power. Urban centres are infiltrated by networks of informants and surveyed by police and military.

“No one knows how these lists are formed, what criteria are held, or what proof exists to conclude guerrilla participation. The majority of these listed people are later assassinated or disappeared by State agents or paramilitary groups.”

Paramilitarism: Infiltrating Civil Society and Rending the Social Fabric

Most socio-political studies agree that the origins of contemporary violence in Colombia began in the mid-1940s. Institutional and rural violence, stimulated by the Conservative Party, left 300,000 dead without investigation and left thousands without homes. The resulting armed uprising from rural sectors precipitated an internal conflict that to this day continues to spill blood. The State doctrine since the 1960s has been one of counterinsurgency and has authored systematic, generalized violations of human rights and crimes against humanity. A key element of the counterinsurgent strategy has been paramilitarism, which uses terrorist tactics and benefits from state support. Paramilitarism has worked to annihilate social resistance and democratic opposition of civil society, creating new agents of capitalist accumulation while generating forced displacement.

According to Arguello, paramilitarism has united the anti-insurgent struggle with drug trafficking and State support under one apparatus of “irregular right-wing war, constructing paramilitary corridors, owned territorialities, zones of consolidation, eruption of local para-states, interlinked into a national phenomenon of power.”

Armed right-wing paramilitary groups have had ample support from corporate sectors, large scale farmers, merchants, State security institutions, Armed Forces, police and regional government. They have even benefited from significant representation in authoritarian criminal control, which inhibits the possibility of citizen action without coercion, making municipal and departmental elections very problematic. Relying on a network of informants, paramilitary infiltration into communities and authorities at all levels of society has broken the social fabric, creating suspicion and mistrust among communities, neighbours and even family.

According to Leonardo Jaimes M, a lawyer with the Committee for Solidarity with Political Prisoners (FCSPP), it is common in penal processes to observe lists created by military and paramilitary groups and the Colombian Office of the United Nations’ High Commission for Human Rights has signalled the ongoing connections between paramilitary groups and the State.

“PNL members, paramilitary groups and the State.”

“Canadian and other foreign companies certainly figure prominently in the paradigm of State violence for economic development. According to The Globe and Mail, Canadian investments in Colombia are an estimated $1 billion from 17 corporations, making Canada the 10th largest investor in the world. The investments are concentrated in the sectors where repression of unionists is greatest: oil, gas and mining.”

According to Maria Jimenez of The Globe and Mail, Canadian investments in Colombia are an estimated $1 billion from 17 corporations, making Canada the 10th largest investor in the world. The investments are concentrated in the sectors where repression of unionists is greatest: oil, gas and mining.

While scandal erupts in Colombia over President Uribe’s ties to narco-trafficers and paramilitaries, Canada is putting trade negotiations with Colombia in overdrive by signing a new Free Trade Agreement. The FTA will open up Colombia for more foreign development and resource extraction for the profit of Canadian companies at the expense of the basic civil rights of Colombians.
have the federal or state government intervene in environmental conflicts with the company.

In October of 2007, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency (Profepa) ordered Continuum to halt all exploration activities at Natividad due to environmental complaints. Locals were glad that the government stepped in, but remained concerned that the company would continue exploration work.

“We decided to take collective action,” says López, referring to the decision by members of the community, including the mayor, to block the main highway out of Oaxaca City.

“On October 16th, we blocked the highway with fifty pickup trucks for five hours, demanding the permanent closure of the Natividad mine.” They withdrew the roadblock once a working dialogue with the Secretary of Economy, the sub-Secretary of Government and Profepa was agreed upon.

Profepa issued another document in November of 2007, noting that among other infractions, Continuum had not carried out hydro-geological studies required of it, because “[the company] lacks permission from the authorities of Capulálpam to enter in their jurisdiction or territory.”

Continuum acknowledges in official documents that it has received environmental complaints and that Natividad has been subject to temporary closure. The company does not appear to have adopted a protocol on corporate social responsibility.

Mexico has ratified the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169, on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, Article 16 of which reads “In cases in which the State retains the ownership of mineral or sub-surface resources or rights to other resources pertaining to lands, governments shall establish or maintain procedures through which they shall consult these peoples, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced, before undertaking or permitting any programmes for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands.”

López, a lifetime resident of Capulálpam, says that neither the government of Mexico nor the company has consulted with the people of the village. The main prospects for Continuum’s expansion of the Natividad mine lay under communally owned property in Capulálpam.

“Protest and Violence” in Context

“Investors may be aware that political and social tension has lead to incidences of protest and violence in Oaxaca over the past six months,” warns a promotional piece for Continuum Resources prepared by Fundamental Research Corporation in April of 2007.

In her new book The Shock Doctrine, Naomi Klein summarizes recent events in Oaxaca in the context of popular resistance to the current economic model in Mexico. Klein writes, “...the right wing government sent in riot police to break a strike by teachers who were demanding an annual pay raise. It provoked a statewide rebellion against the corruption of the corporatist state that raged for months.”

The scale of repression is captured in part by Mexico’s National Human Rights Commission, which reports that stemming from the repression of the teachers’ strike in Oaxaca, between June and December 2006 20 people were killed, 25 people were disappeared, 349 people were detained and 370 people were wounded. The report notes that “the sections of the Federal Preventative Police (PPF) that intervened to restore public order have used repetitive and excessive violence.”

The International Civilian Commission for Human Rights has been able to acquire highly prospective properties with very large land areas due to a lack of interest there.”

Continuum has made good off of “protest and violence,” doing deals with Oaxaca’s corporatist governments, and joining a host of other mining companies, like Vancouver’s Eurasian Minerals in Haiti and others in Colombia, aiming to make a profit in parts of the Americas where repression and violence are often directed against popular movements.

Oaxaca, 2008

In the city of Oaxaca today, there is little more than graffiti as physical evidence of the 2006 rebellion. The full-scale repression intended to decimate the popular movements seems to have worked, at least temporarily.

On my first evening in Ixlán, I went to a gathering place behind the church to watch a fireworks display in honor of the city’s patron saint. Less than a block away was a military jeep with six heavily armed soldiers, monitoring the crowd.

A man approached me, and noticed I was looking at what seemed like too many soldiers for a small town festival. “They’re not here to protect us,” he said quietly, “they’re scared of us. We supported the resistance in Oaxaca City, they know we’re strong.”

For his work advocating for the rights of the 70,000 Zapotec people in the Sierra Juárez, as well as his stand in solidarity with the popular uprising in Oaxaca in 2006, Aldo Rojas from UNOSJO has received email death threats from unidentified individuals, and has reportedly appeared on military black lists, accused of being a guerilla.

Rojas continues his work for justice in the area, as do the citizens of Capulálpam, regardless of intimidation from a government that has proven it is willing to kill, torture and imprison its citizens in the name of control.

It is in this climate of “protest and violence” that Continuum Resources is determined to carry its project forward, and the likelihood is that the mainstream media and the Canadian Government rallies behind them in promoting the extractive industry’s “development” model in Southern/Indigenous territory.

For communities struggling against the extractive industries, consensus around who benefits and who pays is perhaps more easily reached than it is around other issues. As the popular Latin American folk song reminds us, “El pueblo, unido, jamás será vencido/The people, united, will never be defeated.”
failed to trigger any response in the streets. However, this is not an indication that Canadians do not mobilize. When the crisis in Burma erupted, the Canadian public was infuriated. Canadian media coverage of the situation was extensive and numerous protests took place.

However, resistance to Canada’s overdrive free trade talks with Colombia and Peru is evident, as several labour and human rights organizations released statements opposed to a Canada-Colombia FTA in late November. The CLC, in addition to their statement, held a march of several hundred in Toronto on November 29th and called for public support of delegates participating in labour conventions across the country at which they will “consider this issue and demand an end to trade negotiations.” The CLC rejects that such negotiations could be remedied by “ineffective labour and environmental side agreements with no teeth on rights or standards will do nothing to improve the situation.”

In defiance of Canadian labour demands, and despite the general secrecy that usually surrounds bilateral free trade negotiations, it appears that the current Canadian negotiating team has been taking special efforts this time to ensure that labour organizations have no say in the process. Rick Arnold, Coordinator of Common Frontiers Canada, reported this month that “A Colombian trade negotiator recently let slip that the Canadian government told Colombian negotiators to keep the draft labour text secret, well away from Canadian unions and non-governmental organizations.”

According to the Harper Index, in order “to inoculate itself against criticism, earlier this month Federal Labour Minister Jean-Pierre Blackburn announced $1 million being given to Colombia under the International Program for Professional Labour Administration (IPPLA).” The Index quoted the Minister as saying that “this funding will help the Colombian Government to strengthen and enforce labour laws on behalf of workers here, and will support good governance by building capacity for the effective administration of labour legislation.”

However, a joint statement released in July by the CLC and a national Colombian labour organization, the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT), says that addressing the potential threats of a free trade agreement to workers needs to start before any negotiations take place. They call for a thorough and prior assessment of risks to workers noting in particular the great asymmetry between the Colombian and Canadian economies. They outline additional concrete measures that would help address the systematic dismantlement of Colombian labour. During 2006, just over 60,000 workers, of an economically active population of twenty million, were able to benefit from collective bargaining.

RECALCA, the Colombian Action Network Against Free Trade and the Free Trade Area of the Americas, also points out that Colombia’s negative trade balance with Canada amounted to $225 million dollars in 2006. According to RECALCA, this agreement is likely to reinforce Colombia’s orientation as a producer of tropical and mineral products in exchange for manufactured goods and machinery. They note that the themes being addressed by these trade negotiations are the same as those covered by US-Colombia talks and conclude that an FTA with Canada would “lock Colombia into free trade, paralyzing the state’s capacity to promote development, leading to aban-

donment basic food staple production in the country, and leaving aside industrialization while integrating Colombia into the global economy through over-exploitation of cheap labour.” Rural livelihoods are already seriously compromised in Colombia with internal displacement at around 3.8 million.

However, much remains to be seen from the Canadian public. If the CLC campaign catches on, their demands for real change in the situation in Colombia also implicate serious changes to the current Canadian model; “An international business deal with Colombia or any other country,” according to the CLC, should “foster “fair-trade”, and not only benefit international investors while worsening widespread conditions of poverty and social exclusion.”

The Harper government, in its rush to complete this free trade deal, is unlikely to do this on its own. A serious and vigorous public debate in Canada is urgently required.

A previous version of this article was published at ALAI.

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**Frank Giustra doesn’t read the Dominion.**

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to the international market.

In Burkina Faso, on a national level, there was an effort to establish a model of self-reliant development in regards to food, education and healthcare; within four years, the national political mentality and national production model were shifted in a progressive direction that no other African nation has succeeded in achieving before.

This political process had an enormous impact on the imagination of the youth, while also had an impact in regards to the neo-colonial framework of development within Africa, mainly in regards to the ongoing French influence over African development.

France, in reality, hasn’t granted independence to the former colonies due to the neo-colonial economic development framework that it continues to impose on Africa. France utilizes mainstream development models to smuggle resources from Africa, to have easy access to valuable minerals, to have access and influence over the maintenance of a system of capitalist development in Africa. An economic development system that can only be maintained with the support of local puppets that are totally reluctant to listen to the grievances and demands of their own population.

Sankara’s project in Burkina Faso is certainly a project that is important to consider for Africa because it relates directly to pan-Africanism, the collective integration of the African nation-states, certainly an economic model that advocates something inherently different than NEPAD [the New Economic Partnership for African Development], which is actually a plan that is fostering relations between Africa and western nations. In reality, NEPAD can’t be viewed or understood as an African plan for development.

Today, Africa needs to outline an African plan for development and the development of a local or indigenous definition of development was fundamental to the economic program that Sankara was advocating. This is why Sankara died; this is why Sankara was assassinated.

What has been the echo-effect of Thomas Sankara—the way in which the legacy of Sankara’s alternative economic ideas impacted all of Africa, the political and economic ideas that are being discussed today in Africa within networks advocating for social and economic justice?

In terms of civil-society: I must first admit that I have mixed feelings concerning the role of civil-society today, as major parts of ‘civil-society’ on an international level have been co-opted by the international neo-liberal economic framework and institutions like the World Bank and IMF.”

Can you explain for yourself why Sankara’s case is touching for you on a political level? How do Sankara’s ideas strike you? Why are they important to you as a social activist?

It’s simple to understand. GRILA was born the year of the revolution in Burkina Faso, based on the same values that Sankara advocated, as GRILA shared a similar world view, shared a similar dream of establishing a self-governed model for development in Africa, which explains the attachment, the connection.

Self-governed, or managed development, means that nations must rely on their internal forces first, before looking to external assistance. Development must be rooted in creating your own markets of consumption. A nation must feed its own population, which means that all citizens must have access to the national land, while the natural resources and mineral wealth should be owned by the people, not foreign companies.

Sankara advocated for a model of development focused on first fulfilling the basic needs of the population, including providing access to clean water, to quality education, to housing and healthcare. Once these critical elements are fulfilled on a national level, then you can adapt to modern economic markets and modern technology based on the rhythm of your own society and culture.

Today, most African nations aren’t in a position to compete in the world capitalist market due to realities such as the subsidies within the agricultural market within European countries and the unfair nature of the international economic system. African nations must rely on their own forces first, while co-operating with other nations in the global south.
a metal gate around city hall, prohibiting public housing residents from entering the building. Fifteen were arrested in total as the council passed the motion in favour of the demolitions. Residents have pledged to continue fighting, and have called for supporters to travel to the region and take part in a campaign of direct actions against these home demolitions.

Officials in India have conceded that the construction of the World Bank-backed Narmada Dam is illegal. Shri Afroz Ahmad of the Narmada Control Authority admitted that the construction of the dam to the height of 121.9 metres has led to the illegal submergence of houses and farms, particularly those of the Bhil tribal people, many of whom have been struggling against the construction of this mega-dam for more than twenty years. Critics of the dam have demanded that its size be reduced in order to avoid flooding still further indigenous communities, and continue to fight for land for those who have been displaced by the dam’s construction.

Hundreds of trade union demonstrators gathered in Toronto to protest the proposed Canada-Colombia Free Trade Agreement, while approximately 30-40 activists with the Canadian Union of Public Employees picketed the office of former Foreign Affairs Minister Peter Mackay in New Glasgow, Nova Scotia. Critics from trade unions, human rights organizations, and ecumenical organizations in Canada have argued that this trade deal encourages para-military political violence against indigenous peoples, trade unionists, and poor people within resource-rich territories, and also provides the framework to “legalize and legitimize” this economic and political terrorism. Meanwhile, reports of increased military and para-military attacks upon indigenous protests against land expropriation have emerged from the Southwest Cauca in recent weeks.

African political leaders have rejected a neo-liberal trade agreement with the European Union, which would have forced punitive duties upon imported goods from the continent, such as sugar, meat and bananas, which would have competed with European producers. The “Economic Partnership Agreements” have been the subject of protests by trade unions and social movements throughout the continent, and were voted down during an EU-Africa summit in Lisbon. The increased amount of investment from China in Africa has likely provided the subcontinent with a greater amount of breathing room in negotiating such trade deals in recent years.
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