



Revisiting Human Rights: A Domestic Approach

By Ramona Ortega
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Less than five years ago I knew little about human rights, the United Nations and international treaties but I knew a lot about being a woman of color in a predominately white man's world; about being poor in the epicenter of capitalism; and about being queer in a society that favors homogeneity. I understand what it means to be at the crossroads of racism and sexism and to have my rights and dignity be violated and undermined by both the state and 'private' actors. So, when I was formally introduced to human rights it was not hard to re-conceptualize my social justice activism as part of this global movement. A human rights framework makes sense to me because it provides a venue to group the various but inter-related layers of oppression. For example, for me personally, some of the layers are the discrimination I faced in the public school system, my family's history as low-wage farm workers, and the impact of racism and colonization on my social upbringing. Instead of thinking about these as separate social justice issues, I realized they are simply a matter of human rights. More importantly, they can be seen through international laws that articulate government obligations and seek to prevent and remedy these types of violations. Throughout my life, I have been engaged in many causes - labor rights, queer rights, educational reform, youth activism - but I was frustrated with the fact that although I understood them as being linked, I had

to act on them independently through different organizations. For many reasons, including the manner in which social justice work is funded, there are few organizations that actively tackle a broad range of social injustices simultaneously. Most social justice activists would agree with the intersectional theory about social problems. Examples might be the ways that a quality and equitable education is key to economic and gender justice, and privatizing public schools is not the answer. There are few that would see their own work as addressing this broad intersection of education, economic justice, and globalization.

Over the last decade, social justice activists have become increasingly focused on their own specific fields. We have a number of experts on youth, criminal justice, education reform and economic justice. The challenge now is to find a rubric under which we can begin to forge broad systemic solutions instead of creating reactionary single-issue proposals. That is not to say that single-issue projects focused on providing relief to those in need are not needed, they are. At the same time, we, the social justice community must begin thinking and acting more strategically and globally. The human rights model provides a framework in which to locate our work, but also adds a legal dimension to government accountability, something that we so often lack in social justice work. Human rights is not new, nor is it the solution to all the world's wrongs, but it is particularly useful at this juncture of US activism, where we are faced with a growing lack of government accountability due to privatization, an overwhelming number of isolated social justice groups and an onslaught of social ills.

The Human Rights project of the Urban Justice is one of a growing number of US social justice groups using a human rights

You've Helped

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transforming water into a commodity to be bought and sold for profit, creating water scarcity in a water abundant world.

Perhaps the most famous tale of corporate greed over water is the story of Cochabamba, Bolivia. In this semi-desert region, water is scarce and precious. In 1999, the World Bank recommended privatization of Cochabamba's municipal water supply company (SEMAPA) through a concession to International Water, a subsidiary of Bechtel. On October 1999, the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law was passed, ending government subsidies and allowing privatization. In a city where the minimum wage is less than \$100 a month,

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water bills reached \$20 a month, nearly the cost of feeding a family of five for two weeks.

In January 2000, a citizens' alliance called La Coordinación de Defensa del Agua y de

la Vida (The Coalition in Defense of Water and Life) was formed. The alliance shut down the city for four days through mass mobilization.

Within a month, millions of Bolivians marched to Cochabamba, held a general strike, and stopped all transportation. At the gathering, the protesters issued the Cochabamba Declaration, calling for the protection of universal water rights.

The government promised to reverse the price hike but never did. In February 2000, La Coordinadora organized a peaceful march demanding the repeal of the Drinking Water and Sanitation Law, the annulment of ordinances allowing privatization, the termination of the water contract, and the participation of citizens in drafting a water resource law.

The citizen's demands, which drove a stake through the heart of corporate interests, were violently rejected. Coordinadora's fundamental critique was directed at the negation of water as a community property. Protesters used slogans like 'Water is God's Gift and Not A Merchandise' and 'Water is Life'.

In April 2000, the government tried to silence the water protests through market law. Activists were arrested, protesters killed, and the media censored. Finally on April 10, 2000, the people won. Aguas del Tunari and Bechtel left Bolivia and the government was forced to revoke its hated water privatization legislation.

The water company Servicio Municipal del Agua Potable Alcantarillado (SEMAPA) and its debts were handed over to the workers and the people. In the summer of 2000, La Coordinadora organized public hearings to establish democratic planning and management. The people have taken on the challenge to establish a water democracy, but the water dictators are trying their best to subvert the process. Bechtel is suing Bolivia, and the Bolivian government is

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Modern-day Colonialism Proves

a Critical Lens for Progressive Political Education

Did you know that a United States "citizen" who was born in the US territory of Puerto Rico lacks the right to vote in federal elections, even though they are governed by federal law? Did you know that that same Puerto Rican can leave home and move to Iowa, or any other US state, and suddenly their "citizenship" will include full federal voting rights? If you didn't know these facts, you are well in the majority of the country. The status of Puerto Ricans, like the natives of other US territories and jurisdictions, is precarious. Puerto Rican citizenship is conditional because it was bestowed by an act of Congress rather than based in the constitution, as is the case for citizens born in the fifty states. The grant of citizenship was a politically expedient means of quelling the growing independence movement without allowing full civil or political rights to the people. It is the classic mechanism of colonialism in action; control over the land is maintained through control over its inhabitants. Such is the case, even in the twenty-first century.

Last month the FEX grantmaking program took its political education process across the Atlantic to explore modern-day colonialism as it plays out in Puerto Rico. Grantmaking Panel members from the Saguaro Fund, the OUT Fund and the Robeson Fund joined FEX staff in San Juan to meet with existing and potential grantees and be educated about the implication of US colonialism on national and international economies, politics and social practices. Given the relevance of militarism in the US territories, the group traveled to the small island of Vieques, Puerto Rico, to witness the decades-long struggle against military bombing and land dominance on the island.

Each panel came away with a wealth of knowledge and depth of analysis that will enhance its grantmaking. Our work while on Vieques was particularly inspirational for members of the Robeson panel. During our visit, long-term Vieques residents shared their frank account of the military's impact on their lives and the community-led, international organizing effort to stop it. As a result, Robeson panel members reaffirmed the need to support emerging media producers engaged in front-line organizing; to value the process of producing political media, as well as the resulting product.

Members of the OUT fund took time to consider the extent to which control over the land supports control over the body in terms of LGBT rights. When considering Puerto Rico's intact anti-sodomy statute in the context of a people who have no claim to their own land, it seemed clear that the fight against homophobia could only be intensified. While the ostentatious presence of the military on Vieques serves as a reminder to residents that their land is not their own, the sodomy law reinforces the concept with the promise that people's bodies are not their own, either. And as is always the case when repressive conditions are enforced, violence is occasionally employed; through the Navy and the courts against anti-military protesters on Vieques; through hate crimes against the LGBT community.

On the day our meeting began the city of San Juan was largely closed down for a holiday. Members of the Saguaro panel, as all of our group, were inspired to hear that the date, March 22, commemorated the abolition of slavery on the island. As our discourse continued, panel members found themselves grappling with the apparent contradictions of colonial status and a history of slavery on the one hand, and the privilege accorded light-skinned Puerto Ricans on the other. The discussion opened

Criminal Justice Initiative Moves Ahead

In November 2001, the Criminal Justice Initiative's circle of donors and activists met and disbursed grants totaling \$180,000 to nine organizations working to promote a more just system of crime and punishment in this country. Last year's strategic grantmaking focus centered on organizations promoting dialogue in communities affected by the criminal justice system, bringing together isolated and marginalized constituents.

As part of our second year program, we held a Criminal Justice Gathering in New York City on April 18-21, 2002 to bring our donor-activist circle in dialogue with grantees to evaluate the impact of our first round of grants; assess the challenges that the grantees and the movement as a whole faces in the post 9/11 political landscape; and discuss next steps. Donors interested in meeting grantees, panel members, and staff were invited to a dinner and interactive exercise on Friday, April 19 at the New Yorker Hotel. Members of the grantmaking panel are working on a report from the Gathering and will be available shortly.

We are in the midst of fundraising for the Initiative and currently have \$130,000 pledged toward our goal of \$250,000.

FEX on the Ballot Again

We are excited to announce that the Paul Robeson Fund for Independent Media has just been chosen as one of 50 organizations eligible for funds through the Working Assets donation pool. Working Assets will allocate the approximately \$4 million that it collects through a vote of their customers. What the Robeson Fund receives will be based on the number of votes that we receive from Working Assets customers. This announcement could not have come at a better time for the Robeson Fund as we begin our 15th year by continuing to

Terrorism As Cannibalism

By Vandana Shiva

Year 2001 will be etched in our memory as a year in which the vicious cycle of violence was unleashed worldwide. Of the Taliban bombing the two thousand year old images of peace, the Buddhas of Bamiyan. Of terrorists blowing up the WTC on September 11, and attempting to blow up the Assembly of Jammu and Kashmir on October 1, and the Indian Parliament on December 13. Of a global alliance bombing out what remained of Afghanistan after two decades of super power rivalry, and civil war. Of Pakistan and India threatening to go to war as 2001 gave way to 2002.

Why is violence engulfing us so rapidly, so totally? Why has violence become the dominant feature of the human species across cultures. Could the violence characterizing human societies in the new millennium be linked with violent structures and institutions we have created to reduce society to markets and humans to consumers?

Animals of any species tend to become violent when they are treated with violent methods. Pigs love to root in the fields, wallow in the mud, grunt to each other. However when denied this freedom in factory farms where they are confined in over crowded, steel barred crates or multiple stacked cages known as battery cages, pigs become bored, stressed and anxious. They start gnawing cages, picking on each other, biting each other's tails and ears and resorting to what agribusiness industry has called "cannibalism". (Ref. Michael Fox, Old MacDonalds Factory Farm)

Pigs are not cannibals. When they start to display cannibalism, the normal question industry should be asking is why are pigs behaving abnormally. The organic movement and animal liberation movement has raised the question and found the answer in the violent methods of factory farming. In humane farming pigs have been liberated and allowed to roam and roll in the mud. Stopping violence against animals is the best way to stop their violent behavior.

While removing tails and teeth is the solution offered by industry to violent behavior in pigs, chicken in factory farms are debeaked, and cattle are dehorned.

The problem, clearly, is the factory cage - not the teeth and tails of pigs, the beaks of chicken, the horns of cattle. It is the cage that needs removing, not the tail, or beak or horn. When animals are denied their basic freedoms to function as a species, when they are held captive and confined, they turn to "cannibalism".

Humans are animals. As a species we too have basic needs - for meaning and identity, for community and security, for food and water, for freedom. Could terrorism be the human equivalent of the abnormal behavior of "cannibalism" in animals exhibit under factory conditions?

Humans are of course, not being confined to iron cages (though in the US, in Australia, a large percentage of blacks and aborigines are behind bars). Human society is being caged and controlled through complex laws and policies, through violent economic and political structures which are enclosing of their spaces - spiritual, ecological, political and economic.

Humans are experiencing their religious spaces enclosed when militaries occupy sacred lands as in the Mid East. Humans are experiencing enclosure through occupation as in Palestine. The children in affluent America are also experiencing a closing of their lives, and are turning to mindless violence as in the case of shooting at Columbine. And across the world, ecological, economic and political spaces are being enclosed through privatization, liberalization and globalization.

Could the violence being unleashed by humans against humans be similar to the violence pigs, chicken and cattle express when denied their freedom to roll in the mud, peck for worms, and roam outside the confines of animal factories?

Could the coercive imposition of a consumer culture worldwide, with its concomitant destruction of values,

cultural diversity, livelihoods, and the environment be the invisible cages against which people are rebelling - some violently, most non-violently.

Could the "war against terrorism" be equivalent to the detoothing, debeaking, dehorning of pigs, chickens and cattle by agribusiness industry because they are turning violent when kept under violent conditions? Could the lasting solution to violence induced by the violence of captivity and enslavement for humans be the same as that for other animals - giving them back their space for spiritual freedom, ecological freedom, for psychological freedom and for economic freedom.

The cages that humans are feeling trapped in are the new enclosures which are robbing communities of their cultural spaces and identities, and their ecological and economic spaces for survival. Globalization is the overarching name for this enclosure.

Greed and appropriation of other people's share of the planet's precious resources are at the root of conflicts, and the root of terrorism. When President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair announced that the goal of the global war on terrorism is for the defense of the American and European "way of life", they are declaring a war against the planet - its oil, its water, its biodiversity.

A way of life for the 20 percent of the earth's people who use 80 percent of the planet's resources will dispossess 80 percent of its people of their just share of resources and eventually destroy the planet. We cannot survive as a species if greed is privileged and protected and the economics of the greedy set the rules for how we live and die.

If the past enclosures have already precipitated so much violence, what will be the human costs of new enclosures being carved out for privatization of living resources and water resources, the very basis of our species survival. Intellectual property laws and water privatization are new invisible cages trapping humanity.

IPR laws are denying farmers the basic freedom of saving and exchanging seed. They are, in effect, enclosing the genetic commons, creating new scarcities in a biologically rich world, transforming fundamental freedoms into criminal acts punishable with fines and jail sentences.

Water privatization policies are enclosing the water commons,

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Thinking Strategically

Alison Goldberg is the 27 year old Director of Foundations for Change (www.foundationsforchange.org), a nonprofit she started a year ago to direct funding to social and economic justice issues which get neglected by traditional philanthropy. She is also a trustee of her family's foundation and a donor to The Funding Exchange.

Alison has been closely involved in antipoverty and economic justice work in a variety of settings. She has lived on the Northern Cheyenne Reservation in Montana and in rural Ghana and worked on food security issues. These experiences helped to solidify her beliefs in social justice and motivated her to use the money, time and access wisely.

"Like many other people I have felt isolated in my giving. I didn't have any friends to talk to about social justice philanthropy and how to negotiate my giving with my activism. So when I learned about Resource Generation (www.resourcegeneration.org), I was excited to get hooked up with a network of young people that were talking about having money and how to use it to affect social change." Her interactions with Resource Generation, working with her own family foundation and interviewing over 100 people about the direction of social change

philanthropy lead to the creation of Foundations for Change. "I saw how powerful the grantmaking process can be when donors truly become allies to disenfranchised communities, and the enormous opportunity of a new generation of donor-activist collaboratives."

Foundations for Change works to increase the number of young donors and family foundations that give money to social justice groups through shared decision making structures that link donors and activists across race and class. Less than 3% of private funding goes to progressive social change (see www.nng.org). Foundations for Change provides donor education programs for family foundations and young donors, that want to learn about social change philanthropy, and helps them learn about the issues they support from the communities where their grantmaking has an impact.

Alison feels "family foundations and young donors can be so much more effective when they are informed by community activists and organizers. We have so much to learn from activist-advised grantmaking. We need to create conversations about how to make philanthropy more community based. In this country there are over 30,000 family foundations which can be a major source of support for social justice groups."

According to Alison, "very few young people recognize that 'we' can be involved in philanthropy as young people. When we start giving at an earlier age, we can give more and more strategically and effectively throughout our lives.

FEX In Person

Clarity Process Continues

In November 2001 issue I told you some about the national strategic-political dialogue in which we are engaged called the Clarity Process. This is the first attempt in twenty years to review the national criteria for membership into the network of community funds. The review will also provide us with a vision for where this network of 16 funds could be the most relevant and strategic in the year 2002.

The consultants for the Process, Yolanda Alindor and Kit Durgin led the first meetings with the Network Executive Directors and the Network Membership Council of the FEX board at our September meeting in New York. These conversations were amended and repeated a few weeks later in California to include the West Coast funds who were unable to participate at the earlier meeting.

The topics for discussion included:

The Change in Politics: How have the demographics and politics nationally and internationally changed in the last twenty

years? What are the new challenges? How have these changes played out at the local/regional level?

The Role of Progressive Philanthropy: What changes have occurred in the last twenty years in philanthropy in general? In progressive philanthropy? How have these changes played out locally and regionally? How have they played out in the funds?

Funding Exchange Models: How have FEX Member Funds changed and grown over the years. How have they operationalized their missions to accomplish their political goals? What are the different models in existence today?

FEX network: What is the purpose of the Network nationally? What could/should the network do internally? Externally?

For the past few months these same questions were being posed around the country at local fund discussions being facilitated by members of the FEX Executive Committee. Folks reported that the meetings were lively, engaging and very timely.

Yolanda and Kit facilitated an abbreviated version of the local fund discussions with the members of the national office council at our most recent board meeting in Portland,



Ellen's Corner

Another View