

Launch Event Report:

Intersecting Violences: A review of feminist theories and debates on violence against women and poverty in Latin America

Congress Centre, 23-28 Great Russell Street, London
21st October 2010

CAWN Speakers:

- Marilyn Thomson – Chair of CAWN
- Katherine Ronderos – Programme and Advocacy Coordinator

Guest Speakers:

- Baroness Sue Miller (Chair)
- Patricia Muñoz Cabrera – Author
- Pablo Espiniella – Human Rights Officer, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights
- Sandra Ramos – Director, Movement of Working and Unemployed Women 'Maria Elena Cuadra' (MEC) – Nicaragua
- Maxine Molyneux – Director, Institute for the Study of the Americas, University of London

This event was the official U.K. launch of a research report, commissioned by CAWN, that seeks to better understand and challenge the multiple interlinking factors that perpetuate violence against women (VAW) and women's poverty in Latin America. The panel comprised speakers who are experts in the field from the grassroots to the institutional level.

Welcome and Introduction

Marilyn Thomson



Marilyn's introduction included a brief history of CAWN over the last 20 years; from its roots in the solidarity campaigns and human rights committees in the 1980s-90s – a period of revolution and civil war in much of Latin America – to its more established role today as a dynamic advocacy, campaigns and solidarity organisation active in both Central America and the U.K. CAWN disseminates information about women's rights, undertakes and supports projects, and endeavours to make sure that women's voices are heard by policy and decision makers.

The research into poverty and VAW being released is part of an ongoing project, funded by the Big Lottery and carried out in partnership with CEM-H, one of CAWN's partner

organisations in Honduras. The introductory comments were followed by a short video made by CEM-H. The video is in recognition and memoriam of the women who have been killed and calls for a stop to femicide in Honduras and demands an end to the impunity which enables this violence to persist.

Video 'Porque Toda la Sangre es la Misma Sangre' (Because all blood is the same blood) (CEM-H, Honduras)

Opening remarks: How is the relationship between the UK and Latin America contributing to the advancement of women's rights?

Baroness Miller



Baroness Sue Miller chaired the panel and her opening remarks highlighted the ways in which parliamentarians are able to engage with issues in Central America through joining all party groups and that over the last five years there has been greater expression of interest in the U.K. parliament relating to issues in Latin America. Building solidarity between the U.K. and Central America was seen as key to tackling the issue of VAW, especially given the similarity in the situation of domestic violence in the two regions; she noted that the cycle of family violence needs to be broken and that the normalisation of violence and the traditional constructions of masculinity need to be challenged. She predicates that this research provides

important lessons that can be integrated into parliamentary work. Baroness Miller also expressed her particular interest in Central and South America.

Presentation of the CAWN research report: *Intersecting Violence: a review of feminist theories and debates on violence against women and poverty in Latin America*

Patricia Muñoz Cabrera



As a Latin American researcher and committed feminist activist living in Europe, Patricia is perfectly placed to analyse the theoretical interplay in the debates on violence against women and poverty from a perspective that favours neither one side of the Atlantic nor the other. In her explanation of the research, Patricia began with an expression of her thanks to the Afro-American pioneers of intersectionality – a paradigm that has been evolving since 1883 – she then moved on to an expand upon the concepts used and emphasised that due to intersecting structures of domination and power that give rise to the multiple oppressions resulting in VAW and women's poverty these issues need to be addressed from a similarly intersectional perspective.

The fact that women experience violence and oppression in unique, unquantifiable ways and the significant impact of globalisation in the wake of neoliberalism that has swept across Latin America and is evident in the commodification of women's bodies and concomitant rise in VAW and feminisation of poverty are duly recognised in the research.

Patricia went on to underline the reductionist notion of poverty which – like VAW – is an unnatural phenomenon that is provoked, produced and reproduced by institutions and extant structures. Entangled ideologies of patriarchy and religious fundamentalism inherent in Latin American societies perpetuate VAW and poverty and commonly held prejudices mean that poor indigenous women are the most likely targets, with men and upper class, more European-looking women

being viewed as more valuable, hence treated with more respect. This highlighted the need to encourage and enable women in Latin America to mobilise and transform traditional, oppressive mindsets and challenge women's minimal agency in the public sphere.

Amongst the conclusions drawn are that there have been advances, such as the recognition of VAW as a violation of human rights, but there are also many challenges still to face; including the antidemocratic impulses of governments which lead to impunity, the poor education of women relating to what their rights are and how to claim them, the language barrier between Spanish and indigenous languages when it comes to educating women about their rights, and the recrudescence of VAW as a result of globalisation and increased consumerism.

Patricia's presentation ended with her key recommendation that European and Latin American researchers and activists should strengthen efforts to build and share knowledge in order to achieve the major strategic goal of compelling governments and institutions to enforce national and international legislation that will protect every woman's right to a life free from violence of all types.

The mandate of the Special Rapporteur on VAW: contributions and challenges for the region **Pablo Espiniella**



Pablo is the Deputy Head of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) Regional Office for Europe and has undertaken numerous missions to Central America. Having worked closely with the Special Rapporteurs on VAW, he provided valuable insights into that role and how it has moved the debate and work on VAW forward since the mandate was established in 1994.

The main duties of the Special Rapporteur are to prepare thematic reports, carry out fact-finding country visits, communicate with governments on cases and issues of concern – including acting as an intermediary channel and advocating for victims of VAW – conduct regional consultations with CSOs and present a summary of cases to the UN Human Rights Council. Since the UN to date has not been especially receptive to VAW the Special Rapporteur's mandate is very important in its capacity to raise the profile of the issue and achieve action.

The key achievements of the Special Rapporteur on VAW's mandate have been: attaining a deeper understanding of systems and structures which continue to impede the advancement of women and make them more vulnerable to violence; achieving a conceptual shift that makes gender more than a token mention at the end of a report; gaining explicit recognition of VAW as a human rights concern; the development of legal standards and doctrines; and the exposure of women's experiences of violence at an institutional level.

As a result of the Special Rapporteur's visits to Mexico, Guatemala and El Salvador, regional trends have been identified, namely, the pervasiveness of sexual violence amongst other forms of violence, similarities between the patterns and perpetrators of VAW, the pervasiveness of *machismo* and institutionalised gender inequalities which underline gender discrimination in both public and private spheres, and the failure of states to prevent and respond to violations, challenges and obstacles posed by law. There have also been positive developments such as signature of treaties and agreements, however, there remains a gap between policy and

implementation in Latin America and limited resources mean that the Special Rapporteur is not always able to undertake follow-up missions to ensure that recommendations are acted upon. Significant amongst the recommendations for the region are the establishment of a gender sensitive knowledge base that enhances the collection and analysis of reliable data, the necessity to train public officials on how to deal with cases of VAW, and the allocation of resources to protect women who are victims or at risk; Pablo emphasised the fact that women are not vulnerable but are in vulnerable situations.

Ultimately, the Special Rapporteur is determined to continue ensuring that VAW is not understood in isolation from gender-based discrimination but incorporated into future efforts.

Working on VAW in Nicaragua -- why is international solidarity important?

Sandra Ramos



Sandra is the Director of MEC in Nicaragua and gave a moving presentation on overcoming violence at a personal and organisational level. Her own experiences of intrafamilial violence at a young age have driven her commitment to enabling other women to stand up and fight against all forms of violence and survive. Recently, fourteen women's organisations in Nicaragua have come together and drawn up a draft bill against VAW and femicide that recognises economic and patrimonial, as well as physical, forms of violence. She highlighted the fact that governments are obliged to fulfil the rights of women and that women's organisations in Central America are not demanding anything over and above what has already been agreed to by international organisations in declarations such as CEDAW, but more voices are needed to achieve results. She emphasised that the region cannot wait for another Ciudad Juarez to develop before taking action, so we all need to coordinate our efforts and unite in action to defend the lives of women in Central America.

Reflections and analysis for discussion

Maxine Molyneux



Maxine is the Director of the Institute for the Study of the Americas. She brought the panellists' presentations together, adding reflections and recommendations for further action. She underlined that women's poverty not only refers to their lack of income but their lack of knowledge, skills and access to material resources and justice, which increases their vulnerability to violence; as such, women's rights and citizenship are inextricably linked with their capacity to escape violence.

Also important to note is that VAW is a universal phenomenon that takes places even in countries with strong judicial structure and support, and it remains a challenge to get policy-makers to prioritise the issue. In Latin America, the lack of rule of law together with the effects of neoliberalism and prevalent misogyny which glamorises violence – commonplace in all modern societies – leads to a complex matrix of objectification of women and perpetration of violence; the extreme manifestation of this being femicide.

Maxine made five key points to be incorporated in policy:

- On the legal side, laws must be adopted to adequately deal with VAW and the justice service should provide support for women at risk.
- The prevention of violence is not only a matter for policy but demands a huge shift in cultural perceptions which will require work on domestic and international frameworks.
- VAW is not a singular issue and cannot be treated as such; a multidimensional, multiagency approach is needed that will mainstream measures to counter VAW into social policy.
- There is a need to contextualise understanding in poverty reduction programmes (PRPs) and both men and women need to be included as an integrated approach is needed in order to change dysfunctional behaviour.
- There need to be more men in the debate and a greater focus on redefining masculinities.

In closing, Maxine's calls for the U.K. to take VAW seriously and push for the EU to do likewise; 60% of total overseas aid comes from the EU so there is an enormous capacity to tackle this issue were resources effectively deployed.

Discussion and Q&A



Q1. Martha Jean Baker, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF): Women should not be framed as victims, they are agents of their own destiny, is there enough recognition of the important difference between victims and victimisation?

Q2. Diana Mills, Latin American Mining Monitoring Programme (LAMMP):

To add a sixth point to Maxine's policy recommendations, the media is culpable because they trivialise women's plight; it is important to work together to bring forward the fact that women are not objects or statistics. Relating to a forthcoming meeting with the LAMMP, the topic of VAW will be raised in order to elevate the profile of the issue in other Latin American networks.

Q3. H.E. Mr Werner Matias Romero, Ambassador of El Salvador:

El Salvador has recognised that VAW is an issue and human rights need to be promoted and protected. The government has taken six strategic actions to deal with VAW: it will be adopting an appropriate diagnostic to identify causes; it has recognised that there needs to be a national unified system of statistics; there is the need for a special fund to make sure that these policies are properly funded and implemented; it has identified that approaches must be implemented at both territorial and community levels; the definition, implementation and monitoring of approaches to tackle VAW must be done in co-ordination with civil society. In addition to these comments, he raised the question of how does UNWOMEN coordinate its efforts with CEDAW and other UN initiatives?

Q4. Melina Fraga, Goldsmiths University:

How are governments responding to the mandates of the Special Rapporteur on VAW?

Q5. Elsa Dawson, Independent consultant:

Maxine's third point about adopting a multidimensional, multiagency approach is key; there is a need for models in the way institutions deal with prevention approaches and the way that government's respond. There also needs to be a gender sensitive approach to human rights violations.

Answers:

Patricia Muñoz Cabrera [To Q1]: There is no universal notion of masculinity however there is a universal pattern of domination and violence and for this reason we need to rethink what defines what it is to be a man. In doing this it is vital to remember that not all men are perpetrators and men must be included in this work to challenge traditional ideas of masculinity.

[To Q2]: the media in Spain has stopped portraying VAW in television after the realisation that the framing of social reality can work to objectify and also to empower women.

Maxine Molyneux [To Q3]: UNIFEM compared with UNICEF had far fewer resources; the new agency, UNWOMEN, brings together UN activities on women in a unified, more resourceful agency and so should strengthen UN's activities that relate to women.

[To Q4]: Levels of VAW are highest in Latin America but organisations from the grassroots to governmental level have been successful in bringing VAW into the public arena. There has been a growth of initiatives to tackle VAW, such as the provision of special gender sensitive training and establishing of women's police stations in Peru, the setting up of refuges, and development of routine consultations with women's movements. However, there is still a severe lack of resources and there needs to be a comprehensive policy response.

Pablo Espiniella [To Q3]: VAW exists everywhere, but recognition of the problem is an important positive step; it is significant that El Salvador has accepted the Special Rapporteur for a second visit. To effectively tackle VAW, it is necessary to bridge the gap between legislation and action, but this is a universal issue and the opening of the regional office of OHCHR in Brussels is a big step in recognition of its universality – it's not just a developing country matter. Lastly, men do have an important role to play but it needs to be properly defined as there are certain sensitive issues that it would be inappropriate and ineffective for men to investigate, but they must not be alienated from the struggle for women's rights.

Solidarity in action and thank-you

Katherine Ronderos



Katherine concludes that the research makes apparent the different layers of discrimination that women face. Since the project with CEM-H in Honduras began, 500 women have been empowered and 100 women have become community leaders and are working towards the transformation into a more peaceful culture, an example being the re-education of men to define non-violent masculinities.

Her final statement is that CAWN is committed to supporting the women's movement in Latin America and providing a space for women's voices to be heard by policy and decision-makers at international levels. Through disseminating information amongst the U.K. audience CAWN raises awareness of the importance for Latin American issues to be addressed by the U.K.

Closing Remarks

Baroness Miller