Brazil: Brazilian Schools Under Conservative Attacks

A long-term goal of the conservatives’ and Christian fundamentalists’ in Brazil has been to ban debates on gender-related issues from schools. It started in 2014, when the religious caucus at the National Congress pushed for the removal of goals that aimed at overcoming gender, sexual orientation and race inequalities in school settings from the 2014-2024 National Education Plan. The tactic was later replicated with success and many State and City Education were pressured to remove any strategies aimed at eliminating gender, sexual orientation and race inequalities, under the claim that “gender ideology” is against family values and promotes homosexuality. More recently, the conservatives and Christian fundamentalists waged a new battle against gender, critical thinking and teachings with the School With No Political Party bill at the National Congress, under the pretext of defending “religious, political and ideological neutrality” in schools, by threatening to criminalize teachers who bring to the classroom any debate that goes against the moral convictions of students’ parents. The Federal Prosecution Office has already deemed the bill unconstitutional for its attempt to restrict academic freedom and plurality of ideas, as well as for trying to dismantle schools as a critical space for fighting discrimination based on origin, race, sex, color, age and any other kind, which is a constitutional mandate for the Brazilian Republic. Brazil has no comprehensive sexuality education curriculum; making schools safe for girls, LGBTQ, black and indigenous students and providing human rights-based education currently depends on the work of dedicated teachers, which is under attack by this most recent wave of bigotry.

Honduras: Another Chilling Execution for an Environmental Rights Defender

Four months ago Bertha Cáceres was murdered in her own home, she was a well-known environmentalist who opposed the hydropower projects in her region, Central America. At the beginning of July another environmental rights defender was murdered, Lesbia Yaneth Urquia. Their deaths are sadly not unexpected, over 100 people that rallied against dams, mining, logging and agriculture in Honduras have been killed. These deaths more often than not go unnoticed and those responsible go on with their lives without fear of impunity. This is directly linked to government and corporations’ failure to recognize indigenous and local communities rights to decide how their ancestral lands will be used. Under International Law Honduras is mandated to acquire indigenous peoples ‘free, prior and informed consent’ prior to moving ahead with projects – but this almost never happens as development is prioritized over peoples’ lives. It is scary to witness the cruelty of the private sector, in combination with the blind eye of the government, and what the growing demand for energy can lead to. We must value our environmental rights defenders, the women that decide to fight for the protection of their homes, of our Pachamama, and claim justice for their families and our planet.

Lebanon: When the Rule of Law Fails to Protect Women

A Lebanese court reduced the sentence of a man who killed his wife, Manal Assi, by beating her with a pressure cooker to five years. Initially, the man had been sentenced to the death penalty for pre-meditated murder, but the court esteemed that the “dangerous and wrongful action committed by the victim” – namely, being on the phone with another man – was enough justification for his “outrage.” Lebanese civil society organizations...
protested what seemed to be the legitimization and reduced sentencing of honor killings. In Tripoli, a major Lebanese city, a 16-year-old girl was kidnapped, taped, and gang raped by three men. The media was quick to disclose the girl’s name and home address, and her father decided to drop the charges against her rapists, either because he was bribed or because of the mediatic slut-shaming that portrayed the girl as a sex worker and her rapists as victims. While the Lebanese legal system is flawed with archaic laws and loopholes, criminalization laws still prove to be ineffective, especially when they are related to gender issues. In a system that hardly cares for the well-being of its citizens and busies itself with exploitation and privatization, it is not surprising that the ongoing trash crisis is taking its toll on the citizens’ health and quality of life. Rozine Moughalian, a mother of two living in Bourj Hammoud where the trash is being dumped and burned, was diagnosed with subacute liver failure. As the liver transplant surgery she needs is not performed in Lebanon, her family has to fly her to France for $300,000. The case that took social media by storm prompted the Lebanese cabinet to respond and agree to fund half of Rozine’s medical procedures, an unprecedented move that would benefit many citizens who require treatment abroad.

**Mexico: When Women’s Rights Are Used as a Cover Up for Corruption**

For two years there has been an ongoing investigation about the purchase of a $7M luxury house by the president’s wife from a government contractor. This case of very obvious corruption is now witnessing its finale with the official in charge of the investigation stepping down from his position to allow the new anti-corruption regime to take over. In the meantime, the president is also asking for forgiveness, even though, according to him and his wife, no one did anything wrong.

Finally, the current governor in Veracruz, Javier Duarte, (known for his corruption and violence) got his way with the approval in the local Congress of a reform to the 4th article of the state’s constitution adding that the state shall “protect life from conception to the natural death” blocking the possibility to liberalize the laws related to abortion and adding a more persecutory environment for women in Veracruz. This comes within a week of Alaska’s Supreme Court decision that requesting parental consent for women under 18 to access abortion was unconstitutional. It's clear that Veracruz is very far away from Alaska, not just geographically. Veracruz has become now the 18th state to change its constitution after the Mexico City Abortion Law. This doesn't change the current legal state of abortion, but it creates a more hostile context for women, who will need to recur to clandestine abortions or to Mexico City services to get access to the abortions they need.

**Pakistan: Internet Celebrity Murdered in “Honor” Killing**

On July 16th, 2016, 26 year-old Qandeel Baloch was strangled by her brother in what has been labeled as an “honor” killing. Baloch became an internet sensation in Pakistan after she started to post controversial videos and images of herself following her appearance on Pakistan Idol. Her popularity and notoriety spread (she had 800,000 followers on Facebook alone) and quickly lead to mockery, character assaults and more recently, death threats. In her videos and interviews, she often spoke about women’s rights and her role as a “modern day feminist” who was pushing boundaries to change “false beliefs and old practices”.

During the month of Ramadan, Baloch was caught up in a controversy with Mufti Abdul Qavi, a senior member of the clergy. Images of her wearing his signature wool hat and posing in selfies with Qavi were circulated, and he was later suspended from his post in one of Pakistan’s religious committees. While a confession from Baloch’s brother has already been attained stating that he murdered his sister because she dishonored the Baloch family, Mufti Qavi is also being investigated after he issued comments stating that Baloch faced the “wrath of God” because she dared to malign pious religious clerics.

In a critical legal step, the government has assumed responsibility as the complainant in the murder. This has largely been done to obstruct Pakistan’s 1990 Qisas and Diyat (retribution and blood money) Ordinance often invoked in cases of “honor” killing where the convicted killer pays blood money to the victim’s family in order to be pardoned. While an important anti-honor killing bill has been proposed to remove this “out” for perpetrators, it has not yet been passed. But ultimately, laws can only go so far to change a
damaged social system, where women are systemically disempowered and stripped of their agency. As Huma Yusuf writes, the Pakistani government, and society at large, is engaging in “selective feminism” where acceptable accomplishments by “safe” women are celebrated while issues that pertain to the real “security and sanctity” of women make little significant headway. While the debate over Qandeel’s murder carries on there is a hope that her death will spur on the dialogue in Pakistan to help create greater awareness and protective measures for women.

Rest in power, Qandeel.

**Senegal: Corruption, a Growing National Debt and a Failing Health System**

In August 2015, the Supreme Court of Senegal in an historic judgment rejected the appeal of Karim Wade, son of Senegalese former President Abdoulaye Wade. Wade was found guilty by Senegal’s Anti-corruption Court of having illegally acquired 178 million Euros using financial schemes when he was adviser and then minister in the Government under his father’s rule between 2000 and 2012. He was sentenced in March 2015 to 6 years in jail and 210 million Euros to be paid to the Senegalese Public Treasury.

Knowing that the 2016 budget that Senegal intended to allocate to health and social action is more or less 229 million, that the country since 2000 is officially included on the UN List of Least Developed Countries and that Senegalese public debt grows yearly by an average of 770 million Euros, the sentencing of Karim Wade was seen by many Senegalese as the beginning of an era where illicit financial flows would not only be tamed but their products would be rightly returned to the People of Senegal and their public institutions and services.

Unfortunately, shortly after the August ruling of the Supreme Court, the President was prompted to pardon him. After months of public discourse around national unity, dialogue with all Senegalese parties (including the PDS of Mr Wade) to look for solutions for Senegal to be steadily on the path to sustainable development, it seems that all these very carefully crafted political maneuvers only had one objective: allow Karim Wade to discretely be liberated from jail and flee very publicly the country onboard a private jet sent for him by Qatar.

There are many actors that the average Senegalese men, women, girls and boys have to thank for not only making a terrible mockery of our sovereignty, rule of law and separation of powers but also ensuring that we continue carrying a growing national debt, an ever more failing health system, high rates of maternal and child deaths from preventable diseases and an indecent low rate of modern contraception access and use, with nearly 1 in 3 Senegalese women wanting to avoid or delay pregnancy but not having information or access to family planning methods.

**UK: The Second Female Prime Minister in UK is not a Feminist Choice**

If ever there was an example of the problem of advocating for, and celebrating women gaining political position or power, devoid of any consideration of their political and feminist values, Theresa May, like Margaret Thatcher before her, is it. After the resignation of David Cameron, following the UK’s referendum decision to leave the EU, Theresa May, former Conservative Home Secretary and Minister for Women and Equalities, stepped in to the role of party leader. After gaining support from much of the party and, by default following the withdrawal of all other party leader candidates, she also became the second woman Prime Minister of the UK.

Theresa May’s record as the longest serving UK Home Secretary, spells disaster for women. An opponent of the European Convention on Human Rights and the Human Rights Act, a supporter of public spending cuts, an outspoken critic of the handling of domestic violence cases by police whilst singlehandedly dismantling police spending, and an architect of the xenophobic and racist policies and rhetoric witnessed in the UK in recent years, the appointment of Theresa May as Prime Minister is bad news for women in the UK and globally. Despite her post-appointment promises to ending inequalities, injustice and ensuring an inclusive and fair society, May’s track record proves otherwise. The scrapping of the UK’s legal requirement for equality, her out-of touch views, held by so many of the political elite, that poverty is an attitude problem, an issue of lack of ‘aspiration and skills’, whilst systematically voting for a reduction in welfare spending, supporting policies such as the bedroom tax, and failing to recognize or address the very core of issues effecting women across the UK, makes her no supporter of women.
Even with a mixed record of support for LGBT rights, voting against the equal age of consent and same-sex adoptions, but supporting marriage equality, May was worryingly considered one of the strongest Conservative leadership candidate on LGBT rights. And of course, where would any ‘feminist-in-disguise’ be without their subtle anti-choice position.

Theresa May is no feminist. She is anti migrant women, anti poor women and pro the status quo.

*This excerpt is from an article published on the Feminist Voices blog. To read the full article, click here.