Human Rights and Human Wrongs (with Kathleen Staudt)

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Available at: https://works.bepress.com/irasema_coronado/9/
court's intervention" (Miller, A7). Wherever and whenever the "comfort women's" stories are disseminated by activists in the West, those narratives have proved both powerful and convincing.

The body of material, moreover, around "comfort women" issues has grown so rapidly, over just the last decade, that we can now speak of there being a "comfort women's literature," in the same way that we refer to a "Holocaust literature." Its size and scope suggest that the day is not far off when we may also be able to talk of "Comfort Women" Studies as an academic subject. This would institute a formal means to acknowledge the continuing importance of the women themselves and the significance of their experiences; it would also mirror the development of Holocaust Studies programs at many universities. So far, there have been many overlaps between Holocaust representations and "comfort women" representations, yet also interesting differences. Holocaust literature, which exists in a variety of media—from poetry, to exhibitions in museums dedicated to the Shoah, to pop-culture versions made for cinema and television—is, of course, the result of nearly sixty years of cultural work in every Western and Eastern European nation. Its aims might be summed up in two phrases: "Never forget" and "Never again." Thus, it has been concerned first with memorializing the six million victims murdered by the Nazis; with preserving accounts of the pre-War cultures that were destroyed (whether those were the cultures of whole towns and villages populated by Jews or of Romany populations, or of gay men and lesbians in German cities); with detailing the fates that these cultures met; and with recording the survivors' ordeals before, during, and after the War, as well as the continuing effects of these experiences upon the next generations. While building this work of communal memory, it has insisted upon the importance of individual lives and of individual accounts. At the same time, Holocaust literature, whether based in verbal or visual forms, has taken the prevention of future group persecution and genocide as its goal, studying the historical contexts of anti-Semitism, racism, and homophobia that enabled mass murder to occur, and also insisting upon the role of moral education and the advancement of respect for human rights as deterrents.

"Comfort women" literature has had similar aims. It, too, memorializes the 200,000 women who were used as military sex slaves and records the accounts of the few hundred survivors who have come forward to identify themselves and testify since the early 1990s. and former "comfort woman" Kim Hak Soon spoke out in Korea.

It also works toward the prevention of future war crimes, by exposing the ideological underpinnings that underpinned atrocities such as these. But it differs from Holocaust literature in two important respects. Nazi war atrocities were followed immediately by the Nuremberg Trials. During these trials, the details of the concentration camp system were published widely throughout the West, and the crimes against victims were detailed through the testimony of witnesses and also documented with corroborative evidence, especially through displays of photographs and films from the Allies' liberation of the camps. The first round of prosecution set up the climate in which many later kinds of legal actions have been possible. This was work, therefore, that art did not have to do later.

But in the absence of any such attention to or punishment for the "comfort system" at the Tokyo War Crimes Tribunal, which followed the end of World War II, the field of representation has had to assume the burden of documenting and indicting in retrospect. As well as reviewing the past, "comfort women" literature—from lithographs to fiction—has, moreover, served the interests of advocacy in the present, placing sympathetic light the survivors' demands for apologies and reparations from an unwashed Japanese government. It has also self-consciously positioned itself as a counterweight to other sorts of representations circulating in Japan, such as school history textbooks, which have been approved by Japanese authorities, despite their erasure of any mention of the "comfort system." "Comfort women" literature, in other words, has had to be propaganda art—a term that I am using not pejoratively, but positively, to acknowledge the work that art can and often must do in the political realm. And unlike Holocaust literature, which until lately has tended to ignore issues of gender and (as Joan Ringelheim found in the 1980s, through her groundbreaking work with women survivors) often refused to acknowledge the experiences of women as in any way different or as worthy of special study, "comfort women" literature has, throughout its more than ten-year development, put questions of gender and of sexism front and center, since the nature of the war crimes was gender-based. "Comfort women" literature has been informed by feminist perspectives on such questions as wartime rape as a crime against humanity and, in many cases, has been driven by the passionate commitment of artists who are themselves feminists. The majority of these activist-artists so far have been Asian or Asian-American, including a number of Japanese women, giving lie to the myth of feminism as a white Western phenomenon, interested only in middle-class, domestic concerns.

REFERENCES


HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN WRONGS

Kathleen Staudt and Iraema Coronado

SUCCESSFUL ENDEAVORS IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS ARENA

In Ciudad Juárez/El Paso there are several organizations that address human rights issues. It is difficult to say that any one of these organizations is a "successful" organization because success in this arena would mean that these organizations would have no need to exist because, ideally, government officials and law enforcement agents would respect...
human rights. One organization is binational, vocal, and has been able to survive amidst great adversity. It is the Asociación de Familiares y Amigos de Personas "Desaparecidas," also known as the Association of Relatives and Friends of "Disappeared" Persons. It is headed by a resident of El Paso, Texas, and was officially founded four years ago. The organization emerged with a couple's disappearance "from the face of the earth" in Ciudad Juarez. The disappeared man's father is a friend of one of the activists/founders of the organization, who is the present co-director of the association. "Well my friend's son was providing listening devices to the federal police, he was helping to catch criminals and it was top secret, but still it was leaked to the cartels and now they are missing." He said that this was the event that brought him into the business of advocating the investigation of the disappeared.

When newspapers and the media started publicizing the disappearance of this young couple, many other people started to come forward with their own stories of disappeared relatives and friends. Relatives and friends of disappeared people indicated that they had negative experiences with the authorities and that they were reluctant to continue pressuring them for information. Under the guise of the war on drugs, authorities attributed disappearances and murders to the ajuste de cuentas (adjustment of an account involving a drug deal). "These people are afraid of the Mexican police and consider the American Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) a dirty agency. The association has 'busted' the DEA. The general in Ciudad Juarez who didn't want to take on the 200 files of adults that have disappeared and over 164 women that have been raped, violated and murdered" according to the association informant.

Under the guise of the "War on Drugs," Mexican law enforcement agents tend to justify actions even if they are gross egressions of a basic human right. In Mexico, there is a growing concern that under the pretense of the war on drugs, people's human rights are being violated and people are afraid to go to the authorities to report crimes or disappearances. In some instances, relatives of disappeared people report that police and law enforcement agents start interrogating them when they report a crime to the authorities.

The power of the authorities to validate or invalidate a crime has strong psychological implications, especially when one attempts to report a crime committed against a son or a daughter and is humiliatingly asked, "what kind of person was your son or daughter?" Imagine the mixed emotions that people experience: on the one hand you loved one has disappeared and on the other hand people are questioning their moral character. People have reported that officials at times have demanded bribes to pursue a case.

The spokesperson for the association of the relatives and friends of the disappeared claimed that: the government of Chihuahua stopped these investigations because they were leading to the young, middle management in the maquila industry that has money and power, and the government does not want to do anything to scare the maquiladoras away. Maquiladoras are making families rich in Ciudad Juarez. If you investigated certain prominent families, you will see that they own much of the land in the city and probably all the way to Chihuahua City.

He went on to add that the government, in the case of the disappearances, does not move investigations forward. They claim that witnesses are afraid and that they do not have clues, so there is nothing that the government can do. According to the spokesperson of this organization, at the time (in the summer of 2001), there were 236 women dead and over 500 executions in Ciudad Juarez that were unresolved. However, public officials make statements such as "Ciudad Juarez is doing ok because Sinaloa has over 2,000 executions." According to the spokesperson for the association, "over 2,200 files have been reported missing from the new district attorney's office."

We are acutely aware of the discrepancies in the number of disappeared people, the number of murdered women, and the incidences of rape; there are various reasons for the discrepancy in the number of crimes. Human rights organizations claim that the authorities want to "keep the numbers" down because of the negative publicity that Ciudad Juarez received both nationally and internationally. Additionally, they believe that many young people come to the border because of the economic hardships in their families, or because they want to leave their homes and do not tell their families where they are going. This leads people to believe that when a young woman disappears in Ciudad Juarez, no one is looking for her because her family may not know her whereabouts. The authorities claim that human rights organizations inflate the figures of the disappeared and the murdered women to make them look bad.

With the discovery of the narco-cemeteries (in a ranch located outside of Ciudad Juarez), many bodies were found buried in a common grave. Initially, the media reported that there were hundreds of bodies (but in the end nine bodies were found) in 1999; this led members of the association to launch a campaign about the deaths. Letters were faxed and sent to local, state, and federal officials in both countries. A local law enforcement officer from El Paso responded to the fax by saying "you know Mexico is another country, and we cannot tell Ciudad Juarez how to run their city. El Paso is ok." During the unearthing of nine bodies in a ranch outside of Ciudad Juarez in 1999, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) was asked to help with the investigation due to the fact that they had expertise and the technical wherewithal for the forensic studies that were needed. The U.S.-Mexican "mass graves" investigation was halted when Mexican politicians and others complained (presumably nationalist Mexicans) that the FBI presence was a violation of Mexico's sovereignty.

Joint binational efforts are at times complicated and difficult to carry out because of the perception that someone is stepping on someone else's toes. Also, the fact that joint efforts are usually a north-south phenomenon, not the other way around, is seen as suspect. How would people in the United States feel if Mexican law enforcement officers were invited into the United States to assist with an investigation? Nevertheless, many Mexicanos welcomed the involvement of the Americans in the investigation because of their mistrust that they have of their own institutions and their ability to conduct investigations honestly and well. During this time, the head of the association sent a fax three times a day to the attorney general in Mexico City until he finally got a response. This activism has had a cost since members of the association have received various death threats. However, membership in the organization continues to grow as more people disappear or are found murdered. Again, an increased membership role is another indicator of success but is that really a good way to measure a successful human rights organization? Membership in this organization is growing because the association has started working with people in Tijuana, Baja California Norte and in Matamoros, Tamaulipas. This organization is organizing vertically along the border.

Membership in this organization is a source of moral support for family members who have lost loved ones. Being able to share one's plight with another person who is similarly situated must be helpful to anyone who experiences this kind of personal tragedy. The support network offered by the association as well as the growing membership
allows for more people to work on this together and make demands of the authorities in unison rather than individually; after all, there is power in numbers. Membership and participation in this organization are very personal and in order to protect people's privacy they are reluctant to publicly publish a member directory.

In Ciudad Juarez, the asociación also has a co-director of this binational organization. She became involved in this struggle in the early 1990s when her brother-in-law, who went out one evening, disappeared. Her work focuses on asking the authorities in Mexico to "help them find" their loved ones, who are both Mexican and American citizens. She states that there are over 198 people who have disappeared in Ciudad Juarez, 22 of whom are U.S. citizens. She was interviewed in the early spring of 2001. According to a member of the asociación, this is an emotional struggle because it is difficult to live with the uncertainty of not knowing if your loved one is dead or alive. "A person cannot disappear from the face of the earth just because something had to happen to these people and logically there has to exist someone who is culpable" said a spokesperson for the asociación. At this point the group's strategy is to ensure that these disappearances, murders, and rapes are investigated. Allegations that the authorities are dragging their feet on the investigations are well documented.

Women's groups nationwide and internationally started to support the efforts of local women's organizations with the launching of the Ni una más (not one more) campaign in 1998. "Before the null response of the State of Chihuahua authorities to finish and resolve the deaths of women in Ciudad Juarez that now number 133 [this was the figure in 1998], the NGOs and feminist movement, ... have launched a national and international campaign: "A parar la lista: Ni una más [Let's stop the list: Not one more]."

An anonymous source from an NGO hired by the government to help out with the investigation of the murdered women stated that she felt that either the investigators needed more experience and training in the investigation of sexually violent crimes or else they were dragging their feet. "When I was asked to come off board I started asking obvious questions regarding basic procedures. At first I thought that they were really naive and inexperienced; it finally dawned on me that they were overlooking the obvious in some instances. At that point, I decided to depart gracefully from the investigation," lamented a highly respected psychologist whom we interviewed.

Activists and family members of victims blame the lack of progress made in the investigations of the disappeared and murdered women on the authorities. Family members of the victims have accused the police of being part of a cover up or protecting someone prominent and wealthy. A famous television show, Circulo Rojo, aired in late November 2001, close to the site where eight women had been found, documented the concerns the victims' families had vis-a-vis the authorities. An aunt of one of the victims stated how she had sent six e-mails to Vicente Fox. "First I asked him to think of his daughters and then I mentioned our concerns and asked him to address the situation by providing more federal resources to the investigation. I have received an acknowledgement that my emails have been received," the woman said on the television show.

In Mexico human rights work is not an easy endeavor. In October 2001, Diana Ochoa y Placido, a human rights attorney in Mexico City, was shot to death at her office. The culprits left behind a message to other human rights defenders that they could meet similar fates. Unfortunately, there have been other human rights workers and journalists who have been threatened or killed in the line of duty. Death threats, assassinations, and kidnappings are deterrents to people who work in the human rights arena in Mexico and preclude people from getting involved in similar work. In Ciudad Juarez, women's issues are of concern to many human rights organizations and have become a focal point for human rights organizations to rally around.

Diana Washington Valdez, a leading reporter on border issues, reported that she had been on the television with a member of Voces Sin Eco (Voices Without Echo), a nongovernmental organization that advocates justice for the more than 300 women who have been killed in Juarez since 1993. (The number of disappeared was provided in 2001.)

The sound quality was unusually poor that day. There were strange and scratching noises in the background. We were on touchy ground. The call went dead immediately at the mention of a National Action Party member who was questioned by police about one of the victims. The line remained "blocked" for three straight days. I could not call that number, and the other party could not call me back.

Various organizations have held rallies in Ciudad Juarez to raise awareness and bring attention to the issue of the disappeared women. Black crosses on pink backgrounds appear on walls, telephone and electricity posts to commemorate the deceased women. In downtown El Paso, there is a mural on the side of a building that this black cross on pink stands out to remind everyone that the plight of these women is a binational concern.

LAS AMIGAS—LOS AMIGOS Y LAS CASAS DE LA FRONTERA

Casa Amiga

In Ciudad Juarez, there is an institution that is helping address the challenges that women face in the community—Casa Amiga (Friendly Home, fem.) has received local, national, and international attention for its work in this arena. Casa Amiga has been able to establish many binational and international linkages throughout the course of its existence.

In 1992 women's raped and mutilated bodies were found in Ciudad Juarez. A group of women came together and formed Grupo 8 de Marzo (the 8th of March Group), named after International Women's Day in order to raise awareness of the crimes and to promote women's rights. In 1996 La Coordinadora de Organismos no Gubernamentales/ The Coordinating Group of NGOs was founded to defend women's rights. The impetus for this organization emanated from a proposed change in article 219 of the Penal Code of the state of Chihuahua, which proposed outlawing abortion.

Members of Grupo 8 de Marzo determined that there was great need for a shelter that would provide women who were victims of crime and sexual abuse (with) support, counseling, and legal assistance to victims. Hence, Casa Amiga opened in 1999 with the help of a CNN reporter, the municipal government, institutions and people from El Paso, Texas, and a few maquilas. Women who have been raped, assaulted, or physically abused can avail themselves of medical assistance, counseling, social services and legal aid at Casa Amiga. There is more demand for their services than what they are able to provide. This help is for victims as well as for their families. Additionally, they give workshops at schools and places of work regarding sexual harassment.

Casa Amiga is only one of four rape crisis centers in Mexico, and the only one in Ciudad Juarez. It has numerous links to organizations in the United States. The Texas attorney general's office agreed to fund the training of rape crisis volunteers; a businesswoman's organization in El Paso donated $5,000 for the printing of needed educational
materials. The El Paso Police Department's Crimes Against Persons Unit has provided training for police officers in Ciudad Juarez. The training involves police officers examining their own views about criminal sexual conduct, then work toward building a new trust between victims and police. Private individuals from El Paso and other communities in the United States send donations to Casa Amiga. A fast-food chain from the United States has also donated money to Casa Amiga. Lots of organizations on both sides of the border support Casa Amiga.

Cross-border activity is common in the health care arena. Organizations that serve women in the United States report that they also have clients that come from Ciudad Juarez. Estimates indicate that one-third of all abortions reported in El Paso are performed on women who come from Mexico. American women also have been known to avail themselves of abortions in Mexico. American women had been traveling to Tijuana for abortions since at least the 1950s.

The work of Casa Amiga and the success that it has had in raising awareness in the community is commendable because of the adversity it faces: hostility from the government, increasing public pressure to stop the community's "dirty laundry," sexist and patriarchal attitudes, limited funding, and an ever-increasing workload. It is important to note that the leadership of Casa Amiga has not gone unnoticed by other groups in the community who have expressed concern that they are monopolizing resources and using the organization.

The challenges that women face in the border region are many. The issues they encounter run the gamut from the legal, criminal, and medical to work-related concerns. Another Casa that is open to help migrants is the Casa del Migrante (House of the Immigrant).

Casa del Migrante
La Casa del Migrante in Ciudad Juarez is one of five homes dedicated to helping immigrants. The other homes are located in Tijuana and on the southern border with Guatemala. La Casa del Migrante is part of a religious organization that was founded by Beato Juan Bautista Scalabrini in 1987 to provide services to immigrants and refugees. A Catholic priest runs La Casa del Migrante in Ciudad Juarez.

This home provides shelter, food, clothing, medical services, and spiritual guidance to people who have left their place of origin to seek a better life, either within Mexico or abroad. Many of those seeking services at the Casa del Migrante, deported from the United States, are victims of discrimination and abuse. The house has been in existence for 11 years in Ciudad Juarez and has never been closed "thanks in part to institutions and people of good will and heart."10

Casa del Migrante also has ties with a binational group, "Solidaridad Fronteriza" (Border Solidarity), which is also a religious organization in El Paso and Ciudad Juarez. Casa del Migrante also works with other border communities to collaborate on information sharing, for example, in Nogales, Tucson, and Douglas, Arizona. Again, this is an example of linking border people.

The priest who runs Casa del Migrante never misses an opportunity to raise people's awareness to the plight of immigrants. Whether it is a public hearing or a meeting, he always welcomes the opportunity to share the Casa's mission with others and to elaborate on the roots causes of migration. He feels that U.S. organizations have more technical know-how, economic resources, and legal staff to work with immigrants. In Mexico, many of the human rights organizations rely on volunteers; in the United States, there are paid staff, attorneys, and other professionals who can help the cause of immigrants. In Mexico, that is not the case.

Casa del Migrante provides services to approximately 250–300 people a month. They are always seeking to collaborate with other organizations to bring about social justice on the border when dealing with issues of immigration, access to water and other environmental issues, and in raising wages in the maquiladora industry. According to the priest at Casa del Migrante "la division fronteriza es teorica" (the border exists only in theory). This organization is a friend to the immigrant, regardless of where they come from or where they are going. Other friends of immigrants also exist in the region.

American Friends Service Committee
The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), through their U.S.-Mexico Border Program (USMBP), works to end human and civil rights abuses in the region. This is a purposive and religious organization that also works nationally and internationally. The American Friends work to link border residents vertically as well. Throughout the region, the American Friends have offices, staff, and programs from San Diego/Tijuana to Brownsville/Matamoros. They monitor and document abuses and work together with a network of local human and civil rights organizations on both sides of the border. Human rights violations occur on both sides of the border. In Mexico, coyotes (people who smuggle people into the United States for a fee), drug dealers, law enforcement officers, and bandidos (Mexicans who prey on migrants in Mexico, desperate to cross into the United States); all have been known to violate people's rights. Reports of robbery, rape, and assault have been documented in many areas. Unscrupulous coyotes offer their services to help unsuspecting migrants enter the United States and then abandon them either in the middle of the desert or in the back of a rented truck without water or food. Coyotes and bandidos are some of the main culprits in the human rights arena.

The AFSC/USMBP has more resources available to them when compared with organizations in Mexico. Their modus operandi is also multifaceted; they work within the legal system, through educational outreach efforts and in the development of policy. The AFSC/USMBP files complaints on behalf of the migrants, secures legal representation, and increases public awareness of human and civil rights violations. Additionally, they monitor immigration law enforcement practices and make recommendations on policy to representatives of both the United States and Mexico. Their binational work is easily carried out because many of their staff are bilingual and bicultural. A staff person of the AFSC explained how she was able to work both sides of the fence so to speak on this issue:

I can work both sides on these issues. When I testify before the U.S. Congress I exclaim, "As an American citizen, I am deeply troubled by what we are witnessing in the border region in terms of senseless deaths." And when I testify in Mexico, I also exclaim "Nosotros los Mexicanos, merecemos un trato digno ..." (We Mexicans deserve to be treated with dignity).

—Staff Member of AFSC

The work of this organization has had a profound effect in the human rights arena throughout the border region in raising the human rights issue in a binational context.
and in educating the public at large about these issues. Irasema has witnessed how people in border communities leave meetings where AFSC personnel have spoken: Participants leave with a new awareness and an increased sense of community self-esteem, a sense of empowerment just because their rights have been reaffirmed.

NOTES

1. The number of disappeared women varies depending on the source and the time frame that we conducted interviews. Hence, the discrepancy in the figures.
5. Again, the inconsistency in reported number of disappeared women from another source.
8. Ibid.

WHAT, THEN, IS TO BE DONE?

Cross-border organizing is a daunting prospect. We celebrate its emergence and sustenance, for more factors block it than facilitate it. As the book and our brief summary show, cross-border organizing is possible and concrete outcomes are achievable. It can grow, strengthen, and deepen through collaborative work. But these collaborations need to occur across borders: institutional, territorial, and cultural; they need to span the local and the global to combine strong and weak ties, including the resources and networks that come with weak ties. Without growth in cross-border organizing, the power and authority of business and commerce in the officially sanctioned regional and globalized economy will overwhelm civic capacity. If global NGOs are to have real legitimacy beyond consciousness-raising, electronic lobbies and protests, they must be grounded in real people and personal ties.

We extract kernels of wisdom from the analysis and list them below as strategies for change. These strategies contain equally profound implications at the national, regional, and international levels at the levels of policy and law.

• Relevant both to NGOs and official institutions, we urge people to conceptualize interdependent and integrated regions and communities while acknowledg
• NGOs and businesses should work together to encourage employment standards, as did some employers under apartheid in South Africa with Sullivan guidelines. Transnational standards should be adopted and enforced within governments as well.
• Global NGOs should ground their loose networking with strong personal ties at borderlands. Listservs that claim a global reach should sort names and contacts by geographic region to facilitate local contacts and personal relationship building.
• Portable insurance should be available to citizens and noncitizens with preferred provider lists to ensure quality and accountability of healthcare.
• Human rights agreements should be developed and elevated to the levels of La Paz (environmental) and NAFTA (trade) agreements in terms of their enforcement authority.
• Immigration law enforcement should take family unification seriously, including people without the wherewithal and resources for expensive lawyers.
• Crimes against people should be elevated to the level of drug crimes. The murdered girls and women deserve cross-national attention from local police and national investigation agencies.
• National agencies would do well to utilize one office or department to deal with border issues rather than fragment efforts within a single organization.
• Borderlanders deserve “living wages” with health benefits. Poverty and its special bordered dimensions also need attention. Living wages would go a long way in reducing poverty at the border.

The U.S.-Mexico borderlands are now visible to the national heartlands and to North America as a whole. Power relations between the border and the interior, and between the more and less privileged, must change with the move toward social justice. North American institutional shrouds, coupled with strong, cross-border NGOs, provide the framework in which to address problems with the environment, living wages, and human rights. The North American Union (NAU) is an imagined future, but we can seize the structures of opportunity to begin building the bridges and transcending the divisions to act on common interests now.

**CROSSING THE LINES:**
**WOMEN’S ORGANIZATIONS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTIONS**

*Shelley Anderson*

Women’s organizations are playing an increasingly important role in nonviolent conflict resolution. They are frequently the first to take the risks necessary to promote dialogue across divided communities and move towards reconciliation. This work includes local initiatives which often involve an income generating component. One example is a café and pastry shop women have organized in an ethnically divided town Bosnia-Herzegovina. Situated on the unofficial border that separates the two communities, the café and pastry shop is the only safe place within miles where members from different communities can meet and talk with each other. It was started by Croat, Serb a Bosnian women together as a way to both provide employment for women and to heal ethnic enmity. The women also collect the names and addresses of possible return from the “wrong” ethnic group, and help provide returns with practical necessities such as tools and milk cows (Cockburn, forthcoming).

Women’s work for dialogue also reaches to the highest political levels. The Northern Ireland Women’s Coalition (NIWC), after mobilizing broad cross-community support, played a key role in the talks leading up to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. a conducted a successful door-to-door election campaign that sent two members to the Northern Ireland Assembly. In a radical departure from partisan politics, the NIWC insisted that a stand on issues such as a constitution for Northern Ireland, emphasis instead the need for inclusive dialogue and decision-making (Fearon, 1999).

The Liberian Women’s Initiative (LWI) likewise helped to transform a previous male-dominated political process by demanding a voice at the 1994 Accra Clarificatory Conference. By insisting that all parties disarm before the election, by publishing lists of women qualified to take up positions in government ministries if appointed, and conducting an energetic voter education programme that emphasized the need for women to be actively involved in peace-building, the LWI helped build stability and peace in Liberia. LWI’s efforts also laid the groundwork for a founding LWI member, Ruth Per to be elected as Liberia’s head of state (Fearon, 2000).

Several common understandings—and paradoxes—inform the work of all groups. The first understanding is the necessity of involving as many ordinary people possible in building peace. For peace to be sustainable, peace processes and reconstructions must be owned by the communities involved. Women’s engagement in such processes is especially critical. Women’s political marginalization paradoxically often provides them a wider space for peace-building. Women’s motivation in becoming involved in peace-building often stems from, or is perceived as, the desire or need to provide for their family, especially children. This concern for their family gives many women the permission to enter formerly forbidden male political territory. Because of their previous marginalized position, women may be perceived as outside the influence of a conflict major stakeholders. This means that women’s peace-making initiatives may be trusted more by a community than those of peace-makers coming from the political elite. Ang E.V. King, Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women to the United Nations, pointed out some of these perceptions in analysing the role of women in the United Nations Observer Mission in South Africa (UNOMSZA), in which she served as Chief of Mission. While she writes of foreign women in the role of observers, women inside a particular community may also be perceived in the same way.

The presence of women seems to be a potent ingredient in fostering and maintaining confidence and trust among the local population. In performing their tasks with male colleagues, women were perceived to be more compassionate, less threatening, insistent on status, less willing to opt for force or confrontation over reconciliation, even it is said less egocentric, more willing to listen and learn—though not always—a