

THE WATCHDOG

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EDITORIAL WEDNESDAY

Many people in this World – in fact a majority of us – belong to one or more groups being subject to structural oppression. This is because so few of us fit in the norms that stipulate the hierarchies in our societies, our states and our World. On top of the ladder we find heterosexual (or at least they are promoted as heterosexual) white men, like US President George Bush, Catholic Pope Benedict XVI and Microsoft CEO Steve Balmer. It is clear that these people control a vastly disproportional share of the power over Earth. Their decisions to act or not to act affect billions of people, most of them being something else than white men with a heterosexual identity.

Because they have this unjust share of power and because they exercise it in an oppressive manner we must claim our fair share, on our own terms. Us people of colour, us people with disabilities, us women, us LGBTI people, us working class people and us young people must be able to see through our differences and act with a common, inclusive agenda. In order to do this we must, as with all activism, start with ourselves and eliminate our own sexism, ableism, racism, homophobia, classism and ageism – indeed a daunting task but in the light of what we are facing a minor prerequisite. Eradicating our prejudices towards one another is not a strategy, it's our responsibility.

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youth coalition

Working Internationally for Sexual and Reproductive Rights

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The Youth Forum's hardworking Interpreters

Meet our translators!!!

Maria "Maru" Miranda

Rodrigo and Bernardo are the Spanish-English and English-Spanish translators. They are both from Argentina and just graduated from International Affairs at Di Tella University.

Silvina and Jean are the Spanish-French and French-Spanish translators. Silvina is 25, she is graduated in literature and she is a teacher of French and Spanish for foreigners. Jean was born in France and has been living in Argentina for one year.

Amaury and Marie-Noele are the French-English and English-French translators and both are from France. Amaury is 22 years old and he came to Argentina eight months ago for a university exchange. He will soon graduate from economics. Marie-Naile arrived to the country two weeks ago and she will stay here for one year. She has just finished her master in Finance.



ABORTION RIGHTS IN POLAND

Anna Grzywacz

As young women living in Poland under the current abortion law, my friends and I are almost religious in our use of contraceptives. I have never missed my pill because of the possibility of having an abortion in a country where it is illegal. That scenario frightens me. The Polish law on abortion is very strict. It is possible for a woman to have the procedure when her health is in danger, when the foetus is damaged or in case of rape. In reality, even in these cases the termination of pregnancy may be impossible. This happened to a mother of two who has been denied the right to have an abortion on the grounds of serious medical problems with her sight. She gave birth to the third child and as a result she became half blind and incapable of taking care of her children. With the help from the Federation for Women and Family Planning she took the case to the European Court in Strasbourg.

Polish doctors refuse to perform abortions for a variety of reasons. Most of them hide behind the conscious clause in order not to get involved in any controversy. Furthermore, a large group of doctors are hypocrites. They will not perform the procedure, even when it's legal, but they'll do it illegally for a large sum of money in their private practise.

The costs for underground abortions exceed the average wage in Poland, the price might be equivalent even to two or three times a month's earning. In other words, women pay the price for the shameful behaviour of certain doctors. Sometimes these women pay with their lives. In September 2004 a young woman, first time pregnant, died because the doctor refused to perform a medical examination that would put her at a small risk for miscarriage. The badge I'm wearing with my bag says "77% of anti-abortion leaders are men. 100% of them will never be pregnant." This is a sad comment on the situation in Poland. In March the Polish Parliament (with a majority of male MPs) voted to postpone the measure to liberalise the existing law. Apparently they believe that the current regulations are efficient. 40 million people live in Poland and about 150 legal abortions are performed each year. What the MPs fail to see is the number of illegal procedures, estimated at 200 000 per year. 57% of Polish citizens support the woman's right to a legal abortion.

I am here at this Youth Forum to gain advocacy skills and use them in further fight for changing the legal system. Soon it might be an even harder struggle because the conservatives are strong candidates for prevailing in the upcoming Presidency and Parliamentary elections. I am here because I refuse to live in constant fear of going through the hell of an underground abortion. I refuse to be denied the access to abortion because my country has a low birth rate.

I am not a statistical indicator.

I am a human being.

EDITORIAL MIÉRCOLES

Muchas personas en este mundo -de hecho la mayoría de nosotros/as- pertenecemos a uno o más grupos que están sujetos a una opresión estructural. Esto se da porque pocos/as de nosotros/as encajamos en las normas que estipulan las jerarquías en nuestras sociedades, nuestros estados y nuestro mundo. En la punta de la pirámide encontramos a los hombres blancos heterosexuales (o al menos a los que se declaran como homosexuales), como el presidente de Estados Unidos de América, George Bush, el Papa Benedicto XVI y el Presidente de Microsoft Steve Balmer. Está claro que estas personas controlan un vasto y desproporcional porcentaje del poder sobre la tierra. Sus decisiones afectan a millones de personas, la mayoría de las cuales son diferentes a los hombres blancos con identidad heterosexual.

Dado que poseen esta injusta proporción de poder, y dado que ejercitan este poder de una manera opresiva, debemos reclamar por nuestra porción, bajo nuestros propios términos. Nosotros y nosotras, personas de color, personas con discapacidades, mujeres, personas del movimiento LGBTI, personas de la clase trabajadora, y personas jóvenes debemos ser capaces de ver a través de nuestras diferencias y actuar con una agenda común e incluyente. Para realizar esto debemos, con todo el activismo junto, comenzar con nosotros/as mismos/as y eliminar nuestro propio sexismo, racismo, homofobia y clasismo -de hecho es una tarea no muy común, pero por lo que estamos viviendo, es un prerrequisito menor.

Eradicar nuestros prejuicios hacia los/as demás no es una estrategia. Es nuestra responsabilidad.

ÉDITORIAL MERCREDI

Plusieurs personnes dans le monde, en fait la majorité d'entre nous, appartenons à un ou plusieurs groupes vivant des oppressions structurelles. Ceci parce que certains d'entre nous ne rentrent pas dans les normes qui émergent des hiérarchies de nos sociétés, de nos états ou de notre monde. Au sommet de l'échelle sociale, nous trouvons des hommes blancs hétérosexuels (ou du moins ils en font la promotion) tel que le président Bush, le Pape catholique Benoît XVI et Steve Balmer le président de Microsoft. Il est clair que ces gens contrôlent une vaste partie, inéquitement distribuée, du pouvoir de la planète. Leurs décisions d'agir ou non affectent des milliards de personnes, la plupart de ces personnes ne sont pas des hommes blancs avec une identité hétérosexuelle.

Étant donné cette manière injuste de partager le pouvoir et les systèmes d'oppression qui en résulte, nous devons réclamer des échanges justes dans nos propres termes. Nous les gens de couleur, nous les personnes handicapées, nous les femmes, nous les personnes LGBTI, nous les gens de la classe ouvrière, et nous les jeunes devons être capable de voir à travers nos différences et agir avec un agenda inclusif et commun. Pour ce faire nous devons, comme nous sommes tous des activistes, commencer par nous-même et éliminer notre propre sexisme, discrimination envers les personnes handicapées, racisme, homophobie, discrimination de classe sociale et âgisme. En fait, une lourde tâche, mais essentielle pour atteindre pas à pas nos objectifs. Enrayer nos préjugés par rapport aux autres n'est pas une stratégie mais une responsabilité.



Getting Down and Dirty!!!

Participants working hard on the issues!!



AFRICA: The Misunderstood Land.

Edford Mutuma

"No, Africa is not a country"; "Yes, we do have cars"; "Not everyone lives in mud huts";

"Yes, Charlize Theron and Dave Matthews are real Africans"

Welcome to a day in the life of an African living in the Abroad! Over the years, an abundance of these and many other shockingly ignorant and bewildering questions have led me to ask myself, why is Africa so grossly misrepresented in the USA?

When Will Smith returned from filming Ali in 2001, he went on American TV and explained how he felt duped and misinformed when, upon arriving at Jan Smuts's airport, he found that the Africa he had been taught in school and seen on TV was NOTHING like what he had come to experience first hand.

Like Smith, many westerners who do finally set foot in Africa, fall head over heels in love with her beauty, hospitality, and splendour, and most continue to return. "A piece of your soul stays in Africa", explains Michael, an Attorney in Atlanta, Georgia.

As many Africans in the abroad will tell you, we often find ourselves going on the defensive, trying to speak up on behalf of a continent which, though burdened by its fair share of turmoil and strife, is by far the most beautiful and spiritual places on earth. We have found ourselves indignantly whipping out photo albums to show them our beautiful lush homes, our hypnotic Jacaranda trees, the awe-inspiring Table mountain and the majestic Victoria Falls. Many Africans find themselves having to explain certain attributes about themselves, as if being African renders them unworthy of these qualities. A close Zimbabwean friend of mine was recently branded a pariah in his workplace after an exchange he had with one of his new African American compadres, "You're from Africa? Wow, I am surprised you speak such good English!" the American quipped. To which my proud friend retorted, "I am surprised you speak proper English too!"

Another South African acquaintance found he had to prove he is a 'real' African simply because he is white. Frustrated by these and many other incidents, I set out on a quest to unravel this mystery and get to the bottom of this misinformation. Surely we cannot lay all blame at the foot of the mass media machine...or can we? Over the course of a week, I took to the streets and randomly picked 10 Americans from different walks of life and asked them each 4 simple questions:

1. What 2 words spring to mind when you hear the name Africa?
2. Name 5 African countries
3. Name 2 positive things you associate with Africa
4. Would you ever visit Africa? If not, why?

What I unearthed was a vacuous, narrow-minded viewpoint which left me even more baffled than I was going in. All 10 of my respondents named AIDS as the word that immediately sprung to mind when they thought of Africa. The other common words were: civil war, famine, female genital mutilation, Mandela, slave trade and wild animals. When it came to naming countries, the most common were Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa, Nigeria and Liberia, (sprinkled with a misguided Guyana here and Chile there!). Most struggled to name 10. The positive (surely something good has come out of Africa!) they thought, were; the Lion King (I'm serious!), Ancient Egypt, Mt Kilimanjaro, preservation of wildlife, and the beautiful African women. One "enlightened" African American actually said (to my face), that slavery was a positive thing because without it, he'd still be living in Africa "without running water or toilets". The majority were nonchalant about visiting Africa, with several saying that despite Africa's strife, they consider a visit to Africa to be a pilgrimage which every black person should make at least once in their lives. Honestly, I was hurt! I felt as if they had insulted my family. I wanted to tell each one of them how sad and misguided they were...how disappointing it was that they saw the world through such short-sighted lenses. How infuriating it was that people in Africa strive to emulate the American culture and idolize American celebrities, yet they in turn could not look past a biased news report, documentary or "Save the Children" food

(Africa the Misunderstood Land, Continued on page 5)

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drive, complete with fly infested, snotty nosed, malnourished babies.

But then something dawned on me...WHOSE RESPONSIBILITY IS IT TO REPRESENT AFRICA?

I realized that as long as we allow other people to tell our stories and comment on our issues, we shall forever be branded and placed into a box which best suits them.

I cannot be angry at these people, it's not their fault. Because too few of us have stepped forward and tried to tell our positive, inspiring and diverse stories we have been relegated to the notions and opinions of someone else.

Once I realized that I had the power to change the negative perception of Africa, I felt positive and empowered, and hopeful that one day the world would come to view Africa, and Africans as the multi-dimensional and majestic people that they are.

If you feel the same way I do, please pass on this article to as many colleagues, friends, family, workmates as possible. You will have done a service to this beautiful continent.

LONG LIVE AFRICA!!

SEXUALITY EDUCATION AND POLITICS IN LEBANON

Catherine Nemr

I'm a young woman from Lebanon, one of the Arab countries. I spent 19 hours reaching Argentina to attend the Youth Forum and I'm very happy to have this chance. In Arab countries we face many barriers and challenges regarding sexuality education in schools in terms of traditions, values and religion. I would like to tell you about our experiences in Lebanon. Since the year 2000 we have officially started with sexuality education in schools. It is mentioned in the curriculum for secondary level. My association has been talking about sexuality education since 1980 and after a long fight and hard work in collaboration with the Ministry, UN agencies and non-governmental organisations we have realized our goal.

We have many programs specifically for youth, we organise a peer-education training course for young people whom then go out in schools and educate students on STDs, SRHR, HIV/AIDS and drugs. We also have special activities for university students. Our volunteers are divided in 8 regions in Lebanon. It's challenging because many young people don't believe in their SRHR and some even refuse the idea from the beginning. Another challenge is that political decision-makers don't care at all about these issues. Furthermore there is bureaucracy in the Ministry and many employees act on their own beliefs.

Finally I would like to say that I'm really lucky to participate in this forum, to have a chance to share experience and to learn from other's experiences because as well I sometimes need power to fight against risk faced youth.



A Tour Through Old Buenos Aires
Tuesday guided tour of La Boca left many with a better understanding of the city's history.



Mortalidad materna en Argentina: falta decisión política para erradicarla

María "Maru" Miranda

La primera causa de mortalidad materna en Argentina corresponde a las muertes que se producen por complicaciones causadas por los abortos mal practicados.

En Argentina, se practican cerca de 500.000 abortos por año. El aborto aquí es ilegal y muchas mujeres deben recurrir a una práctica clandestina cuando quieren interrumpir un embarazo.

Muchas de las mujeres que concurren a hospitales o centros de salud para ser atendidas por complicaciones surgidas de los abortos clandestinos, no son bien atendidas. Algunos profesionales de la salud las culpan del sufrimiento que están padeciendo, o se niegan a atenderlas dado que, al estar en contra del aborto, no están de acuerdo con atender a pacientes que hayan tenido complicaciones por haber accedido a esta práctica.

Los abortos clandestinos no suelen realizarse en condiciones adecuadas de higiene y sanidad, y muchas veces afectan a la salud de la mujer pudiendo derivar incluso en la muerte.

Uno de los Objetivos de Milenio tiene que ver específicamente con la reducción de la mortalidad materna, y Argentina es uno de los tantos países que firmó la Declaración del Milenio en el año 2000, pero desde entonces no se han visto importantes avances en un plan concreto de reducción de la mortalidad materna, si bien se sabe perfectamente sus causas, y se sabe que son evitables.

Health Is Not a Human Right in the United States

Joya Banerjee

The United States of America is often mistakenly viewed as a bastion of modern technology, luxury, and privilege. My personal truth is that the wealth disparity created by a ruthless capitalist system that disregards basic human necessities in the relentless quest for wealth, denies me of a right that almost all other developed nations take for granted: affordable, quality health care.

I am a 23 year old living in New York with the privilege of an above average income and education. However, for many recent graduates from undergraduate university such as myself, stable and secure employment is difficult to come by. As a Consultant, I am not entitled to benefits such as health care or any leave including sick leave.

Were I to purchase the least expensive health care in my state, it would amount to more than one-fifth of my monthly income after taxes. Welfare health programs are not available to me as my income level surpasses the maximum requirement. Last month I ran out of birth control pills and the cost of the medical exam required to obtain a prescription plus the cost of the pills is \$215 USD. The situation in the US is such that even the middle class has great difficulty in accessing the most basic social services.

Even when a US citizen does have access to health care and prescription drug coverage, access to contraceptives and reproductive health care is extremely limited. Many health care programs including some of federal government employees do not cover birth control pills. 83% of US counties do not have one single abortion provider, and some forms of safe abortion have been made illegal by the Bush Administration.

In only the second time in 5 year the Food and Drug Administration panel reviewing the over-the-counter Emergency Contraceptive pill denied women the right to prevent unwanted pregnancies and to reduce the need for abortions, especially unsafe or "coat hanger" abortions, still quite common, especially among young, poor women. In some states, pharmacists have the legal right to refuse to fill prescriptions for Emergency Contraception and even birth control pills, because according to their religious beliefs contraception is against the will of the Christian God. This is a belief that they have the right to impose of others, regardless of the supposed separation of church and state, one of the founding principles of my country.

The imposition of religion and patriarchal fundamentalism against women's human right to sexual and reproductive health care makes the United States' claims about human rights and democracy laughable, especially when such issues are given as the justification for illegal wars overseas. Men in power in the United States are more concerned with keeping women pregnant and subjugated than they are with the millions of innocent people dying all over the world and in our own country from preventable, and treatable diseases, from hunger, and from war and conflict.

Articles in The Watchdog express the views of the individual authors and not of the Youth Coalition.