

Committee
On
US
Latin
American
Relations

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Winter 1994

Revolutionary Poet



A Conversation With Gioconda Belli

IN THIS ISSUE

- Eyewitness in Haiti...3
- The United States and the Cuban Revolution...4
- A Day in the Life of a Cuban Student...6
- Redefining the Salvadoran Left...8
- Banning Food as a Weapon of War...9
- Jennifer Harbury's Guatemalan Earthquake...12
- Interview with Gioconda Belli...13
- Blaming It All On "Illegal Aliens"...16
- Book Reviews...17

Editorial:

Retrain the CIA

Lost in the current debate about the role the United States should play in Haiti is a an honest look at how our government has been part of the problem. CUSLAR is outraged by recent reports that the Central Intelligence Agency has been actively involved in supporting and funding the most brutal and reactionary elements in Haiti.

According to a recent New York Times article, the CIA has had "strong links to the military and its establishment supporters." The chief CIA analyst for the region, Bryan Littell, has made inaccurate and slanderous remarks about President Aristide based on information given by the Haitian military officers who later overthrew him. Mr. Littell also heaped praise on coup leader Raoul Cedras, calling him a "democratically promising" officer.

More alarmingly, the CIA gave the Haitian Army hierarchy millions of dollars in cash and computer equipment to fight drug trafficking. The money and equipment was later used by the Army for their own drug trafficking operations and to more effectively torture and assassinate political opponents.

There is also mounting evidence that the CIA was supporting and funding the FRAPH, the brutal paramilitary organization responsible for the rape and murder of thousands of innocent civilians.

By promoting and funding the most vile and anti-democratic elements in Haitian society, the CIA has had a central role in destabilizing the regime of President Aristide, leading to the murder of thousands of Haitians and the occupation of the country by the United States.

It's time for Congress to call hearings on the CIA's role in Haiti and to block the CIA's current plans for more covert operations there. The CIA must be told that it will be held accountable for spending taxpayer's money to destabilize democratic regimes and promoting human rights abuses. **-D.F.**

The Committee on U.S./Latin American Relations (CUSLAR) is a Cornell University based group, founded in 1965, which seeks to promote a greater understanding of Latin America and the Caribbean. The members of CUSLAR are a diverse group of people united in our concern about the role of the U.S. in the social, political, and economic affairs of the region. Within this context we support the right of the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to self determination, and support their efforts to free themselves from a legacy of colonialism, exploitation, and oppression. CUSLAR works for peace, justice, and greater mutual understanding in U.S./Latin American relations through education, solidarity and support of human rights.

If you are interested in writing or editing the Newsletter, please call the CUSLAR office at (607) 255-7293. Articles and letters to the editor should be sent to: CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY 14853.

The CUSLAR Newsletter is partially funded by the SAFC of Cornell University. The content does not necessarily reflect the views and opinions of the SAFC or Cornell University.

Editorial committee:

Francis Adams, Daniel Fireside, Jill Goetz, Lisa Rivera and Andréa Rubio

Layout:

Daniel Fireside

Advertising Coordinator:

Erin Sheehan

© 1994

Eyewitness in Haiti

By Ed Kinane

Editor's note: Between October 11 and 21, 1994, Syracuse peace activist Ed Kinane joined a delegation of human rights observers in Haiti organized by Witness for Peace. The following is a summary of a report he filed when he returned to the United States.

In mid-October, against the backdrop of a massive U.S. military occupation, our seven-person delegation was privileged to share with the Haitian people a pivotal event: General Cedras' flight into opulent exile (via a U.S. jet) and the long-delayed return of their democratically elected president, Jean Bertrand Aristide (again, via a U.S. jet).

US/Haiti policy- An outline:

1804 — Haitian slaves defeat Napoleon's army and win independence. The United States, a major slave-holder, refuses to recognize Haitian independence until 1862.

1849-1913 — U.S. gunboats sent to Haiti to assert U.S. business interests in 1849, '51, '57, '58, '65, '66, '67, '68, '69, '76, '88, '91, '92, 1902, '03, '04, '05, '06, '07, '08, '09, '11, '12, and '13.

1915-1934 — U.S. Marines occupy Haiti. Thousands of resisting peasants killed. U.S. imposes constitution; disarms Haitian people; reestablishes forced labor (corvee); arms, trains, finances and centralizes Haitian National Guard. During the same period the U.S. also intervenes militarily in Cuba, Panama, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the

As activists who have followed the Haiti crisis since at least the 1991 coup, we have been deeply dismayed by U.S. policy toward Haiti. Throughout our interviews during our week in Port-au-Prince we sought to discern the attitudes of both Haitians and Americans toward the U.S. presence and U.S. policy. We were particularly attentive to the following issues: disarming the military and their attachés, training of future police and military, implications of economic aid strategies, prospects for building Haitian democracy, and the need for justice and reparations after three years of terror.

We credit the Haitian people and the rank and file of U.S. soldiers for the lack of violence

that has generally prevailed during this occupation. **The Haitians we spoke to seemed to view the U.S. presence as positive or, more accurately, as a necessary evil, at least for now.** Many said they hoped the occupying force would be able to leave soon.

We were struck by the courtesy and professionalism of the many U.S. soldiers we met. They, like ourselves, were strongly affected by the warmth and dignity of the Haitian people. One of our delegates, in an ironic allusion to the Vietnam War era, noted that the Haitian people seem to be "winning the hearts and minds of the U.S. soldiers."

Continued on pg. 20

Dominican Republic.

1957-1986 — U.S. helps bankroll dictators Papa Doc and Baby Doc Duvalier.

1980s-'90s — Haitian officers train at Ft. Benning, Georgia, and— according to *The New York Times*— go on the CIA payroll.

Feb '91 — Fr. Jean Bertrand Aristide, a Catholic priest, becomes President, having won a landslide victory over the U.S.-sponsored candidate.

Mar '91 — AID, the US development agency, spends \$26 million to oppose Aristide's proposal to raise the minimum wage from 14 cents an hour. Such a raise would cut profits of assembly plants owned by U.S. companies and could set a "bad" example throughout the Caribbean and Latin America.

Sept '91 — Above mentioned Haitian officers **depose Aristide.** According to *Time* magazine the

CIA knew about the coup beforehand.

'91-'94 — The *de facto* regime, headed by Generals Cedras and Biampy and Police Chief Francios, kills thousands of Aristide supporters. The Bush and Clinton administrations defy international law by repatriating thousands of Haitian boat people seeking political asylum.

'93-'94 — CIA wages disinformation campaign against Aristide. Porous international embargo enriches Haitian military. U.S. pressures Aristide to make compromises with Haitian military.

Oct '94 — U.S. occupies Haiti; detains few human rights abusers; refrains from active campaign to disarm thugs opposed to Aristide.

-E.K.

The United States and the Cuban Revolution -- An Update

By Jules R. Benjamin

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 left Cuba in an extremely vulnerable position. Cuba's prime trading partner, along with the Socialist Bloc, and principal source of technical, economic and military assistance had disappeared. For most regimes, this would have been a fatal blow. Yet despite massive economic decline and ideological disorientation, despite the efforts of Washington and the Cuban exile lobby, the regime is still in place.

It is instructive to compare Cuba's experience over the last five years with that of Latin America in general. Much of Latin America is undergoing yet another painful economic restructuring (this time in a neoliberal direction) combined with a return to elected leadership after a long period of either dictatorship or civil war. In some ways, Cuba appears to be dealing with its own economic and political reorientation with less difficulty. While Cuba is experiencing the reappearance of an economic underclass and while much of its industrial sector is at a standstill, Havana is not experiencing the high levels of political and criminal violence that now makes life in most large Latin American cities literally a struggle for existence. There are no riots over the rising cost of public services, no death squads roaming the streets, no

murders of homeless children, no daily doses of life-limiting pollution. Moreover, several of the largest and most industrialized Latin American nations (Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Mexico) have undergone an economic restructuring that has placed a large percentage of their population on the margin of existence. [Current statistics on the percentage of people living below the poverty line reflect this reality: Mexico 38%, Brazil 29%, Peru 43%, Colombia 42%, Argentina 19%.] Finally, the inability of the electoral systems of these nations to produce leadership that can gain control of the process of economic restructuring has led to a political bankruptcy as serious as the one facing many local producers. Indeed, in many

instances, the principal threat to the elected regimes in Latin America is not so much their incompetence or complacency but their direct complicity in the seamy side of the economic reorientation. Quite simply, corruption—always an important factor in Latin American politics—has reached new levels and, especially in nations connected to the drug trade, has become inseparable from traditional business arrangements.

While the media in some Latin American countries is able to uncover and disseminate the picture of starvation, brutality and corruption, there is no independent media in Cuba. Despite its lack of pluralism, however, outside sources seem to agree that the Cuban regime has, at least until recently, been free of the corruption now ravaging

Benjamin is a professor of history at Ithaca College.



Low
11.5%
Annual Percentage Rate

Always at your service.

The Alternatives Visa Card works for you and your community. You get the benefits of a Visa card at minimal cost while investing in the Alternatives Credit Union. Your Credit Union, in turn, invests responsibly in this community. \$20 annual fee.

Now, with your new Alternatives Visa Card, receive a free ceramic mug featuring our Alternatives Visa Card logo.

301 W. State St., Ithaca • 273-4666

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Latin America. Certainly nothing approaching the takeover of large sectors of the economy and the judicial apparatus by drug lords (as in Colombia) has occurred in Cuba.

In the final analysis, several things are clear. The economic collapse of the trading bloc to which it belonged has dealt the Cuban economy a very hard blow. The "restructuring" efforts of the Cuban government may not protect the great economic and social achievements of the Revolution. For better or worse, its state-run economy and its socialist ideology are becoming hollow shells. Still, by comparison with the lamentable state of Latin American nations that did not suffer in any direct way from the collapse of the socialist bloc, Cuba is, despite continued prophecies of doom, still on its feet.

None of this makes Washington happy. It views Latin America as a region which has finally broken with its statist and militarist past and which is well on the way to democracy and free market capitalism. No one on the Potomac seems to notice all the bodies on the streets of Medellin, Cali, and Bogota, Salvador and Belem, Lima and Callao, Tijuana and San Cristobal de las Casas. The Clinton administration still finds the time to denounce the jailing of human rights activists in Havana and to tighten the economic embargo on the island's devastated economy. The continued "disappearance" or murder of human rights activists and political opponents in Guatemala or Bolivia or the murder of opposition candidates in Colombia or El Salvador do not cloud Washington's rosy view about rising "bourgeois values" south of the border.

Continuing the thirty-five year program of hostility toward Cuba will only further roil the

waters of the Caribbean. The Clinton administration claims to have brought "democracy" to Haiti. However, it is quite clear that Jean Bertrand Aristide will not be allowed to make significant changes to the unjust social structure of the island. Both policies reflect the U.S. policy makers' worldview in which dark-skinned people must stay in the Third World where they belong if we give them the kinds of governments and economic systems we think they should have. Castro's opponents were regularly wine and dined during the Nixon, Reagan and Bush administrations. This has changed little with a democrat in the White House. The exile lobby continues to exercise considerable influence over American policy toward Cuba.

While our Haitian policy is cynical, our Cuban policy is self-defeating. Almost all Latin American nations, as well as the United Nations, have gone on record in opposition to the continuing cold war-era economic and political blockade of Cuba by the United States. Castro seems more aware of his declining influence than Washington. These days his speeches are more plaintive than defiant. There are true believers in Havana (both of the Leninist and the Castroist varieties) but the chiefs of governmental power in Havana are spending most of their time trying to set in some kind of 'socialist' tourism to

replace the collectivized sugar production that had become the backbone of the economy. In this context, Washington's punitive policy toward Cuba seems unproductive, to put it mildly.

Washington's fear of Castro from Eisenhower's early efforts to prevent his rise to power in 1958-59 to Reagan's counter-revolutionary war to keep Fidel's "puppets" from power in Nicaragua has been obsessive. Our concern has always been such, going back to our fear of Spanish power in Cuba during the 18th century, our fear of a rising, radical Cuban nationalism in the nineteenth century, and our fear of a socialist regime in the twentieth century. Unable to see Cuba as a people, a nation, a society, a culture; North Americans have tended to see it first as a pawn of European colonialism, then as an island of anarchic peoples tainted by African blood, and finally as a threat to U.S. power in the Western hemisphere (known in the cold war era as a threat to U.S. 'national security'). If somehow we could divorce ourselves from our age-old desire to control the fate of Cuba, we could see it as a Caribbean society of modest size and influence that in recent decades has undergone the most far reaching social revolution in the history of Latin America. As such, it is worthy of study, and in my opinion, of respect.



Robert Hackman
Licensed Acupuncturist

Gentle Sea Clinic
(607)272-5450

Acupuncture • Accupressure
Chinese Herbology

417 N. Geneva St. Ithaca, NY 14850

Cuba: Now You See It- Now You Don't A Day in the Life of a Cuban Student

**By Maria del Pilar
Diaz Castañon**

People of Ithaca like to tell visitors, "If you think the weather is bad now, just wait five minutes." We Cubans have a similar saying: "Things are bad now, but next year will be worse."

The parallel isn't the result of a common sense of fatalism, but rather comes from a peculiar tradition that may be hard to understand for someone who isn't a native of either place. Cuba was in the news in the sixties and it's back in the news today. But through the fog that surrounds the myth of the Cuban Revolution, it's difficult to see the truth about how Cubans live, and, above all, why they continue their peculiar path.

Daily life in Cuba today is truly very hard. People interested in Cuba can talk about the shortage of public transportation, the lack of consumer goods and the frequently scheduled blackouts. They can also talk about the shortage of food, clothes, and medicine. These are all realities, and yet, also in some sense unreal, incorporeal, phantasmal. The problem is that they lack the personal experience of living the crisis day after day.

So as not to presume to express the daily reality of 10 million people, I'll limit myself to sketching an image of the life of the sector with which I'm most

familiar: university students and professors. This is not a small group, because every Cuban older than 16 has the right to higher education free of charge.

Getting around

My students begin the day trying to get to the university. This means, generally, that they catch a ride with any transportation available, from private cars to trucks, motorcycles and carts. They could, of course, wait for public transportation, but the little gasoline available means that a bus will come by only every once in a while, without students ever knowing exactly when. Waiting for buses is pointless unless there is lots of time to spare. My students don't have much time—they have to be at the university by 7:30 a.m., on the dot.

And what about bicycles? Sure, almost everybody has one, but they don't always have enough energy to ride long distances. Their breakfast generally consists of what we Cubans optimistically call "infusiones", i.e., a cup of tea or some other drink to warm the stomach. The state still guarantees one liter of milk a day to children up to seven years old, but it can't provide any more.

Let's say that in the end the students have overcome these obstacles and arrived at their destination. They may then discover that their professors have not yet arrived. That's because the majority of the social sciences faculty members are women, who have to do exactly the same as they do to get to the university from the different points of the city, with the extra

hassle of having to drop off the kids in the day care center or school beforehand. Like any other college students, Cuban students know who's late because of something that came up unexpectedly and who simply overslept. In the first case, they wait for them patiently. In the second, they go to the library to make use of their time.

Finding books

And therein lies another adventure, one we might name "in search of the lost book." Cuban libraries used to be very good, but thanks to years of diminishing funds, and generations of students handling the same books, resources have deteriorated. This means that my students have to get in line for books, because there is generally only one copy of each literary work. Also, some books remain from the massive printings of college texts in the 60s, 70s and 80s (that used to be given away free of charge), and of numerous literary, philosophical, historical and sociological critiques. But no matter how good these subsequent reflections may be, you have to read the original to appreciate it— and that is where the problem begins. Try to read Plato's *Republic*, Hegel's *The Science of Logic*, Society and *Economics* by Max Weber or Gadamer's *Truth and Methods*, in a hurry and you'll understand why I have so much respect for my students. They have to read the texts in the worst conditions. And they do it.

Let's assume that the professor arrived on time and classes started on schedule. The professor will generally count on

Diaz Castañon, a professor of philosophy at the University of Havana, spoke at Cornell in April.

her voice as the only instrument for teaching, because chalk is so rare and the blackboards are so old you can't even read off them. She is already used to students taking notes making such good use of their paper that their notebooks look like palimpsests, and that in the middle of class anybody might interrupt to ask to borrow a pen or a pencil because theirs ran out.

To us Cubans that is all commonplace. We get together to make fun of Derrida and his phantoms or to decipher the puzzles of Gadamer, or to decide if Habermas is telling us something different than Kant. All of this must be done quickly, because the class periods are shorter than they used to be; we have to make good use of the daylight, since we can't count on electricity.

And no one should think that once the class period ends, the Cuban student returns home. Only a few are from Havana. The majority come from the country's interior, and receive free room and board through scholarships. There, they have guaranteed meals, but the distance to travel, as I mentioned before, is so great, that they would never have time to return to the library during daylight if they had to travel to their homes.

Only a year ago, the university guaranteed meals for the modest sum of 50 cents. They can no longer do this. Out of a group of 20 students, four receive the right to eat in the university, rotating the privilege on a daily basis. Since there is no other place even to have a snack, students may go without eating until they return home or to the dorm. The next day it begins all over again.

Nevertheless, they are young. Besides the libraries, students figure out ways to attend concerts, movies, and

parties, and to go out on dates. They have the same interests as any other people their age. But for them, everything is much more difficult.

The question then becomes, why do they put up with all this? Young people are traditionally restless and nonconformist. Cuban youths are no different in this respect. It would be difficult to find someone more critical of his or her own country than a Cuban. My students are absolutely intolerant of anything done wrong and are decidedly opposed to justifying everything by shouting "death to the blockade," as we often say here. But they can't understand why the blockade means they can't buy asthma medicine, or why to find out what Ernest Mandel said in his book Power and Money, they have to depend on someone else to send their professor the book and hope the professor is kind enough to translate it for them.

My students are not martyrs or legendary heroes. They are just young people born within the revolution, who know its advantages and defects, and who, in the end, aspire to be able to decide their own destiny. Many of them, like many Cubans of other ages, would prefer to live out the American dream. But an idealized American dream, or perhaps we should say "Cubanized", because they are convinced that in America they will also have the right to an education and free access to medical care. It is only logical; it's what they have seen since they were born.

Others, to whom the illusion of the American dream doesn't ring true, know Cuba is a changing society, and want to change it themselves. They are the ones who run into the streets, without anyone telling them to, to defend what they consider so

natural that they hadn't even thought about it; they understand that anyone is free to pursue the American dream, but nobody has the right to force another to share it, and even less to kill someone to get it. They are the ones, to everyone's surprise, who are warlike and aggressive today, then tomorrow calmly return to a strange and difficult life.

As the magicians say, "Now you see it, now you don't." Any Cuban observer nowadays can look at the crisis of migration and discuss whether the causes are political or economic; anyone can verify the effervescence of the Cuban youth, and their irreverent fatalism; but what is no longer easy to appreciate is the way in which the revolution is a *fait accompli* for the majority of Cubans, including my magnificent students who suffer the trials of Cain to realize the right given to them by the revolution: the right to study.

Ethnic Music Gallery



Ballaphone



Shekere



Agogo Bell



Ashikos

Toko

Imports
215 N. Cayuga St.
Dewitt Mall, Ithaca, NY 14850
in NYS call toll free
1-800-560-DRUM (3786)

Redefining the Salvadoran Left

On December 10, the ERP (Renovative Expression of the People), one of the five organizations in El Salvador's Farabundo Marti National Liberation front, left the FMLN. The announcement was made by ERP leader, Joaquin Villalobos, on November 30th. Solidarity activists may wonder, is the once formidable revolutionary movement of El Salvador falling apart? Or is this "divorce" part of a healthy phenomenon of the Salvadoran left re-defining itself within the new political context allowed by the 1992 Peace Accords?

Since its formation in 1980, the FMLN has been a coalition of five organizations, each with their own ideological grounding and methods of work. The five organizations are the ERP, the FPL (Forces of Popular Liberation), the PCS (Salvadoran Communist Party), the PRTC (Central American Revolutionary Workers Party) and the RN (National Resistance). During the 12 year armed conflict the five were united as the FMLN by a common enemy and the shared goal of defeating the U.S.-backed military regime.

With the United Nations-mediated accords translating into the dissolution of security forces, reforms to the army and limited democratic reforms to

Salvadoran society, the FMLN was able to lay down their arms and transform itself into a legal political party. But historic differences have resurfaced in debate on the future of the Salvadoran left.

Throughout Latin America, armed struggle has yielded to negotiations and solely political movement building. Furthermore, the collapse of Eastern Europe and any "Soviet model" has forced the Latin American left to re-evaluate its objectives. With few proven alternatives to capitalism, the left faces an historic task. The left must not only resist structural adjustment programs and privatization; the Latin American left must articulate and advance viable development alternatives within a broad vision of social and political change.

In the case of the FMLN, not one but two distinct visions of the road forward exist. Their incompatibility has been proven through the FMLN's political paralysis and incoherence over the last several months. Although the right has been on the defensive amidst corruption charges, the FMLN has been politically impotent, lacking a unified strategy to capitalize on the ARENA Government's weaknesses.

For many in the solidarity movement a "divorce" holds the promise that the Salvadoran left will re-invent itself to confront the continuing climate of impunity in El Salvador and to advance coherent alternatives to the ARENA Government's neoliberal economic agenda.

Two distinct visions

For the past year, the ERP and most of the RN leadership have proposed that the FMLN stake out the political center, abdicated by the declining Christian Democrats. The Peace Accords, they argue, were the victory for which the war was waged. Conflict between rich and poor has ended. The left's role, from this view, is to build a center-consensus platform negotiated by diverse social and economic sectors. This could include elements of big business and the Armed Forces that support reconciliation. Everyone would compromise in crafting the platform.

The other vision, embraced by a majority of the FMLN, considers the Peace Accords as the basis for continued struggle under new rules- a partial leveling of the playing field but not a new ball game. The Accords, although still not fully implemented, reform the institutions governing Salvadoran society, thus making it possible to continue the democratic revolutionary struggle through peaceful means. To the FPL, PCS, PRTC, a sector of the RN, and the Democratic Tendency (a former dissident group from the ERP), the FMLN must maintain its historic mission of representing and empowering the traditionally marginalized majority. This mission allows for alliances with other social sectors interested in expanding democracy. But alliances must be approached from the perspective

From the Committee in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES)

To subscribe to *El Salvador Watch*, write to: CISPES, 19 W. 21st Street, Room 502, New York, NY 10010.

Continued on pg 21

Banning the Use of Food as a Weapon of War

By Dr. Michael Latham

Food used as a weapon seldom seriously harms the armed combatants, but rather affects preferentially- and causes starvation or death- in children, women, and the elderly. It is an established fact that when in any conflict between nations or within nations, one of the parties involved prevents food from reaching people in the opposing group, soldiers and combatants suffer much less from food shortages than do civilians. Among the civilians certain vulnerable groups- especially children, the elderly, and women during the childbearing year- most often suffer from undernutrition, starvation, and death. This surely provides a strong argument for banning the use of food as a weapon of war.

Many conventions and protocols address wartime abuses of human beings or the environment, and many of these mention the right to food. As far back as 1897, the Hague Convention stated that "the right of belligerents to adopt means of injuring the enemy is not unlimited." The Additional Protocol of 1977 to the 1949 Geneva Convention used these words: "Starvation of civilians as a method of warfare is prohibited" and "it is prohibited to attack, destroy, remove, or render useless objects indispensable to the survival of the civilian population, such as foodstuffs, agricultural areas for

the production of foodstuffs, crops, livestock, drinking water installations and supplies, and irrigation works." These protocols also address the question, and seek to lay down principles, that allow organizations to provide food to groups of people suffering from hunger.

A related but somewhat different issue is the attempt to go beyond "war," however defined, to the broader attempt to outlaw the use of food for political purposes when it is likely to have negative nutritional effects on civilian groups. The aim is to prevent the use of food as a deliberate strategy, when that strategy will clearly have a negative impact on the nutritional status or health of children, women, the elderly, or other vulnerable groups.

Unlike the banning of food as a weapon of war, which is clear-cut, the attempt to prevent the use of food for political pressure and political purposes is less apparent. Human rights organizations need not get involved in more debatable food and trade issues such as GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) or national food subsidies, which do influence food availability and are clearly political. At least initially, human rights organizations and concerned individuals should focus their energies on obtaining agreements and actions that prevent clear-cut political decisions likely to have a negative nutritional impact on civilian populations.

Surely, the support by the 150 member states of the World Declaration on Nutrition can

prevent at least the most obvious abuses. This requires monitoring, pressure from the appropriate institutions on governments to stop their harmful actions, and publicity in the world media on any failures to adhere to agreements. Supporters of this approach must learn how to effectively publicize violations, providing clear illustrations of the harm being suffered by civilians, particularly children.

The serious problems of starvation and malnutrition, illness and death, caused by man's inhumanity to man in the form of the politically motivated withholding of food, have been caused by the actions of nations large and small in both the north and the south. The phenomenon is not new: reports of sieges, destruction of crops or food supplies, and prevention of food trade come to us from many parts of the world over the last 2,000 years.

Three Examples:

Provided below are three examples; one that deals with food as a weapon of war, and two with political actions resulting in food shortages. The fact that more than one of these examples castigates actions of the United States should not be taken to mean that I see the United States as the main user of food as a weapon. Rather, it is because I live in this country, pay taxes here, and have some access to U.S. politicians. But the United States' role is undeniably important, given its enormous power and huge potential to

Latham is a professor of nutrition at Cornell University.

Continued on pg. 10

Food as Weapon Continued from pg 9

produce food.

(1) The Nigerian Civil War

The civil war in Nigeria, which ended in 1970, was an attempt by one part of the country (the predominantly Ibo part), to proclaim secession from the rest of Nigeria with its dominant Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba population. The war tore Nigeria apart, and there were many deaths due to combat but far more deaths were caused by starvation and malnutrition. The Nigerian government made a political and military decision to end the secession, and prevent food, weapons and other supplies from entering what the secessionists termed "Biafra." Here, food was clearly used by the Nigerians as a weapon of war. On the other side, the Ibo secessionists used hunger and malnutrition quite skillfully to elicit sympathy, assistance, and even arms from European and other countries or from "relief agencies."

At the request of the White House and the U.S. State Department, I went to Nigeria four days after the end of the war to assess the nutritional situation. In Nigeria I saw the worst malnutrition and starvation I have ever witnessed. In my report I stated that "the lives of tens of thousands of children and several thousand adults hang by a slender thread." This hunger, malnutrition, and starvation, like that related to all wars and civil conflicts, was manmade. My report also stated that I cannot help "being extremely impressed by the fact that after such a bitter struggle, peace has been so rapidly restored in the enclave" and that "law and order has been restored and the hand of friendship has

been extended to the Ibo people." But, as in Vietnam, the use of food as a weapon of war had caused thousands of child deaths and devastating malnutrition. Even today, as adults, many survivors probably bear the scars of their childhood starvation.

(2) The Blockade of Iraq

In 1990 at the end of the Persian Gulf war, the United Nations instituted a trade embargo on Iraq at the goading of the United States. This was not really a ban on the importation of food and medicines, but a political decision to prevent Iraq from trading, particularly in oil-

The U.S. embargo violates both Cuba's human rights and international law.

an action that has resulted in serious food shortages and a scarcity of medicines. As a result, malnutrition in children and infant and child mortality rates have risen markedly above the rates reported before the war.

The political action, spearheaded by the United States, was presumably designed to bring down President Saddam Hussein. Did the U.S. policymakers, or those of the Security Council advocating the embargo, really believe that Saddam Hussein, his soldiers, or his political cronies would go hungry because of their action? All of us knew the embargo would cause hunger, malnutrition, and suffering for the poorer people of Iraq, particularly for children, women, and the elderly. And that is exactly what happened.

What is particularly sad, and ironic, is that Iraq is not a poor country. It has oil to export that it is not allowed to market, and it would like to purchase wheat,

legumes, milk, and medicines on the world market. But the United Nations resolution prevents it from having the money to do this. Thus a blocking of trade is contributing to malnutrition and elevating child mortality rates.

Of course, Iraq is not above playing politics with the lives and well-being of her own poor inhabitants either: it could more quickly satisfy all conditions of the peace agreement and reach agreement with the United States and the United Nations.

What concerns me, as a strong supporter of the United Nations for four decades, is, first, that the U.N. Security Council authorized and was a participant in the Gulf War; and, second, that now, after the war, it is party to a trade embargo causing malnutrition and deaths. The United States has agencies like UNICEF, WHO, and FAO to improve the nutritional status, the health and the food security of the world's people, particularly the poor. Yet the actions of the U.N. Security Council and instructions from the U.N. headquarters are contributing to hunger and ill health. The U.N. headquarters appears to be in conflict with its specialized agencies- that themselves have been rather silent about this conflict. Where it deprives needy people of food, the use of food for political purposes is unethical and immoral.

(3) The Cuban Crisis

The Cuban situation has some similarities to that of Iraq, but there are also many differences. For some 30 years the United States has implemented a strict embargo on Cuba, simply because the United States has not wanted a communist regime in the western hemisphere. Whether this was popular with Cubans or not was of no concern to

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Washington policymakers. The policies of the Castro regime, following years of right-wing dictatorships, resulted in remarkable reductions in infant mortality and improvements in health and education for the Cuban people. This seems unimportant to U.S. decisionmakers, either Democrat or Republican; for not only does the United States not trade with Cuba, it uses every effort to prevent other nations from trading with Cuba. The United States has been particularly effective in this regard, with its many client states in the Americas.

The embargo against Cuba is aimed at creating hardships that will lead to a change of leadership. The aim in Cuba is to bring down Castro and his regime and replace it with one that is non communist and friendly to the United States. But the main impact is on ordinary people.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union- and the loss not so much of financial assistance but of trade with the U.S.S.R.- Cuba has entered into a very serious economic crisis that is having devastating effects on ordinary Cubans. There are now real shortages of food and health services, including essential drugs and supplies. Low infant mortality rates and child health that were once the envy of Latin America are now threatened. In June 1993 a delegation sponsored by the American Public Health Association visited Cuba, in part to focus on the impact of the recently tightened U.S. economic embargo. Their summary report states that,

The food supply has diminished, and the Cuban diet is much less adequate than before in both quality and quantity.

Medicines of all kinds and medical supplies are scarce. One devastating effect of the U.S. embargo is the interference in Cuba's access to food and medical products. All this has threatened the health of the Cuban people.

The report goes on to quote the words of the APHA spokesman at a 1993 U.S. Senate committee who stated that the embargo's

interference in the Cuban people's access to food and medicine is tantamount to the use of food and medicine as a weapon in the U.S. arsenal against Cuba.

My recent visit to Cuba confirms this.

Earlier this year a bewildering medical condition struck many Cubans. The diagnosis was of a type of ocular neuritis, which caused serious illness, and in some cases blindness.

Despite investigations by Cuban physicians and visiting U.S. medical teams, the etiology of this condition remains unknown. It may be nutritional- due mainly

to B vitamin deficiencies, particularly deficiencies of thiamin and panthotenic acid. Few observers agree about the exact etiology, but all seem to agree that the worsening situation in Cuba with regard to food, medical supplies, and other essential products has contributed to the mysterious disease.

The U.S. embargo against Cuba violates both that country's human rights and international law. Washington continues to hold hostage the health of the Cuban population for political purposes. This is immoral, unethical, and illegal. The economic embargo has been described as an "inhuman form of warfare- it targets people, especially kids."

Human rights organizations and concerned individuals from all nations must mobilize to ban the use of food as a weapon of war and end the use of food as a political weapon where it will cause harm, including malnutrition and hunger, for significant numbers of civilians.

From the Spring 1994 bulletin of the World Alliance for Nutrition and Human Rights (WANAHR)



Annex Cherry Durland Memorial ALTERNATIVES LIBRARY

127 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University

A COMMUNITY RESOURCE
OPEN TO ALL

Mon-Fri 9:30am-6:00pm
Wed until 9:00pm Sat Noon-4:00pm
Sun 7:30-11:00pm during Bound for Glory live concerts
Call for information: 255-6486

Shaking Up the Guatemalan Army

By Ann Peters

"I only went down to raise my voice, but it turned into an earthquake."

--Jennifer Harbury

We all know that most of what happens in the world every day does not make it into the New York Times or onto "All Things Considered" on National Public Radio. Many events and issues that the U.S. public should have the opportunity to know about are completely ignored, or have been "investigated" by a reporter sitting in the bar at some world class hotel. Yet Jennifer Harbury reached comfortable living rooms across this country as she sat starving in the morning chill on the cement plaza in front of the National Plaza in Guatemala city.

Guatemala is one of the most popular tourist spots for people who admire and appreciate Native American cultures. You can visit the ruined cities and ceremonial centers of the ancient Maya and admire the brilliantly colored, always tasteful, latest fashions in "traditional" dress worn by the modern Maya. New Age travelers particularly enjoy the busy commercial towns, peaceful rural scenes and mystical shrines of the Maya highlands, set between the smoking cones of huge volcanos and the Peten rainforest. Yet many leaders of the Guatemalan army and business community believe the Maya people to be an

impediment to "progress" and have worked towards their physical or social extermination, particularly in the last 20 years.

Jennifer Harbury's story has offered U.S. citizens a rare glimpse into the other reality of this beautiful country whose citizens regularly work 10 to 18 hour days to produce fresh broccoli, cut flowers, brand name clothing, and gourmet coffee for shipment to the United States. In Guatemala the standard "minimum" wage is about \$2 a day. The mistreatment and marginalization suffered by most Guatemalans have led to thirty years of civil war led by four armed "guerrilla" insurgent groups, linked as the Unidad Nacional Revolucionaria Guatemalteca (URNG). As stipulated in the "Esquipulas" Central America peace agreements, the URNG has been trying for years to negotiate a meaningful peace accord with the powerful Guatemalan Army and relatively weak civilian government.

Efraín Bamaca Velasquez (known by his alias, Comandante Everardo), a Mayan leader in one of the four guerrilla groups, disappeared "in combat" over two years ago. Unlike most family members of armed insurgents, non-violent community leaders, or hapless bystanders seized by the Guatemalan Army, Everardo's wife is a Cornell alumna and Harvard-trained lawyer. Jennifer Harbury met Everardo when she travelled to Guatemala to get background information for asylum claims of Guatemalan immigrants to the United States who claimed they

were fleeing death threats, torture, massacres and civil war. They fell in love, they married in Texas, and some time later he returned to Guatemala. Soon after, the Guatemalan Army announced that they had killed Everardo in combat. However, months later a prisoner who escaped from a secret torture and detention center described having seen Everardo alive, undergoing horrible-sounding experimental torture.

Harbury has been struggling for two years for her (internationally recognized) right to know the fate of her husband and his current location and condition, dead or alive. Hundreds of Guatemalans, particularly widows and mothers of the "disappeared," are in the same struggle, demanding and pleading for information from Army and government officials. Harbury is a U.S. citizen and a lawyer, which puts her in a unique position to bring Guatemalan torture practices to international attention. She has been working within the legal system and with international human rights groups from the beginning, and her hunger strike this October and November was her third act of public protest to try to get the Guatemalan government to respond to her case.

For one reason or another, this time Harbury's case made it into the major media. Now, the Guatemalan government has been forced to agree to launch an official investigation by the Human Rights Attorney's office.

Continued on pg 22

Peters is a former
CUSLAR Coordinator

Interview;

Gioconda Belli

By Elvira Sánchez

Editor's note: Award winning poet, internationally acclaimed author, feminist, and revolutionary, Gioconda Belli has been a major presence in Nicaragua for over two decades. While in Ithaca in October to read at a CUSLAR sponsored event, Belli spoke to Cornell grad student Elvira Sánchez.

Elvira Sanchez: Gioconda Belli's story is more interesting, full and lively than the story's of your book's heroines. Tell me a little bit about your life and how it relates to the Frente Sandinista [FSLN] and how this has influenced your writing.

Gioconda Belli: I became involved with the Frente Sandinista more or less in the same period of time that I began to write poetry, through Nicaraguan artists, because the majority were really involved with the Frente. So when I entered this world, I became in touch with a reality that for me up to that moment had been hidden, because the Frente Sandinista was considered a subversive and dangerous organization in the environment in which I moved.

I didn't understand their objectives very well, and through these people I was able to learn much more, not only of the situation with the Frente in Nicaragua, but also, I learned about the correlations that existed between the liberation movement in Nicaragua and everything that was going on in Latin America in that decade.

The 70s were a very belligerent decade. In the U.S. there was the whole campaign for the liberation of Vietnam, and the Women's Liberation movement. So, there was a dynamic social change and a questioning of all values.

In Nicaragua we also had the Somoza dictatorship which was the personification of all the negative things of society. Therefore I became involved with those *compañeros*, and slowly they began introducing me to everything. I had a lot of doubts with my own involvement, which are like the doubts of the character of The Inhabited Woman.

While the protagonist of The Inhabited Woman, Lavinia, has many autobiographical touches, I would say that more than Lavinia's existential situation, the one that is autobiographical, is her personal questioning, her feelings, how it was for a person coming from the class of the oppressor, to adopt the struggle on the side of the oppressed as her own, and her doubt of whether she was ever going to be accepted. But, as Lavinia says in the novel, she didn't choose the place where she was born. And what she felt, which is what I felt, was that she who was so privileged, the least that she could do was to put her privileges to work for a cause that would give her life a feeling of service, of being able to help combat injustice, of which she, "I", had been a part of.

I became very involved in the Frente. Initially, collaborating with little tasks, and little by

little, becoming **more and more** involved. I participated in 1974, with the information team that participated in an assault of the house of Chema Castillo, which is the event that is described in the book The Inhabited Woman. That experience gave birth to the idea of The Inhabited Woman.

Now, the other thing that greatly affected me was the knowledge of the indigenous culture in Nicaragua. My grandfather was a self taught man. He had a great knowledge of the Indigenous past of Nicaragua. He always used to tell me legends when I was small, and also true stories, about the Spanish Conquest, the struggles they had fought and through him I started to have a glimmer of the fact I lived in a country that had a history that was practically unknown.

I also found an interesting piece by Jaime Wheelock called "Indigenous Roots of the Anticolonialist Struggle in Nicaragua." For me that book was an incredible discovery. In the book, all the episodes of the battles that had been fought by the tribes against the Spanish authority were narrated. It was very important for me to learn about this history of resistance because many of the authors wrote about the colonial era as if to make it look like an idyllic period, and I found out by reading that book that none of that existed. Later, I studied more, and I found out some very interesting facts, such as when

Continued on page 14

Belli

Continued from pg 13

the women refused to give birth; also, about the battle of the *Maribios*, who wore the skin of the old people into battle. These two passages appear in the novel. I took the liberty of putting together the Aztec and Mayan mythology, creating a single world, *Mesoamérica*. But that was also real. The Nahuatlés of Nicaragua have a mixture of Aztec and Mayan traditions.

After the assault on Chema Castillo, I had to live in exile from 1975 until 1979. The exile was not really an exile that separated me from Nicaragua because I was involved in everything that had to do with the preparation of the insurrection, the jobs that had to do with the revolution, organizing the solidarity networks, supporting the struggle, arms traffic and all that. I returned to Nicaragua the day of the revolutionary triumph. My first job was to hawk the post-revolutionary newspaper in the streets of Managua.

EV: In Lavinia's character, the class struggle and her search for identity are never quite reconciled. She's always saying to herself, "I neither belong here nor there." Did this thing, that never got defined in Lavinia, get defined in Gioconda Belli?

GB: I think this never gets defined ever. The conclusion I have come to through the years is that privileges are eternal, in the sense that if you are a person that was born into privilege and that has been privileged, you can never compare yourself with a person that hasn't had these circumstances. The other person always has a burden of experience that is different from yours, and there will always be that distance. If there is a person

who has the same cultural level as yourself because they have struggled to educate themselves, then there is always that resentment because you didn't have to fight and they did have to fight to get to where they are. There is no total acceptance. One enters with a little bit of that guilty feeling of political compromise. Therefore, there is more willingness to accept. But more acceptance happened before the triumph of the revolution. After the triumph the difference started to show again. Not in a way that didn't allow you to work. I think that it's like a price that one has to pay and not hope that they'll accept you as the same.

"A revolution, for me, was to understand that I could have a role in history."

And one thing that I have come to find very curious, is that in terms of revolutionary purity, I have found that the *compañeros* that have come from privileged backgrounds, sometimes we have less temptation for the materialistic, because we have already given that up, while the *compañeros* that haven't had anything, the power, makes them a little dizzy.

EV: How would your experience, as a writer, have been different if the revolution never occurred, do you think that you would have confronted all that conflict?

GB: No, I don't think so. I think that one of the fundamental things in my life, was to have participated in the Frente Sandinista and to be a part of

that process. I was destined to be a bourgeois housewife. I married at eighteen, and that was my program. I lived in a situation of rebellion, but of feminist rebellion. When I married, my husband wanted me to stop working because it was not well looked on, and I refused to leave my job because I did not want to depend on a man, but that had nothing to do with politics. The thing that for me was a revolution, was to understand that I could have a role in history and that I could participate in the transformation of a society, and that I could have a collective role and also the fact that I could write poetry about women, the body, eroticism. That gave me a very great sensation of power. I didn't come to feminism from a perspective of victimization, but rather from a notion of power. I think that is something very unique in my life.

It had a lot to do with my mother. I had a very conflicted relationship with my mother. Nevertheless, she was a person that rejected the traditional woman's role, although she was very traditional. She was very restless, which she did something about, but always with an iron ball chained to her feet, because of the traditional point of view. But she gave me all the vision about the female body in a very beautiful way. She taught me that my body is something incredible, capable of giving life, somewhat like a human workshop. I have understood my body since then, as a life giver and a pleasure giver. Then I developed a notion of power, as a woman. I have never felt like a victim and I get annoyed by the portrayal of women as victims. The female being is a power, what happens is that the power has been oppressed.

EV: That power is present in The Inhabited Woman, although there are some contradictions as well. Such as the fact that Lavinia joins the movement in order to follow Felipe, and that her greatest desire is to show him that she is capable...

GB: I don't see it like that. The reality is that quite often we women become involved in issues because of men. Men are more involved. Who have been the ones that have made history? The men. Women in some form have been in history "al trompon y a la patada," creating a space through men, as is the case with Lavinia. She becomes aware of the Movement through Felipe, but the one that really introduces her to it is Flor. She lives her entire dilemma by herself, because Felipe doesn't know, and later she wants revenge for Felipe....

EV: I only say this because the book's critics have understood it this way...

GB: But there is another message. I propose that man and woman are together. In other words, there is no separation, but rather a mutual respect. It's a duality that cannot be broken. That we women and men coexist on this earth in an egalitarian way.

EV: But Nicaragua has been an example of a place where the recognition of women comes after the revolution.

GB: Compared to other Latin American countries, maybe so, but in terms of what we wanted, it has been a battle without barracks.

EV: What's the situation like now?

GB: On the one hand, the women's movement is better. What happened was that the Frente tried to give it their own agenda, so the woman's struggle got lost. It lost some importance during the process of reconstructing the country, where women were needed as a labor force, but where their own gains were relegated to a second tier. We began to question. Now with the electoral defeat, the Frente has continued to put forth another agenda. Then women began to say, "just a second here, you're not responding to us, we're going to organize ourselves independently." That's how a lot of women's groups have been organized. They created a national feminist coordinatorship, which gets together in accordance to their own interests. Projects have been put together in networks. There is a network against violence, another one for economics, another for health workers. Unity in diversity. And these networks are functioning now. They're not trying to put everybody under one umbrella, because there are a lot of different opinions. We saw that if we put all the women to work using a single concept we could fall into the trap of discussing everything without achieving anything.

EV: What does it mean to you, or to the United States, that your novel has been translated into English?

GB: I'm not sure up to what point the theme of The Inhabited Woman is relevant in the United States. It's interesting how the novel has been so uncommonly success in other countries. For example, in Germany, it's been a tremendous thing, selling over two million copies. Despite the fact that the novel focuses on a

specifically Latin American problem, in terms of what it says about women and what we have to confront to actively participate in society, this is a common problem, even for women in more developed countries. Therefore there is something in that book that transcends the problematic of Latin America.

It will be very interesting to see the reaction that it produces with English speakers. Because the novel also lays out the issue of compromise; whether your life has a completely individualistic meaning or if you have a social responsibility. I've gotten very distinct reactions. On the one hand, when I speak to readers in universities, they are very receptive, but the newspaper reviews have been negative. It seems like they get turned off by the politics of the novel. But that was to be expected.

EV: What are you working on now?

GB: I am writing a novel that takes place in the twenty-first century about global conflict. It has to do with the search for utopia, absolutely apocalyptic.... But I don't want to tell too much about the novel.

EV: Has your living in the U.S. affected your writing?

GB: In reality, Spanish has become my own cave, therefore, I enjoy writing, I feel that the language is coming out better, because it's like surrounding yourself with words. The space of writing is something in which I come back to being myself. In English I don't feel like myself. My true "self" is in Spanish. But, at the same time, when I write poetry, I translate the poems myself, because to translate a poem, it's better to write it again.

Blaming It All on "Illegal Aliens"

By Harvey Fireside

If you've listened to the campaigners of 1994, the one thing they tend to agree on is that "illegal aliens" are to blame for all our ills. Immigrants have evidently replaced the Soviet Union as the scapegoat of choice. Once again, California is setting the pace. And the trend is to issue I.D. cards to all true-blue citizens, denying any medical, educational or other public services to refugees.

Other states are already cloning their versions of Proposition 187, and the crowd in Washington is trying to keep up with national legislation to make it tougher for anyone to climb aboard Lifeboat USA. The media have fueled the new mood of collective meanness. They have calculated that the seven states with 85% of the aliens—California, Arizona, New York, New Jersey, Texas, Illinois and Florida—hold 70% of the electoral votes. Hence, any aspiring presidential candidate can only succeed under the banner of xenophobia.

Even *The New York Times* has been featuring news stories and op-ed pieces blaming the victim. Recently, it ran a column by Ben Sherwood, campaign manager to Kathleen Brown who lost the California governor's race to Pete Wilson. Why? Because Brown didn't nail aliens as vehemently as Wilson.

Fireside, a professor of politics at Ithaca College, is founder of The Border Fund

According to Sherwood, California is reeling because 300,000 alien kids attend school, 18,000 'illegal' inmates crowd the jails and Mexican women come to L.A. merely to have babies that will then claim benefits as U.S. citizens.

What Sherwood omits from his account is the positive side of the refugee story. For that you should read Michael Fix and Jeffrey Passel's "Immigration and Immigrants: Setting the Record Straight" (Urban Institute). Based on data culled from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) and the 1990 census, Fix and Passel show that the costs of immigrants are grossly inflated—e.g., they are outweighed by \$25 to 30 billion in benefits.

Immigrants earn \$240 billion a year, pay \$90 billion in taxes and receive only \$5 billion in welfare, according to *Business Week*. When it comes to some 30 million 'illegals', nearly 60% of which are not border crossers but visitors and students who have overstayed their visas. But the spotlight is on the Texas and California borders, where the INS is erecting a new Berlin Wall against invading "barbarians". In truth, the Border Patrol counts day laborers each time they cross the border, are arrested and sent back.

Our southwest border is a paradigm of the U.S. economy, with luxuries of the Anglos borne on the backs of the Third World. It is doubtlessly the one global frontier that separates most dramatically the world of the haves from that of the have nots. South of the border are *maquiladoras*, assembly plants

offering sweatshop conditions to Mexicans; north of it *colonias* of migrant workers toil in the fields. The manufactured goods and choice vegetables are shipped to U.S. markets. The misery and polluted waters stay along the Rio Grande.

On December 11, 1994, "Sixty Minutes" (CBS) ran a revealing segment about the world of high fashion in L.A. The dirty little secret is that the renowned designers or Rodeo Drive are peddling clothes that are cut and stitched by immigrants working at below-minimum wages for subcontractors. No U.S. citizen would apply for such tedious work at such low wages. Ironically, the response of the fashion houses to indictments by labor inspectors is that, if pressed any harder, they'll move operations to Guatemala and points south.

Recent research underscores the fact that immigrants, both as shop owners and as consumers of goods and services, create considerably more jobs than they displace. Fix and Passel conclude that in general refugees do not displace native workers nor depress wages.

If they are not a real threat to our way of life, why do aliens make us feel so uncomfortable and angry? They are the world's poor pressing their noses against the windows of our dining rooms. They remind us, deny it though we might, that, unless they were Native Americans, our own ancestors came here as refugees. It is a truth which I—having fled Hitler's Vienna in 1940—am only too familiar.

In Review

Gioconda Belli, *The Inhabited Woman*. Trans. Kathleen March. Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1994. 412 pps.

Gioconda Belli, a well known poet whose voice has been associated with the Sandinista Revolution in Nicaragua, is now at work on her third novel.

The publication of Belli's first novel, *The Inhabited Woman*, in an English translation, places her among the growing number of Latin American women narrators who are beginning to be well known to English readers: Elena Poniatowska, Lisa Valenzuela, Alicia Partnoy, Laura Esquivel and, of course, Isabel Allende. All of these writers portray women against the backdrop of violent political events. Belli's novel, set in the imaginary country of Faguas, highly evocative of Managua during the Sandinista Revolution, provides the framework for the creation of a female hero: a woman who enters history.

That woman is Lavinia, the novel's protagonist and the changes that occur in her life are the focus of our attention. The novel can be read as a *bildungsroman* in that it offers a convincing picture of the development of a young protagonist in the course of one year. A young, upper-class architect with a room of her own, who rebels against the expectations of family and society, Lavinia is gradually transformed into a revolutionary, who commits her life in the fight against a military dictatorship. The climactic event in the plot, a commando attack on a general's house gives Lavinia, who had designed it, a unique mission to change history. The event has a historic and biographical parallel in a commando attack by the FSLN in Managua, in 1974, in which Belli herself took part. This event, both at the fictional and biographical levels establishes women- Lavinia/ Belli- as active participants in the historic process.

Since its publication in 1988 in the original Spanish, *The Inhabited Woman* has already sold 500,000 copies in Spain, Greece, Mexico, Turkey, Denmark, Holland and the author's native Nicaragua. This may demonstrate a desire on the part of the readers to see women as heroes. Such a need is voiced by the French writer, Helene Cixous, in *The Newly Born Woman*, a work she co-authored with Catherine Clément (1975, English translation by Betsy Wing, 1986). Rejecting mythological and

literary representations of women in western culture, Cixous states: "I cannot inhabit a victim, no matter how noble." Belli's fictional project responds to the same dynamic, and both texts are linguistically related in the curious use, by both writers, of the verb *inhabit/ed*. In Belli's text, Lavinia is inhabited by the mystical presence of Nahuatl Guerrillera who died fighting against the Spanish conquistadors in the sixteenth century. This presence felt by Lavinia at various moments of her life gives testimony to the vitality of Indian myths in the unconscious of modern-day Nicaraguans, validating, at the same time, legends as history. At the culminating moment in the novel, when Lavinia confronts the General, the Indian Itzá fills her mind so that Lavinia "felt in the tumult of her blood the strength of all rebellions, the roots, the violent land of that wild, indomitable country..." enabling her to overcome the Biblical prohibition, "Thou shalt not kill." Women readers, too, may in the process of reading, imaginatively *inhabit* the woman hero, and be transformed in the process.

Life and literature, however, stand in a dialectical relationship to each other. By creating a woman who kills, Belli explores a role contrary to our view of women as givers of life and its nurturers. In her own life, Belli fled the country to escape imprisonment and from then on, worked for the Revolution outside of the immediate war zone. In the fictional circumstances Belli crafts, Lavinia, must take the final risk in the cause of justice.

In the Spanish original, the novel is introduced by an Indian (makiritare) creation myth, cited from Eduardo Galeano's *Memoria del Fuego*. It is worth recalling, particularly since it is not included in Kathleen March's translation: "I break this egg and a woman is born and then a man. And together they will live and die. But they will be born again. They will be born and will die again and again they will be born. And they will never stop to be born, because death is a lie." (The translation is mine.) This creation myth which, unlike the Adam and Eve story, does not assign a secondary role to women, is consistent with Belli's vision of women, underlying all of her creative work to date. There is continuity in Belli's construction of women's portraits as

Continued on page 18

Continued from page 17

independent, passionate, exultant in their sexuality and active in the political sphere. (See also *From Eve's Rib*, translated by Steven F. White and published by Curbstone Press in 1989.) Her novels, however, uncover the secret mechanisms of family and male-female relationships that restrict women's ability to act, and stand in the way of their full self-realization. Although the most moving moment in the novel is Lavinia's lover's (Felipe's) death, their relations are the last battleground for a "new relationship between men and women" of which Lavinia dreams. Ironically, it is he who prevents Lavinia from joining the inner cell of the Movement, against her wishes. Only when he is fatally wounded and dying does Felipe ask Lavinia to take his place in the inner circle of the conspiracy. Lavinia concludes that "Felipe had to die in order to yield her his place. Women would enter history out of necessity."

A distinctive feature of *The Inhabited Woman* is its parallelistic structure where the responsibility for the narration is shared by the traditional third-person narrator and the first-person mystical voice of the Nahuatl Itzá who, in the endless cycle of life, now inhabits an orange tree in Lavinia's patio. The recovery of her life story parallels the unfolding of Lavinia's. It is Itzá mystical voice that closes the novel situating Lavinia's and Felipe's bodies in the endless cycle of nature where decomposition, growth, flowering, pollination and fruition succeed each other, where "death is a lie."

The novel offers a syncretic blending of western logos and poetic imagination, chronological and cyclical time, history and legend. It gives voice to those silenced in the past, and affirms mestizo culture. The text invites the use of poetic imagination on the part of the readers and enriches us with new perspectives on women and society.

-Prof. Maria Nawakowska Stykos
Romance Studies, Cornell University

Gustavo Alvarez Gardezabal, *Bazaar of the Idiots*. Trans. Susan Hill and Jonathan Tittler. Pittsburgh, PA: Latin American Literary Review Press, 1991. 192 pps.

Bazaar of the Idiots is a masterful, sacrilegious parody by Colombian writer Gustavo Alvarez Gardezabal, about a provincial town's narrow views on social stratification and religious fanaticism. In the book, life is cast as a bazaar of incredible happenings blending reality and fantasy, with an irreverent and humorous style.

Alvarez Gardezabal, who spent a year in Ithaca in the late 1980's, is a controversial figure in Colombia. He is the author of nine novels, including his best known book, *Condores No Entierran Todos los Días* (Condors Do Not Bury Every Day). *Bazaar of the Idiots* was first published in Spanish in 1974. In 1991, Cornell professor Jonathan Tittler and his wife, Susan Hill, made it available to English readers.

Bazaar of the Idiots takes place in Tulua, a town near Cali, in western Colombia, and Gardezabal's real life home. The narration focuses on Marcianita Barona, the daughter of Manuela Barona and Father Tascon, the town's priest. The shame of a woman having a priest's child scandalizes the "decent and virtuous family," Marcianita is condemned as a *Satanicengendro* (child of Satan) even before birth, and she is denied entry to any social institution; no school would admit her, nor church nor doctor, and she couldn't even have playmates. Marcianita is thus confined with her mother to "the house of the jasmine," where she is raised caring for armadillos, growing jasmine and embroidering ornaments.

The spell that the town inflicts on her is so strong that neither they nor Marcianita realize that they may have also transmitted a demonic supernatural power that Marcianita eventually passes on to her children. Her two sons are born mentally retarded and they are condemned to the same destiny as their mother, sequestered from the moment of birth. When they reach puberty, Marcianita discovers that they possess a power to heal, and they become the "Miraculous Idiots." Converted into idols of international fame, there is a continuous path of pilgrims at their balcony who seek the curative light beam. The church, incensed by the competition in the miracle business, devises a campaign to destroy them.

This miraculous bazaar is anathema to the fetishism and worship of sacred icons that pervades Colombia, a land still ruled by a strong Catholic Church married to superstition with religious rites. Gardezabal has no limit in attacking all of

FLAVORFUL MEXICAN & new MEXICAN FOOD



Serving Daily from 11:30 am

Tuesday and Wednesday Nights -
Regional & South American
Specialties

Happy Hour Daily from 4-6 pm

Outdoor Deck Dining

Hot times and great flavors
in Ithaca, New York!

277-2806

Colombia's "sacred cows." He indicts the Church, their patriarchs and idols successfully portraying two idiots as the "saints" to be venerated and adored without using apparitions, or by invoking religion. His narration also offers vibrant images of the diverse members of Tulua's society: the powerful and corrupt politicians, the elite women always attuned to gossip, the prosperous but marginalized homosexual, and the anarchist Indian.

It's easy to get caught into the complex plot of Bazaar of the Idiots and to feel the power of the unexpected ending. As Raymond Williams writes in the introduction of the book, "The imaginative and humorous Bazaar of the Idiots is Alvarez Gardezabal's most forceful satire of Colombian social and literary institutions."

-Elvira Sanchez

This book can be ordered directly from the publisher:
Latin American Literary Review Press
2300 Palmer St.,
Pittsburgh, PA 15218
(412) 351-1477

Leigh A. Payne, Brazilian Industrialists and Democratic Change. Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 216 pp.

During the 1980s, Latin America emerged from an extended period of authoritarian rule under military regimes. Although these regimes often encountered widespread societal opposition, it is generally assumed that they were consistently supported by the business elite. Clearly industrialists benefitted from the military's ability to promote economic development and deactivate the popular sectors.

In this book, Leigh Payne, an Assistant Professor of Political Science at the University of Wisconsin, calls into question this conventional

wisdom. On the basis of a detailed study of the business elite in Brazil, Payne develops an "Adaptive Actor" model to account for change in the political attitudes and behavior of industrialists during the period of military rule. She argues that the business elite is solely concerned with the state's capacity to protect private sector investments. This in turn, is a function of a government's political legitimacy, competence in managing the economy, and willingness to grant private sector influence over economic policy-making. As long as these conditions are met, Payne argues, the business elite will readily adapt to either authoritarian or democratic regimes.

For Payne, the adaptive behavior of Latin America's business elite is clearly reflected in the Brazilian case. On the one hand, industrialists did enthusiastically support the 1964 military coup against the democratically elected government of João Goulart. This was due to the administration's questionable legitimacy, perceived incompetence in responding to the nation's economic crisis, and its deliberate exclusion of industrialists from decision-making. However, Payne goes on to argue that most business leaders withdrew their support for the military as the effectiveness of these regimes declined. While the emergence of widespread opposition to military rule undermined their political legitimacy, they were also ineffective in responding to the nation's mounting economic problems. Ultimately, the business elite concluded that continued authoritarian rule jeopardized their economic interests much more than the transition to civilian government.

Payne's analysis is largely based on interviews she conducted with 155 industrial leaders between 1987 and 1988. These interviews, coupled with some documentary research, allow Payne to explain what might appear to be inconsistent or contradictory actions by Brazil's business elite. She thus offers fresh insight into the attitudes and behavior of this key sector of civil society. However, because she limited her interviews to only industrialists who were outspoken on political issues or engaged in political activities, one might question the degree to which this group effectively represents the nation's business elite as a whole.

Despite this single caveat, this work does help account for the rise and decline of military rule in Brazil. Clearly, previous studies of authoritarianism in Latin America have exaggerated the business sector's preference for military governments. By focusing carefully on the attitudes and behavior of industrialists, Payne

"Two Bookstores under one Roof!"	
BOOKERY I	BOOKERY II
Out of Print & Rare Books (Bought and Sold) Appraisals Search Service Foreign Language Books	New Fiction Poetry & Drama Scholarly Books Travel Books / Maps Dictionaries / Tapes
M-Sat 10-6:00	607-273-5055
	M-F 9:30-9:30 Sat 9:30-6, Sun 11-6
DEWITT BLDG. 215 N. CAYUGA ST., ITHACA, NY 14850	

Continued on next page

Review Continued from pg 19

helps identify the conditions under which they are likely to support either authoritarian or democratic governments. As such, this book merits the careful attention of all those interested in understanding or supporting the transition to democratic rule in the region.

**-Prof. Francis Adams
Politics Department
Ithaca College**

Jennifer Harbury, Bridge of Courage: Life Stories of the Guatemalan Compañeros and Compañeras. Introduction by Noam Chomsky. 1994 Common Courage Press, Monroe, Maine. 264 pages. Includes a brief glossary and a listing of Guatemalan solidarity projects and organizations.

This is a riveting book. Perhaps my judgement was affected by the fact that I read it as Jennifer Harbury sat in the chill night on the cement of the plaza in front of the Presidential Palace in Guatemala City, in the third week of her hunger strike. But I could not put it down until I had read every one of the thirty-four vignettes - thumbnail sketches of everyday people turned revolutionaries due to some combination of the experience of poverty and suffering, religious practice, and the violent repressive acts of their government. They are diverse and fascinating people, and Harbury has translated and compiled their testimony into compact, powerful stories. I must admit that I also read the postscript, the guide to "How You can make A Difference", and even the glossary and the reading list before I turned my attention to

Noam Chomsky's introduction.

Chomsky presents a whirlwind tour of the history of the Guatemalan civil war, the vicious government repression, aspects of U.S. involvement, and the horrifying conditions that prompt some people to turn to armed struggle as a path towards a better life. This overview helps the reader climb back out of the particularities of people's individual stories, pull back from the intimate view of the combatants' personal quirks and human weaknesses and their moments of extraordinary strength and courage. It helps to remind us that 1994 is the year that a peace treaty is supposed to end the 30 years of civil war, even though the staggering injustice that led to that war still reigns in Guatemala.

But at the end, do turn to the back page and look at the photos of Jennifer and her husband Efrain Bamaca Velasquez (Comandante Everardo). I feel so fortunate to get to see his quiet smile in a photograph, since I first heard of him two years ago in a report of horrifying torture and government denial. Despite - or perhaps because of - learning to live with this state terror, the Guatemalans who struggle in diverse ways for a just society all share the calm, stubborn, unsinkable spirit that shines forth in Jennifer's book.

-Ann Peters

Haiti Continued from pg 3

Building a judiciary

Haiti has virtually no system of justice, yet it faces with the task of bringing many human rights violators to justice. To safeguard its budding democracy, Haiti must build a judiciary as soon as possible. This will be an enormous project that may require multilateral assistance.

Economic aid

Thanks to years of terrorism and pillage, Haiti is bankrupt, both economically and ecologically. Her people are hungry, ill-housed, displaced, under-employed, and lack potable water and health care. Economic aid *could* be helpful, but only if provided in a manner that respects Haiti's sovereignty and that heeds the counsel of Haiti's popular movement.

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has long been a key player in Haiti. Many of those we interviewed are wary of its agenda. Haitians well know that USAID promotes U.S. business interests at the expense of local workers. These Haitians asked us, as members of U.S. solidarity groups, to closely monitor USAID's program in Haiti and to demand greater accountability of that agency.

Continued on next page



AND



Dewitt Mall
215 N. Cayuga St.
Ithaca, NY 14850

AN ABUNDANCE
OF
GOOD FOODS

(607) 273-8213

Continued from previous page

Disarmament and training

Since the first U.S. occupation of Haiti (1915-'34) the U.S. has organized, financed, trained, and armed Haiti's police and army. These armed forces toppled President Aristide and for decades have maintained one dictatorship after another. We oppose continued U.S. involvement in this sphere. As United Nations/Organization of American States Ambassador Colin Granderson has noted, other members of the international community are quite capable of providing police training.

We are troubled by talk of "professionalizing" and merely "reducing" Haiti's military. While Haiti will need a trained, professional police force, we know of no reason why it would need any military force.

Major obstacles to restoring democracy in Haiti include the arms still held by the Haitian military and its attachés; i.e., those opposing the constitutional Government. We, and most Haitians we spoke to, are troubled that the U.S. occupational force has disarmed few of those who have terrorized Haiti since the 1991 coup.

What U.S. citizens must do

We must pressure the U.S. government to:

- keep hands off Haitian elections
- support multilateral (not U.S.-only) training of police
- disarm the Haitian military and other human rights violators
- stop forced repatriation of refugees until it is safe for them to return to Haiti
- investigate the CIA's role in the 1991 coup, its disinformation campaign against Aristide, and its funding of the coup leaders and the FRAPH thugs/rapists.

El Salvador Continued from pg 8

of empowering the excluded- not from the perspective of building a new inclusive "center" in which popular interests are negotiable.

Programatically, there is consensus in the FMLN that the Peace Accords must be fully implemented. There is also agreement that the old pact that has governed the FMLN coalition must be done away with. The historic pact is based on the five organizations having an equal voice in decision-making, each with one vote. Once a decision is made in the unified leadership body it must be ratified or amended by the various structures of the five parties. Once a decision is finalized all of the organizations and their members must abide by it.

Democratic renewal

The ERP-RN have called for a looser pact, allowing for independent strategies and alliances. Within this framework the FMLN would be an umbrella for five independent organizations doing as they see fit. Most of the FMLN seem to support a proposal for a "fusion" of parties. This fusion would mean the end of the "front" and the birth of a unified party based on full democratic participation. Membership would be open to any and all Salvadorans that agree to a program to expand political, economic, and social inclusion of El Salvador's traditionally marginalized classes. The system of voting by organization would be replaced by universal voting by all members (i.e., one person, one vote).

A decision on the direction of the FMLN is likely to be reached at the December 17-18, Congress of the FMLN. In preparation for the Congress, a series of

assemblies of the base of the FMLN has been underway for the last few months. The ERP has been absent from these assemblies.

Expecting defeat for their center-consensus and loose pact proposals, the ERP announced its resignation from the FMLN, which it says has outlived its usefulness as an instrument of struggle. The ERP hopes to form an alliance among Social Democrats and Christian Democrats. They expect a portion of the RN to join them in the future. If the ERP succeeds, a center-left party will form, positioned to arbitrate between right and left, a step which could advance El Salvador's process of reconciliation.

While the exit of the ERP from the FMLN signals the end of an era, it is far from the end of history for the Salvadoran left. Many anticipate that the December FMLN Congress will lead to a revitalized and radically democratic people's party. Whether or not the new democratic left party keeps the name "FMLN," its priority will remain involving the poor and marginalized in the struggle to meet their own needs. It will be able to fight for expanded democracy in El Salvador based on the strength of its own internal democracy. It promises to place itself within a vision of long-term struggle to build Salvadoran socialism through democratic empowerment.



You're in good company... when you support CUSLAR

CUSLAR Supporters (May - December 1994)

Gerhard Adam
Karen Adams
Julie Albertson
Wayne Alt
Nathan R. Andrew
Susan Attwood
Mr. & Mrs. Chas. Babcock
Frank C. & Blythe C. Baldwin
Merry Jo Bauer
Karl & Alba Bernhard
Meg Hardie Boland
Cheryl Brigid Botts
Nan Brown
Dominique Caouette
Debra & Carlos Castillo
Osvaldo Chinchon
John Cline
John Coleman
Howard & Mary Conklin
Claire & Bart Conta
Cornell Language House
Program
Debra Desgrosiellier
Paul & Mary Doughty
John Efroymsen
John & Martha Ferger
Harvey & Bryna Fireside
Peter Fortunato

William Gibson
Mary Gilliland
Rebecca Godin
Henry Goode
Greenstar Cooperative Market
Holly Gump
Helen Haller
Norma Helsper
Dr. & Mrs. Robert B. Hillman
Leni Hochman
Carol Hoffman
Peter Hudiburg
Ithaca Society of Friends
Cathy Johnson
Tim Joseph
Eleanor M. Kleinhans
Peter Ladley
Henrietta Levine
Andrea Looney
David & Sandra Lyons
Janet McClain
Maryl Mendillo
Chuck Mohler
Howard Morse
Paula Moya
Carol Newman
Benjamin Nichols
Jack Ossont

Fred Palmer
Patricia Pérez
Gema Pérez-Sanchez
Jean H. Peters
Kate Pond
Julie Rawson
Helen Rice
Rick Rogers
Elaine Schuler
Jonathan Shailor
William & Erma Shea
Lynn Shoemaker
Emily Sillars
Emma Smith
Robert Sparks
Mike & Teresa Spezio
Caroline Tengstrom Spicer
Lynda Spickard
Maria Nowakowska Stycos
Francis Vanek
Bill Vollmer
Mark Vorreuter
William & Kathleen Whyte
Jean & Tom Wickenden
Kristina Wirtz
Frank Young
Karl Zweerink

Thanks!

Guatemala from pg 12

The U.S. State Department agreed to look into the case, and the U.S. Ambassador subsequently sent an official protest to the Guatemalan government, stating that the Embassy had proof that Everardo was alive for two weeks after being captured by the army. However, the U.S. Embassy has not made this information available to Harbury to help in her legal case, and the Guatemalan government has threatened Harbury with a defamation suit, ordered by the same office that ordered the investigation of her case. A

slander campaign has been launched against Harbury in the Guatemalan media. The accusations of all kinds of immoral behavior are like others made against prominent people who have called for investigation of the disappearance or assassination of their relatives such as the case of the U.S. nun Diana Ortiz, tortured by the Guatemalan military in November 1989.

Harbury explains that the government denial of the validity of her case and the slander campaign against her are standard practices aimed at all family members of the disappeared designed "to either

destroy their political support or drive them into a nervous breakdown." Like her Guatemalan counterparts, she is determined to hold her ground, and she has received enormous support from many of the Guatemalans whom she meets each day. At the same time, death threats against her have mounted. Like the Guatemalans who speak up about the problems of their government and society, Harbury's own life is in danger.

Harbury will be travelling between the United States and Guatemala as she pursues her case. CUSLAR will be sponsoring a talk by Harbury at Cornell in the Spring.

"All the News
That's Fit to Print"

NOT!

... What the mainstream media
can't fit in, you'll find in the

CUSLAR NEWSLETTER

Human Rights in
Guatemala

Rights of
Indigenous People
in the Americas

Peace and Justice

Women in Latin
America

Environmental
Destruction

**If you like our views
please pay your dues....**

I'm enclosing \$10__ \$25__ \$50__ \$100__ Other__
to keep the CUSLAR Newsletters coming

NAME: _____
ADDRESS: _____

(All contributions are tax deductible and will be acknowledged in print)
Send your donation to: CUSLAR, G-29 Anabel Taylor Hall, Cornell University, Ithaca,
NY 14853



Spanish Classes

Now being offered through
CUSLAR!



- *Small Group
- *Experienced Native Speaker
- *Very Reasonable Rates
- *Conversation Oriented
- *Beginner and Intermediate Classes

For more information call the
CUSLAR office at 255-7293.



CRESP
Anabel Taylor Hall
Cornell University
Ithaca, NY 14853

Non-Profit Organization
U.S. postage paid
Permit 448
Ithaca, NY 14850