THE RIGHT TO A HOME

THIS ISSUE EXAMINES STRUGGLES FOR HOME FROM AROUND THE GLOBE

Home. Slum dwellers in Brazil and South Africa and homeless people in New York City demand to be taken into account in their cities’ development plans.

Home. While Guatemalan indigenous peasants are murdered for protesting a loss of their land, the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute works to maintain the Maya way of life through seed banks and holistic agriculture education.

Home. Undocumented youth who seek freedom to live and work in the country they’ve grown up in – the United States – have won a temporary permit called Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals.

Home. Eduardo Galeano’s 1971 classic, “The Open Veins of Latin America,” documents the history of how the homelands of the many have been pillaged for the benefit of a faraway few.

May we continue to work so that all of the places we call home are safe from violence and fear, with respect for our full rights to dignity and participation in the decisions that concern us.

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Editorial: Look for continued U.S. military expansion in Latin America in Obama’s second term

by Tim Shenk

As Barack Obama settles into his second term, key advisers are encouraging the U.S. president to take a renewed interest in Latin America. “Latin America has never mattered more for the United States,” begins a recent Council on Foreign Relations report aimed at reframing U.S. foreign policy for the hemisphere. This opening statement may sound ominous for those in Latin America who have suffered the realities of U.S.-backed dictatorships, U.S.-endorsed structural adjustment or U.S. military and corporate abuse. Since the introduction of the Monroe Doctrine in 1823, increased U.S. involvement in Latin America has often had negative consequences for the region’s majorities.

U.S. influence waning?

Today, the United States government’s economic and military influence over the region is declining. Whereas a 1979 CUSLAR position paper reported that the U.S. then actively supported 17 right-wing military dictatorships in Latin America, over the past decade popular movements in the region have led a “pink tide” toward increased democratic control.

In a lecture at CUSLAR’s August 2012 Spanish for Activists Camp, Kenneth Roberts listed 12 countries to elect left-wing presidents since 1998. More surprisingly, 11 of the 12 have been re-elected at least once, giving them time to develop regional economic and diplomatic mechanisms to counter U.S. influence.

For example, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) was established in 2011 by 33 countries in the Americas, excluding the U.S. and Canada. Bolivian president Evo Morales was a strong proponent of this alternative to the OAS, saying, “A union of Latin American countries is a weapon against imperialism. Wherever there are U.S. military bases that do not respect democracy, that country does not achieve development.”

In addition, regional trade blocs such as ALBA, UNASUR and MERCOSUR provide many Latin American governments with ways to decrease economic dependence on the U.S.

The next four years

In Obama’s second term, how will the U.S. government try to regain past levels of control in Latin America? A bit of research shows a resurgence of military exercises in the region since 2008. In 2008 the U.S. Navy reestablished its 4th Fleet after 58 years of inactivity to patrol Latin American and Caribbean waters.

In 2009 the Pentagon signed an agreement with Colombia to outfit seven military bases for U.S. personnel. One base, called Palanquero, is a strategic refuel site that allows C-17 military transport planes to travel from Alaska to Patagonia. Many understand the Palanquero expansion was necessary after Ecuador's president Rafael Correa made waves internationally by shutting down a U.S. base in Manta.

As Obama looks to pull the U.S. out of the recession, expect a renewed interest in Latin America’s resources. Whether the U.S. government can get away with ‘gunboat diplomacy’ may be up to an active, informed U.S. public.

Co-re

Correa said he would allow U.S. bases if Ecuador could have a base in Miami. In 2010-11, 7,000 Marines and 46 warships were stationed in Costa Rica and 700 troops trained in Nicaragua. In 2012, U.S. and Dominican governments agreed to collaborate on construction of a U.S.-funded naval base off Isla Saona, a small island national park off of the southeast Dominican coast.

In addition, the U.S. funded, outfitted and trained police and military forces in Mexico and Central America from 2008-10 through the $1.6 billion Merida Initiative. Though officially presented as anti-narcotics work, a frightening byproduct has been increased violent repression of social protest in the region.

Another component of U.S. military strategy includes unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs), or drones. While U.S. drones have violated Cuban and Venezuelan airspace for years, the practice may soon become widespread.

Patricio Barnuevo of the Council on Hemispheric Affairs documents the expansion of the U.S. drone program over the past two years, then adds, “American military commanders may come to see UAVs as a new way to restore American influence and power in the region.”

See “U.S. military expansion” on page 12

Cover photo: Zama Ndlovu in the documentary Dear Mandela. Courtesy of Sleeping Giant Films.

CUSLAR counts on your support!

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by Natalie Hench

Brazil seems to have hit the jackpot. It will host the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games, and millions of fans from around the world will flock to the country. Brazil’s economy will grow as infrastructure is built to accommodate the sports and the spectators, and the coffers will be flooded with money from tourism.

This is great news for the Banco Central do Brasil and Brazilian developers. It is terrible news for the poor. According to The Telegraph, the Brazilian government will be investing over $17.7 billion ahead of the games. This enormous sum will be used to build Olympic Village, renovate existing stadiums and improve the city’s public transportation system. It will also threaten the very survival of the slum dwellers.

Brazil’s impoverished communities have united for decades around one all encompassing, ideology forming, subject: futebol. Between 1948 and 1950, the Maracana stadium was built in the center of Rio in time for the FIFA World Cup. The stadium stands in the heart of some of the poorest communities in Rio. At that time, the Maracana was a manifestation of the heart and soul of the soccer enthusiasts in the poorest communities.

Now in 2012 the old stadium is being overhauled. This symbol of state pride is being ripped up and refurbished for the 2014 World Cup, and the community surrounding the stadium is not pleased. The favelados could probably handle a redesigned stadium, but the favelas surrounding this monument to soccer culture are also being cleared and redesigned. Rich suburbanites are moving back to the center, snapping up land that bears only squatters rights for a title, and new shopping centers and financial centers are being designed to ensure tourists stay, eat and shop in the metro area.

Already the favelas have a history and a reputation of violence; they are home to drug lords, arms smugglers, and gang warfare. An uptick in police surveillance has led to relatively peaceful occupations in some areas farther removed from the metro center, but the land close to the stadium and planned Olympic Village is too valuable to waste.

According to Worldcrunch, one informal settlement called Favela do Metro has seen 350 families expelled and their houses razed. Over 300 remain in the favela and are surrounded by rubble and garbage while they wait for further government action. This process may be called progress, or gentrification, or simple economics, but to Rio’s poor it’s simply unfair.

As many as 170,000 people may face eviction before the games take place, and some are refusing to go quietly. The New York Times reports. Before the 2008 Olympics in Beijing, China, authorities easily removed hundreds of thousands of families from the city. It may not prove so easy in Rio; many have started recording the injustice of their evictions and are rallying support and international awareness of their plight.

Taking a cue from activists around the world, some favelados have begun using social media and video cameras to document and display the violence and unjust evictions that have been taking place around the city.

This bears similarity to other movements for basic human rights around the world. In the struggle for democracy in northern Africa many revolutionaries broadcasted their struggles to the world through twitter and Facebook, and a new internationally acclaimed documentary, Dear Mandela, similarly documents the efforts of the Shackdwellers’ Movement in South Africa.

Many favelados have nowhere else to go. Although the housing authority states that evictions are lawful and that families receive compensation and new housing, often the rubble is all they have. It won’t be surprising to see increasing activism ahead of the games as the favelados fight for the only home and life they know.

What are favelas?

Favelas are informal communities in major cities throughout Brazil. They are slums, but not the temporary, shack filled constructions common on the outskirts of Mumbai or Nairobi. These informal settlements tend to be much more permanent. Favelas are the lifetime, and generational, home of many families and often are located in the city-center. The favelas of Rio de Janeiro hold 1.4 million people -- that’s 22 percent of the city’s population! Favelas represent a community and a lifestyle for the favelados, slum dwellers, and clearing them is on the same scale as clearing the ghettos or projects of Detroit, Los Angeles or Baltimore.

Natalie Hench is a senior Sociology major at Cornell University.
Brazil’s slum dwellers call for World Cup without evictions

Hundreds of young people and families participated in this 2011 protest march in the Vila Cristal settlement in Porto Alegre, Brazil. Residents throughout Brazil have formed a “Popular Committee for a World Cup without Evictions.”

Adapted from an interview with Ana Paula Pimentel Walker, a Predoctoral Diversity Fellow in the Department of Anthropology at Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY. Ms. Pimentel Walker studies social movements in Brazil.

by Natalie Hench

It may seem redundant to say that a social movement cannot be undertaken by one man alone, but Brazilians have taken this truism to a new level. Regardless of social class, race, profession, gender or status, people from around Brazil and the world have united to create a cohesive movement for squatters’ rights. It has allowed the people of the favelas, the favelados, to organize and have a voice.

Twelve cities in Brazil will host World Cup events. The municipal and national governments have plans to develop and modernize these cities so they are equipped to handle the onslaught of tourism the games bring. Each of these cities has considerable slum populations that have become active in advocating for their rights as they are systematically evicted from the land the government wants to develop.

The favelados are upset by this government action and have come together to fight for their rights. This movement, which is a cohesive unit of both favelados and professionals, works with established organizations and the media to spread their message to Brazilian citizens, the government and people around the world.

In the streets, airports and municipal buildings these groups protest against the government development work. There is often singing, dancing, and music and video footage and photographs are taken and disseminated to local and national media outlets.

Sociologists, geographers, lawyers, urban planners, engineers and architects have joined with the favelados to form an umbrella organization called Popular Committee for a World Cup without Evictions. While groups under the umbrella retain autonomy, they have united to create common strategies and goals.

International attention has been garnered for this movement as well. Raquel Rolnik, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Inadequate Housing, spoke at the last general conference and conveyed the UN’s concern regarding mega events and their consequences for squatters’ rights.

While all 12 cities have organizations which promote squatters’ rights, Porto Alegre is especially active. This is significant because Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paolo, two other active cities, are ten times larger than Porto Alegre. The percentage of people living in informal housing there is large and they have mobilized considerable support for the national movement.

These individuals, local groups, national organizations and international bodies are pressuring the Brazilian government to give rights to marginalized citizens. According to the federal constitution, Brazilian citizens are guaranteed the right to housing. While at a strictly legal level the municipal governments can justify the evictions, civil and constitutional laws and UN agreements suggest that the favelados should be fairly compensated.

The movement’s goal is to find a solution for all. Currently, evictions and relocations move people to city outskirts far from jobs and transportation. Favelados say they deserve to be compensated with adequate housing nearby so neither their lives nor the development projects are disrupted.

Favela residents’ campaign, chave por chave, or “key for key,” means that squatters refuse to leave the favelas before they receive the keys to their permanent housing.

Haiti is a training ground for Brazilian troops who then return home to displace poor

Reports surfaced last fall that Brazilians trained by MINUSTAH, the United Nations Stabilizing Mission in Haiti, were being used to displace the poor from the favelas of Brazil’s largest cities.

Gilberto Antonio Gomez of la Central Sindical e Popular of Brazil denounced his government’s use of extreme military force, including tanks and helicopters, to subdue and displace poor residents from major cities in preparation for hosting the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Summer Olympics.

In 2008 Janet Sanderson, then U.S. Ambassador to Haiti, called MINUSTAH “an indispensable tool in realizing the core U.S. Government policy interests in Haiti,” including the suppression of “resurgent populist and anti-market economy political forces,” she wrote in a report.

MINUSTAH, which was formed in 2004 and is comprised of over 12,500 soldiers and police officers from 50 countries, has played a central role in maintaining Haiti as a source of cheap labor for international corporations, who operate over 40 tax-free factories in Haiti.

Brazil’s Major General Fernando Rodrigues Goulart is the force commander, and Brazil has played a central role along with the United States in maintaining a militarized Haiti.

Ed.
South African social movement leaders share lessons on organizing, dignity
by Natalie Hench

What’s shiny, happy, and rich? According to the boards of FIFA and the Olympic Games, Brazil is; or will be in about two years.

These organizations, as well as the government of Brazil, hope to show off a country that sparkles when it opens its borders to hundreds of thousands of tourists in just a few years. The entire world will be scrutinizing Brazil, and it will be crucial to present a country that appears perfect.

To achieve this, Brazil’s government is investing billions of dollars in order to display a presentable face for the world. Unfortunately this plan requires the poor, “dirty,” inhabitants of the country’s many informal settlements to be swept away, out of sight.

A very similar process took place in South Africa ahead of the 2010 World Cup. In Durban, South Africa’s third largest city, thousands of shacks were razed and many were forced to move to “transit camps” located 10-20 miles from the city.

In response to this injustice, communities within several informal settlements began to rise up against the local governments to protest the unfair evictions.

Eventually these groups united under the name Abahlali basemjondolo – Zulu for “residents of the shacks” – and fought together for the rights of the slum dwellers.

In 2007, Dara Kell and Christopher Nizza began filming a documentary called Dear Mandela, which exposes the struggle of these communities for the right to housing. Since its release in 2011, Dear Mandela has won several awards in festivals around the world and has brought international attention to the Abahlali movement.

Ithaca, NY was one of eight U.S. cities to host Kell and two of the young protagonists from the movement in October, where they screened the film and spoke to campus and community groups about their endeavor.

Mnikelo Ndabankulu and Zodwa Nsibandze, two founding members of Abahlali, are residents of Durban’s informal settlements and have helped organize the communities’ fight for justice. The film follows these spirited young activists as they stand up for their rights in the highest court in South Africa and become leaders in a growing social movement.

Abahlali deals with very similar issues to those faced by many communities around the world: struggles for decent housing and basic human dignity. The Abahlali movement against exploitation and for the right to housing and human rights is exactly the predicament that the favelados must deal with today.

While visiting Cornell University, Ndabankulu explained that the World Cup and the Olympics are “world mega-events” that attract millions of people from across the globe. These mega-events and community destruction go hand-in-hand as the standards for hosting such an event are anti-poor.
Continued from previous page

FIFA, explicitly or implicitly, tells governments that there can’t be visible informal settlements, that these situations must remain hidden from spectators and tourists. These world standards, Ndabankulu says, force the government to compromise the poor.

Although the Abahlali movement preceded the World Cup by several years, it gained significant traction after the South African government passed the Slums Act of 2007 in preparation for the games.

South Africa’s Slums Act was instituted to clear the large cities of slums in time for the World Cup. Shack dwellers defeated the Act in the Constitutional Court and kept their homes.

This Act provided local governments with the authority to evict residents from their homes in informal settlements. Prior to the Act, slum dwellers had only to prove residence for 48 hours to prevent immediate and uncompensated eviction from public or private land. This Act removed many of the safeguards that had provided housing security for those living in informal settlements.

Like in South Africa, housing law in Brazil requires that evicted residents are adequately compensated. According to an article in the Fall 2012 NACLA Report on the Americas, squatter protection laws in Rio guarantee a new home within four miles of the original, or monetary compensation sufficient to acquire a compatible house. In Rio these regulations are not being followed – often the compensation is far less, or the new home is up to 40 miles from the original.

Nsibande explained that the Slums Act was instituted to clear South Africa’s large cities of slums in time for the World Cup. The government, she explained, wanted to clean the cities to show to the world that everything was in order.

Initially, the founding members of Abahlali entered a construction site, where an informal settlement had been, and tore up the work that had begun there. The local government had promised new public housing in the area, and instead construction workers had arrived to begin building a private brick factory. Residents then staged a blockade of a highway and demanded an audience with the mayor.

Fourteen people were arrested that day, including school children. Over the next five years Abahlali met with officials, lawyers and policy makers, and eventually took a lawsuit to the Constitutional Court, the highest in South Africa, to argue the unjustness of the Slums Act. In 2009 they were successful and the contested clauses in the Slums Act were revoked.

Like the construction of a brick factory which provided the impetus for the Abahlali movement, the parking garage for which the Favela do Metro has been demolished has caused significant concern. This is the first step of a $45 million redevelopment plan in the area surrounding the Maracanã stadium, according to a recently released NACLA report.

So far 8,000 residents have been removed from informal settlements, and another 150,000 face eviction.

It is still early, but over the next four years these movements could likely mimic the Abahlali protests of South Africa. Ndabankulu spoke to the growing agitation in Rio de Janeiro: “They need vocal voices now,” he says, “not the day of the games. They must start organizing and mobilizing now.” Ndabankulu ended with this explanation:

“These communities, whether in South Africa or Brazil, need vocal mobilization. They need to tell the authorities what kind of societies they want. The government says they want ‘world-class cities,’ and it’s up to the slum dwellers to demand that these world-class cities must be amalgamated to accommodate all levels of life, not only the wealthy.”

As Sandy lays bare inequalities, NYC homeless demand response

Superstorm Sandy was a devastating reminder to many throughout the U.S. northeast that stark inequalities in the area of housing are not just a problem of the global south.

The lights went out for 8.5 million homes and businesses across 21 states at the end of October. New Jersey and New York residents went days, even weeks, without power, water or heat in their homes.

Yet as federal funds start to flow for rebuilding efforts, the New York City-based organization, Picture the Homeless, is calling for a deeper analysis of the social inequalities laid bare by the storm.

This grassroots group founded and led by homeless people demands that post-hurricane relief efforts benefit everyone, especially those who were homeless or unemployed before the storm.

Kendall Jackman, a homeless shelter resident and member of Picture the Homeless, asked the city to prioritize the pre-Sandy displaced population in recovery efforts. The group’s report, available at picturethehomeless.org, provides solutions to eliminate homelessness in NYC through use of vacant properties.

New York and housing transit camps in South Africa were both developed as temporary “quick fixes” but have become long-term “solutions” for cities unwilling to address structural problems that lead to homelessness.

She critiques the public discourse on poverty and economic crisis, as it excludes the voices of those most affected.

Hall writes: “The poor themselves can have a very different analysis of the power relationships at the root of poverty and may present a very different set of solutions for ending it, informed by their grassroots knowledge.”

For example, a 2011 Picture the Homeless report, “Banking on Vacancy: Homelessness and real estate speculation,” documents vacant buildings and lots in targeted areas of New York City. The report concludes that the city could house five times the current homeless population by making vacant properties available to the homeless. This would save the $3,500 the municipal government now spends per homeless shelter resident every month.

-Ed.
by Kayla Kohlenberg

Standing at the border between Mexico and the United States in Brownsville, Texas, I put my arm through the rusty bars that separate the two countries, part of my body reaching into Mexico and the rest pressed against the fence.

Names of the dead or disappeared filled the air one after the other. After each name was called, the crowd responded with a pain-filled cry of “¡Presente!” in unison, a seemingly endless roll call of loss flowing from the crowd.

The names being called were those of dead or disappeared victims of the Drug War. This war was begun in the United States and has hurt not only this country, but has decimated Mexico. Since Mexican President Felipe Calderón declared war on drug cartels in 2006, over 60,000 people in Mexico and the rest of the world have been killed, over 10,000 disappeared, and 160,000 displaced.

Photograph by Kayla Kohlenberg

Demonstrators with the U.S. Peace Caravan ended their month-long cross-country bus tour in Washington, D.C. on September 10-12, demanding an end to the War on Drugs that has killed 60,000 people in Mexico and destroyed families in the United States.

The enormity of these figures can be mind-boggling. The reality though, is that the destruction caused by the War on Drugs is wreaked on people: fathers, mothers, children, and friends.

From this pain a national peace movement has emerged in Mexico, led by poet Javier Sicilia, to give faces and voices to the victims of this failed and costly war. From August to September 2012, members of the Movement for Peace with Justice and Dignity (MPJD) brought their stories to the United States. They traveled over 6,000 miles and visited 27 cities from San Diego to Washington, D.C on a Caravan for Peace, calling for an end to the War on Drugs.

For over a month, I traveled with this caravan among victims organizers, Mexican and U.S. non-profit representatives, activists, artists and press, to raise awareness of the tragedy happening every day in Mexico and the U.S. responsibility to end it. The MPJD calls for a dialogue on alternatives to drug prohibition, as well as the prohibition of assault weapons and the enforcement of arms regulations to reduce the smuggling of high-powered weapons to Mexico. It also calls for more humane immigration policies, an end to all foreign military aid to Mexico and accountability for financial institutions found laundering money.

The Caravan held many events, ranging from rallies in Texas, to marches in Chicago, to lobbying in Washington, D.C. We worked until all hours of the night, slept mostly on floors and relied completely on the hospitality of host communities.

Every day I heard stories like that of Melchor Flores, a father who still sets a place at the dinner table for his disappeared son, or Dani, an 18-year-old boy who fled from Juarez, Mexico to El Paso, Texas after five of his family members were kidnapped or killed. We heard from U.S. families who had been similarly affected: a mother in San Diego who had lost a son to a drug overdose and a boy in Chicago who had been forced out of his neighborhood by violence and poverty.

Hearing these testimonies showed me how important this cause is for both countries.

The proposed changes will take time, but the determination of the people on the Caravan was awe-inspiring, as they desperately fought for peace and justice for their families and communities. It is impossible to determine the exact impact of the Caravan for Peace. However, personal connections were formed and dialogues started as people in communities around the country realized the destruction caused by the War on Drugs and the U.S. responsibility to spearhead change.

Victim Profile: Olga Reyes

Olga Reyes’s family members are human rights activists in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico. Targeted for protesting the human rights violations caused by the militarization of Chihuahua, six of Reyes’s family members have been killed and more than 20 currently live in exile. The family faces harassment and threats by organized crime as well as by government officials. Reyes traveled with the Caravan for Peace to tell her story and call for justice. “My beloved ones were riddled mercilessly,” she said. “They shot their bodies and made their faces unrecognizable. Guns should be used for defense, not for extermination.”

Kayla Kohlenberg, a 2012 CUSLAR intern and graduate of Ithaca College, traveled with the Peace Caravan for the entire 6,000 miles. She served as interpreter and assistant to the coordinator.

LEARN MORE!

Look for Javier Sicilia’s profile in Time’s 2011 Person of the Year issue

Movement for Peace and Justice with Dignity:
movimientoToporlapaz.mx
U.S. Peace Caravan:
www.caravanforpeace.org
A struggle for seeds and sovereignty

The Citizen’s Trade Campaign explains how the trade agreement works:
“Farmers and public agricultural research institutions once freely exchanged seeds and together bred varieties adapted to unique local conditions…. Now, however, the major agri-chemical corporations are charging royalties for their use in research and crop production.”

In Guatemala, for example, the transnational company Monsanto recently purchased all seed distribution companies in the country and encourages the use of patented, genetically modified “terminator” seeds that don’t reproduce after one harvest.

DR-CAFTA has sections that address the patents of seeds. As the stipulations of this agreement continue to go into effect, companies such as Monsanto are increasingly able to enforce patent royalties for seeds and sue farmers if patented seeds cross-pollinate with native seeds.

World seed distribution is currently monopolized by ten seed companies, which own about 67 percent of the global seed propriety market. Monsanto alone owns 23 percent of the market, further preventing self-sustaining indigenous communities.

Lec has developed seed banks in the Lake Atitlán region to help preserve the native food sources, but with these provisions of DR-CAFTA coming into effect, he expects a rebuttal to his efforts. Indigenous resistance to the Guatemalan government and DR-CAFTA provisions that allow companies access to land and resources have been dangerous and unsuccessful, which is why Lec views food sovereignty as the “most subversive act we could take against globalization.”

Although Guatemala has passed a law that includes “food sovereignty” into the political agenda, DR-CAFTA trumps national laws and provides obstacles to implementation. Lee’s work with permaculture and the rescuing of traditional and ancestral knowledge brings the struggle back to the land and to the people.

by Dana Villalobos

“Unity in Biodiversity” is not a misspelling of the European Union’s official slogan “United in Diversity.” Rather, it is a political statement promoted by the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute (IMAP) of the Lake Atitlán region of Guatemala.

While Europe celebrates its diversity, it is largely to Europeans’ doing that ecological and cultural diversity in the Americas has been systematically destroyed. Resources continue to be extracted from the region, eco-systems destroyed, and people forced to move from their land and homes.

Ronaldo Lec, the Director of IMAP, led conversations in Ithaca, Elmira, Dryden and at the Onondaga Nation from October 12-17 on food sovereignty and the reclaiming of indigenous agricultural practices in Mesoamerica. He explained that IMAP’s slogan, “Unity in Biodiversity,” is an attempt to build on the Maya philosophy that humans, plants and animals are all part of one community. According to Lec, “there cannot be life without biodiversity.” His organization struggles against the policies of an increasingly globalized world that threaten biodiversity through monoculture farming and genetically modified terminator seeds.

This is not the first time biodiversity has been threatened in the region. Cortez’ colonization of Mexico brought with it an extermination of domesticated amaranth in Latin America. Amaranth is the best food of vegetable origin for human consumption. It has twice the protein of corn and rice and is packed with vitamins.

The Aztecs had thousands of acres of the plant, but due to its use in indigenous religious rituals, the Spaniards ordered that all its production be stopped and the existing crops be burned. Some say that because it was the food of the warriors, it was banned to keep the people weak and easier to conquer. The Spaniards delegitimized the plant, calling it “bledo,” which means “nothing.”

To this end, corn has replaced amaranth as the primary crop in the Americas, so much so that Lec reminds us that “North Americans have more corn in their bodies than Mesoamericans.”

Although Mesoamericans are thought to eat a lot of corn, corn syrup is in almost every processed food, especially in the United States. Also, most beef is corn fed and ethanol is used increasingly in fuel, so corn is key in many steps of industrial food production. Because of this, the stereotype is turned on its head.

The Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement (DR-CAFTA) is another recent threat to biodiversity in Latin America.

Dana Villalobos is a junior at Ithaca College studying Pre-Law.
Guatemalan military massacres
8 indigenous protestors in Totonicapán

by Dana Villalobos

Eight indigenous peasants were murdered by the Guatemalan military in Totonicapán, Guatemala, in the Lake Atitlán region, on October 4, and numbers continue to rise. Although killings in the country are not uncommon, it is the mobilization in response to this one that makes it unique.

"At some latitudes eight deaths is a big deal [but] I don't think it is such an urgent matter."

Harold Caballeros
Guatemalan Chancellor

Peasants were protesting high electricity rates, as well as educational reforms that make teaching careers inaccessible for the poor, and constitutional reforms that further embed neoliberal policies. The military’s attack on the peaceful protest resulted in 30 wounded and one remains missing. The numbers keep rising as news stories update the situation in Totonicapán.

The Los Angeles Times reported that nine members of the Guatemalan military were arrested for their involvement in the killings of the protesters. National prosecutor Claudia Paz y Paz said, “a colonel and eight soldiers would be tried on charges of ‘extrajudicial execution’ in the shootings of the peasants.”

Two weeks after the killing, the people of Totonicapán mobilized in a Solidarity Caravan from across the country and ended at the mountain pass known as “Alaska,” where the massacre occurred.

Instead of trying to negotiate with the protesters, the military used tear gas and started shooting as soon as they arrived at the scene, according to the grassroots organization NISGUA.

As a result of this loss of life, NISGUA reported calls for Defense Minister Ulises Anzueto and Interior Minister Mauricio López Bonilla to step down from their positions. Anzueto was in command over the soldiers charged with the killings and López Bonilla for his role as overseer of the National Civil Police and his denial of the importance of the incident. Also, NISGUA warned that the massacre “may demolish the administration's democratic and reformist image, jeopardizing government priorities such as the reinstatement of direct U.S. military aid.”

Despite the outcry, Chancellor Harold Caballeros told El Periódico de Guatemala: “It pains me to admit that at some latitudes eight deaths is a big deal, and though it may sound bad to say it, our country has twice that many deaths every of this, I don't think it is such an urgent matter.”

It seems that the elite are not alone in their attempt to downplay the killings, as the middle class blames the “dumb, lazy Indians” for their own suffering. Guatemalan poet Julio Roberto Prado published a poem in response to the massacre on October 4, in which he responded to the most ignorant of comments from the middle class: “There are the dead people they [the indigenous people] wanted”, saying that he “does not know how to explain to the families that lost their loved ones, that they are to blame, for wanting to die.”

According to Prado, the attitude of the middle class is due to their blind striving to associate themselves with the elite.

Remembering Guatemalan military terror

The coup made Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas president, and resulted in the reversal of all of Arbenz’ reforms. The war saw many coups d’état, “abductions and violence, including mutilations and public dumping of bodies.”

A peace agreement was not reached until December of 1996, under new president Álvaro Arzu, but it has been far from peaceful in Guatemala. The current president, Otto Pérez Molina, has a history of involvement with the vicious killings throughout the years of the civil war.

Kate Doyle, a senior analyst at the National Security Archive reports, “Otto Pérez Molina was central to the scorched earth campaign that resulted in the massacre of thousands of Guatemalans.”

Evidence of this comes in the form of video clips that implicate Pérez Molina in Guatemalan military raids and massacres. In addition, military papers connect him to an operation in the region of Quiche, which resulted in 2,744 people massacred between January 1982 and December 1983.

Pérez Molina’s election in November 2011 signals a return to mano dura, or “iron fist” policies in Guatemala. A career military man and retired general, Pérez Molina is the first military leader of the country since democratic elections were reinstated in 1986.

The massacres, and human rights violations in Guatemala are at the forefront of newspapers, but in the back there is always a movement of people working to build communities one field of corn at a time. The community is not always bound by geography, language or culture, as efforts come not only from towns like those in Lake Atitlán, but also from people around the world. In the end, corn runs through all our veins.
From the CUSLAR History Vault

1982 Falklands/Malvinas conflict:
A 'diversionary war' for Argentina, Britain

by Kailin Koch

April 2012 marked the 30th anniversary of the Argentine invasion of the Falkland Islands, which remains a contentious and unresolved issue in the country. The Falkland Islands are called Las Islas Malvinas by the Argentines who claim it as their own. This event provides an important example of the extent repressive governments will go to cover up domestic unrest in this case, through aggressive, diversionary foreign policy.

In 1982, near the end of Argentina’s “Dirty War,” Argentine military dictator Leopoldo Galtieri ordered the seizure of the islands from the British, claiming sovereignty due to their proximity to Argentina and former position as part of the Spanish Empire. British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher then sent military forces to retake the islands, and they have remained under British control ever since.

Galtieri’s military campaign provides an example of how authoritarian dictatorships can promote foreign wars as a means of alleviating domestic discontent and legitimizing their rule.

A 1982 CUSLAR article explains, “In a desperate effort for political survival, Galtieri decided to stir up nationalist sentiment by invading the Falkland Islands.” Others have noted that Thatcher’s equally exaggerated nationalist response to recapture the Falklands was a political diversion at a time when her administration was implementing brutal anti-worker policies at home.

Similarly, in a study of Argentina’s invasion of the Falkland Islands, Amy Oakes notes that “The conflict over the Falkland Islands is the archetypal case of diversionary war,” with the government prompted domestic unrest to pursue aggressive external policy. While this may be a good example the potential deception of dictatorships, Oakes cautions against drawing a simplistic connection between foreign conflict and internal strife. She notes that states have other strategies “to address their domestic problems, such as enacting reform measures or representing the opposition.”

This contentious relationship with Great Britain continues to this day. “As things stand now,” according to a CUSLAR report, “there seems to be little room for a face-saving solution that will be satisfactory to both governments.” Though the CUSLAR report dates from 1982, the sentiment still holds true today. These small, ostensibly unimportant islands have come to symbolize a great deal for both Argentina and Britain.

As recently as 2010 the two countries came to blows about British oil exploration in the region, in what BBC reports the Argentine government characterized as a “militarization” of the waters surrounding the islands. Both President Cristina Fernandez of Argentina and British Prime Minister David Cameron reaffirmed their country’s commitment to the islands on the anniversary of the invasion this past April.

The British were the first European colonizers to land on the Falkland Islands, which were then passed to the French, then to the Spanish. They came under British rule in 1833. Approximately 3,000 people inhabit the islands, whose primary industries are fishing and sheep farming.

The Falkland Islands invasion also provides an interesting instance of a government created campaign that sparked a persistent nationalistic movement. The state continues to push for regional recognition of the Argentine claim to the islands, as the Washington Post reported in April. The article asserts, “Passions run high here, with polls showing that the vast majority of the Argentines support the government’s campaign to pressure Britain over Las Malvinas.”

Indeed, an article by Vladimir Hernandez for the BBC reported, “Recent opinion polls suggest that two-thirds of the population supports this view.” Despite the fact that this invasion was motivated primarily by a self-concerned dictatorship securing its own power, the invasion prompted a wide scale movement of national identity that continues to this day.

In reflecting on this anniversary, it is important to remember both the extent to which governments are willing to go to maintain control, and the level to which such regimes can fundamentally change national issues and opinions.

Kailin Koch is a sophomore at Cornell University studying Spanish and Government.

CUSLAR ARCHIVES OPEN

The CUSLAR Newsletter has been a source of on-the-ground accounts of Latin American politics and social movements, as well as the U.S. Latin American solidarity movement, since 1974. From the aftermath of the CIA-sponsored coup in Chile to the history of U.S. involvement in Haiti, the Newsletters provide first-hand information on a wide variety of topics relevant to the hemisphere.

Make an appointment to visit CUSLAR's archives at 316 Anabel Taylor Hall at Cornell University, or find CUSLAR Newsletters online at cuslar.org under the “Resources” tab.
DACA: Undocumented youth weigh options

by Melissa Giangrande

Under intense pressure from immigrants’ rights groups, especially young people, the Obama administration has undertaken efforts to transform the U.S. immigration system. On June 15 President Barack Obama declared an executive order known as Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), which allows undocumented youth to apply for temporary work permits in the U.S.

DACA: a two-year work permit

As of August 15, 2012, undocumented individuals under 31 may seek to undergo the DACA process, allowing them to remain in the country and apply to work for two years, subject to renewal.

Since 1982 undocumented students have had a right to attend primary and secondary school. Past this point, youth are excluded from eligibility for federal loans and grants, work-study jobs, paid internships, clinical training programs, professional licenses, and in many states reduced in-state tuition.

DACA effects vary by state. Uniformly, however, it allows students to legally work, which would substantially increase their ability to attend and pay for college. Many critics of the executive order note that DACA only assists a small percentage of unauthorized migrants and does not provide a path to citizenship.

Local Response

There are an estimated 15 to 30 undocumented students at Cornell University, and Cornell law professor Susan Hazeldean estimates that as many as 2,500 young adults in the surrounding region are eligible for DACA. Cornell Law School, Cornell Farmworker Program, Rochester Legal Aid Society, and Miller Mayer LLP teamed up on September 29 to offer a free workshop assisting youth in identifying and gathering the proper application documents.

The event was highly promoted but many students chose not to apply and risk being targeted as undocumented. Of the 1.4 million youths eligible nationwide, only 180,000 had applied as of October 31, according to the Internet portal voxxi.com.

José Perez, a lawyer from Syracuse, has helped 30-50 clients submit their DACA paperwork since August. He hasn’t received any denial letters yet and is hopeful all of his clients will be approved for this work permit.

Perez says the national tone on immigration is changing.

“It’s no secret that immigration is the number one issue for Latino voters, above the economy and jobs. So we believe that reforms will be taken seriously in this Congress.” Perez points out, “If the DREAM Act passes, for example, we won’t have to rely on DACA.”

Cautions

Cornell University law professor Steven Yale-Loehr warns in LexisNexis Emerging Issues Analysis that DACA can be very beneficial but is not for everyone.

“High school students may want to put off applying. A DACA application may prevent the three- and ten-year bars from complicating future immigration applications.” DACA is a “wholly discretionary temporary program based on principles of prosecutorial discretion,” says Yale-Loehr.

Perez warns, “This is like showing up on the steps of the government and saying, ‘we are here.’ Deferred Action is not a law – these young people are not entitled to anything. Their cases are decided by immigration officers and there is lots of discretion.” It is likely that these terms would change immediately if foreign relations are strained or another recession occurs.

Additionally, individuals are given only one opportunity to apply. Incomplete or inaccurate applications may be denied, so it is critical that applicants reserve the necessary time and attention for appropriately completing the process.

Each person must make their own careful decision about applying based on their individual circumstances. Perez says that about ten of his clients have decided against applying. Some “are concerned because you have to give an address, and they may have undocumented parents living with them.”

Many believe DACA to be a step toward greater immigration reform. However, it leaves many of the core issues unresolved, such as pathways to regularized status.

Melissa Giangrande is a freshman at Cornell University’s School of Industrial Labor Relations.
CUSLAR prepares fall 2013 launch of Paulo Freire Engaged Practitioners Program

ITHACA, NY -- In the fall of 2013, along with local and national partners, CUSLAR will launch the Paulo Freire Engaged Practitioners Program to host scholars and human rights practitioners from Latin America in Ithaca, NY.

The practitioners will enrich campus and community dialogue and broaden understanding of pivotal human rights issues. Practitioners will share knowledge and experience through lectures and workshops, engage on campus and in the wider community, and will be given time for research and reflection.

Inspired by the pedagogical tradition of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire, this program will be shaped by a human rights framework and will allow students, faculty and community members to engage with leading Latin American practitioners in fields such as education, sociology, international and human development and political economy.

Combining elements from established practitioner fellow programs at Harvard, Columbia, McGill and other institutions, the Paulo Freire Program will foster opportunities for diverse communities to learn from each other.

In addition, the program is designed to support Latin American practitioners in their pursuits of research and professional enrichment. The program will select practitioners who seek to balance intellectual rigor and social action and wish to spend time in Ithaca in dialogue and reflection. The program aims to provide this space as a contribution to practitioners’ increased effectiveness in subsequent “on-the-ground” human rights work.

Paulo Freire (1921-1997), Brazilian educator and pioneer in critical pedagogical theory, insists that the educator’s role should be to prepare students to think critically about their social surroundings, solve social problems collectively and work toward ending oppression in its many forms. In naming its Engaged Practitioners Program after him, CUSLAR aims to affirm Freire’s vision for educational institutions and acknowledge Latin American leadership in the development of social theory.

Latin America brings key perspectives for social change

With a population of nearly 600 million, Latin America is now the most socially unequal region in the world. Humanitarian crises plague Mexico, Colombia and Honduras, and more than a third of the population lives on less than two dollars a day. At the same time, or perhaps partly because of such marked inequalities, Latin America is at the forefront of human rights struggles on a range of issues, including the right to education, health care, land, natural resources and public participation.

Many educators, journalists, organizers, religious leaders, and indigenous leaders throughout Latin America who carry on Freire’s rich tradition, continuing to develop innovative theory and practice in favor of human rights. CUSLAR aims to bring the lessons and best practices of Latin American practitioners into dialogue with students, faculty and communities in Ithaca and across the northeast United States.

The program will connect key Latin American social movement leaders and human rights practitioners with campuses and communities in the northeast U.S., sharing lessons for human rights struggles locally and nationally.

From page 2: U.S. military expansion

Who’s to gain?

Though much of the official justification for U.S. militarization in the region is based on “fighting the drug war” and “controlling crime,” analysts such as Annie Bird have come to different conclusions. In a Spring 2012 article in the NACLA Report on the Americas, Bird presents several case studies that show that “militarization in Central America is less about controlling crime than ensuring access to natural resources.”

Major U.S. investors are well aware of Latin America’s continued potential as a cheap source of energy, minerals and food. For example, the U.S. imports 50 percent more oil from Latin America than from the Middle East.

Yet now the U.S. faces competition as a major buyer of raw materials. China is the new big player in the region, with Free Trade Agreements with Chile, Peru and Costa Rica and $56 billion per year in trade with Brazil as of 2010. Since 2005, according to Boston University professor Kevin Gallagher, China has invested more in South America than the World Bank, U.S. Export Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank combined.

As the U.S. faces unprecedented competition for the hemisphere’s resources, journalist Ray del Papa suggests a review of history when trying to make sense of current U.S. policy. “No country in Latin America or the Caribbean has ever fired a shot in hostility toward the United States,” he writes on the on the Internet portal Counterpunch, while the U.S. has intervened in the hemisphere over 100 times.

“With this background,” del Papa continues, “and the fact that more and more countries are liberating themselves from United States dominance, it is clear that the U.S. will push back. This is the real reason why the U.S. Navy reactivated the 4th Fleet; it will give the United States the option to use ‘gunboat diplomacy’ whenever it seems fit.”

As Obama and his advisers look to pull the U.S. out of an economic recession, the region can expect a renewed interest in the energy, mineral and food resources of Latin America.

Whether the U.S. government can get away with a return to the grisly “gunboat diplomacy” of the past two centuries may be up to an active, informed U.S. public.
Colombian peace talks bring hope, doubt, fear

by Lillian Hall
In August, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos announced that after months of secret talks between high-ranking government officials and FARC guerrilla leaders, there would be peace talks between the two groups in November in Havana, Cuba.

After nearly 60 years of armed conflict, this is good news for the Colombian people. However, it is not without some concerns, doubts and fears.

I am volunteering on the Caribbean coast region of Colombia with a small, community organization called Sembrandopaz, or “Sowing Seeds of Peace.” Founded by Ricardo Esquivia, an award-winning peace activist, interfaith leader and human rights lawyer, Sembrandopaz works with communities of the Montes de María area, an area that suffered much and for decades.

During the worst period around the year 2000, there were paramilitary massacres which forced entire communities to flee. Displacement is only one of the terrible legacies of the conflict.

For people who have witnessed and survived massacres and lived as displaced people, there is fear and mistrust. Eighty percent of the atrocities were carried out by paramilitary forces who are still at large. Ironically, there is also fear that the violence might in fact increase during the peace process as the Right tries to sabotage the process.

It is hopeful that the government and the FARC are negotiating an ambitious five-point agenda, including rural development and land tenure. But without the agreement of the paramilitaries and the other guerrilla groups, how can peace really be attained?

Furthermore, even the Monsignor of the Catholic Church acknowledged that the neoliberal economic model at the root of so much of the social injustice is not on the agenda. How can real peace come about if transnational mining operations and agribusinesses can continue to dislodge peasants to get their land, exploit them as workers and ravage the environment? Sembrandopaz focuses on how local communities can be involved in the implementation of the peace process. While the government and the FARC can sign an accord, that’s just the beginning.

Esquivia stresses that what is being negotiated is not, in fact, peace. It is the end of the armed conflict. “But it’s hard to talk about peace with people shooting at each other, so a signed agreement to stop the conflict is a good thing,” he says. Peace is not just the absence of war. It’s land for the landless, education, health care and citizen participation.

Sembrandopaz encourages people to visit Colombia during the peace process and is organizing study tours or delegations. I have been entrusted with that task. We are convinced that there is no better time than this to visit Colombia and hear firsthand from the people themselves, what their hopes and dreams are for Colombia and what the prospects for peace really are.

We will be meeting with Afro and mestizo displaced communities, peasant leaders, human rights workers, church people, victims groups, women’s groups and ex-guerrilla combatants.

Dangers persist for migrants in Arizona desert

by Miguel Pickard
The journey to the United States continues to be a risky endeavor for migrants who cross the border without authorization, especially if they do so through the Sonoran Desert of Arizona.

In addition to the more well-known dangers of extreme temperatures, predatory fauna and rough terrain, migrants must also deal with a wide assortment of dangerous bipeds. These include abusive Border Patrol agents, violent coyotes, or smugglers, white-supremacist vigilantes and well-armed bandits. Women are especially vulnerable, and sexual violence is a constant threat throughout their journey.

The Coalición de Derechos Humanos, a pro-migrant rights organization in Tucson, AZ, has documented an approximate 10-fold increase in the migrant death rate from 2007-08 to 2010-11. The increase can be explained in part from the changing demographics of border crossers, as desperate economic conditions at home force more women, elderly and even pre-teens to migrate through increasingly hostile terrain.

Once in the Arizona desert, another danger migrants face is coming into the cross-hairs of vigilantes’ high-powered weapons. Derechos Humanos reports seven migrants killed by gunshot wounds in 2011-12. The Southern Poverty Law Center concurs, recently finding an increase in heavily-armed neo-nazi groups patrolling the U.S. border.

Since current border policies were implemented in the 1990s, the remains of more than 6,000 men, women and children have been recovered along the U.S.-Mexico border. It is widely accepted that the total number of deaths could be several times higher, since many remains are never found.

Several humanitarian organizations in Arizona regularly patrol the desert and leave water and food on trails in an effort to reduce migrant deaths. Their efforts are guided in part by the doctrine of “civil initiative,” described by No More Deaths as the “legal right and ethical responsibility of civil society to protect the victims of human rights violations when government is the violator”.

The Inter-American Court of Human Rights and the UN Human Rights Commission have petitioned the U.S. government to cease implementation of its current border enforcement strategy, as it is in violation of international laws on human rights.

Miguel Pickard is a CUSLAR collaborator working in the southern Mexican border state of Chiapas and in the Arizona desert. He has been involved with border issues since 2001.
Review: *Open Veins* still powerful after 40 years

All of the book’s themes are still relevant and worth exploring because learning the history of the region is largely helpful in understanding contemporary issues.

Galeano sets the stage for the book with the conquest of the lands by Spanish rule. Gold mining led to massive profits used by latifundistas, or large landowners, to purchase nobility titles and luxury goods instead of investing, building or modernizing the region.

Shortly thereafter, Latin American fell to European and then American control because as their populations grew, demand for raw materials rose, and industrialization occurred.

Latin American countries became integrated into the world market with free trade and an international division of labor in which industrialized countries profited more off of Latin America’s resources than Latin America itself. The U.S. and Europe bought raw goods at low prices, manufactured them and sold back the finished products at exorbitant mark-up rates.

"Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others."  
Eduardo Galeano

These countries, which developed under protectionist policies, then hypocritically began advocating free trade to suit their own interests. This led to a great deal of pressure on Latin American governments to take on foreign debt.

Reflecting on this cycle of backwardness, Galeano concludes, “Our defeat was always implicit in the victory of others; our wealth has always generated our poverty by nourishing the prosperity of others - the empires and their native overseers. In the colonial and neocolonial alchemy, gold changes into scrap metal and food into poison.”

U.S. self-interests remain the dominant cause for all interactions with Latin America today, as exemplified by The Council on Foreign Relations’ 2008 statement reflecting the value of Latin America as “one of the more open market regions in the world and a crucial global provider of energy, minerals, and food.”

Galeano explains how under the system of neocolonialism, the U.S. establishes corporations in Latin America under the justification of civilizing the region with technology. U.S. influence in the United Nations, World Bank and International Monetary Fund pressure Latin American countries to restructure their economies to support market-based solutions.

To Galeano’s greatest disgust, the U.S. aims to aid itself by only providing aid to countries that show the greatest inclination to absorb U.S. surpluses and alleviate super production. The author shows how the cycle of modern colonialism operates today and keeps Latin America in poverty. Galeano’s reading of history may seem harsh but certainly captures attention. The themes are certainly relevant to modern issues of poverty and under-development. The message brought to light in *The Open Veins of Latin America* is indeed sobering but I highly recommend it to anyone interested in U.S.-Latin American relations, current immigration policy, or in a comprehensive history of Latin America.

by Melissa Giangrande

*Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* exposes an underreported perspective on the history of Latin America.

Written by Uruguayan journalist Eduardo Galeano and first published in 1971, the book details the history of politics and intervention in Latin America from Columbus’s arrival in 1492 until the 20th century. Aside from Galeano’s mastery of poetic prose, the book is worth reading for its relevant content and cultural significance.

The book’s left-leaning perspective was a powerful tool for opposition movements, as it was banned by Brazilian, Chilean, Argentinian and Uruguayan dictatorships in 1973. That same year, Galeano was exiled for his work by a military coup.

The *Open Veins of Latin America* made headlines again in 2009 when Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez publicly gave U.S. President Barack Obama a copy at the 5th Summit of the Americas in Trinidad and Tobago. At the summit, Obama suggested a fresh start in which the U.S. would move forward as “an equal partner to Latin America,” because “every one of our nations has a right to follow its own path.” In response, Chavez gave Obama *Open Veins* to remind the U.S. leader that he could not erase centuries of exploitation of Latin America with a few conciliatory words.

This interaction captured international public attention, sending the book soaring to second on Amazon.com’s bestseller list. The book remains a legitimate account of the factual history of the region.

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**Borrow The Open Veins of Latin America** and browse the CUSLAR library’s 1,500 books and dozens of periodicals and documentaries.

Also available at the CUSLAR library are tens of thousands of newspaper articles on the region from 1983-2001, organized by date and country by Information Services Latin America (ISLA).

Thanks to the Durland Alternatives Library, located at Anabel Taylor Hall at Cornell University, CUSLAR library patrons can check out books through the Finger Lakes Library System. Visit [www.alternativeslibrary.net](http://www.alternativeslibrary.net) to search.
Review: Book shares untold stories of Cuba, Venezuela

by Lucy Mehrabian

What would happen if we made it possible for campesinos to go to medical school?

In 1960, Dr. Ernesto “Che” Guevara said that upon graduating, the campesinos, or peasants, would run, immediately and with unreserved enthusiasm, to help their brothers.


Brouwer dedicates the first few chapters of his book to familiarize the reader with Cuba’s efforts to revolutionize education and healthcare through international medical brigades and the Latin American School of Medicine (ELAM). He emphasizes the deep impact these advances have on the rest of the world and Cuba in the last few decades.

Based on his observations and daily interactions with medical students, doctors, campesinos, and community members, Brouwer describes how the close collaboration between Cuba and Venezuela gave birth to Barrio Adentro, a social welfare program under the Hugo Chavez administration which provides publicly funded health care to poor communities.

On the basis of internationalism and solidarity Cuba boasts one of the most successful healthcare systems in the world. This is due to the empowerment of young trained professionals who offer their services in underprivileged populations, trying to work towards social equity through health.

Founded in 1988, the ELAM in Havana, Cuba attracts students from poor communities that do not have medical resources or facilities. Brouwer writes: “The students’ obligation, in return for the free education they are receiving, is to return home in solidarity with the poor of their native country and dedicate themselves to practicing community health care and preventative medicine.”

Cuba has also implemented a Comprehensive Health Plan, which provides free Cuban medical assistance to struggling local health systems around the world.

This program helped Venezuela launch its community-based health care program called Barrio Adentro, or “inside the neighborhood.” At its initial stage created roughly six thousand health care facilities in the country.

Author visits Ithaca

Steve Brouwer visited Ithaca, NY November 4-7 to present *Revolutionary Doctors* at three campus and community venues.

Brouwer, the author of several books on the increasing economic inequality in the United States, said he wanted a fresh, hopeful perspective. He looked to Venezuela, which had increased its spending on education, health care and other social programs from 8.2 to 20.9 percent of GDP from 1999 to 2007.

In 2007-08, Brouwer spent 10 months in the rural community of Monte Carmelo in the Venezuelan mountains. He wanted to see for himself what was happening in the “Bolivarian Revolution.”

The book that took shape after his time there was based on how struck he was by “the octagonal buildings sprouting up” all over the country as part of the Barrio Adentro community health program. The program, bolstered in its initial stages by 24,000 Cuban doctors and support staff, now has nearly 30,000 Venezuelans in school for family medicine. They are trained in the free community clinics by Cuban professionals and will eventually replace the Cubans.

Brouwer praised the Venezuelan government for accomplishing so much for the empowerment of its people: “It is an extraordinary example of education coming to the community and people that need the education.”

Cuba boasts one of the most successful healthcare systems in the world. This is due to the empowerment of young trained professionals who offer their services in underprivileged populations, trying to work towards social equity through health.
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Spanish Camp connects activism, language learning

CUSLAR and the New York chapter of CISPES celebrated the 11th Annual Spanish for Activists Camp on August 17-19 in Ithaca, NY. Over 50 participants enjoyed a weekend of Spanish and English classes and panels on current issues related to Latin America, as well as camping, singing and a roaring bonfire.

This year’s Spanish Camp featured a number of distinguished guests.

Adalberto Elias of El Salvador’s Minister of Youth was present via Skype and narrated some of the successes of the Frente Farabundo Martí, now in charge of the government’s “social ministries.”

Lisa Fuller, CISPES National Program Coordinator, was his on-site interpreter.

José Oriol González, founder and director of the theater group Teatro de los Elementos in Cienfuegos, Cuba, shared how theater and the arts encourage community involvement and creativity. His U.S. visit was made possible by Susan Metz of Playback Theater.

Colombian filmmaker Mady Samper screened two short films, Human Faces Behind the Rain Forest and El Páramo de Cumanday. The first is her own production and the second is by her mother, the late Gabriela Samper. Human Faces Behind the Rain Forest narrates the suffering caused to farmers and indigenous people by the imposed production of the opium poppy.

José Helsper, center, and Rosa Fernández, right, co-teach the advanced Spanish class at the 11th Annual Jolie Christine Rickman Spanish for Activists Camp, held at the Foundation of Light in Ithaca, NY on Aug. 17-19. Cesar Torras, Maryagnes Lupien and her daughter participate in the discussion.

Summer & Fall Events 2012

CUSLAR’s fall speakers

October 1-3: Mnikelo Ndabankulu and Zodwa Nsibande of the South African Shackdwellers’ Movement and filmmaker Dara Kell screened the documentary Dear Mandela, which chronicles the post-Apartheid struggles for housing and dignity. (See p. 5-6)

October 12-17: Ronaldo Lec, Director of the Mesoamerican Permaculture Institute in Guatemala, shared in several settings about biodiversity as a necessity for survival in the context of increasing pressure from multinationals. (See p. 8-9)

November 4-7: Author Steve Brouwer presented his new book, Revolutionary Doctors: How Venezuela and Cuba are Changing the World’s Conception of Health Care. (See p. 15)

Remembering Bill Rogers 1926-2012

Bill Rogers, CUSLAR co-founder and former Cornell University pastor, passed away on July 7 in Madison, Indiana.

Though Bill always credited his students with providing the spark for CUSLAR in the 1960s and 70s, he was a primary actor in several U.S.-Latin America related initiatives for 15 years, including CUSLAR, Mutuality in Mission and the Cornell-Brazil Project.

His writings and the relationships he developed in those early days continue to shape the trajectory of CUSLAR’s work for peace, justice and increased mutual understanding in the hemisphere.

A former student recently called him “one of the key and indispensable activists during those decades.”

After leaving Cornell in 1979, Bill and June, his wife of 62 years, would serve the Presbyterian Church in Thailand and Brazil and then retire to Hanover, Indiana.

June wrote after his memorial service that “Bill died with dignity and grace. The celebration of his life and ministry was a joy. We danced out of the church to a gorgeous day with blue skies to continue working for the things Bill stood for.”

CUSLAR on the web

Committee on U.S.-Latin American Relations cuslar.org