

# Women's Letter

Written by women in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America.



## What Matters

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## Photo

Solidarity-Action „I walk with ...“: The women's delegates of Mission 21's Synod Ebed Grijalva and Obertina Modesta Johanis stand in for Gender Justice. Photo: Mission 21

see: <https://m21-womengender.org/en/i-walk-with/>



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World Day of Prayer 2020, Zimbabwe

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### Women and Gender

In all its activities, Mission 21 advocates the establishment of gender equality justice. Together with women's networks, church and organizational partners, Mission 21 seeks the most appropriate paths for each local situation, aiming to abolish gender hierarchies and discrimination.

**The Special Desk** offers financial support to strengthen and advance women and women's networks of church and organisational partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America. It also supports Gender Mainstreaming processes in development programs and facilitates spaces for exchange experiences and building knowledge.

**The Women and Gender Commission** accompanies the Special Desk's work throughout Switzerland and Germany, supporting as a group of experts.

# Editorial

## Dears Readers



*At my window I was told that in my town the spring sun died one day  
Go grab your guitar, your voice will belong to all those who one day  
had something to say  
Sing, it's better if you come, your voice is needed, I want to see you  
in my town*

(Song “A mi Ciudad”, Santiago del Nuevo Extremo)

Students from the University of Chile met to compose and rehearse songs that subtly related what was happening in Chile during the dictatorship. By the end of the 1970s, we knew about the horrors that were occurring around us. Anyone was liable to disappear for asking a “seditious” question. After the dictatorship, we worked to ensure that this memory be recorded in school and university curricula, so that it would never happen again in Chile... The recent outbursts of anger and discontent reveal, however, how deep the inequalities and inequities that the neoliberal model helped to increase remain and how precarious a democracy sustained by such inequalities is.

The call for attention and awareness is coming worldwide from youth movements, high school and university students, feminists, indigenous people and environmentalists. They are breaking the mask of silence and inertia in which we are immersed. Every time we meet to analyze our situations, the causes that hinder a life with dignity and free from violence come to the fore and we reflect critically on practices that foster hatred and exclusion of people who are different. We are open to explore our own experiences of discrimination and being discriminated against. Each year, in the context of the Synod of Mission 21, together with the women’s and gender networks, we review progress, stagnation or setbacks regarding gender justice in each continent where Mission 21 collaborates. The message that emerges from this space places the vulnerability of women who do not have access to their basic rights as the main burning issue.

Following up on the burning issues highlighted last year, Obertina Modesta Johanis, Pastor of the Pasundan Christian Church in Indonesia, addresses women’s lack of empowerment and gender-based violence. Pia Grossholz-Fahrni, delegate of the European Assembly of Mission 21, emphasizes the inequity denounced in an extensive strike

carried out in Switzerland under the slogan “Salary, time, respect”.

From the reports of activities supported by the Fund for the Advancement of Women, the work carried out in Cameroon by the partner organization AIChrisWOV stands out: “Ending gender-based violence means curbing HIV”, by Dorothy Tanwani and Glory Ambe. Silvia Regina de Lima Silva, from the Ecumenical Research Department (DEI) in Costa Rica, reflects on the campaigns: “What matters are the transformative actions for gender justice”. Doris Muñoz, from Chile, relates the results of the conference led by the Brazilian ecofeminist theologian Ivone Gebara and invites us to “engage in a process of deconstruction that frees us from ancient ties, which nowadays are functional to a belief system that controls consciences and dominates bodies”.

In Switzerland, we highlight the advocacy work carried out by civil society organizations, which promote and reaffirm an agenda for women, peace and security. This agenda also contains aspects consistent with the advocacy issues raised in recent years by women and gender networks and partners of Mission 21.

As tools for reflection and transformation, we further developed the work on these burning issues using the methodology of the Theatre of the Oppressed in the Pre-Synod of Women and the Program of Advocacy and Women’s Human Rights, accompanied by the collective Ma(g)dalena Berlin.

We also highlight and congratulate two members of our network for gender justice: Evelyne Zinsstag, who received the Marga Bühlig Award 2019 in Basel, Switzerland, and Cecilia Castillo Nanjarí, who will receive the Sylvia Michel Award on March 8, 2020 in Zug, Switzerland.

Finally, we are preparing for the celebration of World Day of Prayer 2020, whose country of focus this year is Zimbabwe.

Josefina Hurtado Neira  
Head of Women and Gender Desk

### Marie Claire Barth

Death never takes a good Lady away, from the hearts of the people she inspired.

Marie-Claire Barth’s vision of life was remarkable. She was a great feminist theologian, writer, friends and “Oma” to many of us.

She will always be remembered.

The legacy remains and continuous throughout generations.

May God rest her beautiful soul.

And bless the family and friends in this time of sorrow.

Langit Kahilila- Wawan Gunawan  
Jakatarub, Indonesia



Photography: Josefina Hurtado

# What Matters: Transformative Actions for Gender Justice

By Silvia Regina de Lima Silva\*

In 2017, with the support of Mission 21's Women and Gender Desk, the Departamento Ecu­m­é­nico de Investigaciones (DEI, Ecumenical Research Department) organized the "What Matters" campaign. In 2018, we continued with the "Transformative Actions for Gender Justice" campaign. These campaigns are a response to the expansion of neo-liberal policies and increasing inequality, authoritarianism, violence, and femicide in Latin America. These problems are the result of a society divided by the resurgence of religious fundamentalisms that adopt neoliberalism as a theological and ideological foundation, fostering practices of intolerance, fear, and control over the bodies of women and sexually diverse populations, as well as feeding into the contempt for and invisibility of the poor. The silence of the churches makes them accomplices to the sin of manipulating the name of God. The alliances of fundamentalist religious groups with political groups and parties represent setbacks for democracy and the progress made towards gender justice.



The musical group Las Sirenatas performed at the launch of the "What Matters" campaign in San José, Costa Rica, September 20, 2017.

Women's bodies have once again become disputed territories, over which laws are negotiated, agreements are reached, and decisions are made. This logic of domination and despoilment is also responsible for the destruction of the ecosystem, which is subjected to exploitation and greed for the profit of transnational corporations with the support of local governments.

Our campaigns are a call to a new form of existence, proposals of alternatives, explosions of creativity that — through music, dance, and the spoken Word of God — invite us to transcend, to encounter the divinity that inhabits us, and to choose the human body, the heavens, and the earth as its dwelling, thus dignifying our existence.

Our campaigns took to the streets with ears attentive to the voices and whispers resisting the discourses imposed by this system of death. We found communities of women who draw songs from their souls that break the logic of patriarchal perversity. The campaign discovered women who are resisting and recovering the experience of a God of unconditional and unlimited love for their diverse and ancestral spiritualities.

We are taking these steps with conviction and dedication. We move forward, in a permanent campaign, knowing that in our voices, in our songs and in our declamations, the voices of Berta Cáceres (the Lenca indigenous leader, Honduran feminist, and environmental activist murdered March 2, 2016), Marielle Franco (the Afro-descendant feminist leader and councilwoman of Rio de Janeiro, murdered March 14, 2018), and other women killed for their commitment to justice, solidarity, and unlimited love are still present.

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<sup>1</sup> Lenca indigenous leader, Honduran feminist and environmental activist. Murdered March 2, 2016.

<sup>2</sup> Afro descendant feminist leader, councilwoman of Rio de Janeiro, murdered March 14, 2018.

# Theological Feminism in the Face of Religious and Political Fundamentalisms

By Doris Muñoz Vallejos\*

In May 2018, a feminist student uprising took to Chile's streets. "Enough with the sexual abuse, abuse of power, and abuse of conscience, especially of women!" they declared, calling to task most of the institutions that represent our culture and particularly the churches. Challenged and motivated by these young women, we decided to organize a conference on feminist theology led by the Brazilian theologian Ivone Gebara. In many ways, she symbolizes the critical feminist thought that is censored in Christian churches and schools of theology throughout Latin America.

The seminar on "Violence Against Women and the Silence of the Churches" (1) brought together some 50 women to address the gender violence of patriarchal theologies in the context of religious fundamentalisms and the dangerous expansion of the conservative right in Latin America. We began by placing ourselves in the context of Chile, and from this perspective, we reviewed the images and symbols that invade us and engaged in a process of deconstruction to free ourselves from the ancient restraints that today serve a belief system that controls our consciences and dominates our bodies.

Why does religious fundamentalism advance so quickly and penetrate so deeply? To answer this question, it is necessary to examine the origin of religion. In this regard, Gebara proposed an exercise in "anthropological archaeology" that helped us to understand religion as a human product rather than a super-cultural phenomena, as the fundamentalist discourse of politicians and religious representatives suggest. Their discourse normalizes a dualistic imagery where the "world above" (the power of the invisible) organizes and commands the "world below" (the visible and chaotic) through hierarchies who know "what God wants" for us. It is a discourse that affects us profoundly, because it feeds on countless fears and the constant vulnerability in which we live due to our precarious environments and the lack of social and political projects



Ivone Gebara

that meet basic human needs. Under these circumstances, women continue to submit. In the words of Ivone Gebara: "Religions administer the power of the divine with our consent, and thus, we sustain religions in which we no longer believe."

In the light of this observation, Gebara raised two great challenges:

The first has to do with ourselves. Although we have talked about power a great deal, we need to understand the ways in which it acts. We know that power acts "from outside to inside" and "from inside to outside," but we are not as aware that it also acts "from inside to inside" ourselves and, therefore, controls us. "Power transforms itself into the skin of our entrails and invades our insides. Thus, without being aware of it, we are the first oppressors of ourselves," Gebara said.

We need to clearly identify the inner forces that make us accept religious dogmas in which we no longer believe. If fundamentalist religion expands, it is due in part to the multitude of women who continue consuming it in

churches and religious institutions. On the other hand, feminist theological reflection fails to permeate the work of these institutions.

For that reason, we need to rethink theology, not as a rhetoric about God, but as a reflection that illuminates the presence of the sacred, of divinity in each person. In other words, a theology rooted in history and nurtured by us. According to Ivone Gebara, “it is necessary to reveal the forms of sustenance that women maintain by using metaphysical parameters when they read about Jesus.” If we want to do something different in the churches, we must start something new and different from what already exists, instead of “imposing a patriarchal order or masculine reasoning on the little that we know about Jesus,” as Gebara said.

We must recognize that in the face of fundamentalism, the alternatives we have for change have to do with our mental structures. We need “to question our own beliefs and experiences: What do I believe in? What do we believe in? Which of my assumptions strengthen the religious assumptions that underpin violence?” Gebara insisted. Apart from demanding change, change must take place within our own mental and emotional belief systems.

A second challenge is to strengthen relationships among women by overcoming “reactive violence” and abandoning that polarizing position in which the other is always guilty, because “the other that I criticize is within me.” The Chilean experience shows us that this polarization has greatly weakened women’s networks. Although women are well-connected and able to make an impact with their demonstrations in the streets, within organizations and/or communities, there is considerable violence and attrition in relationships due to feminist fundamentalism, which also affect us.

Our meeting concluded with the affirmation that theological feminism can be useful to address fundamentalism, if it is based on women’s life experiences and not dogmas or truths defined by others and other contexts. Only then can we rethink the foundations of existence and life as an ethical basis for a sustainable and loving coexistence, as well as for an autonomous life free from any religious strictures imposed by an administrator of symbolic power.

- (1) The conference was organized by CEDM (Centro Ecu­m­é­nico Diego de Medellín), a partner of Mission 21 in Chile, in coordination with women representatives of INDH (Instituto Nacional de Derechos Humanos, Chile), Observatorio de Género y Equidad, Fundación Libera contra la Trata de Personas y la Esclavitud en todas sus formas (LIBERA), Servicio para el Desarrollo y la Educación Comunitaria de la IMECH (SEDEC), Grupo de Estudios Multidisciplinarios sobre Religión e Incidencia Pública (GEMRIP), SUR - Corporación de Estudios Sociales y Educación, Congregación Luterana El Buen Samaritano, Colectivo Con-spirando, and the collaboration of the Latin American Women’s Network of Mission 21.

\*Eco-feminist theologian from CEDM-Chile

# Women's Pre-Synod of Mission 21: Report on Asia

By Obertina Modesta Johanis, Pastor of Pasundan Christian Church

## Introduction

The two burning issues of the 2019 women's conference message are likewise the key issues in our region: women's lack of empowerment and violence against women. Even today, women's empowerment is still a very serious concern throughout Asia. For example, there are still churches that do not accept women's ordination, and even in those churches that do accept women's ordination, women still do not hold decision-making positions.

Violence against women also continues in various forms, ranging from verbal violence, to physical violence, to sexual violence and the trafficking of women. Above all, the form of violence that is least talked about or dealt with is sexual violence, even though the facts show that rates of sexual violence are quite high. In Indonesia, for example, 2,227 cases of sexual violence against women and girls were reported in 2018. Of these, 1,210 were cases of incest. We see a similar situation in Malaysia: from 2010 to 2017, more than 22,000 children, mostly girls, were victims of sexual violence (59.7% were victims of rape, 27% of other sexual abuse, and 8.1% of incest).

## Factors of Change

Three factors of change will help us overcome these burning issues in Asia:

- The willingness of church institutions, with the support of Mission 21, to continue advocacy for gender mainstreaming;
- The people who are committed to carrying out advocacy work to eliminate violence against women; and
- Networking – the issue of gender-based violence is a shared issue, so advocacy is not carried out alone by one institution, but together with many other institutions (e.g., WCC Pasundan-Durebang with the FPL network, BCCM-BM with SAWO).

The notable factors of resistance to change are:

- Lack of support from the governments in the creation or implementation of laws against sexual violence against women, for example, in Indonesia; and
- Strengthening of religious fundamentalisms, which increasingly define women as an objects.

## Achievements and Progress

1. The alumni of the gender justice workshop who understand the meaning of gender justice.
2. The alumni of the gender justice workshop who are able to implement advocacy campaigns for gender justice in their respective communities (Indonesia and Malaysia).
3. A Code of Conduct (COC) was drafted. In February 2019, the Women Crisis Centre Pasundan-Durebang held a workshop on how to handle gender-based violence in our community, including the church, schools, and hospitals. The participants were pastors, elders, teachers, and board member of the schools and hospitals. One of the outputs of the workshop was that each community (church, schools, and hospitals) created their own COC on how to handle gender-based violence.

## Prospects for 2019-2021

Asia Fellowship church members are very diverse in context and struggle. Therefore, the issues of greatest importance also vary according to each context. This diversity of contexts and concerns is explored in the book that was launched during the General Assembly of Asia Fellowship in Taiwan in August 2018. Some of these regional issues are related to women, such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, women's empowerment, violence against women, migrant workers/human trafficking, fundamentalisms, religious radicalism, and environmental degradation.

From so many concerns, two leading problems – violence against women (specifically, sexual violence) and the plight of migrant workers/human trafficking – could be the burning issues for the next period.

## New Goals

For those of us in Asia, the most important goal is for partner churches to be able to implement gender mainstreaming and carry out advocacy related to cases of violence against women in their respective communities.

## Actions from 2018-2019

1. Workshop on Gender Justice: Indonesia Gereja Kristen Pasundan GKP and Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis GKE and Malaysia Basel Christian Church in Malaysia BCCM-BM.
2. Women and Youth Workshop on Human Trafficking (Taiwan, August 2018).

3. Workshop on Handling Victims of Gender-Based Violence (GKP, November 2018 and February 2019, Bandung, Indonesia).
4. Workshop on the Code of Conduct Anti-Sexual Violence in institutions belonging to the GKP (Bandung, Indonesia, March 2019).
5. Campaign for the Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence (Bandung, Indonesia, November 2018 and Sabah, March 2019).
6. The “Thursday in Black” and “I Walk With” campaigns, which are increasingly widespread, especially in Indonesia and Malaysia.
7. Shelter for women victims of violence and human trafficking (WCC Pasundan-Durebang and TTM-HK shelter).

### Best Practice Example

Workshops on understanding and dealing with gender-based violence are one of the most effective ways to bring gender justice. The alumni of the workshop became

more gender-sensitive after gaining an understanding of gender-based violence. They are also able to carry out advocacy through campaigns in the public space.



On a car-free day, a group of workshop participants holds a campaign to encourage the adoption of the Draft Law on the Elimination of Sexual Violence. The campaign also educated people about sexual violence (Bandung, Indonesia, November 2018).

# Ending Gender Based Violence Means Curbing HIV

Dorothy Tanwani and Glory Ambe\*

Throughout a world filled with endless diversity in behaviour and belief, more and more people are losing their feelings of self-worth every day. Many are failing in business, some are ending relationships, some are suffering ill health, and others are gradually fading with the complications of old age. But nothing is more degrading than being compelled by another human being like yourself to do something against your will, let alone being totally subjected to their authority. We are speaking of the grossly overlooked issue of gender-based violence (GBV).

Of course, it is almost totally commonplace in many communities, if not the world over, that women are miserable: the most soft-hearted, forbearing, patient human beings; the keepers of the home; more capable of caring for

children; better cooks (better suited for the kitchen smoke!); the weaker sex (the most popular opinion); and the list goes on! According to the dictates of society, being a woman is just about all of this. A man, on the other hand, depicts authority and control.

Undoubtedly, both women and men are potential victims of gender-based violence, but it is not an overstatement to say that women are more vulnerable than men. Dehumanizing acts like rape, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, widow torture, denial of resources and opportunities, battery, humiliation, verbal abuse, etc., are most often suffered by women, but both men and women are harmed by the extremes of norms, traditions, and cultures.



Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), the virus that can develop into AIDS, has remained an alarming health challenge around the world for decades, yet the connection to GBV is rarely recognized. Of all the acts of GBV, rape stands out as the easiest means through which perpetrators transmit HIV to their victims. Yet, female genital mutilation can also be a channel of transmission for the virus, given the crude tools used in the procedure. The campaign focused on bring new HIV infection rates down to zero could achieve laudable success if the issue of GBV were addressed first. People can follow the rules of “protected sex,” “safe blood transfusion,” and “sterilized syringes, needles, razors,” among other things, but if some rapist barges in on them, they won’t get the chance to take all the necessary precautions.

Gender-based violence is common in Cameroon, especially in the north-west and south-west regions. GBV occurs in religious, traditional, and secular societies, and it includes sexual and physical violence and all forms of child sexual abuse. Children, too, as victims of childhood abuse, are also more likely to be HIV-positive. There is also a high level of HIV intersection with domestic violence in the lives of married women. Consequently, GBV increases HIV risk directly, both for victims and perpetrators.

Unfortunately, many advocates for gender equity keep focusing on empowering women and reminding them of their rights but are doing very little, if anything, to stop perpetrators of GBV from infringing on woman’s rights. Very little awareness-raising is being targeted at men who ought to join the fight against GBV and, eventually, the struggle to curb the spread of HIV. Women and children who run the greater risk of being victims need a mechanism of support.

*Aid International Christian Women of Vision (AIChrisWOV)* is carrying out effective interventions in the following ways:

1. We undertake education and consciousness-raising about GBV for children, women, and men. Our first line of focus is prevention and fighting stigmatisation.
2. We use our voices on the radio to raise awareness about the intersections of HIV with GBV, domestic violence, widow torture, traditional practices, etc. Using social media helps us connect with those outside our regular social circles.
3. We provide safe spaces, counselling, and legal advice to perpetrators and victims.
4. We use neutrality and confidentiality to provide a structural weapon in the fight against emotional trauma and depression in our target group..
5. We strive to improve medical support and care for people living with HIV.
6. We educate people who are using anti-retroviral therapy about the importance of taking their medicines regularly.
7. We work to create job opportunities through training and support.

Ending GBV could have an important impact on the HIV epidemic.

\*AIChrisWOV

# Salary, Time, Respect!

By Pia Grossholz-Fahrni\*

On 14 June 2019, hundreds of thousands of women across Switzerland took to the streets to demand gender equality under the motto “Salary, Time, Respect.” This demand was also the trigger for the first national women’s strike in 1991, which denounced the postponed implementation of a constitutional article to grant equal rights for women and men. Unfortunately, in 2019, we are still far away from achieving this goal.

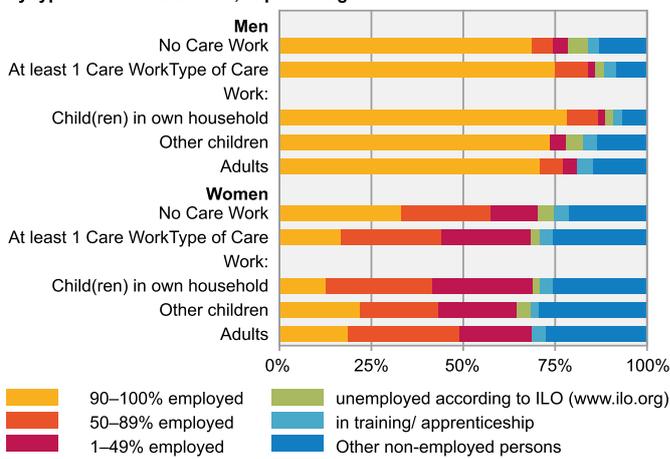
Girls and boys in Switzerland have the same opportunities in school and higher education, and currently, some college programs have even more female than male graduates – such as medicine or theology. Yet, despite these facts, the number of women in managerial and leadership positions is still far lower than that of men.

As a concrete example, 56% of medical graduates are women. Women hold 47.9% of assistant physician positions, but fill only 12.4% of medical management positions.

Equal pay is another pending issue in Switzerland. The pay gap between men and women today is as high as 18.4%. In about 40% of these cases, there is no objective explanation for the difference.

Although the number of women working full-time or part-time is now higher than in 1991, household labour, child care, and care of elderly relatives are still women’s responsibilities. Unpaid care work continues to be

Permanent Resident Population between 15 and 64 years old by type of Care and Gender, in percentage



undertaken mainly by women. In our churches, for example, volunteer work is more often done by women than by men.

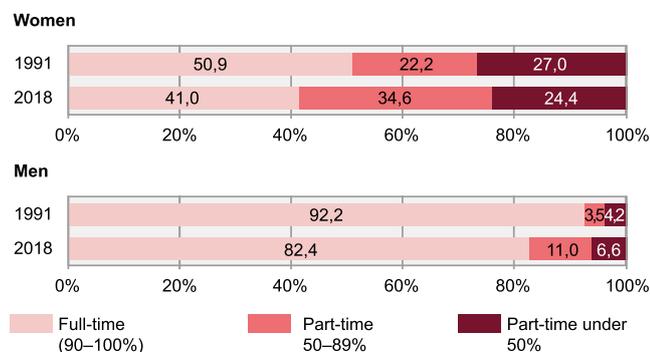
Women face greater difficulties in trying to reconcile work and family life, as the possibilities for child care outside the family are limited and often much more expensive than in France or Germany, for example. The maximum duration of maternity leave is 16 weeks, and no legislation has yet been enacted to create a paternity leave.

While rates of violence against women are lower in Switzerland than in other countries of the world, 59% of Swiss women have experienced harassment, including unwanted touching (hugs, kisses). The worldwide #MeToo movement has undoubtedly contributed to raise awareness throughout society about this issue.

The Federation of Swiss Protestant Churches has taken a stand in favour of the demands raised in the women’s strike and is willing to advocate for equal pay and to promote structures that foster gender equality in the labour market and retirement pensions. It also proposes to certify volunteer work in canton churches and to encourage the development of a church free from physical boundary violations and sexual assault. The federation supports all prevention and intervention measures taken by the member churches.

It is to be expected that the second women’s strike will help bring gender justice back into the debate and political agenda, so that progress can soon be achieved.

## Extent of Employment



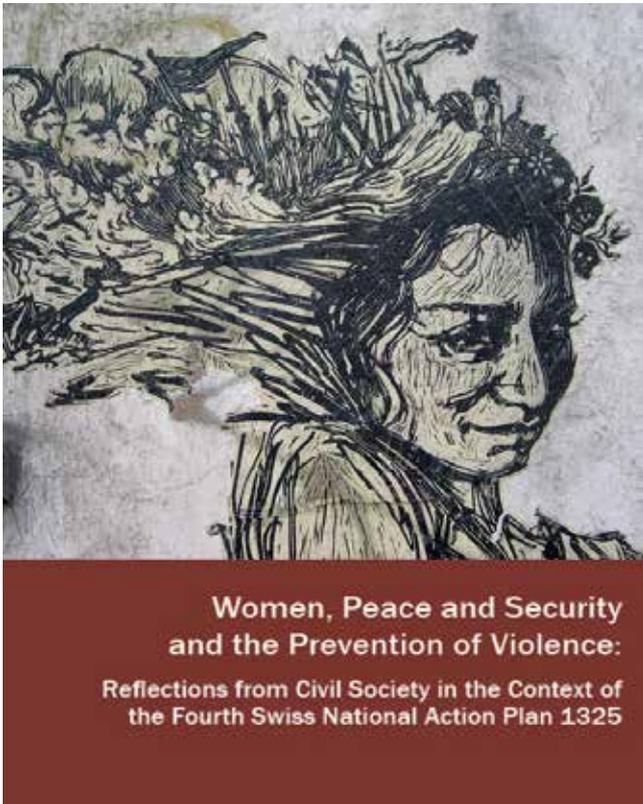
Source: BFS – Schweizerische Arbeitskräfteerhebung (SAKE)

© BFS 2019

Pia Grossholz-Fahrni was the vice chairwoman of the Synodal Council of the Reformed Churches of Bern-Jura-Soleure until the end of March 2019 and a board member of the European Continental Assembly of Mission 21 until June 2019.

# Reading Recommendations: “Women, Peace and Security and the Prevention of Violence”

by Josefina Hurtado\*



Reflections from Civil Society in the Context of the Fourth Swiss National Action Plan (NAP) 1325 – the Women and Gender Desk of Mission 21 was part of the advisory group.

[https://koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/1\\_Publikationen/KOFF-Publikationen/20190827reportnap1325\\_1\\_.pdf](https://koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/1_Publikationen/KOFF-Publikationen/20190827reportnap1325_1_.pdf)

This publication was developed in the context of the project, “Civil Society Contribution to the Swiss National Action Plan for the implementation of UNSCR 1325,” jointly led by PeaceWomen Across the Globe (PWAG), the Swiss Platform for Peacebuilding (KOFF) at Swisspeace, and cfd (The feminist Peace Organisation). This report is the result of extensive research, interviews, and continuous discussions with civil society organizations (CSOs) and experts on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE).

Mission 21 was part of the advisory group that elaborated the following policy recommendations for the Swiss government:

Switzerland, as the implementer of the Swiss National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, as a donor agency in international cooperation and funder of strategic partners, and as an influencer of like-minded countries, should:

- Increase funding and promotion of the Women, Peace and Security agenda;
- Promote and require gender analysis;
- Enhance responsible donor behaviour;
- Promote community-led definitions of security;
- Address negative connotations and impacts of the P/CVE agenda;
- Invest in research on returnees; and
- Critically assess participation in the arms industry.

You can find the full document at:  
[http://koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user\\_upload/koff/Documents/20190827reportnap1325.pdf](http://koff.swisspeace.ch/fileadmin/user_upload/koff/Documents/20190827reportnap1325.pdf)

\*Head of the Women and Gender Desk of Mission 21

# Message from the Women's Pre-Synod of Mission 21

## "Arise, shine – for peace, justice ..."

Basel, 26 June 2019

The main burning issue agreed by the participants in the Women's Pre Synod of Mission 21 is **the vulnerability of women who don't have access to their basic rights.**

### How is this experienced?

- **Through sexual and gender-based violence:** A common challenge experienced by women on all four continents is sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

SGBV is grounded in social norms that tolerate, ignore or accept it implicitly. Furthermore, in many regions of the world, impunity exacerbates and perpetuates these situations.

Women faced with the challenge of limited economic prospects are often forced to migrate. This exposes them to several risks, among which is the threat of being trafficked, abused (molested, harassed, sexually violated, or physical hurt), or in several cases, being killed.

The risk factors increased by economic deprivation raise two critical concerns:

First, ensuring that women KNOW their rights (so that they have access to justice and social protection). Secondly, challenging churches and communities to break the silence on femicide and other forms of violence against women.

- **Through structural barriers:** Women's access to decision-making spheres is often limited due to structural barriers (grounded in social norms and lack of policies). In some contexts, access to the ordained ministry is denied to women and even in countries where this possibility exists, women struggle to be treated in a fair way and remain subordinated to men's leadership. This situation cuts across regions, affecting women in Europe as well, where they still experience pay-gaps and are under-represented in leadership positions.

Churches and communities need to "walk the talk" in order to challenge issues of violence and gender-based discrimination within their own structures. We highly recommend to encourage the following strategies:

**Education:** Education is the access to our rights – or a requirement to even know about them. Increased



accessibility and capacity building can lead to this goal.

**Theological education and formation of the leadership:** As examples, re reading the Bible with the eyes of the girls and women who are suffering.

**Networks:** Synergies among churches and organizations going beyond the traditional North-South cooperation prove valuable and inspirational.

**Gender Policies and Codes of Conduct:** Policies and codes of conduct offer guidance on how to prevent and address issues of violence and gender-based discrimination. Goodwill is not enough.

**Build a Movement of Indignation:** In light of femicides, rampant violence and discrimination against women, it is necessary to build a movement that goes from silence to taking a position in the public space and lead to action. The silence of the churches strengthens the position of those who violate women's human rights.

**Increase Advocacy Efforts:** For the realization of our rights, we have to increase in a further step our advocacy efforts. Though we have done very much, it is still not sufficient.

So we call all delegates of the Mission 21 Synod: Increase your support as we strive for Gender Justice and **continue walking with us.**

# Tools for reflection and transformation

## Theatre of the Oppressed Workshops Burning Issues at Women's Pre-Synod

Liviana Coranda Bath and Jana Burger\*



The Ma(g)dalena International Network was invited to participate in the 2019 Women's Pre-Synod of Mission 21. The Ma(g)dalenas celebrate and promote the expression of female collectives as an opportunity for exchange, protest, solidarity, and support for justice. In keeping with the conference theme, Liviana Bath and Jana Burger, part of the group Ma(g)dalena Berlin, used Theatre of the Oppressed techniques to explore burning issues that affect women around the world, specifically sexual violence. In addition, the Ma(g)dalenas were part of the Training of Trainers (ToT) in advocacy for women's rights working topics, such as masculinities and gender justice.

### What is Theatre of the Oppressed?

Considered a "method of change" by UNESCO, Theatre of the Oppressed transforms reality using games, exercises, and techniques that were developed over decades in various countries for theatre-based activism and educational purposes. Theatre of the Oppressed is also a tool for the promotion of social justice and the transformation of unjust situations and their underlying social mechanisms.

### History, Techniques, Concepts

Teatro do Oprimido (Theatre of the Oppressed) dates back to the 1960s and is attributed to Brazilian director, writer, and political activist Augusto Boal, although its various techniques have been used in almost a hundred different countries all over the world. Among the first techniques were Newspaper Theatre, Forum Theatre, Invisible Theatre, and Image Theatre. As Europe and North America displayed a need for techniques addressing more personal and internalised types of oppression, two new techniques were

developed: Rainbow of Desire and Cop in the Head. More recently, an upgrade of existing techniques emerged, and Legislative Theatre was developed by the women's collective Marias do Brasil in their struggle for rights as domestic workers in Brazil.

The root concept of Theatre of the Oppressed is power, and the method explores, discusses, and exposes power relations between the oppressor and the oppressed: when, how, and where does the oppressor abuse power for the purpose of exploiting and oppressing the Other, the oppressed, who does not possess power or has had it taken away? With this in mind, Theatre of the Oppressed demolishes and erases conventional positions of power among (active) actors and (passive) spectators; it creates a space for dialogue by placing them in new positions of actively involved "spect-actors" (spectators and actors in one).

Theatre of the Oppressed makes it possible to talk about topics that may otherwise be ignored, giving voice to people who would otherwise remain unheard. As such, it democratises theatre and returns it to the people – as in the beginning, when theatre was a free event of songs sung in the open air, by the people, for the people. The topics explored also derive from the people themselves: Theatre of the Oppressed asks questions and explores answers about fighting inequalities, discrimination, racism, injustices, and other forms of oppression, which may not be seen or evident at first sight.

### For more information, visit:

Ma(g)dalena Network – Teatro de las Oprimidas, [www.redmagdalena.blogspot.de](http://www.redmagdalena.blogspot.de)  
Democracy Now interview with Augusto Boal, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PxQ6SsfhiCw>

### For a detailed description of methods, games, and exercises:

Till Baumann, *Übungen und Spiele für Schauspieler und Nicht-Schauspieler von Augusto Boal* (Suhrkamp Verlag, 2013).  
Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Routledge, 1992).  
Bárbara Santos, *Teatro do Oprimido – Raízes e Asas: uma teoria da práxis* (Ibis Libris, 2016).

\*Facilitators from Ma(g)dalena Berlin

## Advocacy for Women's Rights. Training of Trainer 2019

Susan Cabezas Cartes\*



Two intense and successful weeks of training in Advocacy for women's rights took place in Switzerland. Participants from Indonesia, Malaysia, South Sudan, Cameroon, Tanzania, Peru, and Chile were able to share their experiences and reflect together about gender justice, masculinities and advocacy strategies. The first week in Geneva brought together voices of the grass-root level and the international level. The participants will become agents of transformation and healing. The workshop was organized by Mission 21, The Lutheran World Federation, World Council of Churches, Church of Sweden and FCA Finn Church Aid.

The second week in Basel, the training was focused on Integral leadership bringing tools for well-being and sustainable activism. Besides, Angel Roman invited the group to go deep into the reflection about masculinities and gender roles. Magdalena's collective also offered tools from the Theatre of Oppressed as a methodology to work with the CEDAW convention more dynamically.

The opening event was an international dialogue about masculinities with an open conversation between Black Tiger Basel -a hip-hop singer- and Angel Roman from Guatemala. The two experts discussed male roles and stereotypes, among others in the "extreme environments" of youth gangs in Central America and the hip-hop scene.

And they discussed approaches to overcoming such gender norms. The many inputs and questions from the audience also showed that this discussion is far from over.



\*Consultant Women and Gender Desk Mission 21

# Info-Platform

## Sylvia Michel-Award 2020 goes to Cecilia Castillo Nanjarí Communication Desk of Mission 21

Mission 21 is pleased about the awarding of the Sylvia Michel Prize to Cecilia Castillo Nanjarí!

The Chilean theologian and lawyer Cecilia Castillo Nanjarí has been awarded for her work against domestic violence and gender justice for more than 30 years. Cecilia Castillo has also worked for the Latin American programme of Mission 21.

The international Sylvia Michel prize is donated by the Reformed Church of Aargau. It will go to South America for the first time in 2020, to Chile. The award will be presented on March 8, 2020, in Zug. Its goal is to promote women in leadership positions in the church.

On 12 March Cecilia Castillo Nanjarí will talk about her commitment. Together with Evelyne Zinsstag she will be pannelist at the event „Female Theologians committed to Social Justice“ at Mission 21 in Basel.

## Marga Bührig Award 2019: Ryda. Evelyne Zinsstag

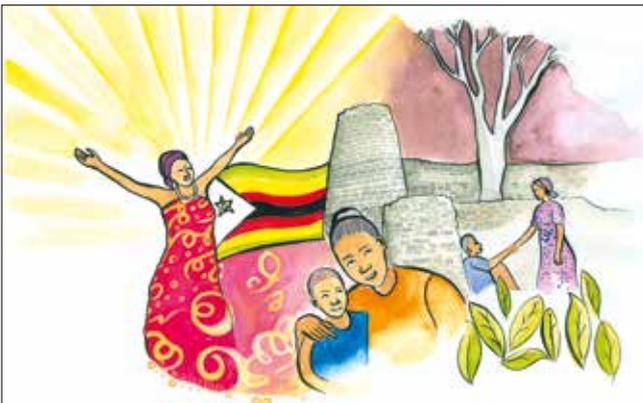
Evelyne Zinsstag was a Mission 21 collaborator and is currently a member of the Women and Gender Commission. She studied Theology in Zurich, Basel, and Bern, and discovered her interest in feminist theology. Her inclination for this subject is also reflected in her master's thesis entitled: "Woman as a whole - human being as a whole. Marga Bührig, Else Kähler, Ruth Epting and female celibacy in the 1950s." The efforts undertaken in her thesis are now crowned with the Marga Bührig Prize.

The Marga Bührig Prize aims to encourage research on feminist liberation theology and its dissemination. This award is an effective means to strengthen the visibility of women and feminist themes in theological and religious science research.

We are very happy for the recognition granted to Evelyne Zinsstag and we sincerely congratulate her.



World day of prayer 2020, Zimbabwe  
"Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk"  
<https://worlddayofprayer.net/index.html>



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