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Brazil’s World Cup: Where Minority Communities are the Biggest Losers

Nothing focuses international attention on a country’s demons more than a major sporting event, and this year’s World Cup in Brazil was no different. In a country still riven by stark inequalities, and yet on the cusp of massive economic development, the matter of how Brazil treats its very poorest citizens is subject to greater global scrutiny than ever before. However, while the consequences for urban favela-dwellers were clear to see, the side effects of football’s greatest spectacle for Brazil’s indigenous minorities were far less visible — although not for want of trying.

Jeguaká Mirim is a thirteen-year-old member of the Guarani, Brazil’s largest tribal group. Present in Brazil since ancient times, their fortunes have waned in since the arrival of Europeans as their ancestral lands were seized — often forcefully — to cultivate sugar and graze cattle. The socio-economic consequences for Jeguaká’s people are severe, with poverty, infant mortality and suicide touching them disproportionately. Then something amazing happened – Jeguaká got a chance to take a stand on the biggest stage with the eyes of the world upon him.

FIFA invited three Brazilian children to release “doves of peace” before the opening game of the tournament, and Jeguaká was one of them. He released the bird as planned, then quietly unfurled a banner reading Demarcação! – “Demarcation Now” – in front of a television audience estimated at one billion people. The cameras cut away; FIFA officials failed to address the issue; the peaceful protest was all but forgotten. When Coca-Cola, one of the main buyers of Brazilian sugar, is also the principal sponsor of the World Cup, the question of who actually owns the farmland is far less important than the slick multimedia spectacle it paid for. Such is the nature of indigenous issues in Brazil.

Indeed, as indigenous lands and resources are the financial motors behind so much of Brazil’s economic miracle, it is not difficult to trace a bloody link from minority reservations all the way to the gates of the Maracanã Stadium. Indeed, the World Cup is emblematic of Brazil’s penchant for massive infrastructure investments that leave the poorest and most underrepresented of its citizens in their wake. And agribusiness isn’t the only symptom – proposals for vast dam projects in the Amazon Basin will also affect indigenous communities the hardest. Brazil’s Government claims that these projects will provide a boost to the entire economy, thus laying the foundations for improved social provisions. But at what cost?

The Brazil Indian Museum in Rio de Janeiro, once a haven of indigenous culture and documentation, has fallen on hard times in recent years, and – in an ironic twist of fate – its abandoned building has become a squat for minority citizens living down-and-out in the city. During the preparations for the World Cup, it was thought that the building sheltered members of up to twenty different indigenous communities. However, as in Beijing before the 2008 Olympics, this scruffy reminder of the country’s socio-economic problems was at odds with the modern image Brazil wanted to present, and so the land was cleared. One of the few pockets of indigenous life in Rio was razed in an instant.

In the rainforests, land reclamation is an even greater issue for minorities. As land is cleared to make way for mining, agriculture and land, indigenous tribal groups are being forced from their natural habitats. For the so-called “uncontacted Indians” who live in near-total isolation, this can literally be a matter of life or death – with no acquired immunity to diseases transmitted by outsiders, any form of contact risks extinction. And with brutal attacks by illegal loggers being all too common, an entire way of indigenous life is at risk of dying out in the name of profit. The Director of Survival International, Stephen Corry, said, “Brazil is frequently celebrated as an economic success story – never more so than in the run-up to the World Cup. But it’s only fair to acknowledge that its economic growth is incurring an immense human cost: the death of hundreds of thousands of indigenous people over the last centuries, and the annihilation of entire tribes. It’s time to recognize the dark side of Brazil.”

The disquiet surrounding these developments in the countryside, coupled with the continued under-investment in urban favelas, peaked in advance of the World Cup, when protestors of both causes united to demonstrate against the gross official neglect that plagues them both. During protests in the days preceding the start of the tournament, indigenous people in traditional dress joined slum-dwellers in marches through São Paulo and Brasília. Sadly and predictably, the action did not remain peaceful for long, as police brutality was met with arrow-fire from minority demonstrators. Members of
both sides were injured, leading Amnesty International to issue the Brazilian police a symbolic “yellow card” warning for violent conduct. Sadly, such sanctions carry far less weight in the streets than they do on the pitch, and this meeting of opponents was far from sporting.

Divergent though their backgrounds may be, all the protestors in Brazil have, essentially, one common issue to air – the fact that the $11bn spent on organising the World Cup could have been far better spent. In Manaus, the city at the heart of the Amazon rainforest, authorities spent $300m on the construction of the new Arena Amazônia, where only four matches were scheduled to be held. Although organisers insisted the venue would continue to be used after the World Cup drew to a close, its 42,000 capacity seems unlikely to benefit a city where local matches barely fill 1,000 seats. Worse still, several construction workers died in the construction process, which unsurprisingly also caused severe environmental disruption.

An hour’s drive from Manaus, the Sateré-Mawé tribe see little benefit from such grandiose investment. According to an article in The Guardian, “for the indigenous communities and favela dwellers, it’s hard to see so much money spent on the stadiums when there is such hunger and poor health, and that money didn’t need to be spent.” And that is the dangerous and depressing interplay between Brazil’s World Cup and its minority communities – based on the money being spent, the time being invested and the priorities being made, it seems there is little place for indigenous people in the “new” Brazil.

Except, of course, as a token gesture. The Arena Amazônia is covered in emblems and motifs derived from local indigenous craftwork, a nod to Brazil’s past in this temple of the future. The creators of this art, however, were not invited to the stadium. One member of the tribe, Awyatô, comments that “Fifa and Brazil have robbed our culture – all of us tribespeople feel that way. If they wanted to use our imagery, they should have included us.” Indeed, just like thirteen-year-old Jeguaká with his simple protest banner, who was paraded onto the pitch at the opening ceremony, the Arena Amazônia is a hollow nod to indigenous communities – a mere curiosity of little importance in the Brazil of tomorrow. This sad attitude, repeated far too often around the world, risks that we lose entire cultures to indifference and the pursuit of profit.
Who are the Awá?

The Awá people, also referred to as Guajá, live in the rainforest of the state of Maranhão, in the east of Brazil. They are a tribe of approximately 450 members, including about 100 individuals who still live in complete isolation. The Awá are nomad hunter-gatherers whose language is part of the Tupi-Guaraní family. The Awá group is made up by three partially isolated villages named Awá, Guajá and Juriti, and is characterized by having a young population, in which 47.6% is less than 14 years old. Since the early 1970s, the tribe has been persecuted and pushed out from their traditional lands by the Brazilian government and more extensively by extractive operations since the 1980s.

Originally living in settlements, the Awá adopted a nomadic lifestyle following the first European incursions in the region. During the 19th century, most of the forests from their land were cleared by settlers. From the mid-80s onward, some Awá moved to government-established settlements, where most of the time they were able to maintain their traditional way of life, living entirely off the forest, in nomadic groups of a few dozen people, with little or no contact with the outside world.

Since the early 1970s the Awá have been suffering the consequences of deforestation as well as harassment from peasants and illegal loggers. In fact, as of 1973, the Brazilian government, through its FUNAI agency (Fundação Nacional do Índio, the National Indian Foundation), started removing the Awá from their traditional lands and relocating them to legally demarcated reservations. FUNAI employees, in charge of protecting the Awá, live in each of those areas in so-called Indigenous outposts (posto indígena, or PI). Close to 315 Awá currently live in four of these PI enclaves (Guajá, Awá, Tiracambú, and Juriti) and a further 20 to 25% are still living in isolation in nearby areas.

The Carajás mining project, launched in 1980 and covering an area of 900 000 km², marked the beginning of a new destructive era for the forests on Awá land. The Brazilian Government and the World Bank supported the mining juggernaut Vale in building a 900km railway to enable iron ore to be transported to the coast for exportation.

In 1982, the Government of Brazil was granted a loan of 9 million USD from the World Bank and the European
Union with several conditions, including the demarcation and protection of indigenous peoples’ lands. However, the demarcation process was blocked largely by politicians and businessmen, some of whom have large landholdings on Awá land. Brazil only took action in March 2003 after a 20-year campaign led by international organizations such as Survival International, and supported by local NGO CIMI (Indigenous Missionary Council). The long and powerful campaign involved publications of leaflets and other multimedia materials addressing the general public to raise awareness about the environmental struggle facing the Awá as well as drafting appeals to the United Nations and petitions to the Brazilian Government urging for the demarcation process to be resumed. Over the years, Survival International generated a movement of indigenous peoples in Brazil who themselves have taken root and given rise to dozens of indigenous organizations lobbying vigorously for their own rights.

Despite the different legal and non-legal instruments acknowledging indigenous peoples rights in Brazil, indigenous populations are still facing evictions from their traditional lands, violent repression from the national authorities and the violation of their Free, Prior, Informed consent (FPIC) in several mining projects. Relocation to the indian outposts has had a dramatic impact on the organization of the Awá’s traditional way of life. Since they seek protection of FUNAI agents from settlers hunting them down, hey are indirectly forced to permanently stay near the outpost. More than half of those who were contacted by FUNAI agents are estimated to have died as a result of diseases transmitted through contact itself.

The slow process of demarcation exposes the Awá’s forests to increased invasion from outsiders and destruction of their land by logging and clearance for farming. Many cases of indigenous peoples being killed on sight by settlers have been reported. According to the Indigenous Missionary Council, 450 Indigenous people were murdered in Brazil between 2003 and 2010.

Indigenous Rights In Brazil

The 1988 Brazilian Constitution lays the ground for the acknowledgement and respect of its indigenous peoples. In fact, their right to social organization, customs, beliefs, languages and traditions are guaranteed by law as well as their right to the land “they traditionally occupy”.

The formal process of demarcation of portions of land to be officially recognised by the State as Indigenous Territory (Terra Indígena [TI]) is the responsibility of FUNAI and requires an ethnographic and geographical survey of the area. The process is often delayed by legal disputes arising from the strong opposition of non-indigenous settlers defending their commercial interests in the TI.

In 2002, the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169, a legally-binding international instrument, which is designed to protect the rights of indigenous and tribal peoples, was ratified by Brazil and enacted through a Presidential decree in 2004. This cornerstone document introduced the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC) in policy and development processes that affect them (Art. 6).

In 2007, this fundamental article on FPIC was re-affirmed by the draft of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), adopted by the Brazilian authorities that same year. Although this international instrument has no legal power, it is a major step for the 148 signatory countries as it officially recognises the right to self-determination of their indigenous population and puts emphasis on their collective rights more than individual rights.

Finally, in March 2012, the Federal Judge, Jirair Aram Meguerian, ordered all outsiders illegally occupying the Awá Indigenous Territory in Maranhão to leave within twelve months. The decision was welcomed by indigenous communities. Nevertheless, the order was never enforced.
Moreover, even when Awá people find safety in the indigenous outposts, they are still not free to circulate as they wish for fear of being shot by loggers. Furthermore, the hunting conditions are more and more difficult since illegal loggers regularly invade their land at the start of the dry season, building roads and damming rivers, which scares away game and suspends the availability of fishing resources.

The future for Awá people is still uncertain and so far, there is no political will from the Brazilian authorities to enforce indigenous rights and save the Awá from extinction. In July 2012, the Office of the Solicitor General issued Decree 303, and having force of law until Brazil’s congress intervenes against it, allows military operations, construction of roads and hydro-electric dams, development of mining projects or any other activity deemed of a "strategic nature" on indigenous lands—all without the consent of impacted communities. In September 2012, FUNAI reported that loggers were penetrating deeper and deeper into Awá lands as they found evidence of deforestation only six kilometers away from Awá communities. As a result, the uncontacted members of the Awá tribe are always on the move in an ever shrinking forest. The Awá people are very likely to extinct, unless action is taken now.

**Catherine Ashton Answers Parliamentary Question on the Awá**

On 20 June 2014, Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, answered a parliamentary question on the human rights issues faced by the Awa indigenous community in Colombia. The question was submitted by a group of 12 Members of the European Parliament, headed by Ms. Catherine Grèze (Greens), who requested more information about the European Union’s policy on indigenous rights in Colombia.

The MEPs expressed great concern about the indigenous communities in Colombia, especially the Awa people, who are on the brink of extinction. The formulated question addressed, several issues this indigenous community is facing. Awa lands are polluted by an overflowing oil pipeline, which goes across their territory down to the port of Tumaco. The Awa are also vulnerable targets for armed groups. Representatives of Awa communities reported that in 2013 at least 17 individuals were killed as a consequence. This appalling situation continues as no specific measures were taken by the Colombian government, even though in 2009 Colombia’s Constitutional Court urged the government to implement a “Plan for the Safeguard of the Awa”.

The MEPs asked the High Representative how the European Union reacts to these issues, especially in light of an exchange of views on Human Rights in Colombia that will take place in the near future. The Members also wondered whether the European External Action Service makes sure that European companies, as well as foreign companies exporting to Europe, respect the UN principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent by indigenous peoples.

In response to these questions, Catherine Ashton declared that indigenous rights issues are among the EU’s priorities in its work on Human Rights in Colombia. The EU keeps strong ties with Colombian activists and
numerous organizations advocating for human rights, and EU officials hold regular meetings with indigenous community representatives. According to her, the EU has often raised questions about indigenous rights in its dialogues with Colombia. Catherine Ashton added that the European Union’s financial support to the indigenous communities is considerable: up to € 5 million to support several projects aiming at protecting tribal communities in Colombia have been granted until now.

Catherine Ashton stressed that it is the responsibility of the Colombian authorities to make sure companies respect the principle of Free, Prior and Informed Consent of indigenous communities. However, the EU continues to pay close attention to this issue. Furthermore, the High Representative stated that her office is monitoring the situation closely, and the Colombian authorities will be questioned if needed.

On 22 January 2014, UNPO convened a conference with the support of Catherine Grèze (Greens) and Richard Howitt (S&D), touching upon the different issues the Awá are facing. The conference is part of a larger campaign UNPO launched in 2013 with the support of the Nando Peretti Foundation.

UNPO would like to express its gratitude to Catherine Grèze and the other MEPs to raise this matter with the High Representative.

Sign the appeal now!
From 12 to 23 May 2014, the United Nations headquarters drew in more than 2,000 indigenous representatives who had gathered to attend the Thirteenth Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues to discuss the fate of approximately 370 million indigenous peoples worldwide.

The Permanent Forum was established in response to rallying cries for a permanent space to discuss the economic, social, environmental, developmental, human rights and cultural dimensions of indigenous issues within the high-level, global body of the United Nations. While the Permanent Forum’s founding may have represented a formal recognition for the urgent need to respect and promote the rights of indigenous peoples, this year’s Permanent Forum exposed deficiencies of the UN body.

Following the meetings, it is reasonable to ask whether it provides a legitimate opportunity to reach tangible conclusions on how to resolve and end outstanding violations and historical injustices?

Despite the criticisms outlined below, the Permanent Forum continues to provide an invaluable opportunity for indigenous groups to speak up, cooperate and seek support via informal avenues. The Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization (UNPO) partook in a number of additional meetings with Ambassadors of UN Member State Missions to the United Nations, as well as human rights organizations, to raise awareness about the issues facing UNPO Members, such as Crimean Tatars, Assyrians, Khmer Krom and Chittagong Hill Tracts, among others.

Admittedly, the agenda of the Thirteenth Session seemed promising and constructive. Various indigenous and State representatives were set to debate land disputes, indigenous youth, sexual health and reproductive rights, and the post-2015 development agenda, among other issues. The special theme for this year’s Permanent Forum was the principle of good governance, consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which was adopted almost seven years ago. The principle refers to transparency, responsiveness and accountability of Governments, but also the right to self-determination, and full and effective participation in decision-making.

The two-week meeting loudly echoed a familiar call; a call for greater respect for the Principle of Free, Prior and Informed consent. Indigenous participants reminded attendees about the importance of the right to self-determination, consultation and participation in decision-making as a crucial determinant of indigenous peoples’ survival. The Principle of ‘Free, Prior and Informed consent’, which implies that an indigenous community has the right to give or withhold consent regarding any issues affecting them – such as development projects to be executed on the territory, which they customarily own and occupy – is widely accepted and enshrined in various international instruments, and some argue is becoming part of international customary law.

The principle was developed to prevent non-coercive negotiations and ensure an equal footing in deliberations about indigenous land use, particularly when it comes to extractive industries, forestry, plantations, conservation, but also in development and climate change dialogues. In accordance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, States are encouraged to consult and cooperate in good faith with indigenous peoples to obtain their free, prior and informed consent.
While equal participation of indigenous representatives on indigenous issues may seem like a well-established standard, it is far from being realized or observed. Not only was this central principle challenged at the Permanent Forum itself, but also by a disheartening controversy regarding the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples. On 21 December 2010, in A/Res/65/198, the General Assembly decided to organize a high-level plenary meeting – the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples – to be held in 2014.

**Is The World Conference on Indigenous Peoples Just Another Reflection of International Injustices?**

Indigenous peoples have made their demands clear; the first-ever World Conference on indigenous issues must include full, direct and equal participation of indigenous representatives starting from the preparatory stages to the drafting of the final outcome document of the conference. Yet, the demands for full and equal participation fell on deaf ears. General Assembly President, Mr. Ashe had previously decided that indigenous representatives would not be actively involved. When indigenous groups mobilized and protested the blatantly State-centric approach, Mr. Ashe had proposed the participation of two indigenous advisers, who would ultimately not be involved in the drafting of the final conference document, which would represent a crucial and decisive role of influence for indigenous peoples.

Mr. Ashe’s proposal unjustly defies the indigenous peoples’ right to choose their own representative; this right was delegated to the Permanent Forum. When a UN agency decides on behalf of indigenous groups who will represent them at the World Conference, it violates the principle that every deliberation, decision or document that affects indigenous peoples, their territories and interests must include full, equal and effective participation.

It is reasonable to question Mr. Ashe’s State-favouring stance. One possible, and likely, explanation is that influential States exerted pressure on Mr. Ashe, raising the alarming speculation of how the deliberations at the World Conference will unravel. Will States adopt conclusions hostile to indigenous peoples? Or will inconvenient issues for States simply be neglected?

The debate around full and equal participation (or the boycotting of the World Conference) is a reflection of how the current international system remains inherently tilted against indigenous peoples. The international order remains State-centric and unjust; it continues to silence marginalized indigenous peoples, not only by shamelessly excluding indigenous voices at the World Conference, but also by the meagre media attention paid to the latest violations played out on the international stage.

The World Conference is not the only controversy. Interactive and effective dialogue was also questionable at the Permanent Forum. Several Indigenous representatives were precluded from speaking by procedural issues. The timing and speakers lists were not properly adhered to by the Chairperson of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous issues, which subsequently resulted in non-corresponding agenda topics and the need to cut off and exclude some speakers. For example, the representative of the Assyrian Universal Alliance was unable to deliver his statement due to logistical mishandling. The Middle East, and its many indigenous populations, was neglected as a region all together. The mismanagement of speaking times during meetings unfortunately led to a general lack of debate; statements went unchallenged, questions unanswered and any possibilities of dialogue seriously stifled.

Furthermore, an obvious drawback to the discussions during the two week-long meetings was the prevalence and dominance of certain groups, but especially State representatives, who were guaranteed a large portion of speaking time. The Assyrian Universal Alliance had attempted to raise the issue of marginalization and underrepresentation of Middle Eastern indigenous organizations, but such questioning was side-lined.

The Permanent Forum issues recommendations to the Economic and Social Council, but will these be viable considering the limited opportunities for dialogue? The Thirteenth Session, with its special focus on good governance, which encompasses the right of indigenous peoples to fully and effectively participate in decision-making in all matters that impact their rights, lives, communities, territories and resources, could have begun the process of dismantling international injustices and effectively addressing how indigenous peoples are consulted and engaged, but it may have inadvertently reinforced and perpetuated traditional power systems.
UNPO Condemns Recent Crackdown of Oromo Student Protests by Ethiopian Government

Following last month’s violent answer of the Ethiopian armed forces against peaceful protesters in Oromia, UNPO expresses its support to the victims’ families. Urgent attention from the international community to the situation of the Oromo people in Ethiopia is required.

Over the course of the month of May, students in Oromia have been facing harsh repression by Ethiopia’s authorities. The peaceful student protests against the Government’s planned education reforms were met by excessive violence, causing the death of approximately 30 students and teachers. Reportedly, the youngest victim was only 11 years old. Ever since, international outrage has spread, and in many cities solidarity protests were held. The Ethiopian Government has denied any responsibility, and is exercising a strict control over the local media.

By staging the protests, the students wanted to express their concern about the Government’s project to expand the municipal boundaries of the capital city, Addis Ababa. This would imply that the Oromo students’ communities, currently under regional jurisdiction, would no longer be managed by the Oromia Regional State. In addition, the reform would include the displacement of Oromo farmers and residents. Considering their vulnerable status in Ethiopian society, this would make the situation for Oromo individuals even worse than it already is.

The discrepancy between the nature of the protests and the Ethiopian authorities’ reaction is extremely alarming, and gives further evidence of the human rights abuses to which the Oromo community is systematically subjected in Ethiopia. The Oromo suffer from severe discrimination, not only in terms of freedom of expression, as was the case in these recent events, but also in terms of basic human rights, cultural expression, socio-economic conditions and political representation.

Housing development in Ethiopia regularly happens at the expense of Oromo farmers, who are forced to give up their lands, with insufficient or no financial compensation in return. These acts of forced removal or land grabbing are mostly achieved through violent attacks and killings. Over the past few years, many reports stated that Oromo individuals had been killed by the Ethiopian Special Police Forces, including women and children. According to a recent report published in 2013 by Human Rights Watch, numerous Oromo political prisoners were tortured and executed in secret prisons in Oromia and Ethiopia.

UNPO strongly condemns the crackdown on the Oromo community and urges that those responsible are held accountable. UNPO furthermore calls on the Ethiopian Government to stop violating the fundamental human rights of its citizens, and to respect and abide by the international conventions it signed and ratified.
REFRAMING GENDER IN POST-CONFLICT RECONSTRUCTION WITH THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERSECTIONALITY: LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE BATWA IN RWANDA

By Iva Petkovic

Introduction

The ethno-political genocide in Rwanda has received an avalanche of international scholarly attention due to the magnitude of inhumanity witnessed during the 100-day period of slaughter. The 1994 genocide was an ethnically-charged and State-sponsored bloodbath carried out with knives, clubs and machetes that left 800,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus dead, despite a “common heritage and a long history of at least comparatively peaceful coexistence, with intermarriage and mobility between the groups” (MRGI 2005).

This paper adopts a feminist analysis of gender in transforming post-conflict spaces. It departs from the idea that since “the conflict in Rwanda was gendered; so must be the recovery,” (Powley 2004, 6), but suggests that peacebuilding and reconciliation processes must adopt an intersectional approach with the recognition of differences in women’s experiences.

Intersectionality as a theoretical framework can be a useful tool in advancing the objectives of post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, because of its focus on several intersecting oppressed identities (Mehrotra 2010, 418), revealing the complex nature of disparities across a population. By focusing on identities as separate and exclusive entities, the realities of intersecting characteristics (e.g. age, race, class, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, migratory status, and political orientation) are obscured.

The inspiration behind this proposal arose from the study of the Batwa, a marginalized and historically oppressed segment of the Rwandan society with poor access to education, healthcare, employment, media and political participation (UNPO 2008) and facing negative stereotyping, isolation and abuse of their rights (Lewis 2000, 13). It is apparent that without official recognition of their distinct ethnic identity and cultural heritage, the task of addressing the multiple forms of oppression is exacerbated, particularly when looking intersectionally at Batwa women. While many Rwandan women have made great strides towards equality, Batwa women remain at the margins across all development indicators. For example, Batwa widows or Batwa women with disabilities are further disadvantaged.
As Rwanda redefines gender roles and ethnicity, the author wonders; is Rwanda’s emphasis on gender equality compatible with its new policy of suppression of ethnic identity? Who does this policy hurt? How does it affect Batwa women and Batwa women facing other forms of oppression? Is a gendered policy of reconstruction enough? Can we really label Rwanda’s reconciliation a success?

To advance the argument of incorporating intersectionality into post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation efforts, the paper will begin with a look at how post-genocide Rwanda tackled gender inequality as a strategy of achieving sustainable peace. It will present the hardships and obstacles faced by Rwanda’s third ethnic group, and particularly Batwa women, aggravated by Rwanda’s official negation of ethnic belonging. It will introduce the concept of intersectionality and theoretically develop how the intersectionality framework could benefit reconstruction and reconciliation strategies by looking at gender, ethnicity and other systems of oppression in need of address. Finally, it will draw new conclusions about possible holistic approaches to gender mainstreaming.

**Conceptual Clarifications**

In Rwanda, “identity politics became a means of legitimizing collective violence” (Hintjens 2001, 25) that was characterized by both ethnic and gender lines. It is important to highlight that the Rwandan genocide affected men and women differently, but the focus of this essay is primarily on how it affected women and what challenges lie ahead in achieving gender equality.

Despite the steady growth of academic interest in gender and conflict over the past 20 years, many authors point to the gender blindness and lack of analysis of persistent gendered power relations within conflict and peacebuilding contexts.

Rwanda’s peace and reconciliation efforts have been hailed as gender-sensitive and highly inclusive of women. The Government of Rwanda recognized the disproportionate (or rather different) impact that the massacres had on women, and incorporated a commitment to gender equality into legislation and institutional organization.

*Gender equality* signifies that women and men share equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities, such as participating in the public sphere, regardless of their sex (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005, 6). Liberal feminists assume that once traditional obstacles to women’s participation and opportunities in life are dismantled, women will be able to achieve equality, but there are countless examples where formal and institutional equality has not led to equality of outcomes (de Waal 2006, 209). Therefore, *substantive equality* requires more than just equal opportunities guaranteed by law, but complete societal transformation (de Waal 2006, 210). The Rwandan genocide, with its immeasurable pain and trauma, completely dismantled social structures and norms. This opened space for redistribution of power and resources.

In the search for gender equality, it must be recognized that *gender* is a socially constructed ‘truth’ with a presumed connection to an individual’s biological traits, and is assumed to reveal a set of gendered and stereotypical characteristics of *femininity* and *masculinity* (Sjoberg and Via 2010, 3) through discourse that frames social and political life (ibid. 4). The stereotypical notions of womanhood were perpetuated in Rwandan peacebuilding efforts through the perception that women as mothers and daughters are ‘naturally’ endowed with moral authority, a propensity for peacebuilding and are clearly better at reconciliation efforts.

In the aftermath of slaughter, Rwanda embarked on a process of *post-conflict reconstruction*, which occurs after fighting has ceased and has “transitioned beyond conflict” (Handrahan 2004, 430) and continues until normalization of the crisis. The initial response is characterized by an intervention to ensure basic security, stability and emergency services, while the second stage, the transformation, is orientated towards rebuilding human capacities, political institutions, reigniting the
Peacemaking, peacekeeping and peacebuilding have been central features of the international system since the end of the Cold War, but this paper is only concerned with peacebuilding, which is a process of addressing the causes of the conflict, either through preventative diplomacy, democratic institution building, development projects, human rights and environment protection, monitoring of elections etc. (Dawson 2004, 2). Another important element to this paper is reconciliation, which represents a major challenge for Rwanda. After all, how can a society come together after it has undergone such heinous crimes of genocide? While Rwanda has never defined reconciliation for itself, scholars like Clark (2010) have suggested it includes a restoration of relationships within a community, forgiving, accepting, confronting the past and reinstating peaceful coexistence.

Gender mainstreaming is the “process of systematically incorporating gender perspectives into areas of work and assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes” (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005, 6). Gender mainstreaming is fused into the “design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally,” (UN ECOSOC 1997, 28). There are two additional elements to gender mainstreaming: the institutional and organizational incorporation of gender concerns and gender empowerment (Moser and Moser 2005, 12). This is imperative to successful strategies in various fields such as humanitarian work, development, peacebuilding and peacekeeping, human rights protection, disarmament, and post-conflict reconstruction, because without a gendered analysis, “we construct homogeneous strategies of response that do not address gender-based differences and generally tend to disadvantage women,” (Thompson 2006, 342-343).

“Gender mainstreaming is based on the principle that the gender order of a society can be changed through deliberate and focused interventions at every level. Therefore, gender mainstreaming can be described as seeking to remedy patterns of gender inequality as it focuses on the trans-formation of gender norms and values” (de Waal 2006 210).

Involving women in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding carries challenges feminist scholars have already identified, such as the “danger of women to merely imitate ‘mainstream/malesstream’ peacebuilding” (Lazarus and Taylor 1999, 93). Therefore, women’s “involvement and the knowledge /women/ bring should result in the transformation of power not just the transfer of power,” (ibid.).

Gender and Post-Genocide Rwanda: From Slaughter to Reconciliation

From April to July 1994, the international community stood by as military, paramilitary, ordinary citizens and “nationalist militias waged ethnic conflict against women’s bodies” (Sharlach 1999, 396). The unprecedented mass rapes, killings, sex slavery and human rights violations of Tutsi (and some Hutu) women proves, to some extent, the deliberate subjugation and targeting of women within patriarchal militarism. During the conflict, Rwandan women also faced displacement, family separation, and food insecurity (Powley 2004, 5).

“Rape does not only inflict humiliation and terror on individual women, but also aims to degrade the women’s ethnic groups /…/ rape as a tool of genocide served as a marker of ethnicity – a deliberate strategy to target women in their role as child bearers to destroy the purity
of the ethnic group” (Hudson 2009, 303).

However, the Rwandan genocide is also exemplary of women taking up arms, and even plotting violence as part of the “little house” elites (Sharlach 1999, 387-8). They account for at least 6% of genocide related suspects and 47 women were listed as ‘Category 1 Genocide Suspects’ (McCarthy 68-9). Yet, as Powley (2004, 4) argues, Rwandan “women are an important symbol of moderation /in/ reconciliation and reconstruction in part because they have not been implicated in the violence to the same extent as men”.

In Rwanda’s post-genocide society, which was 70 % female after the cessation of violence (DCAF 2009, 55), many women still suffer from poverty, anguish, hopelessness, illness, and fall victim to rapes and torture (Topping 2014). Even with high economic growth rates, many survivors, the majority being women, face poverty, particularly in rural areas (Izabilizia). Post-genocide Rwanda needed to urgently address the lack of human capital, illiteracy, pressure of returning diaspora, rape babies, women infected with HIV/AIDS, and children-headed household (Council on Foreign Relations 2003).

**Gender Roles Redefined**

In the precolonial times, men dominated the public sphere and were the main decision-makers in the social, economic and political life (Longman 2006, 134 in Debusscher and Ansoms 2013, 1114). Women’s freedom and power was greatly curtailed by their inability to own or inherit land. Despite their limited leadership role, they were seen as mothers, food producers and, in some cases, religious leaders (Debusscher and Ansoms 2013, 1114). During colonial rule, the patriarchal social structure and inequalities prevailed.

“The abrupt shift from a subsistence to a monetary economy based on paid employment and a formal education system, weakened women’s position relative to that of men. In particular, it weakened their bargaining position on matters concerning their access to, and control over resources and the degree of their level of participation in the development process” (Izabilizia 5).

In post-independence Rwanda, women were still sidelined. Even in the decade preceding the mass slaughter, Rwandan women represented only 18 % of the parliament of Rwanda (DCAF 2009, 55).

The 1994 conflict undoubtedly transformed Rwanda’s society; gender roles loosened their grip and women were propelled to high ranking decision-making positions at all levels (Sørensen 1998, 12; DCAF 2009, 55), allowing them to make extraordinary contributions to the post-conflict reconstruction of Rwanda, top-down and bottom-up.

In the aftermath, women grasped their agency and began organizing. Various local grassroots widow’s groups, such as AVEGA, advocating for land and property rights (Sørensen 1998, 13) or ASOFERA working in areas of economic empowerment, resettlement of displaced peoples, widows and dealing with cases of returnees (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005, 27) were established. Even a men’s group, RWAMREC, which encouraged members to be “loving, caring fathers and partners who are supportive of gender equality” (UN Women 2013) emerged with the purpose of making Rwandan society more equal along gender lines.

Although “the Rwandan genocide shattered the dense local friendship networks and community solidarity that had traditionally provided solace and support for women,” (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005, 10), women transcended the mistrust. They cooperated in various non-governmental organizations and associations to advance various empowerment initiatives, or worked side by side in infrastructure and construction actions, or joined solidarity camps (Mutamba and Izabiliza 2005).

“Women’s organizing in the aftermath of the conflict reflects a practical engagement with the notion of empathetic cooperation – building peace...”
across ethnic, religious, national, and cultural divides” (Hudson 2009, 206).

Since women were left impoverished, traumatized, and alone, they were pushed into heading households and communities (Powley 2004, 5), seeking education to access better jobs as a way of empowerment (Bikorimana 2012), but also survival. While the genocide undoubtedly left all survivors vulnerable, women were “saddled with the responsibility for caring for families single-handedly, taking care of orphans, and assuming duties traditionally carried out in patriarchal Rwanda by men” (Izabilizia 2005, 1).

“They buried the dead, found homes for nearly 500,000 orphans, and built shelters. With early and critical support from UNHCR, USAID, and UNIFEM (among others), women in Rwanda were leaders in reconstruction efforts.” (Powley 2004, 5).

A sharp rise in women’s participation in leadership and decision-making political positions played a paramount role in narrowing the gender gap. “Rwandese women in different leadership positions played critical roles in mobilizing fellow women to live together and to find common solutions to their own problems and those of their country” (Izabilizia 2005, 3).

**Rwandan Government’s Commitment To Gender Equality**

The significance of recognizing the need for promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment as a foundation for sustainable and viable peace was reiterated by President Paul Kagame, stating: “question of gender equality in our society needs a clear and critical evaluation in order to come up with concrete strategies to map the future development in which men and women are true partners and beneficiaries,” (in Izabiliza 2005, 2)

The Government of National Unity wasted no time appointing women to leadership position in the executive, legislative and judicial branches of Government. Women served as ministers and even judges in the Gacaca courts – a crucial element of reconciliation. “These gender posts were meant to ensure that all proposed policies are sensitive to the particular needs of women, a core component of successful gender mainstreaming” (McCarthy 73). The Ministry of Gender and Women in Development was also established and tasked with organizing the gender posts and introducing gender budgeting (Hudson 2009, 505).

The President’s conviction that gender equality in every sector is not a “favour, but every woman’s right” (Rwandan Government 2013) is mirrored today by Rwanda’s legislature where 64% of parliamentarians are women; the highest percentage globally. It far exceeds the constitutionally mandated 30%. This electoral success shows that the perception that women are capable of taking up decision-making posts has proliferated across Rwanda’s society (McCrthy 76).

Women’s strong presence in the national parliament led to cross-party Forum of Women Parliamentarians, which has been crucial in advocating for women’s rights, adopting gender-sensitive and pro-women legislation (DCAF 2009, 55; Bikorimana 2012), and incorporating grassroots women’s groups in the making of Rwanda’s Constitution (Izabilizia 2005, 4). Various constitutional and electoral reforms safeguard women’s participation in high-level political positions.

Furthermore, the Government adopted a legal framework of the National Council of Women, which allows women to participate in forum discussions, exchange ideas, gain visibility, and affect Government policies (Izabiliza 2005 4). Significantly, the Government also adopted ‘Vision 2020’, in which, the development goals of Rwanda were fused with a gender sensitive approach recognizing it as a cross-cutting issue of development.

The country is also experiencing rapid economic growth and improvements in several development indicators that have a profound effect on the lives of women; a falling birth and maternal mortality rate, increasing levels of education in girls and boys (Topping 2014).
Linking Batwa To Rwanda’s Reconciliation Efforts

Who are the Batwa and Why Are They Marginalized?

The Twas or Batwa, are an indigenous population of the Great Lakes region of Central Africa with an estimated population between 86,000 and 112,000 (UNPO 2008). The Batwa are Rwanda’s third ethnic group and remain practically invisible; a “forgotten minority” representing 0.4% of the population (UNPO 2008).

The Batwa do not differentiate from the Hutus and Tutsis in language or religion, but instead for their cultural distinctiveness. Batwa cultural tradition is characterized by unique forms of songs, dance and music, and oral traditions (UNPO 1995, 9; UNPO 2011; Lewis 2000).

The oppression of the Batwa people started in the colonial times and intensified in the 1970s and 1980s, when they were rendered landless, because various agricultural and conservation projects pushed them out their traditional forest environments (UNPO 1995). The Batwa were traditionally hunter-gatherers, and the externally-enforced displacement meant a loss in subsistence. This forced the community to adopt pottery as an income-generating activity, while the majority relies on begging as a primary source of income. Pottery-making is also generally seen as precarious, because of the availability of cheaper mass-produced metal or plastic products (UNPO 2011, 5). Since the Batwa have received no compensation for their eviction, they have become the poorest and most disadvantaged section of Rwandan society (UNPO 2012).

Furthermore, economic deprivation, lack of political participation, and geographical segregation is exacerbated by widespread, but unsanctioned discrimination, which sees the Batwa as being ‘backwards’, ‘unintelligent’, ‘incestuous’, ‘amoral’ or ‘lazy’ (UNPO 2011, 5). They are seen as inferior (a clear marker of racism), feared and despised (Lewis 2000).

Lacking information or awareness about political developments, the Batwa were unprepared for the turmoil that swelled up their country in 1994. Leading up to the genocide, they became victims of increased discrimination, violence, land grabbing, and murder (Lewis 2000, 23). During the conflict, the Batwa were also ruthlessly targeted, even though this is a widely neglected fact. Charles Uwiragiye, Executive Secretary of the Association pour la Promotion des Batwa, estimates that up to 70% of Batwa indigenous peoples may have been killed between April and July 1994 (UNPO 1995, 5).

For those that did survive, there was nothing to come home to and many were displaced (Lewis 2000, 24).

“Without doubt some Batwa participated in the massacres, but many did not. Many Batwa have thus become double victims; first at the hands of the extremists, then by RPF attempting to gain control of the countryside” (ibid.).

Within the Batwa community, particular hardships are faced by Batwa women who lack access to education, not simply because of lack of materials, food and income to pay school fees – although all of these are crucial factors – but also because of lack of awareness of the importance and benefits of education (Ramsay 2010). This is compounded by Batwa traditional views of marriage, whereby it is generally conceived that women are born to marry and provide offspring (ibid.). It is looked down upon for a girl to dedicate her time to school rather than getting married.

Not only are they destined to poverty, while relying on their equally economically disempowered husbands or male relatives, they are also victims of extremely high levels of violence; most Batwa women believe they endure greater levels of violence as compared to other Rwandan women and that this is the result of their inescapable poverty (ibid. 10-11).

Rwandan Unity Or Suppression of Ethnicity In Reconciliation?

The story of post-conflict Rwanda, praised “for many of its initiatives and positive practices that have contributed towards social healing, development and growth” (HRC 2011, 1), is actually much more complicated than the international community may realize; the Government ruled by President Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) has followed a policy of playing down ethnic divides across society. Any reference to ethnicity is ‘divisionist’ according to domestic legislation, which stipulates:

“/t/he crime of discrimination occurs when the author makes use of any speech, written statement or action based on ethnicity /…/ with the aim of denying one or a group of persons their human rights provided by Rwandan law and International Conventions to which Rwanda is party” (Law No. 47/2001 article 3).

While the law may have been adopted for benevolent reasons, one of the drawbacks is that in practice, using the terms ‘Hutu’, ‘Tutsi’ and ‘Batwa’ is met with
intersectionality into post-conflict reconstruction would require a re-evaluation of how experts “conceptualize, investigate, analyze and address disparities” (Bowleg 2012, 1267) within war-torn communities. Intersectionality has already been advanced in various legal and policy areas, from human rights, family, employment, health, immigration, criminal law (Kaur Dhamoon 2011, 230; Bowleg 2012), but has yet to gain ground in this policy area, which is so crucial for the health, development and prosperity of traumatized, battered and wholly transformed societies. The intention of this paper is to apply the existing feminist scholarship and gender theory of intersectionality “that is committed to social justice and the empowerment of all women in diverse communities” (Mehrotra 2010, 418). It recognizes the “experiences of fluid and hybrid identities and multiplicity among women” (ibid.).

“Intersectionality has become a common buzzword to signify a general understanding that women are simultaneously positioned within patriarchy and gender identities, as well as within other systems of oppression,” (Mehrotra 2010, 420).

What arises from policies founded on identity politics (for example focusing solely on ‘gender’), is “that it frequently conflates or ignores intragroup differences” (Crenshaw 1993, 1242). Intersectionality recognizes that different factors can influence an individual’s experience of “oppression, poverty, marginalization and alienation as well as privilege, power and acclaim” (Mehrotra 2010, 419). In the case of Rwanda, simply focusing on gender as a core identity marker in need of redefinition creates space for ignoring and essentializing diversity among women. An intersectional gender lens would be inclusive of the various other identities and oppressions: ethnicity (particularly crucial for the Batwa), educational attainment, sexual orientation, health, disability, widowhood, employment status, class etc., as these impact empowerment and equality.

It is important to underline, that the author embraces the intra-categorical approach, as a middle-ground between the inter-categorical and anti-categorical views of identity. Intra-categorical approach emphasizes the diversity within social groups (such as women) and draws attention to the experiences and views of people who are situated at the intersections of numerous oppressions (Mattsson 2013, 10). The author therefore challenges the presumed homogeneity of social categories, but recognizes the need for groupings.
Intersectionality is useful in post-conflict reconstruction policies, because it puts marginalized groups into the limelight, particularly as conflict tends to make these segments of societies even more vulnerable. The advantage of applying intersectionality in reconstruction efforts, in addition to gender mainstreaming, is that it places “emphasis on multiple socially disadvantaged statuses as focal point” (Bowleg 2012, 1269) and looks at “how multiple social identities at the individual level of experience (i.e., the micro-level) intersect with multiple-level social inequalities at the macro structural level” (ibid.).

Furthermore, mainstreaming intersectionality “foregrounds a richer ontology than approaches that attempt to reduce people to one category at a time” (Kaur Dhamoon 2011, 230), but rather turns its attention to the “multiplicity of experience and social positionality” (Mehrotra 2010, 417). It attempts to encompass the full range of power relations within society. Importantly, “no social category or form of social inequality is more salient than another from an intersectionality perspective” (Bowleg 2012, 1271).

Therefore, post-conflict reconstruction may provide limited results without an intersectional approach to gender equality, for “ignoring difference within groups contributes to tensions among groups” (Crenshaw 1993, 1250). As Crenshaw argues for women of colour, similarly, Batwa women are less likely to have their needs met than women of different ethnicity, who are ethnically privileged (ibid.).

“The fact that minority women suffer from the effects of multiple subordination, couples with institutional expectations based on inappropriate nonintersectional contexts, shapes and ultimately limits the opportunities for meaningful intervention on their behalf. Recognizing the failure to consider intersectional dynamics may go far toward explaining the high levels of failure, frustration, and burn-out experienced by counsellors who attempt to meet the needs of minority women,” (Crenshaw 1992, 1251).
Post-conflict reconstruction must move beyond only looking through the gender lens, even when targeting women’s inequality and empowerment. Instead, it must adopt “complex and multidimensional ways that mirror the experiences of the populations” (Bowleg 2012, 1271). Finally, intersectionality can “facilitate and inform development of a well-targeted and cost-effective /…/ messages, interventions and policies” (Bowleg 2012, 1272).

Conclusion: Is Rwanda’s Emphasis on Gender Equality Compatible With its New Policy of Suppression of Ethnic Identity and How Can Intersectionality Help?

The case of post-genocide Rwanda is exemplary of how conflict can yield new gender identities and roles; many women were able to find freedom, empowerment, new political and economic responsibilities, and importantly, self-worth. The conflict also produced new understandings of ethnicity, and some experts criticise the ‘preventative’ initiative of ‘whitewashing’ ethnicities of Rwandans. Rwanda’s ethnic insecurities left Rwandan leadership hoping to eradicate ethnic divisions altogether. Recognizing that ethnicity is a constructed, unfixed ‘truth’, Rwanda attempted to create a new ethnic unity by denying ethnic differences, and thus, disadvantaging those who face structural hurdles in benefitting from this ‘unity’. While “ethnicity is a powerful idea; it cannot be simply talked out of existence” (Mgbako 2005, 220 in Clark 2010, 147).

As highlighted in previous sections, gender equality has received unprecedented Government attention. Despite this, Batwa girls and women remain oppressed, vulnerable and invisible, because Rwandan leadership has failed to recognize their distinctive and particular origins, culture, traditions and struggles. While the Government’s intention to deliberately exclude and segregate the Batwa is difficult to prove, their inaction and lack of acknowledgement of the Batwa shows a highly problematic aspect of Rwanda’s reconstruction and reconciliation efforts. Without political say or agency, they remain at the margins of Rwandan society.

In addition to gender mainstreaming post-conflict situations, an intersectional lens must be added to ensure a much more inclusive and broader approach to rebuilding, redeveloping, redefining needs, interests and struggles. Perhaps authors who have questioned Rwanda’s gender equality successes should reconsider the concept of gender mainstreaming. It is not enough to focus on women’s needs, not just because of myriad other gender identities – although that is certainly a credible argument – but because ‘women’ are not a homogenous grouping.

Within the category of ‘Rwandan women’ lie complexities and differences. This includes Batwa women, but also outlawed sexual minorities, persecuted female political opposition leaders, women with disabilities, widows with HIV/AIDS etc. All these different women are disadvantaged by very different intersectional forms of oppression and the difficulties they face in their day to day lives make their struggles for equality, agency, empowerment and freedom very different. All categories of oppression can reveal interesting truths about Rwanda today. The realities faced by Batwa women exemplify the consequences of denying ethnic differences. The criminalization of minority gender identities and sexual orientations portrays a murkier picture of where Rwanda - the success story - really is in terms of equality. While the scope of this paper only allowed an analysis of intersecting identities of ‘gender’ and ‘ethnicity’, a more thorough analysis could continue highlighting other divisions between women in Rwanda, exposing disparities among women and reaching new conclusions about how tackling gender inequality is dependent on tackling other forms of inequality or disadvantage. As Batwa women are still far away from benefiting from Rwanda’s commitment to gender equality, one may conclude that tackling gender equality in a vacuum, without an intersectional approach, is destined to leave many of the most vulnerable women behind.
The Mapuche: 2014 So Far

2014 has been a varied year for the Mapuche in their struggle for greater autonomy and recognition, with several positive indications of progress. Despite their status as Chile’s largest minority, many of the structural and institutional hindrances to real advancement remain, with discrimination and lack of land rights still high on the agenda.

Announcing a new indigenous communities policy in June 2014, Chilean President Michelle Bachelet claimed that “we are still in debt to [Chile’s] indigenous people.” Amongst other measures, she announced the creation of an Indigenous Affairs Ministry and a Council of Indigenous Peoples, as well as designated seats in Congress for indigenous groups. Although on paper these steps seem positive, they do little to redress immediate concerns over land rights and autonomy, and only time will tell if they are effective measures at all. The Mapuche themselves are sceptical, complaining that the moves towards increased representation will only benefit “the capitalist business class” within the Mapuche zone.

From a legal perspective, the Pinochet-era terrorism law used to suppress dissent remains very much in force, despite President Bachelet’s pledge to curtail its use and eventually instigate a government review of the legislation. Since the early 2000s, the law has been used in relation to Mapuche issues, and allows for the extended detention of suspects without charge and the admission of anonymous witness testimonies. The United Nations Human Rights Council has called on the Bachelet administration to desist from applying the law to indigenous cases – a practice which has previously resulted in excessive police force resulting in the death of Mapuche activists, and creates the impression that the Mapuche represent a question of public order as opposed to a matter of constitutional settlement.

With regards to land ownership, the pace of reform remains slow. Large-scale landowners have acted to block such moves, arming themselves and even forming an “anti-Mapuche” brigade in one case. In addition, an intense police presence remains in place across much of the Mapuche zone, giving credence to Mapuche claims of an occupation and heightening the risk of tensions in the region. Despite an official apology for historic land seizures from the Governor of Araucania, meaningful efforts to redress these injustices seem as distant as ever, and there appears to be no change in the mining and forestry activity taking place on Mapuche land, nor the inevitable environmental consequences associated with such industries.

These continuing injustices forced some Mapuche activists to take drastic action. Earlier this year, Mapuche prisoners in Chile endured a 39-day hunger strike in an attempt to force the Bachelet administration to tackle issues including the terrorism law. The Government eventually agreed to look at the prisoners’ demands, although not before Mapuche living in the Netherlands and Germany began their own hunger strike in solidarity with the men. These radical acts of protest underline the urgency and importance of the Mapuche’s situation.

UNPO stands steadfastly behind the Mapuche, and all peaceful and democratic attempts towards the achievement of their goals. UNPO calls on the Chilean Government to enact its promise to return all seized land to the Mapuche, and to recognise their autonomy with effective and comprehensive constitutional reforms, which satisfy their unique political and cultural needs. Until the Mapuche have regained the full dignity and authority, which self-determination affords, UNPO will continue to work with them to advocate for their freedom.
Khmer Krom in Europe Demand Vietnamese Apology over Kampuchea Krom

On Friday 1 August 2014, Khmer Krom diaspora from across France gathered in Paris, in the vicinity of the Vietnamese Embassy, to protest against a recent statement by the spokesperson for the Vietnamese Embassy in Cambodia. In July 2014, the said spokesperson, Tran Van Thong, claimed that the former Kampuchea Krom provinces belonged to Vietnam long before France’s official transfer of the land in 1949 – a claim that has created a wave of reactions and protests among Khmer Krom people around the world.

Upon invitation by the Khmers Kampuchea-Krom Federation (KKF), a member of UNPO since 2001, UNPO partook in the demonstration in solidarity with the Khmer Krom people. Following three hours of peaceful manifestation, the Khmer Krom protestors had planned to hand over a list of demands, including an apology on behalf of Tran Van Thong for twisting the history of Kampuchea Krom, to the Vietnamese Embassy in Paris. Not surprisingly, the Embassy refused to receive the petition.

Similar peaceful protests in Phnom Penh in July of this year resulted in excessive use of force by local security forces. At the time, it was already reported that the Vietnamese Government would not consider petitions or protests and that Tran Van Thong intended to maintain his position of not issuing an apology.

Vietnam continues to refuse recognition of the Khmer Krom as indigenous to the Mekong Delta, and consequently the Khmer Krom keep suffering from religious, linguistic and socio-economic inequalities, as well as from a lack of political representation. Khmer Krom human rights publications are banned, while the practice of Theravada Buddhism – the foundation of the distinct culture and ethnic identity of the Khmer Krom – is being strictly controlled by the Vietnamese Government.
West Papua: A Silent Genocide?

The everyday life in West Papua is marked by continued police and military abuses. Security forces are still operating with ruthless impunity, arresting activists and those who dare raise the ‘Morning Star’ flag. Activists claim that the Indonesian State is inflicting a “silent genocide” on the indigenous people of West Papua, using rape, torture and enforced disappearances as common tactics to annihilate native dissent.

When Indonesia obtained independence after World War II, West Papua (then West New Guinea) remained under Dutch control and was prepared for independence. In 1961, West Papuans announced their independence from the Dutch, thus triggering an Indonesian invasion supported militarily and politically by the USSR. In Cold War spirit, the US intervened and under their pressure, the Dutch agreed to a UN brokered settlement providing for an UN-supervised Indonesian administration and vote for self-determination by which Papuans could choose independence or integration with Indonesia. West Papuans were not consulted in the process. When the ‘Act of Free Choice’ - the 1969 vote for self-determination – finally took place, it did not meet international standards: a handpicked group of 1,022 West Papuans were coerced, under threat of violence, into voting unanimously for integration with Indonesia.

Over the past few months Indonesia’s brutal and oppressive policies towards West Papuans have been embodied in a number of events. In April 2014, peaceful student protests demanding the release of 77 Papuan political prisoners, were violently interrupted by armed police. Some students were detained and beaten while in custody. Later on, West Papuan activist groups that planned to commemorate the region’s proclaimed independence by Papuan leaders on 1 July 1971, faced intimidation by the Indonesian military. In a separate incident this summer, two policemen broke in to a farmer’s home and fired pistol shots, first outside and then inside. They kept the victims in their police van with no food, water or toilet overnight. The assaulted farmer was accused of working for the pro-independence Free West Papua Movement.

Amidst continuous oppression, the West Papuan cries have found some allies abroad. In March 2014, Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Moana Carcasses, called for international action and urged the United Nations Human Rights Council to adopt a resolution to protect the rights of the people of West Papua and to investigate alleged human rights violations. However, other neighbouring states have directly or indirectly become party to human rights violations. For instance, since 2009, New Zealand has allegedly carried out military trainings with the Indonesian military in six West Papuan police centers. Since the brutal suppression of human rights in West Papua is linked to the provincial police force, New Zealand, by training...
local forces, is indirectly supporting this brutal policy. However, on a more positive note, on 31 July 2014, the Parliament of New Zealand passed a motion asking the Indonesian Government to allow local and international journalists to report freely on the situation in West Papua, without any restrictions and persecutions.

The discontent of the people of West Papua with their current status was clearly expressed in the run-up to the July 2014 Indonesian presidential elections, as approximately 80% of the West Papuans held a nation-wide peaceful boycott of the election in protest against Indonesian rule and the continued denial of West Papuans' self-determination.

The newly elected President of Indonesia, Joko “Jokowi” Widodo, who won with 53.15 % of the votes, has been described as a “man of the people”, coming from humble circumstances, as opposed to his rival Prabowo Subianto, a former military commander with close ties to the country’s ruling elite. However, if Jokowi is truly committed to addressing intolerance, discrimination and violence, and to protect the rights of indigenous peoples, there must be room for inclusive dialogue and consideration of the concerns of the people of West Papua, Acheh, South Moluccas and others. The coming months and years will show whether the “man of the people” will be the man of all peoples.

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