

Women in Rural India

A popular weekly comic in the *Times of India* features a likeness of the U.S. president as a cape-wearing superhero. DUBYAMAN flies around the world promoting his policies and protecting U.S. interests. In a 2006 strip, DUBYAMAN shows off his National Security Initiative, which identifies Hindi as one of many critical-need languages—foreign languages that are important for Americans to learn. “Hey dude!” says an Indian radio announcer speaking in a mix of English and Hindi, “Wanna bolo Hindi? Sirf suno Radio Mirchi!” DUBYAMAN shrugs, “Dude? Wanna? Radio? Gee, I’ve been speakin’ Hindi all my life without realisin’ it.”

A visitor to India might agree with DUBYAMAN, and find that Hindi is vanishing—giving way to a “Hinglish” mix, or to English altogether. While this is somewhat true for cities today, the majority of the population lives in rural areas where English is much less common. This presents a challenge for the twenty-first century. How do we reconcile our image of India as poverty- and disaster-ridden with images of a rapidly growing economy, a leader in technological development, and the McTikki burgers at urban McDonald’s restaurants? The problem especially holds true for views on India women. When a woman arguably is the most powerful person in India today, why do we constantly hear stories of oppression and violence against Indian women?

Looking at Indian women’s role in village politics allows us to look at many aspects of women’s life in India—and also the role of women in U.S. politics. The Indian constitution requires that women make up 33% of village councils, guaranteeing that women have an official voice in shaping their communities. But one recent election poster for a woman candidate for village council read: “With the support of my husband I will work for the development of the village.” Some might question whether women actually have any power if they need to mention their husbands while campaigning; this never happens in the U.S. Others might point out that many U.S. candidates, male and female, do include their families in their campaign strategy (often to highlight an emphasis on “family values”). Still others might say that female voices on the village council, even when they involve their male relatives, are better than no voices at all.*

The songs of village women often stress the areas where they do have power. During weddings in North India, women often sing abusive songs poking fun at their menfolk. In the example below, the women of the bride’s family mock the men of the groom’s. Such performances are common in weddings in India.

That guy wearing glasses is a bloody hooligan
Kill him quick and take his glasses!

Though technically illegal in India, the giving of a dowry is commonly practiced, especially in villages. The bride’s family is often expected to give many gifts and large amounts of money to the groom’s family. In this song, the women get to yell at the men taking their money (and their daughter or sister), and no one can stop them. In the following example, women directly address the greed of the groom’s family.

The bride’s father is a very rich man.
He sits on a chair and hands out rupees.
The groom’s father is a real miser.
He spreads out a cloth and demands money.

These examples highlight an area of female power. Men are not allowed to make such complaints during a wedding. Women are allowed, and even expected, to complain for them. Similarly, men are not allowed to complain that their daughter is leaving after marriage. But women express that sorrow for them, singing “today my daughter is leaving for another land. My eyes fill with tears; my heart with sorrow.” These songs give us another way to think about the power Indian village women possess, and the ways they can express their thoughts in public.

Comprehension Exercises:

(1) The article mentions two types of images of India commonly held by people in the U.S. What are these two images? Make a list of examples for each one and add other examples that you have come across in the American media.

(2) How do Indian women’s folksongs reveal the power they hold in their society?

*For a lesson plan dealing with the caste system and village politics, see <http://www.nytimes.com/learning/teachers/lessons/19990505wednesday.html>

Author Ian Woolford is a graduate student in *Asian Cultures and Languages*.

The University of Texas at Austin
Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies
1 University Station D0800
Austin, TX 78712-0331

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
Paid
Austin, Texas
Permit No. 391



New for Hemispheres

We are pleased to unveil our new look and a new focus in this first issue of *News from Hemispheres*. Many thanks to Heather Teague, Designer at the Teresa Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies, who created our beautiful new logo and newsletter design.

Striving to be responsive to your needs as educators, we’ve redesigned the newsletter to be more classroom friendly. Articles have been written with your students in mind: they are clear and concise, and include comprehension exercises. Feel free to copy and distribute them to your students to use in current-events lessons, class discussions, or however you see fit.

In this issue: 21st Century Challenges in the Developing World

Our annual summer institute for teachers reached capacity (40 attendees) in record time (3 weeks) this year. *21st Century Challenges in the Developing World* offered a week of thematic content on government, women’s issues, the environment, and other topics of concern in the four regions represented by Hemispheres. Evaluations highlighted the strong organization, highly focused theme, and excellent presenters that attendees have come to expect from the institute. In addition to Hemispheres, UT’s Center for European Studies and Center for International Business Education and Research (CIBER) contributed speakers to the workshop—we’re excited to partner with centers that can offer expertise on different regions and topics. In this issue of *News from Hemispheres*, we recap four of the sessions from the institute. If you are interested in additional information from the workshop, or the themes covered in this newsletter, please don’t hesitate to contact us.

A fond farewell ...

Jordan Phillips, longtime outreach coordinator with the South Asia Institute at UT Austin, relocated to Minneapolis this summer. We’re sad to see her go, but we wish her all the best in Minnesota.

... and an introduction

We’re pleased to welcome Rachel Meyer as the new outreach coordinator in the South Asia Institute. Rachel has extensive experience doing research in India and has her doctorate in anthropology from UT. We’re excited to have her as part of Hemispheres.

Teresa Lozano
Long Institute of
Latin American Studies
Natalie Arsenault,
Outreach Coordinator
Tel: 512/232-2404
Fax: 512/471-3090
E-mail: n.arsenault@mail.utexas.edu

Center for Middle Eastern Studies
Christopher Rose, Outreach Coordinator
Tel: 512/471-3582
Fax: 512/471-7834
E-mail: csrose@mail.utexas.edu

Center for Russian, East European and
Eurasian Studies
Allegra Azulay, Outreach Coordinator
Tel: 512/471-7782
Fax: 512/471-3368
E-mail: aazulay@mail.utexas.edu

South Asia Institute
Rachel Meyer, Outreach Coordinator
Tel: 512/475-6038
Fax: 512/471-3336
E-mail: outreach@uts.cc.utexas.edu

New Web & E-mail Addresses

Our address has changed, but we still have the same quality content and resources you have come to expect from Hemispheres. Please bookmark the following: <http://www.utexas.edu/cola/orgs/hemispheres/>

Our e-mail address also has changed. Contact us at hemispheres@austin.utexas.edu

Professional Development Sessions Spring 2007

Hemispheres will be on the road in the spring for a series of professional development workshops at schools, districts, and regional service centers around the state. Professional development sessions are usually half- or full-day events and include presentation of our curriculum units, skill-building exercises, and/or region-specific content. The program for each session is developed in consultation with the hosting organization to address specific needs and requests of the attendees. Please contact us for more information about registering for one of these events.

January 31–February 1:
Region III Education Service Center, Victoria

February 8: Pearland Independent School District

February 9: Houston Independent School District

February 13:
Region XI Education Service Center, Fort Worth

(schedule subject to change)

DO YOU WANT HEMISPHERES TO VISIT YOUR SCHOOL OR DISTRICT?

Because we do not accept honoraria for our presentations, and our operating budget funds most of our travel expenses, we are able to offer this service at little or no cost to the hosting organizations. We are booked for spring, but please contact us if you are interested in learning more about hosting Hemispheres at an upcoming training event.

News from Hemispheres is distributed to schools throughout Texas to be shared with social studies, geography, language, English, literature, math, and science teachers. This biannual newsletter is a tool for teachers to use in incorporating area studies materials into their classroom lessons and activities. The contents of this newsletter may be copied for nonprofit educational use; do not redistribute without prior permission.

Not printed with state funds.

Newsletter editor: Natalie Arsenault

Hemispheres

Democracy in Latin America

For the first time in history, today every country in Latin America—except for Cuba—is a democracy. At various times during the twentieth century, many Latin American countries were governed by dictatorships, a form of government in which absolute power is held by an individual leader or a small clique, such as a group of military generals. The most recent included Argentina (1976–82), Bolivia (1971–79), Brazil (1964–85), Chile (1973–88), Ecuador (1972–79), El Salvador (1931–79), Guatemala (1982–83), Haiti (1957–86), Nicaragua (1937–79), Paraguay (1954–89), and Uruguay (1973–85).

Democracy has had many faces in Latin America. There are shining stars: Costa Rica has the region’s longest running democracy and takes great pride in the stability that has allowed it to dismiss its army. There are problematic democracies because they don’t offer real choices: one party in Mexico held the presidency from 1929–2000. In 2000, for the first time in 70 years, a candidate from another party became president. Then there are abuses of power: in Peru, elected President Alberto Fujimori staged an auto-coup—so called because he took over his own government—in 1992. Fujimori dismissed Congress and the courts.

Democracy in Latin America challenges our ideas about democracy and its benefits. Democratic governments have not always been able to address basic problems in the region: poverty, corruption, violence. Between 40% and 50% of the population in Latin America lives on approximately \$750 a year. A very few, very rich people run the governments, while many people are poor and struggling to survive.

In order for democracy to work, most people in a country have to believe that democracy at its worst is better than any other form of government at its best. And in Latin America, there have been real alternatives to democracy:

(1) *Populism* is a political movement that supports the rights of the common people in their struggle against the privileged elite. Populist leaders rely on charisma and promises to the masses to get elected, but then power is concentrated in the hands of the president. Although not always democratic, they have delivered on their promises to the common people: Juan Perón, president of Argentina from 1946–55, dramatically increased workers’ wages, and his wife, the famous Evita, personally set up a foundation to distribute money to Argentina’s poor.

(2) *Military rule* in Latin America often has started with national crises, during which the military felt they needed to take control of the government for the good of the country. This was the case in 1964 in Brazil, when the military stepped in because of an economic crisis, strikes by workers and peasants, and an increasingly radical government led by populist president, João Goulart.

(3) *Revolution* has caused significant changes in the landscape of Latin America. During the past century, three revolutions have rocked the region: Mexico in 1910, Cuba in 1959, and Nicaragua in 1979. These were true revolutions in that they overthrew their political systems and caused a dramatic change in the governments of their countries. Cuba is still living under its Communist revolutionary government, headed by Fidel Castro.



However, we now have democracy throughout Latin America. In 2005–2006, 12 countries have had or will have presidential elections. And the results have highlighted the different faces of democracy in Latin America. Chile elected its first female president, Michelle Bachelet, who has supported gender equality by having an equal number of male and female advisers in her cabinet. Bolivia elected its first indigenous president, Evo Morales, who has nationalized, or converted from private to government ownership, important Bolivian industries. And, most recently, Mexico’s July 2006 election was too close to call: Felipe Calderón got 35.88% of the vote, just ahead of Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s 35.31%. After a recount, requested by López Obrador, Mexico’s highest court ruled that Felipe Calderón won the presidency. But López Obrador has not given up and has said that he will set up his own parallel government. We’ll have to wait to see what’s ahead for Mexico, and the rest of the region.

Comprehension Exercises:

- (1) What does democracy mean? How are the three alternatives listed above undemocratic?
- (2) Using a map, shade in and label the countries listed above that were part of the last wave of dictatorships. How much of Latin America does this cover? Why, according to the text, might these countries have turned to dictatorships?
- (3) Explain, in your own words, the good and bad results of the recent presidential elections. (Bonus: Find an article on what’s happening in Mexico and provide an update on that situation.)

Investigating Human Rights in Morocco

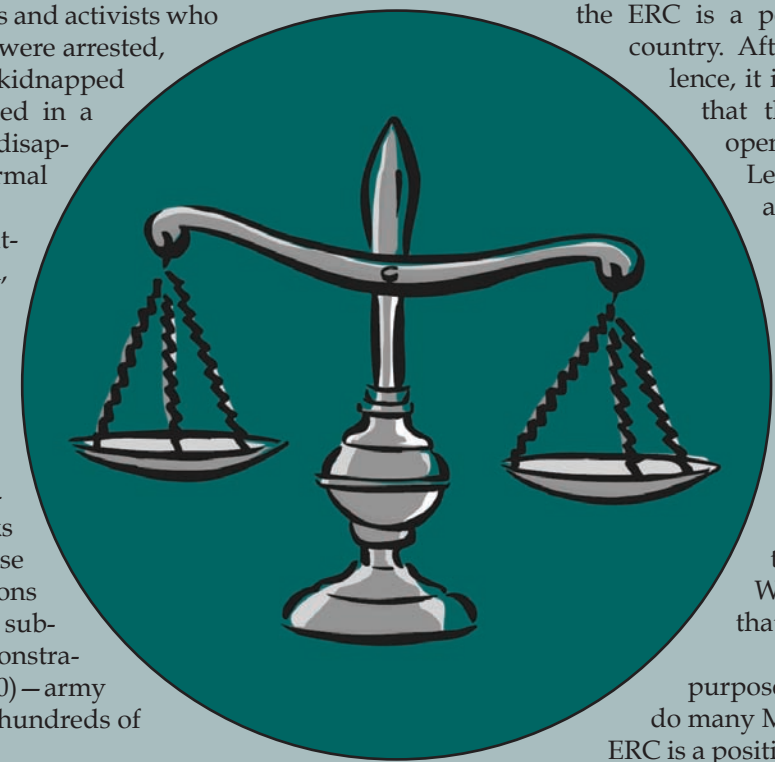
Morocco is a kingdom located in North Africa along the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Its name in Arabic—Maghreb—means “sunset” or “westernmost,” in reference to Morocco’s traditional status as the westernmost part of the Arabic-speaking world. Morocco’s population is made up of Arabs and numerous Berber groups.

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy. The current king, Mohammad VI, assumed the throne in July 1999 after the death of his father, Hassan II. The royal dynasty traces its origins back to the late seventeenth century. For the first half of the twentieth century Morocco was a French protectorate, and France controlled its foreign trade and foreign relations. Morocco became independent in 1956.

The reign of King Hassan II (1960–99) was a very turbulent time in Moroccan history. This period has become known to Moroccans as *Les années de plomb* or “The Years of Lead.” This time was characterized by policies that restricted freedom of speech and freedom of the press. Politicians and activists who openly spoke out against the government were arrested, executed, or sometimes “disappeared”—kidnapped by the secret police and illegally detained in a prison camp. Sometimes those who were “disappeared” were executed without trial or formal charges against them.

In the early 1970s, there were two attempted coups d’etat against King Hassan, both of which were organized and led by officers in the Moroccan army. As a result, officers suspected of involvement in the coup were rounded up and sent to secret prisons for decades. Also during the 1970s there were a number of popular political demonstrations in the major cities of Morocco. These became so common that tanks were frequently seen in the streets. Those who participated in these demonstrations were rounded up and arrested, and often subject to beatings and torture. At two demonstrations—in Casablanca (1981) and Fes (1990)—army officers opened fire on the crowds, killing hundreds of people.

When King Mohammad VI came to the throne, many in the country saw him as a reform-minded leader who would work to improve conditions and respect for human rights. In 2004, the king created the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (ERC), a truth commission that was asked to investigate the forced disappearances and secret arrests that took place during the Years of Lead. The ERC was asked to prepare a report detailing the human rights violations, and to make recommendations about how to help the victims and their families. The ERC was also asked to make recommendations about how to help Moroccans deal with their country’s violent past, while at the same time making changes to the law so that such human rights violations could never happen again.



The ERC is the first such commission ever to be created in the Middle East and North Africa, and it was considered by many to be a sign of the king’s commitment to political reform.

However, there were a number of criticisms of the ERC as well. There were several restrictions placed on the commission’s activities. For example, in its report the commission was not allowed to name specific people who were responsible for committing human rights abuses. This was particularly frustrating for some observers, because in some cases officials suspected of ordering these abuses are still high-ranking members of the government.

In addition, the ERC had the power only to recommend, not to require, how victims and their families should be compensated or given assistance. Similarly, the ERC had no power to force the government to enact any of the changes or recommendations that it made.

Many Moroccans feel, however, that the ERC is a positive step for their country. After many years of silence, it is a significant change that they are able to talk openly about the Years of Lead. Many Moroccans also hope that the ERC will be just the first step toward bringing the country back together after so many years of violence and bloodshed.

Comprehension Exercises:

- (1) What are the “Years of Lead”? What happened during that time?
- (2) What is the purpose of the ERC? Why do many Moroccans feel that the ERC is a positive step for their country?
- (3) Compare the ERC with similar truth and reconciliation commissions in other countries (see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_truth_and_reconciliation_commissions). How is it similar? How is it different? How might the ERC be made more effective?

The Challenges of Chechnya

Half a world away from Texas and only slightly larger than the state of Connecticut, Chechnya is a vital area of the Caucasus. Nestled in the mountains between the Black and Caspian Seas are a people with a rich history who have long thought about the future of their lands and lifestyle. Surrounded by many languages, cultures, and religions, Chechens strive to maintain their traditions in an ever-changing global society and to keep their region economically productive. Although the struggle for Chechen independence from Russia has been going on for centuries, Chechnya is discussed in the Western media only when terrorist acts catch international attention. This focus on the dramatic acts of this modern conflict overshadows the historical roots of this ethnic and cultural struggle.

As a society, Chechnya historically has been democratic and individualistic. Throughout its history, Chechen society was clan-based, with a focus on loyalty to family and ancestral traditions. While clans were identified by differences in dialect, national borders were defined by the link of the Chechen language. However, established society has been continually challenged by Russia, beginning with the eighteenth-century Russian conquest under Tsar Peter I and continuing with Russia’s current interests in the region.

In addition to cultural differences between the clan system and Russian family structure, different religious traditions also separated Chechen from Russian society. While Chechen spiritual beliefs originally were focused on ancestor-worship, Sunni Islam began to penetrate the Caucasus region in the seventh century, and for the next ten centuries Islam and Chechen beliefs mixed. There are many theories about the role of Islam in Chechnya today, ranging from the belief that the current conflict represents a “clash of civilizations” between Muslim and Christian worlds to the idea that Islam is nothing more than a cover for a political goal. Chechnya’s use of the term *jihad* in reference to their struggle against Russia further complicates this debate.

More so than religious and social concerns, economics—and specifically the discovery of oil in the late nineteenth century—have shaped the region. Oil brought many changes to Chechnya. The capital city of Grozny became an important industrial center. By the early twentieth century, Chechnya housed one of the main railroad and oil transportation pipelines in the Caucasus. The economic windfall brought by oil has kept the Chechen economy afloat for over 100 years, but the price paid in human terms has been significant.

During Russia’s imperial expansion in the nineteenth century, a concentrated effort was made by General Yermolov either to isolate the Chechens in the mountains or, conversely, to send captured Chechens into Siberian exile. This policy resurfaced during the Crimean War (1853–56) when many Chechens were forced out of Russian-occupied areas. Once the war was over, the ethnic cleansing of the Caucasus region reached a new height as many Muslims fled to the Ottoman Empire as refugees. The most severe deportation took place at the request of Stalin in 1944. Until 1975, the

Chechen population was forcibly deported to Kazakhstan. The sad effects of these expulsions can still be seen in the small population growth and high poverty rates among Chechens, and in the less tangible losses to culture and language.

The current situation in Chechnya depicts a complicated example of conflict among different religions, cultures, languages, and social mores. The economic and strategic importance of the region serves only to heighten the risks and advantages for the parties who try to claim the riches of Chechnya. As the situation continues to evolve and as the Chechen people continue to strive for international recognition, only further study and renewed interest can help bring cooperation to this region of strife.

For further information visit: The Jamestown Foundation, <http://www.jamestown.org>, (ChechnyaWeekly); Institute for War and Peace Reporting, <http://www.iwpr.net>; Chechnya News, <http://www.chechnyanews.com>.

Comprehension Exercises:

- (1) Use a map to have students locate and become familiar with the Caucasus.
- (2) How do languages divide and unite people in different regions? In the U.S.?
- (3) What influence does oil have on the global economy? On an individual’s life?
- (4) What would students do if they were forced to leave their homes?

Author Annalise Blech is a graduate student in the Department of Slavic and Eurasian Studies.

