

claimed to be.

We found that the FMLN lacked progressive theoretical referents on sexuality in general and on female sexual oppression in particular, which prevented it from constructively criticizing the changes that had actually occurred on that score. The current balance is that many ex-combatant women deny, distort, or feel guilty about their experience during the war, resorting to mechanisms that become more

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intense in a postwar atmosphere where the most conservative positions on sexual and reproductive rights of women have gained ground. Other women have left the FMLN upon finding that it does not offer attractive references in the analysis of relationships between genders; many, finally, now reject the feminist proposal because the aspects related to sexuality and maternity would lead them to review their past experience.

With a view to strengthening women's struggle in connection with their sexual and reproductive rights, not only in El Salvador but also in Central America, we shared the results of this research with 40 women from the region—including some Mexican women

working in the conflict-ridden Chiapas areas—in a forum held in December 1995. The processes relating to a will to forget or a disdain for the subjective aspects in Central American revolutionary projects were evidently similar. The Nicaraguan women, for example, shared their surprise at this reflection on the situation of the Salvadoran women at a stage so soon after the end of the war, given that they themselves have still not evaluated their participation during the revolution and while they were in power. The women at the forum promised to look deeper into this subject as soon as possible, since they see an interesting vein for reflection.

One of the conclusions of the forum—whose intensity will not be soon forgotten by the participants—was that we, the heirs of the generation of frustrated revolutions and wars without victory, have to look into the female experience of everyday life in extreme situations like war, as well as the assumptions on the subject by the Left throughout the region.

We believe that if something can be redeemed from irrational destruction by armed processes, it is the capacity to learn from pain and to change in order to transform our lives. The past and present conflicts in the region, regardless of whether some women do not want to participate in them while others do, affect the lives of all of them. Recovery from the changes this history left in the lives of thousands of Central Americans is one of the most necessary feminist contributions in this convulsed strip of the Americas.

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# from an Indonesian Prison, on International Women's Day 1997

*Chairperson of the Indonesian Center for Labor Struggles and leader of the People's Democratic Party of Indonesia (PRD), Dita Sari was a guest speaker at the International Women's Day march and rally held on 8 March 1995 in Perth, Australia.*

*She was the first prominent democratic leader to be arrested by the Suharto dictatorship in the wave of repression that began in July 1996. She was arrested 8 July while attending a peaceful demonstration of 20,000 young women workers demanding wage increase and other improvements. She has been an outspoken defender of women's rights in Indonesia as well as a courageous reporter of freedom in East Timor. She was also active in solidarity with Megawati Sukarnoputri in the latter's campaign against harassment by the Suharto dictatorship. Even though from a different political party than Megawati, Dita spoke frequently at public meetings and demonstrations as an act of solidarity with another victim of repression and a symbol of democratic struggle.*

Dear Sisters,

I write this letter in a narrow and miserable cell in a gaol in Surabaya. Exactly two years ago I was with you at the IWD rally in Perth. Since then, time has flown by and so many important things have happened in the struggle for freedom in my country.

This regime has chosen me as the lone woman among 15 people on trial for subversion. The People's Democratic Party has many women activists, especially from among the workers. We think that one of the measures of the progress of the movement here is the participation of women activists, both quantitatively and qualitatively. As president of a trade union, I personally cannot separate myself from a special solidarity with the women worker activists, even though I am aware too that every activist is tested in the end via their commitment and loyalty and not other criteria.

The regime has struck out at us so that our Party and its mass organizations are covered with bleeding wounds. Everywhere the regime spreads the word that we are the same as the old Indonesian Communist Party, trying to create mass hysteria and to legitimize its repressive action against us. They needed an appropriate scapegoat and they chose the PRD. This is not a government that stands firm on the defense of the people's sovereignty and their economic and political rights. It is a government built on authoritarian foundations in order to defend special economic interests and capital.

In the midst of this disaster, we survive. We have survived well the early period of

big organizational disruption. Our women cadres from the students and workers have stepped forward to take leading positions in consolidating the organization. The terrorized workers have freed themselves from fear. And the peasants swallowed up by the repression have begun to rise up again.

And in prison, the flame still burns bright among the cadres. Belief in the justice of our struggle and our deep love for the mass of workers are the

In prison, the flame still burns bright among the cadres. Belief in the justice of our struggle and our deep love for the mass of workers are the two things which keep me going.

two things which keep me going. Of course, there are moments when I experience the bitter pain of losing, of a sense of failure, of loneliness. There are times that I must struggle with myself and accept that I will lose the productive years of my youth. And I think I can handle all this?

Yet the next morning, I always awake in the warmth of sweet memories of struggling together with the workers, the people. There are women in the prison here who were workers too, and each time I look at them, I feel their hands reach out to me to make sure I do not fall.

The emergence of Megawati Sukarnoputri, a woman, as a figure supported by tens of millions of people is

a sign of the progress and qualitative advance made by the people's democracy movement and of the movement to end capitalism's use of patriarchy to manipulate us.

Now we wait for the right moment, and prepare our forces, so that we will have an era of democracy where all will have the same rights, where women will have the opportunity to emerge as leaders in all fields.

I truly hope one day to be with you again, as I was two years ago (in Perth) and to discuss with you the economic and political issues affecting women. Your solidarity and international support, from countries where workers are also treated unfairly and women continue to be exploited, strengthens our resolve in the midst of the great losses and oppression of the Indonesian people.

Sisters, I miss you all. I long to be there among you.

Dita Sari  
Surabaya Prison  
March, 1997

*Update: On 22 April in Surabaya, the kangaroo court trying the case of Dita Sari handed down a sentence of six years. The prosecution had demanded nine years. Dita's codefendants, Coen Hussein Pontoh and Mohammed Soleh, were sentenced to four years each. Dita and her lawyers immediately denounced the court as a farce and swore to continue the struggle.*