

TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD

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Source: AFP

The triumph of economic growth over human rights

By Margaret Buzan

In an age where information can travel from one end of the globe to the other in a matter of seconds, it remains fascinating that so many gross human rights violations remain relatively unheard of. There are many such cases, but within this article I will focus on the plight of the Uyghurs in China's Xinjiang province. This Muslim ethnic minority, mainly concentrated in the Western region of China, has fallen victim to recent repressive policies, including indoctrination in re-education camps. This is not a new phenomenon; the Chinese government has actively sought to repress this community for centuries. Although the strategies undertaken by Beijing in order to control the region are certainly new and state of the art, the ideology behind them is not. They echo a longtime paranoia about Xinjiang and a deep suspicion of its non-Han population. China's efforts are a means to achieve the end of retaining Xinjiang and forcing it to assimilate to Beijing's version of what China should be.

In recent years, the discourse surrounding this oppression has centered around two key areas: stability and extremism. This has become the umbrella framework which encompasses China's policies towards and within the region... (cont'd to page 2)

The Global Development and Inclusion Issue.

Each issue of **Transforming Our World**, the UNU Peace and Progress (UPP) newsletter, features one of the three thematic clusters highlighted at UNU's Strategic Plan for 2015-2019. This issue will focus on the topic **global development and inclusion**.

This discourse is evidenced through speeches and statements given by leading Chinese politicians, including Foreign Ministry spokesman Lu Kang, who defended recent measures by claiming that 'taking measures to prevent and crack down on terrorism and extremism have helped to preserve stability, as well as the life and livelihood of people of all ethnicities in Xinjiang.' Again, note the use of the words *stability* and *extremism* in this statement. In order to reaffirm this belief nationally and internationally, the government's main approach to unrest in the region has been to shift the blame, largely to separatist and extremist groups, despite the fact that the size and resources available to these extremist groups could never provide a true challenge to the central government. To a large extent, it has succeeded in doing so by utilizing the same tactics as the United States in outlining terrorism as a national security threat, further justifying a 'global war on terror'. The Chinese government has never acknowledged, however, that its own policies could be to blame for decades of ethno-religious unrest in the region.

I could dedicate an entire article to analyzing the discourse surrounding these policies, but instead of doing so, I ask that you trust this brief analysis and allow me to focus on more pressing issues regarding the Uyghur population in Xinjiang. The increasing importance of the region to China's global aspirations is likely a major reason why Beijing is tightening its grip. Therefore, this article will expand on the two main reasons for why the Chinese government has dedicated massive amounts of resources in an attempt to control this region in order to make it comply with the wishes of the country's political architects in Beijing.

The first reason for why the Chinese government has focused its attention on the region is the fact that it contains some of the country's largest oil and other natural resource reserves. Xinjiang is expected to produce 35 million tons of crude oil by 2020, it contains roughly 40% of the country's coal reserves, and it holds China's largest natural gas reserves. From the perspective of Beijing, it is highly important that the region views the government favorably or, at least, is unable to represent its anger at the government's invasion of the region. (cont'd to page 3)

Beyond homophobia: The fight for human rights in Brazil

By Gabriel Wilson Tavares Calderaro (UNU-IAS)



Source: Paulo Pinto (Fotos Públicas)

On February 13th, 2019, the Supreme Court of Brazil (Supremo Tribunal Federal – STF, in Portuguese) started to debate two lawsuits on legislative omission on the criminalization of homophobia and transphobia, both of which heavily impact the LGBT+ community. These lawsuits are a result of inaction by the Brazilian Congress to include that group in legislation designed to protect their integrity and right to life.

On the next day, as the debate continued in Brasília, the national capital, the beaten and bloodied body of the 18-year-old Davi Silva Amaral was found. He was in an abandoned plot of land on the neighborhood he lived in Santarém, state of Pará, with multiple fractures on his head. A week later, when the Supreme Court continued its legal procedures thousands of miles away, the criminal responsible for attacking Davi was arrested and confessed that his motivation was not based on any personal grievances, but rather homophobia. Despite the arrest of the perpetrator, there was no sense of justice or victory; Davi had been pronounced brain dead by doctors on the 17th.

Brazil is a violent country. There is no need to argue on that. Data from the World Bank ranks the country as the 8th most violent, with 30 homicides per 100 thousand inhabitants in 2016. Members of the LGBT+ community are a particularly vulnerable group, with. According to Grupo Gay da Bahia (GGB), an LGBT+ victim is dying a violent death every 19 hours on average. (cont'd to page 3)

Beyond homophobia... (cont'd from page 2)

GGB is an NGO that has been collecting data on the murder of transgender and homosexual individuals for 38 years. Their data points that the number of deaths has risen 30% between 2016 and 2017; it has increased from 343 to 445, crowning Brazil as country with the most LGBT+ deaths in the world.

The main causes of death were firearms and cold weapons, such as knives. The most targeted groups were gays and transgender individuals, which accounted for 86.5% of victims. Most of these hate crimes took place in public roads and spaces – an astounding 56%, while 37% of crimes happened in the victims' residences; this can point out that there is a worrying lack of safe spaces for queer people. Overall, this paint a grim picture for those that are part of the LGBT+ or are allies, as 12 heterosexual people were murdered for trying to help and save LGBT+ individuals in 2017, according to the newspaper *O Globo*. The news outlet used data from GGB that is not publicly available at this time.

One of the challenges for writing this piece was access to information, as there are no governmental databases regarding victims and survivors of discrimination and hate crimes, so any data gathered by NGOs and other groups may be lower than the actual number. Some crimes may not even be reported as homophobic for a number of reasons. The lack of significant information also makes it difficult to see the reflex of other aspects of an individual's life in their likelihood to suffer an aggression, such as ethnicity. The lack of data also reiterates the marginalization of LGBT+ people in official policies and programs.

That may come as a surprise for many that know of the LGBT+ community in Brazil but have never been witness to the juxtaposition between its vibrant queerness and inclusion, as the largest pride parade in the world and one of the countries to have legal gay marriage, and its strong conservative religious and oppressive side.

During electoral season in the second half of 2018, frontrunner then and current president Jair Bolsonaro incited hate within his speech, not only against the LGBT+ community but also against women and even refugees... (cont'd to page 4)

The triumph of economic... (cont'd from page 2)

The second, and perhaps largest reason for why the Chinese government is particularly invested in ensuring 'stability' in the region is due to its One Belt One Road (OBOR) Initiative. To briefly explain, this initiative aims to develop infrastructure and increase investments in 152 countries in Europe, Asia, the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa, and aims at enhancing regional connectivity. But how does this link back to Xinjiang? Why is the Uyghur population so important in this project? The answer is quite simple. The major belt corridors (overland routes for road and rail transportation) run straight through Xinjiang province. If the region remains a 'center of unrest', the initiative could fail, causing the government to 'lose face' as well as economic growth potential.

China has implemented several policies aimed at increasing stability in and control over the region in order to advance the two interests just elaborated upon. For decades, the Chinese government has implemented and promoted policies with the aim of enhancing the Han Chinese population in Xinjiang. It has done so by granting those moving to the region with favorable conditions, including housing and better job opportunities than natives. This demographic shift coupled with an obvious power struggle has inflamed ethnic tensions in the region. Despite the massive scale on which these policies have been implemented, they have been largely unsuccessful in increasing stability in the region. Thus, the Chinese government has now moved to imprisoning large portions of the Uyghur population in internment camps where they are forced to renounce Islam, study communist propaganda, and give thanks to President Xi Jinping. Extreme forms of torture are also commonplace. It is now being estimated that more than 1 million people are being held in such camps.

So, what are other countries and international bodies doing? To put it bluntly: nothing. Apart from some critical statements, rather ironically given by Turkey, there have been no concrete actions taken against the Chinese government. Why is this the case? Why is it possible for such massive human rights violations to take place in 2019? The answer, again, is short: our economies. The majority of the world's countries are trading partners with China, so doing anything more than issuing a critical statement could have devastating consequences. This is the world we live in. A world where economic growth prevails over human rights. A world where bullies are able to control their victims. At what point do we acknowledge that economic growth should not dictate political decisions? Change is necessary. So, where do we begin? ■

He individually did not commit any crimes, but his attitude and words opened the doors for his supporters to act on the aggressive feelings that he voiced. A poll conducted by Gênero e Número, 51% of interviewed people suffered at least one kind of aggression during the second semester. Another 87% heard of another LGBT+ person suffering some kind of aggression.

During the second semester of 2018, I was not living in Brazil, so I did not experience any kind of discrimination or aggression firsthand, but many close friends told me of their fear of leaving their homes because they had already heard threats on the street. Some of the things they heard were along the lines of "Bolsonaro is coming," and that "gays won't be allowed to walk on the streets like that anymore."

This brings this piece back to the lack of protection for the LGBT+ community in comparison to other targeted groups and how the Supreme Court of Brazil has stepped in to address the issue. However, the response for the tribunal's "activism" – in the words of the Minister for Women, Family, and Human Rights – has not been the most positive. Congress has decided to pressure the tribunal by suggesting bringing back proposed amendments to the constitution on life conception and abortion rights that have a heavy religious tone that should not have place in a secular state.

Legal rites have pushed the decision on the criminalization of homophobia and transphobia did not have any perspective of continuing for the moment. However, popular demand and pressure from stakeholders could be responsible for the debate having an exact date to continue, May 23rd. By the closing of the last session of debating and voting the issue, four justices have already showed their support for the criminalization of homophobia and transphobia in one form or another. The crux of the issue, however, is that the judiciary branch cannot create a law without breaching the separation of powers of the Brazilian Republic. Thus, it can only recriminate the legislators for not taking action on the issue sooner and urge them to take immediate action.

As this legal battle unravels, people continue to die simply for not conforming with societal norms, just like Davi did. Neither the LGBT+ community nor its allies should let fear stop them from speaking out about the violence and injustice we suffer. As a protest chant that became famous during election season says, "if it hurts my existence, I will be resistance." Let's keep fighting! ■

Indigenous peoples: The answer to mitigate climate change through community-led conservation

By Maria Alejandra Aguilar (UNU-IAS)
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Forests are one of the most important ecosystems on Earth as they are providers of multiple services for human and non-human species, from water to carbon sequestration, to special tropical habitats for flourishing biodiversity, and livelihoods for humans and home of 60.0000.000 tribal communities (WWF, 2018).

Nevertheless, forests have been disappearing at alarming rates in the past decades, from 2000 to 2012 2.3 million km² of forest have been lost worldwide (Hansen et al. 2013). Forestry, subsistence farming and commodity driven deforestation are the major drivers. The loss of important forests such as tropical rainforests is one of the major catalysts of climate change.

This panorama is worsening by the existing visible effects of global warming and the increasing concentrations of greenhouse gases as forests are shifting to become sources of carbon dioxide (Gramling, 2017). Revaluating the role of forests and their link as traditional lands is the key to change forest management trends, built resilient communities and efficient mitigation strategies for climate change worldwide.

A recent report from the Rights Resources Initiative, "Corned by protected areas", highlights the effectiveness of traditional land rights of indigenous people in the conservation of the world's forests, the halt of biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation.

In contrast with the business as usual governmental management of protected areas, where participation and the effective access of decision-making processes by local communities is limited or symbolic, and so the traditional knowledge of the indigenous people is disregarded in the inclusion of conservation policies.

The report provides an estimate of the effectiveness of community-led conservation versus governmental led-conservation, "Globally, therefore, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are investing an estimated 16–23 percent (i.e. US\$3.16 billion–4.57 billion) of the amount spent by governments, donors, foundations, and nongovernmental organizations, combined, on conservation" (Rights Resource Initiative, 2018).

Despite protecting about 80% of the world's remaining biodiversity (World bank, 2008), indigenous people are also the most vulnerable to climate change, as their survival depends directly on the health of their habitats.

The recognition of stewardship of natural resources by indigenous people and the formalization of their land rights and prior consultation, are the very first steps to attain sustainable development and achieve the Paris Agreement target to limit the global temperature increase to 1.5°. ■

Value inclusion for development with conservation?

By Anuska Joshi (UNU-IAS)



Source: GringosAbroad

Inclusive Development has been defined as "a pro-poor approach" incorporating and valuing all stakeholders, including marginalized group to address development issues, promote transparency and accountability, enhancing development cooperation outcomes through collaboration between civil society, governments and private sector actors (Oxfam, 2018). As the pillars of sustainable development, society, economy and environment are indispensable components incorporating each other to utilize the resources while sustaining them for generations, keeping their value intact during the process.

This incorporation has been followed ever since the era of cavemen, when the hunter-gatherers used the resources available while revering the natural environment. This reverence followed humanity when hunter-gatherers shifted their régime to cultivation, still making use of the additional resources while respecting nature. Even though this balance shifted towards material gain – resulting in the harm of nature –, revering nature can be seen as being inherent to human nature.

Spirituality is assigned to nature and the environment as the belief that "each seed is awakened" and every living organism has the same right as the human. For instance, Native Americans have sacred sites, to which they refer as places of great healing and spiritual magnetism... (cont'd to page 6)

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In Hinduism, nature is a very important component of spirituality, as mentioned in the various Vedas and Puranas. In these ancient scriptures, nature is at the creation of God himself, with many Gods and Goddesses being a personification of the different aspects of nature. For example, Lord Indra, who is the God of Rain, Lord Narsimha, a lion, Sesh Nag, the Lord of the snakes, and many more are the embodiment of what humans see in nature. Similarly, many animals are associated with different Gods and Goddesses, like Durga with tigers and lions, Saraswati with the swan, etc.

The reverence of the Hindu towards nature has been a very integral part of the development of Hindu culture. So is the case with many other cultures. Many cultures thrive within close distance of a water source, which they worship and conserve. Since a very long time ago, people worshipped the land, *bhumi*, in gratitude for providing sustenance for our life, and as a way to ask for permission to use its gifts. Similarly, the earth, fire, water and air, basically all of nature, has always been worshipped. Most of human settlements were established along river banks because they were a symbol of purity, which helped in replenishing freshness. Even now, cremation is done on river banks, believing in the purification of one's soul after being washed in those waters.

Buddhism also has a very strong reverence for nature. Lord Buddha himself was born under a peepul (*Ficus religiosa*) tree and gained enlightenment under that tree. This already connects the birth of the lord with nature, which is peaceful and calm, just like the teachings of Buddha are. Buddhism is about finding one's true nature, and meditating within oneself, and this is most of the time done in secluded natural areas. Also, Buddhists respect nature as the habitat of all living creatures; they believe in the non-harm of any living creatures, which can be equivalent with nature conservation. Cutting down a single tree means affecting all the birds that nest there, all the squirrels that burrow, and all the other smaller organisms that call that tree their home.

There is a connection between nature and people's lives in every culture on earth. From the Chinese belief of "chi", the inherent energy flowing in all organisms, to the Sufism belief of humans being central to existence, thereby being able to cast light or darkness onto their surroundings, which are going to have subsequent impacts on themselves.

The testament of the ingrained reverence for nature is also seen on the effort of people to protect what they believe is sacred. We have seen cases of Native Americas fighting together to protect the land that they revere from being mined. From native peoples fighting against dams to protect their forest and the water that they venerate in Amazon to farmers allocating days to celebrate their harvest that they owe to the nature gods and goddesses, the testament to the importance of people standing to their values lies in how they become successful in conserving their nature. ■