

WOMAN

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WOMAN FIGHTS KENYAN COURT

A Kenyan widow, Virginia Wambui Otieno has said she will go to the International Court of Justice in the Hague in a bid for the legal right to bury her deceased husband.

The Kenyan Court of Appeals ruled on May 15 this year that the body of S.M Otieno a lawyer, "could be given to his fellow Luo tribesmen for traditional burial". Mrs Otieno, a member of the rival Kikuyu insisted in court that her husband disdained tribal customs. She fought to have a non-tribal burial for him at his farm. According to a report in the New York Times, the Lawyer representing the Luo said: "This goes a long way to confirm the fact that a woman cannot be the head of an African family. Customary law must prevail."

Mrs Otieno points out that Kenya is one of the countries that ratified the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women in 1984. Article 16 states that ratifying countries "shall take all appropriate measures to to eliminate discrimination against women in all matters relating to marriage and and family relations..."

The National Council of Women in Kenya has embarked on a campaign to change the law there. The NCW said, "suggestions or propositions that a widow may not have responsibility to dispose of the remains of her deceased husband are as repugnant and absurd, in our view, as are propositions that a member of a clan is entitled to inherit a widow and to appropriate her to be his wife".

The International Women's Rights Action Watch (IWRAP) has asked persons or groups interested in the case to write to President Moi and/or to the National Council of Women in Kenya, Moi Avenue, P.O. Box 43741, Nairobi, Kenya. IWRAP is a collaborative project which monitors law and policy reform under the above mentioned convention.

(IWRAP News Release)

OFFICE OF MOTHERS' GROUP BOMBED

The office of the Co Madres (the Oscar Armilfo Romero Committee of Mothers of the disappeared, assassinated and political prisoners in El Salvador) was hit by a bomb in May of this year. The bomb which was placed in the toilet injured two women, partially destroyed the roof and walls of the office as well as all of the groups activities.

The Co Madres has been experiencing a period of intense intimidation, including the killing of one of their members by a Jeep following a demonstration at the Supreme Court in the Capital, San Salvador. The popular human rights movement has been mounting pressure for the release of all political prisoners.

Two days after the bombing incident three lorry loads of men in civilian clothes with machine guns stopped in front of the office of another non-governmental human rights group. Women in the building at the time locked the doors and immediately telephoned two San Salvador radio stations. When the men were told that their actions were on the air they left.

(Outwrite Issue #60 July/August 1987)

AQUINO LOSING PEASANT SUPPORT

A report in Outwrite women's newspaper of England claims that Cory Aquino is losing support among the Filipino peasantry despite the outcome of the May 11 elections.

The article cites worsening conditions among the poor urban and rural workers. Particular mention is made of the island of Negros where with the collapse of the sugar industry 180,000 workers have been laid off and children are dying of malnutrition. Unemployed workers have been attempting to occupy the now unused land but are being brutally ejected by the armed forces or by landlord's private armies.

The counter-insurgency programme has been intensified on Negros where poverty and repression have led to growing support for the New People's Army. Eighteen(18) houses were burned down in April because it is alleged, the army said the neighbourhood was an NPA stronghold.

It is estimated that in the Philippines there are more than half a million evacuees who can't return to their homes for fear of bombardments.

(From Alma Latina, Outwrite
Issue #60, July/August 1987)

WOMEN IN NIGERIA BATTLING "FEMALE CIRCUMCISION"

The Women's Centre in Eket, Nigeria has recently taken the first local initiative to launch a massive education campaign against the practice of genital mutilation in that country.

Home visits and countryside tours, as well as a media campaign have been undertaken by the Women's Centre to protest the practice of "female circumcision."

In light of recent research which points to a higher incidence of AIDS for women living in areas where genital mutilation is most prevalent, one researcher says "this new theory has disastrously increased the dangers that have befallen millions of African women who practice female circumcision."

Because AIDS is passed on through bodily fluid contact, women whose genitals have been cut are thought to be at a higher risk of contacting AIDS through sperm contact.

Although groups working to have the practice banned have persistently appealed to various African governments to legislate against it, Sudan is the only African country cited by the women's organisation as having legislated against female circumcision.

(From Horizons, March 1987)

FOUNDER OF MARXIST HUMANISM DIES

Raya Dunayevskaya, born in Russia May 1, 1910 and brought to America at the age of 12 died in Chicago on June 9. She was recognised as the founder of a philosophy she called Marxist Humanism. Living in Chicago in the 1920's, she worked with the American Negro Labour Congress and its paper, the Negro Champion. She was secretary to Leon Trotsky in exile in Mexico in 1937 - 1938. She broke with Trotsky at the outbreak of World War II and worked out her analysis of Russia as a state-capitalist society.

In the period 1941 - 1955 she wrote under the name Freddie Forest while working with C.L.R. James (Johnson) in the Johnson-Forest Tendency. Breaking with James in 1955 Raya Dunayevskaya, together with Charles Denby, author of Indignant Heart: A Black Worker's Journal and others founded News and Letters Committees, a Marxist Humanist organization. She worked "to re-establish Marxism in its original form" which Marx called a "thorough going Naturalism or Humanism".

A writer in Sage A Scholarly Journal on Black Women wrote in the Spring 1986 issue: "If Dunayevskaya can write with insight about women, it is because she has dug deeply into the interrelationship of women's liberation and a dialectics of revolution and found Black working women within"

(From News & Letters release)

MANAGUA SCIENCE CONFERENCE

Central American Conference on Women In Science, Technology and Medicine in Developing Countries will be held in Managua, Nicaragua, August 24 - 28, 1987. This conference will discuss the experiences, prospects and strategies of women in science in developing countries. The focus will be on women in Central America but participants are invited from other parts of the world. Contact: Prof. Ann Hibner Koblitz, Department of History, Wellesley College, Wellesley, MA 02181, USA.

(From Women's World No.13 March 1987)

FETAL ABUSE DISMISSED

San Diego, CA--A San Diego Court has thrown out all criminal charges against Pamela Rae Stewart Monson the first woman to be prosecuted for "fetal abuse." Monson's son was born brain dead last November and the prosecutor, Harry Elias, alleged that she caused the death by failing to follow her doctor's orders

Judge E. Mac Amos ruled that the statute under which she was charged did not apply to the facts of this case but had been intended by the California Legislature to assure that fathers paid for the support of their children. The law made it a misdemeanor for a parent to "willfully omit" to furnish necessary medical attention for a child and included a "fetus" as a child for the purposes of the statute. A violation is punishable by a \$2000.00 fine and one year in jail.

Richard Boesin, Monson's attorney, said he hoped the ruling would send a message that this kind of prosecution is counterproductive and "will do nothing but terrorize the hearts and minds of pregnant women."

(From Off Our Backs, July 1987)
