

GLOBAL ISSUES THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMEN

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Spirit

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revolution is that
of the spirit.”

AUNG SAN SUU KYI

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Women Transforming Faith
7 Spiritual Revolutionaries
In Photos: Aung San Suu Kyi's Release
Rwanda's Revival



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Communion



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A few months ago, I found myself dancing on the dirt floor of an old church in Rwanda—my palms raised high; swaying to the music blasting from an old PA system; gazing into the eyes of a woman I had met just moments before. All around me, women survivors of Rwanda's genocide danced together, grasped hands, and passed babies from hip to hip. The sense of joy and spirit was palpable. I've felt this before in a roomful of women—that feeling that happens when you've been touched by a higher power.

We did not speak a common language, and yet we wrapped our arms around each other as if we were old friends. Many consider these women to be among the most disadvantaged people in the world, but to me, they are the strongest. Most had been raped; many were HIV positive; all had lost family and friends to violence. They say that it was a strong sense of faith and sisterhood that has carried them through unspeakable grief and allowed them to believe in life again.

They are not alone; most people in the world rely on faith in some form. According to a recent Gallup poll, 87% of the world's people consider themselves to be a part of some religion. Yet when it comes to uplifting women,

“There is a new global spirituality emerging, and it is being led by women.”

historically, religion doesn't have a strong track record. For centuries, women's souls have been broken in the name of God. Millions have been subjected to a holy war of witch burnings, stonings, and genital mutilation driven by religious fervor. Scores of our sons and daughters have been sexually violated by priests, and women have been systematically denied physical, legal, and economic freedoms and positions of power within faith-based communities. In Rwanda, some of the deadliest massacre sites during the genocide were churches.

And yet, faith and spirituality have an essential role to play in the healing and revitalization of societies. There is a new global spirituality emerging, and it is being led by women. It doesn't yet have a name, but it exists in the spaces where women find commonality across cultures and beliefs. It colors outside the lines of rigid scripture and breaks through doctrine. It's about interconnectedness.

No matter our faiths, as women, we have a common prayer: a communion with humanity, a belief in the possibility of a peaceful world where every person's spirit can thrive. In pursuit of this vision, women are breaking the stained glass ceiling and becoming rabbis and priests. Across the Muslim world women are reinterpreting the Koran; Buddhist nuns are organizing across Asia; female scientists are showing the positive effect faith has on health, and major conferences are bringing women spiritual leaders together to draft new multi-faith mandates.

As I stepped out of that Rwandan church and felt the calm African breeze, I remembered the words of a wise friend from Bolivia. “When you feel the air against your cheek,” she told me as we parted ways, “I am there; I am with you in spirit.”

And then I looked up and saw a sign. It was a wooden, hand-painted sign that spelled out the name of the women's group I had just visited: Solidarité. Perhaps that is the name of this new spirituality—Solidarity.

The SPIRIT Edition

FEATURES



Photo Essay

Exclusive images of Burma's leading dissident, Aung San Suu Kyi, on the day of her release and the days following.

PHOTOS BY CHRISTIAN HOLST



Detained

World Pulse pays tribute to four women leaders imprisoned for speaking out.

BY ALISA TANG



Women Transforming Faith

Women are at the helm of a spiritual and religious revolution.

BY KIMBERLY CRANE WITH RAMYA RAMANATHAN



Rwanda's Revival

An in-depth look at the women who are defying history and rebuilding a nation.

BY ANNE-CHRISTINE D'ADESKY



Courageous Love

At least 80 countries criminalize same-sex intimacy, but a growing movement to change that is gaining ground.

BY SARA SCHONHARDT

DEPARTMENTS

3 Founder's Pulse

7 Letters

8 PulsePoint
News from around the world

14 Woman to Watch
5 Questions for a rising leader

15 Toolbox
Amy Sample Ward on digital activism

63 Global Gatherings
Top international events

64 In Our Pages
Updates on past coverage

68 Arts
Best in books, music, and film

74 Marketplace
Products supporting women worldwide

80 Your World
Actions you can take for global change



10

My Story

Women across the world logged on to PulseWire to share their stories about Miracles. These are a few of our favorites.



16

Visionary Leaders

For Sikh-American activist and filmmaker Valarie Kaur, healing a divided nation means taking divine risks.

BY VALARIE KAUR



18

Frontline Journal Seeking My Mother Tongue

From just outside North Korea, magazine editor Jin-I Choi exposes everyday stories of hope and resistance.

BY JIN-I CHOI



60

Soak My Personal Peace-building Journey

Women for Women International's Judithe Registre on finding balance.

BY JUDITHE REGISTRE

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Our Cycle of EMPOWERMENT



Our Editorial Cycle of Empowerment Is Changing Lives

World Pulse has developed a unique editorial cycle of empowerment designed to lift women's voices from the ground and make connections that change women's lives. Every woman has a voice on PulseWire, the online sanctuary of worldpulse.com. New ideas, breaking news, and solutions rise from the ground up via Internet cafés and cell phones in rural villages. Our editors are always on the site looking for fresh stories to publish and highlight. When a story is featured in *World Pulse Magazine*, readers can often connect directly with the leaders and organizations on our site. The result has been waves of change. Connections made through World Pulse have led to the creation of mobile clinics, women's cyber cafés, village solar lighting projects, and lasting friendships across borders. Where will the pulse take you?

World Pulse Magazine is published by **World Pulse**, a media enterprise uniting women's voices to accelerate change. From Web to print, we've created a forum where women and their communities can connect across oceans, continents, and cultural barriers to create a new world. Visit our website at worldpulse.com to read additional articles and to connect directly with women around the world through **PulseWire**.

COVER PHOTO: © Eric Lafforgue | India
A young indian girl at Nandi temple in Mysore India.

The World Pulse Community Speaks!

Listening to the voices of our community

About the Articles



Thanks for sharing Reem Al-Numery's brave story ("Young Guru," Winter/Spring 2011). I'm sitting here with my 10-year-old niece who can't imagine a world in which these economic trades in human lives are possible. I just returned from living in a rural North African society where, while becoming evermore rare, child marriage does still happen. Thanks to brave girls like Reem for standing up for their rights, and for the NGOs and journalists who help them in their cause.

REBECCA ROBERTS | USA



Edwidge, between the teariness, I found your piece ("Return to Haiti," Winter/Spring 2011) amazingly profound and simply wonderful. You are quite an accomplished writer, never losing your pride as a Haitian-American, yet remaining aware and real about what is happening in your native homeland.

My heart sickened reading about the "tent phenomenon." As a sexual assault counselor, I know this situation will have long-range effects on Haiti, women, and children in the future. I hope

About Our Editorial Cycle



Thank you for publishing my letter ("My Hope for Afghan Women," Community Letters column; worldpulse.com/magazine/columns) and sending it to President Obama! There is no way to describe how I am feeling. Someone must talk about the reality of my country—someone must bring about change for Afghan women. Now I know that that person is me, Parwana Fayyaz. My letter to the US president is for all Afghans who do not know how to read, write, speak, and understand English. I am really thankful to World Pulse for understanding me and giving me the courage to speak for those who forget how to speak.

PARWANA FAYYAZ | AFGHANISTAN

“It fills my spirit with tears and pride to read all of the lovely stories of women from around the world making a difference—risking everything just to share their voice, dreams, wishes, and goals.”

MIA | USA



Reem is brilliant for asking for a divorce. Thanks to Allah and the lawyer who helped in the case! Things like this happen in many parts of my country where poverty exists. Women have to stand up for their rights. Mothers, sisters, aunties in the family must say no to this—it will help; change starts in the home.

ZAINAB AHMED | NIGERIA



Great piece, Ann ("The Triumph of Women and Sport," Winter/Spring 2011)! There have been great strides in women's empowerment through radical means.

Soccer has been used in Kenya to make peace, especially after the post-election violence of 2008. Some TV programs have used soccer as the story line. One program showed how members of a new Kenyan football club learned to deal with their tribal, ethnic, social, and economic divisions. Viva sports! *On y va* sweaty revolution!!!

MERCY KAREITHI | KENYA

that the severity of the traumatic occurrences will not be minimized or merely forgotten by the funders or healthcare professionals who are helping to rebuild this proud nation.

MICHELE PAYNTER | USA



I have no words to express what I am feeling now—I read this article ("Why I Run," Winter/Spring 2011) and for at least five minutes did

nothing but think about Generose. I cannot even half imagine the pain and violence she and the community have suffered. To lift up a spirit such as hers, to instill such courage and enthusiasm in a heart that is so bitterly battered is no mean feat. Lisa Shannon, you are a real inspiring being and I hope that I will some day be able to contribute and replicate your efforts for my sisters across the globe.

JEBLI | NEPAL

Raise your voice!

Send feedback, thoughts, and suggestions to editor@worldpulse.com, or comment on our articles online!

About the Magazine



I just received my new subscription of *World Pulse* and couldn't wait to sit and read it from front to back and back again! It fills my spirit with tears and pride to read the lovely stories of women from all around the world making a difference—risking everything just to share their voice, dreams, wishes, and goals; risking everything to make change, build a future, and grow a better tomorrow for all women. Thank you!

MIA ROMAN | USA

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR:



In our Winter/Spring 2011 edition, we unintentionally failed to credit Emily Anne Epstein for her photograph on page 27. You can see more of Epstein's work at emilyanneepstein.com. *World Pulse* regrets the error.



Throughout this edition, you'll see this icon, which means you can connect directly with these leaders on **PulseWire** by visiting worldpulse.com.

Taking the World's Pulse for Women

Updates from all corners of the globe

MEXICO: First Female Attorney General



With drug trafficking and organized crime in Mexico at an all-time high, Marisela Morales, the country's new attorney general, has her work cut out for her. But the former head of the Organized Crime Special Investigations Unit has a solid resume and a track record of success. Her appointment signals change in a country that has seen very few female cabinet appointments, and where no woman has ever led the justice department.

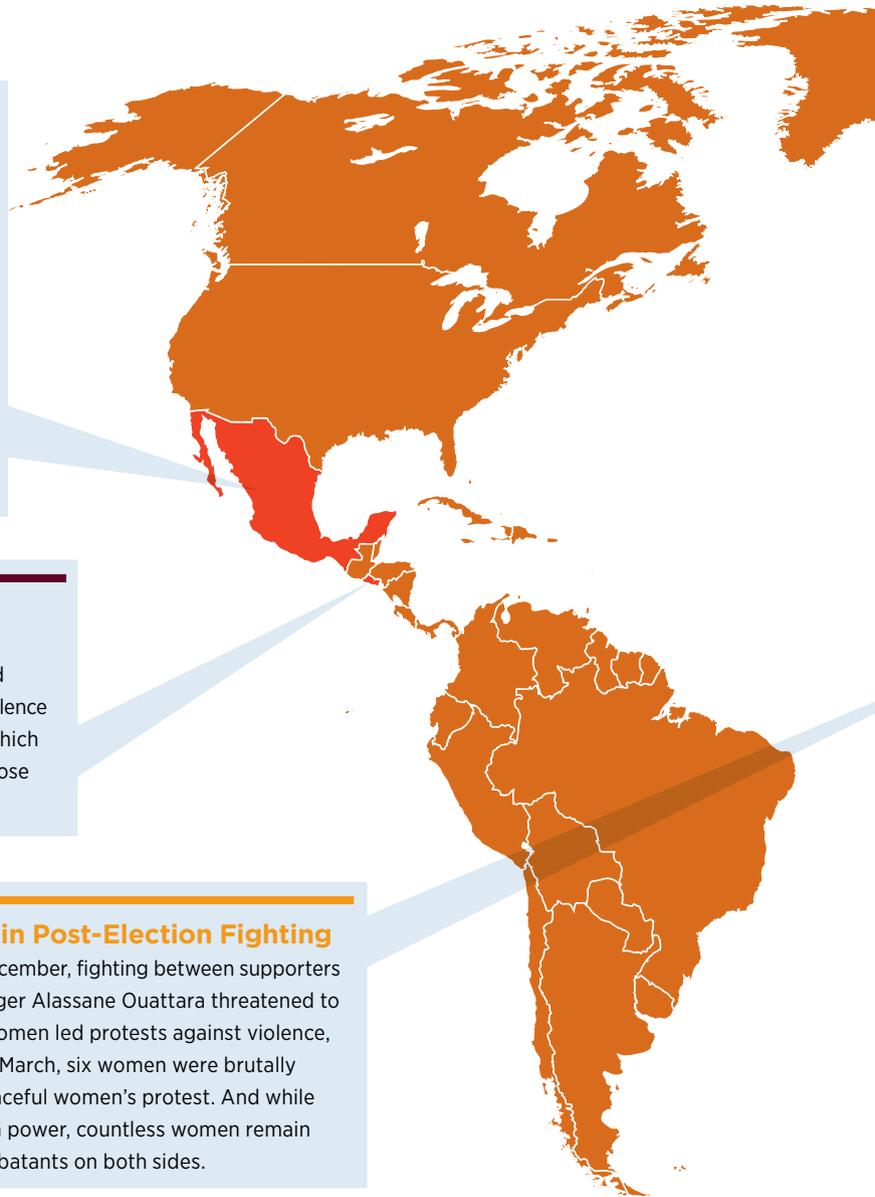
EL SALVADOR: A Vote Against Violence

In El Salvador, the country with the world's highest rates of murder of women, the situation is looking up—at least on the legal front. This year, unprecedented cooperation by female legislators across party lines ushered in a landmark anti-violence bill, the First Comprehensive Law for a Life Free of Violence against Women, which provides increased protections for women as well as increased penalties for those convicted of committing acts of violence ranging from harassment to murder.



CÔTE D'IVOIRE: Women Lose in Post-Election Fighting

After Côte d'Ivoire's disputed election in December, fighting between supporters of incumbent Laurent Gbagbo and challenger Alassane Ouattara threatened to plunge the country into civil war. Ivorian women led protests against violence, but also fell victim to political upheaval. In March, six women were brutally murdered by Gbagbo's supporters at a peaceful women's protest. And while the UN intervened to remove Gbagbo from power, countless women remain vulnerable to violence at the hands of combatants on both sides.



WHAT WE'RE WATCHING

We have our eyes on these new and noteworthy initiatives

The Voice Project



In Northern Uganda, a new peace project emphasizes forgiveness and the power of voice. The Voice Project arms women and men with songs instead of guns to encourage former soldiers—the very people who victimized them—to return home. Learn more at voiceproject.org.

ICELAND: Gender Equity Leader

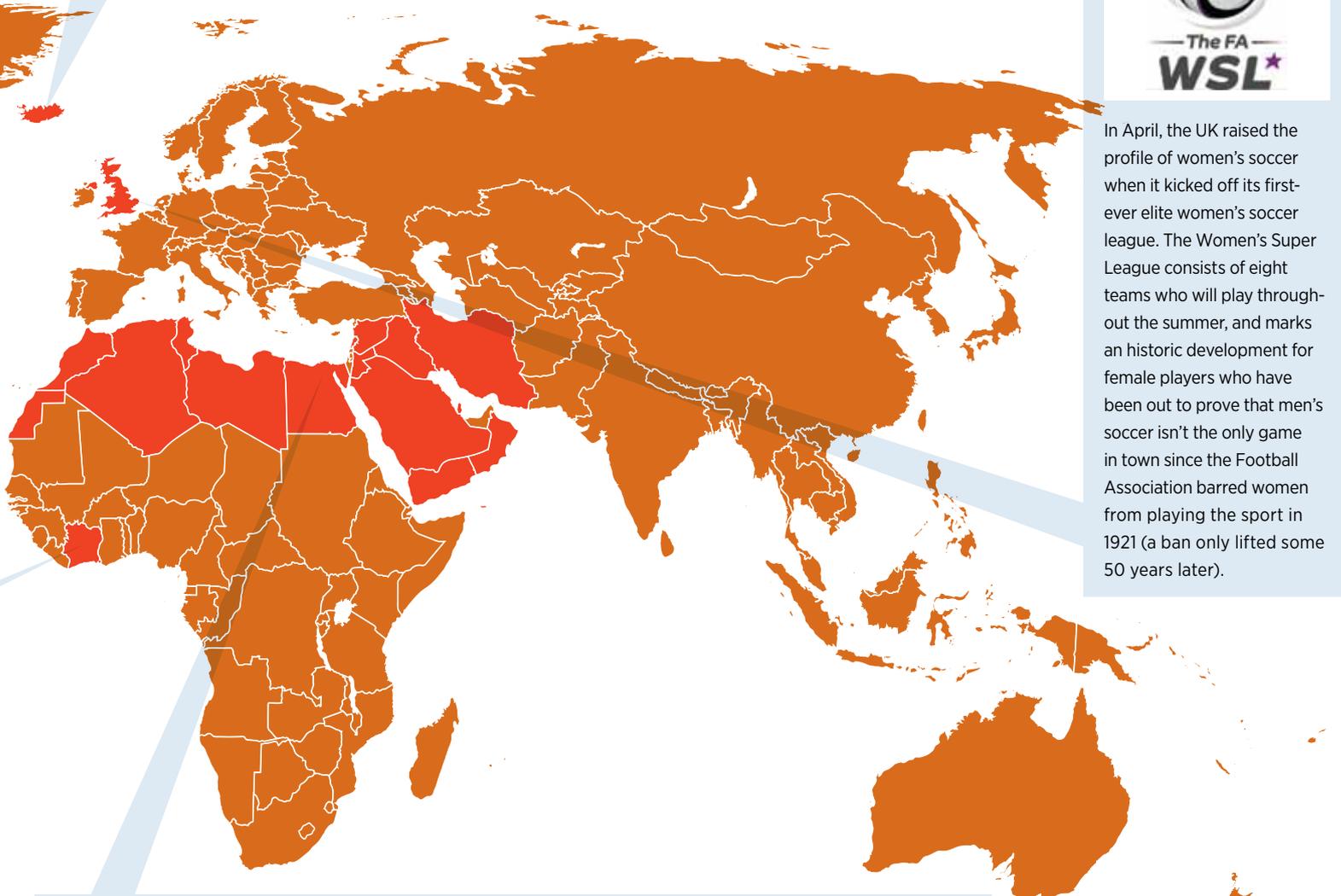


Iceland leads the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Rankings for the second year in a row. What's its secret? Progressive social policies, women in positions of power (including a female head of state), and an active, professional female workforce all boost this tiny nation's gender equality points. Other Scandinavian countries also fared well in the index, which measures achievement gaps between women and men in the areas of health, education, economics, and political participation.

UK: Women's Soccer Goes Pro



In April, the UK raised the profile of women's soccer when it kicked off its first-ever elite women's soccer league. The Women's Super League consists of eight teams who will play throughout the summer, and marks an historic development for female players who have been out to prove that men's soccer isn't the only game in town since the Football Association barred women from playing the sport in 1921 (a ban only lifted some 50 years later).



MIDDLE EAST/NORTH AFRICA: Arab Women's Spring?



© Monique Jaques

Women played leading roles in the Egyptian and Tunisian protests that rallied nascent democracy movements around the world and struck fear in the hearts of dictators from Zimbabwe to Yemen earlier this year. The efforts of pro-democracy activists across the Arab world, many of them female, continue, but it remains to be seen where the struggle for women's rights in the region will land amidst sweeping changes.

© Christina Macgillivray
Breakthrough in New Delhi, India

Chatpati Chat



Rights advocates in Lucknow, India have created a closed mobile phone network that can be accessed from virtually anywhere, at any time. The network, called Chatpati Chat, allows women to share stories, rapidly spread news, share meeting times, and strengthen community mobilization efforts.

Nasawiya

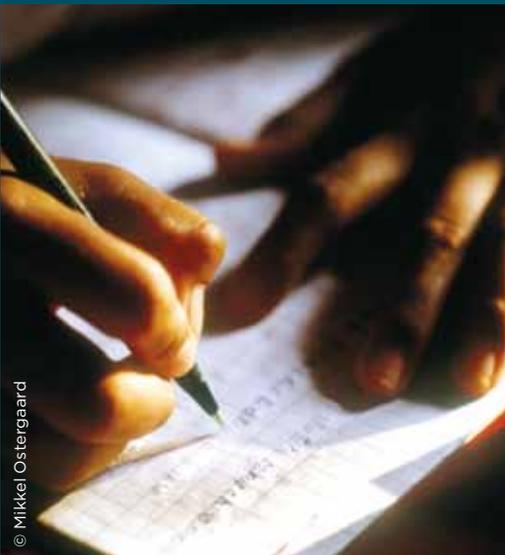


Based in Beirut, Lebanon and using multimedia and information and communication technology, Nasawiya is a group of self-described feminists who create, connect, and support projects that promote gender justice and equality. Check out how Nasawiya is empowering women at nasawiya.org.

MY STORY



© Josie Liming



© Mikkel Ostergaard

Miracles

Women from all over the world wrote in to share their personal stories about **Miracles** with *World Pulse*. What we learned is that for many, Miracles are the unexpected moments and opportunities that make us step back, breathe deeply, and appreciate the possibility around us. And they happen every day.

Unchained Miracles

I cannot speak about miracles without acknowledging God.

In my 24 years, the grim reaper has twice silently knocked on my door. His black wool cloak flapping against the strong winds, inside his skeletal frame creaking like the familiar sound of grandma's kitchen door that needs oiling, in his bony hand the sharp blade of his scythe glistening in the moonlight.

“Tap Tap Tap!”

The sound constantly rings in my head and I cower behind a veil of uncertainty. “Lord, has my time come?” I ask. The sound of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* on the national radio wakes me. How can music so sweet be played between the bouts of cold-blooded hatred broadcast over the sound waves?

At the age of eight one of the bloodiest genocides of the 20th century ripped fiercely through my country, Rwanda. All I had as a reminder of the good life was my beloved plastic doll, Tinnie. The angry slash on her stomach—created by my brother in an attempt to understand why she peed when we gave her water—mirrored the fear that gripped me.

Why was my life spared when around me almost a million people were butchered like fattened goats on Christmas Day?

A few months later, Lake Tanganyika threatened to swallow me whole as I vehemently tried to prove to myself and to my sisters that I could swim. I fought her so hard her wave pushed me back to the shore. I won both times.

But those are not my miracles.

Today, my miracle is that even after going through those terrifying experiences, I can look upon life with rose-tinted glasses. The upheavals that were my life after the genocide are what make my life beautiful: I can still see riches where there is poverty, good in an evil world, joy through tears, a family in a broken-down society, selfless acts in a selfish world. But most importantly, I can see God in a faithless world.

ANGELIQUE GATSINZI | UK/RWANDA 

Here I Am, a Woman

The interview began when he called me a pretty girl but wondered aloud if I were actually intelligent. He held a large, juicy, green apple in his hand. He took a large bite, and I could hear him chewing. My one-on-one, life-changing meeting with the CEO of one of Africa's premier peace organizations began like such and ended with a question only a man of his status could ask:

“Have you put on weight? I can see it in your face.”

“You can see it in my face? The...weight?”

“Yes, I can see it in your face.”

This interview; this opportunity; this promotion that would emancipate me as an African woman was never actually going to happen. This man saw me as a gossip-mongering, must-be-kicked-down woman.

“I can still see riches where there is poverty, good in an evil world, joy through tears, a family in a broken-down society, selfless acts in a selfish world. But most importantly, I can see God in a faithless world.”

ANGELIQUE GATSINZI | RWANDA/UK

Gasping for air, I looked down at the table. It was not appropriate or professional to tell him that as a woman my face might appear swollen due to the tearing of the lining of my uterus, once a month, every month. Nor could I tell him that not once in my life had I ever thought I was fat until that moment. But he seemed to think he could tell me.

He turned towards the window, his teeth munching, gnawing on the apple's core. The apple was large and juicy when I had walked in, now it was just bones.

“I eat the seeds,” he said conspiratorially. “I eat the whole apple.”

I nodded and held his gaze. It is always an effort to control the fire inside me, but now, I thought, at what cost? How many more insults will I allow to keep my job and my family alive? And more than that, fires are controlled out of respect—in this room there was none.

My thoughts matched the crunch of the apple, the suction of spit on the core a drain unclogging my mind.

Turning to me he leaned back. “You are a wild horse that needs to be tamed,” he said.

All the doors closed. The miracle happened when I got up, walked towards the door to my freedom, opened it, and walked out.

BHAVYA | SOUTH AFRICA 

Slapping the Slapper

It was February 12th, and I was going home after work as excited as I could ever be.

I had just arrived in Cairo a day earlier, just after our president, Hosni Mubarak, stepped down. I headed downtown to figure out how Egypt had turned so suddenly into a promising and free country. As I was sitting in the coffee house, there came dozens of military officers walking their straight walk. Everyone stood up and applauded. It was overwhelming.

As I headed home, still naively deifying the military, an officer from the car next to me looked at me and said something that I didn't hear. I enthusiastically looked back at him to listen to what he had to say.

He looked at me with dead eyes, and said, "I wanna kiss you on your boobs." My idealized image of a new Egypt came crashing down; I couldn't help but scream out my car window, "You don't deserve the uniform, you son of a bitch!" He looked at me again with this devilish smile and called me a whore.

I was going to cry—I couldn't believe how violated I felt. Then something happened. I got out of my car, opened the door of his car, and slapped him in the face.

I felt strong. This is Egypt after the revolution. I slapped the slapper. I was not going to be used and abused.

It was February 12th; I was going home after work as excited as I could ever be.

NOON | EGYPT 

I Spoke for Myself and My Sisters

I had been married for five years, and I have five kids with my husband. The last born was a boy named Samoh, meaning "truth." Truth because after his birth, I had to stand for what was true: I had to stand for no other truth than that which says women have rights and deserve respect.

On the night Samoh came into the world, it rained so heavily. My labor started as the rain started, and it progressed so rapidly that I either had to rush to the hospital or give birth to the baby at home. I could not walk to the hospital for lack of strength, and my husband was out with our family car. I called him several times, and he promised to be home immediately. I waited—the pain increasing minute by minute—but he didn't come. My legs were trembling and cramping. I could not move an inch. Alone, squatting gently

“ This is Egypt after the revolution. I slapped the slapper. I was not going to be used and abused. ”

NOON | EGYPT

on the floor, I ushered baby Samoh into the world. It was painful. It was joyful. With tears and laughter, I held him close to my body.

But the emptiness remained. My husband wasn't there to welcome any of our five children. We have always started this together and I am always left alone to finish it. Following Samoh's birth, after I had gone to the hospital, my husband walked into the ward. His very presence made me sick. I needed an explanation; I needed an act of contrition.

But all he said was, "I am now a man. I have a son at last! But I need two more to make me complete."

My answer, my miracle, was "No more! Never again."

Many years have passed—and I have had no more children. It has been rumored; it has been sung in songs; it has been the subject of gossip, my neighbors whispering about how I dared to refuse my husband and community more children.

But I am stronger; I am more joyful. It is my health; it is my life. Many women have come to me wanting to know what it takes to say no, what it takes to take control of their own bodies.

The answer is simple: You have to let your voice be heard. Assert the rights you own—not as a gift, but as an endowment from Creation.

JANE FRANCES MUFUA | CAMEROON 

Miracles of Erin

Like every birth, Erin's was a miracle—angelic face, delicate fingers. Little did we know how many miracles she would bring to us, both in life and in death.

As Erin failed to reach the "normal" milestones, we went to many specialists trying to "fix" her. One day, as I was crying about everything she wasn't doing, she looked up at me and laughed and laughed. My friend said, "She's pretty terrific the way she is." The first of many lessons learned from Erin.

At public school, she was a leader in 'inclusion.' What can a child that doesn't walk or talk do in class? The kids knew—if you asked them. And by listening to them, they were empowered to know that everybody belongs. Because she was so vulnerable, they could let their masks down and she could touch their hearts. Erin had begun her miracles.

Erin loved the water, being in it, watching it. Trips to the aquarium brought all the fish over to her wheelchair as they shared silent communication. "A mermaid in another life," I always said. When she was 21, she moved into her own home across the street with roommates and neighbors as her caregiving team in a house with fish tanks and waterfalls. We saw over and over again the magic she wove among those that knew her and the community created around her.

Doctors said she wouldn't live much beyond 14. Every birthday was a celebration of another year. Each surgery and hospitalization survival yielded more appreciation of every day. Erin continued to smile.

July 2010, at age 31, it finally caught up with her. The night she died a yellow butterfly fluttered outside her window. The next day we held a vigil while dozens of butterflies clustered in the yard. At her celebration of life, hundreds of people came to speak about this one who had come into the world so vulnerable and yet so strong, who had touched their hearts and changed their lives.

“ The night she died a yellow butterfly fluttered outside her window. The next day we held a vigil while dozens of butterflies clustered in the yard. ”

CYNDA COLLINS ARSENAULT | USA

A month later, I took to the ocean two locks of Erin's hair. Before casting them into the sea, they formed a perfect heart in my hand. Releasing them into the water, I turned around and suddenly noticed an empty wheelchair on the beach. Turning back to the water, four dolphins appeared leaping in a circle as if in joy.

Erin had come home.

CYNDA COLLINS ARSENAULT | USA 

An Angel's Visit to Tea Bushes

I belong to the city of Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka, home to hundreds of lush tea plantations. I grew up watching women like my mother walking along treacherous roads, where they encountered venomous snakes on the way to the hospital, the markets, and the local school. Men were often arrested and remanded on suspicion that they were LTTE terrorists or sympathizers during conflict. Young girls were vulnerable to sexual harassment. Political corruption was rampant.

But our social status and Tamil ethnicity has ensured that our plight has been continuously ignored for generations. Though we toiled on the tea plantations to make the state prosperous under grueling and inhumane conditions, our basic needs—health, electricity, transportation, safe drinking water, the ability to vote, the right to citizenship in our own country—were denied. We led a life of slavery and were treated as commodities.

to send me to a school, as I knew that any loss of wages, although only a dollar per day, would mean imminent starvation. And yet, through some miracle, I managed to find my way to school.

I believed that if I could share the kind of education I received with my people then something could finally change. So I conducted basic English and mathematics classes for my friends and their mothers. This education has strengthened household economies and has given a voice to the underrepresented women of Nuwara Eliya. Now they can read newspapers, slogans, instructions on medications, signs, and prices at markets. They can sign contracts and formalize business agreements. I have a dream that all the women in my community will be empowered and given the dignity that ensures their participation and leadership in the development of the community at large.

BHAGYA | SRI LANKA 

March 8, 1990

That night, the moon was beaming. A pregnant mother and an anxious father sought peace from a conflict between two nations of one land. Their residence: a collapsed dwelling in a small corner of Afshar District, situated in the west of Kabul, Afghanistan.

The pregnant woman walked outside in the bitter cold and looked at the stars in the usually dark sky. Fresh snow had washed away the blood

Hospital, which was an hour away. On the way they heard the sounds of shooting, shouting, crashing, and blasting. The father kept his hands on the mother's ears to help her preserve her strength and inner peace. They thanked God when they saw the open gate of the hospital. Inside, it was filled with injured people, dead bodies, and nurses with filthy clothes and tired faces. One of these nurses—exhausted and upset—took my mother to a room.

After 15 minutes, at 4:14am, a baby girl's crying sound was heard. The injured people were heartened by the sound of the baby's cry. A man who had lost his right hand wiped tears from his eyes.

The next night, back at home, the parents offered a name for this new baby girl.

"Parwana," the father said. "It means butterfly. Butterflies are always free; they can reach the flame of the sun; they can touch moonbeams, if they want to. Parwana will break barriers just like a butterfly. She will fly high for her freedom."

The mother knows that the night's unusual moon was for me—her daughter, her miracle, her butterfly.

PARWANA FAYYAZ | AFGHANISTAN 

“Alone, squatting gently on the floor, I ushered baby Samoh into the world. It was painful. It was joyful. With tears and laughter, I held him close to my body.”

JANE FRANCES MUFUA | CAMEROON

Men were skeptical of how literacy could be of use to young girls like me. They worried about the possible social outcomes if educated women were to gain power over their lives and turn towards white-collar jobs. Instead, girls were married off at a young age.

But I knew that this was not the life I wanted. While continuing to work in the fields, I was determined to sit for my entrance exam. I could not compel my mother, our family breadwinner,

that usually stained the white ground a rosy color. The harsh sounds made it so she couldn't sleep that night.

She felt a pain waking inside her, but she was afraid to go to the hospital for fear of the fighting. "Sarwar," she said, "We are two and we can do this." But the father saw the mother's fearful face and said, "It is almost 2am and no one will open the door for us now. We must go."

They caught a risky way to Khushal Khan

MY STORY



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5 Questions for Sapna Shahani

Through a growing network of videobloggers, **Sapna Shahani** is helping launch young women in India as media makers of the future.

BY KIMBERLY CRANE



Sapna Shahani was a senior in college when she first picked up a video camera. She quickly recognized the power of this tool—especially in the hands of a woman—for direct and creative advocacy.

After moving to the US where she lived and breathed the world of community media in Berkeley, Shahani returned to India to find that the community media movement in her home country was still nascent. “Community radio had been introduced and many NGOs and colleges have radio stations,” she says, “but we don’t have community video or TV yet.”

In 2008, Shahani—whose first name means “dream” in Hindi—finally fulfilled her own dream and created the video platform she had been looking for all along: a place where people like her could hear young women’s points of view on social problems. Her organization Women Aloud Videoblogging for Empowerment (WAVE) has grown from a small girls’ film training program into a nationwide network of women videobloggers. WAVE trains women from Kerala to Kashmir in video production and empowers them to broadcast their uncensored take on local issues. WAVE has produced over 175 videos so far. A few, like a video about a female rickshaw driver from WAVE’s youngest (19-year-old) participant have won entry into film festivals.

Now Shahani’s setting out to prove that when women are given the tools to cover the issues they care most about, they produce media that can change the world.

Can you pinpoint a moment when you recognized video as a tool for change and empowerment?

There have been many moments. I recall participating in a TV debate show about youth sexuality called ‘Teen Talk’ in India in the ‘90s. This show influenced my friends and teens of my generation as we were forming our identities. Speaking out in front of the camera had a tremendous impact on my sense of self-expression.

WAVE is built on the idea that “Young women in India need to be heard.” What obstacles are currently getting in their way?

There is unfortunately a long list of obstacles that hamper young women’s voices in the public domain. There’s a lack of knowledge about information and communication technologies (ICT), a lack of access to channels for expression, and—perhaps most challenging—a culture that doesn’t recognize young women as worthy of having opinions.

WAVE aims to start conversations. When you look at everything that’s been brought to light in these videos, where do you think these conversations are headed?

We started WAVE because we wanted to hear what young women thought about education, health, democracy, the environment, and we wanted to encourage young women to participate more in solving local problems. We are trying to go beyond traditional advocacy. We want the conversation to lead to direct action. We are developing web 2.0 tools to connect audiences with the subjects of videos; we are facilitating opportunities for networking with videomakers; and we are connecting with Indian organizations on the ground to contribute content for their campaigns.

How do you see individual video stories connecting to national or global movements?

We started with 30 women blogging from 30 regions in India during the pilot phase of our project. Now that phase is over and we are transitioning towards opening our platform to anyone interested in expressing points of view on social issues through a gender lens. I hope to expand our project to other countries in South Asia and then globally to spread citizen journalism as a tool for empowering women’s self-expression and leading social movements.

Do you have any words of inspiration for those who want to get involved in video activism but aren’t already tech-savvy?

We have trained women from small towns who don’t speak English, or don’t even have their own email accounts or their own computers. Anyone can use video to create change! The most essential ingredient is having the passion to learn and the patience to wade through Google search results to find the right answers. ●

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▶ Visit Sapna’s groundbreaking project at waveindia.org

🌐 Sapna is a **Voices of Our Future Correspondent** with World Pulse! Find her on PulseWire at worldpulse.com/magazine

Videos for a Change

Social-media maven **Amy Sample Ward** gives us five digital storytelling examples that are making a difference.

I believe that by building strong communities we can change our world.

I also believe that technology can help us get there. I've devoted my career to bringing those two elements together: helping people build community around a particular geography or cause, and helping technologists and nonprofits work together to create social impact. I've helped communities form all around the world—from local neighborhoods to global networks. Every day I see big changes happen, all sorts of new tools emerge, and yes, a lot of efforts fail. But I also see many successes, especially with video.

Why video? It's easy to capture: You can use your computer, a digital camera, or even your phone. It's easy to share: Sites like YouTube and Vimeo make storing and sharing video free, and even the most novice users can disseminate incredible stories that are visually compelling and engaging. From protests in the Middle East to nonprofit awareness campaigns, activists are harnessing this medium to create big impact.



Here are five of my favorite examples of how communities are using video to mobilize and inspire:



In January, 26-year-old **Asmaa Mahfouz** uploaded a video in which she said, "I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square, and I will stand alone." After posting it to Facebook, it went viral and today Mahfouz's video is credited with starting Egypt's revolution. She proved that one voice spoken with conviction can help topple a 30-year regime and inspire millions.



In its quest to end modern-day slavery, **SlaveFree** offers many small actions individuals can take that add up to not just a change in a single location or single company, but in a changed market and a changed society. They use video to show us that it isn't just people, but data and information that can tell a story, too.

callandresponse.com/slavefree



The US-based project **InvisiblePeople** uses video interviews to document moving and sometimes brutally honest accounts of homelessness, putting a human face to an otherwise invisible issue.

invisiblepeople.tv/blog



A single video can be compelling, but when many videos are pulled together to tell, and retell, a story, the effect is multiplied. That's exactly what **Laborcasting** hopes to do through community-generated and contributed videos chronicling the fight for workers' rights around the world.

laborcasting.org



Witness knows that video has the power to change the world by opening up people's eyes to real issues. Their mission is to help activists use video to raise awareness of human rights issues; then, they help broker relationships with media outlets to make sure these videos make it to the global stage. Their tag line sums up what video activism is all about—See it. Film it. Change it.

witness.org



AMY SAMPLE WARD is a blogger, facilitator, and trainer focused on leveraging social technologies for social change. Visit her at amysampleward.com.

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Connect with **Amy Sample Ward** on PulseWire at worldpulse.com/magazine

Leaping into the Whirlwind

For Sikh-American activist and filmmaker **Valarie Kaur**, healing her divided nation begins with taking divine risks.

“Tati Vao Na Lagi, Par Brahm Sharnai...”

My grandfather taught me this prayer when I was a little girl. He would hum it as he tied his turban, worked in the garden, and drove us to school in the mornings. I took this prayer, this *shabad* from Sikh scripture, as the secret to his fearlessness. When I grew up, I wanted to be as fearless as him.

This prayer was on my lips when I was 20 years old and hiding in my bedroom. A man from my community had just been murdered. A woman stabbed. And another chased by an angry mob. Anti-Muslim hate crimes had erupted across the US after 9/11 but weren't appearing on the evening news. As a third-generation Sikh American, my family had settled in the US nearly 100 years earlier. But in that moment, our turbans and dark skin marked us automatically suspect, perpetually foreign, and potentially terrorist.

I was scared and numb. It felt like a whirlwind brewing outside my bedroom window. I wanted to do something, but the script I was holding told me that a young woman of color without a college degree should keep her head down.

I have come to think of crises like these as “whirlwind” moments. In these moments, the script we have been handed does not read true. A dissonance rings in our ears, our hands begin to tremble, a moral stirring arises in our hearts, and we have a choice: to continue supporting the status quo, or to follow our moral compass—and leap.

I could not leap alone. But with my grandfather's prayer in my heart, I grabbed my camera and began a road trip across the country to chronicle stories of hate crimes against Sikh, Muslim, and other Americans. At first, it felt like flying. I felt invincible with my camera, and soon I was using it to chronicle stories of people fighting for justice.

Until one day. In 2004, I was arrested with force while filming a protest in New York City. Behind bars, nursing a dead arm that had been badly twisted by a police officer, I experienced what women have known for centuries: challenging the status quo exacts a toll. When we leap into the whirlwind, we fall. Women and girls all over the world who speak out against oppression in their families or communities

or countries bear the costs—sometimes with their lives.

Ten years later, I'm 30. Barack Obama is president; Osama bin Laden is dead. I still cannot write without pain in my twisted wrist. But this pain has shown me that ending cycles of violence requires healing the bodies and minds of victims

“ We have a choice: to continue supporting the status quo, or to follow our moral compass—and leap. ”

and oppressors. It requires humanizing our opponents so that we work to transform them, rather than destroy and replace them. I now believe that the way we make change is just as important as the change we make. I would never have learned this without falling into the whirlwind.

Today I'm working with extraordinary teammates lifting up buried stories—through films and reports and lawsuits—to help heal a still divided nation. The whirlwinds have multiplied. The issues are myriad, and the need for humanity in our struggles for justice has never been greater.

A few weeks ago, I shared my story with the girls of San Domenico School, an all-girls high school north of San Francisco. At the end of my talk, I asked them to share their own whirlwind moments.

One girl raised her hand. “I jumped into the whirlwind when I came out to my parents as bisexual. It was hard, and they didn't understand at first. That was the cost. But now I'm learning to be free.”

“My whirlwind was coming to this country from China as an immigrant,” another girl said.

“My whirlwind was coming out as Jewish in a Christian high school,” said another.

Here's what I learned in crisscrossing the US to 150 cities, listening to school assemblies, congregations, and corporate roundtables. There is a groundswell out there—a groundswell of young people who are calling upon their faith tradition or moral compass to leap into whirlwinds large and small.

This groundswell is sparing no area of society:



campaigns as diverse as immigration reform, religious freedom, and LGBTQ equality are bound up in one struggle for justice, one movement to heal and repair the world. We are witnessing the interconnectedness of seemingly disparate causes, once perceived of and fought as separate campaigns. And many of us are drawing upon our faith and moral traditions to engage in the fight. When we as women and girls link arms and jump into the whirlwind together, we change the world.

When my grandfather died, I was angry with him for leaving me before teaching me the secret to his fearlessness. The night before his funeral, I finally looked up the meaning to the prayer he sung me as a child.

“*Tati Vao Na Lagi, Par Brahm Sharnai...*” It means, “The hot winds cannot touch me; I am sheltered by the Divine.”

This was his last lesson to me: When you leap into the whirlwind, you will fall. But with truth in your heart, you will be sheltered from the swirling hot winds—and rise up to change the world. ●

VALARIE KAUR is an award-winning filmmaker, speaker, and advocate. She is the director of *Groundswell*, empowering the multifaith movement for justice. Her film *Divided We Fall* chronicles racism, hate, and healing after 9/11.

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▶ View more writing, as well as video excerpts from **Valarie Kaur** at valariekaur.com

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Seeking My Mother Tongue

BY JIN-I CHOI WITH KIMBERLY CRANE, INTERPRETED BY JI YOON CHOI

More than a decade ago, poet **Jin-I Choi** fled North Korea with little but her story. Now, as the editor of an underground magazine, she exposes her people's stories of hope and resistance.

I used to think that North Korean, my mother tongue, was the only language in the world. It was the language my mother would whisper to the soybeans after a long day of weeding. “Do you feel refreshed now?” she would mutter, and I fell in love with this gentle, playful dialect. It was the language of poems that came to me on sleepless nights. And it was the language that followed me to university, where I became a writer.

As I was finding my voice, dictator Kim Jong-Il's authoritarian rule was stifling the voice of my country. When I graduated, I joined the National Writers' Association as a poet, and soon discovered that we were paid according to how highly we praised the leader and his ideology. While my colleagues wrote verses celebrating our leader, I wrote poetry about how my life changed after the birth of my son. I longed to focus on writing pure verse, but I soon found this was impossible. I suffered financially.

I could only pray that my son would be safe and hope we would one day be reunited. I remember that I shivered as I looked back at the dark mountain ranges for what I thought was the last time. But I only stayed a few months before I returned to North Korea to retrieve my son and flee again.

I was heartbroken. My own language had lost its appeal, so I began to write in Chinese. At the time, China was rooting out North Korean defectors, and I thought about using a pen name; I even considered circulating a rumor about my death. In the end, I chose—and still choose—to write under my real name. My words have always felt more alive with my own name behind them.

After struggling to tell the stories of my people in an adopted language, I moved to South Korea and I began to see my language in a new light. The Korean I heard there was beautiful and bold compared to North Korea's dialect. Their's is a self-assured language, evolving with society. In the hands of party leaders, the North Korean

I immediately put aside my education to start a magazine, *Imjingang*.

Named after the river that flows through North and South Korea, our magazine represents the free flow of information that we long to see. In my home country the government ruthlessly monitors all publications. Independent press is nonexistent, and when the one-party political system fails, there are no avenues for the public to voice criticism or push for change.

In *Imjingang* we say things that no one else can say. Our stories are reported in secret from inside North Korea, published in South Korea, and then distributed clandestinely to North Korean officials.

When a popular dissident was executed, we spent two years researching and reporting the story—which was news to many North Koreans who lived outside this man's hometown but were exposed only to state media.

In another article, we interviewed North Korean women living in rural Chinese towns along the border. We found that many of these women are marrying into Chinese families, replacing local women who have migrated to cities for work. They are playing a major role in reviving China's dying rural communities. But while many have been living in China for over a decade, they and their children lack official papers or legal rights. They live in constant fear of being sent back to North Korea. For our story, we coined the term “Yŏn-go” women, which can be roughly translated as “China's family.” By naming and writing about these invisible women, we are finding the hidden beauty of our mother tongue and revealing its true colors.

“Our stories are reported in secret from inside North Korea, published in South Korea, and then distributed clandestinely to North Korean officials.”

On a drizzling dawn in July 1998, at the age of 39, I outran armed border guards and crossed Tuman River. I escaped into China, joining so many of my fellow countrywomen and men who could no longer stand the oppression and censorship in North Korea. I remember the sound of winds following me like a ghost when I stepped on this foreign soil for the first time. I was devastated, like a woman betrayed by her beloved.

I had no idea what I would encounter in China, so I had escaped alone, leaving my son behind.

language had lost its confidence and could no longer describe our experiences.

In South Korea I committed myself to re-learning my language. While I continued writing poems in exile, my experiences overwhelmed me. Poems were too brief to contain everything the people of North Korea and I had been through. I was planning to go abroad to start my PhD, when a friend approached me with the idea of publishing a magazine by and for North Koreans. I knew I couldn't turn away from this opportunity.





© Markel Redondo | Panos

Women have always been marginalized in our patriarchal culture, but I am learning that we are also leading acts of resistance. After Kim Jong-Il's decree against women riding bicycles, women continued riding their bikes under the cover of darkness to buy groceries for their families. When police harassment led to the death of a woman on a bicycle, there was a huge public outcry, which ended the prohibition. And as Kim Jong-Il's government bans book after book, women defy restrictions to fulfill their thirst for knowledge.

Since I started the magazine, I have discovered that the people of North Korea have a desire to take charge of their lives. I dream that *Imjingang*

will become a small corner of the people's movement in North Korea, that it will awaken North Koreans to seek meaningful lives, free of government restrictions.

Last year, as we released our 10th edition, I heard that the government has blacklisted us. This attention makes our work dangerous, and it means I have to travel everywhere with armed bodyguards. But it also means that they are listening. They know how powerful we are becoming.

Everyone in North Korea suffers under these failed policies, and everyone fears the military authorities. But right now, few are speaking up. Our culture views political leaders as father

figures, and North Koreans are as likely to attempt to change their government as they are to attempt to change their own fathers. As we've watched the protests in Egypt force their leader out of power, I see this attitude changing. North Koreans are starting to get a sense of what is possible. Change won't happen until we ourselves take action, and no other country can do this for us. We need our own stories in our own media in our own language.

Years ago I ran from my homeland and vowed never to speak Korean again. Today, I find my language to be beautiful. We are reviving our mother tongue, and we hope for the day when North Korea, our motherland, is as beautiful as its language. ●



D|E|T|A|I|N|E|D



In the past year, we've celebrated the release of two high-profile women leaders from political imprisonment—Burma's Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and Ethiopia's Birtukan Mideksa. But what of the countless other women who remain behind bars for defying their governments and raising their voices? World Pulse pays tribute to four who refuse to be silenced.

BY ALISA TANG

SILENCED *or* STRONGER?

“Whatever happens, the government can repress and torture [Hengameh Shahidi], but they can’t really kill the idea that she represents—freedom, democracy, and a new way forward for Iran and the larger Islamic world.”

MIRIAM ELIA | CAMPAIGNER FOR SHAHIDI'S RELEASE, IRAN

“If I am sentenced to death today, I am ready to face my execution and will not beg for my life.”

DARANEE CHARNCHOENGSIKPAKUL | THAILAND

It is hard to estimate just how many women are being detained by their governments, but international human rights advocates agree that cases are becoming all too frequent as governments crack down on those who dare to raise their voices in opposition.

In Ethiopia, former judge and political leader Birtukan Mideksa was arrested following a disputed election and spent a total of three years in prison between 2005 and 2010 under charges of treason and attempting to overthrow the government. Like countless others around the world, she was punished for challenging the powerful, for taking a stand against repression.

In October 2010, rights groups cheered as the Ethiopian government responded to pressure to pardon and release Mideksa. And today, her voice is as strong as ever. But all too often, as momentum behind a leader builds, governments crack down harder, instill fear, and attempt to “teach a

lesson” to those who would dare to follow in the footsteps of political detainees.

These women leaders continue to create waves of resistance that ripple far beyond their lonely prison cells. They—along with their friends, family, and supporters—are leading revolutions in spite of the extreme measures that have been taken to keep them silent.

World Pulse looked to four courageous leaders and activists under threat—Daranee Charnchoengsilpakul in Thailand, Zimbabwe’s Jestina Mukoko, as well as Hengameh Shahidi of Iran and Mao Hengmeng of China—to learn who they are, what they stand for, and how they remain powerful voices of opposition despite imprisonment. Behind bars, these women are not languishing. They are living proof that governments can take away every freedom, but their voices will be heard.

ZIMBABWE

Jestina Mukoko

Jestina Mukoko, a human rights defender and director of an NGO called the Zimbabwe Peace Project, had been researching violence during the 2008 elections when in the wee hours before dawn on December 3 that year, state authorities abducted her from her home. Still in her nightgown, she was tortured and detained, kept incommunicado for three weeks. No one knew where she was or if she was even alive.

“My family and friends actually feared the worst. They feared that I could have been killed, and even I was being told that I only had two choices, either becoming a state witness or going extinct,” Jestina said in an interview with World Pulse.

“My brother even took the search to mortuaries... [my then 17 year-old son] thought he had also lost his mother. My siblings and my mother all left their homes to come and be at my house hoping that as the hours turned into days and days into weeks they would see me walk through the door.”

On the day Jestina was abducted, her drunken captors beat the soles of her feet. On the eighth day, she was forced to kneel in gravel for hours as they interrogated her. Misery enveloped her as her days in detention became weeks.

“Although there was time to sleep, it was not easy to sleep in a place that I did not know, surrounded by unknown people who were keen on hurting me. While for the rest of the time there was no physical torture, the mental torture was intense... I was lucky that in the interrogation room I found a small New Testament Bible, and going through it helped me go through the days, and taking from my faith, I was able to sing and pray for the comfort and strength of my family. That kept me going.”

Jestina finally resurfaced in court on December 24, 2008, charged with trying to overthrow the government. She was released three months later, and the Zimbabwe Supreme Court ordered a permanent stay of criminal proceedings against her on September 21, 2009.

A year after her release, the US State Department honored her with a 2010 International Women of Courage Award. To this day, Jestina endures excruciating pain in her feet from the



beating. However, the detention that attempted to weaken her has instead fueled the fire within her.

“I think the detention made me even more resolute. I do not regret anything because whatever I did at the time was legal and had nothing to do with the spurious charges that they eventually preferred on me,” she said.

“I have never been involved in anything that is against the law and have never been found on the other side of the law. I did not intend to give these people the pleasure of victory because if I had withdrawn from my work they would have been victorious.”

A country where government-sponsored violence and intimidation often silences opposition, Zimbabwe on February 19 even acted preemptively to stifle any possibility of protest by arresting 45 activists attending a roundtable discussion and watching video clips from *Al Jazeera* and *Sky News* about events in North Africa. As of late April, five men and one woman remained in detention and had been charged with treason. ●



IRAN

Hengameh Shahidi



Miriam Elia, a British comedian and visual artist, met Hengameh Shahidi during a downpour, at a bus stop in London in 2007, when they shared a moment of laughter and then a long talk on the bus ride. They swapped numbers and remained close friends.

Two years later, Hengameh, an Iranian journalist who had been in London as a doctorate student at the School of Oriental and African Studies, returned home to Tehran for the 2009 presidential election and to serve as an advisor on women's issues to presidential candidate Mehdi Karroubi.

Next Miriam heard, Hengameh was in Evin Prison.

She was among 6,000 arrested around June 2009, after mass protests following the announcement that President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad had been re-elected. She was tortured and subjected to a mock execution, and sentenced to six years in prison for "gathering and colluding with intent to harm state security" and for "propaganda against the system," Amnesty International reported. Prison officials threatened to further punish Hengameh when she went on a hunger strike in October 2009.

"From what I can tell, she is in a bad way. Her heart defect makes it particularly dangerous to go on hunger strike," Miriam said. She received Facebook messages from Hengameh during a brief period when she was released for medical treatment, but otherwise only gets updates about her through a common friend.

Meanwhile, Miriam campaigns in England for her release, having organized a Free Hengameh

Shahidi comedy night with Amnesty in September 2009 to raise money for Hengameh's case. She now plans to volunteer with the Index on Censorship, a British organization promoting free speech, and start petitioning the Iranian government for Hengameh's release.

"I am always optimistic, I think human beings know each other for a reason, a larger narrative that we aren't necessarily aware of at the time," Miriam wrote in an email to World Pulse.

"I bonded with Hengameh because deep down, I knew that she was an incredibly courageous woman whose ideas would form the future of a failing, misogynistic Islamist world. Whatever happens, the government can repress and torture her, but they can't really kill the idea that she represents—freedom, democracy, and a new way forward for Iran and the larger Islamic world... I have tremendous respect for her, she is a true hero, and people like her make me optimistic about the world."

According to Human Rights Watch, hundreds of people who were arrested after June 2009—including lawyers, rights defenders, journalists, civil society activists, and opposition leaders—remain in detention without charge. Iranian authorities executed 388 prisoners in 2009, more than any other nation except China.

Hengameh has about five years remaining in her prison sentence. ●



THAILAND

Daranee Charnchoengsilpakul

Daranee Charnchoengsilpakul's eyes lit up as she leaned close to the microphone affixed to the plexiglass at Klong Prem Prison in Bangkok. Clutching the small silver mic with her right hand, her left hand gestured powerfully, eagerly pressing emphasis into her words as she spoke to her visitors.

"I think only of the country and the people, of democracy and ideology. I am willing to die for democracy," the 48-year-old activist's voice came through the scratchy amplifier. "If I am sentenced to death today, I am ready to face my execution and will not beg for my life."

Daranee, also known as "Da Torpedo," was once a fiery orator who spoke before thousands of people at "Red Shirt" political rallies. The predominantly working class Red Shirt masses have won recent elections by a landslide, but their vote has been quashed by "Yellow Shirt" elites who have long controlled the political arena, as well as the country.

On July 22, 2008, Daranee was arrested at her apartment, accused of insulting Thailand's monarchy in her speeches—the crime of lese-majeste, cases of which spike during times of political discord in Thailand. Thereafter, the prison changed its rules on visitors. Now she must guess who is visiting her. If she is wrong, they are turned away. This rule has kept out fellow Red Shirts who do not know Daranee personally but support her because they saw her speak on stage at the rallies.

Daranee is a controversial figure in Thailand. Her speeches were crass, many Thais say. Worst of all, she was perceived as maligning the revered monarchy—an accusation used in Thai politics to suppress opposition—and so she has been silenced, denied visitors and bail as her court case continues.

However, on a sunny morning in early 2011, a journalist working with World Pulse and some Red Shirts clad in clothes befitting their movement's moniker strained attentively toward the tinny amplifier as Daranee, emboldened by her visitors, expounded with zeal: "My only hope is for the [Red Shirt] protesters to win."



Then suddenly the amplifier fell silent, her lips still moving close to the microphone, soundlessly.

Daranee tapped on the microphone and shrugged her shoulders in resignation. The microphone and lights had been switched off. The 20-minute visit was over. Facing her visitors as she backed out of the room toward her overcrowded cell, she pumped her two fingers on both hands into the air, framing her face with two Vs, defiant.

In Thailand, Daranee—though still fervent about politics—has suffered a deteriorating disability of her jaw. She is unable to open her jaw more than about a centimeter, and it takes her two to three hours of painful chewing to finish a meal.

"Being in here has damaged me psychologically and physically. The deputy prison director even said to me, 'As a subject of this kingdom, how could you criticize the [royal] institution?' Most of the detainees and authorities see me as having committed a crime worse than murder, worse than a major drug dealer," she said, adding, "I have never regretted what I said because it is the truth."

According to Human Rights Watch, in the aftermath of violent clashes between Red Shirt protesters and the Thai military in 2010, an ad hoc joint civilian-military body known as the Center for the Resolution of Emergency Situations shut down more than 1,000 websites, online television channels, and more than 40 community radio stations aligned with the anti-government protesters. ●



CHINA



Mao Hengfeng

In 1989, Mao Hengfeng was fired from her soap factory job for refusing to abort her second pregnancy. From that moment, authorities moved in on her.

“At the time, the factory authorities forcibly took Mao, who was six months into her second pregnancy, to a mental hospital, where she was tied and fixed to a bed and injected with a great amount of chlorpromazine, generally used to treat mentally ill patients,” her husband, Wu Xuewei, told World Pulse by email. “Mao Hengfeng has been forcibly sent to the mental hospital three times, where she suffered tremendous torture and persecution.”

She gave birth to twins—her second and third daughters—in violation of China’s one-child policy. For decades, she has pressed the government for compensation for her dismissal and other abuses, while calling attention to forced abortions and forced evictions in China.

She was arrested again on February 23, 2010, and sentenced to 18 months of “re-education through labor,” punishment for protesting outside a Beijing court after the conviction of Nobel Laureate Liu Xiaobo. She was released for medical reasons on February 22, then re-arrested two days later.

Although under surveillance at home, her husband was able to send emails to World Pulse: “Please forgive me for my delayed reply...the police are illegally standing guard outside my door, only five meters away from the computer on which I’m writing.”

He said that Mao has been detained several times over the past eight years, and often viciously tortured.

“Many times she was forcefully stripped of her clothes, tied up with rope to a specially made metal bed, with ankles and wrists tied with ropes and pulled in four directions...ancient torture known as ‘five horses tearing up a corpse,’” Wu wrote. “Someone even got on her body, pressing her chest and stomach with their knees, choking her throat with their hands, covering her mouth and nose, slapping her face, pulling her hair... Many times Mao Hengfeng felt that she was slowly being killed.”

During detention from 2006 to 2008, she had tubes inserted into her throat and was force-fed

an unidentified substance. Authorities also pumped her stomach, causing her to bleed internally and from her mouth and nose. She was sent to the prison hospital twice, and tied to the bed naked, Wu wrote.

Wu continued to write at length of the family’s pain: “Recalling and writing of the cruel torture suffered by Mao Hengfeng saddens me a great deal. She even doesn’t want to mention it... Every time when my three daughters and I met with Mao Hengfeng at various detention centers and heard her talk about the cruel torture and mistreatment, we would feel an unspeakable sadness on our way home and for a long period afterwards.

“I respect Mao’s personal beautiful wish. I try my best to help her. The suffering she went through has affected myself and our family. This is caused by the violation of our rights and abuse of the law.

“Her torture and mistreatment in prison have resulted in physical pain, and she is burdened by all kinds of illnesses. All that is left is her strong will.”

But her Christian faith, as well as her desire for justice and peace, helps her endure the pain. According to her husband, she hopes that by calling for her own rights and by exposing her own suffering, she can help “give the world a clear picture of Chinese society... to promote the progress of the society.” ●



RESOURCECENTER

▶ **Amnesty International**
amnesty.org

▶ **Human Rights in China**
hrichina.org

▶ **Human Rights Watch**
hrw.org

▶ **A Safe World for Women**
asafeworldforwomen.org

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DONNAKARAN
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AUNG SAN SUU KYYI

Photographer
Christian Holst
captures Burma's
Voice of Freedom
on the day of her
release and the
days following





“ The only real prison is fear,
and the only real freedom
is freedom from fear. ”



In November 13, 2010 the barriers came down outside the house of Burma's Daw Aung San Suu Kyi and the leader of Burma's democracy and human rights movement became a free woman at last. As she emerged from her home, she was greeted by several thousand jubilant supporters who gathered to celebrate what her release could mean for the future of their country.

Aung San Suu Kyi has embodied the democratic dreams of her people since 1988, when she became involved in politics, joined popular demonstrations, and helped establish the National League for Democracy (NLD) political party. When Suu Kyi's party won the 1990 elections in a landslide victory, Burma's ruling Junta held onto its power through force. As a result, she's spent almost 15 of the last 20 years under house arrest.

Despite years of isolation, Aung San Suu Kyi's popularity, her symbolic power, and the salience of her message has never faded for the

people of Burma. And she, in turn, has not forgotten them.

Over the years, Suu Kyi has become a global symbol of courage, resilience, and unflagging commitment to democracy. Her release had been urged by governments, demanded in letter writing campaigns from human rights organizations, and prayed for in candle light vigils around the world. It was a moment Burma's junta had resisted for years, inventing new excuses to extend the term of her imprisonment. The day she stepped foot outside the walled compound she called home was covered extensively in international media. It became etched in the hearts of her supporters who have waited so long for good news.

But it was also a moment that came and went. On the surface, there have been few substantive changes in the months following her official release from house arrest and her true freedom remains in question.

Suu Kyi has been able to visit with her two sons and venture outside her home; but she hasn't ventured far. Her release came



just six days after what has been widely deemed an illegitimate election that only further solidified the Junta's power. Her party abstained from the election in protest and holds no representation in the current government. Over time, Burma's democracy movement has become weakened and fragmented. And despite Suu Kyi's release, in Burma, some 2,200 political prisoners remain behind bars. The regime is as repressive as ever.

Perhaps freedom and captivity look so similar on the outside because Aung San Suu Kyi has been free all along. Perhaps it is a sign that this struggle was never about imprisonment or votes or public symbolism or political maneuvering. Her power was never something the Junta could take away.

She is widely known as "the Lady," a term of endearment that captures her grace and dignity. She is a symbol of principled nonviolence. Czech leader Vaclav Havel has called her an

outstanding example of the power of the powerless. Desmond Tutu has called her "a lady of great moral courage." But Daw Aung Suu Kyi is equally characterized by her levity, her warm smile, her enduring humanity under conditions of oppression, and her devotion to her Buddhist faith—a devotion she says got her through her years of detainment.

Now, as a free woman, she has been surveying farmers, students, mothers—the heart of Burma—to hear their concerns. She is reconnecting with her country's people—people she never truly lost touch with despite house arrest.

If despots of the world aren't yet shaking in fear at this reserved, understated 66-year-old woman, they should be. With the same quiet control and courage that characterized her years in confinement, she is nourishing and revitalizing the spirit of a strong, united movement. ●

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...ရေး...ဘာဝင်ဆန်





“ We will surely get to our destination if we join hands. ”



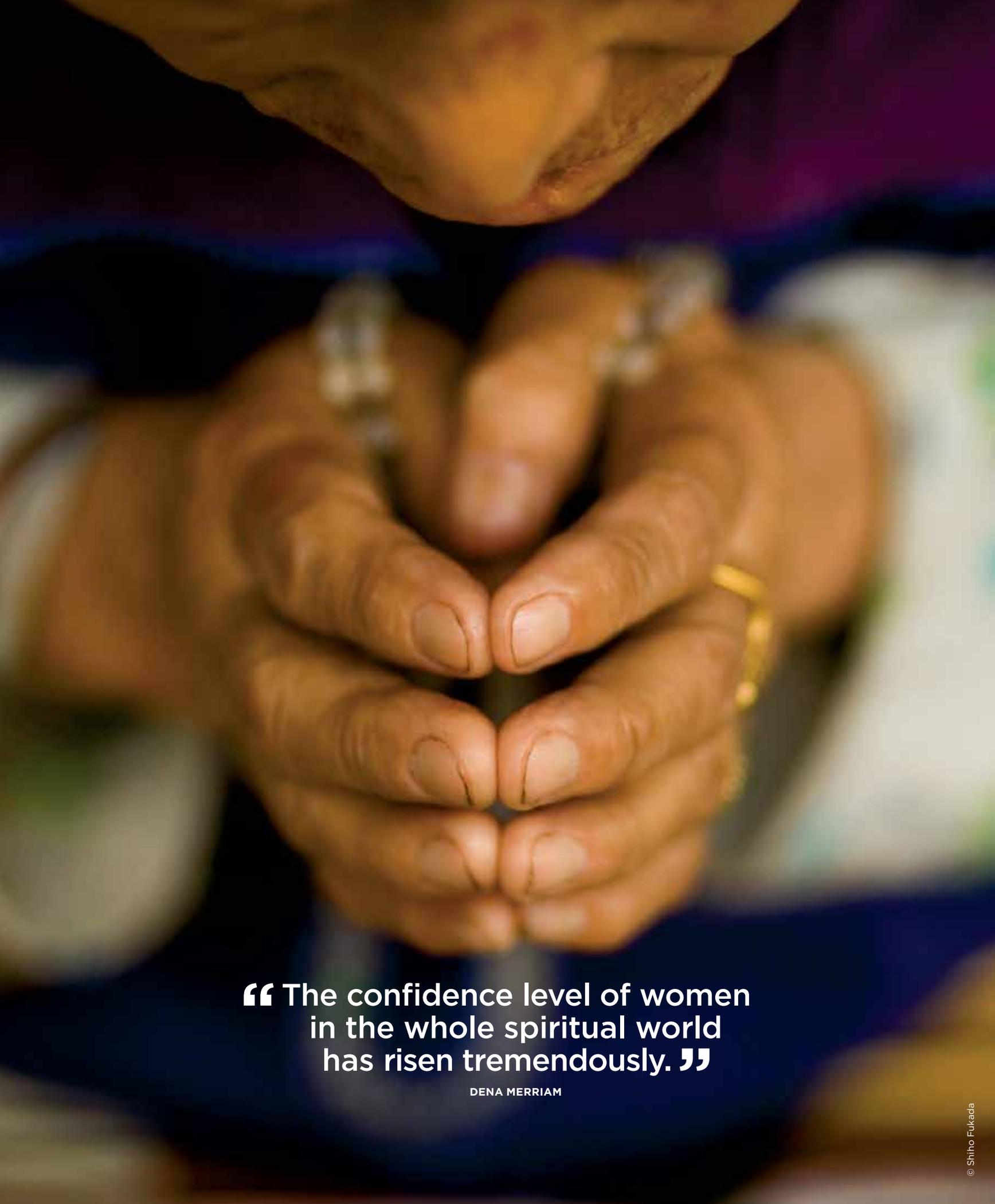
RESOURCECENTER

Learn more about Aung San Suu Kyi and Burma's democracy movement at:

▶ **Burmese Women's Union**
womenofburma.org

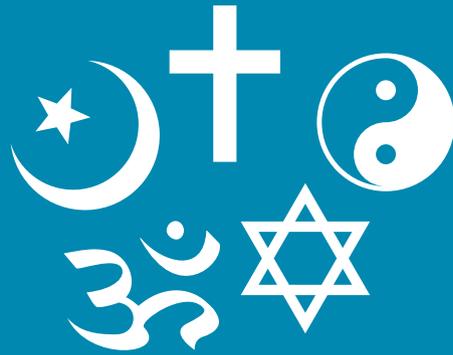
▶ **US Campaign for Burma**
uscampaignforburma.org

🌐 Join PulseWire at worldpulse.com/pulsewire to connect with women on Burma's front lines



**“ The confidence level of women
in the whole spiritual world
has risen tremendously. ”**

DENA MERRIAM



WOMEN TRANSFORMING FAITH

Women are leading a global spiritual evolution

For one historic moment in late August 2000, spiritual leaders from every corner of the globe came together to re-imagine the role faith can play in creating a peaceful world. There were high-level delegates from the Vatican and indigenous spiritual leaders from all over the world. Israeli Chief Rabbi Meir Lau attended along with Grand Muftis from Syria and Bosnia. Reverend Jesse Jackson was there. The Dalai Lama, absent due to pressure from China, sent representatives. The 2,000 participants of the Millennium World Peace Summit represented diverse nations and religions, but most had at least one thing in common: They were men.

When one of the organizers, Dena Merriam, wondered why only a handful of women were invited to help set the spiritual agenda for the next millennium, she was told women leaders were too difficult to find. “We

had to convince people why these voices mattered,” she told World Pulse.

Merriam and other women who were sidelined at the summit decided it was time to take action. They formed the Global Peace Initiative of Women and immediately set to work applying their spiritual backgrounds to address issues like the Palestinian/Israeli conflict.

“Women are not waiting to be given the mandate,” Merriam said, adding that she’s witnessed a sea change in the religious landscape over the last decade.

World Pulse has noticed it too. There’s a shift that’s taking place in congregations, synagogues, mosques, and diverse sites of worship across the world, and women are at its center. They’re leading a spiritual renaissance, assuming roles traditionally reserved for men, and revitalizing institutions that have long excluded and marginalized women’s leadership.

Reaching the Tipping Point

National and global surveys have shown that women, across geography and faiths, are more likely to be religious than men, but they've also long been invisible at the highest levels of religious leadership. In many instances, women are officially barred from leadership roles. Little by little, this is starting to change.

Maureen Fiedler, author of *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling*, has interviewed women leaders the world over and sees a “tipping point” in many faith traditions that has largely gone under the radar. She asserts that gender equality has risen gradually over the last 40 to 50 years and is now becoming an accepted norm.

“Now you have women who are highly regarded as spiritual leaders,” said Merriam, “and it is not unusual to see women in the west as bishops and rabbis.” In 2006 Bishop Katharine Jefferts Schori became the presiding bishop and primate of the Episcopal Church. In the same year, Dr. Ingrid Mattson was elected as the first female president of the Islamic Society of North America. In Malaysia, two women were recently appointed to a Syariah court, an institution that men have historically presided over exclusively. Women in several Asian countries with Theravada Buddhist traditions have revived the practice of ordaining female monks, called *bhikkunis*. And in the US, the number of women senior pastors has increased from 5% in 1999 to over 10% today.

Dr. Amina Wadud became one of the world's first female imams, and she set off a chain reaction of women leading prayer services globally. “Now women are leading prayers all over in Muslim majority and minority countries,” she said. “The point is not to make it a sensation but the norm.”

While the changes at the top have been incremental, Fiedler suggests that the effect is even more dramatic when you look at the grass-roots level. Women, she says, are now “leading theologians and scripture scholars; prolific writers in the field of spirituality; prominent activists for social justice, peace, and ecological sanity; leaders in forging positive interfaith relations; and prominent journalists in religious media.”

“The trend that I see emerging is that the confidence level of women in the whole spiritual world has risen tremendously,” echoes Merriam.

Change at a Cost

However, many of these gains come at great personal sacrifice for women who are pioneering change. Religious institutions have a history of bullying women into toeing the line, using the weight of their moral—and in some cases legal—power against them.



“Faith and social change go together.”

KATHARINE RHODES HENDERSON

In the Catholic Church, women are denied the right to be ordained as priests, but the organization Roman Catholic Womenpriests is pushing that boundary by helping women enter the priesthood. But once ordained, women are automatically excommunicated from the Catholic Church. After female priest Janine Denomme died of breast cancer, she was even denied burial at the church she had attended for years.

Israeli activist Anat Hoffman leads Women of the Wall, a group of Jewish women who challenge Orthodox restrictions, like the ban on women reading from the Torah at the Western Wall in Jerusalem. Hoffman has been arrested for carrying a Torah scroll to the Western Wall.

Fundamentalist Islamic leaders have launched death threats against female imam Amina Wadud. In 2000, the Mormon Church excommunicated Margaret Toscano for suggesting that the prophet and founder of her religion, Joseph Smith, would argue for women to have priesthood authority. Other leaders have faced more subtle, but equally painful attacks against their character.

Part of the Problem, Part of the Solution

None of the leaders World Pulse spoke with denied that countless assaults on women's rights

have been carried out—and continue to be carried out—in the name of religion. As the victims of many of faith's ugliest moments, women have born witness to the shortcomings of religious and spiritual communities, which often mirror the patriarchy of their secular counterparts.

But the visionaries we interviewed believe that religion can also become part of the solution.

While religious bodies are notoriously slow to change, they have undeniable sway over public consciousness. Some observers believe that religious leadership could be key to delivering what national governments, international treaties, and trillions of accumulated aid dollars have all mostly failed at—bringing peace and prosperity to the world's 7 billion people.

Because of the potential for divisiveness, the topic of religion is often avoided in fields of international development and social change. And yet a recent Gallup poll shows that 87% of the world's population holds religious beliefs of some kind. Many activists are recognizing the powerful opportunities to leverage people's most deeply held values and strong spiritual communities for lasting and powerful impact.

“For me, faith and social change go together,” scholar Katharine Rhodes Henderson, who wrote the book *God's Troublemakers: How Women of Faith are Changing the World*, told World Pulse.



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© Suzanne Lee

“Women have always been driven by their faith, from the women’s suffrage to the anti-poverty movements of the 19th century.

“When you look around the world at women in the Middle East now who are fighting for their freedom, some of them are very much motivated by their religious traditions. I am also thinking of the women of Liberia, Muslim and Christian women, who worked together to protest the war in their country and eventually brought the rebels to the peace table and made sure that [president] Charles Taylor was deposed.”

“We need a deep spiritual overhaul,” says Dena Merriam, and she believes that women’s outsider status throughout religious history uniquely positions them to lead this movement. “In a way not having institutional leadership was a blessing,” she says, “because once you rise to positions like a chief rabbi or cardinal you are charged with defending positions.”

Rhodes Henderson agrees, and calls the many women who are leading outside of traditional religious structures “spiritual entrepreneurs.”

“When women do not find spaces in existing structures,” she said, “they create organizations of their own that reflect their values.”

Female imam Wadud, herself a spiritual entrepreneur, believes that when women define Islam, it is more inclusive. “There has been an argument

in Islam of choosing between human rights or Islam. The Islamic women’s movement said, ‘Why do we have to choose? We can have them both.’”

The Long Haul

Women have especially made their mark in the interfaith movement—an effort to unite people across faiths for global action. Women are at the helm of faith-based nonprofit organizations that serve multi-faith communities; they are key thinkers and scholars envisioning more peaceful societies; and they are engaged in direct peace-building efforts. Merriam says she has seen women of diverse religious backgrounds find common causes, especially when it comes to issues related to children. When this subject is broached, she says “the universal mother comes out.”

Karen Armstrong, a bestselling British author, religious scholar, and unifier has won recent acclaim for her bold “Charter for Compassion,” uniting people from all faiths to rally around shared moral priorities and foster greater global understanding and peace. Just shy of 100,000 signatories—a number that includes the names of numerous religious figures—the Charter declares all world religions have one common denominator: an emphasis on compassion.

Armstrong imagines a world where “the voice

of extremism can be drowned out by compassionate voices. If we made the Charter the center of our world’s agenda, and all the world’s religious people can come together on this, we could turn the world around.”

As women around the world work to turn this vision into a reality, many are looking within themselves for the strength to carry on the struggle.

“Justice issues are not solved overnight,” says Rhodes Henderson. “One of the important ingredients that religious faith gives us is the faith to sustain very hard work for the very long haul. And it will take the long haul to solve the world’s problems.” ●

RESOURCECENTER

Learn more about women and faith at:

- ▶ **The Global Peace Initiative of Women**
gpiw.org
- ▶ **Interfaith Voices**
interfaithradio.org
- ▶ **Roman Catholic Womenpriests**
romancatholicwomenpriests.org
- ▶ **Women of the Wall**
womenofthewall.org.il
- ▶ **Charter for Compassion**
charterforcompassion.org

SEVEN SPIRITUAL LEADERS

As women step into leadership roles in spiritual communities across the globe, they're making huge waves in the areas of peace, equality, and interfaith dialogue. But more often than not, their messages are comfortingly simple. These spiritual heroines are just a handful of the powerful women who are guiding us to a better world.



The Renegade Nun
Joan Chittister

“If the people will lead, eventually the leaders will follow.”

ABOUT JOAN CHITTISTER

Sister Joan Chittister is one of the most outspoken advocates for women's ordination and leadership in the Catholic Church and one of the Church's most ardent leaders of social justice causes. A prioress for Benedictine Sisters of Erie, Pennsylvania for 12 years, Chittister's incorporation of feminism, ecology, human rights, and peace into her theology has drawn criticism from some quarters—including the Vatican. With an undaunted commitment to her causes, she has weathered controversy and brushed off attempts to silence her. And she has created a community around an intrepid vision. When Vatican officials forbade Chittister from attending a conference on women's ordination, her Benedictine Sisters of Erie stood behind her to support her decision. Today, she is a sought-after Christian guide and independent voice of conscience.

SPEAKING FOR THE SILENCED

Chittister advocates on behalf of those who have been silenced within religion and society. Until religious and political institutions change, she continues to appeal directly to the hearts and minds of individuals. She has authored over 40 books and has penned a bi-weekly column in the *National Catholic Reporter* since 2003. As a public voice, she leads global religious reflections on current events. And she participates widely in interfaith initiatives, contributing to an evolving vision of a world where people of all religions and backgrounds stand together as equals. In place of a God of divisions and hierarchies, Joan Chittister has devoted her life to an understanding of a God that brings people together.

benetvision.org

2



The Hugging Mother Amma

“ We are all beads strung together on the same thread of love. To awaken this unity—and to spread to others the love that is our inherent nature—is the true goal of human life. ”

ABOUT AMMA

Can a hug change the world? How about 30 million of them? That is the number of embraces Amma is said to have given her followers, who line up wherever she goes to experience the warmth of her loving embrace. Mata Amritanandamayi, an Indian spiritual leader widely known as “Amma,” meaning “mother,” found her spiritual calling at a young age. She was enthralled by her Hindu religion and, to the chagrin of her family, she began attracting spiritual seekers to the family home as a teenager. Amma’s hugs are part of her spiritual practice, which views love as the root of action, and physical embrace as a basic expression of human love from which we nurture compassion for the world. Along with her famous embraces, Amma’s joyful laughter and original renditions of devotional songs have inspired millions.

LOVE IN ACTION

Amma teaches that expressions of love naturally lead to actions that will end humanity’s suffering. Her loving vision for the world led her to create hospitals, educational institutes, temples, environmental projects, as well as multiple programs for social welfare. She has also inspired hundreds of her followers to create similar programs, including food and clothing banks, disaster relief efforts, medical camps, and orphanages.

amma.org

3



The Visionary Elders International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers

“ Women united in close circles can awaken the wisdom in each other’s hearts. ”

ABOUT THE GRANDMOTHERS

Dedicated to reviving ancient ways and wisdom to heal a planet out of balance, the International Council of Thirteen Indigenous Grandmothers is a unique alliance of spiritual leaders hailing from the US, Gabon, Nepal, Brazil, Nicaragua, Mexico, and Tibet. The grandmothers came together for the first time in 2004, joining forces for “prayer, education, and healing for our Mother Earth, all her inhabitants, all the children, and for the next seven generations to come.” They view the council as the fulfillment of a prophecy that will usher in a new world. They live out this calling by visiting each other’s communities, one at a time, forming a prayer circle around the globe.

THE NEXT GENERATION

The grandmothers come together at these gatherings to pray and transmit wisdom to future generations, and their work holds a special focus on children and education. The members of the council draw on their sacred roles as grandmothers, their combined 900 years of life experience, and their position as bearers of ancient teachings to apply old solutions to new struggles against modern warfare, environmental destruction, and greed. With their grandchildren and great-grandchildren always in mind, the grandmothers are lighting a path towards a better future.

grandmotherscouncil.org

4



© Ruth Fremson | The New York Times

The Voice of Unity
Daisy Khan

“ We are all different rivers leading into the same ocean, and the ocean represents God Almighty. ”

ABOUT DAISY KHAN

After 9/11, the US public and international community were quick to define Islam and its adherents. Suddenly, architectural designer Daisy Khan found herself a spokesperson for her religion, pressured to answer for women shot in soccer fields, whose noses and ears were cut off, girls forced to marry middle-aged men—all in the name of Islam. She was compelled to act and founded WISE—the Women’s Islamic Initiative in Spirituality and Equality—a social justice movement led by Muslim women. And later she became the executive director of the American Association for Muslim Advancement. Both organizations bring people together to strengthen peaceful and moderate Islamic movements. Her movement is connecting Muslims within and across borders, giving them the tools to empower themselves, counter extremism, and strengthen their identity as a peaceful and tolerant religion.

LAYING FOUNDATIONS FOR PEACE

Perhaps drawing from her architectural background, Daisy Khan has demonstrated that strong structures come from a strong foundation. Khan reports successful shifts in thinking, like a WISE program that trains imams in women’s rights. One Afghan imam who went through the program refused to marry a 13-year-old girl against her will. He used the occasion to give a passionate sermon against forced marriages. Khan was involved in the planning of the much maligned Park51 Islamic Center near Ground Zero, and was caught off guard by the fervor of backlash against its proposal last year. Not deterred, she took the opportunity to engage with the wider community, and continues to take difficult subjects head on, build community, and cheer on alliances across faiths.

asmasociety.org

5



© Linda Ward

The Global Healer
Cynthia Jurs

“ It is our collective awakening that is going to bring us into a new era of enlightened activity. ”

ABOUT CYNTHIA JURs

In 1990, a 106-year-old lama in Nepal gave Cynthia Jurs a mission that would become her life’s work: Journey to sites of great need and bury earth treasure vases consecrated by Buddhist monks and filled with prayers and healing offerings. Twenty years into this mission, Cynthia Jurs and her organization, the Earth Treasure Vase Global Healing Project, continue to bury vases around the world. In each site they form communities of intention for a harmonious and balanced future, transform prayers into real world alliances for peace, and inspire action with the message that each person is her own treasure vase filled with gifts and offerings for the planet’s healing.

ACUPUNCTURE FOR THE PLANET

Twenty-three of the original 30 vases have been buried in sites across the world. Jurs and her organization have sent them out in every direction, from Hiroshima to Arctic Alaska, to the tops of mountains and to the sources of the Amazon and Ganges rivers. In Papua New Guinea the planetary Coral Reef Foundation along with pilgrims from the Global Healing Project even buried a vase at the bottom of the ocean. “Each location is like an acupuncture point on the body of the Earth,” she says, “and each vase is like a needle bringing balance and healing.” In 2009, they buried a vase in Liberia, a country recovering from 14 years of civil war. The local community came together in a ceremony to call on their ancestors for guidance. Some 500 locals came together to bury the vase at the base of a kola tree in one of the regions most scarred by fighting. One ex-combatant turned peacebuilder has been so inspired by the practice that he has begun to study meditation. While the ritual is rooted in a specific Buddhist practice, it has grown into an international and interfaith prayer for global healing.

earthtreasurevase.org

6



The Equality Defender
Zainah Anwar

“ I believe in a God that is kind, just, and compassionate. Anything done in the name of Islam must be just and compassionate. ”

ABOUT ZAINAH ANWAR

Zainah Anwar became an accidental religious scholar when Malaysia’s political and legal interpretations of Islam contradicted the compassionate religion she grew up with. She was raised as part of her country’s Muslim majority amongst Buddhists, Christians, and Hindus, in a family that embraced Malaysia’s ethnic and religious plurality. She became outraged as she watched women with a claim to equal rights under Malaysia’s constitution fall subject to Syariah (Islamic) laws that made them powerless in family law cases. In 1988, Anwar joined other Muslim feminists to create a coalition, Sisters in Islam, which she led for over 20 years.

FEMINIST SYARIAH

Sisters in Islam argues that the Syariah laws women are subjected to in Malaysia and other Muslim countries are not God’s laws, but laws created by men in power who interpreted the Koran to serve themselves. Sisters in Islam’s solution? Push legal reform and educate the public. But not everyone is happy with what they are doing. “When we protest, they shut us up, saying we have no authority to speak about Islam,” wrote Anwar in an *International Herald Tribune* column. One group even took Sisters in Islam to court challenging their right to use “Islam” in their name. Other authorities, both religious and secular, have started to pay attention to their message. Sisters in Islam has passed amendments to Malaysia’s Islamic family law, and they’ve even drafted their own version of the code that promotes equality. As they continue to lobby the government, Zainah Anwar and Sisters in Islam provide a powerful platform for Muslim women to enter the public sphere and to draw on their beliefs to create a just and democratic society.

sistersinislam.org.my

7



The Bridge Builder
Venerable Mae-Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta

“ If a woman develops herself spiritually, she will possess the energy to move the universe. ”

ABOUT MAE-CHEE SANSANEE STHIRASUTA

Runway model to Buddhist nun might not be an obvious career path, but at the age of 27, Thailand’s Mae-Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta swapped her designer duds for white monastic robes and dedicated her life to spiritual awakening. Her path to enlightenment has modeled spiritual leadership roles for Buddhist women and put her on the forefront of global peace and interfaith initiatives. Mae-Chee Sansanee is the founder of the Sathira-Dhammasathan Center, a women’s meditation center and place of learning in Bangkok. She is also a co-chair of the Global Peace Initiative of Women, an alliance of women spiritual leaders working to create unity among religions and peoples around the world.

NURTURING NONVIOLENCE

Through the Dhamma center, Mae-Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta has created a sanctuary for inner and outer peace. Her teachings in nonviolence aim to awaken human potential for peaceful coexistence, and her center has become a refuge for young mothers and girls escaping prostitution. Mae-Chee is part of a growing movement that acknowledges the primacy of peace and nonviolence within all religions. Through the Global Peace Initiative of Women, Mae-Chee Sansanee Sthirasuta works to bring nonviolence principles into the wider world with coordinated, women-led, interfaith cooperation.

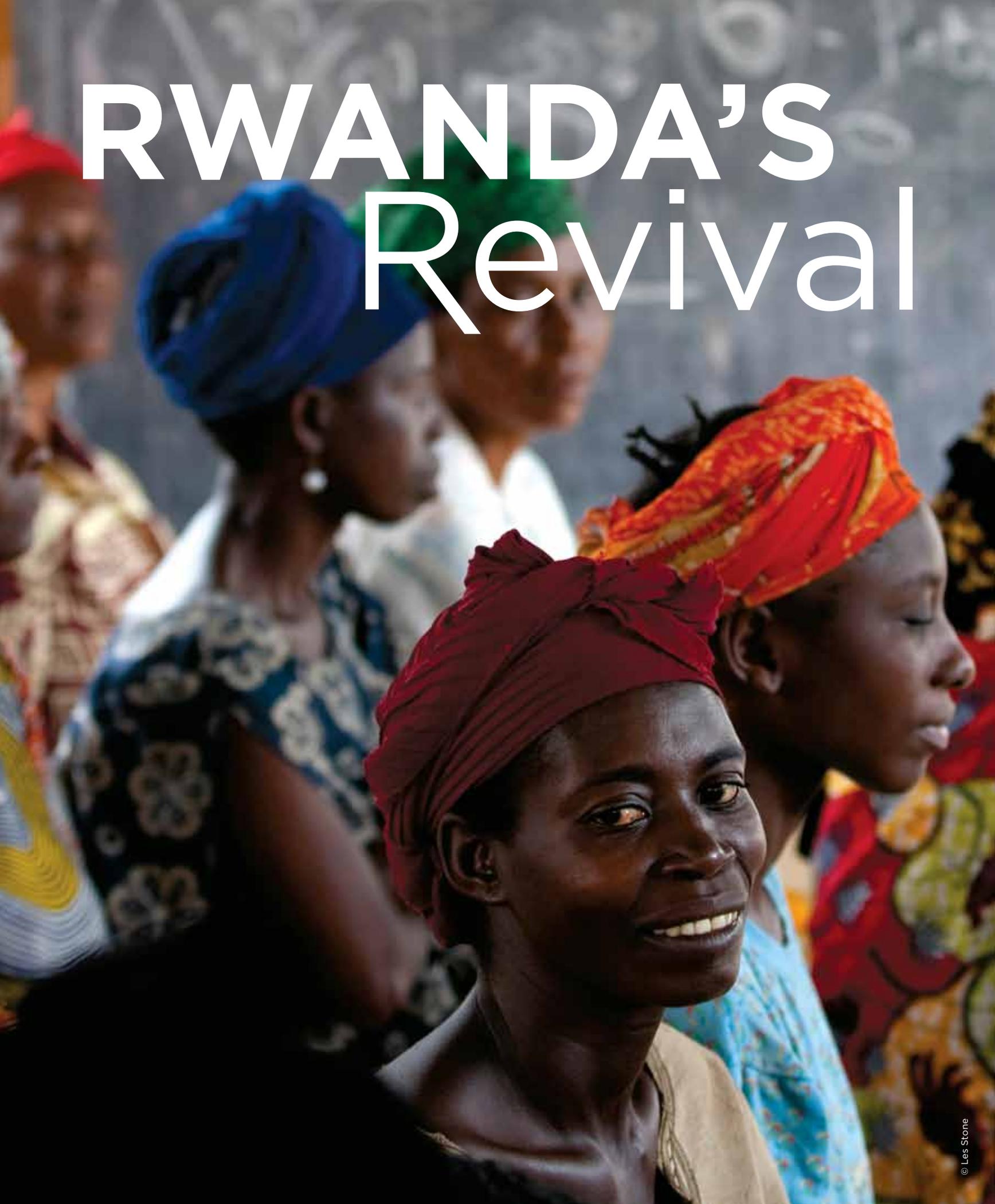
sathira-dhammasathan.org

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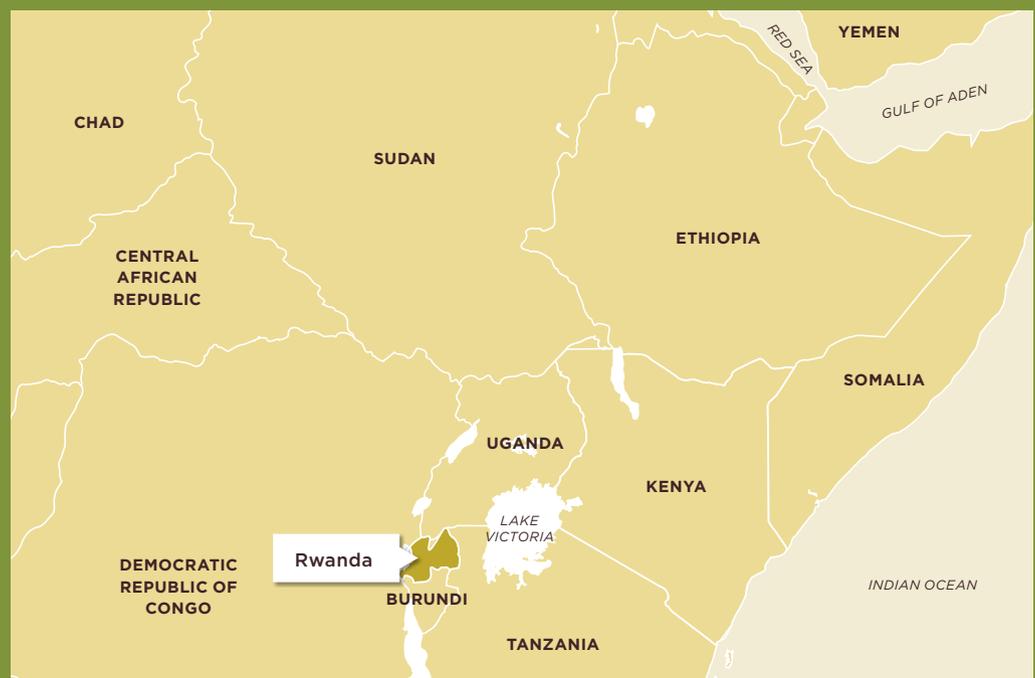


RWANDA'S Revival

A group of Rwandan women are shown in profile, looking towards the right. They are wearing vibrant, colorful headwraps in shades of blue, red, orange, and maroon. Their clothing features intricate patterns and colors, including black, white, blue, and yellow. The background is a textured, greyish wall. The overall mood is one of cultural pride and community.



It's been 17 years since more than 500,000 Rwandans were killed in the horrific genocide of 1994. Today, this tiny East African nation has become a poster child for women's rights. How have they done it? And what more needs to be done? World Pulse journalist Anne-christine d'Adesky reports.



DEFYING HISTORY:

Rwanda's Women Remake a Nation

BY ANNE-CHRISTINE D'ADESKY

KIGALI – *Don't blink*, warn locals to a newly returning visitor, only half-joking, or you might miss it. The “it” in question refers to the quietly bustling capital city of Rwanda itself, or a tall smoky blue-glass building towering over a local neighborhood of corrugated rooftops and mud-earth houses. From high above, a shiny black octopus steadily extends its reach across Kigali, its tentacles newly paved roads replacing rocky red-earth ones. “Things are changing so fast here in Rwanda,” laughs Cecile, a student and budding tour operator. “We hardly recognize it ourselves. Kigali is becoming modern—a city of the future. Even us who live here can't keep track of how much is changing.”

Welcome to Rwanda. Blink, then look again. There, standing tall amid the mid-morning chaos of a *rond-point*, or traffic roundabout, is a young uniformed policewoman calmly halting an impatient mini-bus driver. There, behind the thick glass teller window at the local Banque Populaire du Rwanda, is a smart-looking older woman in a modern African-cut suit who quietly counts out a thick wad of blue-green *mille-francs* bills. Her customer, an elderly woman in a traditional dress and head wrap, looks on with quiet satisfaction. The money represents a week's take—sales of fruit and cassava grown in a small plot an hour away by bus. With it, she'll buy meat, cover school fees for her grandchildren, and soon, add electricity to her home. She is uneducated and poor, and like many here, a genocide widow. But she can sign her own name, and does, carefully and proudly, next to the number of her newly opened bank account.

“It's our duty to survive and to assure this never happens again. That means we have had to participate. We have become leaders.”

ASSUMPTA UMURUNGI | AVEGA

All across the Land of a Thousand Hills, as Rwanda is known, scenes like this one play themselves out daily, reflecting the profound, ongoing changes and progress for women that have made Rwanda—once known only for the genocide of 1994—a global poster child for women's rights. The nation is lauded by global leaders for many other achievements, too: in peacemaking, sustainable development, agriculture, healthcare, education, and communications. Tiny Rwanda, a country in ashes less than 20 years ago, boasts a fiber optic network that connects city residents with coffee farmers in its high hills and pygmy communities who share the border forests with gorillas. *Coffee, gorillas, genocide, decent cell phone service*—Rwanda today is a global tourist magnet, a Phoenix-like success story, and everywhere one looks, women are a part of it.

“I think it's true to say that women have been extraordinary because of the huge burden they had to carry after the genocide,” said Dr. Agnes Binagwaho, a physician who's also Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Health, speaking at a February forum on the progress of women in Rwanda. “Women here have had a choice to be an active part of the rebuilding of the country and the reconciliation. And it was ordinary women and leaders, in the towns and rural areas—everyone participated.”

She's quick to add that many hands joined the gender revolution, including men in the post-genocide Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) leadership. “We have not done this alone,” she adds. “It has involved all sectors of society, including the government and the President. The national policies have supported women to play a more active role.” Dr. Binagwaho also credits First Lady Jeanette Kagame for serving as a strong role model and for her advocacy on behalf of women, genocide and rape survivors, orphans, and people with HIV/AIDS. “I admire the First Lady a lot,” she added. “She's very dynamic and intelligent and has done a lot for women here and for Africa.”



Rising from the Ashes

With husbands and sons murdered, women and girls made up 70% of the post-genocide population, many Tutsi women who had previously done only “women’s work”—farming, trading, caring for children. The door to public life swung open, and women joined the workforce and the government at all levels: as police, soldiers, engineers, builders, taxi, and bus drivers—all things once socially taboo. They also took roles in the judicial system, and it was there that the revolution began.

The genocide illuminated pre-existing inequities that made it harder for women survivors to recover. Widows discovered that they had also lost the right to their family property, since property laws did not allow women or girls to inherit. Others found that male relatives demanded they serve as “second wives.” Still others, now sick with HIV contracted from rape, found themselves evicted from family homes or lands. “It became clear to us that we had to reform the laws to address this discrimination,” said Ingnatienne Nyirarukundu, president of the Rwanda Forum of Women Parliamentarians (FFRP). “That also helped us to strengthen the overall judicial system.”

Today, Rwanda boasts more women in Parliament than any other nation—56%—a huge increase from a below 17% pre-genocide figure. It’s transitional post-genocide government took steps to support women’s participation in decision-making, establishing “women’s councils” and “women-only” elections, as well as a triple balloting system to ensure women occupied a set percentage of seats at the district and local level. It also established a Ministry for Gender and Women in Development, and gender posts at all levels of government and ministries. Today, a national gender framework and gender budgeting are being implemented in line with Rwanda’s Millennium Development Goals and Vision 2020—a national blueprint for growth. Other victories include critical legal reforms related to sexual violence, marital rape, labor rights, property and inheritance, education, and family law.

“We have been able to put equality into the law and our Constitution, at all levels, so that now we have the protections for women,” said Dr. Binagwaho. “If a lot has been achieved, a lot remains to be done at the local level for women to use all the opportunities offered by the legal framework.”

In February, Minister of Gender and Family Promotion Jeanne d’ Arc Mujawamariya welcomed members of the National Women’s Council of Kigali City to review women’s progress since 2004—the 10-year anniversary of the genocide. More women were accessing communal health insurance, microcredit schemes, and income-generation programs, adopting family planning methods, and keeping their children in school—especially girls. “You are heroes because where Rwanda has reached as far as development is concerned, you have been at the helm of it,” MP Yvonne Uwayiseng said, hailing Rwanda’s women.

Global Model—or Exception?

Globally, Rwanda clearly presents a strong case study of the national benefits of empowering women, one others hope to copy. But its unique history also factors heavily into its success—and so does timing. Without the massive tragedy of genocide, which reset the national clock to zero and forced women into new roles and power, would Rwanda have achieved very much for women? After all, the death of so many husbands and sons created the void. More importantly, without women’s vision and influence at all levels, would Rwanda have embraced innovation and reform as it has? Externally, the adoption of international gender reforms like the Convention of the Rights of Women (CEDAW) and later, Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, also influenced Rwanda’s national policies.

Today, Rwanda boasts more women in Parliament than any other nation—56%.

“It’s one of the only positive things we can take from what happened,” said Henriette Byabagamba, a trauma counselor running youth programs for the local Women’s Equity in Access to Care and Treatment Initiative, about the unexpected silver lining of women’s empowerment that resulted from tragedy. But she’s quick to add, “It doesn’t change anything about what we lost. That can never be replaced.”

Extending the Gains

It’s one thing to pass a law, it’s still another to give it muscle. “Up to now, we haven’t been able to engage rural women as much as we want to,” stated Liberate Uwimana, head of Solidarité, one of the many nonprofit groups women set up after the genocide. “That’s still a big piece of work to do. But I do see change, and it is encouraging. The women are mobilizing even in the villages.”

Rural women—and men—make up 86% of the population in this mainly agricultural land. Many are very poor, illiterate farmers who lag behind in the new Rwanda. Away from Kigali’s sparkling skyscrapers, after a dawn spent farming small plots, they sit inside dim village huts, shelling peas or walking long distances over paths to get clean water. The country is decentralizing, giving more resources to the towns and villages, to local leaders. But the real money and power remains highly centralized in Kigali. Many rural women remain unschooled, and, as much as they want to keep their daughters in school, they worry they won’t be able to attend beyond elementary classes. In the villages, health services are still limited, and all the diseases of poverty are found there: malaria, tuberculosis, water-borne diseases—and HIV/AIDS.

“We still have a lot of problems in Rwanda—no one is denying that,” said Assumpta Umurungi, Executive Secretary of AVEGA-Agahozo, one of the first post-genocide widow’s self-help networks. It has chapters in the countryside and over 25,000 members. “Life continues to be very difficult for many members, even though we have been able to help them with psychosocial support and medical care, housing, and income generation programs. Women also help one another. But we still don’t have the housing, and they need



© Lionel Healing | AFP/Getty Images

work. They need food. Many of them are affected by HIV since the genocide.”

At over an hour’s drive from Kigali, in the town of Rwamagana sits the headquarters of AVEGA-Sud, the southern chapter of the organization. It’s an area where a lot of killing took place in 1994. Now, with the noonday sun bright, elderly widows and their few remaining children may be found sitting alone inside darkened homes. Some stay inside to avoid the possibility of running into “a ghost”—a returning neighbor, perhaps released from jail, who, everyone knows, killed members of the survivor’s family.

“The trauma continues,” admitted Umurungi. “So, yes, things have changed, but we still live with this difficult past every single day.”

Shifting Sands

There are other political factors that may also impact how much Rwandan women advance—or speak out. Although President Paul Kagame remains very popular among many Rwandans, he has strong opposition critics who label his rule an authoritarian regime that they say tolerates little dissent and a too-narrow democratic space. As it stands, the political picture in Rwanda remains complex, with an undercurrent of political tension invisible to the passing tourist. Given its recent history, unhealed “divisionism,” and the presence of armed *genocidaires* next door in the Congo, Kagame’s supporters justify his firm hand and limits on open speech.

Redressing History

Many first-time visitors to Rwanda these days have one thing foremost in their minds: the genocide. They have likely read one of the many popular books or watched the 2004 film *Hotel Rwanda*. The scale and detail of horror of this African Shoah leave an indelible mark, even from a distance of 17 years and across oceans. In Rwanda, they find, the genocide has become a grim tourist lure—a subject endlessly presented in various forums. Locals often call it The War, an easier word to say than *genocide*.

For Rwandans, the events of 1994 still serve as a singular reference point and historic yardstick for nearly everything, be it the nation’s or women’s

advances. It courses like an undercurrent through Rwanda’s present society yet remains a subject many wish to move past, wanting Rwanda—and themselves—to be known for something else. Still, one Sunday a month, for years, citizens are required to turn up at the outdoor tribunals called *gacaca* where the crimes of the genocide are reviewed. And every April 6, Rwandans are freshly reminded of the 100 horrific days from April-June 1994, when half of their citizens—ordinary Hutus—were ordered by extremist leaders to systematically hunt and murder their Tutsi neighbors: to kill or be killed. Unlike modern war, machetes were the weapon distributed to the masses.

In all, more than 500,000 Tutsis and moderate Hutus were murdered, and many more were crippled or scarred for life, either physically or mentally. Men and boys were killed first; women and girls were held in rape camps and tortured. When they finally escaped or were liberated, many had HIV, a legacy of this genocide. Of 250,000 women genocidal rape survivors, an estimated 67% contracted HIV, estimated AVEGA.

Today, the images from Rwanda’s genocide remain haunting, time-locked testimonies to horror. What remains of the dead are buried within mass plots outside the big genocide museum in Kigali, or in row upon row of skulls that line the walls of smaller memorial sites, or as parts of bone that poke up among the rubble inside churches that served as killing fields and remain untouched.

Blink then look again. Within the bright metropolis, the past lives and has a future. The young policewoman directing traffic: she is an orphan of the genocide, the only survivor of a once-large extended family, or the eldest of a child-headed household. There are so many war and AIDS orphans in Rwanda. The bank teller: She served in a militia—on one side or the other. She did or experienced things too terrible to recount to her own children or grandchildren and suffers silently as so many Rwandans do, from post-traumatic stress, from itching scars under her fine suit. The uneducated elderly widow: She sold her aging body to feed her grandchildren, since her own children were killed. Now she, too, has HIV.



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Across Rwanda today, in private and public rooms, the healing—and failure to heal—goes on, often out of sight to tourists but painfully visible if one bothers to look or ask.

“In the first years of the genocide, nobody really helped us much,” said Consolata N., an AVEGA widow. “We were so poor and homeless and sick. We decided we had to help ourselves.” She’s explaining how the revolution began for ordinary women like her, who were triply stigmatized when the war ended. They not only lost family, but titles to their homes and animals, due to then-patriarchal inheritance laws. Some were chased away by family members because they had born a child from rape. Others who fell ill with HIV or who became disabled from war wounds resorted to begging. Still others went mad, committed suicide, or fell into profound depression. “Since all of us had suffered from this, we were able to support each other,” added Consolata. “That is what saved us.”

Today, AVEGA is known globally for its advocacy on behalf of widows and survivors with HIV. Of an estimated 250,000 women and girls who survived rape, an estimated three-quarters contracted HIV as a result, AVEGA estimated. Before antiretroviral treatment arrived in Rwanda, many developed AIDS and died. In 2003, AVEGA and other groups sounded the global alarm, pressuring world leaders to help save the survivors and their children, also HIV-positive. Globally, international activists and medical professionals responded, joining leaders like Dr. Binagwaho, AVEGA, Solidarité, and many local NGOs to bring in lifesaving HIV care and drugs.

For genocide and rape survivors, confronting HIV meant confronting how they contracted the virus. That meant reliving the trauma of sexual violence. “Up to then we were learning to die,” recalled Consolata. “After we had to learn to live.”

“We can never forget—it’s our duty to our families and our nation to never forget,” says AVEGA’s Umurungi. “It’s our duty to survive and to

assure this never happens again. That means we have had to participate. We have become leaders.”

HIV-positive women have emerged as outspoken community- and peer-educators and activists, leading support groups, visiting patients’ homes, and spreading the message of HIV prevention. “The most important and biggest progress we’ve made is that our women with HIV have been able to develop a positive quality of life, and understand that having HIV is not the end of the world—that it’s possible to continue living positively,” said Shamsi Kazimbaya, Executive Secretary at the Rwanda’s chapter of the Society of Women and AIDS, or SWAA. “We get there through psychosocial counseling. Secondly, we have to address poverty, so we have an economic program to reinforce their capacity with trainings and small income-generation programs that we help finance. Of course, it’s a process, and our role is mainly advocacy to find the funding and support the women.”

Rwanda’s Girl Effect

Among Rwandan leaders, there’s consensus that education is the critical key to empowering women and girls who can’t advance far without it—especially poor, rural residents. That’s why the government made public education free, and in 2008, rolled out a Girls’ Education Policy. Pre-genocide, Rwandan boys outnumbered school girls 9 to 1. Now both attend primary school in equal numbers—97%—though fewer than 13% of girls attend secondary school. Girls make up 50% of college students.

“Not every woman has benefited in the same way, and that has a lot to do with the lack of education for girls,” said Maria Bwakira, the dynamic in-country director of the new Rwanda Girls Initiative, which just opened the Gashora Girls Academy, the country’s first math and science upper-secondary boarding school for girls. Its first class has 90 girls, and many seek scholarships to attend.

“Education is the key. We have a generation, even two, in Rwanda that did not get it. But for the ones coming up now, we can do something,” said Bwakira.

Over at the new Centre for Gender, Culture, and Development at the Kigali Institute of Education, a modern facility with new computers and a growing library of resources on the women’s movement, the program is “devoted to thinking through the complexities of sex and gender identity.” A first Master of Social Science, Gender and Development class began in January with 50 students—nine of them men, including two from the Rwanda Men’s Resource Center—a new men’s group fighting sexual violence. “We are engaged in consultancies and research—developing a gender audit and baseline, gender policy, and gender action plan for the National University of Rwanda,” reported director Shirley Randall in April, ticking off a long list of activities. She hopes to develop a distance-learning program for teachers studying in rural areas.

Blink, then look again: Next year, or in the future, the young girls at Gashora Academy will return to remote home villages to teach and empower others in “girls clubs” that will dot Rwanda, if Bwakira fulfills her dream. Their brothers may join Randall’s new gender master class, and write a new chapter of men’s growing role in the liberation of women. Like their mothers, and grandmothers, they will defy history. ●



ANNE-CHRISTINE D’ADESKY is a long-time journalist and author who has worked extensively in Rwanda. She is a regular contributor to World Pulse Magazine.

THREE WOMEN, THREE GENERATIONS

How has Rwanda's gender revolution changed the lives of ordinary Rwandan women, across generations? How different are the lives of the grandmothers and mothers who experienced the genocide from the lives of their daughters born after the country's darkest hour? World Pulse spoke to three generations of women in one family to find out.

BY ANNE-CHRISTINE D'ADESKY WITH ADDITIONAL REPORTING BY EMILY SIEDLICK IN RWANDA

THE MATRIARCH Adera Rwanda Bazigaga

At 74, **Adera Rwanda Bizigaga** is clearly the strong matriarch of her large family clan.

A grandmother and mother to 11 children, she greets a visitor wearing a traditional bright yellow dress and colorful head wrap, eager to share her story. Hers is typical of Rwanda's elder generation of women, who were offered one role and future: motherhood.

"We all thought the same," she says. "All the plans were only for boys. For girls the only expectation was that they get married."

Adera was born in 1937, the same year as Juvénal Habyarimana, Rwanda's president from 1973 until 1994, the year his plane was shot down, fanning the genocide. Her family left Rwanda for exile in 1959 during "the first Tutsi genocide," she says, and returned after the events of 1994.

She was among the more fortunate: Her father worked and sent her to a Catholic school. "I wanted to become religious—maybe a nun,"

sing together. And we would always drink milk. Nobody would eat." In Rwanda, a largely agricultural country, cows—and milk—play a central role. Adera still offers visitors to her compound cool glasses of fresh milk.

"We only stayed at home," she says of her girlhood. "Maybe when I got married and had two or three children I was able to travel to see my parents, but then I had to come back." Nor did girls have much choice around marriage. "It was unacceptable for a girl to talk to a boy," she recalls. "A boy would just go and meet the parents to tell them he wanted their daughter. Those who were at school, at least they could write notes to each other. They would say 'I love you,' but they would never meet face to face." Otherwise the parents would come together and arrange for them to get married."

“All the plans were only for boys. For girls the only expectation was that they get married.”

she recalls, grinning. "But my parents didn't give me permission. I really didn't think about my future because my parents were thinking for me."

Her childhood revolved around her home. "We had a very big compound that we would sweep early in the morning, then after that we would bathe," she recalls. "We would make baskets and sometimes we would dance and

Adera married at 16, and right away had children, 14 in all. Three later died. "You were supposed to respect your husband, whether you were educated or not," she says. "We always went by their ideas."

Despite these barriers, she broke the mold, and became a knitter, launching an association to sell sweaters and cover school fees for her



children. Post-genocide, she created an association to help women and orphaned children.

Life today is vastly different. "The way the world works now is that girls have the same rights as boys. Now girls can plan like a man can plan. She can say, 'I will go to school and become someone. I'm going to plan my family; I'm going to plan my future.'"

Looking back at her own life, she is wistful: "Now, if I could have the chance to go back 20 years, I could do so many things. If I was 20 years younger, I would do great things." ●

THE PIONEER

Felicite Rwema



Across Rwanda, **Felicite Rwema** is known by many as “the woman who does football.”

At 53, the mother of four is much more than a leader of women's soccer. She's famous for breaking an important sports barrier for girls and uses soccer to empower girls and to heal and unify her fractured country. She's also been a nurse and successful business owner, and helped pioneer a women's HIV study in Rwanda—the first of its kind in Africa—with women survivors of genocide and rape—“her sisters.”

Born in Uganda, she married in 1980 to a husband who was a soldier in the Defense Forces, and often away. A go-getter, she opened a restaurant to supplement her nurse's salary and pay her children's education, and later, the first beauty salon in post-genocide Rwanda. But a childhood dream pulled at her. Sitting beside her mother for an interview, with two cell phones close at hand, she recalls her extraordinary-ordinary life.

“I used to like sports because my father was a footballer,” she said. “When I was young I used to escort him to go play football, but I was told never to touch the ball, being a girl. In Uganda there were some girls who had female teams—for them it was fine. Because I was older, my generation did not accept [for me] to join them. But I used to follow them.”

Returning to a shattered Rwanda in 1994, she searched for how to help. The answer: soccer. “I tried to look for others and tell them we needed

to start girls' football. They said, ‘No, in our culture, there is no girl who can raise up her leg and go to play football. They are supposed to dance and sing.’ I said, ‘Why not? In other countries women can participate.’”

Two years later, she had created a team of 30 girls and hired a male coach. She later asked the all-male Football Commission for help to go national.

“I said, ‘I'm going to take the teams to each province...to talk about empowering women through sports [and] as a way to talk about unity and reconciliation.’” Soon, others were won over. “They would say, ‘This is incredible!’ Everyone would come to watch, even old men, old women. Then they could talk about the issues of the genocide—why it happened and how it should be stopped.”

A NIKE representative took notice: She won a grant to build a national women's team and launched the Association of Kigali Women Footballers. Then in 2001, she took a three-year break to work with RWISA, a breakthrough women's HIV research study that used her prior medical skills.

Felicite is excited by the Rwanda emerging for her daughters. “Women did not have 100% rights before,” she said. “Even when you looked at sports, it wasn't acceptable for women to play. But as you read the news and watch TV, you see that women are capable of campaigning for the presidency. There is a very big change.”

But there are still social barriers to overcome. “There is still that small cultural thought that if your girl is home, your boy should not wash plates,” she admitted. “It hasn't gone away 100%.” But for women and girls now, she says: “The self-confidence, that self-esteem is now there where it wasn't before.”

As a role model, Felicite hopes to inspire future generations of girls: “I would advise them to participate in every aspect of life. We believe that if you have educated a woman, you have educated a nation. So they need to know they are great in society.” ●

“The self-confidence, the self-esteem is now there where it wasn't before.”

THE NEXT GENERATION

Charlotte Rwema

How are the children's children doing in Rwanda, the generation that did not directly experience the genocide but are shaped by it? Do they feel they have a future within it?

For Charlotte Rwema—Charly—the answer to the second question is a firm, “Yes.” At 22, slender and athletic, Rwema is continuing a family legacy by pursuing her education—and her business dreams. She’s completing her second year of a business management degree at the London School of Business. For her generation, the genocide is not a history to avoid, but a legacy to understand and confront.

Born in Uganda, Charly is Rwandan by nationality, and returned with her family to Kigali in 1994, as the genocide ended. Though very young, she took in everything. “It was a shock—it was horrible,” she recalled. “It was terrible. But

“I used to watch her play all the time. Another was Mariah Carey, because I loved singing. I admired her voice and songs.”

Her interest in sports was also influenced by her soccer-loving mother and an awareness of gender barriers that she had faced. “In my country’s history, women were not very important before the genocide,” she explains. “So I always had the passion to do something as a girl. Not many were playing tennis at the time.”

She was also inspired by Mother Theresa. “I was always amazed by how, at a young age, she felt a calling to serve through helping the poor,” says Charly. “So this always gives me confidence

“The advice I can give to girls of the next generation is that we can’t change what happened in 1994, but as girls we also have the power to determine the future.”

slowly I had to get used to it, to strengthen my friends who were genocide survivors. I wanted to say, ‘We need to bring back the love, and be One’—meaning a united country.

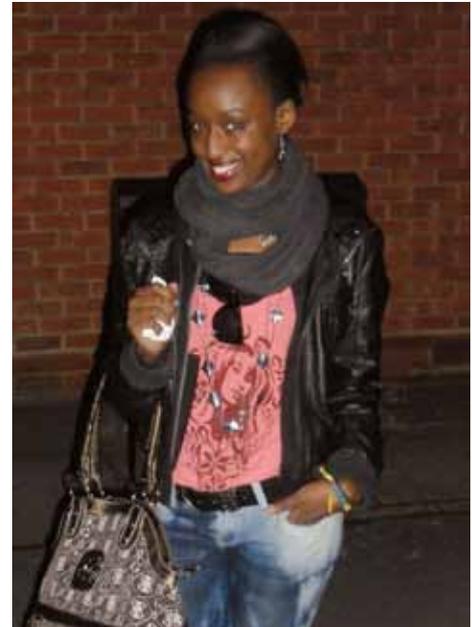
In the new Rwanda, where all citizens are simply “Rwandans”, she moved from a girls-only school to a mixed one. She sang in the choir, swam, enjoyed movies, and reading biographies. Her early role models include Agathe Imana Uwilingiyimana, a mathematics and chemistry teacher who was Rwanda’s first and so far only female prime minister. A moderate Hutu, Uwilingiyimana was among the first to be assassinated by extremist Hutus in the first days of the 1994 genocide. “She is my role model because she didn’t support the genocide, yet she was of the other tribe (Hutu),” states Charly.

Like many young women today, she also found role models outside Rwanda. “Serena Williams—I wanted to be like her,” says Charly.

that age doesn’t matter a lot—it’s just the way we think that makes us who we really want to be.”

Comparing her life and educational opportunities to her mother’s and grandmother’s, she says, “Things have changed. Now girls are doing sciences and it’s normal—before it was a surprise to people. Now girls are getting scholarships to go to the US to study.” Charly is one of those girls. “We are all trying hard to get the best education so we can build our country.”

She cites recent reforms in Rwandan law as proof of progress: “Women can now inherit; women can own property. A girl child and boy child have equal entitlement to inheritance. Generally now, we see each other as equal.” In employment, too, things are looking up: “Women also make up 55% of the workforce, and own about 40% of businesses.” And she adds, in a nod to her mother, “There is at least a women’s football club in every province in Rwanda.”



Still, not all changes are easy to accept. Charly’s mother was unhappy with her single (read unmarried) daughter’s decision to live on her own. “It is still hard for us to discuss our love lives to our parents,” Charly said. “But it’s not like before. I think that’s one of the things parents should work on, because the more you are open to your children, the more they tell you what’s going on.”

That’s how she plans to be. “The advice I can give to girls of the next generation is that we can’t change what happened in 1994, but as girls we also have the power to determine the future. To ensure what happened never happens again.” ●

RESOURCECENTER

Learn more about the organizations represented in this story at:

▶ **Women’s Equity in Access to Care and Treatment Initiative**
we-actx.org

▶ **AVEGA-Agahozo**
avega.org.rw

▶ **Rwanda Girls Initiative**
rwandagirlsinitiative.org

Connect with the Rwandan women’s movement on PulseWire at worldpulse.com

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At least 80 countries criminalize same-sex intimacy, but a growing movement to change that is gaining ground.

BY SARA SCHONHARDT

COURAGEOUS LOVE

Zoie Ha was 21 when she made her first posting on an online forum for Palestinian lesbian women. Organized by the group Aswat, which means “voices,” the online community quickly became a lifeline for Ha, who says that it wasn’t until she was 19 that she even knew the Arabic word for lesbian, “mithlya.” In her insular Bedouin village outside of Nazareth, Israel, being gay isn’t something you talk about, let alone something you act on.

Finding the Aswat forum was life changing. Suddenly, Ha had a group of friends with whom she could honestly and openly discuss their shared experiences as lesbian women in Palestinian society. And yet, each time she visited the site, she worried about what would happen if she were discovered by her brother, whose computer she had to use to access the Internet, or by her father, a devout Muslim passionately opposed to both homosexuality and women accessing information online.

When her father found out that she was visiting the forum, he mistakenly assumed she was talking to boys—and he beat her.

“If my father hit me because of a boy, he’ll kill me because of a girl,” she told World Pulse. “I am sure he would kill me if he found out. Nothing else. He would kill me.”

Last year, desperate for a way out of her father’s house, Ha exchanged marriage vows with a man.

She scoured the Internet and eventually found a gay Palestinian man who lived in Los Angeles and who also faced pressure to wed.

After a few lonely months in Los Angeles, Ha made the difficult decision to leave her husband and go back home this March. Although she is staying only a half hour away from her family, they don’t know that she has returned.

“When I’m walking down the street,” she told oral historian Shimrit Lee, “I don’t take buses. I always have glasses on, I dye my hair, I cover my face with my scarf.” If her family finds out she is no longer living with her husband, she will be forced to again live in her father’s home.

Like many lesbian women around the world, Ha walks a narrow line between the desire to live her life freely, to demand rights and acceptance from her community, and the need for protection and safety. Each time she and her friends log on and shed their disguises to share stories,

resources, and even poetry with each other; they are strengthening their voices and nudging their society toward equality.

A Global Struggle

Currently, at least 80 countries criminalize same-sex intimacy, and those who desire people of the same gender face increasingly harsh punishments ranging from fines to imprisonment. In seven of those nations—Nigeria, Sudan, Somalia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Yemen, and Mauritania—homosexuality is a crime punishable by death.

But even in many countries where there is little threat of legal action, gay and lesbian individuals face persecution in their communities, families, and workplaces. Labeled “unnatural,” “un-Christian,” “un-Islamic,” “un-African,” or “the family secret,” their lives are silently erased from public view.

But now, as a global movement that recognizes sexual orientation as a human right gains ground, and as the Internet opens up new possibilities for connection, women like Zoie Ha are finding power in the realization that they are not alone. They are organizing locally and internationally, creating funding networks, founding advocacy groups, shelters, and support lines. They are connecting to larger movements, sharing information and resources, and helping each other imagine and create a reality in which they might live their lives without fear.

And in some places, activists are making advances toward equality.

This April, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) activists in the Netherlands celebrated

the 10th anniversary of legal gay marriage in their country. Last July, Irish President Mary McAleese ignored protests from senior bishops and signed into law the Civil Partnership Bill, which legally recognizes same-sex relationships and offers couples certain protections, such as pension rights. In June 2010, Iceland's parliament voted unanimously to legalize gay marriage, and Prime Minister Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir and her partner became the first couple to marry under the new law. Argentina and Mexico City followed soon after. In Indonesia, a majority Muslim country with a secular constitution, human rights advocates are working to reform the 1974 Marriage Law that defines marriage as between a man and a woman. And in February, US President Barack Obama declared that the government can no longer defend the constitutionality of a federal law banning same-sex marriage. That law, the Defense of Marriage Act, has been at the heart of peaked debates between conservatives and liberals, since it effectively trumps laws in five states that allow for same-sex unions.

Two Steps Forward, One Step Back

But even as steady progress is made, LGBT human rights activists are finding that it's not just about changing laws. Often when legal protections are in place, they aren't enforced, and in many cases, societies with progressive laws on the books have failed to protect their gay and lesbian citizens.

In Indonesia, where LGBT individuals enjoy a greater amount of freedom and legal protection than many other Muslim countries, a mob of hard-line Islamists stormed a hotel in East Java last year, attacking delegates at an international gay and lesbian conference.

"You can pardon men for being gay because it's just men being naughty," says Ade. "But if you're a lesbian it's a sin. It's not excusable... [We're] invisible here but that's because of the fear we plant in our own hearts," she says, flicking ash from the end of her cigarette.

In Uganda, international pressure has led the legislature to drop anti-gay legislation that would impose the death penalty on those who are HIV positive or who engage in same sex acts, but one of the bill's most outspoken critics, David Kato, was murdered in late January in what human rights activists say was a targeted attack on gay rights campaigners in a country that has ignored discrimination faced by LGBT people. (In October, Kato's photograph appeared on the cover of the Ugandan tabloid *Rolling Stone*, under the headline "Hang Them.")

In South Africa, one of the first countries in the world to legalize gay marriage, and the only African country to do so, a surge in violence against sexual minorities is sending many people back in the closet. Some South African groups have estimated that 10 lesbians are raped or assaulted every week in Cape Town alone.

For gender and HIV/AIDS activist and Positive Women's Network founder Prudence Mabele, the grisly statistics have hit too close to home.

In 2007, she returned from a women's rights conference to the news that one of her colleagues, Sizakele Sigasa, and her partner Salome Masooa, had been brutally raped and murdered because of their sexuality.

As one of the very first African women to go public with a positive HIV status, Mabele has spent much of her career combating the conventional wisdom that AIDS only affects gay, white men.

press statement," she told World Pulse. "It was just too big."

Although Mabele has redoubled her commitment to her work to honor her friends' memory, she remains haunted by the fact that the young men who committed this hate crime, though identified, have never been brought to justice.

Need for Protection

Pouline Kimani, an activist in East Africa who has been attacked and arrested for being a lesbian, says that even in regions where same-sex relationships are not criminalized, LGBT activists require protection.

"Every six months I change houses," Kimani told World Pulse. "I never stay long enough for people to become familiar with me. Sometimes it becomes like you're running, but you don't know what you're running from."

The 25-year-old Kenyan says it's the government, her neighbors, and her distant family who pose the greatest threats in a country that provides a false sense of safety to people in the LGBT community. Relationships between women are legal in Kenya, and there is no law against marriage, but blackmail, extortion, and violent stigmatization are common.

But Kimani isn't giving up. She currently helps nonprofit groups build resources to support the region's burgeoning LGBT network. And she and her friends regularly hold queer parties to raise awareness about HIV and sexual health in the queer community, and she continues to look for ways to combat discrimination.

"Homophobia establishes itself in our hearts," she says. "If we question how we've been socialized to relate to each other then we can start a conversation."

Women out Front

For Aswat, the organization behind the Palestinian online forum for lesbian women that Zoie Ha frequents, activism is not about pride parades and coming out. They are still working to create a language amongst themselves in a society where even talking about sexuality is taboo. As a group, they are breaking taboos very carefully. The faces of members do not appear in the photo section of their website, and their recently published anthology does not reveal the real names of writers. They actively work to hide the identity of members while, as a collective, they struggle to make their rights visible.

In Burkina Faso, lesbian rights activist Mariam Armisen created an online network similar to Aswat's forum, called the Queer African Youth Networking Center. Its purpose is to unite lesbian,

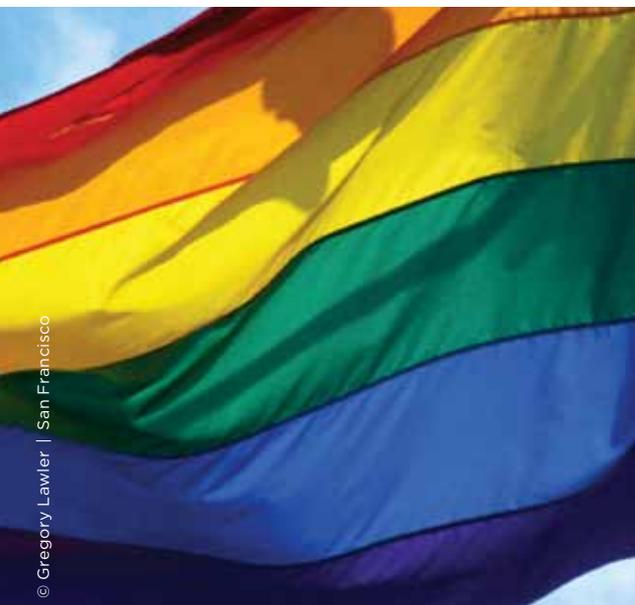
“It becomes like you’re running, but you don’t know what you’re running from.”

POULINE KIMANI

Ade Kusumaningrum, a 39-year-old Indonesian movie publicist, says it is particularly hard for lesbians to be open about their sexuality in her country—in part because, as women, they already face so many challenges. Like many countries, sexual identity in Indonesia is rooted in a culture that views women with sexual desires as promiscuous.

She is used to being the loudest, and sometimes lone, voice for justice. But in this case, she had no words. She couldn't stomach the thought that the very hatred Sizakele had been working against had ended her life.

Every time Mabele glanced at a newspaper she saw her friend and colleague dead, her dreadlocks yanked from her head. "I couldn't even form a



“Lesbians are invisible here—but that’s because of the fear we plant in our own hearts.”

ADE KUSUMANINGRUM | INDONESIA

gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex youth so that they can connect and provide support for each other.

“The image of gay people in Africa is very caricatured,” she said. She founded the center in 2010 to provide what she calls “real” information about gender identity and sex education to youths in Africa. “It was not a choice for me to be open in Burkina Faso. You learn very fast as you come out that you also have to stay in the closet.”

While no law in Burkina Faso criminalizes relationships between two women, Armisen says society does. “Women are often assaulted or sexually abused to rid them of lesbian urges. You get called sir more than ma’am, and it’s very common for men to take a lesbian to church and rape her.”

The level of violence can debilitate those who live amidst it. But like Armisen, Prudence Mabele, the South African activist, wasn’t going to be silenced. After Sizakele and her partner were killed, Mabele threw herself into the details of the memorial service to honor their lives. And today, her activism continues to pay tribute. “If you’re going to nurse your feelings now you are letting the perpetrators victimize the struggle. You’ve got to be out there and do what you have to do,” she told World Pulse. “And then you fall apart later.”

These courageous women are part of a movement of LGBT activists across the globe who are fighting back. And they are finding safety—and success—in numbers.

In December, Luleki Sizwe, a small group of South African activists, started a petition against corrective rape—the rape of lesbian women in

order to “cure” them of their sexuality. In just three months the campaign gained 170,000 supporters from 163 countries, jammed the Ministry of Justice email system, and drew international media attention to their cause.

Backed by global allies, they marched on South African Parliament and successfully convinced the same officials who had for years ignored their pleas to commit to developing an action plan to address hate crimes against the LGBT community.

In Kyrgyzstan, the organization Labrys—named after a double-sided axe used by Amazon warriors and later adopted by lesbians as a symbol of power and independence—provides shelter, employment, and counseling for the LGBT community. As their country, which once outlawed homosexuality under Soviet rule, becomes more democratic, Labrys has started reaching out to LGBT communities in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, where governments still exert strict control over personal freedoms.

Regional publications such as Africa’s *Behind the Mask*, and the Lebanon-based English/Arabic language publication *Bekhsoos*, are giving LGBT activists a collective voice strong enough to counter the silence of local media. And with the protection and support of a globally expanding movement, individuals all over the world are finding the freedom to express their demands for dignity and justice.

Back in Israel, Zoie Ha holds out hope that her family and community will find a way to support her decision to continue her studies and to live independently with her girlfriend. But she knows this best-case scenario isn’t likely. For

Ha, the stress of her double life and the pain of alienation from her family and community are eased only by the knowledge that her Aswat friends—her adopted family—will always be there for her. And as they work together to fight for their basic human rights and freedoms, they are speaking the same language, in a strong and unified voice. ●

RESOURCECENTER

- ▶ **Aswat**
aswatgroup.org
- ▶ **Queer African Youth Networking Center**
wp.gayn-center.org
- ▶ **Behind the Mask**
mask.org.za
- ▶ **Bekhsoos**
bekhsoos.com
- ▶ **International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)**
ilga.org
- ▶ **International Gay and Lesbian Human Rights Commission (IGLHRC)**
iglhrc.org
- ▶ **Astraea Lesbian Foundation for Justice**
astraeafoundation.org

 We asked women around the world to share their views on **LGBT issues** around the world. Go online to read their stories at worldpulse.com/magazine

A close-up, partial view of a woman's face on the left side of the page. She has dark hair, light-colored eyes, and a slight smile. The background is plain white.

Dr.Hauschka

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My Personal Peace-building Journey

Women for Women International's
Judithe Registre on finding balance

For more than a decade, I have worked in war zones helping women who have been traumatized by war, conflict, and poverty find their voices and reclaim their power. My job has taken me to some very challenging spots, including Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo, and Sudan.

In the Congo, I met Maria, a rape survivor who witnessed her daughter bleed to death as a result of being raped. She saw her 3-year-old son get killed as he tried to protect her with his small body, and she watched as her mother burned alive, her flesh disintegrating into nothingness. All of this happened to Maria in just one morning.

“Like many international development workers, I had no concept of self-care.”

Sadly, Maria isn't alone. I've heard countless stories like hers, and I've come to realize that these accounts of rape, torture, and extreme suffering can grip your heart in paralyzing ways. Like many international development workers, I have had no concept of self-care. I have been carrying the emotional stress of the communities I have visited, and I have pushed through my exhaustion because I have felt guilty for needing to rest when there is so much to be done. My emotions were tying me down and preventing me from doing better and achieving more.

My heart cried: I knew that my job was not to be the voice for the voiceless, but to help women

who have been through enormous loss find and use their own voices; their eloquence reminded me every day of why I do the work I do. And yet, in helping others, I have been too busy to pay attention to my own voice and my own needs. I have been so focused on other people's trauma that I've failed to realize that, in a way, my work has traumatized me.

As a global women's movement, particularly for those of us working on issues of violence and torture, we must recognize that vicarious trauma exists. We refuse to acknowledge it because we feel that our suffering pales in comparison to those who have suffered so greatly, with so little.

For me, I did not mean to avoid practicing self-care; the work was a drug for me. Watching women transform their lives and reclaim their own worth and dignity in the face of so much hardship has been inspiring, motivating, and very fulfilling. But it has also kept me from focusing on my own life and my own needs.

Recently, I made a decision to change that. I went on a personal peace-building journey to India to find out how I could become a person who can work for the cause without losing herself. I realized that I needed to make my world a better place before I could make everyone else's world a better place.

While in India, I delved deeply into places within myself that I had never acknowledged. Suddenly I was facing myself and my life without the slightest distraction. It was like being back in my mother's womb, except I had the history of my life thus far in there with me. I have always been active and purposeful, so the art of doing nothing is not an activity I often practice. It was scary; it was uncomfortable. I was at peace for the first time in years. But the healing and enlightenment I expected didn't come—at least not immediately, or in the form I thought it would.

I felt a little thrown that my “ah-ha” moment didn't happen during this trip—and yet, taking time for myself allowed me to realize that there isn't an easy fix for a life out of balance. It takes work.

There is never a perfect time to begin this process of caring for yourself, but it is important that each of us, as a movement, begins to do so. As activists, we must each make a decision to commit to discovering ways to remain balanced while doing this very important work. For me, that balance meant taking time for myself by traveling to a new place to detach and gain perspective, and then finding ways to stay grounded in the here and now through self-love, self-care, and self-acceptance.

What does it mean for you? ●



JUDITHE REGISTRE is the Director of Policy and Outreach at Women for Women International.



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opportunitycollaboration.net

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blogher.com

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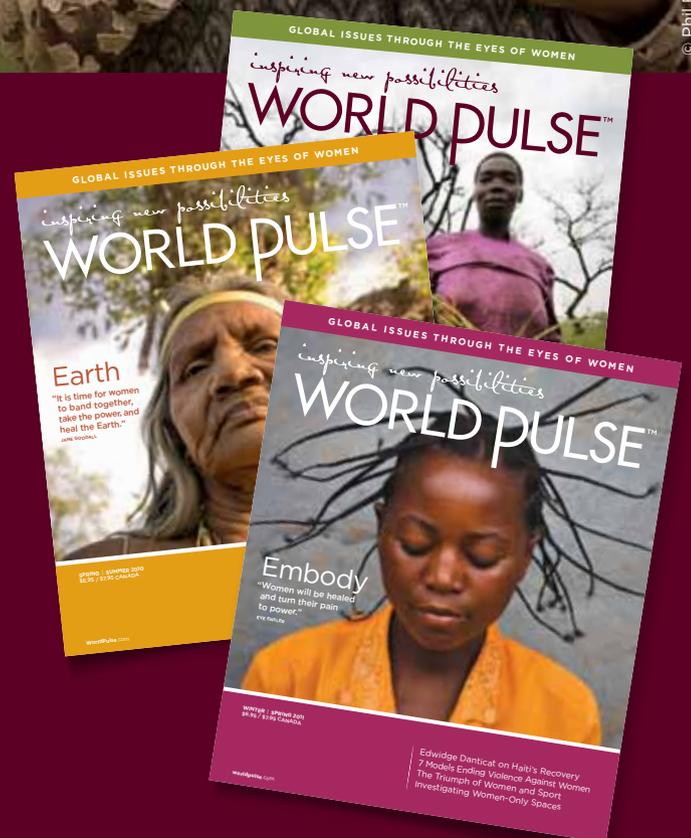
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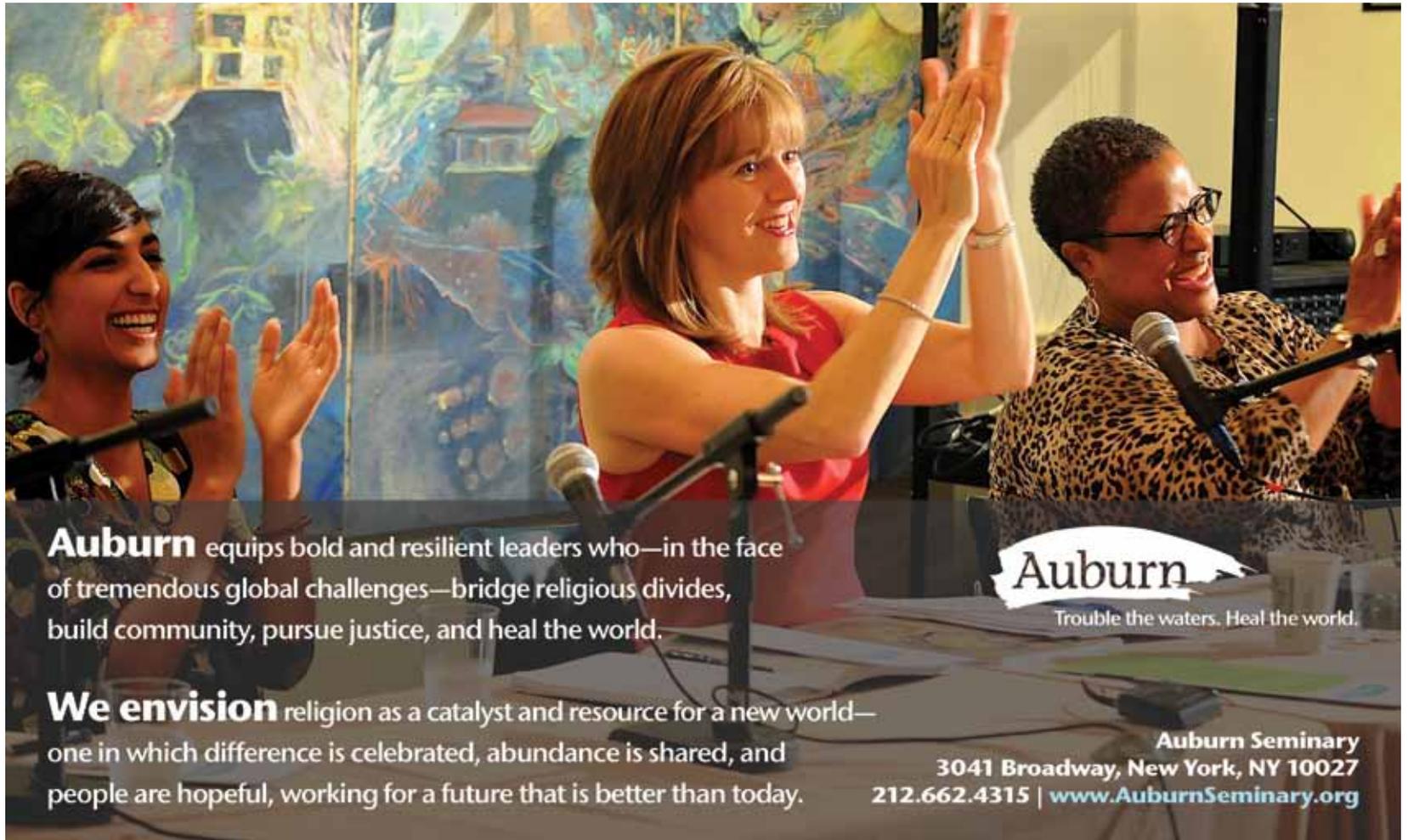
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Special thanks to our Leadership Pulse Network of world leaders and philanthropists, who are on the forefront of our work using new media and communication technology to lift and unite millions of women's voices to accelerate change.

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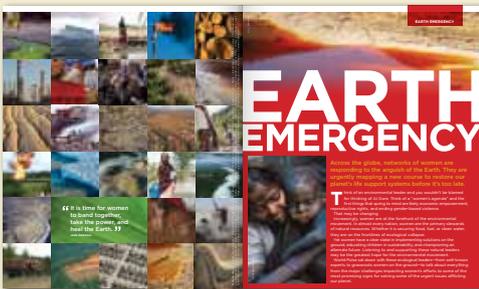
Revisiting Our Heroes

World Pulse revisits past editions and finds that in the sites of greatest global change—be they scarred, wounded, or pulsing with energy—women are leading the fight for justice.



Noha Atef

When protests rocked Egypt in January, an ocean separated Noha Atef (*Woman to Watch*, Issue 5, Spring/Summer 2010) from her homeland. Atef may have been studying abroad in the UK, but this was her revolution. She tweeted between classes, connecting activists across borders and pushing out stories and photos from protesters on the ground. And when Mubarak’s regime attempted to shut down communications networks, she didn’t miss a beat, reviving landlines and fax machines. While a diverse slice of Egyptian society showed up to protest in Tahrir Square, Atef is the face of the uprising that inspired the world: young, resourceful, and fiercely determined to have a voice in her country’s future.



Ursula Rakova

First she watched the waters encroach on her beloved islands. Then she saw her people go hungry as their seawater-poisoned crops failed. As a final blow, she witnessed the international community break their promises and stand by to watch it happen. Still, Ursula Rakova continues to fight for the people of the Carteret Islands—the world’s first climate refugees. Last year, she highlighted the urgent need to resettle Carteret islanders on neighboring Bougainville in World Pulse (“Sailing the Waves on Our Own,” Issue 5, Spring/Summer 2010). Since then, funding and international commitments have stalled, and only two new houses have been built to resettle a population of 2,325 people. While the cries of her people drown in bureaucracy, Ursula Rakova continues to put her country’s struggle on the map—even as the country itself disappears from it.



Esra'a Al Shafei

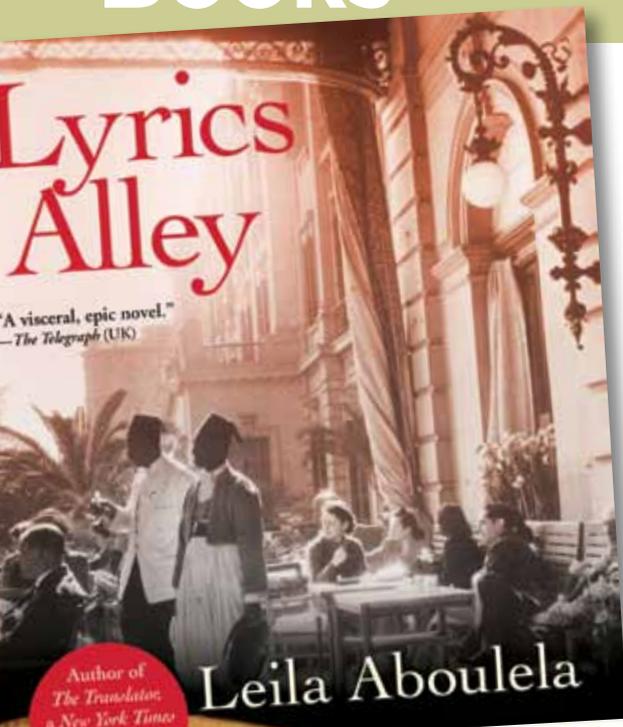
Esra'a Al Shafei (*Woman to Watch*, Issue 6, Winter/Spring 2011) started Mideast Youth as a website for activists to branch out across the region, forging connections across movements—from domestic worker rights to religious tolerance. When Shafei’s country of Bahrain joined the list of Middle East nations with building protest movements, Mideast Youth’s crowd-sourced protest channel, Crowdvoice, turned inward. Banned at one point in Bahrain and later in Yemen, Crowdvoice became a go-to online platform for activists throughout the Middle East to organize and report on their activities.



Haiti’s Women Leaders

Nine months after Haiti’s 7.0 earthquake, we spoke to top women leaders and learned that Haiti’s women’s movement had identified increased political participation as a top priority for the recovering country. (“Honoring the Ancestors,” Issue 6, Winter/Spring 2011). The good news is that in early May, Haiti’s legislature pushed through a constitutional amendment that mandates that 30% of public service representatives must be female. Vital Voices and its local partners in Haiti—who helped campaign for the 47 women who ran for legislature in Haiti’s November election—attribute the success to increased representation of women in Congress. In the coming years, all eyes will be on Haiti’s new class of political leaders to see if they can deliver the security, health, education, and employment opportunities that are desperately needed.

Books



Lyrics Alley

Leila Aboulela | Grove Press, 2011 | Sudan



Mohammad Bey is the patriarch of the wealthy Abuzeid family and his two wives—a young, modern Egyptian and an older, traditional Sudanese woman—embody the tensions of the day as they wage battle over polarizing issues like female circumcision. When a paralyzing injury crushes the dreams of Nur Abuzeid, the young heir to the Abuzeid dynasty, it shakes the entire family. A love story between Nur and his teenaged cousin in 1950s Sudan becomes a love story for a country in transition. As Nur finds his calling as a poet, his struggle for self-expression gives him a reason to live and the reader a reason to keep turning the pages.

Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life

Karen Armstrong | Knopf, 2010 | Global

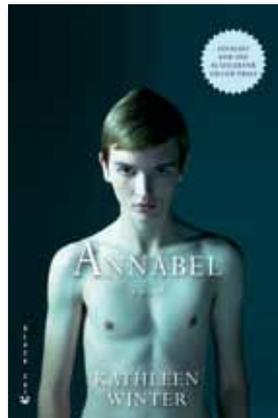


If compassion is central to the teachings of every major religion, why isn't it more present in our world? Karen Armstrong, the visionary behind the Charter for Compassion, believes we've set the bar too low. Belonging somewhere between the self-help and social theory shelves, her book, *Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*, is a 12-step guide for a world stuck in its destructive habits. Armstrong has dedicated her life to transforming the universal

ideal of compassion into something we see in the world around us. For her, step one is for all of us to learn what compassion truly means. With her encyclopedic knowledge of religious history, this book will bring all of us closer to living more compassionate lives.

Annabel

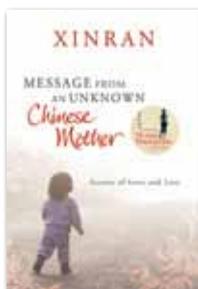
Kathleen Winter | Grove Press, 2011 | Canada



Set in isolated Labrador, Canada, Kathleen Winter's first novel is the intimate coming-of-age story of an intersex child. The child's parents call him Wayne and raise him as a son, while a friend secretly calls him Annabel. A story as quiet and beautiful as the landscape that surrounds it, *Annabel* explores the gender continuum through the eyes of an insular community and a child who finds belonging somewhere between son and daughter, between Wayne and Annabel.

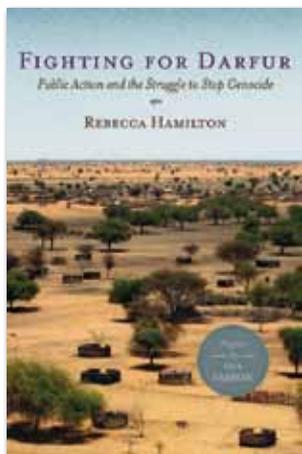
“All faiths insist that compassion is the test of true spirituality.”

KAREN ARMSTRONG | TWELVE STEPS TO A COMPASSIONATE LIFE



Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother
Xinran | Scribner, 2011 | China

Message from an Unknown Chinese Mother lovingly gathers stories from women who were forced to abandon, give up, or drown their daughters. Xinran exposes the haunting consequences of China's one-child policy and the cultural traditions that paint girls as valueless. This book is a gift from Xinran, herself the daughter of an absent Chinese mother, to adopted Chinese daughters everywhere with unanswered questions and unhealed wounds.



Fighting for Darfur
Rebecca Hamilton | Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 | Sudan



Rebecca Hamilton goes behind the “Save Darfur” bumper stickers to uncover the geopolitics of the successes and inadequacies of the Darfur advocacy movement. A crucial read for citizens, students, and policymakers alike, Hamilton's account is an important call for the protection of any future population in danger of genocide.

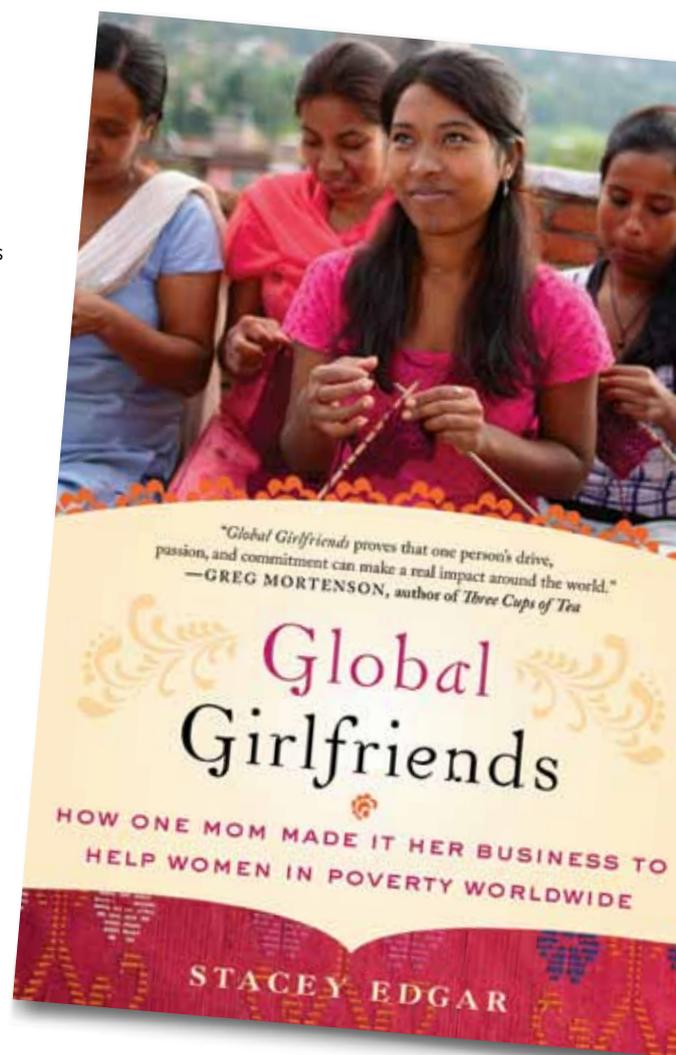
Global Girlfriends: How One Mom Made It Her Business to Help Women in Poverty Worldwide

Stacey Edgar | St. Martin's Press, 2011 | Global

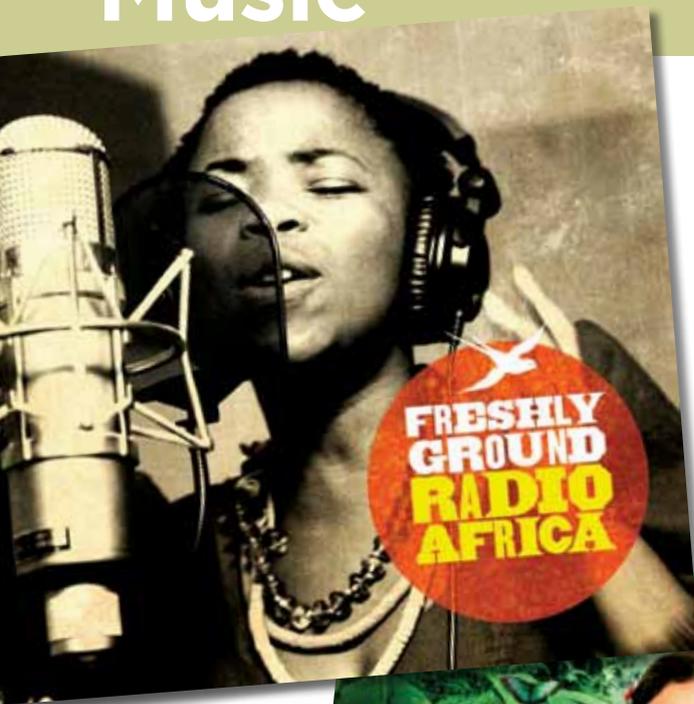


Some things are best left to experts. But in *Global Girlfriends*, Stacey Edgar insists that anyone can help a woman rise out of poverty. Edgar, a suburban mom, spotted an opportunity in handmade crafts made in impoverished regions. She learned that in the US women control 80% of consumer purchases, while globally they represent 70% of people living in poverty. With her \$2,000 tax return, Edgar made her first investment in what she calls the “she-economy,” launching her organization Global Girlfriend to bring women craft producers and consumers together in sustainable partnership.

An insightful memoir on how Edgar turned an idea into a thriving fair trade business, *Global Girlfriends* is also an ode to women around the world who are making ends meet with dignity and hope.



Music



Radio Africa

Freshly Ground | Freeground, 2010 | South Africa

Best known for its collaboration with Shakira on the official song for the 2010 World Cup, the dynamic seven-person band Freshly Ground blends the sounds of Kwassa Kwassa—a dance rhythm from the Democratic Republic of Congo—with the exuberant cadence of Afro Pop. In both English and the South African-based language of Xhosa, lead vocalist Zolania Mahola tackles with innocent intensity topics as complex as the infrastructure of the working class and as universal as the desire to be loved.



She Was a Boy

Yael Naim | Indie Europe/Zoom, 2010 | Israel



Yael Naim, whose sincere, no-frills voice made its sudden global debut in 2008 with *New Soul*, is back with her sophomore album. Featuring the same intimate storytelling and emotional truths she's

become known for, *She Was a Boy* showcases endearing pop songs with childlike appeal and grown-up sound.



From Night to the Edge of Day

Azam Ali | Six Degrees Records, April 2011 | Iran/India



Azam Ali's ode to her son is a soothing and evocative exploration of Iranian, Lebanese, Kurdish, and Turkish lullabies. In "From Night to the Edge of Day," the lullaby is a tool of both comfort and protest, particularly for children separated from their motherlands.

“ Music is a way for me to become the best version of myself. The best part of me is to embrace humanity and life around me. ”

ZOLANI MAHOLA | LEAD SINGER OF FRESHLY GROUND TO PORT ELIZABETH



Radio Babel

Watcha Clan | Pirhana Musik, 2011 | France

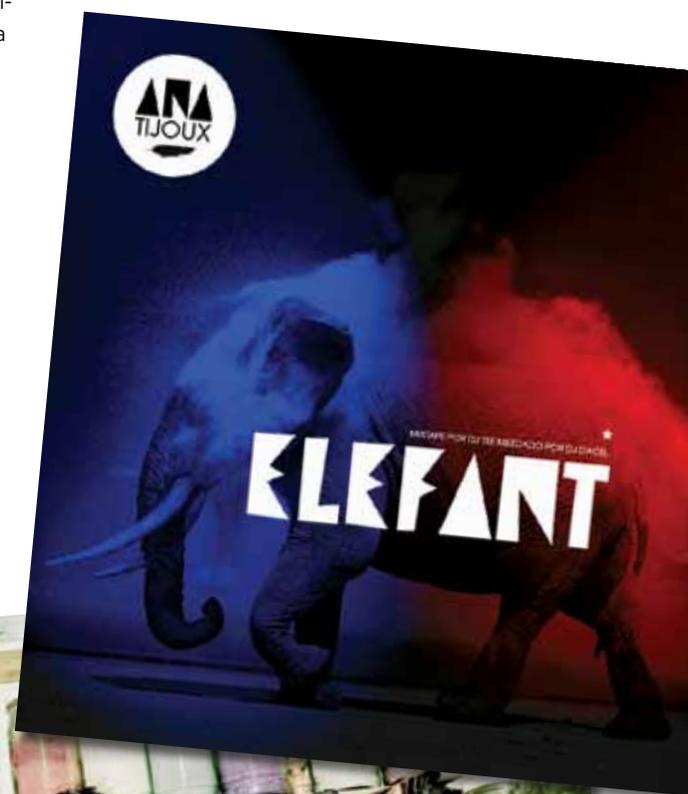
Pulsing with Mediterranean grooves, ululating voices, hand-clapping, and playful musical arrangements, *Radio Babel* evokes the historical city only in its multilingualism. Incorporating French, Algerian, and modern electronic musical styles with lyrics in more than four languages, Watcha Clan's message is one of unity, not division—a message lead singer Sista K sums up beautifully in “We Are One,” the ethereal second track of this tantalizing album.



Elefant Mixtape

Ana Tijoux | Oveja Negra, 2011 | Chile

In 2009, Ana Tijoux's infectious album *1977* put her in line for a Grammy award and launched her into Spanish-language hip-hop stardom. With her latest release, *Elefant Mixtape*, she drops rhymes on a foundation of contagious beats and creative rhythms. The Chilean rapper—whose parents were exiled under the Pinochet dictatorship—writes lyrics that encompass the poetic and the political with a sound and style unmistakably her own.



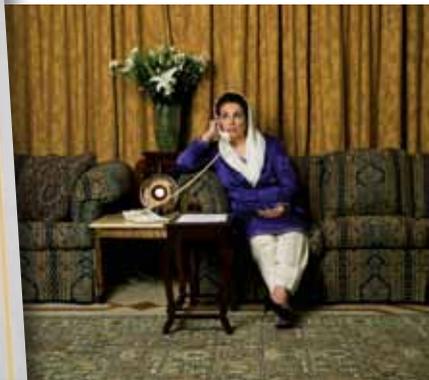
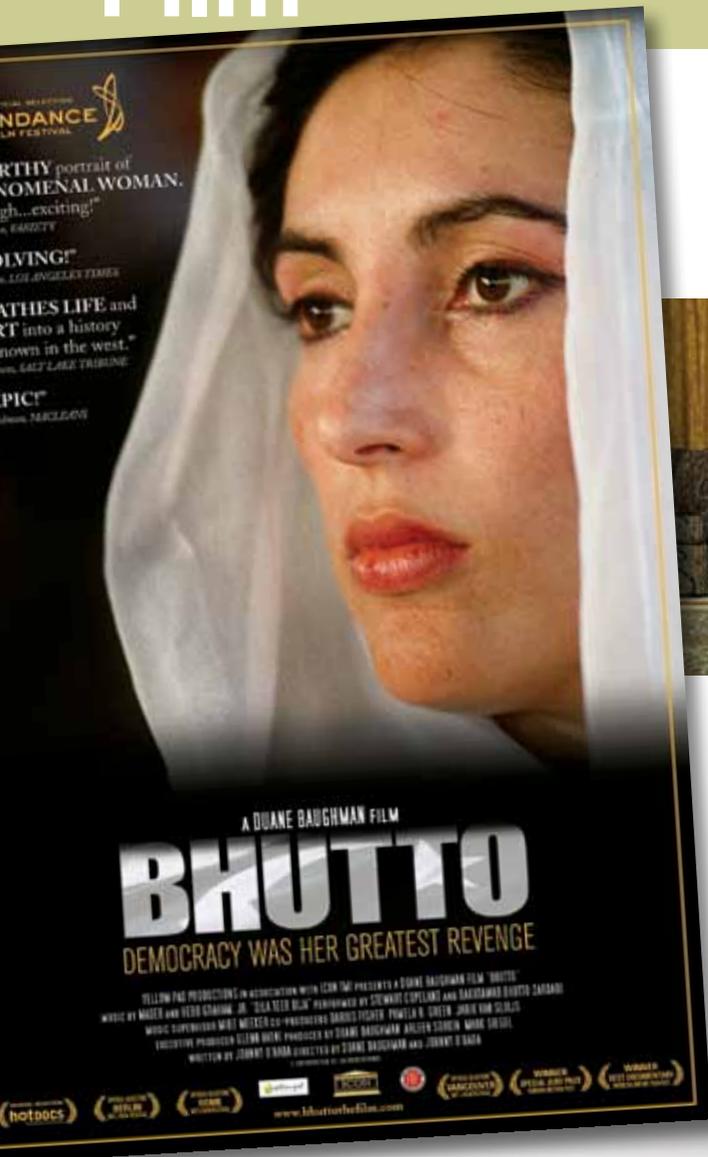
Handmade

Hindi Zahra | Blue Note, 2011 | France/Morocco

Born in Morocco and drawing on her Berber heritage, Hindi Zahra gives us a debut album that's drawn comparisons to Patti Smith, Portishead, and Norah Jones. With a nod to the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix, and her own grandfather, there's an edge and energy to *Handmade* that's unforgettable.



Film



Bhutto

Duane Baughman, Johnny O'Hara
First Run Features, 2010 | Pakistan

Bhutto chronicles the life and assassination of Benazir Bhutto, Prime Minister of Pakistan and the first female-elected leader of a primarily Muslim nation. The film reveals the history and political context of Pakistan through Bhutto's life and work. Drawing from interviews with Bhutto's family, friends, and critics, as well as archival events footage, this documentary portrays Bhutto as a strong, controversial, but undeniably important woman.

Poetry

Chang-dong Lee
Kino International,
2011 | South Korea

With understated grace, an elderly woman grapples with a world that seems to be unraveling. Marginalized and raising her grandson alone, she takes blow after blow in stride: an Alzheimer's diagnosis, her grandson's involvement in a horrific crime, financial hardship. While the unspeakable is happening all around her, she takes a poetry class at a community center and begins to find her own voice.



“The important thing, it seems to me, is that we believe in the possibilities of one another.”

FEO ALADAG | DIRECTOR OF *WHEN WE LEAVE*
TO CINEMA WITHOUT BORDERS



When We Leave

Feo Aladag | Olive Films, 2011
Germany/Turkey

Umay, the daughter of Turkish immigrants living in Germany, tries to leave her abusive husband and finds out just how much her close-knit family is willing to sacrifice for “honor.” A beautiful and devastating film, *When We Leave* is a deeply human look at honor crimes made more poignant by the many sweet and even humorous moments in the movie. Incredible acting reveals the strength of Umay's character as she continues to choose both her family and her freedom in a society that tells her she can't have both.

Even the Rain

Icía Bollaín | Vitagraph Films, 2011 | Bolivia

A film crew arrives in Bolivia to make a movie about Christopher Columbus while the 2000 Cochabamba water crisis unravels on the streets outside the set. Exploring colonial legacies and contemporary water politics, *Even the Rain* is a tightly woven story with a subtle and mesmerizing cast that looks at what happens when art-making collides with change-making.



Pink Saris

Kim Longinotto

Women Make Movies, 2011 | India

One young pregnant woman seeks marriage to avoid rejection from her family. Another woman faces abuse from her in-laws. They do not turn to a social service agency or the police, but to Sampat Pal Devi and her Gulabi Gang, an outspoken group of pink sari-clad women's advocates who stage interventions, taking matters like these into their own hands. Longinotto's fly-on-the-wall documentary style allows viewers to walk with Sampat Pal Devi through the streets of Uttar Pradesh and experience her daily life firsthand. The film reveals tender connections between these women, but also the limitations of the Gulabi Gang members, who themselves are struggling with violent family dynamics.

Women Art Revolution

Lynn Hershman Leeson | Zeitgeist Films, 2011 | US

If Feminist Art History 101 was taught in your living room, and your professors were the women who lived it, and they got caught up reminiscing about that one time they broke into the Whitney Museum to cover the floor with eggs—it would feel something like this movie. You don't need a background in art to enjoy this story of a group of women trying to claim their history—boisterously, creatively, and often hilariously. You'll want to watch it twice. Once for the story, and a second time with a pen handy so you can look up the names of artists you've never heard of but who now feel vitally important to your understanding of art. Forty years in the making, and with over 1,000 hours of footage of conversations between feminist artist and filmmaker Lynn Hershman Leeson and her colleagues left on the cutting room floor, these 83 minutes are a tiny window into a huge and ongoing movement. Luckily for us, Hershman Leeson has created a living archive of footage that you can use and contribute to at rawwar.org.



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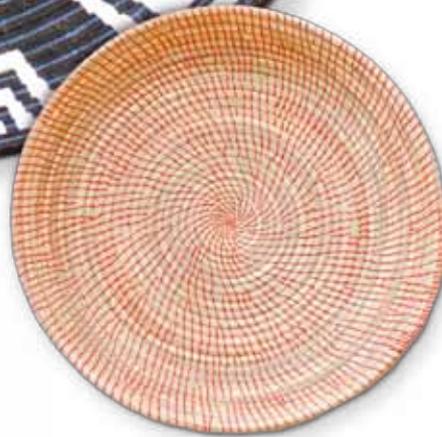
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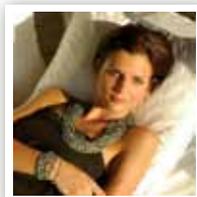
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Women in Construction, Gulf Coast, Mississippi
December 2008 © Elizabeth Rappaport

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Friday, **Gloria Steinem** will open speaking about: **When Women Are People and Corporations Are Not: Why the First Inequality Will Also Be The Last** One of the most important, iconic and influential leaders to emerge from the women's movement, Gloria will trace the historical, political and practical reasons why the women's, environmental, and social justice movements are linked, not ranked, and why our success depends on it.



Steinem

Baumeister

Greene

Moore

Simons

Teish

Tucker

Yeh

Inspiring women leaders will abound at Bioneers 2011, including Yale's professor of religion and ecology **Mary Evelyn Tucker**, indigenous scholar and activist **Melissa Nelson**, The Biomimicry Institute's **Dayna Baumeister**, Ecuadorian Pachamama Alliance activist **Natalia Greene** and Google Earth's **Rebecca Moore**. They'll be joined by **Women's Earth Alliance**, **Lily Yeh**, **Luisah Teish**, World Pulse founder **Jensine Larsen**, **Voices of Our Future** correspondents, **Cultivating Women's Leadership's Toby Herzlich** and many more as part of Moonrise, Bioneers women's leadership program that produces media, education and trainings to encourage and equip the leadership of women in transforming how we live on Earth and with each other.

Attracting about 3,000 people from all walks of life, the gathering assembles an accessible and welcoming network, where many established and emerging leaders cross-pollinate ideas, develop their visions and advance their work. Beamed nationally by satellite and through the internationally syndicated Bioneers Radio Show, the Bioneers Conference resonates with celebration and inspiration long after the last seat is filled.

for more information, visit
www.bioneers.org



Download a free pdf of our book **Moonrise: The Power of Women Leading from the Heart** from our website.

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1

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charterforcompassion.org

2

Stand with Aung San Suu Kyi and the People of Burma

The world rejoiced when Burma's popular outspoken pro-democracy leader, Aung San Suu Kyi, was released from house arrest in November 2010. Despite her high-profile release, political repression continues in Burma and over 2,200 political prisoners remain in captivity. Aung San Suu Kyi carries on the fight for these prisoners and for basic human rights in her country. Amnesty International has launched a photo campaign to gather photos of support—over 2,100 of them—for Burma's political prisoners. Snap your photo and join human rights advocates around the world in standing with Aung San Suu Kyi and the political prisoners of Burma.

amnestyusa.org

3

Stop Corrective Rape, End Hate Crimes

As LGBT individuals around the world struggle for their rights, your support can make a difference. You can start by demanding the most basic right of all—the right to a life free of violence. Last year, a South African lesbian woman, Millicent Gaika, was brutally attacked and raped in an attempt to “turn her straight.” Her attacker walked free and the South African government did little to protect her. This is one of many stories of hate crimes in South Africa, as well as around the world. Sign this petition to send the message to the government of South Africa—and to leaders all over the world—that we all have the responsibility to stop hate crimes in our societies and to guarantee human rights for all.

change.org

Find out more actions you can take to make a global difference at worldpulse.com/action





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NEXT ISSUE UPRISING

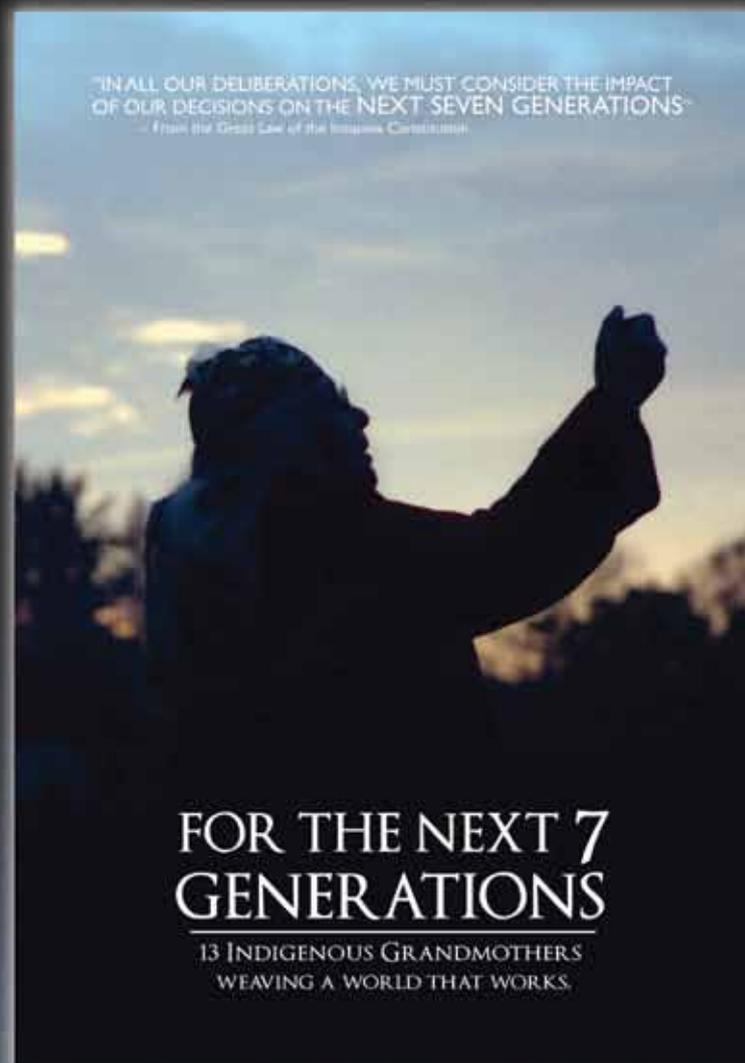
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