

WE SEE





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femLENS workshops 2021, Cameroon
online group



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THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL TO HELP BUILD A STRONG RESILIENT COMMUNITY

by Sneha Singh and
Elena Palaiorouta

Think global, Act local. Environmentalists, civil rights activists and feminists have time and again made us all realise that we must practice justice and liberation and keep fighting for our rights in our day-to-day lives, so that it all adds up and brings a bigger change in the global society.

This phrase has been echoed all around the world and focuses on a simple idea of how small acts of change can slowly lead to building a better neighbourhood, a better community, a better city and ultimately, a better world. From issues like environment sustainability to gender rights, one needs to look at the effects on the local community first, and then focus on the bigger picture.

Find opportunities that serve your local communities through volunteering, including the underrepresented, share stories from the under-served sections of society to strengthen society at its core. Take a stand on local issues which, in the long run, can have an impact on the global policies. Your actions today will add up with the actions your friends, families or connections take in other parts of the world, and these will accumulate to create a bigger change over time.

The most important part is to think about strategic actions that can create a necessary global change. So take a step back and think if the action you are taking towards a local issue plays into the strategic vision of bringing about global impact.

femLENS brought together a number of stories from different parts of the world on issues ranging from deforestation, droughts, marine life suffering due to pollution, a campaign on women at work and a gender-based violence campaign – keeping in mind how a small action taken by a group in one part of the world can contribute towards a bigger change.

The Environmental Context

In an environmental context, the ‘think global,

act local concept’ means that you must think seriously about environmental and climate change issues, and at the same time consider what actions you are taking in your own community to help protect your local sphere. Each small action helps in the creation of a cumulative effect on the planet at large.

A great example of this is the ‘Gard Our Oceans’ initiative by the Norwegians. “Dugnad” is a tradition where people get together and tidy up their beaches. Held twice yearly, “Dungad” is a national beach cleaning initiative where the local community members join hands to clean up all the plastic waste and help keep their beaches clean, which contributes to the welfare of marine animals and shore birds.

The issue of trash disposal around the world is huge and if you sit and think about it, you might get stymied by the enormity of it. Instead, if you try and reduce your own waste, avoid the use of plastic and recycle more, you will be contributing a big time into solving a world-wide issue.

Additionally, you may want to support your local politicians or activist groups who are working on the issues of environmental pollution more largely. While we are responsible for our own actions, large international players need to do more to reduce unnecessary packaging, built in “due by” dates and other wasteful practices.

So think about the global significance on the environment when you take a small action to improve your local environment. It is all inter-connected.

Fighting for Women Rights

A number of key issues around women’s rights were highlighted through a series of stories and campaigns by femLENS this year. Year 2021 saw women coming together from different parts of world, sharing their stories of struggles, celebrating wins - big and small - and hoping for even



Photo by Augustine Asta
femLENS workshops 2021, Cameroon
online group

bigger changes in time to come through a single platform. While the “Women at Work” campaign talked about the under-represented section of working class women, the second shift, visual stereotypes around picturing women at work and other challenges women face, the “Skin” campaign highlighted the struggles of coloured women in a white-skin dominated world. The “Anti-Gender Based Violence” campaign brought to the fore unimaginable stories of suffering, struggle and survival of women from different parts of the world.

Engaging women as local actors to raise their voices is critical. Women-led local actors can address issues like GBV more sensitively and responsibly from their communities. Localising humanitarian action is essential to see a larger impact on a global level. As explained by ActionAid, localisation is:

“Localizing humanitarian action involves shifting financial and other resources, as well as power and agency, to local and national responders. This shift must have women and women’s organizations at its forefront, bringing their invaluable contextual knowledge, skills, resources, and experiences to emergency preparedness, response, and resilience building. This will help reduce the male-dominated and gender-biased international humanitarian system we currently have and make responses to humanitarian crises more effective and gender transformative.”

The longstanding inequality, patriarchy, discrimination and violence can only be overcome by the vibrant women’s movements around the world, no matter how small-scaled they are. It is high time to challenge those patriarchal humanitarian systems that cut short women’s opportunities at a local level, thus hampering their growth on a global scale.

As per a recent report, years of progress in women’s rights and equality have been reversed by COVID-19, and without action “the feminisation of poverty will accelerate”. More women have lost income than men, the gender pay-gap is at its worst. Women are the ones most exposed to COVID-19 due to the nature of their jobs and domestic responsibilities, the high levels of stress and emotional exhaustion is unimaginable to many in more privileged situations.

The need of the hour is to investigate and advocate the needs of women from under-served sections of our local communities in a way that also fits on the global map. Women and girls must be placed at the centre of all aspects of response and recovery which includes gender-responsive laws and policies. A very relevant and systematic fight is required on a local community level that will contribute to a greater sense of equality for women as a global collective. A small voice of protest can at least help start a conversation on some key issues.

We See magazine aims to support and promote women photographers in print as well as online. On the following pages, Russian photographer Maria Kopytova talks about her photographic practice

A CONVERSATION ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY WITH MARIA KOPYTOVA

by Jekaterina Saveljeva

City/Country
Narva, Estonia.

What do you enjoy most about photography?
Making pictures is probably my main tool to communicate with the world around me. I was doing it constantly even before the “phone in my pocket” era. I transformed reality through my viewfinder. I might be some kind of sociopath who collects pictures.

Was there anything that inspired you to start making photos?
It was a natural thing to me as long as I can remember. I spent my childhood with my father’s Zenit in my hands, moved to portable film cameras, then to digital, then back to film but with a “serious approach” after I got some theory and ideas about photography. Also an education in Fine Arts helped to transform it to something new. I went through so many cameras and different styles in photography, I can’t even name all. It was an obsession and yet never the main activity.

What is your favourite object/subject/topic to photograph?
It was always about documentary photography in general. Parties, travelling, commercials, complicated conceptualities - I’ve tried it all, but in the end it is just about taking photos all the time and “having an eye” on things.
The second favourite part is editing. Working with a lot of material involves self-criticism and discipline. But at the same time I hate doing that, so for years i pushed myself not to take too many photos, but

shoot less and better. That means you have to be fast and to predict things that might happen around. Do you feel it is important to share your vision on social media?
If there’s something you can tell, then yes, it is important. I found so many friends and stories just because of sharing on social media, so I have no doubts about doing it. Modern life is loaded with pictures and yet it’s hard to find your soulmates.

Who do you think is your audience?
I have no idea.

Do you like working on stories at home/in your local community? If yes/no – why?
To me, it is not a question of whether I like it or not. I left my hometown many years ago and visit quite rarely, so I have a very different point of view with which I don’t want to invade or dictate things. I’m already an alien to my Siberian region, but I definitely have a strong connection to the place. In the end, I still think I’m making local stories even if I’m not born in this place. It’s about feeling that you belong to some community and “get” them.

Do you think photography could change someone’s life? In what way?
Photography is changing lives constantly. Visuals are just easier to reach and to understand. We talk to each other literally with images, characters and shapes. It’s humans first connection to each other - to use imagination to understand one another. So we are still having a conversation between generations or even dead people, only because of their pictures or images.



@BORINGNARVA

by Maria Kopytova

It happened spontaneously: I moved from Russia to Estonia and started my communication with the place through photography. It is a border city with quite a history, but the first thing that I noticed - there was no graffiti, which means no young people, no cultural projects, no life. What can you say about a place with no street art? It’s boring. So I made an Instagram account “boringnarva” and decided to find out if it is really THAT boring or what.
I have issues with taking photos people, despite knowing that it is the most interesting thing in photography, I still can’t overcome them. So I’ve been shooting abstract ideas about the place, without trying to tell a complicated story.





PICTURING WOMEN AT WORK



Photo by Danielle Bonner
femLENS workshops 2021, Ireland
online group

by Jessica Couloute

Picture this: a woman dressed in a blue-collar uniform with an employment badge affixed, hair pinned up and wrapped in a red polka-dotted handkerchief, with her sleeves rolled up to expose a flexed bicep proving that “We,” as in women, “Can Do It!”. This iconic poster, painted by J. Howard Miller, and the woman depicted in it, is known as Rosie the Riveter.

This poster was one of many artefacts created for a campaign that encouraged women to join the workforce during World War II. Due to labour shortages brought about by the absence of men, who were away fighting overseas, women assumed roles traditionally held by men. Women were now working in factories with heavy machinery, with lumber and in steel mills to maintain production during wartime.

During this period, the United States saw a significant increase in women entering the labour force. Female workforce participation increased 10 percent between 1940 and 1945. By 1945 about one out of every four married women was working outside of the home. Today, it is clear how images influence our understandings of the world, and how they form and shape our reality. Visual representation is a powerful tool, it calls on us to question how we have been and still are applying it to depictions of the working woman. This notion is crucial to our understanding of the role women play in our economy, and shapes how society classifies work and who performs it.

A 2018 Pew Research study concluded that online image searches display a notable difference in representation of women and men for various occupations. Researchers found that women are underrepresented in images such as general managers, chief executives and security guards; while being overrepresented in

image searches related to models, flight attendants, and singers.

The study highlights a distinction when examining images by determining if the individual is engaging in the position of interest, as opposed to just being associated with the props of the occupation. The study concluded that “many searches for jobs did not yield a majority of images actually depicting people working in those jobs”, and only “44% of image search terms from a broader list of initial occupations returned a majority of images that showed people engaged in the job – rather than other people or objects associated with the job”, which likely does not lend credibility to the impression of women performing those jobs in real life.

According to a CNN report, Susanna Nezmeskal, head of diversity and values at Deutsche Post DHL Group, says “real images from the working environment can say so much more than a simple stock or modelled image. Showing people who this employee is and why she was singled out can also shed some light on the ways different women do a variety of jobs within the company — things beyond the stereotypical ‘feminine’ work”, and that organisations should “use real pictures to show people ‘This is what happens in our company,’ and not just on a brochure”.

Looking back at the imagery surrounding Rosie the Riveter, while it was effective during its time, it promoted women in a supporting role required during a time of need. The imagery, brought about by an urgent necessity, did not challenge the status quo. We can see this by, first, acknowledging the original painting of Rosie by Norman Rockwell. This image is similar to the more common J. Howard Miller version.

The Rockwell rendition features a full-body silhouette of a woman, postured to match Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling painting of the prophet Isaiah. She is dressed in the familiar blue-collar jumpsuit on a lunch break with a riveting gun resting across her lap. The original model for this painting was 19-year-old Mary Doyle Keefe, who worked as a telephone operator. Rockwell painted his Rosie to appear noticeably more muscular than Doyle. One may ask why Rockwell made this choice.

According to historians Sarah Myers and G. Kurt Piehler, during the world war II era there was “a fair amount of ambivalence about women entering the workforce, especially if they had young children. Efforts to provide adequate day care for women were met with considerable opposition”. Men who remained working on the home front “were resistant to the idea of having women work as welders, riveters and construction workers, fearing the feminisation of these professions and decreasing wages”.

Myers and Piehler go on to state that because of “concerns about fluctuating gender roles, much wartime propaganda would portray women who ended up assuming non-traditional roles in the workforce as attractive, white, feminine and middle-class workers” to communicate that these circumstances were temporary and would only last until the war concluded.

They observed that “in many of these posters, you can easily imagine the women returning to their roles as homemakers once the war was over”, and in the case of Rosie, she “certainly reflects the remarkable contribution of women to the war effort. She’s also more masculine than much of the wartime propaganda featuring women – something that undoubtedly inflamed American anxieties about gender roles. At the same time, her femininity is still present with her red lipstick and womanly figure.”

As Rosie and her fictional existence began to fade away, so would the surge in female labour. As the war ended and men began to return home, women were forced to leave the male-dominated positions; and Rosie would be forgotten until the 1980s, when she would re-emerge as a feminist symbol of empowerment.

It is apparent how images and symbols impact our thinking and actualise our reality. This arguably makes the case why depicting women at work should be rooted in reality and not propaganda. Female participation in the workforce is not about a provisional agenda. It is, and should be, an inclusive fact of life. Showcasing images and material that reflects women’s contributions and ambitions in the workplace is imperative; because it reinforces women’s belief in their ability, and provides confidence in those pursuits.

A study conducted by 21st Century Fox, the Geena Davis Institute on Gender in Media and J. Walter Thompson Intelligence surveyed over 2,000 women to measure their impressions of the X-Files character, scientist Dana Scully. The findings were enlightening. About “two-thirds (63%) of women that work in STEM say Dana Scully served as their role model”, and “50% said their interest in STEM increased after watching Scully onscreen”.

The importance of visual representation of women’s work is not just about levelling the playing field between men and women. While we want to see women reflected in all professional fields, we should not

undermine duties in women-dominated occupations. Imagery not only informs who is doing the work but speaks to what qualifies as reputable work. Legitimate labour is not only conducted in an office, factory or a lab; it also includes the unrecognised labour of domestic work.

Even though conducting an online search for “caregivers” may result in an over-representation of women, which unfortunately reinforces stereotypes, it should not mean that this kind of work is frowned upon. It can be argued that if we begin to deconstruct notions of gendered work, it will become legitimised.

According to a 2017 study, when examining gender-neutral occupations, men are viewed as more credible than their female peers, even though performance between men and women does not differ. This notion can be applied when we examine societal perceptions on parenting between mothers and fathers. When parenting, women are often faced with more scrutiny and judgment than their male counterparts, who are more likely to be overly praised for the same general parenting efforts.

Further evidence demonstrates that male participation can legitimise work through observations of their absence. Other studies have found that men leave female-dominated fields because “female qualities tend to be culturally devalued, the result being that men often refuse to be associated with women’s work – so much so that some even prefer unemployment to taking female jobs”, which only continues to perpetuate gender norms and gender disparities within various professions.

However, this thinking decreases when examining “high-status occupations” because of shifting gender norms. Data indicates that “some female-dominated occupations are no longer as heavily associated with feminine attributes (e.g., caretaking) as others. As the presence of women in the labour market has increased, the female-dominated sector has expanded, and many high-status positions that were male-dominated in 1980 became female-dominated by the 2000s.

This is the case with jobs involving extensive coordinating, training, and supervising duties (e.g., service and health organisation managers, legal assistants, education counsellors, and vocational supervisors). Since these jobs resemble stereotypically male occupations more closely than do low-status female jobs (such as librarians or kindergarten teachers), men entering them might suffer less negative stereotyping, and thus less pressure to leave.”

So, picture this: we are living in a reality where conducting an online image search for “caregiver” yields results that are inclusive of men and women. Image searches for “chief executive” or “manufacturing” include a robust selection of women. And both are a norm!

The effort of fair representation of female participation in the labour force is work that crosses gender lines. If we can broaden our definition of work, and reinforce it with images that are inclusive, representative and real for both women and men, we can expand our perspective on labour and how we value it, and ultimately how we value women, female attributes and their contributions to the labour force. And in doing so, an equitable society won’t be imaginary. It will be reality.

COLLECTIVE PROJECT:

IWD 2021

by Miranda Awah, Cameroon | Maria Vesselko, Ireland
| Ewa Drewa, Poland | Eva Rico Narváez, Spain | Viviana
Ceballos, Mexico | Anna Melchiori, Italy | Jekaterina
Saveljeva, Estonia | Marguerite Solange Beko'o,
Cameroon











by Elisa Mariotti

In Italy, the management of the COVID-19 pandemic has determined the adoption of measures that have ranged from a general lockdown in the spring of 2020, to temporary suspension or restriction of work activities.

Since November 2020, the measures applied have varied over time both by region and by type of activity, depending on the performance of specific indicators identified by the Central Government.

This project was born to give a voice to a sample of operators working in the city of Bibbiena who have seen their activities suspended or limited both during phase 1 and during phase 3. Without pretending to represent the entire population, the project seeks to investigate the impact of the pandemic on the personal vision of one's present and future.

All persons who were contacted joined the initiative. In addition to posing for portraits in their workplace, they were asked to answer eight questions about their relationship to their work, how this was born, evolved, and what their projection into the future is. In particular, they were asked to identify their working "Past, Present and Future" with three distinct words.

The words related to the future are always positive. "Hope and peacefulness" the most frequent.

IMPOSED PAUSE



TO BECOME

**LAURA GORINI, DANCE TEACHER AT
“UNIVERSO DANZA ASD”**

Laura lives and breathes dance, it's been a lifetime. She disappointed a lot of people with her choice because it is not seen as a traditional job.

When she was 17 years old she became a teacher of ballet.

Activity closed for more than seven months.

“My work has the power to make me vulnerable and very strong at the same time, because I pour all of myself into it.”

“This year my work became something different. We do not build, we do not plan, we fight to hold on. In ballet, each stop means a regression: recovery will be very difficult.”

TO RESIST

TO RECONSTRUCT

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a black swimsuit and a blue towel, stands in a swimming pool, leaning on a red metal railing. The background shows the interior of a swimming pool with various banners and windows.

STIMULI

ALICE GIANNINI, SWIMMING
INSTRUCTOR AT “ASD BIBBIENA
NUOTO”

Alice has been swimming since she was a little girl. She was lucky enough to turn her passion into her work.

Activity closed for more than seven months.

“My work made me autonomous and allowed me to build my own family. Today working becomes a state of necessity.”

“It’s practically impossible for us to do ‘smart working’, so we tried not to lose contact with guys from the swimming team. They always give us the strength not to give up and hold on despite everything.”

HOPE

UNCERTAINTY





SATISFACTION

CONCERN

**LIANA SASSOLI, OWNER OF
“ESTETICA LIANA”**

Beautician for 30 years. She began by helping her mother in her perfume shop when she was still a teenager.
Activity closed for more than five months.

“My job consists of taking care of people, both physically, and often, psychologically.”

“The relationships that were created over the years with my customers have turned out to be a real support over this period.”

PEACEFULNESS

PASSION



ELENA SALVI & FEDERICO BACHINI,
OWNERS OF “BAR PASTICCERIA EDI”

Federico has inherited the bakery. He is the third generation. Elena shares life and work with Federico.

Activity totally closed for two months and later limited for six months.

“Going to the bar is no longer a pleasure, but a necessity.”

“But a moment remains to have a word with your clients, it cheers us up, socializing despite barriers, masks and prohibitions.”

DETERMINATION

TRADITION



ANGUISH

JOY

ANNA BIANCONI, OWNER
OF “VANITÀ”, HAIR SALON

Anna began as an apprentice in her sister’s salon on 25 March, 1985.

In 1990 they entered into a partnership. In 2010 her sister retired, so right now Anna works alone.

Activity closed for more than three months.

“My work means everything to me. It has always been and still is everything. It is my home, more than my own house.”

“One day with a customer we decided to put on plastic aprons, gloves and masks, and we embraced each other. This is what is missing.”

“I know the future will never be the same again, but I hope I can regain freedom.”

MELANCHOLY

RESILIENCE



PERSEVERANCE



SACRIFICE

SILVIA ROSSI, OWNER OF “EXPART”

Silvia imagined her studio in a big city in Northern Europe.
She opened Expart in 2010.
Activity closed for more than four months. No opportunity, no fairs or events during the entire year.

“My job is my life. I do what I’m passionate about, I try to bring what I’m passionate about into my work.”

“There is a great desire to start again. How? We’ll see, I’ll be ready.”

A woman with grey hair, wearing a blue jacket and a red top, sits in the center of a theater. The theater is filled with rows of yellow seats. Many of the seats have a red and white sign that says "VIETATO SEDERSI NO SITTING" with a crossed-out icon of a person sitting. The word "HOPE" is written in large white letters in the upper left corner.

HOPE

**MARINELLA PIERI, OWNER OF
“CINEMA ITALIA”**

Marinella was practically born inside her cinema. Her family has been carrying on this “wonderful” activity for three generations.

Activity closed for more than six months and limited for seven months.

“I hope that the Cinema can move forward and grow, in step with the times.”

“My work is my passion.”

PASSION

EMOTIONS

BILLBOARD

SWEETENER





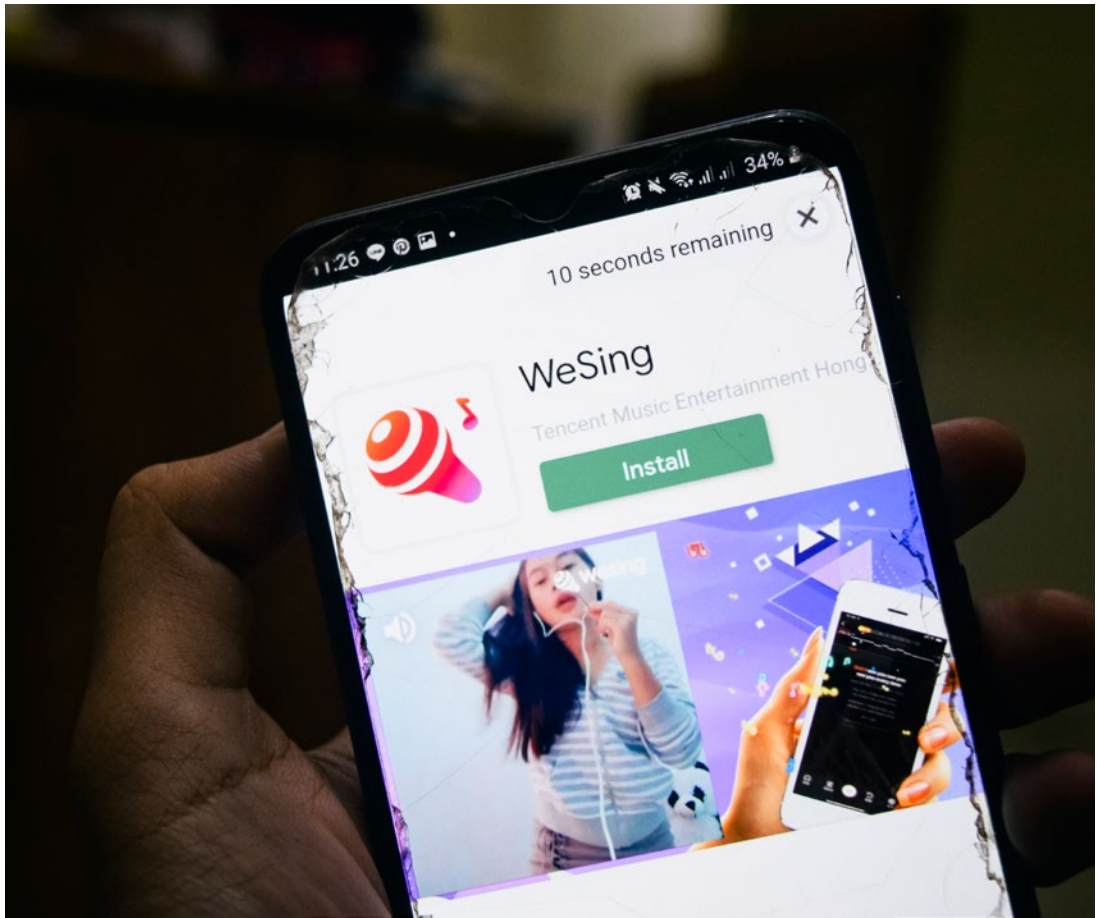
by Nabilla Adristiningrum Djide

Nowadays, advertisements with women can be easily found almost anywhere in the world, from billboards to social media, in shopping centres, on product packaging, to television and so on, almost everywhere we look. Images of women in advertisements are ubiquitous, making women seem cheap, and who can be enjoyed anytime and anywhere. An advertisement feels incomplete without the presence of women in it “attracting” viewers or buyers, even for a product that is not actually related to women or which requires women to promote it.

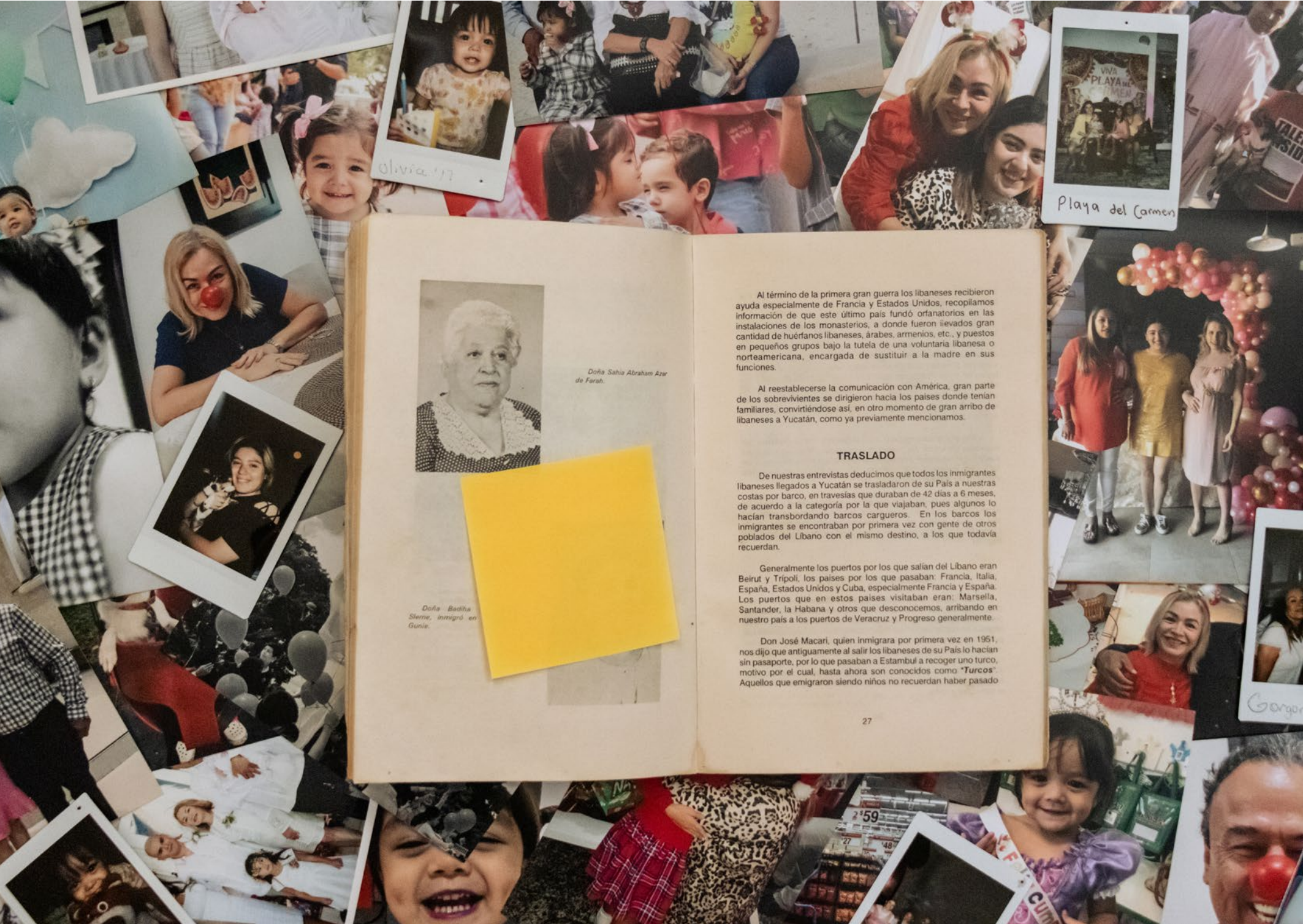
In this photo series taken in my home town, Cirebon, Indonesia, a semi-urban city, I am trying to collect advertisements with female models along with human interactions with the ad, with those who sees the ads everyday. These ads make me comment: “very out of topic”, “is it really necessary to have women in this ad?”, “oh my gosh!”, etc. It is not uncommon for these advertisements to be seen by those who are not supposed to see them, such as children. What a public duping.

This photo series is my criticism of the media and advertising industry, and a call to women - this is not normal (anymore)! Regrettably, in the modern era, and with women’s equality, this primitive practice is still inherent.





LEBANESE ROOTS: MY MOTHER (ZIMME)



by Monserrat Irazoqui

This photography series centres around my personal journey connecting with my Lebanese heritage as a means to discover how my ancestors' life experiences and cultural aspects have influenced who I am. I am a third generation Mexican-Lebanese born and raised in southern Mexico, where there is a strong Lebanese presence and still-strong and growing community.

Because of the current restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic and because of her strong Lebanese pride, I decided to center this photography project on my mother (Zimme in Arabic) with whom I share a home and a constant craving to learn more about our Lebanese roots. I followed her daily life in confinement and places around our house that would show the blend of Mexico and Lebanon.



by Louisa Akwanka

With over 40 percent of the land expanse of Northern Cameroon hit hard by desertification, aridity is resulting in acute food insecurity for over 30 percent of the region's population. Wanton tree felling without properly coordinated reforestation efforts is among the most prominent anthropogenic precursors, to which denizens resort, citing the expensive nature of other environmentally less damaging fuel options such as domestic gas.

Derivatives of firewood including sawdust and charcoal are equally in high demand, with the most visible consequences being vast lands devoid of trees, subjected to erosion, with accompanying shorter rainy seasons, the latter usually lasting between the months of June and September, as underlined by Sali Seini, of Cameroon's Plan for the Fight against Desertification.

Tree planting efforts have begun to be multiplied gradually, in an attempt to reverse the effects of desertification. In the wake of the initiative dubbed "Green Sahel" initiated by the Government of Cameroon thousands of trees are planted each year, under the stewardship of the country's Minister of the Environment, nature protection and sustainable development Pierre Hélé. School goers and the rest of the population are encouraged to plant and nurture trees until they are sufficiently mature to survive on their own.

The sale of charcoal is also being discouraged and sanctioned, in an attempt to curb the indiscriminate felling of trees, and thus restore the region's ecosystem.





DISAPPEARING WATER





by Marguerite Solange Boko'o

Water, they often say, is life. You will all agree on the veracity of this saying. Everyone needs water on a daily basis to be used differently. It is most needed in various aspects of our daily routine. Water is essential for the survival and productivity of all life and ecosystems.

Ebolowa, chief town of the South Region of Cameroon, is in the heart of the equatorial forest. With this forest, it would be normal to have a good supply in water for its ecosystems and population. Unfortunately, getting water in Ebolowa has been a daunting task for most of the population living in this town. The company in charge of distributing pipe borne water, known as CAMWATER, finds it difficult to provide the population with the precious liquid. The majority of the population in Ebolowa and their households are not connected to this water system and therefore have to look for other ways and means of getting water on a daily basis.

Some institutions, such as the the Regional Delegation of Communication or the Our Lady of Resurrection Catholic Primary School, and good Samaritans in Ebolowa have wells that they put at the disposal of the general public too. It is common to see men, women, youths and even children rushing to the few wells

in town to get a few drops of water for their household needs. Most often they come along with 20 litre cans to be able to fetch the most and not be compelled to come to the well many times in a day given that some come from afar.

The availability of wells in neighbourhoods of Ebolowa is not sufficient compared to the growing population. An average of two wells in a neighbourhood are used by as many as 15 to 20 households in a radius of two kilometres. The impact of the drought this year on the water tables was very harsh. Water provision/production in Ebolowa during the just ending dry season was negatively impacted.

With the severe drought that lasted much longer (from November 2020 to mid March 2021), getting water for households was an uphill task. The harshness of the drought dried up wells thereby making the demand more pressing. The few available wells were over-exploited to the extent of completely drying up the water in some and pushing their owners to close them to the public. The remaining few have since been overused by the needy communities. This over-exploitation too makes the remaining wells dry up quickly, which means people can fetch water only for a few hours a day.







THE IMPACT OF CONSUMERISM ON IRISH SEALS

by Caroline Burrow

Humans have lived alongside seals in Ireland for thousands of years, and they are part our ecological and cultural heritage. Seals inhabit Irish myths and legends, with stories of a deep and often complex relationship between humans and seals. Folktales tell of seals who rescue drowning humans, selkies, shapeshifting seal women who are taken by men to be their brides, mother seals that suckle human babies, and of fishermen injuring a seal only to then come across a human with the same injury who requires that no seal will be harmed again. The central themes of these narratives are often that of learning to respect the seals and live in harmony with them.

In Ireland there are two species of seal: the grey seal and the smaller, common seal (also known as the harbour seal). Previously hunted in Ireland for their meat, fur and oil, in 1914 seals were nearly extinct with

less than 500 seals in Irish and UK waters combined. The Wildlife Act of 1976 and The EU’s Marine Mammal Protection Act, 1972, now protect seals, making it illegal to kill them.

Donegal is known as one of the best places in Ireland to see seals in the wild. With regular sightings, a number of haul out sites around the coastline, and reports of a number of seal colonies, each comprising of up to 250 seals, it’s easy to think that seals in Donegal are thriving. If you ask local fisherman how many seals there are, the good humoured reply is often “too many”.

“There a fewer grey seals than African elephants” states Melanie Croce, Environmental Scientist and Executive Director for Seal Rescue Ireland. Around 50 percent of the global grey seal population is located in Irish and UK waters and seal surveys suggest that nearly a third of Ireland’s grey seals are located on the coast of south-west Donegal with specific sites in the county being identified as nationally important in their conservation.

Common seals have a similar global population of around 300,000 – 500,000. The situation for common seals in Ireland is even more concerning. They are identified as a species of “special concern” and their numbers are declining, with only approximately 3,000 – 4,000 remaining in Irish and UK waters combined.

The seal population recovers very slowly as seals only have one pup a year, with only 50 percent of those pups surviving. Our seals

in Donegal and the Irish seal population as a whole are therefore extremely precious.

There are a number of different threats to seals including water pollution, habitat loss, disease, limited food sources, the effects of climate change, human disturbance and plastic pollution.

Climate change impacts upon our local weather system and an increased number and severity of storms hitting the Irish coastline are putting seals at risk of injury and drowning. Seal pups can become separated from their mothers or orphaned, thus making their survival unlikely.

The rise in water temperature due to climate change also affects seals as it reduces the phytoplankton and zooplankton populations, which make up the bottom of the food chain, leading to reduced food sources for the seals as the apex predator at the top of the food chain.

This rise in water temperature can also lower seals’ immune function. Seals’ immune systems are also detrimentally affected by water pollution and sewage runoff, which leaves them vulnerable to disease, parasite infestation and infection.

Plastic waste and other forms of rubbish cause injury and death to seals and other marine life. Plastic bottles, bags etc. break down into microparticles and are ingested by marine animals. Seals often mistake plastic waste as food and gulp it down whole as if it was a fish. As seals do not have a gag reflex this waste becomes lodged in their digestive tract, meaning they cannot feed properly. This can lead to a slow, distressing death from starvation.

In terms of food sources, humans are the biggest competitors with seals for fish. The relationship with seals and fisherman can be highly conflictual and indeed in recent years there have been calls for seal culls across Ireland, including Donegal.

However speaking to local small scale fisherman reveals a respect for the seals. They describe how seals would steal fish from their nets (depredation) and impact upon their livelihood, although they also acknowledge that the seals must “find a way to live” too.

In recent years the fisherman in Donegal are no longer in competition with the seals as their catch has changed, with many fisherman now catching lobster or crab rather than the salmon which used to be their primary catch. The small scale local fishing industry in Donegal and seals now face a common enemy.

The rise in industrialised fishing by supertrawlers in Irish waters. Irish fish stocks are being depleted with EU reports of unsustainable overfishing in Irish waters of up to 22 percent more than recommended quotas.

These supertrawlers not only cause a threat to seals by the reduction of their food sources, seals are often landed as bycatch. By catch is where marine life indiscriminately gets caught in the trawlers’ nets. In addition to seals, bycatch may include nontargeted fish species, dolphins and sharks. The seals are killed by drowning and local anecdotes tell of the bodies of seals and other protected marine creatures being extracted from the ice used to preserve the catch on the large trawlers in Killybegs harbour. There is no data on the numbers of marine life killed by bycatch and there is currently no supervision on fishing boats in Irish waters, but the EU has suggested that there are illegal fishing practices occurring on these ships.

The fishing industry can also pose a threat to seals from ghost nets. Research suggests that 40-50 percent of the plastic in the Oceans is

made up of discarded fishing equipment. These “ghost nets” do not degrade and cause injury and death of seals and other wildlife when they become entangled. A recent news report in May 2021 showed pictures of a seal in Cork entangled in fishing nets. Seal Rescue Ireland treat many cases of entanglement each year in their rehabilitation centre in Courtown, Co. Wexford. Sadly, many seals throughout Ireland die a slow and painful death as a result of entanglement as it is often difficult to catch and rescue them.

Habitat loss can occur for a number of reasons including the human activities of fishing, aquaculture, leisure and tourism. All of which are major industries, providing much needed local employment in Donegal. These industries also contribute to the disturbance of seals. Seals require safe haul out sites on land so they may rest, breed and raise their pups. If seals have less places to haul out due to habitat loss or if they are disturbed they spend more time in the water, impacting on their natural behaviours and putting them at risk.

“CONTACTING LOCAL COUNCILLORS, YOUR LOCAL TD, GOVERNMENT MINISTERS OR YOUR LOCAL MEP TO RAISE THE ISSUES OF PLASTIC WASTE AND RECYCLING, POLLUTION AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION HELP TO MAKE CHANGES TOWARDS MANAGING THE THREATS TO THE SEAL POPULATION AND PROTECTING THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT.”



A seal survey conducted in 2011 for the National Parks and Wildlife Service reported seal disturbance in Donegal including shellfish harvesting, quad bike activity and low flying aircraft.

Seal Rescue Ireland (SRI) rescues many seals as a result of human disturbance with incidents including dog attacks and mothers abandoning their pups as a result of humans getting too close.

It's important that we reduce these threats to seals and help restore their habitats and rebuild their population as they have been part of the ecosystem of Ireland for thousands of years. Melanie Croce from Seal Rescue Ireland states "Seals have evolved alongside the fish populations. They are an apex predator and are essential to healing and maintaining our marine ecosystem. Seals kill off the unhealthy fish and keep the fish population healthy."

Melanie also describes how seals are a 'bio-indicator' species, in that the health of the seal population indicates the general health of their habitats. "If we're getting a lot of sick seals from a particular area, it could be a warning of a wider environmental issue that impacts more than just seals.

Seal Rescue Ireland is the only rehabilitation centre for seals in Ireland. They are currently only able to rescue seal pups due to their limited facilities, the majority of their funding coming from donations and product sales. The organisation relies heavily on volunteers both at their rehabilitation centre in Courtown and in their rescue network which covers the entire country.

The number of seals rescued increases year on year, with 165 seals rescued in 2020. In 2021 within only a few weeks of the beginning of the common seal breeding season 3 pups have already required rescue in Co. Donegal alone. The number of dead seal reports is also increasing with 202 recorded for 2020, almost double the number reported in 2019.

Every seal rescued by Seal Rescue Ireland displays at least one of the examples of the threats described above, some requiring care and rehabilitation as a combination of issues.

Their executive director, Melanie Croce, reports that 2021 has been the first year that seals have returned to the centre after previously been released. Pups who were released in a healthy state returned underweight with intestinal parasites. Their failure to thrive indicating an unhealthy environment, affecting their immune system and leaving them vulnerable to disease.

When we are faced with environmental threats, we often feel powerless, but there are things we can do to help conserve the seal population.

In Co. Donegal we are lucky to have 14 blue flag beaches and 4 green coast award beaches. However, there is always more that can be done. Organisations like Clean Coasts Volunteers help to keep our coastline free from rubbish. Organised beach cleans and picking up rubbish or discarded fishing equipment on beach visits reduces the risk of ingestion of or injuries from plastic, metal or entanglement in ghost nets.

Ensure that if you encounter a seal/seals you give them enough space, particularly during pupping season. The grey seal pupping season is from August to February and their pups spend their first 3-4 weeks on land. Common Seal pupping season is from May to September. It's important to keep at least 100m distance from the seals and to keep dogs on leads. This reduces the chance of disturbance, injury and mothers abandoning their pups.

Ideally, the creation of protective spaces for seals, such as the closure of Bride's Head beach, Co. Wicklow during pupping season, would help reduce disturbance in specific areas.

Changes to our lifestyle can help promote seal conservation; cutting out single plastic use, reducing fossil fuel usage, reducing our consumption of meat and fish all help with issues of pollution, habitat destruction and climate change. Seal Rescue Ireland promotes "Meatless Monday" as a simple way of making a difference. Contacting local councillors, your local TD, government ministers or your local MEP to raise the issues of plastic waste and recycling, pollution and wildlife conservation help to make changes towards managing the threats to the seal population and protecting the wider environment.

Getting actively involved in conservation by joining local and national organisations, planting trees, restoring habitats, protecting local green spaces and calling for marine protected areas all contribute to a healthier marine environment for seals. EU requirements are that by 2020 10 percent of Irish waters should be designated as marine protected areas (MPAs), with this target rising to 30 percent in 2030. Currently only 2 percent of Irish waters are designated and there is no enforcement of the no fishing zone.

Ecotourism may be a way forward for humans and seals to live together in Donegal, but this needs to be conducted in such a way to ensure that the seals and their habitat are not disturbed.

James Kenny is a local man, whose boat charter business "Seas The Bay" offers wildlife watching trips, out of Portnablagh, on Donegal's north west coast. He takes visitors to view a colony of around 200 hundred grey and common seals. James, who trained with the organisation Wildsea Europe, understands the importance of maintaining the delicate balance with nature when engaging in ecotourism activities, so that our longing to see these creatures and to learn about them, doesn't detrimentally affect their natural behaviours and safe havens. James talks passionately about the need to conserve and restock the ocean and how he educates his passengers about the seals and other local wildlife.

As a result of restrictions, and changes to our lifestyle due to the COVID-19 pandemic many people report they have reconnected to the natural environment. This can be viewed as an opportunity to reset our course in our relationship with the natural environment. With domestic tourism likely to increase in Donegal, as international travel restrictions continue, there is potential for us to move in the right direction by becoming more involved in both protecting and promoting the seals of Donegal.

As you walk along the shoreline in Donegal you can feel the magic of the seals who inhabit this liminal world where the land meets the ocean. You may catch a glimpse of them watching you from the water with their soulful eyes and human-like faces, and possibly, like I did, you may fall under the spell of this sacred creature. And as we become aware of how our increasing consumption threatens our planet, you may remember the old folktales and again learn to live in harmony with the seals.





WASTED RESOURCES

by Geraldine Conlon

*When we think of our community,
What is it that makes it ours?
Is it our local shop,
That hasn't been opened in two years.
Is it the houses that we live in,
That show the wear from all the years.
Is it the scenery that surrounds us,The mountains standing proud.
The green fields upon our doorsteps, the litter on the ground.
Is it the buildings all around us and the services that they provide or is it the access to everything in little more than a half hour's drive.*

*What is it that convinces us to volunteer in chasing time. To help preserve our resources, feeling I'm wasting mine.
Is it really all the structures that makes it all so great or is there something else that keeps us holding Faith.
I think it is the people.
Just a familiar face.
Another volunteered member of this the human race.
It's people like Alice Kelly.
"Glenshane's silent warrior"
It's what she does everyday that she sees as simply not a bother.
It's the likes of Tracy Boylan and her willingness to get stuck in.
The blessings of her green fingers that keep things neat and trim.
It's the likes of Robbie Conlon.
Jobstown community centre manager, and the time he put in with the youths just to keep the centre opened later.
It's the kindness of our shopkeepers who'll ask about your day.
It's your neighbours you haven't seen since yesterday that still stop to just say hey.
Or is it simply just our ice cream man,
Unique in his own way.
Keeping adults and kids alike both happy on the long hot summers days.*

*There's one thing I know for sure and that's that our community won't survive,
if we all remain content with hiding out inside
The collective's mentality of "who cares:
once I can shut my own front door"
Really needs to change as its not helping us anymore.
If I could have one wish that came with a guarantee. I'd wish more community members, normal Joe's like you and me.
Would choose to play their part, take back our own responsibility because let's be brutally honest we're no-one else's priority.
We need to learn to trust again in the success that we could have if we could share a sense of unity, and remember to have a laugh.
I know what you are thinking, that's some dream more than a wish but let me put it simply like this.
If you were to ask the children, " What do you feel about your estate", I doubt it very much they'll be all screaming out "It's great".
Now take the time to recall what it was like for you growing up? And we have the cheek as adults to say the kids theses days have all the luck!
So let's say we just forget the reasons that keep us all apart and build on understanding, Everyone deserves a fresh start.
Let's do it for the kids around us they've had a rough few years, let's make some happy memories for them to help them survive an adult tears.
Excuse my way of thinking if it seems a bit too much but the importance of this wish to me I just can't express enough.
I want pride back in amongst my community
I want reasons to celebrate, I want to know neighbours again a cuppa at the garden gate.*

So class me as a chancer or nutjob and the rest but you can't blame me for trying to do my best. So if we share a madness and you feel the same as me, please reach out and find me as I need the company.









SHEROES IN THE SHADOWS

by Joanne Nolan

I was looking at what was happening in my community. Who was doing what and where? I became struck by the many women just doing. Not blowing their own trumpet, just quietly doing.

I knew of women who were now making masks and handing them out. I knew many nurses who had returned to the front line, home schooled and managed to mind their elderly parents and neighbours who were cocooning. I knew of women who had volunteered to deliver PPE to local nursing homes. Foster carers going above and beyond. Women working with the homeless, which led to my idea to highlight these women and what they are doing.

This is “Sheros In the Shadows”.

Bernadette Fagan is a Homeless Outreach worker, she does this in the capacity of a volunteer. Bernadette is an accidental Shero. She always helped with the Annual Christmas shoe boxes appeal for the homeless. The organiser urged Bernadette to give volunteering at the soup run a go. Bernadette relented to satisfy her friend.

She thought 1000 percent that this was a one off. On a freezing cold November evening five years ago, Bernadette volunteered at her first soup run. On that night she met Ger. Ger had such a happy disposition and wicked sense of humour despite her circumstances, it caught Bernadette completely off guard.

Her mind was blown that first evening, she was shocked and humbled by those she met, especially Ger. As she arrived eagerly the following Tuesday, she noticed a small group huddled together around a framed picture with tea lights as a memorial to Ger. Bernadette was forever changed in that moment.

She now runs Lucan Homeless Donations and does outreach in Dublin’s city center, offering food, dry clothes, goodies, even McDonald vouchers when available, but from my observations, more importantly, she sits with them and listens, she sees them with no judgement.

I accompanied Bernadette one Sunday afternoon as she assisted a homeless outreach van that comes up from Portlaoise once a month. One of the people I met was Ella Rose, she is eight years old. Ella is third generation homeless, she was there that day with her grandad Michael to get some ‘bits’.

Ella lives in Tallaght Cross Hotel with her mam, her mam’s partner and her siblings aged 11, four and four months. Ella tells me that there is no outside space, but that there is an indoor play area that is open until 6pm. This was closed during the Covid restrictions. Michael, her grandad, tells me that they had to flee their home in Clondalkin due to antisocial behaviour. They are just “waiting”, wise Ella says. Waiting for a permanent place to call home.

I came across Vin a gentle-man from the UK. Grief brought him to his knees, he says. He plays a mean tune with his tin whistle. I stood listening to him play whilst the world whizzed by. We spoke for a long time. Vin is a very clever, articulate, kind and caring man trying to put the pieces of his life back together.







VALEDICTION FROM PARADISE PIER

by Yvonne Callery

“But I cannot undo the past
to which myself is wed,
the woven figure cannot undo the thread.”
From Valediction, by Louis Mc Niece.

This part of my story begins with an ending.
Before the ending was to be the beginning, a new county, new home, new slate upon which to write our shared story.
But the ending came suddenly, unexpectedly and catastrophically in the form of a death, a death which felt like the amputation of a vital part of myself.

Bruckless was to become our lair, Bruckless from Old English leger meaning bed, couch, place of lying down.
We chose a place where we could live well, walk, read, have friends and family visit. We were a little intoxicated by the name of the pier a short stroll from the house, Paradise Pier, the image it conjured in our minds of a place of promise and peace.

The incomprehensible absence is there day and night, the act of living is different all through. To borrow from C.S. Lewis who wrote so poignantly about grief, Micky’s absence is like the sky spread over everything. I am surrounded by the artefacts of my life, but a restlessness has inhabited me, and I gain little comfort from having his beautiful paintings and my once treasured books near me.

I am consumed with an insatiable hunger for first hand experiences like my own. I search for and read through the literature of grief canon, but this hunger cannot be satisfied.
I feel more connected vicariously to writers, poets and songwriters who can eloquently speak the language of grief.
Nothing but complete immersion in the language will assuage my despair.

Immediately after the funeral the restlessness was at its most intense, exhausted but my body charged with adrenaline, I could not sleep for fear of nightmares, my waking moments I tried to revisit places where we had been happy, a fruitless quest to feel his presence, but I was left bereft realising that the absence was no less emphatic than anywhere else.

My impulsivity took me to a Buddhist centre for a few days, for peace and silence, maybe even the path to enlightenment.
But it was too soon, seven weeks after the day my life had changed irrevocably, in an instant.
Could I still my monkey mind here?

Buddhism teaches that all life is interconnected, and compassion is natural and normal. I wanted to explore the concept of compassion and self compassion. In the classical teachings of the Buddhist tradition compassion is defined as the heart that trembles in the face of suffering, acknowledging that all pain cannot be fixed or solved, but all suffering is made more approachable in a landscape of compassion.

But my monkey mind was put into overdrive with all the silence and meditation, and solitude, and the coldness that gripped me since the funeral, I climbed fully clothed into my sleeping bag, the sole occupant of the women’s cottage, armed with Buddhism sacred text.

Good intentions have their place, but in this instance the sacred text was cast aside in favour of Netflix on my phone, and yet another episode of a Scandi noir thriller. I had developed a dependency on nighttime subtitled police procedurals. I’m sure psychotherapists would have something to say about it.
Rabindranath Tagore wrote:

“What will you give?
What will you give
When death knocks at your door?
The fullness of my life-
The sweet wine of autumn days and summer nights,
My little hoard gleaned through the years, and hours rich with living.
These will be my gift when death knocks at my door.”

A letter four months after the day of days brought a truth bomb. My state of suspended animation was dealt a blow. A reality check, so to speak.

The letter had been painstakingly laboured over for weeks, its author stressed.
It began “Dear Loved One”...
even reading it today for the purpose of accuracy in relating this, I am reduced to tears for the person who addressed me in this deeply personal loving way.

An anonymous person had written to express profound gratitude for being a recipient of my beloved’s organs. The priceless gift of an organ which could potentially transform the recipients life, is how the letter described it. Truth bomb! Micky was gone, he wasn’t coming back, his passing had given hope of continued life to another.

I cry for the one who lost his life too early, but gave generously.
I cry for myself who lost out on all I had imagined for us around Paradise pier.

A global pandemic six months later barely impacted on me at the outset. I was occupying a liminal space anyway, my jangled nerves and insomnia almost welcomed the enforced reduction in my world. I became accustomed to the lack of expectation, the days had their own rhythm, I had to invent ways to keep my benumbed brain from straying to the dark side.

The quotidian details of existence become central to survival when the anchor of relationships, work and routine are stripped away.
I walked and I wrote letters daily, the volume of output far exceeded the input but the activity of writing was its own reward. It was the thread that kept me bound to the past and present.

I keep the urn close, there never seemed to be an opportune time to scatter the ashes, and for many months I thought this place had no meaning or connection to Micky, for he died the night before the removal vans were to transport us to our new home in Bruckless.

So he didn’t get to share the walks, sea swims and seasonal changes with me. Yet through all this time he has been ever present. His nature, his belief in Epicurean philosophy of simple pleasure, friendship and a secluded life has fortified me. The ashes will be scattered here, for here I found sustenance in memory, in nature and in the peace that suspended time can bring.

“On the long hills of Clifden
the green hills of Clifden
I will lay down my grief.
to accept death it must be
that death changes into light
that light changes into sea
and sea into memory.”
Derek Mahon excerpt from The Clifden Road.

This journey, this story is unfinished, it began at the beginning of an ending, and it is ending at the beginning again with a valediction – a farewell....





*"How often now I just sit,
with my elbows on the desk
and my hands holding my face bold and upright,
and stare into the past."*

Afternote by Mary Oliver



WHAT IS REPRESENTATION FOR THE UNDER-REPRESENTED?

by Rupali Ovhal

The media representation of under-represented groups has long been a topic of debate. A non-dominant category, such as people of colour, people with disabilities, people from a lower socio-economic status, people who are gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender, people of a non-mainstream religion, and retirees are all considered to be under-represented groups. While there are different definitions of under-represented groups, women make up a substantial part of these who are under-represented.

A recent article revealed data about how the LGTBQ+ community feels about their representation in advertising. It was found that most brands do not communicate to this community, while there are some who jump on the bandwagon during pride month to encash popularity. Some members of LGTBQ+ also feel that drawing a rainbow on products isn't enough to make them feel included. Besides #pridemonth cannot be the only time when brands talk about the LGTBQ+ community. This research shows that there is a growing feeling amongst the members of the community that brands should communicate with them as they have a role to play in progression of societal views.

It is important to remember though, media representation is probably the last concern for under-represented people, considering they have to fight so many battles at ground level.

For instance, women's under-representation in fields like science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) has been a significant issue. While there have been studies that provide hypothesis that women are under-represented in these fields due to them lacking raw intellectual talent compared to men, reality is women do not pursue these careers, or advance to leadership positions – not because they lack talent or aspirations – but because they face barriers like bias, sexual harassment, unequal access to funding and resources, pay inequity and limited opportunities, among others.

These issues are not just faced by women but by other under-represented groups such as members of LGTBQ+, people of different race, religion or caste.



From a project “Creativity in Motherhood” by Fiona Dowd

“Motherhood can be extremely isolating, particularly in the early years. You can be cut off from your usual routines, friendships, and work (whether that be for the duration of maternity leave or by becoming a stay-at-home parent). The imposed pause forces a period of deep reflection, a time to examine who you are and what your purpose is. In much the same way that the global pandemic has done. Having interviewed the women, I noticed the parallels of the pandemic and motherhood. In terms of isolation, reflection, re-integration, overwhelm and the uncertainty that comes with knowing life will never be the same again. It's a life experience that changes you from the core on the deepest level. We saw on social media the huge shift towards creativity as a way of coping with the isolation of lockdowns. Many turned to old hobbies or embraced new creative practices. You will see through the interviews that this was a common trait through motherhood too.”

See the full story on www.femlens.com



From a project “Focus on Female Farmers” by Maud McClean

“An RTE article I saw earlier this year asked “Why are just 12% of Irish farmers women?” One of the main reasons is the ‘deeply embedded’ tradition of fathers passing the land to their sons. The tradition has existed for a long time but is now starting to be questioned in a very different era of gender equality.

I was starting to see more and more young women interested and involved in farming around me. Was this a new phenomenon, or had there always been women farmers, I just hadn’t seen them. I was aware of a handful of women farmers, operating as the main person on their farms, though I knew that in many farm families there were a multitude of woman carrying out largely unrecognised support roles.

I was curious to investigate a little further. It took quite a bit of effort first of all to find women farmers, and secondly to have them agree to be interviewed. I didn’t manage to include any women in their 50s or older, as they were more reserved, yet the young farmers were happy to be seen doing what they love.”

See the full story on www.femlens.com



Many scholars have researched the various barriers or challenges the under-represented communities have to go through in order to get access to quality education, employment, healthcare and much more. While diversity is considered the cornerstone of good business practice, in practice there are still many fields or areas of work that lack representation.

A research conducted to study the lack of representation of certain racial and ethnic groups in the Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) field revealed that their absence leaves these groups to face discrimination and injustice at various levels. As a result, they continue to receive unequal pay and are unable to devote time to up-skill themselves.

These barriers act like a vicious cycle that continues to cause grievances for the under-represented groups that are trying hard to break out of that cycle.

It is hard to eradicate the issues faced by under-represented groups in a day, and might require generations of efforts. However, there are ways in which the work system can be improved. If those with authority, such as employers, can provide opportunities and practice the values they preach in ‘Company Ethics and Values’, the benefits will be shared by everyone.

Under-represented groups in a workplace can be made to feel included if they are treated equal to others and not something special. They want to receive equal opportunities and receive incentives based on what they bring to table and not what race or gender they belong to. It is important they receive guidance, support and a pathway to success within an organisation. Diversity is a win-win situation, it not only helps bring equality to the workplace but also helps bring in different perspectives. This ensures that there is a flow of creativity within the team. This, in the long term, benefits the organisation.

Intent alone isn’t enough fix the biases, it is critical to examine the processes followed by the organisation in terms of hiring and employee engagement, and make amendments based on critical analysis. Under-represented groups, just like other individuals within an organisation, require career growth and leadership opportunities. Therefore, it is critical to redesign the practice of promoting talent and offering opportunities.

For the larger picture to change, and for better representation both in the media and the real world, innumerable changes are required at base level. Continuous and consistent awareness within the hierarchy is requisite to make the world equal in the real sense.



DARKNESS BEHIND THE DOOR

by Yevis

My voice is for all of the victims, survivors, for those who lost their lives at the hands of their partners and for those who are still living in silence, experiencing domestic violence.

How sad it is to see on the television news, newspapers and to hear on the radio how the number of victims of domestic violence is increasing.

It is terrible that during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 there was an even greater increase in the number of women locked up suffering and living unsafe in their own homes in different countries.

Where in Donegal, the Women's Domestic Violence Service has seen a 70 per cent increase of women seeking its service.

The truth is that it is difficult for victims of domestic violence to contact services due to the fear and insecurity in which they live.

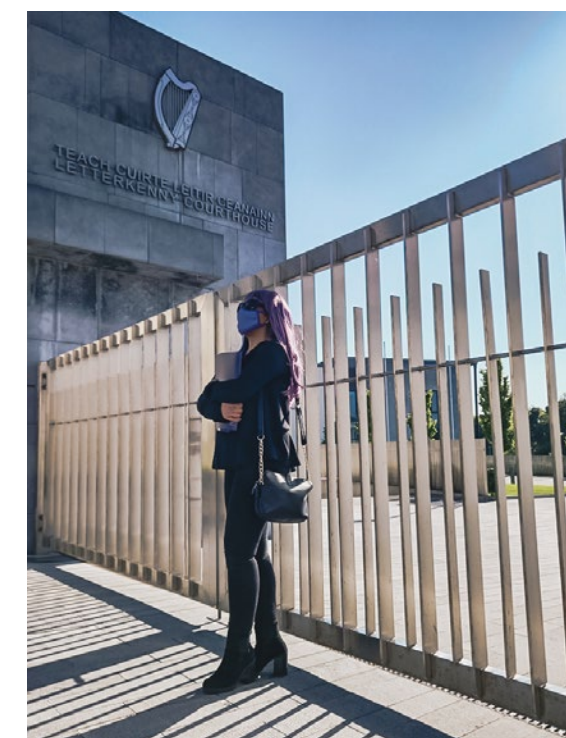
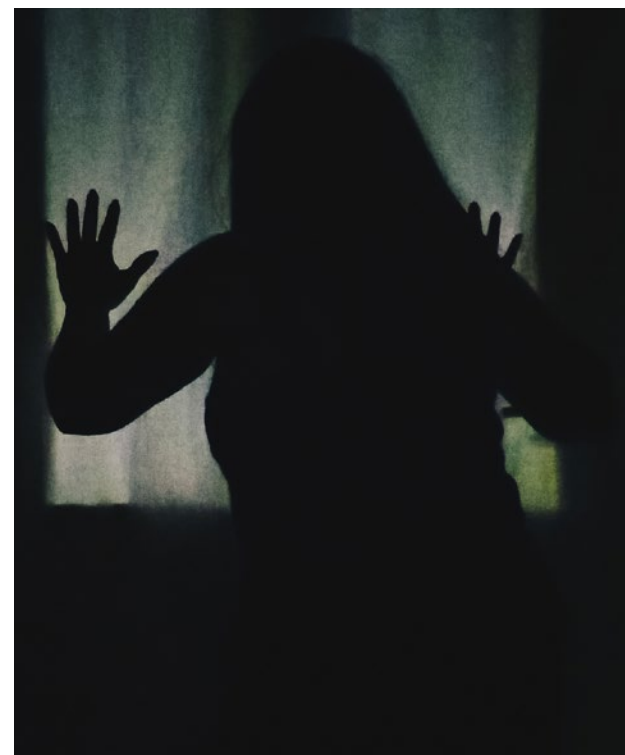
It takes many years, months, days, weeks to make the decision, the courage and strength to seek help to leave and escape from the environment of anguish, sadness, fear, abuse and violence.

It would be important to start a campaign of information and programs in schools, high schools, universities, for employees and society, to raise awareness. Let's prepare our children by informing and educating them against this terrible situation of domestic violence, because every day more and more women continue to be victims.

It is not fair that any human being should live in fear or insecurity either at home, workplace or anywhere in the world. Because tomorrow it could be our children, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, neighbours or the person next to you.

Unfortunately, victims of domestic violence live it in silence without anyone noticing, not even their own families. I would never want my children, nor any woman or human being to live this experience because it is not fair and no one deserves it.

My thanks from the bottom of my heart to the amazing and wonderful staff dedicated to providing help and support to the mothers and children, to all of the victims of domestic violence in Donegal. There really are no words to express my gratitude for your wonderful work with the victims and survivors of domestic violence.



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