

# WE SEE











Photo by Elisa Mariotti  
femLENS "Women at work" campaign, 2021





Photo by Sara Díaz  
femLENS Discord Community Project  
2022





Photo by Shaemaa Abasi  
femLENS workshops 2022, Jerusalem

8 THE POWER OF MANY  
by Tracy Piper-Wright

12 FEATURED PHOTOGRAPHER:  
FATEMEH BEHBOUDI  
Interview by Jekaterina Saveljeva

18 BREAK GENDER BIAS FROM  
ITS ROOT  
by Elena Palaiorouta

20 HER STORY. HERSELF. HER  
WORLD  
by Liz Gallagher

28 GENDER-BLIND MEDICINE. HOW IMAGES  
AFFECT DIAGNOSIS AND THE HEALTH OF  
WOMEN  
by Aishling Heffernan

30 ▲ DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PALESTINIAN  
by Nimat Natsheh

34 MY LITTLE BROTHER  
by Alaa Shabanehs

40 CITY OF DERRY 'CAGE BIRD  
SOCIETY'  
by Rachel Sharkey

44 SEA TONIC  
by Sara Anderson

52 WOMEN NOT IN THE RIGHT  
PLACE  
by Elena Díaz Rodríguez

58 HOUSING IS NOT A PRIVILEGE  
by Alice Castiglione

62 KEEPERS OF THE SEA  
by Sara Alemão



# THE POWER OF MANY

by Tracy Piper-Wright

*“Activist photography is intent and process. It is an act and a filter through which a photographer perceives the world. It is a passionate voice and a moral vision.” (Bogre 2011: xii)*

Photography has always been used as a tool to highlight the things that are and the things that should be changed, to paraphrase the social documentarian, Lewis Hine. The camera’s ability to dispassionately record has always been its chief advantage; creating records of working conditions and city streets, providing evidence that could support legislative change or showing us life as it is lived. As the principles of ‘documentary’ photography developed, the photographer became a witness to social and political inequalities, her camera a tool in the quest to inform and educate. Documentary’s Latin word root *doc* arises from *docere*, meaning to teach or instruct, highlighting the potential of photographs to become powerful tools in broadening our knowledge about the world. Through its projects and workshops femLENS has chipped away at the edifice of established knowledge, creating windows and doorways through which women in many parts of the world have shared their experiences. The accessibility of the mobile phone camera and the simplicity of taking a photo and sharing it, is part of this opening up of the visual media landscape to more women. femLENS projects and workshops have ranged far and wide, but it is in their use of social media and in the rousing of women’s voices toward several global campaigns, where we see a new potential for women’s vision not just to tell us stories of how things are, but to actively point to what needs to be changed. femLENS’ campaigns follow in a tradition of visual activism that began during first wave feminism. Rallying around the central tenet of “the personal

is political”, feminist activists in the 70s and 80s used the democratic and everyday medium of photography to document lived experience and to undermine established tropes found in advertising and the media. This type of practice goes beyond documentary and takes on a political urgency, moving the photographer from the position of witness to advocate. Requiring a different level of personal investment from the photographer, activist photographs are not just ends, but means to a solution, even if that solution is uncertain. Activist photography is often a life’s work. Pioneering activist photographer Jo Spence saw herself primarily as a photographer-educator and used her practice as an example to others of how photography could be a tool of empowerment. Her work as part of the Hackney Flashers between 1974-79 was key in showing how a political, collective and everyday photography could raise awareness of women’s lived experience. The collective drew together women with different levels of photographic experience in North London communities, producing two major pieces of work: *Women and Work* (1975) and *Who’s holding the baby?* (1978). *Women and Work* used images of women in the workplace, most often in factory or piece work settings, alongside commentary which highlighted levels of employment and differences in pay between men and women. Responses to the project highlighted the lack of discussion about childcare for working women, which informed the collective’s next project. *Who’s holding the baby?* explored the difficulties of women caught between the necessity to work and the lack of publicly funded childcare. This second project was far more critical in its intent, exploring how the absence of childcare impacted on women, children and society at

large, and addressed the complexity of women’s roles as mothers and workers inside and outside the home. The work was formed of 23 panels, each exploring a different facet of issue, using provocative titles such as ‘What are mother’s made of?’ and ‘childcare is a matter of money and class’. Each panel comprised photographs and text along with collage, advertising imagery and graphics, making the critical, agitprop nature of the work unmistakable. *Who’s holding the baby?* was shown at conferences, trade union meetings, libraries; anywhere it could reach as wide an audience as possible. Its role was to educate, but also to press for actual change and improvement in existing conditions, rather than just depict them. The fact that this was a collective issue, a problem that affected large numbers of women gave it additional weight in terms of its relevance and importance. It proposed a significant counter-narrative to idealised societal ideas of motherhood and childcare, revealing a reality which up until that time was barely recognised or appreciated by society at large. Contemplating the early years of feminist visual activism can show us how far we have come, and perhaps how far we have yet to go. The nature and scope of activist photography has been transformed by the advent of digital photography, the mobile phone camera and social media. Despite these developments, it’s apparent that the campaigns that femLENS

have instigated via their Instagram platform over the last two years share much in common with the activist principles espoused by Jo Spence and the Hackney Flashers. The areas of interest in contemporary campaigns echo those which were of concern many decades ago. femLENS’ *Women at Work* campaign sought images that celebrated women’s manual, intellectual and domestic labour. The campaign drew attention to invisible labour carried out in the home under the auspices of being ‘women’s work’, and the intersections of class and economics which valorises some forms of work while diminishing others. The *Mothers at Work* campaign in 2022 followed up on women’s unpaid labour, highlighting the 70% of working women who do all or most of the caregiving at home. The campaign’s focus on the emotional and health impacts of this doubled workload, moves the territory identified by the Hackney Flashers into a contemporary context where the expectation of ‘having it all’ needs to be challenged. While contemporary and historic campaigns share a focus on issues that have universal impact on women, what differs in the contemporary context is international reach. Economic independence, caring responsibilities, gender-based violence and women’s health are ongoing, shared battles, and femLENS campaigns have brought women from across the world to the collective fight. This is the advantage of social



Image and design by Rudy de Souza for femLENS “Women at Work” campaign, 2022.



media, and femLENS' campaigns form part of a continuing trend of online activism which exploits the instant connectivity of social networks to break down barriers to communication. As Hester Baer argues, digital spaces have been an important strand of contemporary feminist activism:

"Digital platforms offer great potential for broadly disseminating feminist ideas, shaping new modes of discourse about gender and sexism, connecting to different constituencies, and allowing creative modes of protest to emerge." (Baer 2016: 18)

Intersectional feminism recognises shared experiences but also how these are differentiated with regard to culture, ethnicity and economics. The campaigns that femLENS have organised form a kaleidoscope of experiences through which we can understand both what we have in common and where our experiences differ. The acknowledgement of difference and diversity, alongside shared concerns, is the sign of a mature and democratic feminism and one that aims to raise the aspirations and potential of all women.

The shared domain of the social also contributes to the accessibility of women as producers of activist images and texts. With access to a mobile phone, women can make their voice heard without the need for gatekeepers and the wave of feminist activism on social media is evidence of how an event or issue in one part of the world can ripple outward from the local to the global. For Tara L. Conley, the founder of Hashtag Feminism, the power of social media lies in the real time interaction and communication that the platforms enable. Using hashtags to identify key issues, users can follow and contribute to events that are overlooked by mainstream media, leading to the extraordinary impact of campaigns such as #MeToo, #Yesallwomen and #NotBuyingIt.

Conley's *Hashtag Feminism* is an archive of feminist social media activism between 2013-2015, documenting a key period of time when internet culture and social justice intersected. Conley's site demonstrates how the hashtag can be used as tool to draw together and document discreet strands of activist commentary on a single issue, creating a repository for consciousness raising and future activism. This type of archive

contradicts the perception that social media is ephemeral or disposable and points to an important means through which collective voices can be heard together and maintained for the future.

Over the last two years, femLENS' campaigns have drawn in an ever-wider range of participants to comment on issues ranging from women's protest to environmental awareness, gender bias to affordable housing, offering a polyvalent expression of women's insight and commentary on issues that matter to us all. Social media creates rhizomatic connections between individuals, places and voices; weaving together threads of individual experience that may never have crossed outside of this shared domain. Feminist activists have always used the tools of the everyday, subverting them to reveal new truths and press for change. Contemporary feminist activism uses the everyday tools of social media, subverting the apparent individualistic or superficial aspects to create sites of lasting significance in the campaign to raise women's voices and vision. It's the power of many.

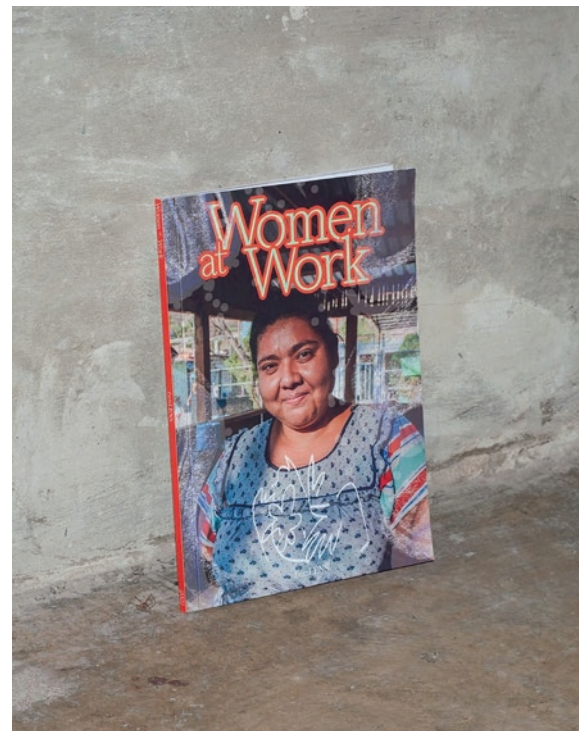


Image and design by Rudy de Souza for femLENS "Women at Work" campaign, 2022.

Economic independence,  
caring responsibilities,  
gender-based violence  
and women's health are  
ongoing, shared battles,  
and femLENS campaigns  
have brought women  
from across the world to  
the collective fight.



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

# A CONVERSATION ABOUT PHOTOGRAPHY WITH FATEMEH BEHBOUDI

by Jekaterina Saveljeva

**City/Country**  
Tehran /Iran.

**What do you enjoy most about photography?**

For me, photography is a path without limits, at every stage it confronts me with many intellectual challenges. Under the pretext of photography, I get close to different people and see different aspects of life from other people’s eyes and touch the events closely. Photography is both a difficult and an easy way. It depends on how we look at photography and what we want from it. In my opinion, the beauty of photography is the changes that happened in us while working, and it turns us into deeper human beings and finally gives new meanings to our lives. I love this challenging path.

**Was there anything that inspired you to start making photos?**

When I was younger and I wanted to start photography, I saw Kevin Carter’s famous photo (child and scavenger), which left a deep impression on me and inspired my photography. Can I capture a photo as strong as Kevin one day? I always ask myself this question and try to continue my photography in this path.

**What is your favourite object/subject/topic to photograph?**

My first favourite subject for photography is about “war”. I was born between the Iran and Iraq wars (1988-1988). My childhood and youth years were spent in the name of war. Every day, I have seen the inexhaustible effects of this war in my life and that of others. How it will involve itself for generations to come has always been a question for me. In addition, the Middle East has always been a victim

of various wars. That’s why we were always involved in the issue of war. I would like to be able to continue this project in the Middle East one day.

**Do you feel it is important to share your vision on social media?**

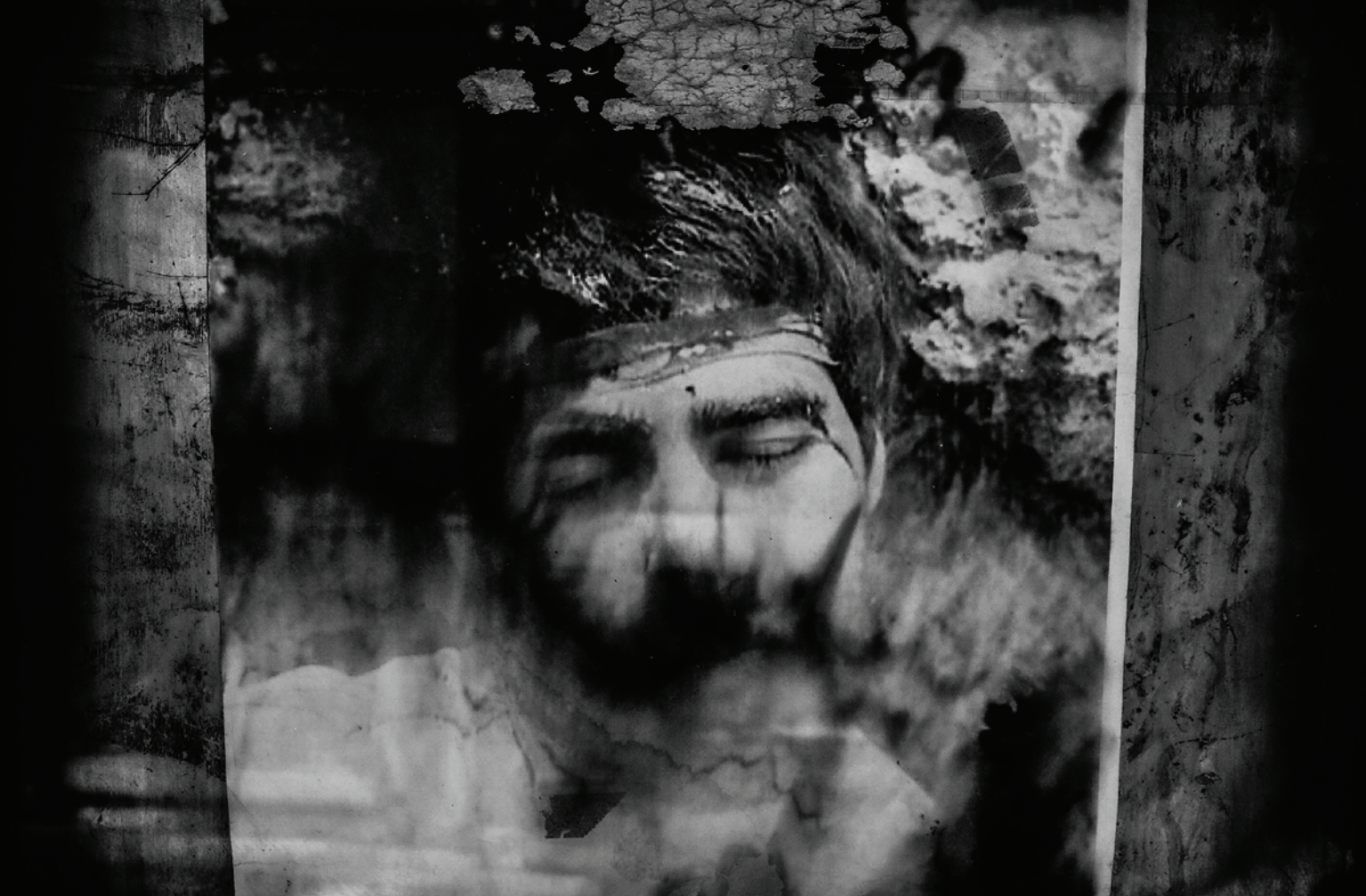
I think we humans have our own world view. It is our different look at issues that can influence people and create new intellectual and social currents and ultimately change people’s understanding of the events around them. I think it’s very important to share our views on social media.

**Who do you think is your aimed audience?**

Ordinary people are the main audience of my work. I have always seen myself as a normal person. Ordinary people can become heroes... they can create epics... they can do great things... they can love the people of other countries. I cried and laughed and lived many times with ordinary people. They are the same. Both in Iran and in other countries. I try to create a bridge for understanding between nations with my photos. A bridge to peace.

**Do you like working on stories at home/in your local community? If yes/no - why?**

I love new experiences. I always like to work both in Iran and in other countries. However, considering the complex situation and culture of Iran, I think there are still many stories in my country that have not been addressed properly, and it is our duty to tell the stories. I think that the photo has a lot of social flow power and can affect the life of a person or people. But everything depends on the time situation, the type of storytelling, the way the project is presented.



Faded portrait of Iranian martyr Amir Haj Amini, who was martyred in March of 1987, as a result of a mortar shell injury. This image became popular among the Iranian people after the war as the most beautiful martyr image. Because of that, many people use this image for the graves of unknown martyrs, without name or identity. Tehran, from my long-term project “Martyr is Alive”.

@FATEMEHBEHBOUDI

by Fatemeh Behboudi

Three decades have passed since the end of the Iran-Iraq war, but many mothers are still waiting for the return of the remains of lost sons who perished during the war. Many veterans who managed to survive spend their days with the psychosomatic pains caused by chemical and biological warfare. Every day their every breath has been accompanied by tears, screams and dreams of death. Thirty years have passed since the end of the war, but children and many people in the border towns of Iran are still the victims of buried land mines in the soil, and their dreams have died with them. Thirty years and counting since the end of the war, but war-torn cities remain torn and have not revived, have not been restored to their former glory. And the inhabitants of these sad cities have not seen a return to vitality and life.





Mustafa Salari died fighting in the Iran-Iraq war and his body was never returned to his family. Salari's father made a mortuary in the name of his son, open to the public for prayer and contemplation. Salari's mother often visits the mortuary, crying alone for hours. Photo from "Mothers of patience" project.



People are visiting the Shalamcheh area for Iranian martyrs. Each year, nearly two million people travel to war-torn areas of the war between Iran and Iraq. The people of Iran believe that these areas are holy because of the blood of the Iranian martyrs who were killed in the war. Many of them are families of martyrs and travel to those areas to pray and mourn for their martyred family members. Shalamcheh is a border area between Iran and Iraq and is one of the first regions that was attacked by Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator. It was destroyed during the war and thousands of soldiers were killed in this region. Photo from "trip to holy land" project.



People are visiting the Shalamcheh area for Iranian martyrs. Ahvaz city, Shalamcheh border. Each year, nearly two million people travel to war-torn areas of the war between Iran and Iraq. The people of Iran believe that these areas are holy because of the blood of the Iranian martyrs who were killed in the war. Many of them are families of martyrs and travel to those areas to pray and mourn for their martyred family members. Shalamcheh is a border area between Iran and Iraq and is one of the first regions that was attacked by Saddam Hussein, the Iraqi dictator. It was destroyed during the war and thousands of soldiers were killed in this region. Photo from "trip to holy land" project.

Thirty years gone but the children and families of martyrs still travel to locations where their fathers and children were martyred. Still, martyr families are looking for even a small part of the bodies of their martyrs or whatever remains from that amid the devastation. Who has said that the war is over? The war is alive. Even after 30 years. I was an infant in the middle of the Iran-Iraq War. The war began in 1980 with the invasion of Iraq to the international border of Iran. More than 220,000 Iranian soldiers were killed and more than 800,000 injured. About three million people from both countries were killed and wounded in this bloody war, a war that is known as the greatest classic battle of the 20th century. It lasted eight years and eventually ended in 1988 with Iran adopting UN Resolution 598. The war (for the government and media) ended, but then the real war began for the people .. The hidden wounds of the war show up increasingly. And as I opened my eyes and ears in childhood, I was surrounded by a sense of fear, the sounds of emergency sirens and of bombs and the news about martyrs.... they were all in front of me and all the memories of my childhood were full of these sorrowful scenes. From then till today, I always heard a common name in all Iranian homes: Saddam Hussein. He was, of course, the Iraqi dictator ultimately responsible for all the carnage. People have always talked about him and how his crimes had destroyed the lives of hundreds of thousands of people. The talk that never stopped and can still be heard in many Iranian homes. And this turned into a question for me: why this war remains so fresh on the minds of millions and why Saddam is not yet forgotten?



Anbar Jabeti (72), who has waited 28 years for her son, is crying over her son's clothes. This is the only way for her to be calm. During the Iran and Iraq war (1980-1988) more than 220,000 Iranian soldiers were killed. After the war it was revealed that the bodies of over 10,000 Iranian soldiers were missing and there is still no sign of them. The mothers of Iranian soldiers, whose bodies were never returned, are crying for their lost sons every day. They do not know anything about their lost sons' bodies. Years of crying have damaged the eyesight of many of the mothers. From my long-term project "Mothers of patience".



The war between Iran and Iraq started on September 22, 1980, with Iraq's massive aggression against Iranian territory. The war lasted eight years and more than 220,000 Iranian soldiers were killed. The war, identified as the longest conventional conflict of the 20th century, ended in July of 1988, after the two countries accepted UN resolution 598. After the war, it was revealed that the bodies of over 10,000 Iranian soldiers were missing and there is still no sign of them. In recent years, the bodies of about 7,000 Iranian martyrs have been found and they have been buried under the name of 'Unknown Martyrs' because they can't be identified. At present, over 5,000 other martyrs remain in Iraq. Corpses are found and brought to Iran every few months. Recently, eighty Iranian bodies were found in Iraq and are waiting for license to go to Iran. Shalamcheh border, Iran and Iraq, from "Mothers of Patience" project.





Ezzat (64), a mother who waited 30 years for news, meets the body of her son, Hamid Saeedi, who was 18 years old when he went to war. The war between Iran and Iraq started on September 22, 1980, with Iraq's massive aggression against Iranian territory. The war lasted eight years and more than 220,000 Iranian soldiers were killed. The war, identified as the longest conventional conflict of the 20th century, ended in July 1988, after the two countries accepted UN resolution 598. After the war, it was revealed that the bodies of over 10,000 Iranian soldiers were missing and there is still no sign of them. From my long-term project "mothers of patience".



Clothes of one of the Iranian soldiers who was Killed in the Iran-Iraq war. The body and clothes and ID of the Martyr were found after 32 years. Photo from "Unknown martyrs" project.



Reza Reyhani, 57-year-old. As a boy, he was a minesweeper during the war, working to clear mine fields in Iran, a practice that was widely criticized in the West. He is ill and cannot speak or move today because of the chemical effects on his nervous system of his service during the war. Photo from "Victims of the war" project.



A member of a martyr's family sleeping on the grave of a martyr, Tehran. Behesht-e Zahra in Tehran is the biggest cemetery of Iranian martyrs. It hosts the bodies of over 33,000 Iranian nationals who were killed in war. The people in Tehran go to the tombs of their martyrs every week and live with them. They even hold the most important events of their lives beside the tombs of martyrs. The revival of traditional religious beliefs in the Islamic Revolution, and the Iraqi-imposed war against Iran combined to make martyrdom a deep and powerful issue in Iranian culture among families who lost people in the war.

The Iranians believe that anyone who resists in the right way, defending people and sacrificing himself is a martyr and remains alive. A martyr has saved many other lives by his death and, therefore, martyrs enjoy a great position in Iranian society. While they don't have bodies, their spirits are alive and always live with their families and communities. Photo from "martyr is alive" project.

The Iran-Iraq war and its traces, its consequences and victims, became my most important concern and subjects in photography. I was able to get much closer to the victims of the war with my camera. I saw the old wounds of war as alive as ever - the wounds that had not healed even after 30 years.

"War is still Alive" is the title of a long and (ongoing) documentary project that I have been working on for six years, and so far I have worked on parts of this project. My first story was "Mothers of Patience" a story about the lives of mothers of Iranian martyrs who have been waiting for a son's body to be found and returned for proper burial. This initial project was the first effort to look deeper into the war and its victims. How did the victims of the war spend their best years of life with the deep pain of war?

What bothered me the most was that they never returned to their normal lives after the war and most of the victims never could be the same person they were before. The suffering of the victims of war has become a profound pain for me, and it has made me more resolute to carry out further post-war projects.

With this project, I want to show the effects of war on different generations, how it can influence the life of an individual... a family, a community, a nation, a region and how it left wounds and deep pains on survivors for decades.

I live in Iran and every day we are expecting a new war in my country or nearby, because of threats from the U.S. and some neighbors.

Can you imagine that waiting for new war is more difficult than real war? It can seem so.

With the continuation of this long-term project in Iran and in the Middle East, I want my photos to be the voices of people who have been sacrificed to war and have been forgotten. I hope that one day, politicians and warlords can hear the lost voice of the people.



Portrait of a pregnant woman and her children at home in Khorramshahr city. Khorramshahr is one of the border cities of Iran, which was known as the paradise of Iranian ports before the war. The city was occupied by the invasion of Iraq in 1980, which was finally liberated by Iranian forces in 1982. In this war, more than 80% of this city was destroyed and became known as the bloody city of Iran. Thirty-three years after the end of the war, people still live in war-torn homes. Photo from "this city has no heroes".



A woman walks through the ruins of her home, which was destroyed in a war 41 years ago. Khorramshahr is one of the border cities of Iran, which was known as the paradise of Iranian ports before the war. The city was occupied by the invasion of Iraq in 1980, which was finally liberated by Iranian forces in 1982. In this war, more than 80% of this city was destroyed and became known as the bloody city of Iran. Thirty-three years after the end of the war, people still live in war-torn homes. Photo from "this city has no heroes".



# BREAK GENDER BIAS FROM ITS ROOT

By Elena Palaiorouta

Several centuries ago, it was believed that women were inferior to men (anatomically and mentally) as sciences were stubbornly trying to create more and more examples of women's inferiority. Although such theories have been debunked for some time now our world still remains highly gendered.

According to the UN, gender bias is the preference towards one gender over one other, and is related to sexism, as it also describes the discrimination against women. These terms cannot be interchanged though due to some differences.

Sexism is commonly defined as the subordination of one sex (usually female) to another due to an ideology that sees one sex inferior to other. On the other hand, gender bias, as the term suggests, focuses on the gender aspect and is more inclusive as it accommodates prejudices as well as discrimination. This bias can be unintentional or implicit as it occurs when someone unconsciously attributes stereotypes to a person or to a group. What is more, in today's world, gender bias is more often used in regards to the privileged treatment that men receive.

Gender bias has a pervasive influence on almost every aspect of modern life and can commonly be found in the social institutions such as families, education, economy, health, media, sports and the state/government or different workplaces. This bias can be harmful when it restricts women's or men's capacity to advance personal abilities, pursue professional careers and make choices about their lives. Gender stereotyping can be prosecuted when it results in a violation of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Gender differences start from the minute we are in our mother's belly, as male babies tend to be described as more active and stronger. Then, parents force us to fit into pre-existing categories such as – girls should like dolls or colours like pink – things that boys should categorically dislike. Thus, from an early age we are all forced to belong to certain gendered categories and to carry these labels into the rest of our lives. Furthermore,

besides the toys and colours, kids' behaviour is also being gendered. Boys should be active, rough and adventurous, while girls should be gentle and timid.

A gendered world creates a gendered brain which then leads, for instance, to toxic masculinity, sexism, gender-based violence, physical and emotional health issues and so on. More specifically, the way some masculine traits are emphasised during childhood and then conditioned is linked to male sexual violence against women. Megan Maas of Michigan State University says; "We know for instance that the individuals who perpetrate sexual violence tend to be high in 'hostile masculinity'". Hostile masculinity can be decoded as the beliefs that men are naturally violent, need to have sexual fulfilment, and that women are naturally submissive to them.

Additionally, Christia Spears Brow, a US psychologist and author, and colleagues argued in a 2020 paper that sexual assault by men against women is so common precisely because of the values we condition onto children. This socialisation comes from a combination of parents, schools and the media. "Sexual objectification for girls starts really early", says Brown.

In order for a significant change to occur, people have to not only understand their biases but also to be mindful of their prejudices, especially towards and in front of kids. We can explain that girls can and do play football and that boys can have long hair or may like to play with dolls. As Maas says, we have to provide as many opportunities as possible "for them to have experiences that go against this sort of avalanche of gendered play".

We are more alike from birth than we are different. The way we treat children should reflect that in order for society to stop being gendered. Undoing these assumptions is not an easy task due to so many parts of society having a stake in this, but on a personal level, we can all think twice before we tell a little boy how brave and strong he is and a little girl how kind or pretty she is.

# Gender bias has a pervasive influence on almost every aspect of modern life.









by Liz Gallagher

### Her story

My mum comes from an age-group of women whose likes will never be seen again. Born into a humble country background, she walked barefooted to school and worked from the age of 10. Educational opportunities were non-existent for these women. My mother talks about winning story-writing competitions in school and, she can recite all the words in Irish which she still remembers, 78 years after having her last Irish class and leaving school.

Women's rights, divorce, freedom of movement, were a near impossibility, never even considered in my mother's time. There were no private earnings, it felt as if she lived

entirely as "a mother" serving family and farm, self-less to the last detail.

She now lives alone in that same farmhouse. I want to show her courage, resilience, continued interest in household activities, and connection with her carers, and the immeasurable love she continues to show us, her children. We were children of the 80s recession whose natural next move, after receiving further education, was to emigrate. Ireland did not hold any opportunities for that wave of new graduates students that had access to grants to study. My father said, "Third level education took you all away from us..."

My mother's adaptability to living alone, after



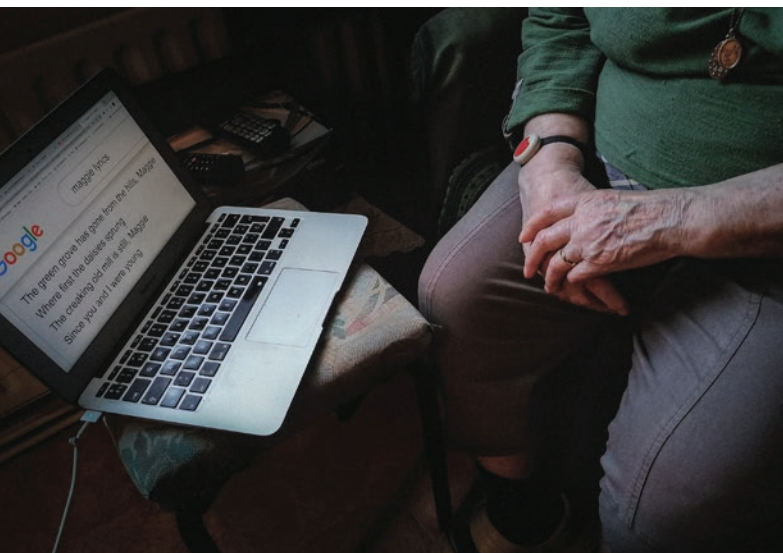
a whole 56 years of living with my father, who died in 2016, has never ceased to amaze me. I tell her each day that she is a role model in courage and adaptability.

My mother being able to live alone is due to the fact that 12 years ago when she and my father had health issues, they applied for, and got, a home-help package. That same home-help package would not be offered now to people in the same, or worse, situations.

Socialjustice.ie (ii) states: '...The Government policy to support people to remain in their own homes is not evidenced by the significant decrease in the provision of Home Help hours following 2008 at a time of population ageing...

Numbers of people receiving home help and the hours allocated reduced from 2008 and especially from 2010, and there were still fewer people in receipt of Home Help support in 2017 than there had been in 2008. Numbers of people in receipt of Home Care Packages (HCPs) grew after 2008 but the funding for that scheme was largely static for many years and the average value of each package fell...the HSE itself suggests that home care has not kept pace with population growth or population ageing and that demand for home support continues to exceed the level of service that is funded.... planning and investment are required to meet the challenges presented by population ageing





... to address the infrastructural deficits created by underinvestment...'

I want to highlight how allowing the elderly to live in their own homes adds to their life choices, their independence, their continued interest in their surroundings, and the people they come into contact with, leading to a more holistic way of treating the elderly instead of institutionalising them and taking their independence and homes away. A statistic from alone.ie (i) states that 1 in 3 older people live on their own in Ireland.

The story and photos focus on my mother's presence in her house, her hallway, her walls and window sills, her photos, her religious symbols: Saint Brigid's Cross given to her by her neighbour, Patrick, who made it on the eve of Saint Brigid's Day, 1 February 2022, holy water bottles taken back to her from far off pilgrim places like Fatima and Rome, her wedding photos, her many angels given to her as symbols of other-worldly protection, her miraculous medal, her Saint Patrick's medal. Her envelope full of prayers that she says each morning.

#### Herself

When I ask my mother if I can do a photo story project on her, she laughs incredulously and asks who'd want to know about her at this stage in her life and smiles. Nevertheless, she enjoys seeing the photos and comments humorously, "I'm not bad-looking for an old lady of 88!"

When I ask her about living alone she says that naturally enough she sometimes feels lonely but she also senses dad is with her. She says she has the TV and her books. And the girls. "All the girls are good to me. Frances is good "crack". Frances is the home-help who does a sitting service with her where they sit together for two hours, twice a week and exchange stories. There is also Siobhan and Sarah, Jackie and Joyce and Michelle, a whole team of great people who show love, care and humour to my mother, sensing what she needs, reassuring her and treating her with respect and love. She knows some of their stories. Their relationship with her is invaluable in allowing her to live alone.

When I ask my mother how she feels, she laughs and says, "I feel old, how do you expect me to feel at this age!", and laughs. There is one particular story and a joke that she loves telling

and she is good at telling them. Both are about married life.

One tells of a new bride exiting the chapel with her new husband and going with him towards his bicycle. When he asks her nonchalantly, "Where do you think you're going?" She answers, "I'm going home with you, Sam". To which Sam replies, "Indeed you are not, you're not going home with me, we have nay room for ourselves, never mind you!" My mother laughs so much at this story. One night she tells it to Joyce, as they are walking together towards her bedroom and she stops with her walker to bend over and laugh heartily at the idea of this story.

The other story my mother tells is a joke about a husband and wife. The wife has never been happy with the husband because he is lazy and doesn't do a tip of work. When he dies, she gets him cremated and his ashes put in an egg-timer. She keeps boiling eggs and says, "You didn't do a tip when you were living so I'll keep you going now!"

When I ask my mother about her working life, she says, "There was nothing for it but to do it". This attitude that her generation had of "getting on with it" and not wishing your life away on other things is a mentality that, in the modern world, seems out of place since the whole ethos now seems to be "wishing for other things", the need to be "bettering".

An important part of her life is praying. First thing in the morning my mother takes out her "prayer envelope" which is full of prayers. She takes them all out, says some of them and re-arranges them back into the envelope again. She also says a decade of the rosary for every one of her family. She listens to 'Radio Maria' for an hour before mass starts. There is sometimes wonderful music that stops me in my tracks as I am going about the house, preparing mum's lunch or making my breakfast. The mass comes on at 10am and mum listens intently and answers the mass at all the right interludes. At 10.30 we change to the national station, RTE. She enjoys seeing where the mass is coming from and we both hold out for the days when the mass is broadcast from Donegal. One day it comes from Glenswilly, which is up the road. She especially enjoys it because of that.

I admire her faith, seeing how it sustains her. There is something admirable and amazing, and magical even, about her rock-solid and



steadfast belief in a spiritual world that can guide and help her. There is the way she knows so many prayers by heart and says them aloud with a lilt and a sing-song tone, both with the carers, and with us when we are visiting, as she is preparing for bed, and when in bed "There are four corners on my bed, there are four angels above my head, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, Bless this bed that I lie on. And if I die before I wake, I pray to God my soul to take". Mum has always loved reading. It still amazes me how she gets engrossed in a book and stays glued to it for hours. Yesterday she read aloud to me pieces from a set of short stories titled "True Murders in Ireland".

Alongside reading, she loves all Murder Mystery series, her favourites being "Murder She Wrote" ("...Jessica gets to the bottom of the stories very quickly..."), "Columbo" ("...he's a funny detective who, on leaving a room after questioning someone, always appears back seconds later saying, "I've just remembered one more thing..."").

Another series that she loves is "Little House on the Prairie" and the fact that it is set on a farm with good people who love each other yet the inclusion of nasty, self-serving, bad article 'Nellie Olson' adds to the drama, especially as my mum believes that good will always triumph over nastiness, even if the journey to get there is always ridden with twists, turns and traps.

I ask mum what her favourite part of the day is and she laughs and says, "Dinnertime". She does enjoy her dinner especially now when it is totally "pounded" up and she doesn't have to

worry about choking. She loves Siobhan's stews and would have them every day if she could. Alongside the stews she loves shepherd's pie. Friends and family coming to visit mum usually bring something to the house, such as cake, buns or fruit. It's great the way this tradition has remained. When I'm visiting we use the leftover cake and buns to make trifle. We have been wondering whether to admit we make trifle from visitors' gifts, if we have been unable to eat them all within a few days, due to home-baked buns and cake being more prone to going stale quicker than shop-bought products.

Mum loves singing. She listens on the laptop or mobile to Bridie Gallagher, a local Donegal singer, from my mum's generation. Mum enjoys telling how she ran away with a circus and became famous. Another singer she loves is Daniel O'Donnell. A song we have been singing a lot recently is "Maggie". It was her father's favourite song as her mother's name was Maggie. Mum's mother died when mum was just two. Mum has got into the lingo of "googling". She asks if we can google the lyrics again of "Maggie" and I make the font really big and she reads the words from the screen and sings along.

Mum remembers a lot of words of countless songs and poems. I ask her how she knows so many songs and poems by heart and if she learned them at school. She says, "We didn't sing at school, we only learned hymns. We learned songs from the "Ireland's Own" (a long-standing magazine) and the gramophone". I ask her if she remembers the songs from barn

dances and she says at her home they didn't have barn dances but dad had barn dances at his home.

There is an oil painting of mum and dad on their 50th Wedding Anniversary. My brother John, who lives in Taiwan, got a friend to paint it for them. It hangs in the living room. When I show mum the photo of the painting she laughs and says, "Look at the way he is looking down at me. I must have been saying something to make him laugh or maybe he was making me laugh". We remember a phrase about not being an "oil painting". She laughs and says, "'You're no oil painting' is an old saying meaning you're not so handsome!" And we laugh some more.

Mum's walking frame plays a major role in her life. It still has the tag with her name on it from the rehabilitation centre she was in for three months, 11 years ago. She likes her walker placed either around her chair or around her bed. The only time the walker is on its own, away from her, is when it is standing in the hallway outside the bathroom looking like it has a life of its own, looking as if it were some extraterrestrial mutant, a Dalek, from the science fiction series Doctor Who, waiting patiently for mum.

Windowsills have always been used for placing important things on: photos, holy water, angels, memorial cards, cards for all occasions have a temporary stay there. Windowsills also open up the outside for mum. They are her only contact with the outside world. The garden with its high hedge, the peat shed and the path to our old cottage that lies abandoned and full of castaway items, some symbolic, some native to

the cottage, some chucked in — out of sight, out of mind.

The whole place outside is amazing on a sunny morning when the early morning light casts full-blown shadows, duplicating everything in its path, from the grandeur of the roof and chimney pot to the modest, yet essential, salt, cutlery and daily tablets laid out on the kitchen table.

**Her World**

I ask mum if I can take a photo of her standing at the front door of the house. It is a grey, overcast day. I never usually take photos on such days. That day I take the photo because I am leaving for a few weeks and it might be the last opportunity to do so. I do not expect to be shocked by what I think is just a wide-angled photo of my mother standing at her front door. When I stand in the lawn and try to get the photo done as quickly as possible, I realise mum has probably not stood, for years, waiting there at her front door, looking as if she wants to be any place else but standing there.

The overcast sky is drawing in around her and so too is the lawn, moving closer to her, the branches curving and trapping the house and my mum in a frame framing her, trapping her there as if against her will. The grass on the cracks of the front street are inbound too, snaking towards her, as if all paths on that overcast day, lead to mum. When I show the photo to my mum, she says good-humouredly, "I look as if I've shrunk!" And we laugh. Then she adds, That's what happens when you get old!"





# GENDER-BLIND MEDICINE, HOW IMAGES AFFECT DIAGNOSIS AND THE HEALTH OF WOMEN

by Aishling Heffernan

An image can be synonymous with representation, and representation often leads to inclusion. It might be inclusion in dialogue, or simply resting in the thoughts of another. It may be representation via film or print. It may be representation experienced in real life, a poster made by a protestor that catches your eye. Representation is the art of inclusion. It can signal the moment you feel seen because someone who looks like you appears on stage speaking about things you have felt, seen, heard or experienced. Representation is the power and art of inclusion, but it is also the sign-post and the catalyst for attention. When we see an image, we don't just take it in. We attend to that image. So we have to ask what it means when there are blank spaces in our depictions of people – in our news, our films, our felt-sense of our world. What does exclusion mean when we know that representational inclusion can be so powerful? That it grabs attention? And, in the world of women's health, what are the repercussions for little, no, or inaccurate depictions of women? Since 1979, the UN Convention for the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women has been signed and ratified by different countries. It's CEDAW for short. In its first article, CEDAW defines discrimination as: "any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the recognition, enjoyment or exercise by women..."; in private, political and social spheres. CEDAW requires that states must take action on the elimination of discrimination, as defined by the convention (Article 12). When we focus on women's health, we see patterns of discrimination that are represented within subtle, visual levels, that are pervasive across the dominant medical model in every nation, and which negate gender awareness where it is vital to women's welfare: in the educational material of our healthcare systems and providers. In 2008, Science Daily released the findings of a visual gender parity study, focusing on medical textbooks, conducted by Professor María José Barral from the University of Zaragoza. Her study

found that white, heterosexual male images were used as the body-template across 16,329 images in 12 medical textbooks. These textbooks were chosen for analysis by the Professor and her researchers because they are also the 12 most recommended medical texts by the top-20 medical universities across the US, Canada and Europe. For neutral body-parts (think limbs) European text-books used male bodies 12% of the time, with female bodies represented by just 2%. If we get a little analytical ourselves about Barral's data, we find that a 12%/2% difference represents a 83.3% reduction in depictions of female bodies compared to male. Her study goes further: in 9 out of those 12 textbooks, only Caucasians are depicted. This represents a unique challenge for anyone of an ethnicity that is not 'white'. Transgender depictions were not covered in the scope of this research, but we can easily assume a similar drought of visual education would appear if it had been. We have to ask, would you trust a Doctor to diagnose you correctly, if they had only been exposed to your gender (image) roughly 18% of the time throughout their entire education? Would you expect them to take your concerns seriously, and to work with you over an extended time period with the recognition that there might be gaps in their knowledge? If something is unseen, and excluded, if there is no representation then we have to acknowledge that within the sphere of medical education, that (lack of) impact is felt in the bodies of the patients of doctors who are implicitly educated that persons not 'white-male', are a blank space. A blank space that when experienced in real life medical situations, must then fit the male-template, or be relegated to the unknown. In a 2009 article titled "From gender bias to gender awareness in medical education", the researchers note that gender is a determinant of health and healthcare, and that medicine has been seen as a 'gender-blind' field. They see this gap of gender specific medical, educational, data as a unique opportunity to balance the scale of

inequity between genders, while recognising that the re-education of medical students or experts is multi-disciplinary, complex, and requires an integrative approach. But to do that, medical leaders need to prioritise this task. In 2011, this exact question around the prioritisation of gender in medicine was examined and published in an article titled, "Important... but of low status': male education leaders' views on gender in medicine". The title actually does say it all in this case. Researchers found that out of the male medical leaders interviewed: "All informants were able to articulate why gender matters. As doctors, they saw gender as a determinant of health and, as bystanders, they had witnessed inequalities and the wasting of women's competence. However, they had doubts about gender-related issues and found them to be overemphasised. Gender education was seen as a threat to medical school curricula as a consequence of the time and space it requires." There's a famous story about renowned anthropologist Dr. Margaret Mead that goes like this: a student of hers asked Dr. Mead what the first sign of civilisation in a culture was. The student expected the typical answer: clay pots, tools, or other culturally significant artifacts. Instead, Mead replied that the first signs of civilisation were marked on the remains of a 15,000 year old healed, but once broken, femur. Healing a broken bone without modern medicine takes six weeks. In the animal kingdom, Mead stated, if you break something, you die. You can't forage, you can't escape a predator, you are grounded, and therefore helpless. A healed bone means that someone stayed with this ancient ancestor. Someone bound their leg, fetched water, and food. Someone helped keep predators at bay. The first sign of civilisation was the human capacity for care. We have to ask ourselves, in this frame of what it means to care, and what it means when we leave out the depiction of the female body in medical education. If civilisation is the ability to care and to assist healing, what message does it send to exclude the female body from the education of our health-caregivers? In 2018, AERA (American Educational Research Association) published a research article from a group of researchers situated in universities in Australia. Titled "Gender Bias in Medical Images Affects Students' Implicit but not Explicit Gender Attitudes", the study investigated whether images in anatomical textbooks had

the knock-on effect of causing mis-diagnoses for women (hint, the study finds that they, in fact, do.). Referencing no less than 14 articles in the introduction alone on the ways in which gender bias can impact women's diagnosis, with direct links to studies examining the dangers of implicit biases for women's health, the study concluded that, "...viewing gender-biased images can have a significant impact on the implicit gender attitudes of students studying anatomy". From pain being perceived as more emotional rather, than physical when a woman reports it to her doctor than when a man does, to doctors missing male fertility issues (as fertility has been socio-culturally linked to women), to doctors being less-likely to send women for cardiovascular testing for the same reported symptoms as men – the research on the misdiagnosis of women is not just a matter of fixing an educational semantic of political correctness, but an immediate need to heal the fractured education of healthcare-workers worldwide. While images alone cannot fix the plethora of educational mishaps that medicine has evidently made in relation to gender, they are imperative in reducing implicit bias in our healthcare providers during the seminal time of their education. Correct, inclusive anatomical images are vital to the education of our doctors, and to the life and health of the women whose health they are purported experts in. The unique opportunity presented by having a focal point, a clear issue to be addressed, (gender-blind anatomical images), isn't always so neatly packaged when we discuss issues of gender disparity. When we focus on the seemingly innocuous details that create implicit biases we have a chance to action change in a way that is focused. Powerful. Cohesive. And, potentially, faster-acting than other interventions that aim to reduce bias. Our doctors, nurses and healthcare workers have a right to an adequate, gender-woke education. Men have a right to have fertility concerns noticed, but, frankly, most of all, women have the right to be represented in medical textbooks. We have the right to have our concerns taken seriously. We have the right to lives that are not peppered with casual disrespect, or gaslighting in our doctor's office. The repercussion of gender-blind, non-inclusive images in medical textbooks are the lives of women. So maybe this blog-post can be wrapped up in one simple sentence: *We have the right to be seen.*



by Nimat Natsheh

Hello dear readers, my name is Nimat Natsheh and I'm just a Palestinian woman trying to live my life amidst all of the chaos that's happening in my country. I graduated more than a year ago after finishing my Bachelor degree in Psychology in Birzeit University. And since then, I've been trying to live my life to the fullest.

When I thought about telling my own story through pictures, I immediately thought of photographing what makes me feel unsafe since that's a familiar feeling here in Palestine. However, as soon as I began photographing I realised that there are a lot of small things in my life which make me feel safe and comfortable. I came to the realisation that tiny little details in life matter the most, especially when we're often used to focus on the negative aspects in life, we fail to notice and appreciate the beauty in smaller things. As Delilah said in her book *Arms Full Of Love* "It's the little things in life that remind us all of the goodness that does exist in this world". And I realised this while spending one of my weekends trying to photograph whatever made me feel unsafe.

The pictures shown in this story are a collection of my what usual weekends spent with one of my best friends Haneen look like. Her presence, her cooking, her home, her smile and her pet dog Simba - all of these smaller details have always managed to cheer me up and keep my going through tough times. Not only this, but there's also a lot of things that manage to cheer me up as well which I couldn't even capture. I have always thought about how hard my life is, especially living under a colonialist government and a patriarchal society but I never noticed the beauty that still exists in my life.

In short, as much as we as Palestinians face hardships living such life, we still manage to find hope, live and comfort in everything. Lastly, I wish for everyone out there to find hope in every detail, or else life won't feel worth living.

# ▲ DAY IN THE LIFE OF A PALESTINIAN











MY LITTLE  
BROTHER



by Alaa Shabanehs

This is my little brother, he's 16. On his days off he spends his day between studying and practicing his hobby of playing basketball. And some time on the computer.  
He talks to our father, and helps my mother in some matters. My mother, my father and my brother live together in our home.











**by Rachael Sharkey**

When lockdown hit in March 2020, we were all left lost and confused. Isolated and stripped of the company of our loved ones. The world was left to find comfort in the small things in life. John Doohan, an 83 year old man, originally from Tory Island living in Falcarragh, Co.Donegal was one of these affected by the new normal. As an elder person, he found comfort in clubs and classes to keep a wholesome social life pre pandemic. John is president of the City of Derry Cage Bird Society. A group which encourages a community of bird admirers to come together and appreciate their shared passion. John would attend weekly bird meetings where he would meet with his companions and talk about their shared love for the hobby of bird breeding. The pandemic took this joyous passion out of Johns life. He was left isolated in his home, along with loving wife Madge. They share a small home in

the seaside townland of Ballyness where John has three outdoor sheds dedicated to his birds. He has a daily routine of feeding and caring for his birds, which was more alive than ever during these months.

Between Canaries, Redfinches and Bullfinches, John has around 100 birds which he cares ever so dearly for. He wakes up at 7am every morning to cook for the birds. He feeds them, cleans out their cages and make sure they are at a top-class standard. Having this hobby helped him through the long, lonely months of Covid isolation. It gave him hope and something to look forward to everyday when he didn't know if there would ever be an end in sight for the pandemic.

John has since returned to the bird shows in Derry City and continues to win awards for his top-class birds.













# SEA TONIC

by Sara Anderson

I started sea swimming three years ago in the spring. It was something I had wanted to do for years, and I wanted company. The original sea group I was in turned out to be more of a swimming group. I was a dipper. In my depth was where I felt safe. So in October 2020, I set up another group for those who wanted to dip, at the quiet small pier - Sea Tonic. No swimming skills needs. Everyone welcome. Everyone matters. We meet at the small pier in Mountcharles, in south Donegal. It is not as boisterous as the big pier which is a quarter mile further along the coast road. The small pier is quieter, less people, much more unintrusive than the big solid pier which is a walkway for many. There is less noise, less traffic, you feel closer to nature and we can stay in our depth. I usually go in a couple of times a week. We put up in our WhatsApp group when someone is going and there is nearly always someone or many ones that say “Yes, I will come in too”. There is about nine core members, and then others who intermittently join us. It is the best thing I have ever done in my life. I love being in the sea with others. And when I have made the commitment in the group to meet someone, I show up. Left to myself, I would still be in the cave, dreaming about sea swimming. Throughout my life, I have been prone to bouts of depression, and I find that being in the water with others is a Sea Tonic, and it seemed an apt name for our group. It keeps my spirits up, and any time over the past few year that I have stopped for any period more than a few weeks, I notice my mood starting to dip. There is something profound and magical about being in the sea, particularly over the months when the water is really cold, something that is beyond words. And then being with other women, seeing them each week, sharing our stories, our celebrations, our challenges, sharing our love of the sea and sharing in gratitude for nature and the sea, and all that it means. Some of the women come out regularly. I wanted to know what the sea meant to them and how it has helped their wellbeing. Carol, is the longest member in our Sea Tonic group. We were both there at the start. We had

been in another sea group who were mostly fair weather dippers. This prompted the creation of the new group. I asked Carol, “What does being the sea give you?” “The sea is there for me, it gives me immersion in nature, it teaches me a greater appreciate of my beautiful home.” “What do you get from being in the sea with others?”, I asked Carol. “Fun, laughter, a listening ear, shared experiences. We support each other. It lifts my spirits.” Carol lost her partner a few years ago, and this beautiful poem she wrote says everything she felt about the sea and grieving.

*The sea accepted my grief  
An ocean of tears  
Mine just a drop  
The sea gave me life  
The cold shock woke me  
Forced me to breath  
The sea embraced me  
Gently held...while  
Out of my depth.*

Betty had also lost her partner just before Covid, and a year ago had seen us dipping and started coming along. Just like someone did for me, when I joined and continued to do for a whole month, I held Betty’s hand the first time she went into the water. Betty got hooked. I had been going through a bout of depression, in August 2021, and was finding it hard to get motivated to go into the sea. I knew how much it helped me, but the pull was strong to retreat to my cave and hang out with my wounds. I reached out to the group, shared how I felt and Carol had offered to go in with me for 21 consecutive days. And then lots of other people started joining in. That was when we made the transition from dipper to swimmers, and over the next 21 days we swam further and further and now it is part of our ritual - about 500 m of a gentle swim. Heads up, breast-stroke, like ladies - within our depth of course. And along the 21 days, Betty, our new recruit, felt the urge to keep going. Betty did 100



consecutive days, and apart from three days, she always had company. "To me it helps liven up my day, invigorate and freshen up everything that is going on in my head," she shared. "How do I feel when I am in the sea with others? I feel safe and I know that everyone is there to take care of each other. Being in the sea with the community, there is no pressure. Everyone is there to help and support one another. No questions asked, no need to explain yourself if you are not having a good day. And it definitely helps my wellbeing, because sometimes you feel sad when you loose someone you love and you need to change the record in your head and swimming in the sea does that."

Betty had told Bridget about the swimming, and along she came one day, and stayed. Here is Bridget's story, "I've been swimming since I was a child. We lived beside the sea. It was something all the family did together.

Previously, I would go for a swim, chat to a few people and come home. Being with the group in the sea is far more interesting and rewarding. We chat about what we observe around us, the wonderful colours of the sky, the sea, the colours of the surrounding trees, the sunrise and the sunsets.

Everyone contributes to the conversations and we have a lot of fun."

And then there is Roisin, who moved up from Dublin, just before Covid, to support her son who was starting a new school.

Here is Roisin's story, "I have been sea swimming since early childhood having grown up near the sea in Dun Laoghaire. That type of swimming was very seasonal and weather dependent. My mother was instrumental in bringing us daily but did not swim herself!

In later years, and especially in stressful times, either at home or work I found sea swimming a great stress buster. The cold water and different conversations, sometimes with complete strangers, brought an awareness that everyone has problems or stresses or good things going on in their lives. I always went home feeling better."

The Sea Tonics idea of a group swimming was new to me but having relocated to a new place it seemed a great way to combine two essential elements for survival, especially during lockdown, sea swimming and meeting new friends.

The Sea Tonic is an eclectic bunch of women

brought together by a common dominator - sea swimming and friendship. Plus some of our group are the best bakers ever!

In the early days, we would just go in for our dip and then head home, often in our dressing gowns. As time progressed, so did we, into the luxury of dry robes. Occasionally, we would had a cuppa, and then Freda joined - Freda and her cane picnic basket. Freda, alongside Carol are our group bakers. And they are talented women. Freda is the picnic queen, she always has her basket in her boot, ready with a flask and cups for all, and often home made scones and jam. Carol makes scones too, passes on her recipes and every so often treats you to a delicious cake. Having the tea and a chat afterwards has become an important part and ritual in our gatherings.

Here is Freda's story, "I started sea swimming during Covid with my daughter Amy. We used to go on a Sunday, just to mark the day, as one day ran into another and it was a focus for us. The Sea Tonic group is a wonderful social group full of fun, wisdom and kindness.

And each of us are on a journey; the sea helps us focus and grounds us.

When I am in the sea I feel free, calm, grounded, happy and I love the banter between us. The sea gives me calmness, serenity, laughter. It brings strength and allows us to stop and be in the moment. Focus on all the surrounding beauty and just be. And I love the social chats and banter. The cup of tea or coffee afterwards and the fun and laughter. Swimming with others lifts your mood, brings a calmness, and no matter what the conditions are, you always feel so much better after a dip."

And then there is Julie, who is also a regular. Julie has a multitude of swim suits, and hair colours and styles. And whose recent birthday we celebrated with a big picnic feast.

Julie had gone through a profound loss of her partner before the lockdown, and took up going for a swim in the sea last year. Because of restrictions, yoga was relocated to the beach, and one evening the invitation went out for a dip after the class. Initially it brought up a lot of fear and trepidation. Julie said, "I had lived in Ireland for like nearly 30 years and you'd hardly get me in the sea unless it's a really really hot day, and then often that's with the wetsuit as well. So I was a little bit panicked - "I can't really







say no”, “I might look silly in front of everybody else”, “I am just going to have to brave it.”

“Tossing and turning in bed, ‘I will. I won’t. Wetsuit, no wetsuit.”

Accompanied by her son’s pragmatic voice in her head, who had been so supportive during her loss: “Just get in”, “Just put a coat on”, “Just put a hat on” . As Julie walked down that beach to the sea, her son in her head, “Don’t think about the sea, don’t think about the cold. Don’t think about the waves. Just get in.”

And she did.

“I took a deep breath and as I went down under the sea, I let the breath out, and I got hooked, instantly. The sea soothed and all I could think about was the cold, nothing else and my head totally cleared.”

“When I am in the sea with others, I absolutely love Sea Tonic ladies. I just think they are such an accepting, non judgemental group. You feel very safe with that little group. Our common theme is sea swimming, dipping, so encouraging. Even outside of it, emotionally encouraging, little messages when we have not seen each other for a while. You feel like you really, really belong. And the common theme is the dipping, and it really does not matter what we all do outside of that. When we come together it is like this invisible glue that just gels. It is just very simple. It’s basic. A little camaraderie but without the “Did you hear about...?” or “Do you know...?”. It’s just little sharing of safe stories. And that’s exactly what I feel with Sea Tonic - I feel safe, I feel nurtured. I feel cared for. I feel like I belong. It is total, non judgemental acceptance and it warms my heart and makes me smile, even just thinking about the group.”

Kathy is our youngest member, she swims in a wetsuit and shades.

“I started swimming because I wanted to move my whole body again and to do it in a wholesome way, connecting to the nature around, to reconnect mind, body and soul. It has been three years for me, since having brain surgery that I felt robust enough to do it.”

For Kathy, “Sea Tonic is a wonder space created by women like myself, who want to heal and reconnect to the world around them and themselves. It is an inclusive and caring group of women. The sea allows me to let go, to have courage and face all of my physical challenges, my past challenges and feel held enough to accept where I am in my life right now.

I have a feeling of being part of a group, included, not so isolated. I feel a great sense of joy and can express it freely with others. Swimming with others gives me a sense of relief, anxiety release and helps me put life into perspective.”

Geraldine first joined our group a few years ago, and found it very very cold. She is an occasional dipper. Here is Geraldine looking very proud of her towel robe that she made the previous night. Geraldine said, “The sea Tonic group is like a family who encourages me to dip, like finding your tribe to help you do something in common. The sea offers support. It can be gentle, encouraging me to let go and enjoy the moment which reminds me of childhood - enjoying the sea.

It clears my head, and being part of a group helps me if I feel lonely. It is refreshing.”

Isuspect that over time, Geraldine might become more of a regular swimmer. The occasional has become more frequent. The germination of the seed of a committed Sea Tonic-er.

And finally me, Sara, my story.

I love the sea. I love being in it. The sea teaches me to let go and see the beauty that is around me, whether it be a sunny day or a day like today, a rainy, windy day like today, where we all giggle and laughe at how crazy we are to be out on this “bad” day.

The sea has a holding presence. Something happens when I am regularly in the sea. It is a felt experience, like no other. I love how I feel in it and after being in the water. I feel fully alive and present. I love connecting with the other women. I love sharing our love of the sea. There are days when we swim under rainbows.

Mayo Angelou said, “If God put the rainbows right in the clouds themselves, each one of us in the direst and dullest and most dreaded and dreary moments can see a possibility of hope. Each one of us has the chance to be a rainbow in somebody’s cloud.”

The Sea Tonic has been going now for nearly two years. At different times, over our hundreds of dips, we have been a rainbow in each others’ clouds. I hope that over the years to come, many more women will join us, and get to experience the power and the healing of the sea and community.

**It is the best.  
It is Sea Tonic.**





# WOMEN NOT IN THE RIGHT PLACE

by Elena Díaz Rodríguez

Today, the majority of society is used to taking photos of women in a typical manner - in beautiful places, dressed in “stylish” clothes, with special hairstyles, and smiling. I want to show that we can take photos in a different way, that we can draw attention through originality of a place, showing people of different ages in places where we would not normally take their photos, or through the way they dress, through their expressions. So... let's break stereotypes!

## MARINA AND JUDIT

Marina and Judit are two teenagers who are used to taking photos in beautiful places such as the beach or the mountains. Being photographed in front of an office building in the middle of a big city, they didn't like the idea.

The truth is that whenever I take photos I really enjoy it. But in this case, it was more difficult than other times; they didn't like the place and they were very embarrassed because they were the center of attention of everyone who passed by on the street, and we had to repeat photos a few times.

We did several shots in different locations and with different perspectives, even in a building under construction. They took objects with them with which they felt identified, Marina some books and Judit rhythmic gymnastics accessories. Thanks to that, they felt more comfortable, and we were able to finish the session without any complications.





#### YOLANDA

Yolanda is a 54-year-old woman who likes to have her photos taken.

When I proposed to do a photo session she immediately accepted, and we met up in a children's park on a weekday afternoon. That day, as is normal and logical, there were mothers with small children at the park, and when they saw Yolanda climb the swings, rope pyramids, slides, they were surprised by the situation, they sat on the benches watching us. Other girls, approached us with curiosity, trying to understand what we were doing.

The day was cloudy, and luckily it didn't rain! The truth is that we had a great time, taking different photos. She felt comfortable and youthful, she went back to childhood for a few minutes. The experience was very enjoyable.



#### MARUJA

Maruja is a 75-year-old woman who lives in a town near Barcelona. Her husband shares an orchard with other men, which is about a 30-minute walk away, and she sometimes helps him.

When I told her I wanted to take photos, she was surprised that I wanted to take her there. Although she would have preferred to take photos in a more beautiful landscape and to be more dressed up she didn't really care or mind.

That day was sunny, and we were able to take the photos in different places with different types of light. Her husband's companions were also there that day. They didn't say anything to Maruja and me, but they looked at us surprised when they saw that I was taking photos of her working.

Maruja felt comfortable and it was easy to do the photos with her. It was a great morning, we ended up sitting on a bench sunbathing and talking.





**OLIVIA**

Olivia is a 9-year-old girl who likes to have her photos taken, but she was amazed by the places we went to. The first place we went was to a gas station, but we couldn't take many photos because of the traffic and because the manager told us that we couldn't take photos there. Then we went to a truck park. There was no one there except for a dog that came up to us because it wanted to play. Olivia felt very strange in this place, but with the skateboard and a doll that she was carrying, we were able to take a few photos. Next we went to the sea, but not exactly in a pretty place, rather we stayed close to some wild plants and a rubbish bin. The cars full of people that passed us looked at us strangely which made Olivia feel somewhat self-conscious. We also took some photos in a place with graffiti and on a staircase. The truth is that it was a very entertaining and busy morning.



**ILONA**

Ilona is a 46-year-old Polish woman that has been living in Spain for about 14 years. I met up her on a Saturday afternoon for the photo shoot. That day was very cloudy and with poor light, but we were able to take several photos in a community area which has a basketball and tennis courts. She was surprised that I wanted to do it there, because she is not an athlete and she was not wearing sportswear. The next day we met up in the morning to repeat the photo session with different light. Apart from taking photos in the community area, we went out to the road and to our surprise, we found a sofa that had been left to be thrown away, so, we took photos there too. The people who were walking by and those who were driving, looked at us amazed and laughed at the unusual situation they were seeing. During this session, Ilona felt very strange and this made her laugh. It was difficult for her to keep a serious face. At first, she would have preferred to take the photos in another place, but we liked the results, because we took original photos, and had a good time.







*Housing is not a privilege* is a collaborative photographic project by Alys.theWitch and Ester Di Bona. The intent is to question the application of Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

“Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services; he also has the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or in any other case of lack of livelihood due to circumstances beyond his control.”

Alys and Ester spent their time taking pictures at night and distributing basic necessities such as drinking water, soap, food, toothpaste, toothbrush, etc., aware that it would not be right to take pictures, even if for reporting purposes, and leave nothing in return.

They decided to tell of a Palermo that is not shown to tourists, a reality hidden in the dark corners of a centuries-old city, far from the bourgeois eyes of those who do not want to see it.

This collaborative photographic practice wants to be a reflection against the unbridled individualism that characterises our society: we want to highlight it this way, showing as a group what our city hides.

The intention is clearly to denounce a condition experienced by too many people and that exposes especially women and non-binary people to mental vulnerability, but also to violence and rape that are rarely reported, told or documented. This leads the affected person not only to suffer violence, but also not to seek help.

Although the idea exists that the homeless are people from North Africa due to economic migration, it is fair to point out that there are many locals who, for various reasons, no longer have a home.

Although there are charitable organisations that help these people survive, it would be good for institutions to ask themselves how to avoid situations where a person ends up on the street.

Listening to people and supporting them in times of difficulty is one of the tasks of the democratic institution that, in theory, should provide for the complex needs of a society stratified into social classes with different possibilities and needs.

There are thousands of homeless people in Italy and in Europe. Yet there is no census of the homeless population living on the streets of Italy's fifth most populous city. And yet there are many houses confiscated from the Mafia that have never been counted and rehoused. What are the institutions waiting for?

We explored the centre of Palermo and were struck by the contradiction of the Kalsa: this quarter is one of Palermo's oldest quarters, dating back to the period of Islamic rule. Its name derives from the Arabic al-khalisa, 'the chosen one', because within it was the fortified citadel of the emir and the seat of his court. One of the entrances to Piazza Kalsa is the Porta dei Greci, the place where the Santa Rosalia float is put on display at the end of the festival dedicated to the city's patron saint. Right behind the float, under the stone door, homeless people sleep, seeking protection for the night.

Ironical, isn't it?

Although  
there are  
charitable  
organisations  
that help  
these people  
survive, it  
would be  
good for  
institutions  
to ask  
themselves  
how to avoid  
situations  
where a  
person ends  
up on the  
street.







# KEEPERS OF THE SEA

by Sara Alemão

In Sado estuary, Setúbal, Portugal, a group of women from the fishing community works as Keepers of the Sea.

It is possible to say that this new and tailored occupation was created by Ocean Alive, a local nonprofit, in order to act on the problem of seagrass meadow degradation in this area. The loss of major areas of this habitat, which is the nursery habitat for many fish and shellfish species, has consequences both on marine life and on the fishing community's economy, contributing to unemployment, particularly of the fisherwomen. According to Ocean Alive, "Through our capacity-building program, we created new occupational and professional roles tailored to these women's expertise and life experiences, providing them with a source of complimentary income. Our goal is to protect the seagrass meadows with the engagement of local fisherwomen, our Keepers of the Sea." The creation of this profession contributes to actions within the real concept of sustainability, responding to a problem with solutions originated from within the local fishing community, the people that depend directly upon this habitat.

Keepers of the Sea have an important role in creating awareness and promoting behaviour changes within their peers. By bringing the possibility of change to light, they contribute to tackling three problems for seagrass meadows, which they have been able to identify by being directly related with their own community's behaviours: marine litter, namely plastic salt containers from shellfish gatherers' activities, docking of anchors on the seagrass meadows and destructive fishing methods.

But their role is not limited to this dimension. They take part in all of the activities lead by Ocean Alive. They are awareness-raising agents, sea guides and monitors of the seagrass meadows.

Sea guides act on the marine education program; they educate people, from students to general public, by showing them the marine life, talking about the importance of the seagrass habitat and sharing their life experiences, which illustrates what they are helping to educate about.

Monitors of the seagrass meadows work along with scientists, providing scientific data and their traditional ecological knowledge.

They are committed women in this profession. You can find them in the middle of their peers, or in the middle of students of all ages, children and adults learning more about the seagrass habitat, or as volunteers in bigger actions, as well as with scientists studying and finding ways to preserve and restore the habitat. And they fit in anywhere - from situations where they have to be in their fishing boots, to scenarios where they hold GPS devices and wear surf wetsuits, or more formal meeting settings. Hands and heads on, that's how I see them.

Even without being totally aware of it, these women are an example of gender equality and women and girls empowerment, working for a more sustainable future, as set out by the UN SDG 5\*. They are without doubt challenging the bias by being a positive example and creating impact.

In Dina Santos' words, one of the women in this profession, being a Keeper of the Sea "is preserving, creating awareness. Doing something about tomorrow right now, urgently, in order to have time to act before it is too late".

*\*Goal 5: Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls. Gender equality is not only a fundamental human right, but a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.*







# WE SEE

The femLENS magazine

**Editor**

femLENS

info@femlens.com

**Publisher**

Blurb.com

**Contacts:**

femlens.com

info@femlens.com

Instagram/Facebook: @femlens

Twitter @femlensphoto

Front cover photo by Sara Díaz, femLENS “Mother’s at Work” campaign, 2022, Spain.

Special thanks to the following organisations that have participated or assisted in the workshops:

Women’s Collective Ireland, Ireland  
AWC, Jerusalem

femLENS MTÜ is an Estonian non-profit association (registration number 80429622). Our vision is empowered women creating and sharing their own stories about their lives.

WE SEE is the magazine of femLENS.

Copyright © 2022, femLENS

No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission from femLENS.

Created in Narva, Estonia.



Photo by Shatha Abbasi  
femLENS workshops 2022, Jerusalem





Photo by Alice Castiglione  
femLENS "Women at Work"  
campaign, 2022, England



