

# women Today



Organizația Națiunilor  
Unite pentru Educație,  
Știință și Cultură



Comisia Națională  
a României  
pentru UNESCO



WOMEN MAKE THE NEWS:

*The fight for gender equality & mass  
media as a tool for women's empowerment*

# Opening word

The second edition of Young Women Academy approaches a current issue - "Mass media as a tool for women's empowerment", which is an extension of the previous edition's topic "The fight against xenophobia, extremism and aggression". Further on, the Academy sets as its goals the examination of the UNESCO agenda and the identification of viable solutions in the technological evolution context. Mass media influences and shapes the societal component, fulfilling an essential role in the general perception regarding the women's role in society. There is an inextricable connection between the media and the social, political, economic dimensions. Only through technological means we will be able to achieve a greater impact in the message dissemination.



The research in the field of mass media and communication technologies is supported by the international community **UNESCO UNITWIN (University Twinning and Networking Programme) Network on Gender, Media and ICTs** being created in this regard. This network aims to promote gender equality and an active participation of women in the research activities through innovative methods.

In the spirit of The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted in 1995, which remains a fundamental element for the women's empowerment, UNESCO significantly enhanced a number of initiatives regarding the women representation in the digital area. Beginning with 2015, UNESCO and the *Global Alliance on Media and Gender (GAMAG)* organize **Women Make the News**, a global initiative that raises awareness of the gender inequalities and the importance of new strategies in order to highlight the women's presence on online platforms. Moving forward with a 2018 initiative, UNESCO has launched, with support from Cambridge University Press, the first ever sports media-focused **gender equality** Chrome extension, called Her Headline, designed to highlight sexist language in sports media.

The Young Women Academy, organized by the Romanian National Commission for UNESCO stands by international efforts, materialized through UNESCO's programmes. The second edition aims to promote women's status through media tools, contributing in this way to a better local and to regional involvement, in order to accomplish cohesion policies, which would offer equal opportunities and chances to both women and men.

*Mr. Ani Matei,*  
Secretary - General of National Commission  
of Romania for UNESCO

# Agenda of the second edition of *UNESCO's Academy of Young Women*



## Day 1:

- **Welcoming speeches** - Daniela POPESCU (project coordinator, expert of the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO), Jacques RAO (adviser of the French National Commission for UNESCO), Ana DUMITRESCU (former representative UNESCO Paris), Alexandra TIMOFTE (youth representative) and Susana PLETEA (COO Burda Romania, partner of this project).

## Day 2:

- **Visit** at the headquarters of the National Commission of Romania for UNESCO;
- **Presentation - UN and gender equality in the contemporary society** - Victoria POPESCU (former Ambassador in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs);



- **Presentation on the European vision on gender equality and equal opportunities for women and men** - Rodica PRECUPETU (former governmental expert specialized in human rights/ minority rights);
- **Presentation of the media trust** - Susana PLETEA (COO of Burda Romania);
- **Bucharest city tour; visit to Elite Art Gallery.**

## Day 3

- **Training session** for the simulation of an editorial team - Susana PLETEA and Mara COMAN (Editor-in-Chief Marie Claire Romania);
- **Presentation "Types of photos and techniques"** - Mihai NICOLAE (photographer of Burda Romania team);

- **Workshop on Virtual Reality (VR)** - experiencing new media tools.

## Day 4

- **Tips and Tricks in design and image processing** - Cristian GARCIA, Chief of Retouch Burda Romania;
- **Workshop on photography** - Mihai NICOLAE;
- **Presentation "Freedom of expression"** - Diana COLCER, Editor-in-Chief Cosmopolitan Romania;



- **Module of journalistic training** - Susana PLETEA.

## Day 5

- **Training "Women's access to digital media and new technology features of radio and TV journalism"**;
- **Training "Social media as an information tool"**;
- **Workshop on journalistic materials for the future magazine "Women Today"**;
- **Visit to the Romanian National Television**, with the support of the Department for National Minority Broadcasts.

## Day 6

- **Closing ceremony.**



Remember:

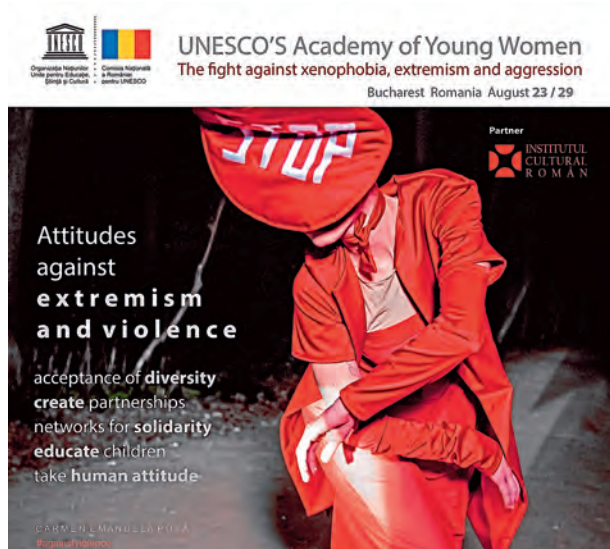
# The First Edition of UNESCO Academy of Young Women

Dr. Daniela Popescu



both men and women and helped them to understand the differences in mentality between them and to analyze the sensibilities of each gender. They must make special efforts against cultural conflicts, aggression, violence that can in many situations lead to extreme cases, especially violence against women. We thus expressed our desire to contribute to the establishment of a society based on understanding and solidarity, a society of nonviolence, dialogue, cooperation and peace.

The National Commission of Romania for UNESCO organized in Bucharest, between 23 and 29 of August 2017, the „UNESCO Academy of Young Women - Fight against xenophobia, extremism and aggression”, a project aimed at promoting education as an essential tool for the creation of non-conflictual, inclusive societies, in which gender equality is respected. The participants included at least 50% of women who are trainers, coaches, mentors, NGO educators, or who have their own private business with beneficiaries/clients being women or focusing on women with low chances. The project targeted



The first edition of the project was concluded with some remarkable results, such as: 10 newsletter issues available on the Facebook page of the Academy; one journal that was presented at the UNESCO General Conference in Paris in November 2017; over 100 appearances in the media; an online open platform where trainers, organizers and participants will continue to communicate for future projects or on topics related to social inclusion, international development, gender equality etc.; an online open platform for future projects on topics related to youth involvement, UNESCO's core activities etc.

# Daniela Popescu —

## *A woman with vision*

held by Eliza Vasilescu, Sebastian Berchesan

*The first edition of UNESCO's Academy of Young Women took place in Bucharest, in August 2017 and treated the subject of "The fight against xenophobia, extremism and aggression". In the light of the success of the first edition, the second edition of the Academy was initiated between May 13th -18th 2019 in Bucharest, with the central topic Mass media as a tool for women's empowerment. Under the condition that the need for a real empowerment of women using all types of instruments, the project aimed to promote ideas such as equal opportunities for both men and women in benefiting of ICT training and education, and in the same time strengthen and encourage the use of all types of media tools.*

*In the current context, in the 3rd millennium, there are still situations in which women are discriminated against and oppressed. To achieve a decent status, similar to the status enjoyed by men in society, and to fight discrimination and violence of all kinds, a higher involvement is necessary in order to fight against this issue.*

*The 25 years of experience in the Romanian National Commission for UNESCO pushed me to initiate several projects that encourage women empowerment, starting from a core question: How can I develop a suitable framework for raising awareness regarding the feminine issue?*

*In the first stage, I focused on identifying the barriers the women of XXI century have to fight against and also, the solutions to these problems. At the societal level, it is essential a deeper understanding of the way in which we can have a cohesive society, built on mutual understanding and collaboration, such as future developed through the participation of women in all processes: economic, social and cultural. Moreover, projects as the UNESCO Young Women's Academy, aim to determine a more active implication of the local and regional decision makers in the application of a series of coherent policies related to equal opportunities for women and men, in accordance with the principles established by the UN and the European institutions.*

**Q: What is the meaning of women empowerment?**

The twenty-first century, the rebellious and uninhibited 21st century, is not yet fully exempt from prejudices. One of these prejudices, perhaps the most resistant to change, is the inferiority of the woman in relation to the man. The public space and the political decision, of major importance for the existence of all, both for women and men, have been a predominantly masculine manifestation area from Antiquity until today, limiting or even forbidding the woman to be involved and to action in the public space. She was entrusted with the other space of human existence - the private one, the family, the household issues, the



children's growth. From assignment to isolation and exile, there was only one step left.

**Q: How does UNESCO promote gender equality?**

To be the protagonist in our life, we need equal chances and freedom.

Gender equality remains one of the global priorities of UNESCO by 2021, which is why the organization will ensure that gender equality is reflected in both its policies and programs.

In the past twenty years, significant progress has been made in the institutional relationship between the UNESCO Secretariat in Paris and the Member States on this subject. UNESCO prioritizes gender equality through education, being one of the central objectives of the international community, proposing its fulfillment by 2030. These initiatives have multiple valences: on the one hand, the education of girls and, implicitly, women, and on the other hand, it is an essential element for sustainable development and peace building.

*Q: What are the main challenges UNESCO encounters while promoting women empowerment ?*

Today, geographical isolation, minority status, poverty, domestic violence, limited education, early pregnancies, sometimes even at the age of childhood, pose great challenges in promoting women's empowerment. We also find rigid and traditional attitudes and mentalities when we are talking about the status and the role of women, these harmful ideas preventing them from fully exercising their right to receive education. In order to achieve a decent status, similar to the status of men in society, and to fight discrimination of all kinds, women must take attitude, trust their own strengths and they have to be organized. Only then their voice will be heard.

*Q: How does UNESCO Romania take action regarding this issue?*

First of all, I want to mention UNESCO's message on women empowerment, which is a clear one: women and men must enjoy equal opportunities, choices, capabilities, power and knowledge as equal citizens. Regarding UNESCO RNC, we have initiated and implemented a series of projects at international level, in order to identify and subsequently, eliminate gender disparities. On this line, a relevant example is represented by our projects, the UNESCO Young Women Academy, Future Folk, Metamorphoses, the Women's Day celebration at the United Nations.

*Q: Can you explain the purpose of The Young Women Academy?*

The Young Women's Academy, UNESCO-funded participation program and coordinated by me, proves that UNESCO's policies pay special attention to the women status in the world. The first edition of the Academy, organized in 2017, had culminated with a series of promising projects aimed to inform, sensitize and influence broad categories of people in its attempts to attenuate stereotypes and to model mentalities.

The main question, on which the first edition was based, remains up to date: "How can I solve the women's problems in the community and also in my country in order to change the world for the better?". In relation to this question, we targeted a niche area this year, on different types of journalism and used non-formal education tools, as well as those of experimental learning in order to emphasize the women's role in media. Usually, we propose subjects that have a major impact on our daily lives, wishing to promote true value. These can provide new perspectives and new solutions in the central pillar of combating discrimination and violence; there are many training modules focused on organizational communication, mass media, intercultural education, the creation of (pro-) attitudes against extremism

and violence of any kind, as well as solidarity partnerships and networks.

*Q: How can we overcome gender stereotypes through mass media and education?*

First of all, it is needed a society sustained effort, which has to be directed on two main coordinates: education and mass media. If we relate to education, it has a central role because the institutional educational environment is fundamental in promoting gender equality. This is a necessary condition for achieving de facto equality, so a review of the curriculum is needed to allow a more comprehensive view of the women's experiences from different backgrounds.

Mass media has a main role in shaping ideas and behaviors. It has a vital impact on how gender equality is perceived and the role of women in society. It is worth mentioning that in all European countries there are laws and institutions that aim to ensure gender equality and equal opportunities for men and women alike. However, discrimination based on gender is still an issue, which is why discouraging sexist attitudes and supporting education will diminish women's stereotypes. They will be able to fully use their talent, training, ability to dialogue and performance.

In the spirit of UN - UNESCO regulations and recommendations, which places equality of opportunity in today world priorities and consider it a factor of progress in humanity over the next decade, UNESCO RNC has proposed, through its project, the UNESCO Young Women Academy - a new perspective to a future in which women have a more prominent voice in the media.

*Q: How can a woman be empowered while maintaining her femininity?*

First and foremost, she has to practice the chosen job at high standards. This is the foundation on which a lasting career is built: professionalism. Then she needs to dare, to have courage, to have a feminine power. It is essential to know her potential, value and, of course, to claim what she deserves. There is a high



risk because of the excess of modesty, which can sometimes be overlapped over femininity. I advise women to analyze and evaluate in a lucidly and objectively way and then to look forward to the social place that can make them worthwhile, while keeping their femininity untouched.

*Q: Do you think gender equality has progressed in Romania?*

Although we still identify a series of stereotypes related to women's status, the most well-known image is the appearance of a housewife, I consider that gender equality has made some progress in Romania. Firstly, the appointment of a woman as a prime minister was an important step in removing certain traditional conceptions about the women's role in political positions.

We also identify a significant increase in the number of women in the economic and political sphere. As far as the Romanian scientific, educational, medical, cultural dimensions are concerned, there is a significant number of women working in these fields than in most European countries.

In the context of Romania's accession to the European Union, important legislative and institutional changes have taken place. The Community acquis has been transposed into Romanian national law and a specialized institution has been created - the National Agency for Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, within the Ministry of Labor and Social Justice and led by a Deputy Minister. Last year, the Romanian Government adopted a National Strategy to Promote Equal Opportunities for Women and Men (2018-2021). In 2019, between May 6th -11th, Romania celebrated Equal Opportunities Week, and May 8th was declared Equal Opportunities for Women and Men Day. The gender theme was also one of the Romanian priorities during the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, a mandate which was successfully carried out between January 1st - June 30th, 2019.

*Q: How can Non-Governmental Organizations help promote women empowerment? What about us, the individuals?*

Through NGOs, especially through UNESCO Clubs and Associations, programs can be initiated in order to create a social and political conducive framework for community development and, implicitly, to gender equality. Non-governmental organizations whose women empowerment initiatives are successful in a very large proportion, succeeding in consolidating the idea of independence and assuming their own decision-making process.



Regarding to what we can do individually, I believe that active participation in NGO's activities will provide opportunities for underprivileged women to enter the social and political spheres that are hard to access so far.

This has also determined me to run for the president position of the European Federation of Associations and Clubs for UNESCO, after being the first woman elected in the World Federation's Board. The entire road was challenging because, even at UNESCO, the male representation space has dominated from the beginning of the organization to the last few years.

*Q: Shall men participate in promoting gender equality?*

Gender equality is the responsibility of individuals, regardless of their gender. Taking into account that many men are involved in gender issues, I think they have an essential role in building equality. The progress towards a better society can be made only through the sustained efforts of women and men.

Our project and, in general, all UNESCO projects also aim at organizing events where both men and women can participate, to facilitate understanding the mentality differences between them and to analyze the sensitivities of each gender. In the end, the expected result is a deeper understanding of the key issue and the way we can achieve a non-violent society through public education.

*Q: Do you think gender equality will be obtained all over the world by 2030?*

Global progress on gender equality should be taken into account. However, it is a long way to achieving gender equality. In a civilization of love, "hopes instill hearts, and even deceive us, make us to experience rare pleasures."

# Feminist issues

## in UNESCO initiatives



*Education represents the fundamental element of UNESCO's initiatives on women's empowerment and also the key element that could help diminish gender stereotypes.*

The 21st century is a representative one for reaching the objective of gender equality. Looking at UNESCO's initiatives, we can identify a diversity of programmes oriented in multiple directions: cultural, social and geographical. In the last years, there are nicher projects, being underlined the importance of gender equality through education. The education represents the fundamental element of UNESCO's initiatives of women empowerment and also the element that could diminish gender stereotypes.

It's essential to have all the conceptual clarifications for a better understanding of UNESCO's actions at international level regarding the women issue. Moreover, is necessary to define the gender equality. According to UNESCO Priority Gender Equality Action Plan (2014-2021), "gender equality refers to the equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities of women and men and girls and boys. It implies that the interests, needs and priorities of both women and men are taken into consideration, recognizing the diversity of different groups of women and men". Taking into consideration this definition, the nowadays gender inequality becomes an inexorable truth, reason why important changes took place in the way of dealing with the matter. It is to be remarked the propensity for local or regional actions. What is important to mention is the fact that gender equality is in an interdependence relationship with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, reason why the women issue is a global topic. For example, through programmes as the Spotlight Initiative, UNESCO, UN, that want a new multiannual perspective focused on the elimination of all types of violence against women.

UNESCO contributes to the creation of a favourable gender equality learning environment,

offering an authentic and holistic vision. There are 5 distinct major programmes. In education, UNESCO promotes equality throughout the education system - access to education, the creation of professional future perspectives. In Natural Sciences, UNESCO supports the development of women's capacities and the dissemination of information, giving them the chance to progress in different domains. An example in this regard is the L'Oréal private scholarship programme "For Women in Science". In Social and Human Sciences, UNESCO fosters the inclusion of gender equality in a fair social environment. Through Culture, women's access to cultural life is assured.

The last UNESCO's initiatives involves multi-sectorial collaborations as the UNESCO's Global Partnership for Girls' and Women's Education - "Better life, better future". It provides a platform for Governments, bilateral and multilateral organizations, the civil society to get involved in the abolishment of discrimination.

The equality through education coexists with the other UNESCO global priority at this moment - Africa. Consequently, a series of projects were initiated through which the gender equality disparities must be diminished. Since its inception, UNESCO has been a promoter of the right to qualitative education for girls and women. It's important to mention some of the successful projects, starting with 2011: "Gender-Sensitive Training of Teachers and School Principals for Girls' and Women's Access, Participation and Advancement in Mathematics, Science and Technology Education in KENYA and LESOTHO", "Literacy Project for Girls and Women in SENEGAL", "Crowd-Sourcing Girls' Education to Reduce Drop-Out Rates in ETHIOPIA and TANZANIA".

Since the beginning of 2016, there were innovative some UNESCO Prize for Girls' and Women's Education laureates, honouring the innovative contributions made by individuals, institutions and organizations in order to promote girls' and women's education. The prize is unique in the representation of successful programmes, which promote and improve the girls' and women's educational perspectives and last, but not least, the life quality.

At the level of The Romanian National Commission for UNESCO, it is paid a special attention for the programmes, which approach the feminine issue, looking at the stereotypes and old mentalities regarding the women's role in the society. In order to change the society's ideas, RNC UNESCO organized a series of significant projects at the international level, such as The UNESCO Young Women Academy, Future Folk, Metamorphosis, the celebration of Women's Day at the UN Headquarters.

Women's empowerment and the equal chances are just some of the essential criteria for the evolution of the entire society. At the core stage of life, we all enjoy the human being status, without paying attention to the gender disparities. Why shouldn't we enjoy equal rights, without being constrained by stereotypes and dissonant ideas?



# The road to rights. Women who changed history.

## The struggle to be - The beginning of the feminist movement

by Mircia Andreea-Florentina



*The marches were the first type of events which united millions of women from all corners of the globe.*

The rights the women enjoy nowadays have not always been a fundamental prerequisite. The women have always been handmaidens, child caretakers or husbands' servants, but never considered good enough for having access to education, for pursuing a career or for taking the leadership in different work or social areas, centuries of struggles being necessary for achieving the right to be seen as equal human beings in a world dominated by men. In the article hereafter a brief historical overview of the feminist movement from the very start of the women empowerment until the 19th century included will be made, for the purpose of taking a

closer look at the origins of women's rights movement and therefore understanding the struggles met by women in their fight to be.

The role of the women in the society, as previously mentioned, was from the very settlement of the social order, clearly defined. No right to vote, no access to education or to the public life, no independence and no career opportunities - only a range of restraints, an array of prevailing possibilities that the women had no access to. The only permitted activities were to be carried out in the private spheres of their households, were they could have been under the close observation of their fathers or men.

**The Cult of Domesticity** or the **Cult of True Womanhood** - that's how this value system, having the women at its core, was called by the historians later on, in the 19th century. But even before finding a denomination for these hundreds of years old system, attempts have been attested with the objective of defending the women's position not only in the society, but in the world as well. Thus **Christine de Pizan**, a French writer and moralist, was, in the 15th century, the first woman to write about the importance of women in the society, encouraging them consequently to cultivate their outstanding qualities. Attempts continued in the 16th and 17th century, the most important milestone to mention during this period being the **Women's March on Versailles** (1789), when a bunch of women were finally able to show that women own the strength too, rebelling as a consequence against the bread shortage and rise of prices and making what men couldn't, namely constraining the French king at that time to find a quick solution to their demands.

Despite their rather peaceful tryouts of winning an identity, at the end of the 18th century, when drawing a conclusion, not much has been achieved on the path towards women's empowerment. Reason why the women quickly understood that the revolutionary path was the only solution for gaining the much-coveted equality. They needed to step up and make their voice heard, the 19th century becoming as such the most auspicious historical period in trying to do so.

Accordingly, the women in Europe and beyond started to become vocal participants in what was later on called the **First Wave of the Feminist Movement**. They started to stage get-togethers or assemblies on purpose of discussing the actual shortfalls of the system when it comes to women's rights and searching for solutions of gaining these. The United States

could be considered a frontrunner of this cult of assemblies, hosting in 1848 the **Seneca Fall Convention**, where women, as well as men, came together in order to discuss the current women's status and to come up with strategies for eventual women's mass mobilizations.

At the end of the Conference, bringing together the discussed idea, the draft has been created to what was later on called the **Declaration of Sentiments**, created according to the model of the Declaration of Independence, playing a crucial role in turning the focus of the feminist movement from the women's rights in general, which was the case until now, to the women's suffrage, the achieving of the right to vote.

The revolutionary spirit shortly crossed the Atlantic Ocean and reached the European continent, where the women began to decry the social order and the women's position during group meetings, such as the Langham Place Group in London, where early pioneers was looking after solutions for reaching equality. Countries like Denmark, Netherlands or

Sweden, but also Australia, New Zealand or Persia joined the first wave of the feminist movement, reform being the key word adopted in literature and mass-media when it comes to the feminist issue or gender role in general.

At the end of this revolutionary century, it must be noted that the women's shouts finally found their echoes in a patriarchal system that seemed to keep its doors closed at every women's attempt to break them. The women finally managed to make the first steps towards change. In Britain, the married women had now the right to own and manage their belongings at will, in Brazil the first elementary schools for girls were opened, while New Zealand was, in 1893, the first country which finally allowed the women to vote in the national elections. But the women's attempts to fight a system built on inequalities didn't cease here. The 19th century only marked the official beginning of a by now hundreds of years fight for an identity, of an already hundreds of years existing struggle to be: *ei lupte ce avea ca scop câștigarea identității feminine.*

## The Political Struggle:

# 20th Century and Women's Right to Vote around the World

by Cojocaru Alexandra

Wacky ideas, old mentalities and false and ridiculous reasoning. There were some of the greatest obstacles that women of the 20th century had to face and subsequently, to overcome. In this article, we will approach the main movements and actions that aimed at obtaining political rights for women. From the viewpoint of the modern reader, these „claims” seem to suit all citizens, regardless their gender, race or religion. Although, the 20th century proves the opposite.

The right to vote, to express a political affinity, at both local and national level, has not always been a universal right. As we have seen in the previous section, the 19th century represented the beginning of the women's rights movements, and the 20th century would be an extension of these initiatives, an extension successfully transposed into reality. The main movements' members demand was related to civil aspect of the women's issue: from the right to vote and implicitly, equal citizenship, to the unrestricted access to quality education, the possibility to practice any career, as well as an equitable access to medical care. Until the outbreak of the Great War, few European states granted women the right to express their political options. Thus, in the Great Duchy of Finland women have been able to vote since 1907, being followed in the pre-war period by other two Nordic states - Norway and Denmark have allowed women to vote in 1915.

The women's right to vote issue has found its perfect expression in the women's suffrage in the United Kingdom, and later, it will cut across the geographic barriers. However, we should mention one essential thing. Despite the impact of the women's right movement, the First World War generally acted as a social and political stagnation, and it has led to the cessation of suffragettes' actions. It was not until the end of the war that the United Kingdom passed the Representation of the People Act, which giving the right to vote to all men and women over the age of 30 who met de property qualifications; all women over the age of 21 in Britain will be enfranchised not before 1928. In the interwar Europe, we are noticing a significant actions' multiplication, which advocate for gender equality in the political life. As a result of these actions, Germany granted the right to vote in 1918, followed by other European states in 1920, as Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Poland and Spain in 1933. In Romania, women could vote starting in 1938, the universal vote being enshrined in the 1938 Constitution of Romania, and France granted the women's right to vote only in 1944, in full war effort. The women's suffrage movement had some strong echoes throughout the American continent. In Canada, women gained the right to vote in 1917, and in the United States, women obtained political rights by adopting the 19th Amendment in 1919. If we talk about the United States, we must remember the



*An eternal symbol of the struggle for emancipation of women: Rosie the Riveter.*

particularity of the women's movement, which was developed as an abolitionist one, being known as the all-women's struggle, regardless of racial criteria. Despite their common fight, the civil rights were differently obtained in the US, according to ethnic and racial criteria. Native Americans were enfranchised in 1924, Asian-American citizens gained full citizenship in 1952, and people of color were kept from voting until 1965.

The outbreak of the Second World War brings the attempt to manipulate the idea of gender equality, by encouraging women to work in factories and shipyards, in order to replace the male workers who joined the military service. Initially, it was promoted the importance of women's role in the country's economic life, but there was only one aim: to support war supplies and national war effort. It was a temporary option; after the end of the war, women's jobs were given back to the former servicemen. This has generated women's critics against stereotypical views, specific to patriarchy.

During the post-war era, women from all over the world became actively involved in the public life and made significant efforts to gain political rights. As a positive consequence, women will get the right to express their political choices in different countries. Italy allowed women to vote in 1946, India in 1947, Greece in 1952, China and Mexico in 1953, Egypt in 1956, Switzerland in 1971 or Iraq in 1980.

We can notice that 19th century women's rights crystallized ideas could be turned into reality only a century later, through sustained efforts, marches, peaceful or violent demonstrations, being governed by the desire for equality and universal franchise. Although the 20th century didn't reach the hardest goal - gender equality, it was the decisive century for gaining civil and political rights, giving us the necessary energy for taking up the contemporary challenges.

# The Struggle to Be Heard: *Women break the silence*

by Bădescu Daria-Alexandra

In the previous sections we took a look at the history of women's movements and their struggle to have the same rights as men through time. But what is happening in the 21st century, about 100 years after women gained the right to vote?

A fact is certain: the fight for equality continues. Since 1945, with the adoption of the United Nations Charter, it is recognized at an international level as a fundamental principle the value that women and men enjoy equal rights. However, there are countries in the present that still don't identify with this regulation. According to Peace Corps, the gender gap is felt the most in regions like the Middle East, South Asia and Africa, with a few exceptions.

Therefore, this was, and it currently is a central topic for debates and events organized by a variety of NGO's from all over the world that encourage the equality between the two genders. Moving on, we are going to tackle a part of the most successful campaigns in order to comprehend the magnitude of the waves created by the grand Women's Rights Movement.

Women's Marches from all around the globe - 2017

21st of January 2017 was a day to remember in the history of Women's Marches. While the famous Women's March on Washington enjoyed the support of a total of 500,000 people, more than 600 other demonstrations took place at the same time in the rest of the United States. Moreover, some of the most important capitals and largest cities from all over the world joined this movement and marched together. Cities like Sydney, London, Paris and Berlin held the most numerous demonstrations. Having the same purpose and fighting for a better chance on equality, approximately 4.7 million people were at unison on the 21st of January.

## **#MeToo Movement**

The MeToo Movement started in 2017 when the actress Alyssa Milano came forward on her Twitter account with a statement regarding some accusations against a Hollywood producer that was suspected for a number of sexual assaults. In the tweet she asked other people to reply with "me too" if they were ever harassed. The post went viral and created a wave of public declarations from famous artists that supported further on the movement. In addition, millions of women all around the world entered the campaign by sharing on social media their personal experiences. The #MeToo campaign conducted to #HerToo, a UNICEF Report on the statistics regarding 9 million of girls between 15 and 19 years old who were sexually assaulted.

*The #MeToo Social Media movement started as a consequence of a scandal involving the Hollywood producer Harvey Weinstein.*



## **Red My Lips Campaign**

Red My Lips is an international organization which coordinates every year an awareness campaign in order to bring under the spotlight the reality about sexual violence, rape myths and other types of harassments against women. The campaign takes place in April and consists in wearing red lipstick throughout the month with the purpose of expressing solidarity and support to all the victims of the assaults. During the time of the campaign, the ones that get involved also share pictures and engage in #RedMyLipsCampaign discussions on social media.

We live in the fast-changing era of globalization, but women's rights are not globally recognized. How many physical and psychological sacrifices should one endure in order to be treated equally?

# Wonder Women from Yesterday and Today. The Fight for Women Rights and Gender Equality



by V. Alexe V., A. P. Bruyer, N. Pantic

***An approach on feminism coming from women who lived in different times and from different backgrounds, women who brought a new dimension to the importance of this cause with their work.***

Equality between men and women is a daily struggle that is played out over the long term. Many men and women contribute to this fight every day, by simple gestures or words, regardless of their sex, age or work. Sometimes the struggle seems difficult, but some figures that have become public are there to remind us not to give up and are a model for everyone who fights for a better (and egalitarian) world on a daily basis.

The women we are about to present to you are examples to follow and have made this fight their battle horse. We will show you an approach on feminism coming from women who lived in different times and from different backgrounds, women who brought a new dimension to the importance of this cause with their work. These model women are the Wonder Women of today!



## Simone de Beauvoir *the Mother of Feminism*

Why talk about Simone de Beauvoir when talking about the Wonder Women of today?

Simply because the new «equality fighters» (that's how I like to call them) would have been inspired by their elders. And if there are wonder women nowadays it's because there are also wonder women of Yesterday, and what better representative of the movement than Simone de Beauvoir?

Born in 1908 and died in 1986 in Paris, she is one of the founding mothers of the feminist movement, in France but also throughout the world.

She is still regularly quoted in debates on gender equality, gender recognition and feminism. Author and philosopher, very young she was already firmly opposed to marriage and developed her thinking around the freedom and autonomy of individuals, especially women.

In the 1970s, she became a leading figure in women's struggle for social equality.

Before that she was already considered a pioneer in the fight for equality with her book «Le Deuxième sexe», published in 1949, which was a success. The title is evocative, it reminds men that they are not the only humans (yes, difficult to believe at that time) and that women also have rights (how that possible?).

She wrote her book based on a single question: «What does it mean to me to be a woman?» - a complex question to which she answers in her book with the famous sentence: «One is not born a woman, one becomes one».

Social construction, patriarchal domination, taboo abortion... Many topics, each more topical than the next, are all covered in her book.

While she endures many criticisms during her time, her book is now the bedside Bible for many people (men and women) on philosophy and the defense of gender equality.

In 2008, a «Simone de Beauvoir pour la liberté des femmes» prize was even created in France in her honor.

## Maya Angelou *the Black Light*

A poet, a singer, a memoirist, and a civil rights activist, Maya Angelou was and still remains an artist with an impressive portfolio she left as a legacy. But her art is not the only thing she wanted to be remembered for. Besides her artistic accomplishments, among which we have seven autobiographies, three books of essays, several books of poetry, a list of plays, movies, and television shows spanning over 50 years and dozens of awards and honorary degrees, Maya Angelou left a mark on the process of women empowerment in general, and black women in particular, in the U.S. in the 1970's.

Despite some controversy raised by her description, in her autobiographies, of various aspects related to lesbianism, and other detailed sexual activities she practiced, her works helped at paving the way for gender equality in a period when this concept was just getting momentum, even less in the case of black women.

When her work, "I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings" was published in 1969, the general reception was generally positive, with some even arguing that her autobiography opened a way for black women writers and African-American autobiography alike. This marked her ascendance to the status of spokesperson for black people, women and black autobiography writers.





## Billie Jean King *the Champ*

Former World No.1 professional tennis player, Billie Jean King is one of the most iconic figures of professional tennis of the last century and a pioneer of gender equality in sports as well. With a total of 39 Grand Slam titles in her career, her athletic accomplishments could have easily be considered enough for many others, but not for her.

She championed the cause of women athletes in tennis and in 1973, she lobbied for equal prize money for men and women at the U.S. Open of that year, efforts which, in the end, paid off as a sponsor was found to accomplish this. Since that moment her activity on women empowerment and gender equality only grew. In 1974 she co-founded "World Team Tennis", the only professional, co-ed team sports league in that time.

Also in 1974, she co-founded "WomenSports" magazine and "Women's

Sports Foundation", the later one dedicated to the empowerment of women by ensuring girls equal opportunities in sports.

Last but not least, in 2014 Billie Jean King started the "Billie Jean King Leadership Initiative", a non-profit organization with the purpose of addressing the gender gap between men and women in many fields, starting from sports and into the workforce pool.

## Sarmiza Bilcescu-Alimănișteanu

### *Wonder Lawyer*

At the end of the 19th century, in a time when the world was dominated by men, including the political, economic and social spheres of interest, the achievement of Sarmiza Bilcescu-Alimănișteanu was truly remarkable. She became the first woman in Europe to obtain her bachelor's degree in law at The University of Paris and the first woman in the world with the PHD in Law. She was actively involved in feminist circles of that time, fighting for the right to education for women. Moreover, she was one of the founders of the Romanian Ladies Society and the executive president of the University Women Association, institution that has been militating for women's rights in Romania since 1925.





## Kirthi Jayakumar *The Peace-BUILDER*

Born In 1987, Kirthi is an Indian women's rights activist, a social entrepreneur, and above all a peace activist.

100% adapted to her time, this young woman promotes the values of equality, education, peace and feminism throughout the world and through various means. Through her Instagram account you can discover a project called Femcyclopaedia, where she doodles portraits of inspiring women through the ages and from across the world and curates their stories under these portraits.

Project which won a prize in 2017! And this prize is just one among a long list earned in reward of her books and work in Humanitarian aid.

She's also the founder of «The Red Elephant Foundation», an initiative built on storytelling, civilian peace-building and activism for gender equality.

The work of the association is mainly based on awareness and education.

The aim is to show the consequences of inequalities, what they generate,

the problems that result from them and how to change things in one's daily life. The very principle of the foundation is that each of us can make a difference! No need to be famous, rich, or a tenor of the bar, each person must give something of himself.

The education of the younger generations is necessary, and Kirthi Jayakumar has understood this well.

Education is the only weapon that can make a difference without violence.

## Hoda Katebi *The Blogger*

In an article where we presented a number of women which marked the development of feminism and the idea of women empowerment, we looked for women who not only did activism, but for women who delivered their message in an unmistakable way and who did it even for niche target groups, such as young female athletes or black women. This approach was used to underline the multifaceted nature of the issue. In this final presentation will be no different. The person whom we wrote about is from the young generation, the 24 years old Hoda Katebi, a Muslim-Iranian blogger who created the "Joojoo Azad" fashion blog.

What makes her work remarkable for our topic is that her fashion blog is strongly politically influenced, in the sense that she often brings to public attention the fact that there is a reductive media representation on the hijab-wearing Muslim women and correlates this with various implications it might have.

Her "break" into fame came with the appearance on WGN News Chicago, to promote her photography book, "Tehran Streetstyle", an appearance which became trending on Twitter after her response to the anchors who tried to shift the attention of the interview from her publishing to a discussion about Iran's nuclear weapons. Since then, her opinion gained more weight in online and this, in turn, translated into the announcement of a new platform, "Joojoo Journal", a project she expects to be a "multilingual, multimedia publication where diasporic, marginalized and 'subaltern' voices are uplifted", as well as a fashion project in Chicago, a unisex clothing brand that she is designing, she is doing for immigrant seamstresses she helps to connect with small-scale fashion houses.





# Gender gap in numbers

## What does it mean to be a woman?

by Vladimir Alexe, Natasha Pantic, Alix Bruyer

### Such a complex question!

Moreover, depending on your country, your religion, your entourage, your own interpretations, the question may have thousands of different answers.

One thing, however, does not change: the struggle every single woman all around the world faces, one way or another.

But what does the above question mean in an objective way? How do we actually measure the «gender gap»?

Your own experience as a woman provides, of course, the most important answer for you. But all women have different

experiences and ideas of what the «gender gap» really is, and any opinion values no less than an other.

The statistics, collected by NGOs or Governments, represent an easy, useful tool to overview the situation in different countries and all around the world in an objective way.

The numbers - sometimes shocking - offer a general idea about the work that has been achieved , but also pinpoint all the obstacles against which women (and men!) must continue to fight in order to achieve gender equality.

The year on which the last country in the world (Kuwait) authorized women's voting.\*  
The first one ever was New Zealand, in 1893.  
Such a long fight but we did it!

(\*Amnesty International)

# 2015

# 2

The number of women killed each week by their partner (or ex) in UK, in 2016\*.

The violence against women happens everywhere, even in the richest and most developed countries, despite the advertisements, the sensitization, and all the associations raising awareness on the subject.

Family members are the first likely to be able to identify signs of violence and take action.

Be vigilant.

(\*ONS, 2016)

The number of countries that prohibit abortion regardless of circumstances and risks for the mother. Many countries still punish women for abortion by jail and even by death. This fundamental right is fragile even in developed countries.

(People review)

# 26

The percentage by which women are more likely to suffer severe injuries in car crashes because safety features are designed for men\*.

Many things are designed or produced in accordance with men's needs. The quoted study shows how the choices car producers make can result in safety hazards for all of the human beings.

47%

16%

The percentage representing the wage gap between men and women in France in 2017\*. In most countries, women still suffer from discrimination in employment, difficulty in accessing positions of responsibility and wage gap compared to men.

(\*INSEE)

The percentage representing the number of countries recognized as such by the UN, governed by a woman. This represents 16 countries out of 193\*.

In other words, parity in politics at the highest level is far from being achieved. But thanks to education becoming more and more accessible, many young girls are entering political science today and will be the leaders of tomorrow.

8%

(\*UNWomen, 2017)

650  
millions

The worldwide number of currently living married women under 18. About 12 million\* girls around the globe are forcibly married each year. A tragedy reinforced by the image of women as sexual objects and as belonging to their husbands, which in some cultures and traditions is still too present.

(\*UNICEF)

# The position of men

## amid the women's empowerment

by Henadz Aleinik, Eleni Kritsidima, Konstantinos Tatsis, George Vlantis



*Women and men, girls and boys, must enjoy the same rights, resources, opportunities and protections.*

To study this issue, 100 representatives of the stronger sex at the age of 20 to 55 were interviewed. The main questions asked were: **1.** Do you feel a violation of your rights due to the empowerment of women? **2.** How do you feel about the fact, that hegemony of men in certain areas will suffer due to the restoration of the right's balance? **3.** What is the best way to reconcile disadvantaged men and disadvantaged women?

64% of respondents answered positively to the first question. Explaining in which cases or under what circumstances the survey participants were disadvantaged, 38% of respondents indicated a "work area". When hiring, also in case of promotion, and in everyday affairs (appointment schedule lunch, work shift schedule, bonus at work, etc.). Another 8% answered "studies, continuing education courses". They noted a more friendly attitude on the part of lecturers and examination boards to women. The remaining 18% feel infringement of their rights or unequal treatment of them in everyday life. It is worth noting that in most cases, the men themselves turned out to be responsible for the infringement of the rights of men by giving preference to women on the basis of not professional qualities, but external ones. For example, one of the respondents cited as an example the promotion of his colleague, which their director (man) liked.

Each of the respondents was also asked the question: ***"do you think that the reason for the unfair attitude lies in the initial illiteracy attitude of men and women?"*** All 100% of respondents answered this questions positively. Male-respondents do not blame the opposite sex, but blame those who are responsible for the distribution of benefits and privileges. In their view, men should also be included in the fight against discrimination against women.

***One of the many questions raised during the study of women's empowerment is the position of men. Do men feel infringement of their rights amid the expansion of the rights of the opposite sex today?***

36% of respondents said that they do not feel discrimination of their rights in the time of the women's rights empowerment. They also noted that they are at the same level with women in terms of responsibility, requirements and privileges at work and in daily routine. In addition, they consider that the process of empowering women is necessary, because they see it as a way to build a balanced society in which people will be engaged in the development and improvement of living standards, but not in the struggle for natural rights.

The second question concerns the attitude of men to the collapse of their monopoly in various fields and the admission of women in them. 74% of respondents answered positively. Many of them noted if the number of workplaces and the quality of work are saved, they are ready to allow women into those areas of life that were previously considered primordially male. The same opinion regarding the social spheres. Many of the respondents have a positive attitude to their spouse's career growth and the fact that they can bring greater financial profit for families than the male half.

26% of respondents spoke in favor of maintaining the separation of professional and social spheres into "male" and "female". Some respondents suggested creating female versions of male areas where they could realize their potential. For example, the introduction of army service in countries where military conscription exists only for men.

The third question concerns the best way to reconcile disadvantaged women and men. 92% of respondents felt that the best way is to initially regulate duties, responsibilities and privileges between men and women so that the scales are the same. Also, the respondents noted the equalization of the rights of women and men in all permissible spheres of activity as a mandatory point. Mandatory admission of men to the female profession and women to the male. The remaining 8% of the respondents offered the issue of benefits to the "affected" parties as a tool for regulating rights. As well as the gradual introduction of equality, which will not violate the usual way of life on both sides.

However, expanding these rights, one should not "bump into" fanaticism and forget about the essence of the concept of equality.

# The Big Dirty 'F' Word:

## Interpreting feminism in the world today

by Alana Daly Mulligan

**Nasty. Aggressive. Obstructive. Problematic. Too serious. Overly politically correct. Angry. Crazy.**

Depending on where you look, you can find very different definitions for what feminism means. Some people wrongly interpret the word to mean women's superiority over men, they associate the movement with swarms of angry women who police every word that falls from the lips of some poor politically incorrect person who crosses their path. Or some see feminism as an act against the divine duty of women- to serve men and produce offspring.

To describe oneself as a feminist is seen as a curse of sorts- a self-inflicted wound that ostracizes you from common society built on decades of misinformation and the conservative patriarchal powers that be.

However, when we examine the dictionary definition, we are presented an entirely different picture of what this word represents.

"Feminism, the belief in social, economic, and political equality of the sexes." – Britannica Academic. In a nutshell, feminism's main goal is equality between all people - regardless of your gender, sex, political belief, social or economic background- nobody is better than everyone else.

So, if this concept of equality is so straight forward, why do people have such a problem with the "F" word?

While the word "feminism" is a fairly modern concept, the practice of women standing up for their rights has existed since time began with smatterings of women across history standing up against the system through art, literature, academia, performance or just downright rebellion. Women were oppressed by patriarchal structures but that did not silence them completely. This fear of women gaining power and overthrowing is one that continues to survive and poison the work towards equality and community that feminism promotes. It ranges from derogatory comments made on the internet, to legal restrictions on the rights of women such as abortion bans and unequal wage payments, to hyper sexualization of women in media and the growing pornography industry, physical attacks, rape culture in universities and workplaces, trafficking of young women and girls, and perhaps worst of all, a dismissal of the voices who encounter these situations.

While the movement is constantly changing and evolving to battle the hypocrisy of the day, its core belief that everyone should be equal stands out, begging the question, is this not a word we should be introducing into the vocabulary of not only young girls, but young boys too? It seems our education systems freeze up at the mention of feminism, not knowing where to place the conversation about equality in a classroom setting- does it best belong as a definition, should it be incorporated into sex-ed or should it just not be touched



*Feminism is much more than a gender debate, it is a cry for social change!*

and left to the internet to explain? The word's "feminization" so to speak has slowed the progress by the word that some now argue was incorrectly given to it. People now more than ever are favoring newer phrases, such as egalitarianism, equalitarianism or even humanism, all of which are important movements but not exactly encompassing all the beliefs of feminism. It is understandable that society wants to rebrand the movement, there is no doubt that past actions under the feminism banner (often incorrectly called such) harmed the reputation of the cause. However, by wiping away the feminist label, people do not recognize how it is in fact, conforming to the exact conservative ideology that it aims to demolish with the eradication of the word from our vocabulary.

We need feminism because it encompasses egalitarianism equalitarian, humanism but more importantly, stands for so much more than these movements do by themselves. We need feminism because we still need a space to allow women to speak and explore the types of people they want to be and how they can contribute to the world. To call oneself a feminist, is to rebel against the namesake- feminism is much more than a gender debate, it is a cry for social change. That's why this curse word needs to be taken off the naughty list. It has been the spark to so many cultural movements, be it abortion rights, marriage equality, LGBTQ\* rights, and now, we see feminism as a driver of the movement for the environment, taking care of the rights of our original mother earth. We need to teach children that to be a feminist, is to believe they can achieve any dream they want because they are human beings- that two letters assigned at birth should play no role in how that child is treated or disciplined to behave.



## Social Report

# What women should do to win the right to life and free decision making?

by Ana Kaplarević, Taykan Sökmen, Irida Papaioannou

*When they were given to write a postcard to any person in their lives, all refugee women at one workshop choose to write to the general public - Europe or politicians. Maybe now is the time for all of us to understand their undefined need to be visible.*



*Gender-based violence should be considered as legitimate basis to seek asylum.*

On recently held elections for the European Parliament Eurosceptic and far-right parties made substantial gains throughout the EU. How the election results will be reflected on the issue of the migrant crisis and human treatment of refugees remains to be seen. And while high politics is led behind closed doors, (extra)ordinary people do what they can. Sara Ristić is twenty-eight years old graduated psychologist, and since the beginning of world refugee crisis at 2015. she has been giving her knowledge and goodwill in order to help people who were forced to leave their homeland. For two and a half years now she has been working in the Info Park refugee center in Belgrade, Serbia, specialized in protection, information, communication and education services, also having the special program just for girls and women where they can find safe place for rest and privacy, have confidential talk and get information. As Sara provides psychosocial support to migrants, focused on women and girls, she turned our attention to the

fact that, according to global statistics (mostly UNHCR), more than 50% of refugees worldwide are children and women. The problem is, sad Sara, that this data is invisible, showing a kind of manifestation of patriarchy, because when we speak about refugees (or nowadays more migrants) the stereotype is: young man, with a good mobile phone, who is just trying to find better job in Europe. "I think one of the biggest problems is that refugee women are not represented in the media, they are not allowed to speak in their own name. Instead, most of the time NGO's, different organizations or even men from their families speak for them", said Sara. She warned that women and girls are far more vulnerable group who suffer from various types of violence because they are in refugee. The basis for seeking asylum is not only political crisis, war, religious persecution... Through the Belgrade Info Park there were many underage girls from sub-Saharan African countries who explicitly say they escaped from female genital mutilation. Sara thinks that gender-based violence should be considered as legitimate basis to seek asylum. She also says that prevention, gender empowerment, different training and workshops, expanding the capacity of safe houses is significant help, but the most important thing is- make women visible!



*A young girl does her part in supporting the young women of tomorrow, as marchers attend Women's March in Los Angeles, California.*



**My body. My choice.**

In many countries and states abortions are considered as a human right. Theoretically, women all over the world have the right to decide about what happens in their body. However, when theory turning into practice, laws variant from side to side. In 2013, the UN reported that abortion is legal upon request in 58 of its 193 Member States.

Generally speaking, abortion is legal in most of North America, Europe, Asia, and Australia. It is illegal in most of Africa and South America. Not only in the so called third world countries but also in "liberal" countries such as U.S.A there is a rising wave of abortion restrictions.

In 2014 study estimates that 14.9% of all 2013 maternal deaths were caused by abortion, totaling somewhere between 38,336-49,843 maternal deaths. More than half of these deaths are believed to have occurred in sub-Saharan Africa. The problem is that globally women do not have equal rights and means to health care abortions, they are facing social criticism for their choices and do not have the right of decision.





### **Womens have limited access to research funds**

Julie Klausner once said "Why can't science work on making women more entitled in general? Or at least get us to listen to those L'Oréal ads that tell us how we're worth it?"... Nowadays more and more women enter tertiary education. There is progress but also a persistent "generation effect". However, getting more women into science is not working as women have less access to research funding.

Furthermore, women in science face plenty of problems, which prevent them from following scientific carrier, such as the graduate-level environment, the maternal wall/glass ceiling, performance evaluation criteria, the lack of recognition, lack of support for leadership bids, and unconscious gender bias.

According to UNESCO's Institute of Statistics (August 2015) Latin America tops world for female participation in science while in Europe female researchers growing fastest. Despite these gains, women's academic careers in Europe remain characterized by strong vertical and horizontal segregation.

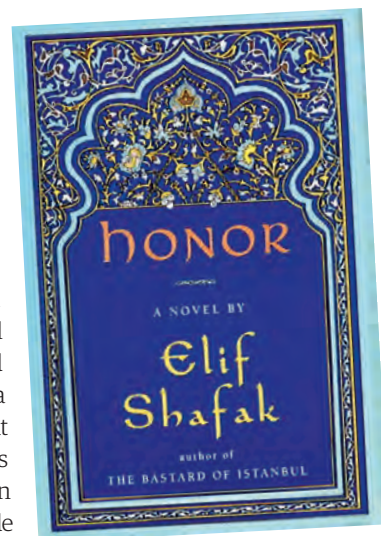
*Performance evaluation criteria, the lack of recognition and unconscious gender bias prevent women from pursuing careers in Science.*



*Gender equality has to become more than a symbol, it should be imprinted in the future generation's mentality.*

### Art and the fight for the women rights

Elif Shafak is the most widely read female novelist in Turkey, who focused on the contribution of women for literature. Her masters' thesis won a prize from an association of Social Sciences. She has published 16 books so far, ten of which are novels. Her main areas of interest are Istanbul, feminism and women rights, freedom of speech, global politics, mysticism, East and West. She presented herself in a TEDxGlobal session. She says that the West think of themselves as solid, safe and stable. Her Western side believes that the other side (East) should increase their level



of feminism, activism and human rights. Shafak is an activist for Women rights. Consequently, in every book she writes about women, women rights, as well as oppression or violence against women. *Iskender* (one of her novel) tells the story of immigrants and of the honor killings of a Turkish family who had immigrated to London. The heroine, Esma, has some characteristics from the author herself too. Esma tries to establish a balance between her traditional upbringing and the modern world and she desires to become a writer. Shafak also tries to explain the balance of East and West from the perspective of women. She said "East, West, South or North makes little difference. No matter what your destination, just be sure to make your journey, a journey within." (TedXGlobal)

Elif Shafak continues her activities as a women's right activist. In addition to her work for freedom of speech and literacy, Shafak is known as an advocate for minority rights and LGBT rights. Domestic violence you can fight in many ways. She chose art.

## Violence against women in numbers

- It is estimated that **35%** of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some points of their lives. Some national studies\* show that up to **70%** of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime.
- **87 000** women were intentionally killed in **2017**, worldwide. More than **50 000** were killed by intimate partners or family members. This means that **137** are killed by a member of their own family every day.
- At least **200** million women and girls alive today have undergone female genital mutilation in **30** countries with representative data of prevalence.

\*UN Women statistics and studies

# Facing the reality

## The Book Babies: Single mothers returning to education

by Alana Daly Mulligan, Mircea-George Morar, Cristina-Simona Belli

*We raise our daughters to be a million things, but allow them to be none of them.*



*Single mothers are the anomaly to the system that the system itself does not want to support.*

Women are extraordinary. The bringers of new life, the providers of wisdom, the patient listeners and the caring friends. When girls are growing up, they are taught to follow an expected social trajectory- nowadays, education is a big part of this rite of passage which is followed by marriage and children in many cultures. But there exists a merciless double standard that does not cater for the women who do not fit this system. It is one that has been an institutional threat since men donning togas decided to have notions about a woman's autonomy. Single mothers are the anomaly to the system that the system itself does not want to support. It prioritizes motherhood over

the improvement of one's social situation even if betterment would in turn improve the life of the mother and baby, often unintentionally placing barriers in the way of young women who want to re-enter education through lack of formal supports. It is all well and good for me to talk about the injustices, but how do these women feel? What supports exist in actuality? What are the effects on them and their children? We looked at Ireland for our subjects: a country with an interesting, if not a dark history when it comes to treatment of women. It is a nation that knows the power of institutionalization as it sits as an oddity of Europe in the face of a raging Atlantic ocean, the effects of the infamous **Magdalene laundries** continue to haunt families with guilt to this day. Speaking to two women, one who obtained her degree over a decade ago, and another who is in the midst of her **3rd level career**, we learned so much about a system that seems rigid in its standing to remain unchanged.

We also sought the advice of the very capable Dr. Diana Vasile: a trauma psychotherapist with near to two decades worth of experience and a particular focus on family trauma, post traumatic growth and resilience to examine the effects of single mothers returning to education. What was the big takeaway from our conversation with Dr. Vasile? Stress is the single biggest factor that impacts mother and their children upon returning to education. "Usually a woman who follows the natural development doesn't get into a situation in which she becomes pregnant too early- not at 18 or 20, she can wait and manage her sexuality and relationships in a way that she can become pregnant when she is more appropriate for her ability to nurture her child. Otherwise, if this comes too early, she develops a high level of stress because of the conflict that arises between her own needs and her child's needs. That puts her into a situation with somehow no solution."

Enter Emma Murphy: a 25 years old, 2nd year nursing student in University College Cork. She is an active member of the University fencing club and a dedicated student with a passion in her field, stemming back to her teens and driven forward by her desire to look after children. Emma is a single mother to her 5 years old son Nathanael who accompanied her to the interview, full of energy and little desire to sit down despite my bribes of chocolate for when the interview was over. No doubt the pair is very fond of one another. "I'm more comfortable when he's with

me” Emma says before we begin, her face easing into a smile of relief with her little boy on her knee.

However, it hasn't always been smiles for the pair. With challenging circumstances at home, Emma and Nathanael moved to a women's shelter where they stayed for around six months before finally renting accommodation of their own, something in of itself that proved difficult. “We have to wait to get something from the government and I keep looking, but there's a long waiting list. Other than that, we're on rent allowance and trying to get a landlord who will take that-especially a young single mother with no real references-is a real challenge.”

Formal governmental supports are lacking when it comes to supporting lone parents in Ireland despite a €16.5 million increase in 2017 which aimed to increase 3rd level access to single parents and individuals from marginalized backgrounds. Emma's experience in the system has been labyrinthine, an utter maze of information with very little clarity or organization for young women facing into the prospects of trying to pursue their education. On top of general information regarding supports, those that do exist are limited, especially when it comes to childcare- something that has been highlighted in the media over and over again. With childcare averaging out at approximately €135 a week, Emma will only receive €15 in support of her using the service.

Our other interviewee is Tammy Darcy, a mother of four and CEO of the award-winning social enterprise Shona.ie. The website is a hub for young girls to celebrate each other and the positive women in the world today, dealing with topical issues. From sexuality to cyber-bullying, Shona.ie is a safe space for women to feel empowered, to find the role models they never knew they needed and learn to be the heroes they always want to be. This message is a personal one for Tammy who herself searched for scarce role models in the “Age of Oprah” and couldn't find a connection with the airbrushed beauties fronting on glossy magazines. She started her career as an academic nearly 15 years ago, with a story similar to Emma's. When she became a single parent at 18, there was a push on the breaks as she figured out how to be a mother. “If you had a child and you were very young, you were labelled a tramp, or a slut and I always felt it was really unfair. I thought people had a perception of me and I was really defensive about it for a while. It took a long time for me to eventually decide I was going to start making choices for myself and my family.” So, at 25, she signed up for college at night, got her undergraduate and has continued on to now complete her second masters. Tammy has this immense can-do spirit, making the feat of raising four kids, remarrying, being her own boss and getting three degrees seem easy. Unsurprisingly, it is most definitely not that and it seems fifteen years ago the supports for Tammy as a single mother were as limited as they are for Emma now.

“I studied at night, so I was working through the day. I had my third child halfway through my degree, and it was a real struggle, but that was just being pregnant, working, just energy-wise, focus wise all of those kinds of things. Then in my last year I had a new-born baby so there was no support available to part time students at the time. There might have been [supports] for full time students, but I really relied on my family and friends to help me out, not just for the nights that I was in college, but also the nights where I had study, assignments and things like that



*Emma Murphy is a 25 year-old 2nd year nursing student in University College Cork and a single mother to her 5 year-old son, Nathanael.*

I really would have been in trouble without them. At the time, there were very few resources or supports for part-time students at all, even financially. You had to pay full fees, which meant it wasn't accessible to a lot of people.”

So how do single mothers manage their work, education and family lives at such young ages? Dr. Vasile says that help is immensely important to these women and having a reliable social structure in place is imperative.

“[Single mothers] need a social support, **she needs relationships, she needs friends and family and a good care situation around her.**” Dr. Vasile says, something that both Emma and Tammy have attested to utilizing as they returned to education.

On the one hand, Tammy was fortunate to have a strong support network behind her of family and friends who saw her pursuit of 3rd level as a continuance in what seemed like a blip to a system of a once terrifically gifted student who was full of confidence, ambition and motivation. Despite the support, Tammy sometimes felt that the work she was putting in wasn't fully comprehended; “I was basically doing a full-time degree on a part-time basis- the work load was the same, so it was really, really tough. A lot of my friends and family maybe didn't understand how much commitment I had to give and how much hard work I had to do.”

Meanwhile for Emma, a lack of after-crèche support both during the college year and during school holidays left a gap for help that she needed. Luckily, her support network came around her at just the right time. “It got to that point where everyone could see that I was struggling” Emma says, despite her initial reluctance to ask for help, she admits that the balancing act of raising a child and completing a degree is a laborious undertaking. The equilibrium is a difficult one to strike; with a full-on college schedule during the day and mothering duties in the evening, it is a challenge for Emma to find the time to study, and when she does, guilt stares her in the eyes. It seems from all angles, she is under massive pressure to perform with university demands, where she can't

spend time with her son, and as a parent where she finds herself being criticized by a system she is trying to escape from with her child. "I go to the crèche and they say he's having a rough time because he's there all the time and just needs his mum. **I'm trying to do this for us, but then is it worth it because he's just upset and I'm just upset in the meantime?**"

Getting this balance right, the one between the mother taking care of her needs and that of her child is a tricky one. If the balance is not correctly reached studies have shown that it can lead to anxiety, depression and lower levels of self-regulation in the case of both the mother and child. Dr. Vasile's conclusion lead us to the hypothesis that a mechanism to control the mother's stress like education, can ultimately lead to more stress for both child and mother, which imaginably not ideal. It is all circumstantial. Returning to education can boost self-confidence and self-regulation but it depends on the educational stresses attached and the details of the child; their age, the moment upon which the mother decides to return etc.

How the mother is feeling, is deeply important in the development of her child as Dr. Vasile points out, with research indicating that with the mother-child relationship having a foundation of stress and anxiety, it can result in children being bonded to their parent through these two emotions. However, once again, it is all circumstantial.

"[The relationship between the single mother and the child can be one] that is based on anxiety and different levels of neglect. Young children, particularly babies and infants have lots of needs that depend on the [physical] and emotional presence of the mother. That's why the level of stress in the mother is so important" says Dr. Vasile.

That's just it, isn't it? Education in the modern age is a struggle and a challenge for those fresh out of second level education. It's a time of development, learning about who you are and who you want to be. Having to help another person figure out their wants and needs at an equally crucial age while you too are trying to find yourself is undoubtedly an exam in itself, one that begs the question why would someone go back to education if the stress and strain are so immensely pressing?

For Emma, it was a case of opening doors that previously had lost their keys. **"I needed to do something to make our life better, so we have options."** She says unwaveringly; "I always get a bit nervous when people ask [about five-year plans] because I know how quickly things can change. I'm just hoping that I finish the degree, that I can go travelling with him-I want to give him a world view and actually live somewhere and experience different places. And that he's happy, that neither of us suffer in the meantime. I want him to have someone he can look up to and that he doesn't feel stuck or trapped. It comes a lot with single parents-**we just feel we can do better so we're going to keep trying.**"

Just like Emma, Tammy knows the guilt attached to turning to education too. **"I feel guilty 100% of the time-always have-always will, since the day I went back."** She tells me, but reassures me that clarity with her children has been the key from the get-go, and with that explanation, the reason for the work follows suit; "if you're working full time and then you're studying on top of that you need to be really clear with your kids about why you're doing it. I want them to have a better life than I had. I wanted them to have better role models than I had. They do give out to me sometimes, especially when I've been working all day

and have another few hours to do, but, I really try and tell them that I am a person as well who has rights and has dreams and has ambitions that need to be fulfilled and that you don't live 25 years with your own autonomy educating yourself just to then give your whole life to somebody else's needs and wants. **I don't want my daughter to grow up and think that as soon as she has kids her life is over and her dreams become irrelevant."**

It seems that the dream of having it all can only exist in bits and pieces. However, it is all about perspective-life is a mosaic of different colors and shades, just because the pieces are not wholly together, doesn't mean the image is broken. Tammy very much proves that, from the darker shades of her early life to the bright explosions of color that decorate the world she is very much remodeling for women of the 21st century with the work of Shona.ie, her gentle approach to feminism, being her own boss and a mother; **"I am and proving that a kid that I had when I was 18 wasn't disadvantaged because I had him."**

I asked all three women to give me their tips for young women going forward in education as young, single mothers. Dr. Vasile's words of wisdom were simple, yet effective: "Get help. It is okay to ask for help. It is okay to find people around, it is okay to study with the child. It is not easy but [the mother's] self-care needs to be important. And if education for her means self-care, that's okay. I encourage young mothers to continue education while taking care of the children."

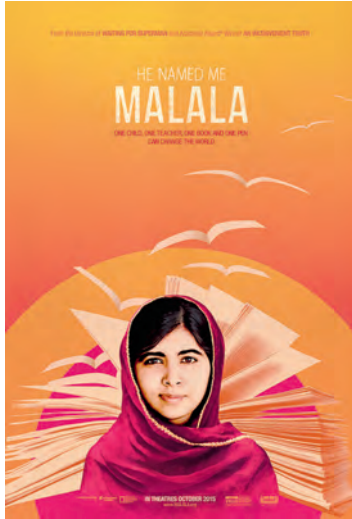
Emma's words also echoed along the same vein, with an emphasis on the struggle ahead but the worthwhileness of the journey. Tammy, in the Shona.ie spirit cites the education "bug" as the driver to change things once you know how the world works and encourages young women to educate themselves to avail of as many options as possible. "we need to educate our daughters and young women about who they should look up to, about how they should be socially active and to widen their world view a little bit so that they see lots more options available to them." She tells me.

When it comes to investigating single mothers and their lives, it is immensely difficult to do these women justice in any regard. It is an experience that unless you yourself have lived, is incomprehensible to understand the difficulty of the matter on all grounds. What our governments need to know is that just because something is incomprehensible does not make it irrelevant, or not worthy of attention. Governments around the world are still getting used to the idea of women "in the boys club" of parliament and while change is being slowly maintained, it remains an uphill battle for many countries- including Ireland where according to the 2018 Report on Equality between men and women in the EU, only 22% of people in national parliament were female- below the European average of 30%. If we had more women in positions of power like this, would we see more empathy for single mothers and their cause? Even if the education systems designed procedures to help single mothers so they are not reliant of the good-natured benevolence of their lecturers helping them along, would we create a space where more women feel they could participate without judgement and know that their passions, being valid, would be supported by the powers that be? But don't misunderstand me- single mothers are not victims. They are troopers in a system that despite overall changing attitudes, does not want them-we should allow them to fulfill their happiness how they wish because childbirth should not stop happiness.



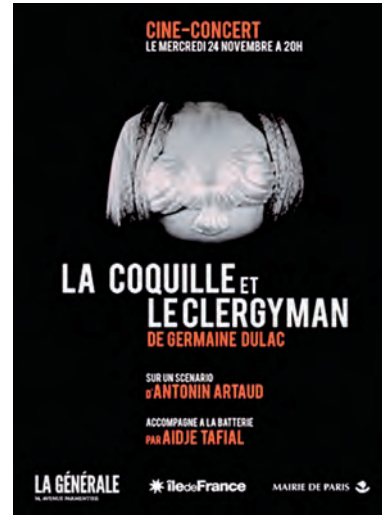
**Here we've made a small selection of movies, biographies, documentaries and books, all gender equality related. All of them will offer you entertainment, but you will also discover things you didn't know about this topic.**

by Eliza Vasilescu, Sebastian Berchesan



He Named Me Malala  
(2015)

A documentary film about one of the most powerful female activists, Malala Yousafzai, who fought and still continues fighting for women rights and especially for the right women have to education. Her story is a certainly tough one, Malala wanted to go to school, despite all the opposition she encountered. The young girl was shot by a Taliban gunman as a part of an organization's violent opposition to her dream. Fortunately, she had recovered and she could further fight for the women's right to education in Pakistan. For her courage, Malala was nominated as a Nobel Prize laureate for Peace in 2014.



The Seashell and the Clergyman  
(1928)

This might be the first manifestation of feminism throughout the film industry. It's the first film in which woman's body doesn't belong to man, but to herself. Through a series of revolutionary special effects, the artistic creation of Germaine Dulac portrays the dream of a clergyman to obtain the favors of another man's wife. Even though the male lead tries to capture the woman's body, to see it and hold it tight, every time he ends up caught in his own mischievous game. Thus, through this movie, women start being presented as strong personalities, equal to men, not even a bit inferior.



This is a 2015 TEDWomen Talk held by a sociologist named Michael Kimmel. Watching this short 15 minutes long conference is a must for understanding how important the obtaining of gender equality is for all the people around the world, not only for women. It also portrays the differences between races that play an important role in gender equality, some women being treated worse than others, based on their skin color and culture. This TED Talk rised and still rises awareness about the importance of promoting gender equality.

# UNESCO ACADEMY SECOND EDITION OF YOUNG WOMEN



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# MASS MEDIA AS A TOOL FOR WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

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