



Women Who Light the Dark

Paola Gianturco

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Across the world, local women are helping one another tackle the problems that darken their lives—domestic violence, sex trafficking, war, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination, inequality, malnutrition, disease. These women may lack material resources, but they possess a wealth of an even more precious resource: imagination—*their imaginations light the dark*.

Women in Morocco create and produce plays that educate illiterate people about women's rights. Girls in Zimbabwe compose and perform poetry that shocks communities into fighting child rape. In Viet Nam, counselors heal survivors of domestic violence with line dancing, art and games. Teachers in India invent puppet shows that help homeless children understand AIDS. Brazilian math teachers inspire girls from the favelas to learn arithmetic by originating fashion shows. Roma women in Slovakia collaborate with non-Roma women to design postcards, kindling communication in place of suspicion. Lesbians in Argentina develop and stage street skits, demonstrating against discrimination. A master ballet teacher instructs a thousand poor Cuban children in classical dance.

Sometimes imagination takes the form of innovative strategies. In Nepal, women teach their sisters to drive taxis and guide treks, and in Nicaragua, to become welders, carpenters and electricians—all, supposedly, men's jobs. In Kenya, mothers get wells dug so their daughters can go to school instead of walking seven hours to fetch water. In Cambodia, doctors and nurses conduct mobile clinics and arrange loans to give indigent women the health and funds to start businesses, foiling sex traffickers who try to lure women with promises of income. In Cameroun, medical specialists train traditional rulers and healers whose behavior has inadvertently spread AIDS, to become health educators. Recreational activists in the United States introduce women with disabilities to challenge courses, camping, whitewater rafting and swimming, empowering them to lead others who are disabled.

Travel with photojournalist Paola Gianturco: climb Annapurna; eat lunch while soldiers carry sandbags to the roof; watch a traditional healer at work; attend a Muslim reception with ambassadors, rabbis, bishops and cabinet ministers; witness a ceremony that welcomes indigenous babies to the world.

Listen as 129 women in 15 countries on five continents describe their lives, dreams and work. They will inspire you with their courage, creativity and effectiveness as they kindle hope and possibilities for their families, communities, countries and our world.

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