

This photo-essay book offers an insight into how women with a migration background in Spain, Poland, Belgium, Austria and Italy define and experience 'empowerment'. Using photos and discussing what these photos mean to them, these women share moments, people, ideas in their lives that made them feel empowered or that reflect empowerment and how it is shaped by their living conditions. You will find pictures and quotes from women all across the globe, from Ukrainian refugees in Poland to Latin-American students in Spain and Asian entrepreneurs in Austria, accompanied by the meanings these women give to these pictures.

This book is the result of a collaborative research project called ReIncluGen (Rethinking Inclusion and Gender empowerment) which involves research institutions, civil society organisations and their participants. The ReIncluGen project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Research & Innovative Action under Grant Agreement No. 101093987.

The ReIncluGen team consist of dedicated academics and social workers studying and working with migrantized women in Europe. More specifically, we focus on what empowerment means to them and share these insights with the broader public. Our team consist of universities and civil society organizations from 5 different countries: Belgium, Poland, Spain, Italy and Austria.

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WHISPERING TRUTHS IN MANY WAYS & PLACES



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A photo-essay book by  
migrantized women across Europe



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Amal Miri,  
Lore Van Praag,  
Kris Aerts,  
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*Whispering truths in many ways & places*

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# PROLOGUE

*“Ermächtigung, Potenziamento, التمكين, 권한 부여,  
empowerment. It whispers its truth in many ways, in diverse  
places. Without that multifaceted aspect its translation would  
simply be an echo, lost in the silence of uniformity.”*

*- Rania*

Being unbreakable, showing resilience in the face of multiple hardships, drawing inspiration from role models, helping others, or feeling pride in achieving personal goals - these are just a few ways migrantized women define “gender empowerment”. When asked about its meaning, they shared a multitude of experiences and examples mainly shaped by their migration journeys, the obstacles they overcame in their countries of origin, and the ongoing challenges they face in their new homes.

Many of these women contribute to the societies in which they live, addressing specific needs in their communities by establishing organizations and engaging in voluntary or “invisible” work that supports their social environment and broader society. Unfortunately, these efforts are often unrecognized or not seen as “achievements” by the majority of society and policymakers. Thus, the key question of this book is: “What is ‘gender empowerment’? Let’s hear it from migrantized women themselves!”

In this book, we aim to amplify the voices of these women in Europe, showcasing their definitions of “gender empowerment” through their words, narratives, and selected photos. We focus explicitly on migrantized women because their experiences sit at the intersection of two significant identity factors: gender and migration. These intersections affect their understanding and experience of gender empowerment differently than for women without a migration background or for men in general.

Building on interviews that employed photo-elicitation methods as part of the Horizon Europe ReIncluGen project in Italy, Belgium, Spain, Poland, and Austria, this book presents a selection of narratives and photos. In addition to these interviews, we launched a photo-essay contest to bring in even more voices, expanding beyond the voices of our research participants. One of the three winning photos from the contest has been chosen as the cover image for this book.

In doing so this book highlights the multitude of meanings and interpretations of gender empowerment across Europe. The images capture the experiences of a diverse group of women, ranging from Ukrainian refugees in Poland to Maghrebi economic migrants in Spain. These glimpses into their lives aim to broaden our understanding of what empowerment means to different people.

To realize this photobook, we collaborated with civil society organizations (CSOs) working to promote gender empowerment and inclusion. This collaboration helped us better understand the contexts in which these organizations operate and connect with women who participated in their activities. Together, we discussed their migration trajectories, experiences in their host countries, and the settings that facilitate their success in society. We also explored how gender empowerment should be conceptualized: as a process or an achievement? As a personal or collective marker of success, or something evaluated by society?

Together, we selected various photos and even objects to discuss this concept across different moments in time, establishing trust and taking time to reflect on its meaning. This is particularly important as, in many languages, the term “gender empowerment” lacks a direct equivalent, cannot be literally translated, or is seldom used in everyday conversation.

This book is the outcome of the Horizon Europe ReIncluGen project, involving 11 partners: University of Antwerp, Erasmus University of Rotterdam, Autonomous University of Barcelona, University of Warsaw, SYNIO, EMPACT vzw, OrientExpress, Feminoteka, La Strada - Der Weg, InteRed, and Kunlabora.

We hope this book challenges the existing notions of empowerment found in everyday life, academia, policymaking, and social work. We are deeply grateful to all the inspiring women who contributed to this project and shared their stories.

*Word of Explanation:*

- “CSO” is an abbreviation for civil society organization
- The contributors could choose how they would be mentioned in the book. Some have given us their full names, some only their first names, while others used pseudonyms or preferred to stay anonymous.
- Some pictures have texts in one, two, or three languages. The reason for this is that these interviews were conducted in a variety of languages. In most cases, in the local language (Polish, German, Italian, Spanish or Dutch), which we translated to English. In some cases, the participant spoke in her native language, which we added to the text, along with the local language and English translation. In other cases, the participant did the interview in English.
- Some countries worked together with professional photographers while conducting the interviews. Their names are mentioned in the beginning of the chapters.

**Towards our own sun**

Blossoms grow on branches free  
from leaves, leave  
scents of a homeland left

and unforgotten, of a woman free, every day  
we name miracles that are outside of us and within.  
Every day we birth life.

There is the blue sky, a river caressing a city and a seagull soaring  
there is the woman who is a cactus  
there is the woman who is her own child.

She sculpts peacocks and planetoids and out of nothing,  
weaves hope out of love and salt,  
carves out jewels from courage and rage,  
and one day, the decision to be enough.  
That day a flower bud bursts open out of thin air,  
in the cracks of dry soil.

Her face is a moon  
Her soul is a wild horse with manes of glass mosaic reflecting the sun  
her story a school.

Traveling to far off lands  
she listens to the earth and winds whisper:

We are mountains holding the balance, uprooted  
we hold our ground, we plant seeds of resistance,  
the future is something we remember.

She carries in her hands the secrets of other women  
she will walk all the way back to free her sisters,  
knowing that when she tires, and she will, she will

be carried too.  
Out of this web woven together she cannot fall,  
in the silence she hears ancestral songs.

She is facing the ocean, retrieving and rinsing her dreams  
she is roaming the woods, stands in front of waterfalls,  
a field filled with a thousand sunflowers  
and those who came before her, those who stand beside her  
look how splendid they are  
we are  
turning towards our own sun.

Yusra Benfquih

**POLAND**

Незламна, як Україна!

Я горда тим, що я українка! Міцнію духом коли ношу вишиванку—символ національної єдності. Моя земля, колосся нив, тепло соняшникового проміння- моя Сила! Мої серце і душа віддані цій землі, і кожен мій крок—це крок у майбутнє, в якому як українець продовжу відзначати та підтримувати свою ідентичність. Я горда тим, що належу до великої родини українців!

**IRINA POLIANITSIA**

Unbreakable, like Ukraine!

I am proud to be Ukrainian! My spirit is strong when I wear *vyshyvanka* - a symbol of national unity. My land, ears of wheat, the warmth of the sun's rays - my Power! My heart and soul are devoted to this land, and each step I take is a step into the future, where I will continue to celebrate and maintain my Ukrainian identity. I am proud to belong to a large family of Ukrainians!



## AGNIESZKA BUKOWIECKA

### Throw away culture

It is hard to accept the fact that we live in a society where so many things are treated as disposable - cups, party hats, straws, but also relationships. Women sometimes become objectified; one can quickly be replaced by another. When we feel withered as flowers, suddenly another woman appears, sometimes even a stranger, who becomes our support, a defender of dignity, a goddess of female solidarity. The writer Sarah Addison Allen beautifully put it in these words: "We're connected, as women. It's like a spiderweb. If one part of that web vibrates, if there's trouble, we all know it." I am proud to be part of this web.



Trudno pogodzić się z faktem, że żyjemy w społeczeństwie, gdzie traktujemy wiele rzeczy jako jednorazowe—kubki, czapki urodzinowe, słomki, ale również związki. Kobieta niekiedy staje się uprzedmiotowiona; jedna może szybko zastąpić kolejną. W chwili, kiedy czujemy się zwiędnięte niczym kwiatek, pojawia się nagle inna, czasami nawet obca kobieta, która staje się podporą, obrończynią godności, boginią kobiecej solidarności. Pięknie to określiła pisarka Sarah Addison Allen: "My, kobiety, jesteśmy jak pajęczna sieć. Jeśli choćby jedna nić wibruje, jeśli któraś z nas wpada w tarapaty, wiemy o tym wszystkie." Jestem dumna, że mogę być częścią tej sieci.

Kobieta Ślimak. Są to uchodźcy zmuszeni do ucieczki z domu przed wojną. Zabierają ze sobą kawałek domu i na łzach czołgają się Bóg wie dokąd. Ukrywają swoje cierpienie pod kamuflażem, aby postrzegać je jako "swoje".

## PUHACHENKO MARHARYTA

Snail Woman. These are refugees who are forced to flee home from war. They take a piece of home with them and crawl on their tears to God knows where. They hide their suffering under camouflage so that they are perceived as "their own".



## NATALIA MUSHAK

This photo is very important to me because it reminds me of my participation in the World Law Congress, which took place on July 20-21, 2023 in New York. The first day, with the motto “Peace through Law”, included presentations by outstanding lawyers of international law, who proposed solutions that could influence policies in their countries. I was very proud to highlight current issues related to the status of Ukraine as a candidate country for the European Union, the country’s integration with the EU, the implementation of a number of legal reforms in Ukraine, etc. These issues are related to the World Jurist Association’s mission - promoting peace through respecting the rule of law and the role of justice in strengthening peace and stability in the world.

The second day was held at the Plenary Session in the ECOSOC Chamber of the United Nations, during which the World Peace & Liberty Award was awarded. In its 59-year history, the World Jurist Association has awarded people such as Winston Churchill, René Cassin, King Felipe VI of Spain, and others.

This photo will forever remain in my photo archive. It is a reminder of my participation as a representative of Ukraine in the events on a geopolitical level essential for the cooperation between lawyers, judges, and other legal professionals. They help shape a more just and peaceful society, using law as a tool to achieve these goals.



To zdjęcie ma dla mnie ogromne znaczenie, ponieważ przypomina mi o moim udziale w Światowym Kongresie Prawników, który odbył się w dniach 20-21 lipca 2023 roku w Nowym Jorku. Pierwszy dzień pod hasłem “Pokój przez prawo” obejmował prezentacje wybitnych prawników z zakresu prawa międzynarodowego, którzy proponowali rozwiązania, które mogłyby wpłynąć na politykę w ich krajach.

Z wielką dumą podkreślałam aktualne zagadnienia związane ze statusem kraju kandydującego Ukrainy w Unii Europejskiej, integracją kraju z UE, wdrażaniem szeregu reform prawnych na Ukrainie itp. Zagadnienia te wiążą się z misją Światowej Izby Adwokackiej –promowaniem pokoju poprzez przestrzeganie zasad praworządności, roli sprawiedliwości w umacnianiu pokoju i stabilności na świecie.

Drugi dzień odbył się na Sesji Plenarnej w Sali Zgromadzenia Ogólnego ONZ, podczas której przyznano Światową Nagrodę Pokoju i Wolności. W swojej 59-letniej historii Światowe Stowarzyszenie Prawników przyznało najwyższe wyróżnienia osobistościom takim jak Winston Churchill, René Cassin, król Hiszpanii Felipe VI i inni.

To zdjęcie na zawsze pozostanie w moim archiwum fotograficznym i będzie przypomnieniem mojego udziału jako przedstawiciela Ukrainy w wydarzeniach na poziomie geopolitycznym, które są niezbędne dla współpracy pomiędzy prawnikami, sędziami i innymi profesjonalistami w dziedzinie prawa. Pomagają kształtować bardziej sprawiedliwe i pokojowe społeczeństwo, wykorzystując prawo jako narzędzie do osiągnięcia tych celów.

Kiedy przeprowadzasz się do nowego miasta lub innego kraju, zaczynasz życie od początku. Otwierasz siebie i życie na nowo. Niezależnie od tego, czy marzyłeś o tym, czy stało się to nagle, w obu przypadkach jest jak jest

Spędzasz dużo czasu sam ze sobą. Myśli i uczucia. Uczucia i lęki. Dobre i niezbyt dobre wspomnienia. Życzenia i marzenia.

Tak czy inaczej, przeszłości nie można przywrócić.

Daj sobie czas przed każdą nową życiową decyzją.

Zatrzymaj czas. Zrób sobie przerwę i spędź czas sam ze sobą, aby wszystko przemyśleć.

Odpowiedz na pytania: Z kim i gdzie idę? Jakie są moje cele i pragnienia? Co jest naprawdę ważne i co mnie interesuje? Jakie działania dają siłę, radość i ponadczasową przyjemność? Jakim chcę, aby było moje życie?

Cisza zewnętrzna i wewnętrzna pomaga zrozumieć siebie. Wszystko zaczyna się od nowa.

## NATALIIA DOLOMANOVA

When you move to a new city or country, you start your life over. You open yourself and your life up again. Whether you dreamed of it or it happened suddenly, it is a test.

You spend a lot of time alone with yourself. Thoughts and feelings. Feelings and fears. Good memories and the not-so-good ones. Wishes and dreams.

Either way, you cannot bring back the past.

Give yourself time before each new life decision.

Stop time. Take a break and spend time alone with yourself to think everything through.

Answer the questions: Who am I and where am I going? What are my goals and desires? What is actually important and interesting to me? Which actions give me strength, joy, and lasting pleasure? How do I want to live my life?

Silence inside and out helps you understand yourself. Everything starts over.



## JACQUELINE DICKSON MAPULI

This photo reminds me of my home country because on this day my husband's business was burnt down, which made him become so weak. I was the one who supported him and gave him courage to overcome that difficult time. Though I was a woman, I stood up and proved that I'm strong, courageous, and focused.



На фото моя білява дочка з моєю подругою ромської народності. Моя подруга вчить їх паски за ромським рецептом. Ми всі—біженки, ми усі —не вдома. Ми такі різні, але ми взаємодоповнення. Ми черпаємо із нашої різниці, тому що ми прагнемо до розуміння і взаємодопомоги. Покоління за поколінням жінки проходили виклики долі завдяки взаєморозумінню і взаємопідтримці. Бо жінки—за життя.

## KUMPAN AISHA

In this photo you can see my blond daughter with my Romani friend. My friend is teaching my daughter a traditional Romani recipe for an Easter *babka*. We are all refugees, none of us at home. We are so different, but we complete each other. We draw from our differences because we need understanding and mutual help. Generation after generation of women managed to face the challenges of fate thanks to mutual understanding and support. Because women are for life.



## TATIANA SAFONOVA

My name is Tatiana Safonova, I am a photographer and I cannot hear well. I live in Toruniu. My own story also reflects women's strength. When I moved to a new country, I had to face many challenges, including a language barrier and the necessity to adapt to a new culture. But I did not give up. My passion for photography helped me find myself in this new world. My photos became a way of expressing myself, but also a way of sharing my original story and an inspiration to others.

This photo to me is a symbol of female strength. It expresses our ability to overcome obstacles and flourish even in the most difficult situations.



Nazywam się Tatiana Safonova, jestem fotografką i słabo słyszę. Mieszkam w Toruniu. Moja własna historia również odzwierciedla tę siłę. Przeprowadzając się do nowego kraju, stanęłam przed wieloma wyzwaniami, włączając w to bariery językowe i adaptację do nowej kultury. Ale nie poddałam się. Moja pasja do fotografii pomogła mi odnaleźć się w tym nowym świecie. Moje zdjęcia stały się nie tylko sposobem wyrażania siebie, ale także sposobem dzielenia się moją unikalną historią i inspiracją dla innych.

To zdjęcie dla mnie symbol siły kobiecej, wyrażający naszą zdolność do pokonywania przeszkód i rozkwitania nawet w najtrudniejszych sytuacjach.

Фота нагадвае мне пра яе сілу і рашучасць сустрацаць выклікі эміграцыі і адзіночнага мацярынства з годнасцю і ўпэўненасцю.

Цяпер гэта фота натхняе мяне быць стойкай і ўпэўненай у себе, незалежна ад цяжкацей, з якімі я сутыкаюся як жанчына ў вымушанай двойной эміграцыі і маці-адзіночка.

Я хачу падзяліцца гэтай гісторыяй, каб натхніць іншых жанчын, особлива тых, хто сутыкаецца з аналагічнымі цяжкасцямі, і паказаць ім, што яны не адны, і што сіла і рашучасць ёсць у кожнай з нас.

## AKSANA DABRYIANETS

This photo reminds me of her strength and determination to face the challenges of immigration and single motherhood with dignity and confidence.

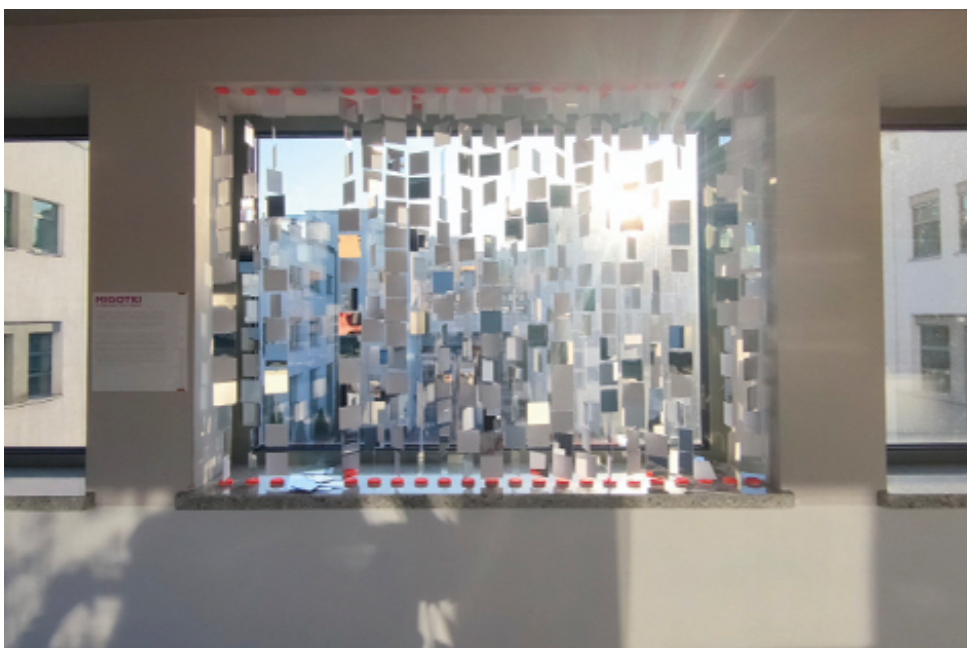
Now, that photo inspires me to be resilient and confident, despite the difficulties I face as a forced dual-immigrant woman and a single mother.

I want to share this image to inspire other women, especially those who are facing similar challenges, to show them that they are not alone, and that there is power and determination in all of us.



## KSENIIA KYSHYSHIAN

A glass mosaic - these tiny mirrors symbolize feminine strength, which is different and strong. A woman knows how to be different and this makes her interesting. Glass mosaic in the window gives me strength by showing me that life is beautiful and I have amazing opportunities to go wherever I want and do whatever I want. This window shows my opportunities and the power to receive what I need here and now from the world.



Migotki—to są lusterka, które symbolizują kobiecą siłę. Ona jest silna i różnorodna. Kobieta potrafi być różną i to czyni ją ciekawą. Migotki w połączeniu z oknem dają mi siłę, pokazując, że życie jest piękne i że mam niesamowite możliwości iść tam, gdzie chcę i robić to, co chcę, okno to moje możliwości i moc otrzymania od świata tego czego potrzebuję tu i teraz.

Сила жіночої єдності в кожному дотику, кожному обіймі, кожному усміху. Ця фотографія втілює моменти справжньої підтримки і взаєморозуміння, які можуть створити лише жінки, об'єднані спільною метою. Тут ми бачимо не просто групу жінок, а справжню команду, де кожна підтримує одну, а разом вони формують непохитну стіну єдності. Це нагадування про те, що ми можемо досягти будь-яких висот, коли стоїмо разом. Кожна з нас приносить свою унікальність, свою силу і свій досвід, що збагачують і підкріплюють колективну міць. Ми разом святкуємо наші перемоги і разом долаємо труднощі. У ці моменти ми усвідомлюємо, що наша єдність робить нас непереможними, а наша підтримка—незламною. Нехай ця фотографія стане символом жіночої сили, натхненням для кожної жінки знайти свою команду і відчувати всю міць єдності та взаємопідтримки. Жінки, об'єднані мрією, разом можуть змінити світ.

## OLENA LIASHOK

The power of female unity is in every touch, every hug, every smile. This photo shows the moments of true support and a mutual understanding that only women united by a common goal can create. We don't just see a group of women, but a real team, where everyone supports everyone. Together they create an unbreakable wall of unity. It is a reminder that if we stick together, we can reach as high as we want. Every one of us brings her uniqueness, her strength and experience that enriches and reinforces the collective power. Together we celebrate victories and together we overcome difficulties. In such moments, we realize that our unity makes us invincible and our support - inseparable. Let this photo become a symbol of female power, an inspiration for every woman to find her team and to feel the power of unity and mutual support. Women united by a dream can change the world together.



## ANASTASIIA SKOLOZDRA

Having lost everything, I found myself. When the war in Ukraine began, I left the country with one backpack, holding the hand of my daughter. Without understanding what I would do and when I would return. I am an educated artist and this profession is my life, the mirror of my soul. As Coco Chanel said: "Everything is in our hands, and therefore cannot be omitted." With this rule I started my new life. This photo was taken a year after I arrived in Poland. I am working on another painting exhibition. It shows strength and faith that even after you lose all your possessions, you should never lose yourself! Despite everything, we have strength within ourselves. In the last two years, more than seventy of my paintings have been presented in Poland and eight personal exhibitions have been held. And this is just the beginning.



Straciwszy wszystko, odnalazłam siebie. Wraz z początkiem wojny na Ukrainę opuściłam kraj z jednym plecakiem, trzymając córkę za rękę. Bez zrozumienia, co zrobię i kiedy wrócę. Z wykształcenia jestem artystką i ten zawód jest moim życiem, zwierciadłem mojej duszy. Jak powiedziała Coco Chanel: "Wszystko jest w naszych rękach, więc nie można ich obniżyć." I na tej zasadzie zaczęłam nowe życie. To zdjęcie zostało zrobione rok po moim przyjeździe do Polski, na nim przygotowuję się do kolejnej wystawy malarstwa, pokazuje siłę i pewność, że po utracie wszystkiego, co materialne, nigdy nie należy tracić siebie! Mimo wszystko mamy siłę w sobie. W ciągu dwóch lat w Polsce pokazano ponad 70 moich obrazów i odbyło się 8 wystaw osobistych. A to dopiero początek.

## Niezlomne piękno

Być kobietą to dla mnie upaść tysiąc razy. Wstać, założyć najlepszy strój i iść dalej. Być kobietą to całkowicie załamać się psychicznie lub fizycznie. Potem zebrać się w sobie i iść dalej. Być kobietą to płakać przez pół dnia, potem nałożyć makijażu i iść dalej. Iść dalej bez względu na wszystko. Kobieta jest niepokonana.

## YAROSLAVA HOLYSH

### Unbreakable beauty

For me, being a woman means falling a thousand times. To get up, I put on my best outfit and move on. To be a woman is to be shattered mentally and physically. Then, getting a grip and moving on. To be a woman is to cry for half a day and then put on makeup and keep going. Moving forward, no matter what. A woman is unbreakable.



**ITALY**

Photographer: *Edoardo Guriato*

“Vederli crescere sani mi dà più orza. La cosa più importante che ho, ho promesso che voglio essere una mamma.”

Hope, una donna nigeriana di 40 anni, vive in Alto Adige da tre anni, spinta dalla ricerca di un futuro migliore. Diciotto anni fa ha lasciato la sua terra natale per esplorare il mondo, rifiutando una proposta di matrimonio e trasferendosi a Napoli da sua zia. Lì ha incontrato e sposato un uomo italiano, trasferendosi con lui in Calabria e avendo tre figlie. Nonostante le iniziali difficoltà di accettazione, questo periodo le ha portato una grande gioia.

La tragedia l’ha colpita sei anni fa, quando suo marito è morto di cancro, esponendola al razzismo da parte della famiglia di lui. Sola con tre bambini, Hope ha affrontato una profonda disperazione. Alla ricerca di conforto, ha iniziato una relazione con un uomo nigeriano, trasferendosi con le sue figlie in Alto Adige. Il loro bambino, nato con una grave forma di autismo, ha presentato nuove sfide. Hope ha subito violenze dal suo secondo marito e attualmente vive con i suoi figli in un appartamento che fa parte del progetto della CSO, che offre alloggi temporanei per madri single.

Hope riflette sullo scontro culturale tra il suo matrimonio italiano e la relazione nigeriana, evidenziando il cambiamento nel suo modo di pensare negli anni trascorsi in Italia. Attualmente, Hope non può lavorare a causa delle esigenze di suo figlio autistico. Il suo percorso è una testimonianza di resilienza, determinazione e della ricerca di una vita pacifica per i suoi figli.

Hope trae forza dai suoi figli, definendosi principalmente attraverso la maternità. Nonostante le difficoltà, loro le danno la motivazione per liberarsi da una relazione violenta, plasmando il suo impegno a crescerli senza violenza. La maternità, per Hope, è il suo compito centrale e una fonte di empowerment.

## HOPE

“Seeing them grow up healthily gives me more strength. The most important thing I have is my promise that I want to be their mum.”

Hope, a 40-year-old woman from Nigeria, has lived in South Tyrol for three years, driven by a quest for a better future. Eighteen years ago, she left her homeland to explore the world, rejecting a marriage proposal and relocating to Naples with her aunt. There, she met and married an Italian man, moved to Calabria with him and had three daughters. Despite initial challenges with acceptance, this period brought her immense joy.

Tragedy struck six years ago when her husband succumbed to cancer, exposing her to racism from his family. Alone with three children, Hope faced profound despair. Seeking solace, she entered a relationship with a Nigerian man, and moved to South Tyrol with her daughters. Their child, born with severe autism, presented new challenges. She left her second husband after he became violent. At the moment Hope lives with her children in an apartment that is part of the CSO’s project that offers temporary accommodation for single mothers. Due to her autistic child’s needs, she cannot work.

Hope reflects on the cultural clash between her Italian marriage and Nigerian relationship, highlighting the shift in her mindset over the years she lived in Italy. Her journey encapsulates resilience, determination, and the pursuit of a peaceful life for her children.

Hope draws strength from her children, defining herself primarily through motherhood. Despite difficulties, they provide the motivation to break free from a violent relationship, shaping her commitment to raising them without violence. Motherhood, for Hope, is her central task and a source of empowerment.



## ANNA

“We don’t have much. The government doesn’t give women freedom. They decide that women must wear the veil.”

At just 13 years old, Anna was forcibly married to a 28-year-old man. The same fate befell her sisters, one of whom was married at the age of 9. She became a mother at the age of 15 and eventually had three children with the man. Anna describes the situation of women in her home country, Iran, as being largely without rights. Her decision to leave the country is closely linked to her dream of freedom.

Anna describes life as very dangerous, both in Iran and in Italy. She often feels afraid, even in the small town where she now lives. She would like to get a job so that she can afford a better apartment and find a way to bring her son to Italy. Anna is undeniably a very proud, intelligent and strong woman.

She moves between two very different cultures, trying to find and live her definition of freedom for herself and her daughters. In doing so, Anna creates a special balance. From a certain perspective, her second marriage could be seen as a necessity, rooted in traditional thinking, to be an honorable and protected woman. Yet, her husband lives in Egypt while she organizes her daily life alone with her daughters in Italy. Her husband will not come to Italy until she obtains Italian citizenship.

A similar observation could be made about the veil. Anna does not wear a veil and spoke very positively about the riots in Iran where women burned their veils. At the same time, she emphasized how beautiful she found the veil and that she would certainly wear it again when her husband comes to Italy.

This special and self-determined balance between the two cultures can be described as Anna’s path to freedom.

«Non abbiamo molta. Il governo non dà libertà alle donne. Decidono che le donne devono indossare il velo.»

Anna è stata costretta a sposarsi all’età di 13 anni con un uomo che all’epoca ne aveva 28. Lo stesso è successo alle sue sorelle, una delle quali è stata costretta a sposarsi a soli 9 anni. Anna è diventata madre per la prima volta a 15 anni e ha avuto in totale 3 figli con quell’uomo. Descrive la situazione delle donne nel suo paese d’origine, l’Iran, come una realtà priva di diritti. La decisione di lasciare il paese è strettamente legata al sogno della libertà.

Anna descrive la vita come molto pericolosa, sia in Iran che in Italia. Spesso si sente spaventata, anche nella piccola città in cui vive ora. Per il suo futuro, Anna desidera trovare un lavoro per poter permettersi un appartamento migliore e trovare un modo per portare suo figlio in Italia. Anna può essere descritta come una donna molto orgogliosa, intelligente e forte.

Si muove tra due culture molto diverse, cercando di trovare e vivere la sua definizione di libertà, sia per sé stessa che per le sue figlie. In questo, Anna crea un equilibrio particolare. Da una certa prospettiva, il suo secondo matrimonio potrebbe essere visto come una necessità, radicata nel pensiero tradizionale, per essere una donna rispettabile e protetta. Allo stesso tempo, suo marito vive in Egitto e lei organizza la sua vita quotidiana da sola con le sue figlie in Italia. Suo marito non verrà in Italia finché lei non otterrà la cittadinanza italiana.

Un’osservazione simile potrebbe essere fatta riguardo al velo. Anna non indossa il velo e ha parlato molto positivamente delle proteste in Iran, in cui le donne bruciavano i loro veli. Allo stesso tempo, ha sottolineato quanto trova il velo bello e ha detto che sicuramente lo indosserà di nuovo quando suo marito verrà in Italia.

Questo equilibrio speciale e autodeterminato tra le due culture può essere descritto come il percorso di Anna verso la libertà.



## CARMEN

“Slowly but surely, one goes far.”

Carmen, a 38-year-old woman from Peru, has been residing in Italy for a year and two months, accompanied by her two daughters aged 17 and 6. Back in Peru, she faced violence from her husband, who in the end abandoned her and their children. Initially, Carmen came to Italy alone at the suggestion of a friend, while her children remained in Peru. Her journey to empowerment and inclusion unfolds through her experiences.

Carmen reflects on her initial struggles, feeling alone in a new country but determined to learn Italian and provide for her daughters. She highlights the importance of finding stability, both in housing and emotional support. Despite facing challenges such as language barriers and financial hardships, Carmen’s resilience shines through as she navigates the complexities of rebuilding her life.

Carmen emphasizes the significance of advice she received from an elderly woman in Italy during one of her most challenging moments. The old woman’s words, “*Piano piano si va lontano*”, meaning “Slowly but surely, one goes far”, have become a mantra for Carmen. This phrase has served as a source of inspiration, motivating her to persevere through difficulties and continue moving forward despite the struggles she faces.

Now residing in a refugee shelter with her children, Carmen remains optimistic about the future. She expresses her aspirations for her daughters’ education and her own desire to study and work as a caregiver for the elderly.

«Piano, piano si va lontano.»

Carmen, una donna di 38 anni originaria del Perù, vive in Italia da un anno e due mesi, insieme alle sue due figlie di 17 e 6 anni. Ha subito violenza da parte del marito, che ha abbandonato lei e le figlie. Inizialmente, Carmen è venuta in Italia da sola su suggerimento di un’amica, mentre le sue figlie sono rimaste in Perù. Il suo percorso verso l’emancipazione e l’inclusione si snoda attraverso le sue esperienze.

Con le sue parole, Carmen riflette sulle sue difficoltà iniziali, sentendosi sola in un nuovo paese ma determinata a imparare l’italiano e a provvedere alle sue figlie. Sottolinea l’importanza di trovare stabilità, sia abitativa che emotiva. Nonostante le sfide come le barriere linguistiche e le difficoltà economiche, la resilienza di Carmen emerge mentre affronta le complessità della ricostruzione della sua vita.

Carmen evidenzia l’importanza di un consiglio che ha ricevuto da un’anziana italiana in uno dei suoi momenti più difficili. Le parole della donna anziana, «piano, piano si va lontano,» sono diventate un mantra per Carmen. Questa frase è stata una fonte di ispirazione, spingendola a perseverare e a continuare ad andare avanti nonostante le difficoltà che incontra.

Ora residente in un centro per rifugiati con le sue figlie, Carmen rimane ottimista riguardo al futuro. Esprime le sue aspirazioni per l’istruzione delle figlie e il suo desiderio di studiare e lavorare come assistente per anziani.



## ELENA

“He was very jealous. The fact that I went to school at 7 am and came back home at 11 am was already a problem for him. Months passed, and I got pregnant. I wanted this child. I was looking for him. I was alone, and I needed it. I needed a love similar to what I had for my mother. It was a very difficult period: the mistreatment, the violence... Now we [Elena and her son] have our apartment. [In the photo] we were in Romania. Bringing my son to meet his great-grandparents was a milestone I was very happy about.”

Elena, a 24-year-old single mother from Romania, has spent most of her life in Italy since joining her mother at the age of 9. Recently, she moved from the CSO's shelter to her own apartment with her son. Her family's ruptures, fuelled by her mother's migration and her father's alcohol addiction, underscore the importance of maintaining ties with her grandparents. Both her parents passed away in recent years, leaving Elena to navigate life's challenges independently. In the photo, her son stands with her grandfather, a poignant symbol of generational connection.

Elena's narrative is one of longing, struggle, and resilience, shaped by familial bonds that transcend borders. Although born in Romania, she finds herself confronting a mix of challenges and opportunities in Italy. Her story resonates with themes of familial estrangement and longing, epitomized by her son's introduction to his Romanian relatives - a poignant bridge between past and present.

Despite adversity, including experiences of violence and exploitation, Elena finds solace and empowerment, carving her path towards autonomy and inclusion. Her experiences highlight the profound impact of familial connections, transcending geographical and cultural boundaries, shaping Elena's journey towards self-discovery and resilience in the face of adversity.

“Era molto geloso, il fatto che andassi a scuola alle 7 del mattino e tornassi a casa alle 11 era già un problema per lui. Sono passati mesi, e sono rimasta incinta. Lo volevo. Lo cercavo. Ero sola, ne avevo bisogno. Avevo bisogno di un amore simile a quello che avevo per mia madre. È stato un periodo molto difficile: i maltrattamenti, la violenza... Ora [Elena e suo figlio] abbiamo il nostro appartamento. [Nella foto] eravamo in Romania. È stato un traguardo di cui ero molto felice, il fatto di aver portato mio figlio a conoscere i suoi bisnonni.”

Elena, una madre single di 24 anni originaria della Romania, ha trascorso gran parte della sua vita in Italia da quando si è unita a sua madre all'età di 9 anni. Recentemente si è trasferita dal centro di accoglienza della CSO al suo appartamento insieme a suo figlio. Le fratture nella sua famiglia, alimentate dalla migrazione di sua madre e dall'alcolismo di suo padre, sottolineano l'importanza di mantenere i legami con i suoi nonni. Entrambi i suoi genitori sono deceduti negli ultimi anni, lasciando Elena a fronteggiare le sfide della vita da sola. Nella foto, suo figlio è insieme a suo nonno, un simbolo toccante della connessione generazionale.

Il racconto di Elena è fatto di desiderio, lotta e resilienza, plasmato da legami familiari che trascendono i confini. Sebbene sia nata in Romania, si trova ad affrontare una combinazione di sfide e opportunità in Italia. La sua storia risuona con temi di estraniamento familiare e desiderio, incarnati dall'introduzione di suo figlio ai parenti rumeni, un ponte commovente tra passato e presente.

Nonostante le avversità, comprese esperienze di violenza e sfruttamento, Elena trova conforto e forza, tracciando il suo percorso verso l'autonomia e l'inclusione. Le sue esperienze sottolineano l'impatto profondo dei legami familiari che superano confini geografici e culturali, plasmando il viaggio di Elena verso la scoperta di sé e la resilienza di fronte alle difficoltà.



## INEZ

“The more you put yourself out there, the easier it becomes. I feel like I’ve put myself out there a lot, but in reality, I could have done much more. Maybe over time... You know, there are also many insecurities.”

Inez, a 34-year-old Spanish woman living in Italy, moved there for her studies and stayed for love. Her journey reflects the challenges of starting anew in a foreign land, grappling with feelings of exclusion, and actively seeking inclusion. Despite her privileged status as a well-educated immigrant, Inez often compares her experiences with those less fortunate.

Initially arriving for a specialization in neurocognitive rehabilitation, Inez settled in a small town, completing her studies and meeting her partner in Bolzano-South Tyrol, a bilingual Italian-German province.

The transition to Bolzano was difficult: Inez faced hurdles like financial constraints, job restrictions due to her language, and cultural differences. Despite these challenges, Inez persevered by taking German courses and relying on her partner’s support. She found her place through volunteering and theatre groups. While occasional feelings of isolation persisted, Inez learned to rely on herself and foster supportive networks.

Today, she advocates for stronger community bonds, emphasizing the importance of vulnerability and connection in building inclusive societies. Her story is one of resilience, perseverance, and the power of human connection.

“Più ti metti in gioco, più diventa facile. Sen-  
to di essermi messa in gioco molto, ma in re-  
altà avrei potuto fare molto di più. Forse col  
tempo... Sai, ci sono anche tante insicurezze.”

Inez, una donna spagnola di 34 anni che vive  
in Italia, si è trasferita per i suoi studi e vi è  
rimasta per amore.

Il suo percorso riflette le sfide di ricominciare  
in un paese straniero, affrontando sentimenti  
di esclusione e cercando attivamente l’inclu-  
sione. Nonostante il suo status privilegiato  
di immigrata istruita, Inez spesso confronta  
le sue esperienze con quelle di chi è meno  
fortunato.

Arrivata inizialmente per una specializzazio-  
ne in riabilitazione neurocognitiva, Inez si è  
stabilita in una piccola città, completando i  
suoi studi e incontrando il suo partner a Bol-  
zano, una provincia bilingue.

Lottando con barriere linguistiche e difficoltà  
economiche, ha perseverato, frequentando  
corsi di tedesco e affidandosi al supporto del  
suo compagno.

Il passaggio a Bolzano è stato difficile, con  
Inez che ha dovuto affrontare ostacoli come  
restrizioni lavorative dovute alla lingua e dif-  
ferenze culturali. Nonostante queste sfide, ha  
trovato il suo posto attraverso il volontariato  
e gruppi teatrali. Sebbene occasionalmente  
si sentisse isolata, Inez ha imparato a fare  
affidamento su se stessa e a costruire reti di  
supporto.

Oggi, si fa promotrice di legami comunitari  
più forti, sottolineando l’importanza della  
vulnerabilità e della connessione per co-  
struire società inclusive. La sua storia è una  
testimonianza di resilienza, perseveranza e  
della forza della connessione umana.



## MARIA

“I also want to look for friends. Without friends it’s difficult, because I want to talk, to walk all around...”

At the time of the interview, Maria is 23 years old and has been living in Italy for nearly 15 months. She fled to Italy with her family from the war in Ukraine, her father avoiding conscription. Now, she lives with her parents and younger brother in a small village in South Tyrol. Her older sister stayed in Ukraine with her husband, as did her aunt. Maria talks about the horrors of war, the friends she lost and the division that has occurred in the Ukrainian population, which is also being repeated in South Tyrol. Whereas language differences weren’t problematic in eastern Ukraine where Maria grew up, the language spoken in the family now carries weight. As Russian speakers, Maria’s family is marginalized by Ukrainian-speaking refugees, intensifying her loneliness.

In contrast, Maria’s younger brother, school-aged and enrolled in a soccer club, easily integrates. For Maria, who has fewer social contacts, integration and language learning prove challenging. Years of involuntary upheavals, exacerbated by COVID and war, severely restricted her autonomy as a young adult.

Participating in the V.I.T.E [Viticulture Integration Training Empowerment] project is crucial for Maria: it is an opportunity to leverage her oenology studies. Her dream is to establish herself in South Tyrol, to find work and build a life, filled with friends, love, and family. For Maria, language, friends, and work are the essential building blocks in her journey towards an active and self-determined life in Italy.



“Voglio anche cercare amici, perché senza amici è difficile, perché voglio parlare, camminare ovunque...”

Al momento dell’intervista, Maria ha 23 anni e vive in Italia da quasi 15 mesi. È fuggita in Italia con la sua famiglia a causa della guerra in Ucraina, con suo padre che ha evitato di farsi arruolare. Ora vive con i genitori e il fratello minore in un piccolo paese dell’Alto Adige. Sua sorella maggiore è rimasta in Ucraina con il marito, così come sua zia. Maria parla degli orrori della guerra, degli amici che ha perso e della divisione che si è verificata tra la popolazione ucraina, divisione che si ripete anche in Alto Adige. Cresciuta nell’Ucraina orientale, dove le differenze linguistiche non erano problematiche, ora la lingua parlata in famiglia pesa. Parlando russo, la famiglia di Maria è emarginata dai rifugiati di lingua ucraina, intensificando la sua solitudine.

Al contrario, il fratello minore di Maria, in età scolare e iscritto a un club calcistico, si integra facilmente. Per Maria, con meno contatti sociali, l’integrazione e l’apprendimento della lingua si rivelano difficili. Gli anni di sconvolgimenti involontari, aggravati da COVID e guerra, hanno limitato gravemente la sua autonomia come giovane adulta.

Partecipare al progetto V.I.T.E [Viticulture Integration Training Empowerment] è cruciale per Maria, un’opportunità per valorizzare i suoi studi in enologia. Il suo sogno è affermarsi in Alto Adige, trovare lavoro e costruire una vita, piena di amici, amore e famiglia. Per Maria, lingua, amici e lavoro sono i pilastri essenziali nel suo percorso verso una vita attiva e autodeterminata in Italia.

“Questa foto è stata scattata una settimana fa. Ero molto felice quando ero nei boschi. Perché la settimana scorsa sono andata a vedere una macchina per conto mio, perché ho preso la patente. Ho comprato una macchina, una Opel. Leri ho guidato da sola. Per la prima volta, ero molto spaventata, ma ora sono felice. Ho la mia macchina. Penso anche che ora sono più libera.”

Tania, una donna di 29 anni proveniente dal Bangladesh, vive in Italia con la sua famiglia da sei anni. Sebbene il suo matrimonio fosse combinato, parla positivamente della sua vita familiare. Tuttavia, i suoi primi anni in Italia sono stati complessi, tra barriere linguistiche e differenze culturali. Nonostante le sfide della maternità, lei persevera nel ritagliarsi la propria identità. Recentemente, Tania ha ottenuto la patente di guida e ha comprato orgogliosamente la sua macchina, segnando una tappa importante.

Riflette sulla vita contrastante delle donne in Bangladesh e in Italia, notando cambiamenti positivi in Bangladesh e sentendosi inizialmente apprensiva ma gradualmente guadagnando fiducia in Italia. Tania descrive la sua iniziale apprensione nell’osservare la libertà di movimento e l’indipendenza delle donne italiane, contrastando con le sue esperienze personali. Nonostante la paura iniziale, ha gradualmente acquisito fiducia, compiendo piccoli passi verso l’abbraccio dell’autonomia e dell’inclusione nel suo nuovo ambiente.

L’Italia funge sia da sfondo che da catalizzatore per la sua trasformazione. Ispirata dalla fiducia delle donne intorno a lei, Tania si sforza di integrarsi e di connettersi più profondamente con la sua nuova casa. La sua storia inizia con la scoperta della tranquillità delle montagne, trovando conforto nella bellezza della natura, simboleggiando il suo ritrovato senso di libertà e empowerment.

## TANIA

“This picture was taken a week ago. I was very happy when I was in the woods. Last week I went to see a car on my own, since I got my driving licence. I bought a car, an Opel. Yesterday I drove it by myself for the first time. I was very scared, but now I am happy. I have my own car. I also think I’m freer now.”

Tania, a 29-year-old woman from Bangladesh, has been living in Italy with her family for six years. Although her marriage was arranged, she speaks positively about her family life. However, her first years in Italy were complex, amid language barriers and cultural differences. Despite the challenges of motherhood, she perseveres in carving out her own identity. Recently, Tania obtained her driving licence and proudly bought her own car, marking an important milestone.

She reflects on the contrasting lives of women in Bangladesh and Italy, noting positive changes in Bangladesh. Tania describes her initial apprehension in observing the freedom of movement and independence of Italian women, contrasting with her personal experiences. Despite her initial fear, she gradually gained confidence, taking small steps toward embracing autonomy and inclusion in her new environment.

Italy serves as both a backdrop and a catalyst for her transformation. Inspired by the confidence of the women around her, Tania strives to integrate and connect more deeply with her new home. Her story begins with her discovery of the tranquility of the mountains, finding solace in the beauty of nature, symbolizing her newfound sense of freedom and empowerment.



## ROSA

“I didn’t know what I could do because it’s dangerous here [in Peru]. They threatened me with a weapon. I had to escape from my country because there was no one there to defend me or help me. Now I think I have to learn a little bit of Italian, even if it’s not very easy... I like the people here, I like everything. I am happy.”

Rosa, a 50-year-old Peruvian woman, has been living in Italy for a year and a half. She has two adult children, one in Madrid and the other in Peru. The story of Rosa is one of resilience and perseverance in the face of adversity. Forced to flee her homeland due to threats and violence, she found herself alone and vulnerable without shelter on the streets of a foreign country. With no government assistance, she relied on the support of CSOs. Despite the hardships, Rosa refused to give up, determined to create a better life for herself and her family.

Her journey towards inclusion and empowerment was fraught with challenges. Struggling to navigate bureaucratic hurdles and cultural differences, she sought solace in community organizations like Caritas and La Strada, where she found support and guidance.

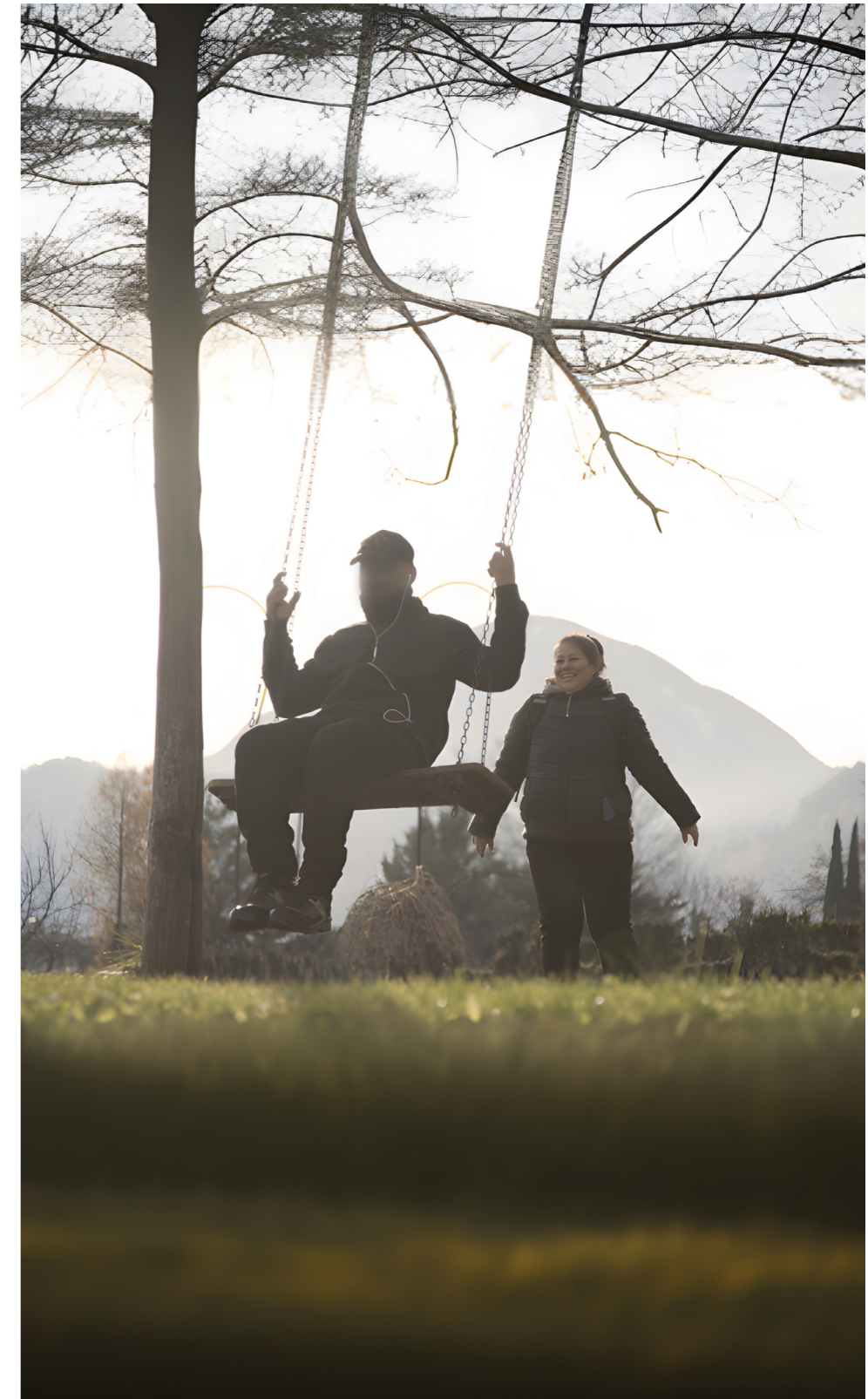
Rosa’s story is a testament to the strength of the human spirit and the power of community. Despite facing unimaginable hardships, she refused to be defeated, finding hope and inspiration in the kindness of strangers and the bonds of sisterhood. Today, she is grateful for the opportunity to build a new life in Italy, embracing each day with gratitude and optimism. Her journey serves as a reminder that, with courage and determination, anything is possible.

“Non sapevo cosa avrei potuto fare perché qui [in Perù] è pericoloso. Mi hanno minacciata con un’arma. Ho dovuto scappare dal mio paese perché non c’era nessuno lì a difendermi o aiutarmi. Ora penso che devo imparare un po’ di italiano, anche se non è molto facile... Mi piacciono le persone qui, mi piace tutto. Sono felice.”

Rosa, una donna peruviana di 50 anni, vive in Italia da 1 anno e mezzo. Ha due figli adulti, uno a Madrid e l’altro in Perù. La storia di Rosa è quella di resilienza e perseveranza di fronte alle avversità. Costretta a fuggire dal suo paese a causa di minacce e violenze, si è trovata sola e vulnerabile per le strade di un paese straniero senza riparo. Senza assistenza governativa, si è affidata al supporto delle organizzazioni del terzo settore. Nonostante le difficoltà, Rosa ha rifiutato di arrendersi, determinata a creare una vita migliore per sé e per la sua famiglia.

Il suo percorso verso l’inclusione e l’empowerment è stato costellato di sfide. Lottando con ostacoli burocratici e differenze culturali, ha trovato conforto nelle CSO come Caritas e La Strada, dove ha ricevuto supporto e orientamento.

La storia di Rosa è una testimonianza della forza dello spirito umano e del potere della comunità. Nonostante le difficoltà inimmaginabili, ha rifiutato di essere sconfitta, trovando speranza e ispirazione nella gentilezza degli sconosciuti e nei legami di sorellanza. Oggi, è grata per l’opportunità di costruire una nuova vita in Italia, affrontando ogni giorno con gratitudine e ottimismo. Il suo percorso è un promemoria che, con coraggio e determinazione, tutto è possibile.



**AUSTRIA**

Solange ich mich im Spiegel sehe, existiere ich. Also, dann denke ich, ich muss etwas tun.

Kendimi gördüğüm sürece ben varım. O halde birşeyler yapmalıyım.

1.

As long as I see myself in the mirror, I exist. So then I think I have to do something.



2.

So this flower that comes out of the wall and is such a beautiful flower was fascinating, because it's such an unexpected thing that such beauty comes out of the wall. And I kind of saw it as a wish for the future and said: "Well, maybe that will happen to me too." Unexpected. Look, like a miracle, so to speak. [...] This photo symbolizes this clinging to life.



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Also diese Blume, die von der Mauer rauskommt und so eine schöne Blume ist, das war faszinierend, weil es so eine unerwartete Sache ist, dass aus der Mauer hinaus so eine Schönheit kommt. Und das habe ich für mich quasi als einen Wunsch für die Zukunft gesehen und hat gesagt: „Also, vielleicht passiert mir das auch.“ Unerwartet. Schau, wie ein Wunder quasi. [...] Dieses Foto symbolisiert dieses Festhalten am Leben.

Der Himmel ist die Unendlichkeit, die Möwe die Freiheit. Das Foto als Symbol für Fröhlichkeit und Glück, sowie ihre Liebe für Istanbul.

Gökyüzü sonsuzluk, martı özgürlük, fotoğrafın tamamı mutluluk ve İstanbul sevgisi.

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3.

The sky is eternity, the seagull is freedom. The whole photo is a symbol of my happiness and love for Istanbul.



4.

The secret of a happy life is that the one who looks with a beautiful eye sees beauty.



Das Geheimnis eines glücklichen Lebens ist:  
wer schön anblickt, sieht das Schöne.

Mutlu yaşamın sırrı güzel bakan güzel görür.

Was wir jeden Tag tun ist eine Entscheidung,  
das wissen Sie, oder? Die Entscheidungen  
sind sehr wichtig. Das ist meine Entschei-  
dung und ich möchte, dass Sie sich auch  
dafür entscheiden. Denn Sie machen etwas  
Gutes für sich selbst. Es ist sehr wichtig, dass  
der Mensch für sich selbst etwas Gutes tut.

Her gün ne yapacağımız bir seçim, biliyor-  
sunuz dimi? Seçimler çok önemli. Ben bunu  
yapmayı seçiyorum, sizin de bunu yapmayı  
seçmenizi istiyorum. Çünkü iyi bir şey  
yapıyorsunuz kendinize. İnsanın kendine iyi  
bir şey yapması çok önemli.

5.

You know that every day we have a choice about what we do, right? Choices are very important. I choose to do this and I want you to choose to do this, because you are doing something good for yourself. It's very important to do something good for yourself.



6.

Memory of my home(land).



Erinnerung an meine Heimat.

Memleketimin hatırası.

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Wenn ich mich mit einer Pflanze vergleichen sollte, dann wäre es ausnahmslos ein Kaktus. Ich mag es, wie Sie stehen. Langlebig, robust und mit eigenem Charakter er hat die Einstellung, dass ihm alles scheißegal ist. Es gibt Dornen für diejenigen, die ihre Grenzen überschreiten, und wunderbare Schönheit für diejenigen, die ihre Grenzen kennen. Ein Dorn für die, die hinschauen, eine Blume für die, die zu sehen verstehen.

Kendimi bir bitkiye benzetecek olsam, bu istisnasız kaktüs olurdu. Duruşunu seviyorum bir kere. Kendine has karakteriyle dayanıklı, sağlam; hiçbir şeyi umursamayan bir tavır var. Haddini aşana dikenleri var, sınırını bile ne fevkalade güzelliği. Bakana diken, görmeyi bilene çiçek.

51

7.

Should I compare myself with a plant, it would be without a doubt a cactus. I love the way it stands. With its unique character, it is durable, sturdy; it has a carefree attitude. It has thorns for those who overstep their boundaries, and marvellous beauty for those who know their limits. A thorn for those who look, a flower for those who know how to see.



8.

For me, this photo is a kind of reminder that there are also positive things in life. At the end of the day, I think: "You have to see the positive side of this day." A lot happens on the side, the arguments, whatever [...] but I want to save the good memories that I can also share with my daughter.



Dieses Foto ist für mich so eine Art Erinnerung, dass es auch Positives im Leben gibt. Für mich ist es so, dass ich am Ende des Tages denke: „Man muss das Positive vom Tag sehen.“ Es passiert auch sehr viel nebenbei, die Streitigkeiten, was auch immer [...] aber ich will die guten Erinnerungen speichern, die die ich auch mit meiner Tochter teilen kann.

Dieser Artikel ist für mich eine Anerkennung, dass ich Teil der Gesellschaft bin, dass es auch anerkannt wird, was ich getan habe und, dass ich keine Fremde mehr hier bin. Und diese Anerkennung hat dazugeführt, dass ich immer mehr erreichen möchte, dass ich mehr Selbstvertrauen habe, dass ich mehr erreichen kann und das führte eben zu meinem Erfolg. Es geht nicht so sehr um den Titel des Artikels selbst: „Meinen Deutschkurs bezahle ich selbst“. Sondern, die Idee, die ich rüberbringen wollte war, dass ich als Geflüchtete nach zwei Jahren schon einen Job habe, dass ich so viel erreicht habe.

RAZAN

I chose this newspaper report because for me it is recognition that I am part of society, that what I have done so far is recognized and that I am no longer a stranger here. And this recognition has made me want to achieve more and more, it has made me more confident that I can achieve more and that has led to my success. It's not so much about the title of the article: "I pay for my German course myself." The idea that I wanted to get across was that as a refugee I already had a job after two years, that I had achieved so much.

Von September bis November 2017  
**Mehrsprachige Beratung direkt in der Schule**

Unter dem Motto „Wohin mit 14“ können sich Schülerinnen und Schüler ab nächster Woche direkt in der Schule über verschiedene Bildungswege informieren. Los geht's am 19. September in der NMS Gassergasse. [Nähere Infos für Sie unter www.wien.gv.at/kontakte/ma17](#)

Wien. Vielfalt. Wissen 2017  
**Besseres Verständnis – Besseres Miteinander**

In einer bunt gemischten Vortragsreihe liefert die MA 17 Einblicke in gesellschaftliche und religiöse Hintergründe verschiedener Flüchtlingsgruppierungen. Nähere Infos für Sie unter [www.wien.gv.at/kontakte/ma17](#)

**„Meinen Deutschkurs bezahle ich selbst“**

**Wir haben es geschafft**

Migrantinnen in Wien: Serie in Kooperation mit der Stadt Wien

**Nützliche Infos**  
Kurse für Flüchtlinge:  
[www.fluechtlinge.wien.at](#)  
Alles zum Thema Integration:  
[www.integration.wien.at](#)

Beim Unterricht werden österreichische Lieder gesungen.

Razan gibt ihren Schülern nützliche Informationen.

von Maria Jelenko

In dem Raum am Keplerplatz sitzen rund zehn arabische Flüchtlinge, Frauen und junge Burschen. Bevor die Stunde beginnt, singt die Gruppe auf Deutsch „Alle Vöglein sind schon da“. Razan Mohamad Jamil unterrichtet Flüchtlinge in Wien als muttersprachliche Referentin. In dem Kurs geht es diesmal um Gesundheit in Österreich, etwa um die Fragen: „Was tun, wenn man sich oder jemand anderer sich verletzt? Was bedeutet die e-card? Die 42-Jährige ist im November 2015 aus Syrien, Damaskus, nach Österreich geflüchtet. Mit dabei: ihre beiden Kinder, damals 19 und 16 Jahre alt. „Wir haben Drohungen bekommen, ich hatte Angst, entführt zu werden. Mein Sohn hatte gute Computerkenntnisse. Ich fürchtete, man würde diese für kriegerische Zwecke nutzen.“ Nach der abenteuerlichen Flucht fand die Alleinerzieherin, die in Damaskus als Arabisch-Lehrerin und Sozialarbeiterin für Kinder und Jugendliche arbeitete, einen Job bei der MA 17. Zusätzlich arbeitet sie freiwillig an nachbarschaftlichen Projekten mit, wie am Workshop „So duften die Kulturen“, der heute im Favoritner Arthaberpark abgehalten wird: ein Erntefest des Kräutergartens. „Ich will den Frauen Vorbild sein, ihr Selbstbewusstsein stärken“, erklärt Razan. „Mir haben meine Freunde Silvia und Helmut aus Wien geholfen, als ich hier ankam. Sie haben für uns eine Wohnung gefunden. Ich bin ihnen so dankbar.“ Ob sie gläubig ist? „Ja, aber nicht sehr. Kopftuch habe ich nie getragen, ich bin liberal aufgewachsen“, erklärt sie und zeigt eine Urkunde, die sie von der Wiener Polizei bekommen hat: für ein Modul zum Thema „Sicherheit“, an dem sie teilgenommen hat. Ihren Deutschkurs bezahlt sie selbst. Ihre Lieblingspeise in Wien? „Am liebsten esse ich Eiernockerln!“

## MESA

Hello, I am an Indonesian woman who has been living in Vienna since 2018. In this photo, I am holding a piece of paper with “Puan Adaptif” written on it. Puan Adaptif is a social movement about women’s empowerment that I founded with seven friends in August 2023. For more information, you can follow our Instagram account at @puan.adaptif.



Hallo, ich bin eine indonesische Frau die seit 2018 in Wien wohnt. In diesem Foto halte ich ein Blatt Papier mit Schrift „Puan Adaptif“ in der Hand. Puan Adaptif ist eine soziale Bewegung über Frauen Empowerment, die ich mit sieben Freundinnen am August 2023 gegründet habe. Für mehrere Information könnten Sie unsere Instagram Account bei @puan.adaptif folgen.

## Bild 1:

Davor musste ich fliehen. Den Krücken meines Mannes, die zeigen, dass er körperlich behindert war und mich als Pflegerin brauchte. Aber er machte mich auch machtlos und handlungsunfähig, indem er unhöflich zu mir war und mir nichts erlaubte. In diesem Bild gibt es keine Freude und keine Hoffnung, und es steht für meine Vergangenheit.

## Bild 2:

Freude und Schönheit und Blumen, die ich in meinem ersten Urlaub allein genießen kann, frei von der bedrückenden Ehe, die ich hatte. Das Genießen der Schönheit und der Farben ist das Gegenteil der schwarz-weißen Krücken. Ich fühlte mich frei, Freude als Frau und als Mensch zu empfinden.

## Bild 3:

Dieses Bild steht für Freiheit und Unabhängigkeit und einen Neuanfang. Es ist die erste Urlaubsreise, die ich nach unserer Trennung allein ohne meinen Mann unternommen habe. Es ist das Glück, etwas allein zu erreichen, etwas allein zu tun. Das ist für mich ein Erfolg. Vor diesem Moment hatte ich Angst und war unsicher und fühlte mich abhängig von meinem Mann. Hier bin ich dankbar, dass ich hier allein sein kann.

## 11.

- Picture 1:  
This is what I had to run away from. The crutches of my husband which show how he was physically disabled and needed me as a carer. But he was also making me powerless and disabled by being rude to me and not allowing me anything. There is no joy in this picture, and no hope, and it represents my past.
- Picture 2:  
Joy and beauty and flowers, that I can enjoy on my first holiday alone, free from the oppressive marriage that I had. Enjoying the beauty and the colours is the opposite of the black and white crutches. I felt free to feel joy as a woman and as a person.
- Picture 3:  
This picture represents freedom and independence, and a new beginning. It is the first holiday trip that I took alone without my husband, after we separated. It is the happiness of achieving something by myself, of doing something only by myself. This is success for me. Before this moment I used to be afraid and insecure, and feeling dependent on my husband. Here I am grateful, that I can be here alone.



12.

This is in Afghanistan. She is a teacher and these are her students. If there are no teachers, how are you supposed to educate yourself? No matter if they are a woman or a man. If I was like this woman, educated, if children could learn something through me, that would make me happy.



Das ist in Afghanistan, sie ist die Lehrerin und das sind ihre Schüler\*innen. Wenn es keine Lehrer\*innen gibt, wie sollst du dich selbst bilden? Ganz gleich, ob Mann oder Frau. Wenn ich wie diese Frau wäre, gebildet, wenn Kinder durch mich etwas Lernen könnten, das würde mich glücklich machen.

Ich bin generell ein großer Fan von Natur und Tieren. Ich liebe Hunde, ich liebe Vögel, ich liebe Orte des Friedens und der Freude. Und Pfauen sind einfach sehr schön. Sowohl männliche als auch weibliche.

Das habe ich gemacht, also nicht gemalt, sondern mit Knete modelliert. Ich habe es gemacht, damit ich es genießen kann. Damit ich mich jedes Mal, wenn ich es ansehe, daran erfreuen kann.

Schau, ich vertraue in mich selbst. Diese [Bilder] habe ich aus Liebe geschaffen.

13.

I'm generally a big fan of nature and animals. I love dogs, I love birds, I love places of peace and joy. And peacocks are simply very beautiful. Both male and female.

I made this, so it's not painted, but sculpted with plasticine. I made it so that I could enjoy it. So that every time I look at it, I can enjoy it.

Look, I am confident in myself. Those [figurines] I've created out of love.



14.

I had the feeling that I could go out on my own. We can have a good time and nobody forbids it. Like: "You're a woman and you're not allowed to do that." When I look at the picture, I get self-conscious. If I hadn't been here, I might not have been able to take this picture with the women.



Ich hatte das Gefühl, dass ich alleine losziehen kann. Wir können eine gute Zeit haben und niemand verbietet es uns. Zum Beispiel: „Du bist eine Frau, du darfst das nicht machen.“ Wenn ich das Bild anschau, werde ich verlegen. Wenn ich nicht hier gewesen wäre, hätte ich vielleicht nicht dieses Foto mit den Frauen machen können.

58

Es waren wirklich Blumen ohne Blätter. Die Bäume waren trocken, aber sie hatten immer noch Blüten. Und sie rochen so gut. Das war so interessant für mich.

Ja, der Duft war so gut. Die Frauen, alle von ihnen, mit den Düften und den Duschen riechen sie wirklich so. Das ist so wichtig für sie.

Ich war dort auch mit meiner Familie, mit meiner Mutter und meinen jüngeren Geschwistern.

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15.

They really were flowers without leaves. The trees were dry and yet they still had flowers. And they smelled so good. That was so interesting for me.

Yes, they smell so nice. The women, all of them. They really smell like that with the scents and showers. That's so important for them.

I was there with my family, too. With my mother and my younger siblings.



16.

We were outside, all girls. And they had a big surprise for me. They each gave me a rose and at the end there were so many of them.

It was the first time that girls had given me flowers. It was such a nice feeling, that also girls can give flowers.



Wir waren draußen, alle Mädchen. Und sie hatten eine große Überraschung für mich. Sie haben mir jeweils eine Rose gegeben und am Ende gab es so viele davon.

Es war das erste Mal, dass Mädchen mir Blumen gaben. Es war so ein schönes Gefühl, dass auch Mädchen Blumen schenken können.

60

Wir reden miteinander, wenn wir uns niedergeschlagen fühlen.

Der Tag war auch so schön für mich. Ich weiß, es ist normal, jede\*r geht raus und so. Aber als ich 14, 15, 13 oder 11 war, hatte ich nicht so eine gute Zeit. [...] Aber jetzt ist es sehr, sehr einfach. Wenn ich etwas machen will, mache ich es. Das macht mich glücklich.

Was ich möchte oder was ich machen möchte, ist mir erlaubt zu tun und deswegen fühle ich mich gut. Ich habe einfach diese Freiheit. Es gibt niemanden, der sagt: „Geh nicht um zu dieser Tageszeit raus“ oder „Ich mag das Mädchen nicht.“

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17.

We talk to each other when we're feeling down.

The day was so nice for me too. I know it's normal, everyone goes out and stuff. When I was 14, or 15, or 13, or 11, I didn't have such a good time. [...] But now it's very, very easy. If I want something, I do it. That makes me happy.

What I want or what I want to do, I'm allowed to do it and that's why I feel good. I just have this kind of freedom. There's nobody who says: "Don't go out at this time of day" or "I don't like this girl."



18.

In my generation, we fought a lot, we fought a lot for self-empowerment and for the right to say no. That's why the organization is so important to me, because they reinforce me in this.

In meiner Generation haben wir viel gekämpft, wir haben viel gekämpft für Selbstermächtigung und dem Recht „Nein“ zu sagen. Deswegen ist mir die Organization so wichtig, weil sie mich darin bestärken.

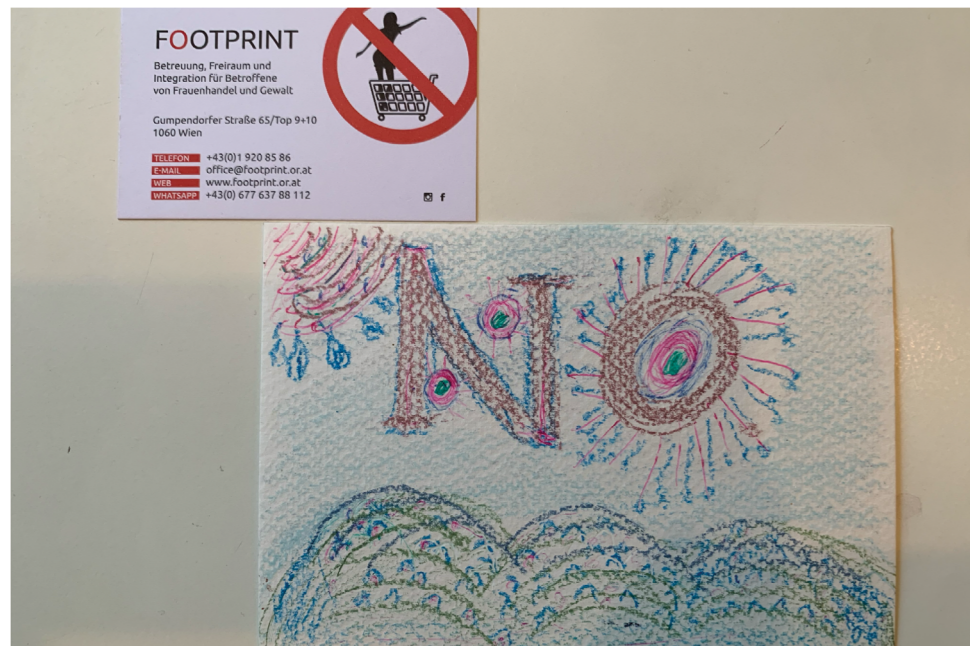
Das ist meine beste Freundin und Lieblings-schülerin.

Arbeit ist mein Leben. Und das war für mich komplette Selbstermächtigung, ich möchte mein eigenes Geld haben. Und ich habe alles dafür gegeben, alles, dass ich eine Arbeit hatte, dass ich gearbeitet habe. Das ist wirklich wichtig für mich. Also für mich schafft Arbeit Identität und Selbstermächtigung, weil ich dann mein eigenes Geld habe, meinen eigenen Status („Ansehen“), ich bin unabhängig von meiner Familie, denn ich kann sie mir nicht aussuchen.

19.

That's my best friend and favorite pupil. [She was a language teacher.]

Work is my life. And that was also total self-empowerment, I want to have my own money. And I gave everything for that, everything. That I had a job, that I was working. That's really important to me. So for me, work creates identity and self-empowerment. Because then I have my own money, then I also have my own status, independent of my family, because I can't choose them.



I want to start with the travel pictures, because that was my first empowerment. That was when I went to Italy with my friends when I was 17. I was always curious about new and different things. That was the reason why I enjoyed travelling abroad. That, and to see other places, other cultures and other ways of life. To broaden the horizon, and to question your own principles.

And I always asked myself, even as a young girl: “How can I have a good life?” Not just materially, but a life that is in harmony with the inside.

And I have also emancipated myself from my parents and also from the narrative I grew up in, that a woman doesn't travel alone. You have to be engaged or have a boyfriend who looks after you.

Ich möchte mit den Reisebildern beginnen, weil das meine erste Selbstermächtigung war. Das war als ich nach Italien mit Freund\*innen gereist bin, da war ich 17. Ich war immer neugierig in Bezug auf neue und andere Dinge. Das war der Grund warum ich so viel Freude daran hatte ins Ausland zu reisen. Andere Orte zu sehen, andere Kulturen und andere Lebensweisen. Den Horizont zu erweitern. Und deine eigenen Prinzipien zu hinterfragen.

Ich habe mich schon immer gefragt, sogar als junges Mädchen, wie man ein gutes Leben führen kann. Nicht nur in Bezug auf die Ehe, aber so, dass es auch in Harmonie mit deinem Inneren ist.

Und ich habe mich auch von meinen Eltern emanzipiert, und auch von dem Narrativ mit welchem ich aufgewachsen bin, dass eine Frau nicht alleine reist. Man muss verlobt sein oder einen Freund haben, der nach einem schaut.



# SPAIN

Photographers: *Mireia Bordonada* and *Loreley Ritta*

Elsa nació en Honduras y migró a Cataluña en 2007. Trabaja cuidando a una señora mayor en régimen interno. Tras superar las adversidades de la migración, el racismo y el machismo, Elsa se convirtió en escritora. Publicó cinco libros de relatos y poemas, y una novela.

A Elsa le gusta especialmente la flor del girasol y lo asocia con el empoderamiento de género y la “fuerza” de las mujeres:

“El girasol siempre está abierto y cuánto más fuerte está el sol, el girasol le sigue dando la cara, lo busca, lo enfrenta. Esa es la fuerza que tenemos las mujeres. Necesitamos energía y mucha agua, como los girasoles. Y damos la cara, nos enfrentamos, no nos rendimos.”

## ELSA

Elsa was born in Honduras and migrated to Catalonia in 2007. She works as a live-in carer for an elderly woman. After overcoming the adversities of migration, racism and machismo, Elsa became a writer. She published five books of short stories and poems, and a novel.

Elsa is particularly fond of the sunflower, which she associates with gender empowerment and women’s “strength”:

“The sunflower is always open, and the stronger the sun, the more the sunflower turns towards it, seeks it, and confronts it. That’s the strength we women have. We need energy and a lot of water, like sunflowers. We face it, we confront it, and we don’t give up.”



## ADAMA

Adama was born in Guinea-Conakry and migrated to Catalonia at the age of 10, together with her mother and brother. In school, she suffered from bullying and discrimination, being ignored by teachers. This led her to develop a strong character, and she confronted both societal racism and her family's attempt to arrange a marriage for her at the age of 14.

Racism and bullying at school, along with a lack of support from her family and the pressures of her community, made her feel very alone and angry with the world throughout her adolescence. Over the years, she found support from people in organizations who helped her to reconcile with society and with her culture of origin. She is proud that she did not give in to an imposed marriage and at 27 she is expecting a child from the man she chose.

“When I was 17, I would have liked to have people by my side who would have supported me or listened to me, because when I had problems, my way of solving things was through violence. Later, I met the association, and I made a very drastic change; that is, now I wouldn't think of hitting anyone because they called me black or whatever they said. Now I want to raise my child in freedom.”

Adama nació en Guinea-Conakri y migró a Catalunya reagrupada por su padre a los 10 años, junto a su madre y su hermano. En la escuela, sufrió acoso y discriminación, siendo ignorada por el profesorado. Esto la llevó a desarrollar un carácter fuerte y se enfrentó tanto al racismo de la sociedad como a la imposición de su familia de concertarle un matrimonio a los 14 años.

El racismo y el acoso en la escuela, y la falta de apoyo de su familia, sumado a las presiones de la comunidad, la hicieron sentirse muy sola y enfadada con el mundo durante toda la adolescencia. Con los años, encontró apoyo en personas de entidades que la ayudaron a reconciliarse con la sociedad y también con su cultura de origen. Se siente orgullosa de no haber cedido a un matrimonio impuesto y con 27 años espera un hijo del hombre que ella eligió.

« Cuando tenía 17 años, me hubiera gustado tener a mi lado a gente que me hubiera apoyado o escuchado, porque cuando tenía problemas, mi forma de resolver las cosas era a través de la violencia. Más tarde, conocí la asociación, e hice un cambio muy drástico; es decir, ahora no se me ocurriría pegar a nadie porque me llamara negra o lo que fuera. Ahora quiero criar a mi hijo en libertad»



## SAIMA

Saima is a 20-year-old girl of Pakistani origin who grew up in Barcelona. She is the youngest in a family of twelve siblings. At 18, she decided to leave home with the help of an organization and lives in a group home with other friends and peers.

Saima loves to write and takes every opportunity to read stories and novels. She wants to study law to help other women in situations of violence. From her own perspective and experience, she reflects on gender empowerment in relation to the inequality experienced by many women.

“When you say ‘empowerment’, the first thing that comes to my mind is a woman. Not a man, but a woman. When I say ‘empowerment’, I think of single mothers who are at home raising a family; families who are in very bad economic situations and keep going; high school girls who are being bullied and who feel they can’t take it anymore every day, but keep going. Women who have suffered violence at some point, be it domestic, sexual, psychological, but have moved on... That’s empowerment to me.”



Saima es una joven de 20 años de origen pa-kistaní que creció en Barcelona. Es la menor de una familia de doce hermanos. A los 18 años decidió irse de su casa con la ayuda de una entidad y vive en un piso de acogida con otras amigas y compañeras.

A Saima le gusta mucho escribir y aprovecha cada momento para leer cuentos y novelas. Quiere estudiar derecho para ayudar a otras mujeres en situaciones de violencia. Desde su lugar y experiencia, reflexiona sobre el empoderamiento de género en relación con la desigualdad que viven muchas mujeres.

“Cuando dices empoderamiento lo primero que me viene a la cabeza es una mujer. No un hombre, sino una mujer. Al decir empoderamiento pienso en las madres solteras que están en casa llevando una familia adelante; familias que están muy mal económicamente y siguen adelante; chicas del instituto que están sufriendo bullying y que cada día sienten que no pueden más, pero siguen adelante. Mujeres que han sufrido en algún momento violencia, ya sea doméstica, sexual, psicológica, pero han seguido adelante... Eso es empoderamiento para mí.”

Daniela, Janice, Yessi y Sandra son cuatro jóvenes de primero de bachillerato con familias de diversos orígenes: Colombia, Filipinas, Honduras y Perú. Todas ellas son conscientes de cómo sus familias, sobre todo sus madres, han sufrido explotación laboral o falta de reconocimiento de sus saberes y formación.

En ocasiones la migración ha creado tensiones en sus relaciones con sus madres u otros familiares, y casi todas comentan los retos de vivir entre mandatos de género distintos. No obstante, todas están muy orgullosas de lo que sus madres o abuelas han conseguido en el país de recepción.

Aunque han tenido un proceso migratorio variado y a diferentes edades, todas comentan la falta de apoyo, las dificultades y las barreras del sistema educativo, pero también las claves y herramientas para afrontarlas, como el hecho de “encontrar buenas amigas” o alguna docente que les ha sabido transmitir confianza en sus expectativas. Todas ellas tienen aspiraciones profesionales y están estudiando para conseguirlo.

Estas jóvenes definen el empoderamiento como la igualdad de oportunidades para acceder a los mismos derechos que sus compañeros chicos, y como un proceso colectivo:

“L’apoderament va molt lligat amb la igualtat perquè les dones abans no teníem els mateixos drets. Per les dones que han obert la porta per nosaltres, hem de lluitar contra els prejudicis, els estereotips i les discriminacions. I crec sobretot que l’empoderament de gènere és col·lectiu. Que no és només una persona que ha de representar algo, sinó que tothom que ha tingut diferents experiències. S’ha de compartir i després intentar superar-ho de forma col·lectiva”.

## DANIELA, JANICE, YESSI, SANDRA

Daniela, Janice, Yessi, and Sandra are four young women in their first year of high school with families of different origins: Colombia, the Philippines, Honduras, and Peru. They are all aware of how their families, especially their mothers, have suffered from labour exploitation or a lack of recognition for their knowledge and education.

Migration has sometimes created tensions in their relationships with their mothers or other family members, and almost all comment on the challenges of living within different systems of gender mandates. Nevertheless, they are all very proud of what their mothers, aunts or grandmothers have achieved in the host country.

While each has had a different migratory process, they all comment on the lack of support, the difficulties, and the barriers within the school system and society, but also the keys and tools to overcome them, such as finding good friends or teachers who were able to transmit confidence in their expectations. All of them have professional aspirations and are studying post-compulsory education to achieve them.

These young women define empowerment as equal opportunities and same rights as their male peers, and as collective process: “Empowerment is closely linked to equality, because women did not have the same rights in the past. For the women who have opened the door for us, we must fight against prejudice, stereotypes, and discrimination. And I believe above all that gender empowerment is collective. That it is not just one person who must represent something, but everyone who has had different experiences. It must be shared and then try to overcome it collectively.”



## CAMILA

Camila was born in Tegucigalpa, Honduras, and studied law. In 2012, while she was visiting Barcelona, a colleague was killed and she decided to stay because of the violence in her home country. Currently, she works as a legal technician in a company and is part of the team that leads an organization of migrants in Barcelona.

She has a 27-year-old daughter who lives in Honduras and a 5-year-old grandson.

For Camila, empowerment is related to the glass ceiling suffered by women in the workplace, to stereotyped ideas such as “they don’t want to be bosses” and also to the racism experienced by migrant women:

“I don’t tolerate racism, it makes me feel ‘down’. There are colleagues who have the same level as you or a little more and feel threatened by a *panchita*, I have been told this more than once. Even though I have a Spanish ID card, it’s not worth anything now, because they always see me as a *sudaca*.”



Camila nació en Tegucigalpa, Honduras y estudió derecho. En 2012 mientras ella estaba de viaje en Barcelona mataron a un compañero de trabajo y decidió quedarse debido al contexto de violencia. Actualmente trabaja como técnica jurídica en una empresa y forma parte del equipo que lidera una asociación de migrantes en Barcelona. Tiene una hija de 27 años que vive en Honduras y un nieto de 5 años.

Para Camila, el empoderamiento se relaciona con el techo de cristal de las mujeres en el trabajo, con ideas estereotipadas como el de «no quieren ser jefas» y también con el racismo que viven las mujeres migrantes:

“No tolero el racismo, me hace sentir ‘down’. Hay compañeros que tienen tu mismo nivel o un poquito más y se sienten amenazados por una ‘panchita’, más de una vez me lo han dicho. Aunque tengo un DNI español ahora eso no vale para nada, porque siempre me ven como sudaca.”

Latifa tiene 22 años y dejó Marruecos a los 15, cruzando el Mediterráneo en una patera. Con una infancia dura y un padre con problemas mentales, protegió a sus hermanos menores.

Migrar a España fue su apuesta por una vida mejor. A pesar del racismo vivido y la nostalgia por su familia, especialmente por su madre, no se arrepiente de haber migrado. Años después se enorgullece de su madurez y también de haber aprendido a entender y a cuidar a su padre. Busca su lugar entre lo que extraña y lo que la ha hecho crecer aquí.

“En poder venir aquí porque yo vine en patera; estoy súper orgullosa de esto, porque no cualquier persona lo puede hacer, arriesgar su vida y también estar esperando seis años para ir a ver a tus padres. Siento que he madurado mucho, y además he aprendido el idioma. Estoy intentando sacar estudios, estoy orgullosa de muchas cosas.”

## LATIFA

Latifa is 22 years old and left Morocco at 15, crossing the Mediterranean in a small boat. With a tough childhood and a mentally ill father, she became the protector of her younger siblings.

Migrating to Spain was her bet for a better life. Despite the racism she experienced and the nostalgia for her family, especially her mother, she does not regret migrating.

Years later, she is proud of her maturity and also of having learned to understand and care for her father. She seeks her place between what she misses and what has made her grow here.

“Being able to come here because I came in a small boat fills me with pride. Not everyone can do that, risk their lives and wait six years to see their parents again. I feel I have matured a lot, and I have also learned the language. I am trying to study, and I am proud of many things.”



## HAWA

Hawa was born in Dakar, Senegal, and is of Wolof origin. At the age of 19, her family sent her to Catalonia to meet her future husband, but she refused to marry and was forced to move to Italy. Back in Barcelona, she was forced to marry to a 47-year-old Senegalese man. One day, she decided to report him thanks to the help of a friend she met in Spanish class.

Hawa experienced violence and discrimination as a child. She remembers never being treated “like a person” and regrets not having a family “like everyone else”. Despite all this, she shows a strong resistance to submission, oppression, and violence.

“In short, I am 20 years old, but I feel like I am 60 because of all the suffering I have gone through.”

As a victim of forced marriage, she currently lives in a shelter under the protection of an organization, along with other women. This has allowed her to rest, relax, meet friends, and rebuild a life like any other girl of her age.



Hawa nació en Dakar, Senegal y es de origen wolof.

Con 19 años su familia la envió a Catalunya a conocer a su futuro “esposo”, pero ella se negó a casarse y la trasladaron a Italia. De vuelta en Barcelona, la obligaron a casarse con un hombre de origen senegalés de 47 años. Un día decidió denunciarlo gracias a la ayuda de una amiga que conoció en clase de lengua castellana.

Hawa también vivió violencia y discriminación desde su infancia. Recuerda no haber sido tratada nunca “como persona” y lamenta no haber tenido una familia “como la de los demás”. A pesar de todo ello, muestra una firme resistencia a la sumisión, la opresión y la violencia.

“En resumen, tengo 20 años, pero siento como si tuviera 60 por todo el sufrimiento por el que ha pasado.”

Como víctima de un matrimonio forzado, actualmente vive en un piso de acogida bajo la protección de una entidad, junto a otras compañeras. Esto le ha permitido descansar, relajarse, conocer amigas y rearmar una vida como el resto de las chicas de su edad.

Mariama tiene 19 años y nació en España en una familia de origen argelino.

Se siente orgullosa de haber mantenido sus principios desde pequeña y no ceder a la imposición violenta de los mandatos de género en casa y al aislamiento y la experiencia de racismo vivido en la escuela: “todo lo que era haram yo lo hacía”. Por todo lo vivido, define el empoderamiento desde la resistencia:

“Que no decidan por mí. Que yo ya tengo voz para mí. Que no necesito ninguna... Ningún grupo social, ninguna cultura, ninguna imagen, ninguna actividad, ninguna gente que nada, o sea, que cada uno tiene sus propias opiniones y que da igual si eres mujer u hombre, se tiene que respetar.”

Actualmente, agradece a la entidad que le proporciona un piso de acogida poder “ser persona” y dice estar acostumbrándose a tener libertad. Por ahora, y mientras se recupera sus aspiraciones son pequeños momentos como “poder tomar el sol en un banco”.

## MARIAMA

Mariama is 19 years old and was born in Spain into a family of Algerian origin.

She feels proud of having held onto her principles since she was young, refusing to give in to the harsh imposition of gender mandates at home, as well as the isolation and racism she experienced at school: “Everything that was *haram*, I would do.”

In the light of everything she has lived through she defines empowerment through resistance:

“They don’t decide for me. I already have a voice for myself. Any social group, any culture, any image, any activity, any people, I mean, everyone has their own opinions. It doesn’t matter if you are a woman or a man, you have to respect them.”

Mariama expresses gratitude to the organization providing her with a shelter, as it allows her to “be a person”, and she says she’s getting used to having freedom. For now, as she recovers, her aspirations are small moments like “being able to sit on a bench and enjoy the sun”.



## ISABEL

Isabel is from Cochabamba, Bolivia, and speaks Spanish, Quechua, Aymara, English, and is learning Catalan. As a child she worked selling sweets on buses. She studied psychology and was active in the student movement. At the age of 34 she was a local representative and promoted a law against harassment and political violence together with a group of women, including deputies and senators. Years later she was the director of an organization to prevent gender-based violence.

Shortly before the pandemic, she decided to migrate to Barcelona with her husband and son, where she works in an organization for migrant women. She relates empowerment to “giving power” but in conditions of equality between men and women:

“When I was a local representative, the press used to question me: ‘You want to be more than men.’ I would reply: ‘No, we don’t want to be more than men, we simply want equality in positions and roles. We want equality in all areas; even in the home, we want equality. We want both men and women to reach a country where people can live in peace.’”



Isabel es de Cochabamba, Bolivia, y habla castellano, quechua, Aymara, inglés y está aprendiendo catalán. Trabajó desde pequeña vendiendo golosinas en los autobuses. Estudió psicología y participó activamente del movimiento estudiantil. A los 34 años fue concejala e impulsó una ley contra el acoso y la violencia política junto a un grupo de mujeres, entre ellas diputadas y senadoras. Años después fue directora de una organización para prevenir la violencia de género.

Poco antes de la pandemia, decidió migrar a Barcelona con su marido y su hijo, en donde colabora en una organización de mujeres migrantes. Relaciona el empoderamiento con “otorgar el poder” pero en condiciones de equidad entre hombres y mujeres:

“Cuando era concejala, la prensa solía cuestionarme de que ustedes quieren ser más que los varones, y les respondía, no, no queremos ser más que los varones, simplemente queremos la equidad en puestos y cargos, queremos la equidad en todos los ámbitos, aún en la casa, queremos la equidad. Queremos que tanto varón y mujer llegemos a un país donde la gente pueda vivir en paz.”

Nuria es hija de una pareja que emigró de Argentina en 1977 durante la última dictadura militar, y nació en Barcelona en 1979.

Su origen migrante ha sido relevante en su experiencia vital. Relata con nostalgia los veranos de infancia en los que visitaba a la familia extensa y refiere dilemas identitarios de juventud. Ser capaz de conciliar la pertenencia a dos mundos fue empoderante para ella:

“Recordo que en algún moment de la meva adolescència, li dono la volta a això i dic: ‘no és que no sigui d’enlloc, és que soc dels dos llocs. Tinc les dues coses.’ I començo a transformar-ho, no? I crec que és un dels primers passos d’empoderament o de resiliència, de transformar un neguit o un buit a un significat en el que jo em trobo poderosa.”

También lo es, identificar situaciones de subordinación y encontrar mecanismos para salir de esa posición. Por eso, más allá de su vocación social, fundó su propia CSO (Organización de la sociedad civil) para transformar de una relación laboral en la que sentía que podía dar lugar a esa convicción.

## NURIA

Nuria was born in Barcelona in 1979 as the daughter of a couple who emigrated from Argentina in 1977 during the last military dictatorship.

Her migrant background has been significant in her life experience. She nostalgically recalls the childhood summers spent visiting her extended family and mentions the identity dilemmas she faced in her youth. Being able to reconcile a sense of belonging to two worlds was empowering for her.

“I remember that at some point in my adolescence, I turned this around and said, ‘It’s not that I’m not from the place, it’s that I’m from both places. I have both.’ And I start to transform it, don’t I? I think it’s one of the first steps of empowerment or resilience, of transforming an uneasiness or an emptiness into a meaning in which I find myself powerful.”

Equally important to her is identifying situations of subordination and finding the mechanisms to get out of them. This is why, besides her social vocation, she created her own CSO (Organización de la sociedad civil) to transform it into a work relationship where she felt she could give expression to that conviction.



## NORA

Nora is 21 years old and of Pakistani origin. She was reunited with her father and stepmother at the age of 11, but never felt welcomed by her stepmother. The poor relationship with her stepmother and the problems within the family nucleus led her father to send her back to Pakistan without her consent and to withhold her documents. She eventually managed to return and, with the support of an organization, decided to leave home and forge her own path.

Nora recognizes a before and after this moment. Before, “I obeyed orders and endured”, and now “I know how to distinguish between good and bad for myself, and I know my rights”. Nora has always seen school as her space for socialization, where she has been helped and advised, in contrast to at home. She is currently training in aesthetics and would like to be able to work in that field in the future.

“I believe that I have to study and have a certificate in hand and then go back to them [her father and family] and show it to them, because they didn’t want me to be independent, they were afraid of that. They knew what I was like, that I could face all that and I did.”



Nora tiene 21 años y es de origen pakistaní. Fue reagrupada a los 11 años por su padre y su madrastra, por quienes nunca se sintió acogida. La mala relación con la madrastra y los problemas en el núcleo familiar, llevan al padre a devolverla a Pakistán sin su consentimiento y a retenerle los documentos. Finalmente logra volver y decide, con el apoyo de una entidad, irse de su casa y emprender su propio camino.

Nora reconoce un antes y un después de este momento. Antes “yo acataba órdenes y aguantaba”, y ahora “sé distinguir entre lo bueno y lo malo por mí misma, y conozco mis derechos”. Nora siempre ha vivido la escuela como su espacio de socialización, donde la han ayudado y aconsejado, contrariamente a su casa. Actualmente se está formando en estética y le gustaría poder trabajar de ello en un futuro.

“Yo creo que tengo que estudiar y tener un certificado en mano y luego volver a ellos [su padre y familia] y mostrárselo, porque ellos no querían que fuese independiente, tenían miedo de eso. Ellos sabían cómo era yo, que podía enfrentarme a todo eso y lo hice.”

Elena es de Honduras, estudió administración de empresas y trabajó en una compañía internacional. Al quedarse embarazada de su primer hijo se dedicó a la vida familiar.

En 2021, su hija decidió estudiar diseño de moda en Barcelona y ella, a sus 55 años, decidió acompañarla. En Barcelona, Elena hace trabajos de limpieza y cuida a un señor con Alzheimer los fines de semana. Su principal aspiración es crear una asociación de prevención y asistencia a personas con dependencia y deterioro cognitivo en Honduras.

Considera que una clave para el empoderamiento es el soporte económico y el apoyo entre mujeres, pero también a partir del trabajo de organizaciones de mujeres migrantes:

“Yo siento que empoderamiento, empatía y solidaridad deberían ser casi sinónimos. Sin las organizaciones, todavía estaríamos silenciadas. Es muy importante la labor que realizan porque es la única manera de dar visibilidad a lo que hacemos las mujeres migrantes.”

## ELENA

Elena is from Honduras, she studied business administration and worked for an international company. When she became pregnant with her first child, she dedicated herself to family life.

In 2021, her daughter decided to study fashion design in Barcelona, and at the age of 55, she decided to accompany her. In Barcelona, Elena does cleaning work and takes care of a man with Alzheimer’s on weekends. Her main aspiration is to create an association for the prevention and assistance of people with dependency and cognitive impairment in Honduras.

She believes that a key to empowerment is economic support and support among women, but also through the work of organizations for migrant women:

“I feel that empowerment, empathy, and solidarity should be almost synonymous. Without these organizations, we would still be silenced. The work they do is very important because it is the only way to give visibility to what we migrant women do.”



## KHADIJA

Khadija, from Morocco, is 32 years old and migrated to Barcelona in 2018. She was married twice, both at a very young age. From her first marriage, she has a 16-year-old son, and from the second, a 9-year-old son. Both live in Morocco.

After her second separation, Khadija decided to migrate to Barcelona, following in the footsteps of her older sister, who welcomed her and guided her in the city. Khadija is very active, working in a supermarket and cleaning in the afternoons. She took Catalan courses, where she made friends with migrant women from different countries, and participates in events and projects organized by neighbourhood entities.

With the effort of these years, she fulfilled her dream of buying her own apartment where she hopes to be able to bring her children, as she “doesn’t see them having a future in Morocco”. Her hard work always reminds her of her father, whom she misses especially, as he always “went ahead without complaining”.

“I can say that my father is the air I breathe. I don’t know what I would do if my father wasn’t with us anymore.”



Khadija, de Marruecos, tiene 32 años y migró a Barcelona en 2018. Se casó dos veces, ambas muy joven. Del primer matrimonio tiene un hijo de 16 años y del segundo, un hijo de 9. Los dos viven en Marruecos.

Tras su segunda separación, Khadija decidió migrar a Barcelona, siguiendo los pasos de su hermana mayor, quien la acogió y la orientó en la ciudad. Khadija es muy activa, trabaja en un supermercado y haciendo limpieza por las tardes. Realizó cursos de catalán en donde entabló amistades con mujeres migrantes de distintos países y participa de eventos y proyectos de entidades del barrio.

Con el esfuerzo de estos años cumplió el sueño de comprarse su piso donde espera poder traer a sus hijos, ya que “no ve que en Marruecos puedan tener un futuro”. Su ardua dedicación al trabajo le recuerda siempre a su padre, a quien echa especialmente de menos, ya que siempre “tiraba adelante sin quejarse”.

“De mi padre puedo decir que es el aire que respiro, no sé qué haría si mi padre no estuviese.”

Wendy nació en 1970 en Honduras. Empezó la carrera de abogacía, pero se vio obligada a dejar los estudios para dedicarse a la maternidad.

En 2010 migró a Catalunya para buscar trabajo mientras sus hijos, Paula y Leo, se quedaron en Honduras. Como la mayoría de migrantes, ha realizado trabajos temporales de cuidados de personas mayores, pero su gran motivación y proyecto a largo plazo es el mundo del coaching.

Cuando Paula cumplió 9 años pudo reagruparla y desde entonces viven juntas en Catalunya. Ahora, Paula, ya con 19 años, estudia el grado de Relaciones Laborales.

Para Wendy como mujer migrante “en un mundo donde no todos tienen las mismas posibilidades”, el empoderamiento y la realización profesional van de la mano.

“Porque a pesar de muchas cosas que he pasado, podría haber caído en una depresión y vivir de la ‘vida fácil’. Que todo el mundo la llama fácil, pero que no es fácil. Que hay unas que lo hacen por placer, otras que lo hacen por obligación, y otras por una necesidad. No, gracias a Dios que todavía no he llegado a ‘eso’. Entonces sí, me siento bien. Me siento satisfecha, empoderada, conmigo misma como mujer.”

## WENDY & PAULA

Wendy was born in 1970 in Honduras. She began a career as a lawyer but was forced to give up her studies to devote herself to motherhood.

In 2010 she migrated to Catalonia to look for work while her children, Paula and Leo, stayed in Honduras. Like most migrants, she has done temporary jobs caring for the elderly, but her main motivation and long-term project is the world of coaching.

When Paula turned 9, she was able to reunite with her and since then they have been living together in Catalonia. Paula, now 19 years old, is studying a degree in Labour Relations.

For Wendy, as a migrant woman “in a world where not everyone has the same possibilities”, empowerment and professional fulfilment go hand in hand.

“Because despite many things I have been through, I could have fallen into a depression and lived the ‘easy life’. Everyone calls it easy, but it’s not easy. There are some who do it for pleasure, others who do it out of obligation, and others out of necessity. No, thank God I haven’t got to that ‘easy life’ yet. So yes, I feel good. I feel satisfied, empowered, with myself as a woman.”



## LIS

Lis is a 40-year-old lawyer of Chinese origin who migrated to Ibiza at the age of 12. In China she had a particularly strong bond with her grandparents, who often took care of her as her mother worked and her father lived in Spain.

Lis says that her migration was not easy at all. She did not have much support, and neither her parents nor the school knew how to help her in her process of adapting and learning the language. This led her to become a very independent young woman, but she also reflects with sadness on the price she has had to pay to acquire this autonomy. She understands empowerment as the ability to make conscious decisions, for which having a minimum amount of money is necessary if one wants to have the time to think about how they really want to live.

“The autonomy I gained as a teenager has its positive points, but also negative ones, in the sense that I don’t know how to delegate. In other words, since I learned to be autonomous, I don’t know if it was too early or too late, because my parents depended on me for all the paperwork. [...] That part of autonomy that we gained means that, for example, we lost the innocence of that time, and we had to do things that we didn’t have to do.”



Lis es una abogada de 40 años de origen chino que migró a los 12 años a Ibiza. En China tenía un vínculo especialmente fuerte con sus abuelos, que la cuidaban a menudo ya que su madre trabajaba y su padre vivía en España.

Lis cuenta que su migración no fue nada fácil. No tenía muchos apoyos, y ni sus padres ni la escuela sabían cómo ayudarla en su proceso de adaptación y de aprendizaje de la lengua. Esto la ha llevado a ser una joven muy autónoma, pero también reflexiona con tristeza el precio que ha tenido que pagar para adquirir esa autonomía. Entiende empoderamiento como la posibilidad de toma de decisiones de forma consciente, para la que tener unos mínimos económicos es necesario si se quiere disponer del tiempo de pensar cómo se quiere realmente vivir.

“La autonomía que gané en esa época adolescente tiene sus puntos positivos, pero también negativos, en el sentido de que no sé delegar. O sea, como aprendí a ser autónoma, no sé si demasiado pronto o demasiado tarde, porque mis padres dependían de mí para todos los trámites. [...] Esa parte de autonomía que ganamos hace que, por ejemplo, perdamos la inocencia de esa época, y nos ha tocado hacer gestiones que no nos tocaba.”

**BELGIUM**

## IMANE EL BOUCHIKHI

This picture gives me hope: for a better world, a better future. You see a desert, and yet you see a flower growing in that drought. The woman is the future. She makes sure that there will always be next generations, so I really see a woman as the source of the future, of next generations, of hope...



Deze foto geeft mij hoop: naar een betere wereld, een betere toekomst. Je ziet de droogte, echt een woestijn en toch zie je een bloem groeien in die droogte. De vrouw is de toekomst, zij zorgt ervoor dat er altijd maar volgende generaties komen dus ik zie een vrouw echt als de bron naar een toekomst, naar de volgende generaties, naar hoop...

Ik maak graag dingen, zoals collages, dat geeft me rust en daar krijg ik geen stress van. In Chili is een "powervrouw" iemand die alles kan, een zaak heeft opgericht, en nooit moe is. Soms voel ik me zo en dan voel ik me empowered. Maar soms gaat het minder goed, dan sluipt mijn verleden terug naar boven en vind ik de mentale ruimte niet in mijn hoofd. Ik ben trots op de dingen die ik heb bereikt. Naar België verhuizen, mijn kinderen, alles balanceren. Maar soms heb ik ook rust nodig.

## SHARON

I like to make things, like collages. This gives me peace and doesn't stress me out. In Chile, a "power woman" is someone who can do everything, has founded a business, and is never tired. Sometimes I feel this way and then I feel empowered. But sometimes things don't go as well, then my past creeps back up and I don't find the mental space. I'm proud of the things I've accomplished. Moving to Belgium, my children, balancing everything. But sometimes I also need rest.



5

For me, gender empowerment is showing solidarity with other women. That way you also strengthen yourself. There is a lot of strength in women, although we often don't realize it. We are all different, but what brings us together? The fact that we are women, that all of us are carrying a backpack with all our experiences. We are women. For me, this film reflects that. This is a story about solidarity, about what gives women strength.



Voor mij is *gender empowerment* solidair zijn met andere vrouwen. Zo versterk je ook jezelf. In vrouwen schuilt er heel wat kracht, alleen beseffen we dat vaak niet. We zijn allemaal verschillend, maar wat brengt ons samen? Het feit dat we vrouwen zijn, allemaal een rugzak hebben met al wat we hebben meegemaakt. We zijn vrouwen. Voor mij geeft deze film dat weer. Dit is een verhaal rond solidariteit, wat vrouwen kracht geeft.

Ik kijk op naar mijn moeder. Ze kan niet lezen, heeft een heel moeilijk leven gehad en is heel jong getrouwd. Ze heeft bepaalde keuzes gemaakt omdat ze moest en niet beter wist, maar naar haar energie kijk ik op. Naar mijn vader kijk ik ook op, want ik voel dat hij het wil goedmaken. Normaal zijn dochters minder waard binnen de Romagemeenschap. Die gaan voor problemen zorgen, kunnen niet je achternaam dragen en aan hen heb je ook niet zo veel. Mijn ouders dachten lang ook zo, maar beseffen nu dat dit niet zo is. Toen ik ben afgestudeerd, als maatschappelijk werker, dat was voor mij niet enkel het halen van een diploma, maar vooral het bewijzen aan mijn vader dat meisjes het ook kunnen.

## MERIMA MEHMETI

I look up to my mother. She cannot read, has had a very difficult life and got married very young. She has made certain choices because she had to and didn't know any better, but I look up to her energy. I look up to my father as well, because I feel he wants to make amends. Normally daughters are worth less within the Roma community. They cause problems, can't carry your last name and you don't have much use for them. My parents thought the same way for a long time, but now realize that this is not the case. When I graduated in social work, it did not just mean I was getting a degree, but it proved to my father that girls can do it too.



## MIRANDA MEHMETI

During my youth, one of the hardest things to do was to accept myself as Roma. By going to different European organizations for Roma and getting to know so many different people, I learned that my identity can be different from the typical image and that I should not be ashamed of being Roma. April 8 is International Roma Day and I feel so strong and proud to celebrate this day here. This day is very important for Roma because on that day it was decided not to call Roma Gypsies anymore. Then they said: “We are going to choose one flag, because Roma are everywhere.” In 1973 there was a big congress where it was decided: “We are people too and you will call us that.”



Tijdens mijn jeugd was een van de moeilijkste dingen om te doen mezelf te accepteren als Roma. Door naar verschillende Europese organisaties voor Roma te gaan en zoveel verschillende mensen te leren kennen, heb ik geleerd dat het ook anders kan dan het typische beeld rond Roma en dat ik me niet te schamen dat ik Roma ben. 8 April is de Internationale Romadag en ik voel me hier zo sterk en trots om deze dag te vieren. Dit is een dag die voor de Roma heel belangrijk is, omdat er op die dag gekozen is om Roma niet meer zigeuners te noemen. Toen is er gezegd: “We gaan één vlag kiezen, want Roma zijn overal.” In 1973 was er een groot congres en daar is besloten: “Wij zijn ook mensen en jullie zullen ons zo noemen.”

Wandelen in de stilte van het bos bevrijdt mij van alle zorgen. Ik geniet van de schoonheid van de natuur met al haar seizoenen en van het alleen zijn met mijzelf. Het doet me er telkens aan herinneren hoe verwonderend en mysterieus de kracht hierachter is.

## SAIDA BOUTKABOUT

Walking in the silence of the forest frees me from all worries. There, I enjoy the beauty of nature with all its seasons, just being by myself. It reminds me again and again of how wondrous and mysterious the power behind all this is.



## MELISA MEHMETI

Family really is number one. Without my family I would be lonely. They are the only ones I can actually talk honestly with, we carry each others' secrets.



Familie staat echt op nummer één. Zonder mijn familie zou ik eenzaam zijn. Zij zijn de enige waar ik écht eerlijk mee kan praten, we dragen elkaars geheimen.

Hier voelde ik me echt empowered: zoveel mensen kwamen samen om dezelfde reden, om mijn gevoelens hardop te weerspiegelen: "Fuck the patriarchy." De meeste problemen van de vrouwen komen door dit concept, 'the patriarchy', een grote figuur die controle op je uitoefent. Je kan perfect een huisvrouw zijn, maar niemand moet jou controleren. Vroeger dacht ik dat zorgend zijn iets slechts is, een zwak punt. Maar nu, door mijn dochter, voel ik hoe een sterke rol dit is. We zorgen voor onze familie, onze vrienden, onze kinderen, en dat is niet makkelijk. We moeten dat claimen en blij zijn dat we van nature zorgend zijn.

## MAWDA ABBAS

Here I felt really empowered: so many people came together for the same reason, to reflect my feelings out loud: "Fuck the patriarchy." Most of women's problems come from this concept, "the patriarchy", a big figure controlling you. You can be a housewife if you want, but no one can control you. I used to think that being caring is a bad thing, a weakness. But now, because of my daughter, I feel how strong this role is. We take care of our family, our friends, our children, which is not easy. We have to claim this, and be happy that we are naturally caring.



## SOEHAILA LAKHBYAZ

For me, being a woman does not only mean having the ability to give, but also the freedom to receive. In a world where women are often encouraged to strive for independence, I see empowerment as allowing vulnerability and embracing support. An empowered woman is one who finds the strength to give, but also has the courage to ask for and receive help.

A woman can choose her own path, pursue her dreams and realize her potential. However, true empowerment goes beyond that. In a world that tends to emphasize women's caring and giving roles, empowerment advocates balance. An empowered woman understands that her worth doesn't just depend on her ability to give, but also on her willingness to receive what she needs.

Empowerment is an ode to the versatility of female power, in which self-love, asking for and receiving help are considered as valuable as independence and entrepreneurship. For me, empowering women means embracing all these aspects and nurturing the power that comes from the full expression of womanhood.



Voor mij betekent vrouw-zijn niet alleen het vermogen om te geven, maar ook de vrijheid om te ontvangen. In een wereld waarin vrouwen vaak worden aangemoedigd om te streven naar onafhankelijkheid, zie ik empowerment als het toestaan van kwetsbaarheid en het omarmen van steun. Een empowerde vrouw is degene die niet alleen de kracht vindt om te geven, maar ook de moed heeft om hulp te vragen én te ontvangen.

Een vrouw kan haar eigen pad kiezen, haar dromen najagen en haar potentieel realiseren. Echter, ware empowerment gaat verder dan dat. In een wereld die soms neigt naar het benadrukken van de zorgzame en gevende rol van vrouwen, pleit empowerment voor een evenwicht. Een empowerde vrouw begrijpt dat haar waarde niet afhangt van haar vermogen om te geven, maar ook van haar bereidheid om te ontvangen wat ze nodig heeft.

Empowerment is een ode aan de veelzijdigheid van vrouwelijke kracht, waarin zelfliefde, het vragen om hulp en het ontvangen ervan als even waardevol worden beschouwd als onafhankelijkheid en ondernemerschap. Empowerment voor vrouwen betekent voor mij het omarmen van al deze aspecten en het koesteren van de kracht die voortkomt uit de volledige expressie van vrouw-zijn.

## SYEDA RIZVI

I am a professional woman. I take care of myself and I take care of things in the house. I am a researcher, but also a mum and a spouse. I like to cook for my family, but I also like to paint for myself. Being a woman is being a multisided scale: you have yourself, your career, your spouse, your children, your family, and your home. Sometimes balance is difficult to maintain. Many times it happens that you are not giving as much to certain aspects as you should. But then the situation comes back into balance again. When I feel like myself, I feel empowered. Being able to enjoy time with myself, enjoying the beauty of nature. I'm doing the things I want to do, I have agency over my life and I'm grateful for the mercy of God for the opportunities that were granted.



## SANA BARGHOUTI

This picture is from my final year collection in Fashion Studies. For me, this perfectly represents what it is to be a woman. My collection was about powerful women. In my mind, these are three women with different jobs, different backgrounds, yet they all hold so much power in their own ways, because all three are independent. I don't always dwell on the things I can be proud of. For example, these outfits have been used on a film set, I can share my knowledge through sewing classes, and I work in my field with many opportunities for growth. These are things that I am only now realizing: I have actually accomplished quite a bit already.



Deze foto is van mijn eindejaarscollectie voor de modeopleiding. Voor mij geeft dit perfect weer wat het is om vrouw te zijn. Mijn collectie ging over krachtige vrouwen. In mijn hoofd zijn dit drie vrouwen met verschillende jobs, verschillende achtergronden, maar toch hebben ze allemaal op hun eigen manieren zoveel macht in handen, want alle drie zijn ze onafhankelijk. Ik sta zelf niet altijd stil bij de zaken waar ik trots op mag zijn. Deze outfits zijn bijvoorbeeld gebruikt op een filmset, ik kan mijn kennis delen via naailessen, en ik werk in mijn veld met veel doorgroeimogelijkheden. Dat zijn dingen die ik nu pas door heb: ik heb eigenlijk toch wel al wat bereikt.

Voor mij staat Harriet Tubman voor gender empowerment. Zij was een tot slaaf gemaakte persoon, uit de negentiende eeuw. Zij vond slavernij niet kunnen en ze was echt een rebel. Haar ouders hadden altijd al onder de slavernij geleefd en zij werd daarin geboren. Ze was zo van: "Ik hoor niet zo te zijn!" Zij wilde heel graag vrijheid. Zij is ontsnapt via de "Underground Railroad" in Amerika. Zo ging ze van huis naar huis om van het zuiden naar het noorden te gaan, want in het noorden was slavernij afgeschaft. Dus daar zouden slaven vrij zijn en daar kon ze dus gewoon zelf werken enz. Zij is tot daar gegaan en ze had toch iets van: "Oké, ik heb nu vrijheid, maar ik wil dat iedereen dat heeft!" Dus ging ze terug naar het zuiden om mensen te halen en slaven te redden. En zo deed ze dat elke keer opnieuw. Ze noemde zichzelf eigenlijk Mozes, hun Mozes, omdat Mozes de slaven in Egypte had bevrijd. En ik vond het heel mooi dat een vrouw dat heeft gedaan. Ze is echt een van de sleutelfiguren in de afschaffing van slavenhandel in Amerika. Toen ik dat verhaal, dat een vriend had doorgestuurd, had gelezen, keek ik naar een video hierover en was echt zo van: "Wauw!"

## CHANEL LOUIS

For me, Harriet Tubman represents gender empowerment. She was an enslaved person from the nineteenth century. She didn't think slavery was acceptable and she was such a rebel. Her parents had always lived under slavery and she was born into it. She was like, "This is not what I'm supposed to be!" She very much wanted freedom. She escaped via the "Underground Railroad" in America. Then, she went from house to house to go from the South to the North, because in the North slavery had been abolished. There, slaves could be free and she could just work herself etc. She went there and still said: "Okay, I have freedom now, but I want everyone to have it!" So she went back South to get people and rescue slaves. And so she did time and again. She actually called herself Moses, their Moses, because Moses had freed the slaves in Egypt. And I thought it was amazing that a woman had done that. She's really one of the key figures in the abolition of slavery in America. Once I had read this story, sent to me by a friend, I watched a video about it and was really like: "Wow!"



## MARIAM EL A.

“Why me?” I have a homemade comfort box that is a reminder that no matter what happens, no matter what plate falls, it becomes more beautiful after it is glued together with gold. Scars are beauty. In my comfort box, I keep my fresh open wounds that become scars with time. This is a poem I wrote when I had another open wound for a while, which of course is now a beautiful golden scar:

### Why Me?

The journey took some time in my mind, like centuries. Now I only know the fruits.

The plate had to break to be glued with gold, because this is what made me who I am today.

I do not yet see it fully as my father, who says: “There is good in everything.” Perhaps I do not see it yet today.

I hear it whisper again, “You don’t have to know, for it may already be over without you knowing.”

Hate nothing, for there may be goodness in it, the phrase I didn’t like hearing when I was broken, but only really understand now that I am glued.

I want to be a memory for you. I am ahead of you, I am glued.

And with this poem I want to show you my shards, so that you will be careful with your plate.

“Waarom ik?” Ik heb een zelfgemaakte troostdoos dat een herinnering is dat ongeacht wat er gebeurt, ongeacht welk bord er valt, het mooier wordt nadat het aan elkaar gelijmd is met goud. Littekens zijn schoonheid. In mijn troostdoos bewaar ik mijn verse open wondjes die daarna littekens worden met de tijd. Dit is een gedicht dat ik schreef toen ik weer even een open wond had, die uiteraard nu een prachtig gouden litteken is:

### Waarom ik?

De reis duurde even in gedachten, net alsof eeuwen. Nu ken ik enkel de vruchten.

Het bord moest breken om gelijmd te worden met goud, want dit heeft mij gemaakt tot wie ik vandaag ben.

Ik zie het nog niet volledig zoals mijn vader zegt: “In elke zaak zit er goedheid.” Misschien zie ik het vandaag nog niet.

Fluisterend hoor ik weer: “Je hoeft het niet te weten, want het kan al voorbij zijn zonder dat jij het weet.”

Haat niets, want er kan goedheid in zitten, de zin die ik niet zo graag hoorde toen ik gebroken was, maar nu pas echt begrijp nu ik ben gelijmd.

Ik wil voor jou een herinnering zijn.  
Ik ben jou voor, ik ben gelijmd.

En met dit gedicht wil ik je mijn scherven laten zien, zodat jij voorzichtig bent met jouw bord.



## FATOU

This photo of my mother embodies the essence of gender empowerment for me. Here you can see her proudly displaying the jewellery my father designed, a task traditionally attributed to men in Senegal. In our society, it is unusual for women to engage in this craft, which is often considered taxing. At the same time, my mother exudes self-confidence in front of the camera, an act often labelled as feminine. For me, this photo represents the power of breaking gender stereotypes and embracing my own path. As a jewellery designer - a role traditionally assigned to men in our culture - and as someone who does not shy away from taking charge behind the camera, I am the living proof of change. My brand, Ziaar, does not only represent my creative expression, but also the message of empowerment and equality that I want to carry to the world.



Deze foto van mijn moeder belichaamt voor mij de essentie van *gender empowerment*. Hier zie je haar trots de juwelen tonen die mijn vader heeft ontworpen, een taak die in Senegal traditioneel aan mannen wordt toegeschreven. In onze samenleving is het ongebruikelijk voor vrouwen om zich bezig te houden met dit ambacht, dat vaak als zwaar wordt beschouwd. Tegelijkertijd straalt mijn moeder zelfvertrouwen uit voor de camera, een handeling die vaak als vrouwelijk wordt bestempeld. Deze foto vertegenwoordigt voor mij de kracht van het doorbreken van genderstereotypen en het omarmen van mijn eigen pad. Als juwelenontwerpster—een rol die traditioneel aan mannen wordt toebedeeld in onze cultuur—en als iemand die niet terugschrikt voor het nemen van de leiding achter de camera, ben ik het levende bewijs van verandering. Mijn merk, Ziaar, staat niet alleen voor mijn creatieve uitingen, maar ook voor de boodschap van empowerment en gelijkheid die ik wil uitdragen naar de wereld toe.

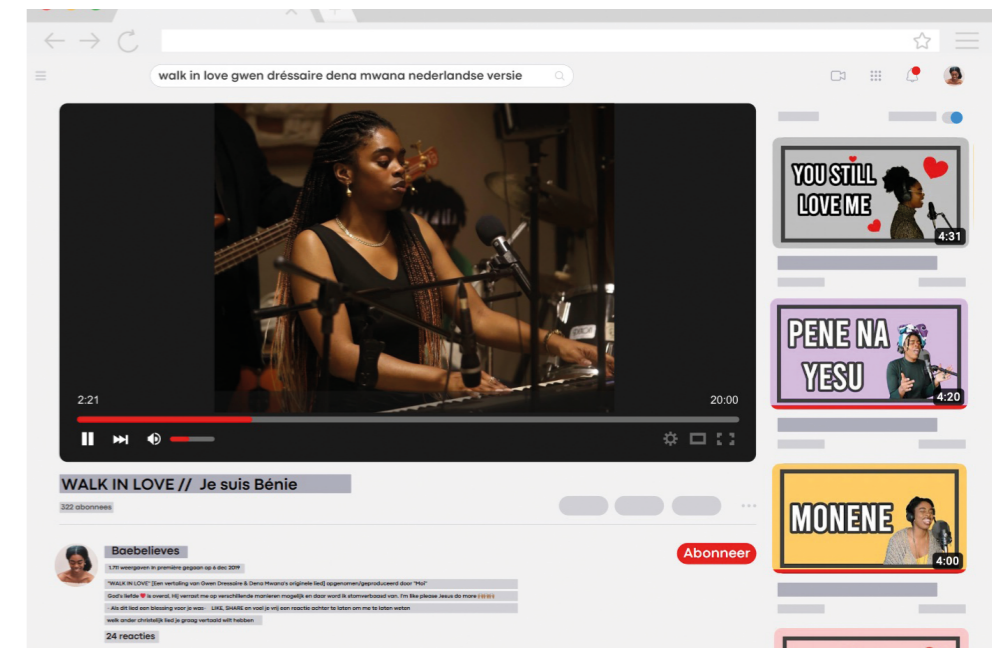
Dit is een verhaal dat ik gewoonlijk niet snel vertel: over de manier waarop de piano aan mij werd geïntroduceerd. Het was zeer simpel. Mijn moeder stelde mij de vraag of ik het zag zitten om de piano te bespelen? Waarop ik gewoonweg met “ja” antwoordde. Kort na mijn eerste pianolessen, zonder enige echte skills te hebben, postte ik mijn eerste video op YouTube waarin ik mezelf begeleidde op de piano terwijl ik mijn eigen lied zong. Omdat ik echter maar 13 jaar oud was en volgens mijn moeder veel te jong om video's online te posten, mocht ik geen content meer plaatsen op YouTube.

Jaren later had ik, in augustus 2019, het idee om er terug aan te beginnen. Dus op 6 december 2019 postte ik mijn tweede video op YouTube. Mijn bedoeling was om christelijke liederen, die vooral in andere talen voorkomen, te vertalen naar het Nederlands en het Frans. Op die manier konden Nederlandstaligen en anderstaligen ook in aanraking komen met een ander soort van muziek. Het feit dat ik mijn liefde voor muziek en talen kan combineren geeft mij een *empowered* gevoel.

## BAEBELIEVES

This is a story I don't usually tell people at first: about how I got introduced to the piano. It was very simple. My mother asked if I was interested in playing the piano, to which I simply replied: “Yes.” Shortly after my first piano lessons, without having any real skills, I posted my first video on YouTube accompanying myself on the piano while singing my own song. However, because I was only 13 years old and, according to my mother, far too young to post videos online, I was no longer allowed to post content on YouTube.

Years later, in August 2019, I got the idea to get back into it. So on December 6, 2019, I posted my second video on YouTube. My intention was to translate Christian songs, which are mostly found in other languages, into Dutch and French. That way, Dutch and non-Dutch speakers could come into contact with a different kind of music. The fact that I can combine my love for music and languages gives me an empowered feeling.



## T. A.

“It’s not about being invincible, it’s about being unstoppable, always give 1 per cent.” Everyday you should give 1 per cent. Even if you don’t feel good. It’s not about being invincible. It’s about no one stopping you from expressing your dreams or your vision or your personality. If you want to do something, be a certain person, wear makeup, or something *you* feel good about... Yes, that’s what this stands for. That’s why I had it tattooed on my wrist last year. That way I’m reminded of it every day.

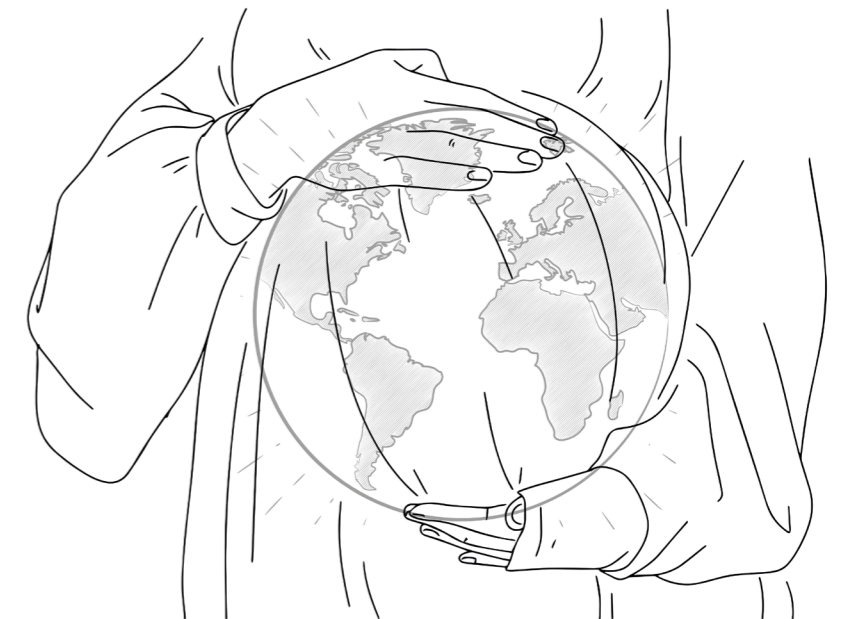


“It’s not about being invincible, it’s about being unstoppable, always give 1 percent.” Elke dag moet je gewoon 1 procent geven. Zelfs al voel jij je niet goed. Het gaat niet om onoverwinnelijk te zijn. Het gaat erom dat niemand jou kan stoppen om jouw dromen of jouw visie of jouw persoonlijkheid te laten zien. Als je iets wil doen, of een soort persoon wil zijn, of make-up op doen, of iets waar *jij* je goed bij voelt... Ja, dit staat daarvoor. Daarom heb ik het vorig jaar laten tatoeëren op mijn pols. Zo word ik er elke dag aan herinnerd.

Ik ben Tuğba, ik ben een vrouw, ik ben een (toekomstige) mama, ik ben een *mens*. Het belangrijkste is dat je een mens kan zijn. Want de rest komt vanzelf. Een vrouw kun je zijn als je mens bent. Dat lijkt heel simpel. Maar het is zo’n volwaardig woord dat het het begin en einde bepaalt van alles. Sta erbij stil. Wie ben ik als mens en wat doe ik als mens? Geloof in veranderingen. Geloof in jezelf. Want daar begint de verandering. De sterkste verandering kun je bij jezelf en met je nakomelingen verwezenlijken. Ken jouw verantwoordelijkheid hierbij. Want je nakomelingen zijn “jou”. Dat ben jij die de veranderingen kan brengen in wereld. Onderschat jezelf niet. Onderschat je kracht niet. Onderschat niet hoe sterk je de wereld kunt veranderen. Want dat gaan we samen doen als *mens*. Als mama’s, als vrouwen. Jij brengt een vrouw, maar ook een man op aarde! Aanschouw je kracht, de kracht die je krijgt van Allah (God). Geef liefde, geef respect, geef je tijd aan je kind(eren). Want die zijn je toekomst. Elk kind is een nieuw klein mens die verandering in de wereld kan brengen. Die meer liefde en respect kan delen. Wees niet bescheiden en weet/ken je kracht! En geef zeker nooit op! Houd je moedig. Erin geloven is de sterkste stap die je kunt zetten. Onthoud: je oogst wat je zaait. *Ne ekersen onu biçersin.*

## TUĞBA

I am Tuğba, I am a woman, I am a (future) mum, I am a *human*. The most important is being a human. Because the rest comes naturally. You can be a woman if you are human. It seems very simple. But it is such a loaded word that it decides the beginning and end of everything. Think about it. Who am I as a human being and what am I doing as a human being? Believe in change. Believe in yourself. Because that is where change begins. The strongest change you can make is with yourself and your offspring. Know your responsibilities about this. Because your descendants are “you”. That is you, bringing change to the world. Don’t underestimate yourself. Don’t underestimate your strength. Don’t underestimate how strongly you can change the world. Because that’s what we’re going to do together as *people*. As mothers, as women. You bring a woman, but also a man, onto the earth! Behold your strength, the strength you receive from Allah (God). Give love, give respect, give your time to your child(ren). Because they are your future. Each one is a new little person who can bring change to the world, who can share more love and respect. Don’t be humble, and know/acknowledge your strength! And definitely never give up! Keep your courage. Believing in it is the strongest step you can take. Remember: you reap what you sow. *Ne ekersen onu biçersin.*



## IMANE

My father didn't tell me how to live, he lived and let me watch him do it.



*Ermächtigung, Potenziamento, التمكين, 권한 부여, empowerment.* Het fluistert zijn waarheid op vele manieren, op diverse plaatsen. Zonder die veelzijdigheid zou zijn vertaling slechts een echo zijn, verloren in de stilte van uniformiteit.

In het vergeelde papier van een krant uit Tanger, gedateerd 2002, ontvouwt zich voor mij een tijdloos verhaal van genderempowerment dat als een kostbaar erfstuk mijn innerlijke kracht heeft gevoed. Die vergeten bladzijden herbergen niet slechts inkt op papier, maar vormen het weefsel van mijn overtuigingen en aspiraties. Dit verhaal raakte niet slechts mijn hart, maar legde ook de kiem voor mijn eigen streven naar empowerment.

Daar, tussen de regels van de krant, schitterden mijn moeder en tante als pioniers van pluimveehouderij, hun vastberadenheid gevangen in een investering van 10.000 DH, ongeveer 1000 euro. Een schijnbaar bescheiden som die echter grootsheid op hun maat weerspiegelde. Twee jonge vrouwen uit Tanger, onbekend met de complexiteit van investeringen, omarmden het onzekere pad met een moed die de grenzen van de krantenkolommen overschreed. Als kind aanschouwde ik mijn moeder in die krant, een kostbaar document dat ik door de jaren heen heb bewaard, en koesterde ik de overtuiging dat ik, zoals zij, kon gedijen in onbekende terreinen.

In die krant vond ik niet alleen een inkijkje in het leven van mijn familie, maar ook een spiegel van mijn eigen potentieel. Het verhaal van mijn moeder en tante illustreert dat genderempowerment geen uniforme reis is, maar een persoonlijke odyssee. Het is een herinnering aan de waarheid dat empowerment geen vaststaand concept is, maar een evoluerende kracht die iedereen op zijn eigen pad kan ontdekken en omarmen.

## RANIA OULKOUH TOUZANI

*Ermächtigung, Potenziamento, التمكين, 권한 부여, empowerment.* It whispers its truth in many ways, in various places. Without that versatility, its translation would only be an echo, lost in the silence of uniformity.

In the yellowed paper of a Tangier newspaper, dated 2002, a timeless story of gender empowerment unfolds before me that has nurtured my inner strength like a precious heirloom. Those forgotten pages do not merely hold ink on paper, but form the fabric of my beliefs and aspirations. This story did not only touch my heart, but also sowed the seeds of my own pursuit of empowerment.

There, between the lines of the newspaper, my mother and aunt are shining as poultry farming pioneers, their determination captured in an investment of 10,000 DH, about 1,000 euros. A seemingly modest sum that, however, reflected relative greatness. Two young women from Tangier, unfamiliar with the complexities of investment, embraced the uncertain path with a courage that transcended the confines of newspaper columns. As a child, I beheld my mother in that newspaper, a precious document I have kept over the years, and nurtured the belief that, like her, I could thrive in unfamiliar territory.

In that paper, I found not only an insight into my family's life, but also a mirror of my own potential. The story of my mother and aunt illustrates that gender empowerment is not a uniform journey, but a personal odyssey. It is a reminder of the truth that empowerment is not a fixed concept, but an evolving force that each person can discover and embrace on their own path.



**OUTRO**

## Tapestry of Thanks

This book is a tapestry woven from countless hearts and minds, each thread contributing to a story of resilience, hope, and empowerment. To all who poured their passion and creativity into this work - thank you. Your voices and visions have illuminated paths toward inclusion and equality.

*As Maya Angelou beautifully said, “We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color.”*

Let this book serve as a testament to the power of unity in diversity and the unyielding strength of women shaping their own narratives.

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