

# sister

N A M I B I A

N\$10,00  
Vol. 21 # 3  
September 2009  
ISSN 1026-9126



YOUNG WOMEN WITH  
REAL! STORIES



RESISTING THE  
MALE GAZE

## MARIA KAPERRE

leads the Council of Churches in Namibia

Ngame okakadhona owala

Maria Kapere  
lei die Raad van Kerke in Namibië

# Dear readers

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With this issue of *Sister Namibia* we are proud to share with you some of the highlights in the twenty-year history of our magazine. It's been a long and eventful journey, with input from so many sisters – and recently a few brothers - along the way.

We also update you on our youth magazine - *REAL!* - and the Sisterhood girls' empowerment project that was instrumental in its production. A big thank you to UNICEF for sponsoring this pilot project, from which we have learnt a lot with regard to reaching out to young people through print media.

For our cover profile it was good to catch up with Maria Kapere again after so many years; we first interviewed her when she headed the Department of Women Affairs in the Office of the President – just after independence. We support her strong stance on empowering women in the churches by doing away with

hierarchical and oppressive orthodoxies. Our second profile features Michaela Clayton of the Aids and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa, who recently won an international award for her leadership and the work of her organisation.

There are also stories on the Namibian Women's Summit for entrepreneurs, suing for abortion rights in Malawi and property rights in Swaziland, standing together for peace in Liberia, and dialoguing with communities in Namibia on the interlinkages between culture, women's rights, violence and HIV/Aids. See our new section on counselling and support services that can help see us through the ongoing violations of our rights and strengthen us to fight back.

But first, join eleven-year-old photographer Jeneth Kharigus on the middle pages!

Enjoy!

## Who we are

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Sister Namibia is a feminist organisation based in Windhoek, Namibia.

Our vision is a society that recognises, protects and celebrates the full personhood of all women and girls including respect for our dignity, diversity, sexual choices and bodily integrity.

We aim to inspire and equip women to make free choices and act as agents of change in our relationships, our communities and ourselves. We are dedicated to developing a new feminist politics and consciousness. We work for transformation through education, information, collective action, and celebration.

Our current activities include publishing *Sister Namibia* magazine, presenting a weekly radio show on Base FM community radio, and campaigning for women's sexual and reproductive health and rights.

We house a resource centre with materials on feminism and gender issues at our Windhoek

office, and we have recently established a new satellite office at the Sam Nujoma Multi-Purpose Centre in Ongwediva, northern Namibia.

**Our work is sponsored by Oxfam Canada, the Heinrich Böll Foundation, OSISA, Fahamu/Sigrid Rausing Trust, Urgent Action Fund and HIVOS.**

**Board of Trustees: Dianne Hubbard, Lucy Steinitz, Rudolf Gaweseb, Sarah Taylor, Eveline January, Leigh-Anne Agnew, Liz Frank (Executive Director)**

### Sister Namibia on sale

*Sister Namibia* is on sale at the following places in Windhoek:

Book Den  
Craft Centre

New Book Cellar  
Blue Olive

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# Maria Kapere leads the Cou

By Erika von Wietersheim

“We are so proud that she defeated these powerful men and took victory! She will open many doors for women!” exclaimed pastor Magdalena Ya-Shalongo from Ongwediva in the north, when she heard that in June of this year Maria Kapere of the Africa Methodist Episcopal Church became the second woman to be elected into the post of General Secretary of the Council of Churches (CCN). Precisely a decade ago Anglican priest Nangula Kathindi became the first female General Secretary.

The Council of Churches in Namibia, founded in 1978, represents all major churches in the country. Before independence the Council strongly spoke out against the apartheid government, while after independence it has acted as an advocate for the oppressed and the poor. The Council is also regarded as and expected to be the spiritual voice of the nation, guiding and keeping a critical eye on government.

## From teaching to politics

Becoming General Secretary of a church body, or even a pastor, was never really Maria Kapere’s main purpose in life. When she completed her secondary education at St. Theresa Secondary School in Tses in the south, she went for further studies to South Africa to fulfill her dream of becoming a social worker at the University of the Western Cape. However, a year after the student uprisings in South Africa, she had to abruptly end her studies and return home. Back in Namibia she was offered a teaching post at Minna Sachs Primary School in Keetmanshoop in 1978 and later with the Rössing Foundation at Arandis Primary School. During this time she became a prominent member of the SWAPO Women’s Council, and in 1987 she was forced to resign from teaching because of her political activism.

From then on, she jumped into politics full time and stayed there for almost twenty years: she was appointed deputy head of the SWAPO election directorate to organise Namibia’s first democratic election in 1989; she also became chairperson of the Keetmanshoop branch of the SWAPO Women’s Council from 1988 to 1989. After independence she worked in the Department of Women Affairs in the Office of the President until she became Under-Secretary in the Ministry of Environment and Tourism in 1996.



Tony Figueira

## Keeping a social commitment

Though life had pushed her into politics, Maria never renounced her social commitment. She became very active in her church as an evangelist, doing outreach work among women and the youth. But also in her church her strong leadership qualities – in addition to her spiritual integrity - were soon recognised. “At a conference the bishop told me that the church was looking for a pastor and that he saw capacities in me,” Maria recounts. “At that time it was exceptional to become a woman pastor, there was only one ordained woman pastor in our church with more than 30 pastors.” Maria responded to the call of her bishop, was admitted to the Ministry as a licentiate and in 2004 became a pastor at St. Gustav AME Church, Okahandja. When two years later she was appointed as a pastor with Ebenezer AME Church in Katutura, she left the political arena.

To become the General Secretary of the CCN from the position of a rather new pastor in her church was a “huge leap”, Maria explains. “I was called to become a pastor at a very late stage in my life, and I am still learning. Therefore, sometimes I cannot believe that I am sitting here! But apparently some bishops and pastors thought I had the right qualities, and my 17 years of experience with the civil service were weighed against my inexperience as a pastor.”

# ncil of Churches in Namibia

## Building the ecumenical movement with women

Maria is known for her 'strong ecumenical heart'. For her the CCN provides a structure for churches to reach out to each other and be inclusive: "Ecumenism to me means looking at society as a whole - not only at my church or at the large and well established CCN member churches. There are hundreds of small and informal churches in Namibia, which are not part of the CCN, and we should have a vision of how to unite the whole body of Christ." She would love churches to look beyond their different church doctrines, reach out to one another and step by step attain a common understanding about the essence of their Christian faith. "From there," she says, "we should also reach out to other religions, to hear what they have to say and to find common ground so that we can focus together on really urgent issues."

Women's issues have also always been close to her heart, both as a politician and as a pastor, Maria emphasises. As head of the Department of Women's Affairs she crisscrossed the country to establish mechanisms for the appointment of women coordinators in government structures, and also as a pastor she headed the Women in Ministry department in her church: "It was always important to me to develop the skills of female theologians and local church stewardesses."

Maria would like to revive an ecumenical women church movement, which in the past failed to find ground. "My vision is to enable women to organise themselves at community level in local ecumenical church groups that can engage with government action plans," she explains. "We have stayed too much inside our churches and have neglected to develop close ties with our communities." She sees the urgent need for community orientated educational programmes in order to tackle social problems such as domestic violence, alcohol abuse and unemployment.

## Teaching a theology of liberation

With respect to gender equality, Maria points out that at the time of creation, women were probably much freer of oppression and enslavement than today: "The oppression of women only came as civilisation developed and established all kinds of rules and laws, and also our churches are built on decisions taken

by human beings and councils centuries ago. Each church therefore needs to revisit these decisions and doctrines, and assess if these decisions still matter and are applicable in today's context."

Maria is emphatic that from a Christian perspective, women are as gifted with spiritual and intellectual talents as men, quoting Genesis 1:26-27: *God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.* She feels that women might have even felt a stronger connection to Christ than men, which becomes clear in the newly-discovered Gospel of Mary, where Mary Magdalene is portrayed as a favoured disciple of Jesus and later as his apostle. "We women should therefore learn to appreciate ourselves, to love ourselves as creations of God, to lift each other up and support each other."

Maria is strongly inspired by her understanding that Jesus Christ brought a totally new dimension into human society. "Christ wanted human beings to see themselves as free creatures, liberated from dehumanising and enslaving laws, and to address all evils from this perspective." She regrets that human beings continue to bestow oppressive and discriminatory laws and rules on themselves, often using the Bible to justify their actions. "When the Bible was written, it was written for certain people living in a certain context. But we, living today in a totally different context, have to look at the essence of the Christian message which is that Christ freed us from all cultural, gender, racial and social boundaries and from all discrimination." This includes all people, also gays and lesbians, she adds. "The church is not excluding them, there should be no judgment and condemnation; all people should be embraced with compassion."

With respect to the future, Maria is confident that her experience as a civil servant will help her to run a huge organisation like the CCN, to manage staff and to develop and implement action plans. "I have this experience and I will use it," she emphasises. But her main mission is to organise training seminars and meetings, where pastors as well as community members can learn to gain a true understanding of the liberating power of the Christian faith so that they can help build a strong and peaceful society without discrimination and oppression. "I think it was God's will that I was placed into this position, and now I have to take up the challenge, a big one indeed." ♀

# Sister Namibia magazine

## A platform for the voices of women

By Liz Frank

The first issue of *Sister Namibia* hit the streets of Windhoek in July 1989, produced by Estelle Coetzee, Nicky Marais, Ayesha Rajah, Jo Rogge and Wiebke Volkmann. They had joined together to form the Sister Collective, an autonomous not-for-profit organisation committed to providing a platform for women's voices in the transition to national independence and beyond.

### WE ARE ORGANISING

Here it is !  
The first copy of **SISTER** - a magazine for women in Namibia.

As independence for Namibia becomes a reality, we are pleased to notice that all across the country, groups of women are speaking out, to make their demands for peace and justice known.

Women have been almost completely written out of history, and their voices have been silenced for too long - at home, in the workplace, in churches, in the courts of law. We are organising to change this.

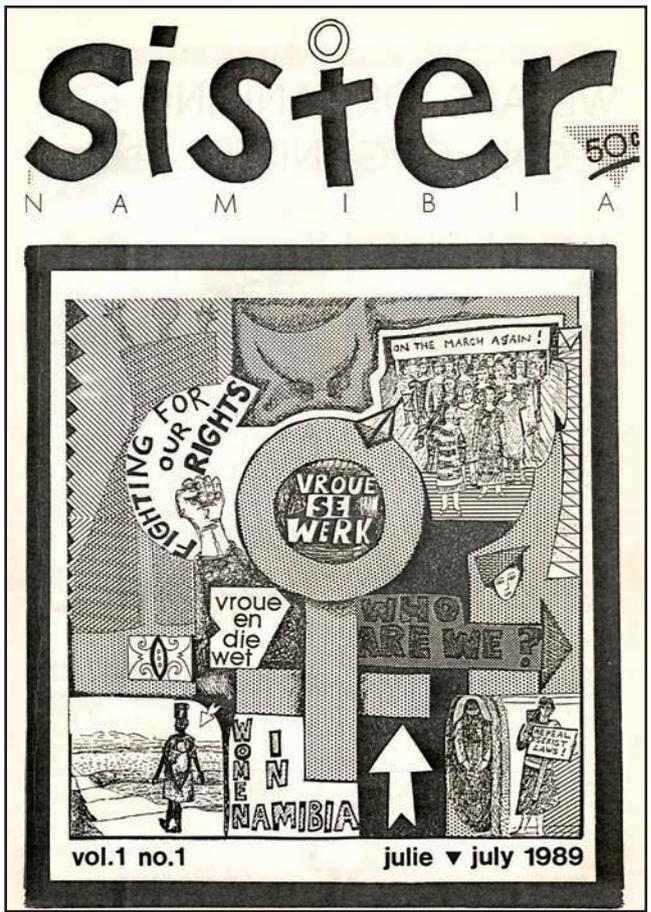
► **SISTER** rejects the oppression of and discrimination against women on all levels and wherever it may occur. We aim to address issues that affect us as women in our immediate political, social, economic, cultural and legal situations. We will make our voices heard.

► **SISTER** also aims to provide a forum for debate on women's issues and we invite comment and contributions on this subject from all sources.



The Sister Collective was soon joined by more women who wanted to write for the magazine, and we met once a week to plan forthcoming issues, share and critique our texts, do the layout and develop funding proposals. We started to build up a resource centre with feminist texts from around the world, and those who were there at the time fondly remember our reading nights, at which we would share readings from our favourite authors and our own creative writings.

For the first two years, all our work was on a voluntary basis and we covered the printing costs through sales of the magazines and donations, but from 1992 we began to receive funding and were able to open an office and employ staff. Our first funds came from Oxfam Canada and the Frauenanstiftung, a German feminist agency now integrated into the Heinrich Boell Foundation. We are grateful that both



## ♀ WELCOME HOME ♀

**SISTER** warmly welcomes back all returnees who were forced to spend years in exile in foreign countries to escape the iron hand of the racist South African regime.

Your motherland is happy to have you back.

Approximately two thirds of the returnees are women and children. We, as sisters must offer the hospitality of our homes and organisations to them.

We hope that the women, with the skills and knowledge that they have acquired in other countries, will teach us and that we will learn from each other so that together we can build a better future.

organisations still staunchly support our work, 18 years on! HIVOS is now co-funding the magazine.

Developing our skills as writers, graphic designers and photographers was an important goal for the collective, and we organised a number of workshops in these fields which improved our inputs to the magazine. While most of the writing continued to be done by the volunteers, staff did the layout and the distribution of the magazine: to subscribers, through shop and street sales as well as through outreach trips to women's groups and organisations in various parts of the country, from which they brought back stories to feature in the magazine.



**Namibian women- pick up your pens! Members of Sister Namibia Collective at a writing workshop conducted by the Congress of South African Writers in 1992**

In 1993 we held a five-day Women's Cultural Festival with films, an art exhibition, and workshops and performances of dance and drama and poetry. For our fifth anniversary in 1994 we held a women's soccer

match, invited women photographers to participate in a photo exhibition, and published an anthology of poetry and short stories from the magazine – see below.

## A new initiation song Writings by women in Namibia

**Sister Namibia Collective 1994**

The sixty-two poems and prose pieces in this anthology trace the collective's growth in confidence and militant consciousness, and vividly reflect the magazine's outstanding characteristics: pride in female identity, aliveness to the issues being addressed in the women's movement world-wide; and above all, a vivid concern with the hardships and injustices suffered by Namibian women in their daily lives and intimate relationships...

For an old poem watcher like me, it is a great joy to be able to praise without reserve a volume of poems which are true in the sense defined by the old Chinese masters who declared that a poem is true – that is 'good' or 'beautiful' if the emotions are real; the setting is real; the facts are real; the thoughts are real. These poems are poetic by that definition. They are not 'poetic' in the sense of finely spun and layered constructions, they are robust tools and weapons in a struggle for transformation.

It is often remarked that the greatest challenge facing women poets is the liberating of a man-made language – cleansing it of all the inbuilt and accreted impurities, making it adequate to what women see, feel, think



and desire once they dare to do so afresh, beyond the net of man-made words. It will be a long struggle, this finding and shaping of a women's language to express women's dreaming. Sister Namibia is well on the way. ♀

Extracts from a review by Professor Annemarie Heywood  
Sister Namibia Vol 6 # 5 & 6, Dec 1994

# Sister Namibia magazine...

the story continues

We recently received the following request from the librarian at the National English Literary Museum, Grahamstown, South Africa, whose institution has been subscribing to *Sister Namibia* for many years: *I have just been visiting the University of South Africa Library and while I was there I browsed through their holdings of Sister Namibia volumes 1 to 7, which we don't have. Would it be possible for us to purchase copies of all the back issues for volumes 1 to 7? There is so much relevant material that we really should have a full set.*

## A magazine with a long shelf life

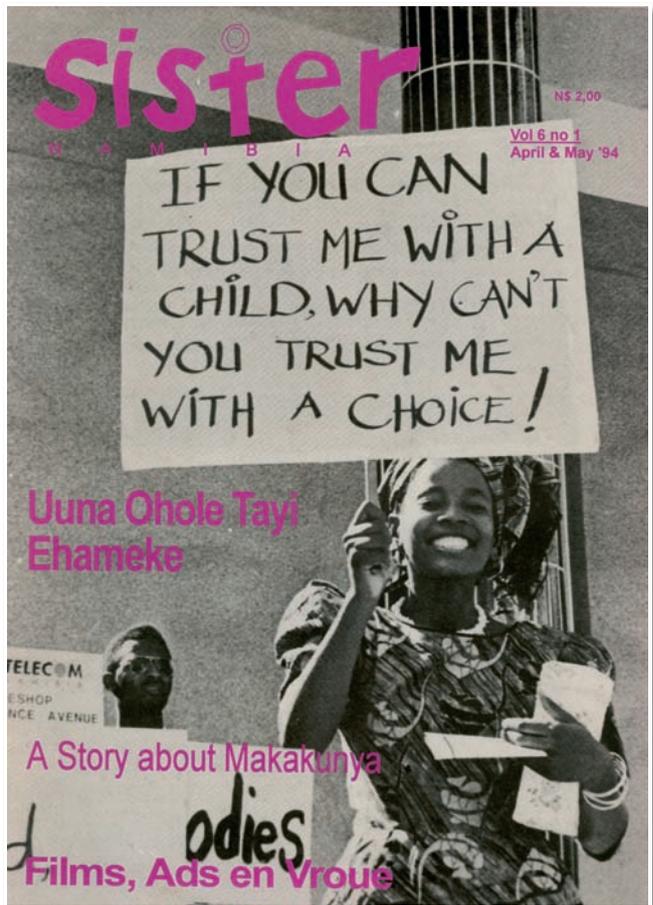
Looking back at those early volumes of *Sister Namibia*, it is indeed interesting to see that we broached many of the issues we are still tackling today, such as women's reproductive health and rights including abortion, violence against women, and poverty, while also documenting Namibia's transition to national independence, including women's rights under the new constitution and the International Women's Day celebrations that brought women together once a year across party lines and other divides.

We had a strong focus on women in domestic work and agriculture, celebrated writers such as Bessie Head and Audre Lorde, and our first regular columns were **Fighting Women Then and Now**, profiling women who had fought for independence both inside and outside the country, and **Reclaiming History** featuring Chieftainess Kanuni, Johanna Urieta Gertze and others. We soon added regular book reviews, news clippings, the letters page, as well as features on law reform, women's projects and profiles of **Women on the Move**.

## Documenting our activism

Over the years we have documented the major campaigns of the Namibian women's movement, including the march for law reform on abortion held in 1994, the "Black Thursday" vigils held outside the Windhoek High Court protesting the rising tide of violence against women and children, and the marches organised by the Multi-media Campaign on Violence against Women and Children for law reform on domestic violence and rape.

From 1999 to 2004 the 50/50 Campaign on Women's Political Empowerment featured regularly



Sister Namibia Vol 6 no 1, April 1994

in the magazine, as did the Human Rights Awareness Weeks conducted by Sister Namibia and the rainbow project, sometimes in partnership with other human rights organisations, calling for the promotion and protection of the equal human rights of people with diverse sexualities and genders. We will revisit these campaigns in our next issue of *Sister Namibia*.

## Adding new sections

Over the past ten years we have added new sections to the magazine: the regular cover profile stories featuring women leaders from different walks of life and social arenas, who have been an inspiration to many of our readers; the middle pages showcasing women's creative talent in the arts and crafts; the Brother Namibia section which challenges mainstream masculinities; and the Feminist Forum, a space for opinion and debate on moving the 'gender agenda' forward in search of radical social transformation 'beyond gender'. Through the Internet and the many listservs set up by women's groups we are now also able to regularly tap in to the situation and struggles of women in other societies around the globe.

## Who reads *Sister Namibia*?

In the early years our focus was on selling the magazine through subscriptions, bookshops, the Windhoek street market, and using the outreach trips to find women in other regions willing to sell our product. With a print run of 2000 copies it was difficult to become known outside the women's movement and women's projects.

In 1999 we increased the print run to 8000 copies which we distributed as inserts to *The Namibian* newspaper, targeting the major towns across the country but also smaller places. This brought us an increase in subscribers, and we started becoming a household name. However, some of the retailers took the inserts out of the newspapers and started selling them for their own profit. While this proved the point that we were producing a marketable product, it defeated our aim of reaching those who were not able to afford buying our magazine.



Contributed

**Young readers of Sister/Brother Namibia in Kamanjab, who received their copies through Ombetja Yehinga Organisation**

We changed strategies again and set up our own distribution system to make sure we reach our target audiences – and our distribution list grows with every issue of the magazine as we identify new groups of recipients. We currently distribute 9000 copies per issue.

### A targeted distribution

*Sister Namibia* goes to the more than 60 community libraries and all the secondary and combined school libraries around the country, as well as into women's libraries and archives and some university libraries on all continents. We further distribute to all members of parliament in Namibia, regional and local councillors, traditional authorities, staff at the gender ministry in Windhoek and the regions, as well as to Namibian embassies abroad and foreign embassies in Namibia.

All the colleges of education, vocational training centres, multi-purpose youth centres and teachers

resource centres receive copies, as do the media departments at tertiary institutions, residents at Osire refugee camp and inmates at the women's police holding cells. Beyond this, the number of Windhoek-based NGOs, cultural centres and health facilities distributing our magazine has now reached over 70 and they distribute altogether approximately 5,000 copies per issue to their staff and constituencies in various regions of the country. For the schools and other educational institutions we provide an educational supplement with each issue, containing reading comprehension and critical thinking questions, ideas for creative expression as well as other suggestions for activities teachers and peer educators can use with students to discuss issues raised in the magazine.

The AfricaFiles website based in Canada regularly posts stories from our magazine and sends them out to readers subscribed to their gender listserv. We are also subscribed to two web publishing companies that post selected stories, for which we received royalties when downloaded. We are currently establishing our own website – at last! and will archive the key stories from twenty years of *Sister Namibia* magazine. ♀

## Some recent feedback from our readers

*Since my story was published in Sister Namibia, I have been able to confront my past. Although my family was unhappy about what I revealed, I am happy because I have shared my story, my truth.* Reader in Rundu

*It's such a nice magazine. It encourages me a lot.* Client at the New Start Voluntary Counselling and Testing Centre in Katutura

*It's a good thing that they have articles in Oshiwambo and Afrikaans also; we don't all speak English.* DOTS patient at Aids Care Trust, Katutura

*Where's the men's section? I know that there is now a men's section in this magazine.* Reader in Katutura

*When I read Sister Namibia I just have to cry. I am so inspired by the stories. I have started leading a discussion group with the women I work with at the lodge.* Reader in Kunene Region

*We from the rural areas want to thank Sister Namibia. We get the magazine also on the farms without paying for it, and it always has stories and articles from which we learn a lot.* Reader in Kamanjab

*I've collected every single issue of the magazine since it started, except for the first one.* Reader in Windhoek

# Young women telling *REAL!* stories



Ricky Khaxab

The *REAL!* team visiting Base FM community radio in Katutura

*I never really had a vision in life, I never dreamed but since I came here, I realised that things are possible if you dream.*

*Usually I stay with my mum and my brother. As a guy he would always tell me what to do and boss me around but as I got here, I learnt how to defend myself, speak out at home and tell him what he is doing is wrong. I learnt that we are all equal - women and men.*

*I was never able to do team work and here I learnt how to co-operate and communicate with people.*

*This is the only place I can express myself fully.*

These were some of the comments made by the members of Sisterhood, a girls' empowerment project run by Sister Namibia over the past year. This was a pilot project run in conjunction with the development and production of four issues of the youth magazine *REAL!* targeting girls and young women aged fourteen to twenty. The aim of the project was to create a magazine that would express the opinions, ideas and creativity of young women while at the same time providing them with important information that they need to make positive and healthy choices in their lives.

## The Sisterhood

For the magazines' objectives to be reached, young women had to be involved in all phases of the process, including the choice of a name, deciding which issues

to tackle and stories to tell, as well as writing, taking photographs, contributing artwork and taking part in the distribution process. For this purpose, the girl's empowerment programme called Sisterhood was created in July 2008. Sisterhood members came from various high schools and other educational institutions in Windhoek. They met in the Sister Namibia resource centre once a week to discuss issues, grow their feminist consciousness and work on the magazine.

Through Sisterhood, these young women were trained in a range of exciting and important skills necessary for the production of *REAL!* magazine. Activities included a photography workshop, discussions on human rights issues, training in how to write opinion pieces, and learning how to use satire and cartooning to illustrate controversial yet important issues. They helped to determine the layout of the magazine and the different sections that it should contain.

The participants became very engaged with the process and would spend hours working either as individuals or in teams, coming up with ideas for stories or art and photos that could be used. They visited the Gender Research and Advocacy Project of the Legal Assistance Centre to learn more about their rights, and were introduced to the key issues in the Children's Status Bill. They also visited the Women's Leadership Centre and learnt about the power of writing in women's lives. They watched films and attended local theatre productions and an art exhibition.

In the Sisterhood programme, the young women found a safe space, free of prejudice and judgment, where they could also share and discuss their personal issues and receive guidance and advice. It was through this process of sharing that many of the topics for the magazine came to be. The girls acquired skills not only for the magazine but for their personal lives as well. One participant said, “I used to think being a journalist was an easy task, but when I did the story on the young woman living with HIV in America, I realised that this is a lot of work. Just being in this **REAL!** team I realised things don’t come easily; we need to work for them.”

## Challenges and achievements

When the Sisterhood programme began, it had a sixteen-strong team of enthusiastic and eager young women from different parts of Windhoek with different backgrounds. These young women were very excited at the opportunity and thought that an initiative such as this had been a long time coming. However, as time progressed, Sisterhood saw girls dropping out of the programme due to prior commitments, family obligations, and the challenge of balancing school with a demanding extra-curricular activity. This was an eye opening moment for the programme where we saw just how hard it is for young women to get time for themselves to spend on things that they enjoy doing. The magazine team came down to five young women, fully dedicated to **REAL!** and each other.

Despite these challenges, four issues of **REAL!** were produced and distributed to NGOs and community groups working with young people, as well as to secondary and combined schools throughout the country. Favourite topics among the Sisterhood members and the readers included *To Be or Not to Be*, a story about self-determination and avoiding the pressures of pop culture; *True Friendship*; *What Makes you Beautiful?* and *Who do you Admire?* They also loved the quizzes that included topics such as *Are you Ready for Sex?* and *Which Career is Right for You?* and got a lot of inspiration from the posters in the middle pages and on the back cover. The *Dear Diary* section was also a favourite as it gave the readers a chance to reflect on the issues in the magazine more deeply, and the creative writing was a hit.

## Inspiring and empowering

Aside from the production of four issues of **REAL!**, a well attended launch, and a lot of fun, one of the biggest achievements of this programme was thus the sense of empowerment it instilled in the participants and in the readers. “Every wall is a mountain and the

higher one climbs, the further one sees into the future,” said one participant, quoting one of the inspirational messages that had made it to the back cover of **REAL!** Almost 200 hundred readers joined up to receive an inspirational quote via SMS every Monday, and some of them sent us messages in return:

*The magazine really touched my heart and built up my self-esteem.*

*Keep rocking Namibia, we really need it!*

*Thanks for your inspiring messages, you are my light and give me power every week.*

In focus groups we also asked some of our readers how they felt after reading **REAL!** Some of their responses were:

*I felt renewed and regained my self-confidence.*

*I felt inspired and feel good that I am a woman.*

*I feel motivated and have high self-confidence to be a girl and have a dream of making changes all over.*

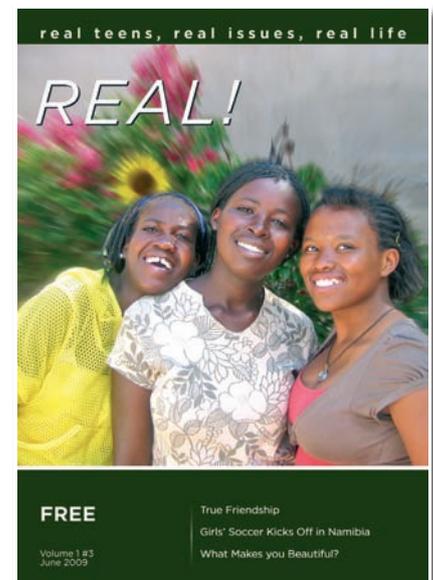
## A **REAL!** future

This one-year pilot project came to a close in July 2009.

The participants have been inspired by this year and have big ideas for going forward. “I am proud just to see how far we’ve come with these four

issues. I know we could continue to do a lot better,” said one of the girls. “I want this project to be in all thirteen regions and why stop with a magazine? We could do drama, plays, poetry and anything else that includes media,” said another. “Coming to an end, I think it has been a long journey. We have learnt a lot and we have gained a lot of experience. We would love to see our magazine read by the youth all over Africa and the world. We just hope that our magazine continues.”

While this may not be possible due to issues of staff and funding, *Sister Namibia* magazine will reserve a few pages in each issue for contributions by young women from the Sisterhood programme and others. A big thank you to UNICEF for initiating and funding this pilot project! It helped us to reach out to the next generation of young feminists. ♀



# Michaela Clayton stands for a human rights approach to HIV and Aids

By Sheena Magenya

In June this year, Michaela Clayton, director and co-founder of the AIDS and Rights Alliance of Southern Africa (ARASA), was awarded the prestigious 2009 International Award for Action on HIV/Aids and Human Rights. The award, given annually since 2002, recognises outstanding individuals and organisations that protect the rights and dignity of people living with or affected by HIV and Aids. *Sister Namibia* caught up with Michaela to find out more about ARASA, her feelings about the award, and ARASA's work on addressing women's issues in relation to HIV.

**Sister Namibia (SN): How do you feel about the award?**

**Michaela Clayton (MC):** I think it's a great recognition of the hard work done by a lot of people in Southern Africa over the last fifteen to twenty years. At the awards ceremony in Toronto I made it clear that I was accepting it on behalf of all the people and organisations that I have worked with over the years. The award was and is not about me, because you just cannot do this kind of work on your own.

One of the advantages of getting an award like this is that it raises the profile of the organisation and its partners in Southern Africa, and of the work that's being done around HIV and human rights. After the awards ceremony I participated in a symposium for lawyers on HIV and human rights in Canada, and then did a speaking tour through New York and Washington, where I met with a number of senators' aides which was quite fascinating. I think it was important that people got to know this kind of work is being done here.

**SN: Is ARASA a one-of-a-kind organisation in Southern Africa? How did it come into being?**

**MC:** It is actually the only regional organisation that focuses on HIV and human rights. ARASA started when we convened a meeting in September 2002 in Windhoek for people to come together from across the region to share what was going on around HIV and human rights. About sixty people attended from Southern and East Africa, and we learnt that there were a lot of organisations doing care and support around HIV, a few were providing legal services, but only one or two were focusing on HIV



Awarded for leadership - Michaela Clayton of ARASA

Contributed

and human rights. The meeting identified the need to establish a partnership of organisations where the more experienced organisations like the AIDS Law Project in South Africa and the AIDS Law Unit at the Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) in Namibia build the capacity of the less experienced organisations that wanted to do more work on HIV and human rights.

ARASA started as a partnership of five core organisations in 2002 and was at that time a project of the AIDS Law Unit at the LAC. But over the years the membership grew and we had to establish a separate organisation. We now have 45 partners.

**SN: How has the issue of human rights and HIV been taken up since ARASA started?**

**MC:** I started working on HIV and human rights in 1989, before Namibia's independence. Then it was completely new and there was nothing written about it, as I discovered when I was invited to address a group of doctors about HIV and human rights. In those days the work we were doing was mainly focused on people who had been detained in terms of security legislation before independence, and people who had been tortured in detention. But through this invitation my interest was kindled and just grew from there.

Our initial approach as lawyers working on HIV was to focus on the individual rights of our clients, including issues of confidentiality, consent, of discrimination in the workplace and access to healthcare, and those issues are still there. But over the years we have realised that it's not enough to just look at the manifestations of discrimination or human rights violations based on a person's HIV status.

Our perspective shifted to that of human rights lawyers, as we began to look more broadly at the issue of socio-economic rights, the denial of which fuel the epidemic. This means, for example, analysing what makes women more vulnerable to HIV than men: looking at issues such as women’s limited ability to access credit and to achieve inheritance rights, as well as at cultural practices that put women at risk of HIV infection.

The issues here are so vast that you are basically looking at changing the world order, in terms of discrimination on the basis of gender and of poverty. What fascinates me about HIV and human rights is that it is so multi-faceted, and that is what makes it so challenging. There are so many different coalfaces that you need to work at in order to effectively address the epidemic.

Has there been an improvement in human rights in the context of HIV? I think generally - on paper - yes. If you look through the region, and specifically at Namibia, the policies and strategic plans we have in place all say the right things about non-discrimination and human rights. But if you look at how that translates into practice, people are still being discriminated against on the basis of their HIV status and their gender.

**SN: Does ARASA’s work focus on women in Namibia?**

**MC:** Yes it does, it is very important for us to focus on women’s issues. In fact, one of our key advocacy initiatives at the moment is looking at sexual and reproductive health rights with a focus on women in the region. In a meeting in September last year we brought a lot of people together from the different countries in Southern Africa to identify what we considered to be important issues on the topic of sexual and reproductive health rights. Out of that meeting we synthesised key issues we wanted to focus on as a group in terms of an advocacy agenda for the region. We are also looking at issues

of fundamental gender inequalities, and not just regarding laws and policies, because most countries have laws and policies that prohibit discrimination based on gender, but culturally and socially it will take much longer than that.

**SN: Where to from here? What can we look forward to from ARASA in the future?**

**MC:** I would like to see the concept of ARASA and our model of establishing partnerships for capacity building expanded into East Africa and West Africa, because it really does work. Also, the more partners we get on board the more visible our work becomes. I hope that ARASA is going to continue promoting a human rights based response to HIV, and that people will find the model useful, not just in Africa but the rest of the world as well. ♀

Sister Namibia congratulates ARASA, its partner organisations and Michaela Clayton on the award.

## Rwanda’s reproductive health bill violates human rights

Human Rights Watch said that Rwanda’s recently drafted reproductive health bill contains three troublesome provisions related to HIV testing. First it provides that all individuals who plan to marry must undergo HIV testing and provide a certificate beforehand. Second, married individuals are required to be tested for HIV upon the request of their spouses. Third, if a physician finds it “necessary” for a child or an incapacitated person to be tested for HIV, he or she may conduct the test without seeking consent and may show the result to the parent, guardian, or care provider.

Mandatory HIV testing and disclosure have been condemned as violations of the right to privacy and counterproductive to effective HIV and Aids control. It puts women at increased risk of abuse and undermines public trust in the health care system. Research by Human Rights Watch on HIV testing has documented significant abuses associated with coercive testing programmes.

The proposed bill also obligates the Rwandan Government “to suspend fertility for mentally handicapped people.” Systematic, forced sterilisation has been recognised as a crime against humanity by the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court.

Source: Human Rights Watch



# Malawi government sued over abortion rights

By Pilirani Semu-Banda

An influential women's rights organisation, Women in Law in Southern Africa-Malawi (WILSA-Malawi), is suing the government of Malawi for preventing women from accessing safe abortion. Malawian law prohibits abortion - Section 149 of the country's penal code says any person who administers abortion shall be liable to imprisonment for 14 years, while Section 150 indicates that any woman who solicits abortion is liable to seven years imprisonment.

But WILSA-Malawi's executive director, Seodi White, says these laws infringe on women's rights. She says they force women to seek back-street abortions from traditional healers and illegal clinics, thereby putting their lives in danger. "These laws do not make sense at all. They are contributing towards the death of so many women. We need to get rid of them as soon as possible," urged White.

## Denying abortion rights is discrimination against women

Government statistics in Malawi indicate that up to 30 percent of maternal deaths in the country are due to unsafe abortion. Malawi's maternal mortality is one of the highest in Africa - second only to war-torn Sierra Leone. White says refusing women the right to abort is discrimination. "Access to legal and safe abortion services is essential to the protection of women's rights to non-discrimination and equality. Where women are compelled to continue unwanted pregnancies, it puts them at a disadvantage because abortion is a medical procedure that only women need."

White argues that the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has implied that the denial of medical procedures that only women need is a form of discrimination against women. "Therefore, restrictive abortion laws may amount in certain cases to discrimination against women," she concluded.

WILSA-Malawi is also contending that when pregnancy is unwanted, a legal requirement to continue the pregnancy may constitute government intrusion on a woman's body. "We are therefore taking the Malawi government to court for failing to protect the women in the country," explained White.

## Support from the human rights sector

A number of other organisations have joined WILSA-Malawi in the debate on unsafe abortion. The Malawi Human Rights Commission (MHRC), a government body working on developing and sustaining a culture of respect for human rights among all people in Malawi, indicated that one of the issues the country needs to tackle is abortion.

"This is part of addressing reproductive and sexual health rights of all Malawians. This is important, because there is overwhelming evidence of dangerous termination of pregnancies among women and girl children of Malawi," said MHRC executive director Dr. Aubrey Mvula.

He says the initiative is in line with global women's rights protocols, such as the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) and the Beijing Declaration and its Platform of Action. ICPD objectives include universal access to reproductive care services, while the Beijing Declaration urges governments to review laws that contain punitive measures against women who undergo illegal abortion.

Mvula stressed the fact that international human rights law supports the right to terminate pregnancy to promote and protect other human rights. "Therefore, MHRC submits that Malawi needs to move forward and significantly promote the health of women and the girl child by making sure that all pregnancies acquired through unwanted, ill-advised and accidental sexual activities or economic problems may be terminated on that basis," he said.

## Unsafe abortions are rampant in Malawi

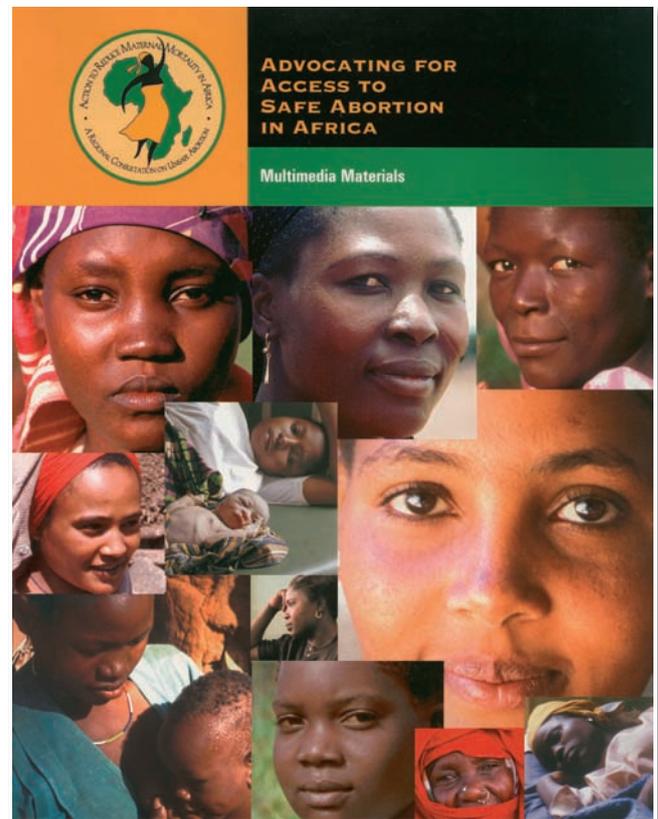
In response to the demands by MHRC and WILSA-Malawi, the Reproductive Health Unit (RHU) within Malawi's Department of Health admitted that unsafe abortions are rampant in the country. RHU deputy director Fannie Kachale explained that while the government of Malawi does not permit abortion, it indirectly acknowledges the fact that illegal abortions take place, because it provides post-abortion care to women who underwent abortions and have developed complications.

As the example of Malawi shows, making abortion illegal does not prevent them from happening. “Where safe abortion is unavailable, women go for unsafe abortion through the ingestion of herbs, bleach, gasoline and gun powder. Others go for vaginal insertions of sharp tools such as twigs and pouches filled with arsenic,” explained Dr Eunice Brookman-Amissah, vice president of IPAS Africa. Some women have also been reported to hit themselves into the stomach, while others throw themselves from high places to abort the foetus. According to IPAS, apart from death, consequences of unsafe abortion include significant short and long-term illness, injury and infertility.

### The benefits of safe and legal abortion

According to Dr Brookman-Amissah, women usually have valid and important reasons for abortion. “Women tend to seek abortions when pregnancies are not supported by their partners, families or communities, when the pregnancy may threaten the woman’s health or survival or when the foetus has abnormalities. It’s not for immoral reasons,” she said.

Dr Brookman-Amissah also explained that the medical process of abortion is usually simpler and cheaper than post-abortion care. “Induced abortion is one of the safest medical procedures. But with unsafe abortion, women easily develop complications, such as hemorrhage, infections, incomplete abortion and secondary infertility. These conditions are very expensive to treat.” ▶▶



The Sister Namibia Resource Centre holds a collection of materials on abortion issues in Africa.

RHU deputy director Fannie Kachale pointed out that most countries with low maternal death rates, such as South Africa and Ghana, have permitted induced abortion, and that legalising abortion has not led to increased numbers of abortions in those countries. “It has just shifted numbers from unsafe to safe abortions,” she said. ♀

Source: IPS/Pambazuka News 430. The story has been shortened.

## Saving women’s health and lives from unsafe abortion

In March 2003, more than 100 leaders from 15 African countries came together in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to deliberate on the causes and effects of unsafe abortion, which results in the deaths of about 30,000 African women each year. The conference ended with a communiqué that stated: “We recognise that, worldwide, restrictive abortion laws and lack of safe abortion services are major factors contributing to the disproportionately high mortality of women from unsafe abortions. Most African countries operate under archaic abortion laws that were imposed by former colonial powers and which have long since been changed in those countries. In most countries where abortion laws are liberalised, there are almost no deaths from unsafe abortions.”

A Namibian hospital-based study on abortion launched in 2002 found that women in all regions of the country resort to horrendous methods to abort unwanted pregnancies. The most common reasons

given were: being rejected by their male partner, being too young or still in school. Some of the married women said that they already had a number of children but their husbands disapproved of contraceptives and wanted more children.



Former Minister of Health and Social Services, Dr Libertina Amathila, presenting the findings of a Namibian study on abortion at the “Action to Reduce Maternal Mortality in Africa” conference in Addis Ababa in 2003

Liz Frank

# Changing the river's flow

By Justina Shivolo

**S**AfAIDS (Southern Africa HIV and AIDS Information Dissemination Services) is a regional organisation aimed at addressing the HIV epidemic through information dissemination. The organisation has embarked upon a project called Changing the River's Flow, which aims to challenge gender dynamics in a cultural context to address HIV in a number of countries in the region.

As the name denotes, this project is about changing the flow of the river in which we all are swimming. For years now, mass media and educational prevention campaigns focusing on ABC messages - Abstinence, Being Faithful and Condomising - have hardly impacted the rates of infection. Is there something not being addressed or where does the problem lie?

## Shifting the focus to culture and women's rights

The Changing the River's Flow project takes a different angle to addressing the issue of HIV and AIDS by targeting the inter-linkages that exist between harmful cultural practices, gender based violence, women's rights and HIV, which have been left out of most programming - apart from the work done by local feminist organisations such as Sister Namibia and Women's Leadership Centre.

Four Namibian organisations are partnering with SAfAIDS to implement the project in Namibia. These are Aids Care Trust, Tonata, Namibian Women's Health Network and Pots of Hope. Sister Namibia will play a supportive role. A training of trainers workshop was held in August in Windhoek by SAfAIDS and the Namibian partners for 20 staff of their own and other organisations who will now train community based volunteers to carry out the work at the local level.

## Unpacking culture

At the workshop, the concept of culture was defined as people's way of living and socialisation. This includes both the traditional cultures and popular culture. Culture has defined women and men differently, and their roles are divided according to their gender. It was identified that the division of roles between women and men has caused inequality between the two genders, and this contributes greatly to violence against women.



Liz Frank

**Men exploring social and sexual expectations towards women at the SAfAIDS workshop on culture, women's rights, violence and HIV/Aids**

An interesting activity was done at the workshop, whereby the men were given an opportunity to explore women's roles, and the women explored men's roles in society, as well as in the bedroom. Some of the differences that were mentioned were: men are expected to be strong physically and make decisions, whereas women are expected to be neat, give sex to their male partner or husband whenever asked, and they are supposed to smile in bed, show sexual pleasure, and respect men's decisions.

These roles place women into a subordinate position to men, and this can have a great impact on the violation of women's rights. Since men are seen as the decision makers, they are expected to make decisions, and women should follow. And since women are not expected to talk back to men, they risk accepting all decisions made by men, including decisions made only in the interest of men, and that may be detrimental to women's lives. If women talk back in an attempt to challenge the decisions made by men, they risk being beaten up. With this situation, women may find themselves in a situation where they cannot even control their sexual lives, and are therefore at risk of contracting HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

## Working together to transform cultures

The Namibian partners agreed to work together to facilitate community dialogues that will enable women and men in various local communities to explore their own cultural practices, so as to identify those that contribute to the chain of gender based violence and other violations of women's rights that fuel HIV. The aim is for communities to challenge these practices themselves, and find their own solutions to problems caused by culture. ♀

# Women mean business

## Reflections on the Namibian Women's Summit 2009

By Florence IKhaxas

When I arrived at the National Theatre of Namibia for the official opening of the Namibian Women's Summit 2009 my mind was hungry, thirsty like a sponge longing for water. I wanted to absorb information and get inspired. I am happy to say that's exactly what I got and more. Surrounded by strong women leaders, I felt so proud to be a Namibian young woman.

For me the highlight of the Summit was the performance of *The Vagina Monologues*, staged by the two powerful, courageous and talented actresses, Frieda Karipi and Sampa Kangwa-Wilkie. It gave me so much confidence to go home and have a vagina discussion with my partner – about what my vagina needs and wants. And to appreciate, honour and love even more the other vagina in my life. I highly recommend all Namibian men to see the play – and all lesbians, oppressed wives and girlfriends. Because I believe that a woman who knows what she wants, enjoys the pleasure of getting what she wants and needs. So speak out, ladies!

### Knowledge is power

The second day of the summit was much more serious. As a budding young entrepreneur and artist, I needed to listen. Not only to listen but to seek advice, ask as many questions as possible. The theme at the 2009 Summit was "Knowledge is Power".

Dr. Sharon Freedman, an entrepreneur from the US, advised us to always be on the look-out for business opportunities in our communities, do research and surround ourselves with people who are positive and support our ideas.

Namibian business woman Martha Namundjebo-Tilahun said that as entrepreneurs we must reach for our dreams and search to realise our goals. To sum it up - HARD WORK, FOCUS and DETERMINATION will take you places.

### Balancing our lives

Dr Christina Swart-Opperman spoke about how to balance one's life, and it made me realise how I sometimes tend to juggle too many things in my life - which is not helpful. There is a need for work - life balance!



Participants of the Namibian Women's Summit

Thea Visser

The third and last day of the Namibian Women's Summit was the most informative. We also discussed our problems and needs for future summits. Many women wanted topics included such as HIV and Aids, poverty, women's rights and their violation, and an empowerment programme for young women. They also wanted various mentoring workshops in all parts of Namibia. There was also a lot of praise for the Summit organisers. Each of us benefitted more than we had expected.

### Growing from our roots

The last speaker was Dieda Storfberg, a life coach. Her inspirational speech was regarded as very valuable by many women. I regard the speech as the root from which a tree develops. She encouraged all of us to become the better version of ourselves, getting to know ourselves and to become better leaders. She talked about making time for oneself, listening to one's own heart, needs and desires and doing meditation to relax and become connected with oneself.

### Inspiring others

I was able to ask whatever I did not understand. I took with myself that success can't be reached alone - that I need other people to succeed with me. I learned to be myself, a woman and be good at it. As women we have arrived in Namibia and our voices are changing and developing this nation. We can be any thing we want! I can't wait to put all the great advice and ideas I got at the Namibian Women Summit into action.

I am starting to reach for my dreams by reflecting on my experience through writing and inspiring other young women. ♀



# Sharing my world through photography

By Jeneth Kharigus

My name is Kansis Jeneth Kharigus. I was born in 1997 in Rehoboth, where I started my school career at Rehoboth Pre-Primary School up to grade one, while I was staying with my grandma and my aunt at my father's side.

Then my mother brought me to Gobabis, where I am now in Grade 6 at Rakutuka Primary School. I will be twelve years old in September. I am interested in trying out anything crossing my path; this is how I started with photography with Ms Amanda Miller from Peace Corps, in the project "My Namibia". In the first two months I have already taken 500 digital photos.

I would like to further my studies in this field, as well in the arts, drama and modeling.

*Kansis Jeneth Kharigus*

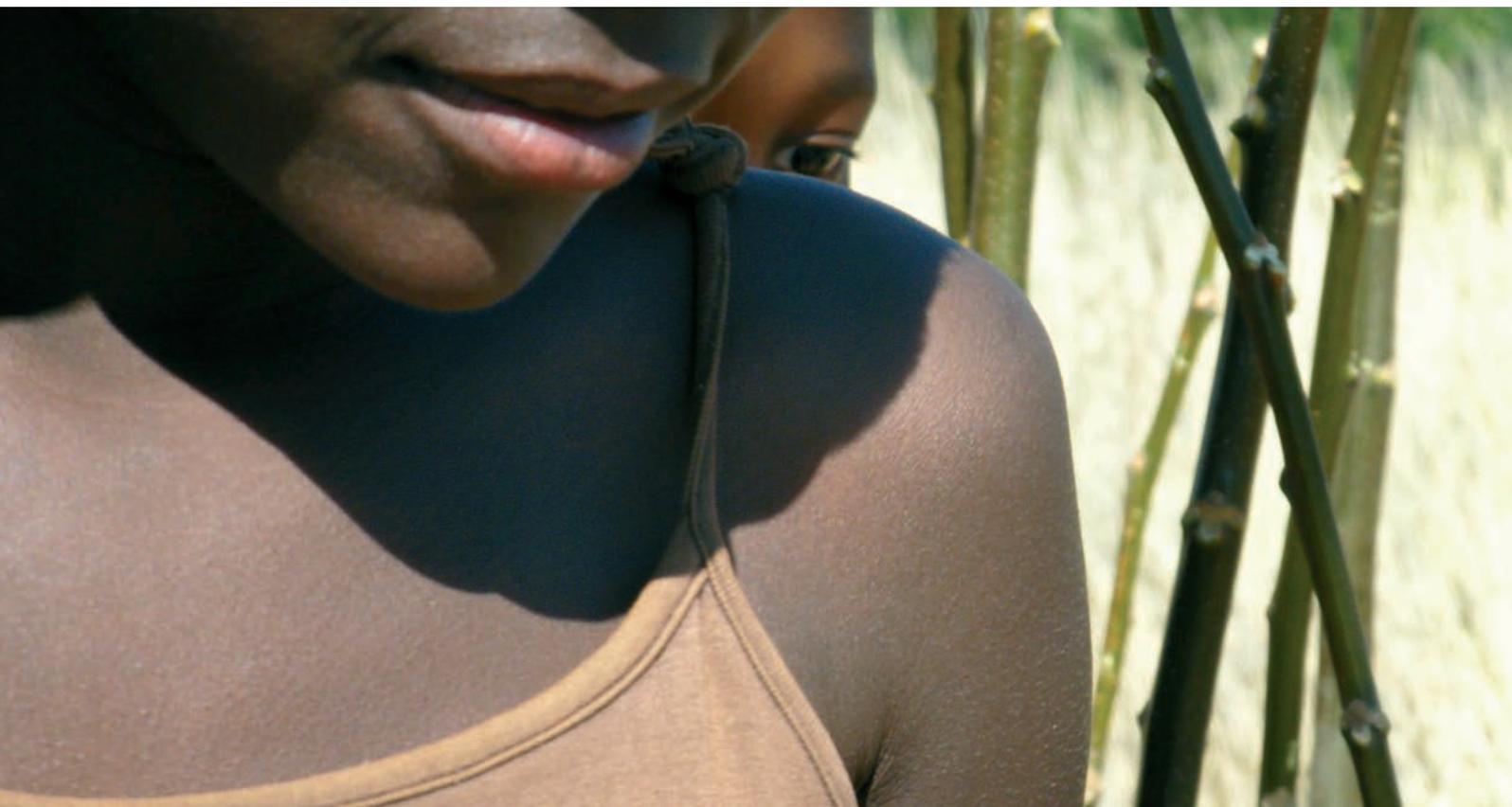
*I took this photo myself. This is me!*

My hobbies are reading, singing, going to church, drawing and studying. I like facing new challenges, to use them as a stepping stone to my dreams coming true. I have the ability to face challenges and I can accept my mistakes in order to learn from them. I am one of the best achievers at school.

I sent my photos to *Sister Namibia* because I want to show everyone what my world looks like.

*Sanna and Telencea*

*This is a close-up photo, you can see the shadow and the serenboom.*



**“I like black and white photos because they bring out the light and dark colours. I think they are more beautiful than colour photos. They are like the photos from history.”**



*Innocentia Doeses*

*This is my sister, Innocentia, and she is staying with us at home. She has two daughters. In this photograph, she is excited!*

## **About the photography project**

“My Namibia” was initiated by the Peace Corps Diversity Committee in conjunction with United States Peace Corps Namibia. The vision of the photo project is to give learners a voice to express themselves and share their stories and their lives with the world through photography. We are placing cameras in the hands of individuals who may not have the opportunity to use photography as a unique and innovative medium of expression, thus empowering, educating and inspiring the youth and their communities.

**Amanda Miller, Peace Corps Volunteer Teacher Educator working with schools, teachers and learners in Omaheke Region**



*Aplonia and Cheridan*

*In this picture we see how the hair is plaited. Pay close attention to the contrast of the white and the black.*



*The Flame of the Fire*

*The fire heats the pot and makes the water boil. We cook in the water and then we feed the family.*

# Maria Kapere

## lei die Raad van Kerke in Namibië

Deur Erika von Wietersheim

“Ons is so trots op haar dat sy sterk manne oorwin het en hierdie magtige posisie verwerf het! Sy sal nog baie deure vir vroue oopmaak!” was die opgewonde uitroep van Pastoor Magdalena Ya-Shalongo van Ongwediva in die noorde, toe sy hoor dat Maria Kapere van die Afrika Metodiste Episkopale Kerk in Junie vanjaar aangewys is as die Algemene Sekretaris van die Raad van Kerke (CCN). Maria Kapere is slegs die tweede vrou wat hierdie pos beklee – die Anglikaanse priesteres Nangula Kathindi was die eerste vrou wat presies ’n dekade gelede as die Algemene Sekretaris aangewys is.

Die Raad van Kerke in Namibië, wat in 1978 gestig is, verteenwoordig al die groot kerke in die land. Voor onafhanklikheid het die Raad sterk standpunt ingeneem teen die apartheidsregering. Sedert onafhanklikheid veg hulle vir die onderdrukte en die armes. Die Raad word beskou as die geestelike stem van die nasie wat met ’n kritiese oog leiding aan die regering gee.

### Van onderwys na politiek

Om die Algemene Sekretaris van ’n kerkliggaam te word, of selfs net ’n pastoor, was nooit deel van Maria Kapere se toekomsdrome nie. Nadat sy haar hoërskoolloopbaan aan die Sekondêre Skool St. Theresa in Tses in die suide voltooi het, het sy in Maatskaplike Werk aan die Universiteit van die Wes-Kaap in Suid-Afrika gaan studeer. Haar droom het egter buite bereik gebly aangesien sy weens die studente-onluste haar studies moes kortknip en terugkeer na Namibië voor sy haar graad kon voltooi. In 1978 is sy aangestel as onderwyseres by die Primêre Skool Minna Sachs in Keetmanshoop en het later deur die Rössing Stigting by die Primêre Skool Arandis onderrig. In die tyd het sy ’n prominente lid van SWAPO se Raad van Vroue geword, en is sy in 1987 as gevolg van haar politieke aktivisme gedwing om uit die onderwys te bedank.

Van daardie tyd af het sy vir bykans 20 jaar al haar energie voltyds aan politiek bestee: sy is aangewys as die adjunkhoof van SWAPO se verkiesingsdirektorat wat Namibië se eerste demokratiese verkiesing in 1989 georganiseer het. Vanaf 1988 tot 1989 was sy die voorsitter van SWAPO se Raad van Vroue in Keetmanshoop. Ná onafhanklikheid het sy vir



Thomas Hohner

Algemene Sekretaris Maria Kapere in haar kantoor by die CCN

die Departement van Vroue-aangeleenthede in die Kantoor van die President gewerk totdat sy in 1996 aangestel is as Onder-Sekretaris in die Ministerie van Omgewingsake en Toerisme.

### Volgehoue betrokkenheid in die gemeenskap

Ten spyte daarvan dat die lewe haar in politiek ingedwing het, het Maria nooit haar betrokkenheid in die gemeenskap gestaak nie. Sy het ’n baie aktiewe evangelis in haar kerk geword, en het spesifiek uitgereik na vroue en die jeug. Haar geestelike integriteit en sterk leierskap eienskappe was opmerklik in die kerk. “Tydens ’n konferensie het die biskop my meegedeel dat die kerk ’n pastoor benodig en dat hy die potensiaal in my sien.” Op daardie stadium was dit baie uitsonderlik vir ’n vrou om ’n pastoor te word. Ons kerk het 30 pastore gehad en net een van hulle was ’n vrou.” Maria het gehoor gegee aan die versoek van die biskop en is tot die bediening toegelaat as ’n leerling pastoor en het in 2004 ’n pastoor geword van die St. Gustav AME kerk in Okahandja. Twee jaar later is sy aangestel as ’n pastoor in die Ebenezer AME Kerk in Katutura en het sy uit die politiek getree.

Dit was inderdaad ’n reusesprong van ’n relatief nuwe pastoor in haar kerk tot die Algemene Sekretaris van die CCN. Soos Maria dit stel: “Ek is geroep as ’n pastoor op ’n baie laat stadium in my lewe, en ek is steeds besig om te leer. Daarom kan ek soms steeds

nie glo dat ek nou hier sit nie! Maar blykbaar was ’n groep biskoppe en pastore oortuig daarvan dat ek oor die nodige eienskappe beskik, en vir hulle het my 17 jaar in die staatsdiens swaarder geweeg as my beperkte ondervinding as ’n pastoor.”

## Werk met vroue om die kerk te verenig

Maria is bekend vir haar ‘sterk verenigende hart.’ Volgens haar is CCN ’n organisasie waarin kerke na mekaar kan uitreik en almal kan insluit: “Eenheid beteken vir my om te kyk na die gemeenskap as geheel – nie net na my eie kerk of na die groot en gevestigde CCN lidkerke nie. Daar is honderde klein en informele kerke in Namibië wat nie deel van CCN is nie, en ons moet ’n visie hê om die totale liggaam van Christus te verenig.” Sy sou graag wou sien dat kerke verby hulle onderskeie leerstellings sal kyk en na mekaar sal uitreik ten einde stap vir stap te streef na ’n gemeenskaplike begrip van die kern van die Christelike geloof. “En hierna moet ons ook uitreik na ander godsdienste om hulle standpunte aan te hoor en om ooreenkomste te vind sodat ons saam kan werk aan sake wat dringende aandag verg.”

Vroue-aangeleenthede het haar nog altyd baie na aan die hart gelê, as ’n politikus en as ’n pastoor. Tydens haar termyn as die hoof van die Departement van Vroue-aangeleenthede het sy kruis en dwars deur die land gereis om voorsiening te maak vir die aanstelling van vroue as koördineerders in die staatsdiens, en as ’n pastoor het sy in haar kerk aan die hoof gestaan van die Departement van Vroue in die Bediening: “Dit was altyd vir my van groot belang om die vaardighede van vroue pastore en plaaslike kerkamptedraers te ontwikkel.”

Maria wil ook nuwe lewe blaas in ’n kerkbeweging wat vroue sal verenig, iets wat nie indie verlede moontlik was nie. “Dit is my droom om vroue te bemagtig om hulleself op gemeenskapsvlak te organiseer in plaaslike verenigde kerkgroepe wat saam met die regering in die gemeenskap kan werk. Ons het te lank in ons eie kerke gebly en nagelaat om hegte bande met ons gemeenskap te smee.” Sy sien ’n dringende behoefte aan opvoedingsprogramme vir die gemeenskap met die oog daarop om probleme soos huishoudelike geweld, alkohelmisbruik en werkloosheid aan te spreek.

## ’n God van bevryding

Ten opsigte van geslagsgelykheid voer Maria aan dat vroue by die tyd van skepping waarskynlik vry van onderdrukking en slawerny was: “Die verdrukking van vroue het eers begin toe die beskawing ontwikkel

het en verskeie reëls en wette gemaak is. Die kerke is ook gegrond op besluite wat eeue gelede deur mense geneem is. Daarom moet elke kerk hierdie besluite en leerstellings ondersoek en vasstel of dit nog van toepassing is in vandag se wêreld.”

Maria benadruk dat vroue vanuit ’n Christelike uitkyk oor dieselfde geestelike en verstandelike gawes as mans beskik, en sy haal Genesis 1:27 aan: “God het die mens geskep as sy verteenwoordiger, as beeld van God het Hy die mens geskep, man en vrou het Hy hulle geskep.” Sy voel dat vroue moontlik selfs ’n sterker band met Christus gehad het as mans, soos blyk uit die onlangs ontdekte Evangelie van Maria, waar Maria Magdalena uitgebeeld word as die geliefde dissipel van Jesus en wat later sy apostel geword het. “Ons vroue moet daarom leer om onself te waardeer, om onself lief te hê as deel van God se skepping en om mekaar op te hef en te onderskraag.”

’n Groot inspirasie vir Maria is haar oortuiging dat Jesus Christus ’n totale nuwe betekenis tot menswees gebring het. “Christus wou hê dat mense hulleself beskou as vry en gered van onmenslike en onderdrukkende wette en om alle onheil vanaf hierdie opsig te benader.” Sy is jammer dat mense steeds onderdrukkende en diskriminerende reëls en wette afdwing en dat hulle baie keer juis die Bybel gebruik om hul aksies te regverdig. “Die Bybel is geskryf vir spesifieke mense wat in ’n spesifieke geskiedkundige tyd geleef het. Ons leef vandag in ’n wêreld wat heeltemal anders is as in die Bybelse tyd en daarom moet ons ons wend tot die kern van die Christelike boodskap, naamlik dat Christus ons vrygemaak het van alle kulturele, geslags-, rasse- en sosiale grense en diskriminasie. Hierdie boodskap is vir alle mense, ook vir homoseksuele mense. Die kerk sluit hulle nie uit nie. Daar mag geen veroordeling en verdoemenis wees nie; alle mense moet met meegevoel verwelkom word.”

Wat die toekoms betref, is Maria vol vertroue dat sy baie sal put uit die ondervinding wat sy as staatsamptenaar opgedoen het om haar te help om aan die hoof te staan van ’n reuse organisasie soos die CCN, om die personeel te bestuur en aksieplanne te ontwikkel en uit te voer. “Ek beskik oor die ondervinding en sal dit gebruik,” het sy benadruk. Haar hoofdoel is om opleidingseminare en byeenkomste te reël waar pastore sowel as lidmate kan leer van die ware betekenis van die bevrydende mag van die Christelike geloof sodat hulle kan help bou aan ’n sterk en vreedsame gemeenskap wat vry is van enige vorm van diskriminasie en onderdrukking. “Ek dink dit was God se wil dat ek in hierdie posisie aangestel is, en nou moet ek die uitdaging aanvaar, wat inderdaad ’n reuse uitdaging is!” ♀

# Ngame okakadhona owala

Maria Lirumbu

Ohaya ti ehala lyandje omegumbo  
 Ohaya ulandje elayi  
 Ihaya pulakene kwaashoka tandi popi  
 Ohaya ti omadhiladhilo gandje ka ge na shoka taga ti  
 Oshoka kuyo,  
 Ngame okakadhona owala

Ohaya ulandje omadhina  
 Ngaashi oomwenyo dhawo dha hala  
 Ohaya kwata ndje koonkondo nokumonitha ndje iihuna  
 Ohayati ngame ogwawo  
 Oshoka kuyo,  
 Ngame okakadhona owala

Ohandi indile ekwatho  
 Ashike ka ye na nomaiyuvo gandje  
 Ka pe na ngoka ta kwatha nande  
 Ka pe na ngoka iitaala ndje kushoka tandi ti  
 Oshoka kuyo,  
 Ngame okakadhona owala

Uunake taye shi mono  
 Kutya ngame onandi yooloka kuyo?

Nande napu pite ethimbo  
 Otandi lilile ekwatho  
 Ootate, ootatekulu naamwamememati  
 Ka ye na siku yu uve ndje  
 nenge ya hulithepo omahepeko.

Ka ye na siku nande  
 Omanga yeli natango mwaambyoka yonale  
 "Ku tse; ngoye okakadhona owala."

Omafano ku Susan Mitchinson

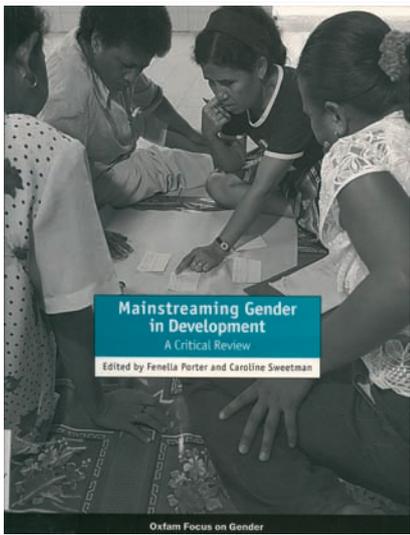
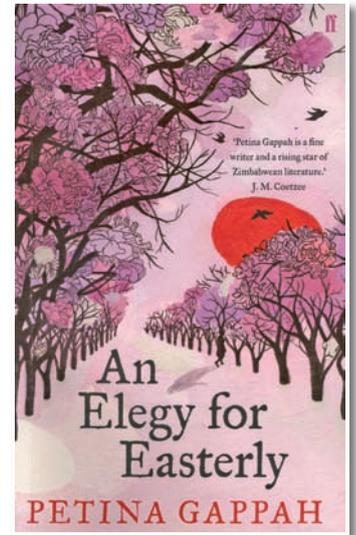
Ehokololo olya nyanyangidhululwa nepitikilo okuza membo lyo "Between Yesterday and Tomorrow – Writings by Namibian women" nolya tulwa kumwe nokutalululwa ku Elizabeth IKhaxas, Women's Leadership Centre, Windhoek 2005

# An Elegy for Easterly

By Petina Gappah  
Zed Books, 2009

A woman in a township in Zimbabwe is surrounded by throngs of dusty children but longs for a baby of her own; an old man finds his job making coffins at No Matter Funeral Parlour brings unexpected riches; a politician's widow quietly stands by her husband's funeral watching his colleagues bury an empty coffin. Petina Gappah's characters may have ordinary hopes and dreams but they are living in a world where a loaf of bread costs half a million dollars; a country expected to have only four presidents in a hundred years; and a place where people know exactly what will be printed in the one and only daily newspaper because the news is always, always good.

In her spirited debut collection, Zimbabwean author Petina Gappah brings us the resilience and inventiveness of the people who struggle to live under Robert Mugabe's regime. Despite their circumstances, the characters in *An Elegy for Easterly* are more than victims; they are all too human, with as much capacity to inflict pain as they have to endure it. They struggle with larger issues common to all people everywhere: failed promises, unfulfilled dreams and the yearning for something to anchor them to life.



## Mainstreaming Gender in Development

### A critical review

Edited by Fenella Porter and Caroline Sweetman  
Oxfam GB, 2005

This collection of articles critically assesses the degree to which gender inequality has been addressed in the work of development organisations. Contributors scrutinise the efforts of governments and NGOs, at the national and international levels, in order to assess the difference that gender mainstreaming has made to advancing women's interests in development. In addition, they consider the progress that development organisations have made in insuring women's fullest participation at all levels of their own organisations.

Contributions to this volume include case studies from Bolivia, South Africa, India and Thailand. Among the authors are Caroline Moser and Annalise Moser, Aruna Rao and David Kelleher, and Shamim Meer.

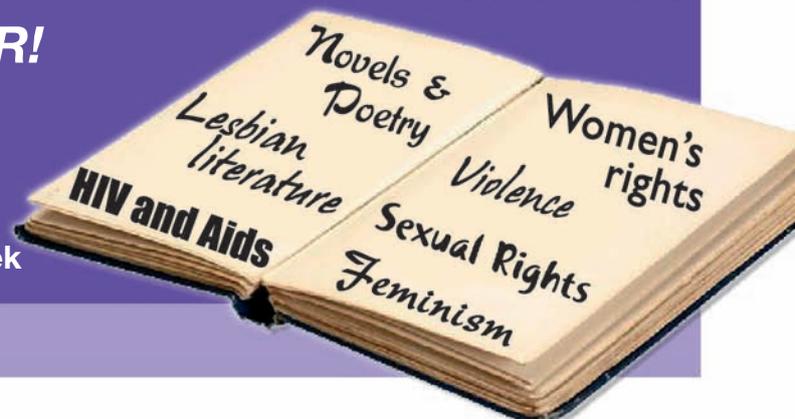
## Sister Namibia Resource Centre

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### KNOWLEDGE IS POWER!

For information on feminism and gender issues, visit the Sister Namibia Resource Centre  
163 Nelson Mandela Avenue, Windhoek

Call for an appointment 061 - 230618.



# Book review: Between Yesterday and Tomorrow

## Writings by Namibian Women

By Dr. Marna Broekhoff

After decades of struggle against colonialism, racism, and apartheid, the Republic of Namibia was finally established in 1990 as a “democratic... State securing to all our citizens justice, liberty, equality and fraternity.” These proud and inspiring words in the Preamble to its Constitution gave hope for a new era to all Namibian citizens, women and men alike. Article 23 even states “that women in Namibia have traditionally suffered special discrimination and ...need to play a full, equal role in the life of the nation.”

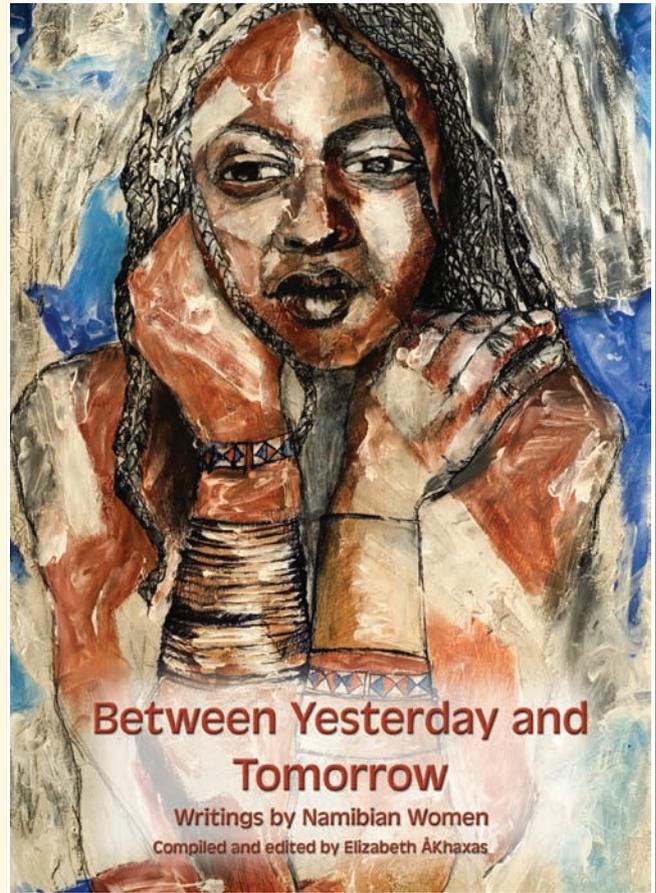
### The myth of gender equality

Sadly, however, these words have remained mere verbiage nearly twenty years after Independence, inspiring only bitter disillusionment. Gender equality in Namibia is a total myth! Indeed, Namibia is one of the most violent and unequal societies in the world, with an “apparent increase in violence since independence,” according to Deputy Minister of Education Dr Becky Ndjize-Ojo. To temper this climate, the Women’s Leadership Centre (WLC) was founded in 2004 by Elizabeth IKhaxas with the primary purpose of fostering women’s writings as a means of consciousness raising, empowerment, creative expression, and resistance to male-dominated culture.

The Centre’s first book, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, is an anthology of poems, stories, and essays about gender inequality in Namibia, which still exists just as much today as when the book was first published in 2005. The second WLC anthology, *We Must Choose Life* (2008), puts faces into the bleak Aids landscape in Namibia. The third, *Moments of Courage* (forthcoming), showcases women defending themselves in a male-dominated society. A fourth volume will focus on the role of Christianity in the oppression of Namibian women.

### Women writing change

Submissions for *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* were solicited through 20,000 flyers distributed throughout the country, followed by four Women’s Rights and Writing workshops in Windhoek with 150 participants, who then conducted more than fifty local workshops. From the hundreds of submissions, 89 were published, many by first-time writers.



Compiled and edited by Elizabeth IKhaxas,  
Women’s Leadership Centre, Windhoek 2005

Some submissions were translated for non-English speakers, and some were also transcribed for illiterate women. Many women had to be coached to overcome their objections that writing requires computers and printers, library access, education, social mobility, and that it interferes with family responsibilities and cultural expectations for women to be shy and silent. Finally, though, they came to see writing as a top priority because “Through writing we are standing up for our rights and making a case against the abuse of women,” and “We are writing for our daughters, and to bring about changes in our cultures and traditions.”

Thematically, there is much overlap among the nine separate sections, but several motifs stand out. One is the similarity in attitudes between “then” and “now.” Grandma Susan, born in 1934, comments sadly about watching toddlers being given away to older men as wives because “we were nothing, simply objects.” A poem about the present, *I’m just a girl*, makes a similar case: “They call me names.../They rape and abuse me/ They say I’m their property/ Coz I’m just a girl to them.” As one perceptive woman comments, “The

truth is that most men [even advanced degree holders] believe that women are subordinate to men.”

## Patriarchal culture prevails

Marriage customs have not improved. Women are still sold for *lobola*: “They told my father that the cattle would be sent the following day. They had sold my step-sister, Tupawo, to a man she had never talked to.” Widows are stripped of their possessions and forced to marry their late husband’s relative: “Immediately after this the possessions of the deceased are divided. And then one of the elders says, ‘The widow is given to the brother of the deceased.’” Polygyny is common: “Then he brought her/ Number Three he called her/ I thought I’d never/ Ever/ Share him/ But he said it’s Africa/ It’s his right.” Divorce is not allowed by the church. A woman thinks that “if she leaves her marriage she will be a laughing stock in the community.”

“Disobedient” women, whether married or unmarried, are raped and even murdered with impunity: “Today/ I saw love/ Or so I thought/ I saw your hand in his/ ...And then the evening news: I watched your face splashed over my little screen/ The reason: A lover’s quarrel/ Another daughter lost/ My sister. My friend.” In *Nangula’s story* we learn that she “died with her unborn baby, brutally killed by a man who raped her and got away with it.”

Children, unsurprisingly, do not fare well in these circumstances, as poignantly expressed in *Everybody’s Child*: “I remember when Anybody’s child could walk the streets/ free from fear and protected by Everybody/...Now Anybody’s child cannot be rescued, because it is Somebody’s child/...Nobody hears Somebody’s child scream/ Somebody’s child gets raped and killed/ Now, Everybody asks, where was Somebody?/ What happened to Everybody’s child?” Along with rape and murder of children is the all-too-common crime of incest. In *A letter to Papa*, the daughter asks, “Do you remember...When I woke up and found you fumbling with my bloomers...how I trembled and struggled.... Did you ever think about saying, ‘I’m sorry, please forgive me?’”

## My friend, my pen

Most readers of *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow*, like Marlene Mungunda, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, are likely to feel “profoundly shattered by these testimonies.” Facing such pain, one may wonder what is the value of these stories for both writer and reader? The unique contribution of all the WLC books is that they empower Namibian women, particularly the most marginalised, to tell their stories and advocate for social justice. In so doing, they “be-

come writers” and create art in their own right as black women. In the words of one impoverished poet, “My friend, my pen!/ Help me to talk/ Without you/ people see me/ as nothing/ My friend, my pen!/ Speak for me.../ My pen!/ Sit down with me/ and I will give you/ wings to fly/ You are my only friend/ My only way to let the world/ know what I feel.” The penned products in this anthology are surprisingly eloquent and stinging heartfelt, thus rising to the level of literary art.

Released  
the creative power  
of my sisters  
long denied  
long desired  
released the writer  
the taste of freedom!  
Elizabeth IKhaxas

For writer and reader alike, the anthology should serve as an important agent of social change. Indeed, only by understanding the past can one transform the present and create a different future. The hypocrisy surrounding the Namibian Constitution must be exposed because “the state must always be made accountable and responsible to the people, regardless of who the people are.” And not only in Namibia. Strong evidence supports the existence of similar abuses of women and girls all across Africa in “pernicious continuities between colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial systems,” according to feminist researcher, Amina Mama.

In addition to advocating, *Between Yesterday and Tomorrow* profoundly educates. It is a supreme example of auto-ethnography, an account of one’s own experiences as grounded in and reflecting a culture. As such, it enables the writers to realise that research is not something that only white or educated people do, a radical insight. The anthology can also serve as a gold mine of qualitative data for researchers. Additionally, with the recently developed curriculum for the book, it can be used in numerous secondary and tertiary instructional settings. Most of all, perhaps, the book provides an education about the resiliency of the human spirit, for along with the pain, the reader also experiences the optimism, the energy - and the power - of Namibian women. ♀

*Dr. Marna Broekhoff worked in Namibia in 2008 as English Language Fellow, U.S. Department of State. She is a writing consultant to the Women’s Leadership Centre.*

# Liberian women's experiences in ending civil war

By Kathambi Kinoti

Leymah Gbowee played a leading role in organising women of different faiths and ethnicities to bring about an end to the civil war in her country in 2003. She spoke to the Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID) about her experiences.

[The women's movement played a crucial role in resolving the long drawn out conflict in Liberia. What strategies and actions did you use?](#)

We used many non-violent actions and strategies; protests, picketing, media outreach, community sensitisation on the role of women in advancing the peace agenda, coalition building, position statements and prayer vigils. A major strategy was the daily evaluation and review of activities to document successes, challenges and lessons learned. These daily meetings also served as a space for members of the movement to vent their anger and frustration about both personal and collective issues. This was extremely helpful in preventing a spill-over of issues from previous days.

[Women are not homogenous; they have the same religious, ethnic or class identities that feed conflict. Yet the women's movement in Liberia demonstrated a unity of cause. How did you manage to do this?](#)

Women have been socialised to believe they cannot work together. However, from my experience, women work better as a group than with men or alone. In our case the work was effective because we went through a period of "resocialisation". Our identities that have so often been used to promote conflict were used to promote peace and togetherness using simple campaign messages. For example we used this message to validate our religious identity: "Does the bullet know a Christian from a Muslim?"



Liberian women calling for peace

These messages together with focus group discussions helped women understand that it wasn't about a particular group or sect but about us as women.

[What other factors contributed to your success?](#)

We stayed focused on our goal, and didn't get distracted by opportunities to take up other issues such as HIV and Aids, or female genital mutilation. We decided our focus was on ending the violence before taking on any other time-consuming issue. Also, we had a well-structured leadership chain and tasks were distributed without anyone usurping the other's authority. In addition, our message was clear and to the point. It was never duplicated or added to.

[What internal and external challenges did the movement encounter?](#)

Internally we faced religious fanaticism. Some Christians felt praying with Muslims would "dilute" their faith. Muslim women in the group were criticised by some from within their community as being "street women" for involving themselves in political activities. Another challenge was the rural-elite divide. For many years the women's movement in Liberia was led by groups of educated urban-based women. Our campaign was the first to be made up of predominantly rural women. During the campaign there were tensions about one group usurping the space and recognition of the other. Externally, politicisation of the group was a major challenge. As elections approached we were constantly struggling to remain neutral and focused.

[How has the Liberian women's movement been involved in addressing the aftermath of the conflict?](#)

Women's groups are working in three areas: social services, advocacy, and socio-economic development. Various groups are providing services to girls and women affected by conflict through relief assistance, medical care, skills training and counselling. Others are advocating for the advancement and protection of women's rights in Liberia. Today, we have a law against rape, and an inheritance law. Women's groups led by the Association of Female Lawyers are drafting the "Fairness Bill", which seeks to ensure affirmative action in all of Liberia's policies.

Since the end of the civil war, many women have returned with renewed vigour to farming and small-scale micro enterprises, as the major bread winners for their families. ♀

# Swazi government in court over property rights

Story and photo by Mantoe Phakathi

Swazi women's rights activist Doo Aphane has taken her government to court. She is contesting legislation that prohibits her from registering property in her maiden name jointly with her husband. If the court grants Aphane her request, it would give Swazi women and men married in community of property equal rights in the administration of property.

## Protecting her dignity

Currently, Section 16(3) and regulations 7 and 9 of the Deeds Registry Regulation prohibit women who are married in community of property from registering immovable property in their maiden names. This means that they cannot register properties without assuming their husbands' surnames. It also implies that married women cannot have sole ownership of property.

Under Swazi common law, men married in community of property are regarded as administrators of the estate. As a result, women cannot sell or buy property without their husband's consent, while men can sell property without consulting their wives.

Aphane argues these provisions of the Deeds Registry Act disadvantage women and foster gender inequality. "The purpose of this application is to protect my dignity and the right to non-discrimination," she explained.

Aphane also believes that the country's common law is in conflict with Section 20 of the constitution, which makes everyone equal before the law, and Section 28, which awards women equal rights to men in political, economic and social activities. She is therefore demanding that the court declare the offending sections of the Deeds Act unconstitutional.

## Non-existent constitution

Sizakele Hlatshwayo, gender specialist with the Coordinating Assembly of Non-Governmental

Organisations, says Swazi women are discriminated against by many outdated laws despite a more modern constitutional dispensation introduced four years ago. "Such laws deprive women of their rights awarded in the constitution, which means the supremacy of the constitution is nonexistent in practice," said Hlatshwayo.

Swaziland adopted a new constitution in 2005, but it has not yet harmonised the country's common law to bring it in line with the constitution and other international instruments such as the UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

## Women's rights not a priority

In fact, Swaziland does not have a law reform commission. "For now, the review of laws is given to the officers at the attorney general's chambers who are already overwhelmed by too much work. Women's rights tend to take the back seat because they are not regarded as priority issues," explained Hlatshwayo. She said the fact that Swazi women are not adequately represented in parliament indicates that there is no political will to advance women's rights in the country.

Out of the 55 elected members of parliament, only seven are women. Section 95 of the constitution stipulates that the Head of State, who appoints 20 members of parliament, should appoint at least five women into the House of Assembly and eight into the House of Senate. However, King Mswati III appointed only two women into the House of Assembly and seven into the House of Senate, fewer than the law requires.

"We have lost confidence in parliament because it is not constitutionally constituted, and I think the only way women can get their rights is through the courts," said Hlatshwayo. ♀

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Doo Aphane, Chairperson of the Swaziland Gender Consortium

# Resisting the male gaze

## A REVIEW OF THE EXHIBITION 'FACES' BY CARLOS CARVALHO

By Erika von Wietersheim

"I was at the National Art Gallery today, where an exhibition from Brazil was being mounted – very disturbing images indeed ..." a friend emailed to me in May. The following day I had the opportunity to talk with artist Carlos Henrique de Mello Carvalho about his 18 unusual paintings, which he had brought to Namibia at the invitation of the Brazilian Embassy.

### Why only faces of women?

Walking into the gallery to meet the young artist, I was immediately intrigued by the huge images hanging in the entrance hall. All of them depicted faces of beautiful women - in drab colours, painted on tattered pieces of canvas with frayed edges in uneven shapes. Many faces were cut, torn and covered with bruises and stitches. Why only faces? And why only women? were my first questions.

"For me, the beauty of a woman is concentrated in her face," Carlos explained. "The rest I leave to people's imagination. And what I want to show is so much more disturbing and shocking with women; with men it's not the same message."

Carlos started painting women's faces six years ago, while still at university – at that time mostly faces of friends. But he began asking himself: *How have artists before me, especially during the 19th and 20th centuries, depicted women in their art? How does my work fit into their tradition?*

### Men as viewers and owners of art

He applied for a research scholarship and soon came upon art critic John Berger's influential essay *Ways of Seeing*, in which Berger investigated the artistic portrayal of women over the past centuries. Berger came to the conclusion that, traditionally, most artists have painted female figures with a male viewer in mind; they painted women to expose them to the 'male gaze'.

Nude women, in particular, have therefore been depicted as passive figures, without their own stories, accessible and desirable, posed in a way to please or entice the male spectator. They do not capture the essence of the individual woman, but are, according to Berger, portrayed for men to "gain reassurance of their manhood" – both as a spectator and as an owner of art.



Of course there were masters, Berger admits, who created unique images of particular women, showing their love and respect for their female subjects, but this was a rarity. Most paintings of female figures only **seem** to be about the woman portrayed, but they are not: they are all about the male painter and the male viewer.

### Nakedness and nudity

Berger makes an interesting distinction between naked and nude. A naked woman, he writes, is naked and at the same time remains completely herself, without feeling used and without being viewed as an object. A nude woman is also naked, but she has become an object to be gazed at, an object of pleasure, sexuality or power. Images of nude women reveal what the artist or, in modern times, what the photographer or filmmaker wants the viewer to see.

This representation of women has, according to Berger, continued until today and has found its culmination and perversion in the modern media and commercial advertisements. Nude or half-nude women are exposed ubiquitously to the public eye, used to

create certain feelings, mainly in men, in order to sell a product or an idea.

### Challenging the objectification of women

In reponse to this tradition, Carlos began to paint images that would force the viewers of his art to look behind the masks, facades and smooth surfaces of beautiful women. “I wanted to challenge this idea of woman as an object to be looked at,” he explained. “I therefore paint the faces of women in a very different way. First of all I do not use clean canvas, but tarpaulin that has been used to cover loaded trucks and that has travelled all over my country. It is full of tears and patches, dirty and damaged; it has been exposed to wind and weather, and it has a history just like the women I paint.

“Then I paint well known faces from photos, advertisements, or of popular singers and actresses onto this canvas. First I paint them beautiful and perfect, contemplating and affirming their beauty in a traditional way. But then, as a second step, I destroy my own work. I cut through it, make rips and tears, and thereby deconstruct it. So my work portrays my idea of a beautiful woman, but at the same time I am destroying it.

“As a third step,” Carlos continued, “I try to stitch the image back together again, but not in a way that reconstructs and heals. The rough stitches with strips of leather and rubber from old tyres make the destruction even more visible. They allure to hardness on the one hand, but may also create associations of power and sexual violence. In the end everything is visible: the original face, the tears and cuts, and the stitches.”

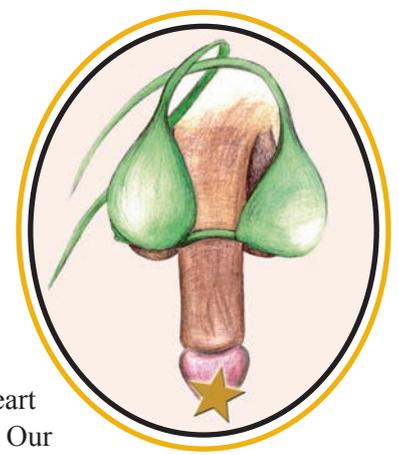
### Exposing the male gaze

“My art is not simply a process of deconstructing and reconstructing,” emphasised Carlos. “I like to go deeper than that. I like to make visible the condition of gender in our society. I want to show something that is very disturbing with respect to women and the tradition of art.”

By cutting into the women’s faces, opening them up and showing parts of their inside, even behind the stitches, Carlos forces the male viewer of his art to focus on the woman on the canvas instead of on himself as a spectator. And he reveals his subjects as women with a history, as women with wounds and stitches and destroyed masks; he shows women naked, not nude. ♀



# More nominees for Sister Namibia's Green Ball Holder Award

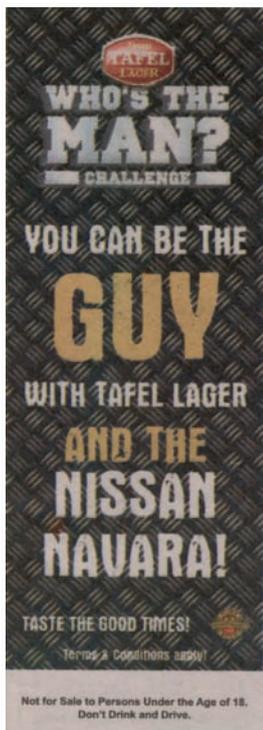


Some months back, Sister Namibia debuted the Green Ball Holder Award, which seeks to expose sexist and gender stereotyped advertisements in mainstream media. This edition of *Sister Namibia* sees us awarding three advertising culprits.

## Don't men cook?

One nominee is a Zesty Foods advert that is aired on Radio Wave 96.7 FM. This advert has a woman, who could easily be confused for a neurotic perfectionist housewife by the tone of her voice, accosting a store manager for not stocking certain Zesty Food products. She then proceeds to list all these other products and points out that being limited to a small selection of foods to cook can turn her into 'a bad mother and wife'. She threatens to organise a protest, at which point the manager pleadingly says that he is going to make sure that the missing Zesty Foods are stocked.

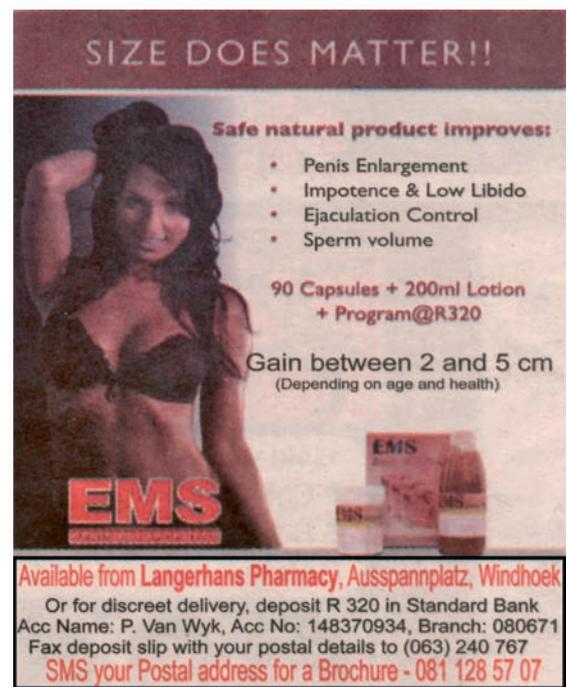
This advert is sexist because it implies that only women shop for food products. It also gives the listeners the impression that being a 'good' mother and wife is synonymous with cooking or buying good food. Don't men cook? Also, it makes it seem that women are extremely passionate about keeping house, such that an obstacle to this mission is the one thing that spurs them towards some kind of collective social action. Zesty foods need to re-think their advertising style and Radio Wave 96.7 FM needs to review airing such adverts.



## Don't women drink beer and drive cars?

Another advert that has us wondering what is going on is the Tafel Who's The Man Challenge. For those not in the know, Tafel Lager is a popular local beer brand in Namibia. They launched a competition that is looking for 'a guy' to win a car. They have huge billboards plastered all over the city with slogans saying things like 'Of course guys have good taste' and 'The fastest

way to every guy's heart has to be Tafel Lager ...' Our question is: what if a woman wins? Does she then become a 'guy'? Don't women drink beer too? And there is nothing challenging that the advert makes its entrants do apart from purchasing beer and texting in a number. Quite the challenge that clearly only a man can do - huh? This advert is sexist in its blatant targeting of men for a usually unisex product. Yes, men are predominantly the buyers and users of alcohol, but this is no excuse to totally ignore women as consumers who may also want to win a car. Congratulations to the 'guys' at Tafel for getting their first Sister Namibia Green Ball Holder award!



## Size matters to who?

Finally, we award an advert that has appeared in several local dailies. It shows a woman in her underwear advertising several products targeted at men for various sexual 'problems' or 'issues', all because 'Size Does Matter.' All we can say is that since size matters so much to men, why don't these products show a man in his underwear instead? If men are shy we can recommend the artist that drew us the Green Ball Holder Award! We are sure that the artist will be more than willing to draw up something that works for their advert! ♀

Send us an SMS to 081 407 6292 with your responses to these awards and further nominees you think should be awarded.

## Getting muddy for justice



Bikini-clad CODEPINK activists smeared with mud and many supporters rallied in cities all over the world to protest Israeli cosmetics company, AHAVA. The company uses resources from the Dead Sea to manufacture beauty products in an illegal Israeli settlement in Occupied Palestine.

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb, Co-founder of Shomer Shalom Network of Jewish Nonviolence, supports the campaign. "After decades of working for peace through dialogue, I've come to believe that it's time to apply new tactics. It's time for us to listen to the Israeli and Palestinian peace activists

who are calling on us to boycott Israeli products made in Occupied Palestine."

AHAVA violates international law by labelling its products of "Israeli origin" even though they are produced in the Occupied West Bank. The company further violates the Fourth Geneva Convention by exploiting occupied natural resources for profit. AHAVA tries to put a pretty face on their company, touting their products' purity and even hiring Oxfam Ambassador and 'Sex and the City' star Kristin Davis as their spokesperson.

Source: CODEPINK

## Affirmative action in corporate Norway

In 2004 the Government of Norway took affirmative action on improving gender equality in the corporate sector. It passed a law that required Norway's 500 Public Limited Companies (PLC) to fill forty per cent of their board seats with the under-represented gender within two years.

In 2003, women constituted only seven per cent of the members on PLC boards. By July 2008 this

figure had increased to thirty-nine percent. Businesses have experienced an enhancement of their corporate reputation and corporate leaders say they needed something dramatic to open up their eyes to the talent they were missing out.

Many women have been approached for top management jobs as well as board positions. Women are now visible in corporate Norway.

Source: APWW-Meet

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## Lubna Hussein defies dress code for women

Thirteen Sudanese girls and women listening to music in a Khartoum cafe were arrested in July - for wearing trousers. Article 152 of the Criminal Code, which prohibits "indecentry" in dress without defining what it is, was invoked. Ten of the thirteen women accepted a plea bargain - ten lashes and a fine. But journalist and UN press officer Lubna Hussein, and two others, insisted on going to trial - even though losing in court could mean forty lashes and a much bigger fine. In fact, Hussein resigned her UN post so as not to have immunity. "I will take my case to the upper court, even to the constitutional court," she said, "And if they find me guilty, I am ready to receive not only 40 lashes, I am ready for 40,000 lashes. If all women must be flogged for what they wear, I am ready to be flogged 40,000 times."

Hussein has not been tried yet because prosecutors are unsure whether she has immunity. Although Hussein gave up her job after the arrest, UN chiefs insist she still has a right to immunity because she worked for them at the time. Hussein has gone to lengths to publicise her case, posing in loose trousers for photos and calling journalists to support her.

Protestors have complained the law gives no clear definition of indecency and gives individual police officers the power to decide whether or not a woman is indecently dressed. Hussein is challenging the charges, arguing that her clothes were respectable and so did not break the law.

Source: [www.dailymail.co.uk](http://www.dailymail.co.uk)

## Tanzania opens Africa's first women's bank

In July, Tanzania opened an all-women's bank, becoming the first country in Africa to do so. Opened in late July, the Tanzania Women's Bank already has five hundred customers, seventy per cent of whom are women. Although men are allowed to open accounts, the bank's services will centre essentially on supporting women's economic activities.

A bank owned by and targeting women is a milestone on a continent where many women cannot access banking services due to lack of information and onerous administrative procedures. Women's groups in Tanzania have long campaigned for a financial institution of their own, and spent the past ten years raising the necessary funds and satisfying all the conditions to be recognised as a bank.

At the women's bank, all that one needs to open an account is an identification document and a three thousand Tanzanian Shilling (\$2) deposit. There are no monthly bank charges and the bank offers training in basic business skills and money management.

Plans are already at advanced stages to open branches in other Tanzanian towns, and to provide additional services to rural women. "Many women live in the countryside," said Margareth Matabi Chacha, executive director of the bank. "Trips to ATM machines are long and costly. We will make banking available through mobile phones," she said. The Tanzania Women's Bank is yet another step towards the economic empowerment of women.

Source: *The East African*, AllAfrica.com



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## Same sex adoption rights in Uruguay

Lawmakers in Uruguay have approved a bill allowing gay and lesbian couples to adopt.

Despite opposition from the country's Roman Catholic Church and some of the political opposition, the 99-seat Chamber of Representatives passed the bill 40-13, with the remaining members absent. It goes next to the Senate, which approved an earlier version of the bill in July but must now vote again on modifications.

If it becomes law, Uruguay would be the first country in Latin American to allow adoption by gay and lesbian couples. The law is supported by socialist President Tabare Vazquez's Broad Front coalition, which has already legalised gay civil unions and ended a ban on homosexuals in the armed forces.

Source: Los Angeles Times



Mads Westermann

A lesbian couple smiles after receiving church blessings at the recently-held World Outgames in Copenhagen, Denmark

## Virginity testing banned in Jordan

A Jordanian institute has issued a fatwa, or Islamic ruling, banning the practice of pre-marital virginity examinations for women. The Jordanian Committee of Religious Decrees and Islamic Studies said that such examinations were *haram*, or prohibited under Islamic law. The fatwa said such examinations were a form of abuse against women.

"We view this practice as a degrading treatment for women and one which violates women's rights to physical integrity and privacy," said Nadya Khalife, a women's rights researcher with Human Rights Watch. "I'm happy to note that the Council finds this practice humiliating," she said. "It's definitely a step in the right direction."

Virginity checks are usually conducted on young women who are about to get married. Pre-marital sex is frowned upon in Jordan, and in some cases, women caught or even suspected of sexual relations outside of wedlock are killed by male family members, on grounds that they tainted the family reputation. Such 'honour killings' take the lives of around 20 women in Jordan each year.

Victims of 'honour killings' can also include women who have extra-marital affairs or have been raped. Perpetrators often face mitigated punishments, if at all. As of 1 August, Jordan is operating a newly established tribunal that will focus exclusively on suspected perpetrators of 'honour crimes', in an effort to speed up the legal process and bring killers to justice.

Source: AHN

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## Women's Voices

A weekly broadcast  
by Sister Namibia



Tune in and empower yourself!  
Tuesdays @19h00 on Base 106.2 FM

Sheena Magenya hosts Women's Voices

## Hats!

I was so attracted to the cover of the recent magazine, July 2009 - that I even wanted to make it a poster for my room. When I opened the first page I realised that Sister Namibia has come a long way and is still firing. Sister Namibia has taught our mothers to be strong and brave and fight for their rights, to fight against discrimination and achieve gender equality in our beautiful country.

It's so amazing to see that there are women here in Namibia who care for other women regardless of what situation they end up. I was also amazed by the story of women with disabilities on the middle pages - it shows how brave and talented women are regardless of what situation they find themselves in. They really inspired me a lot. I have learned that there is a lot more that I can do as a woman. As I went on reading the magazine I got so touched and impressed, I wanted to make every page a poster for my room and get to read it every time I lie on my bed - but I couldn't do it since it's printed on both sides. Keep up with the good work Sister, Mother, Auntie Namibia - hope to see you rocking and inspiring the next generation.

Sofiana Silva

## Sister Namibia

Your article in the July 2009 issue by Natasha Kayle really inspired me - just to think our young children are so open-minded and impartial. Furthermore it is great how you celebrate woman with disabilities. I really take my hat off to you.

Inspired young lesbian lady

## Greetings from Zimbabwe

I am a young and talented multi-lingual poet-musician and award-winning journalist working for Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation on social, economic, religious and political issues including HIV/AIDS, gender issues, women's and children's rights. I believe poets and writers are prophets, the ears and eyes of the society. They are watch dogs who strive for the betterment of communities. They always hold on to the past and predict the future.

I got to know about your organisation and magazine recently when I had an interview with the World Young Women's Christian Association Secretary General, Nyaradzayi Gumbonzanda. I would like to make contributions in your magazine and share with you the stories of Zimbabwean women. I would like to also network with you so as to widen my skills on gender related issues, especially towards the emancipation of children and women. I also use my skills in music to touch on issues affecting women.

I liked the layout and contents of your magazine and enjoyed reading Fransina's and Colleen's articles in your October 2008 edition. I am a member of Gender Media Southern Africa-Zimbabwe and other journalistic and women's organisations.

Regards

Nqobile Malinga

## Dear Nqobile

*we look forward to receiving your contributions and to networking with you!*

## YOU ARE A WOMAN OF COURAGE!

What is the most courageous thing you have done in your life? Was it standing up for your rights, or what you believed in? Was it talking back, speaking out? Was it taking a risk, or helping someone else? Was it making a difficult choice to be true to yourself, or follow your heart?

### THE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CENTRE (WLC) WANTS TO HEAR YOUR STORY!

Our third anthology, slated for publication in 2010, aims to showcase acts of courage in the lives of Namibian women. Sharing our stories of courage can inspire others to be courageous.

What stories do you have to share about the moments of courage in your life?

### HOW TO PARTICIPATE

You can write a short story, a poem, a song, a letter, a diary entry, or express yourself through a photograph or an artwork that can be printed in a book.

Post, email or fax your writing (in English) or your artwork to WLC at the address below. Include your name and contact details: telephone number(s), fax number, e-mail and postal address. If these details are not available, please provide the contact details of a relative, a friend or a neighbour through whom you can be contacted.

Submissions must be between 500 and 2500 words and should focus on **one specific moment of courageous action** in your life. They must reach WLC by 30 November 2009.

Published authors will receive two copies of the book.

**Submit your writing/artwork to: Women's Leadership Centre • PO Box 90675 • Windhoek**

## WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY NAMIBIA

**We act together to stop violence  
Peace building is our mission**

Women's Solidarity Namibia believes in a holistic approach that is based on human rights and equality, recognises diversity and guarantees all people access to essential resources.

We are a feminist organisation and believe in speaking out against violence and discrimination against women and children in our communities, at schools and at work places. Our goal is to eradicate violence from all spheres of Namibian life.

### What we do

We initiate and take part in collective action; issue public statements; submit petitions to relevant authorities, and take part in media and public campaigns.

### Lobbying and advocacy

We lobby all levels of Government and its institutions, civil society, the media and policy makers on issues and laws related to violence against women and children.

### Capacity building

We provide training on leadership, counselling, women's human rights, violence against women and children gender and HIV & Aids, and self-empowerment.

### Support group formation

We assist rural women and men to form support groups that address socio-economic challenges, such as violence against women and children.

### Advice and referral of clients

We counsel and advise clients on issues related to domestic and sexual violence and abuse. We also refer them to relevant service providers.

Contact information: Women's Solidarity Namibia, PO Box 7378, Katutura, Windhoek, Namibia, Tel/Fax: (061) 260924, E-mail: [womensol@iway.na](mailto:womensol@iway.na)

## LIFELINE/CHILDLINE

**Do you or someone you know need counselling?**

**Contact LifeLine/ChildLine for the following services:**

### National Crisis Counselling Telephone Line

Offers immediate counselling, onward referral and follow-up face to face counselling by appointment  
Staffed by lay counsellors from 8am to 10pm, 365 days per year  
Telephone: (061) 23 22 21

### National SMS line

Offers delayed counselling, onward referral and follow-up face to face counselling by appointment  
SMS a brief message and a lay counsellor will call you back within 24 hours  
Telephone: 0811 400 222

### Face to Face Counselling by appointment, Windhoek

Offered free of charge at our Windhoek office in Bismarck Street  
Mainly for those who cannot access counselling through medical aid  
Telephone: 061 23 22 21

### Drop-in Counselling, Kavango and North Central Namibia

Offered free of charge by lay counsellors at the following counselling points, weekdays:  
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Onankali (Clinic)  
Ongwediva (MPC)  
Ondangwa (LL/CL office, Oluno Clinic)  
Eenhana (MPC)  
For more information phone (065) 246252 North Central or



## PEACE CENTRE

Our centre provides professional psychotherapy and counselling through our network of eight psychologists, who do pro bono work, and our own staff members.

Our contact details are: Telephone: 061 371 550; Fax: 061 371 555; 26 Rhino Street, Windhoek North; E-mail: [info@peace.org.na](mailto:info@peace.org.na)

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