

THE UNESCO Courier

October-December 2019

Teachers: Changing lives

Canada

A second-chance school

Chile

Teaching behind bars

China

A teacher brings hope
to a remote village

Congo

Teaching a class of 76

India

The school under
a bridge

Sierra Leone

Mohamed Sidibay:
The story of
a former
child soldier

ISSN 2220-2285
0 1 9 0 6
9 7 2 2 2 0 2 2 8 0 1 4



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

Read the
**UNESCO
Courier**
and spread
the word!

Subscribe to
the digital version



It's 100%
FREE!

<https://en.unesco.org/courier/subscribe>



Published in
10 languages

Arabic, Chinese, English,
Esperanto, French, Korean,
Portuguese, Russian, Sicilian
and Spanish.

Become an active publishing partner
by proposing new language editions of
the *UNESCO Courier*.



Read and
share

Share the
UNESCO Courier

with your network by
promoting it, in line
with the Organization's
Open Access publishing policy.



Subscribe to the print version

- 1 year (4 issues): €27
- 2 years (8 issues): €54

Subscription fees cover printing and
distribution costs. There is no profit motive.

Discounted rates for group subscriptions:
10% discount for five or more subscriptions.

For more details, contact

DL Services, C/O Michot Warehouses,
Chaussée de Mons 77,
B 1600 Sint Pieters Leeuw, Belgium
Tel: (+ 32) 477 455 329
E-mail: jean.de.lannoy@dl-servi.com

2019 • n° 4 • Published since 1948

The *UNESCO Courier* is published quarterly by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It promotes the ideals of UNESCO by sharing ideas on issues of international concern relevant to its mandate.

The *UNESCO Courier* is published thanks to the generous support of the People's Republic of China.

Director: Vincent Defourny

Acting Editor-in-chief: Agnès Bardou

Associate Editor: Katerina Markelova

Section Editor: Chen Xiaorong

Editions

Arabic: Anissa Barrak

Chinese: Sun Min and China Translation & Publishing House

English: Shiraz Sidhva

French: Gabriel Casajus, proofreader

Russian: Marina Yartseva

Spanish: William Navarrete

Digital edition: Mila Ibrahimova

Photographs and illustrations: Danica Bijeljac

Translation and layout coordination:

Veronika Fedorchenko

Administrative and editorial assistance:

Carolina Rollán Ortega

Production and promotion:

Ian Denison, Chief, UNESCO Publishing
and Branding

Eric Frogé, Senior Production Assistant

Digital Production:

Denis Pitzalis, Web Architect/Developer

Media Relations:

Laetitia Kaci, Press Officer

Translation:

Peter Coles, Cathy Nolan

Design: Corinne Hayworth

Cover illustration: © Osama Hajjaj

Printing: UNESCO

Interns:

Gao Sijia, Ren Danni, Xu Dan (China)

Alice Christophe, Coralie Moreau (France)

Natasha D'souza (India)

Co-editions

Portuguese: Ana Lúcia Guimarães

Esperanto: Trezoro Huang Yinbao

Sicilian: David Paleino

Korean: Eun Young Choi

Information and reproduction rights:

courier@unesco.org

7, Place de Fontenoy, 75352 Paris 07 SP, France

© UNESCO 2019

ISSN 2220-2285 • e-ISSN 2220-2293



Periodical available in Open Access under the Attribution-ShareAlike 3.0 IGO (CC-BY-SA 3.0 IGO) licence (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/igo/>). By using the content of this publication, the users accept to be bound by the terms of use of the UNESCO Open Access Repository (<https://en.unesco.org/open-access/terms-use-cbysa-en>). The present licence applies exclusively to the texts. For the use of images, prior permission shall be requested.

The designations employed in this publication and the presentation of the data do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of UNESCO concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Articles express the opinions of the authors and do not necessarily represent the opinions of UNESCO and do not commit the Organization.

Editorial

This Wide Angle section is published to mark the occasion of World Teachers' Day, celebrated on 5 October every year.

An "impossible profession". For Sigmund Freud, education, like government and psychoanalysis, represented an undertaking "in which one can be sure beforehand of achieving unsatisfying results"¹. It is no easy task to simultaneously transmit knowledge, maintain classroom discipline, stimulate curiosity, impart the rules of living together and train future citizens.

The challenge is all the more difficult to take on in contexts that are marked – too often – by a lack of resources, overcrowded classrooms, or even the risk that the teacher's original purpose loses its meaning.

Certainly, everyone recognizes the key role teachers play. On a personal level, we can all name at least one teacher who made a difference – sometimes to such an extent that it redirected our whole lives. At the international level, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Goal 4 in particular, recognize the importance of teachers in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Agenda by 2030.

Yet, the profession is being undermined. The development of cognitive neuroscience and the many applications of new technologies in the field of education are forcing the profession to adapt and reinvent itself.

Once respected and valued, the role of the teacher is now contested, with teachers being held accountable for the failures of the education system.

This negative perception of them can – in some cases – result in intimidation, or even violence, by students or their families.

In fact, the profession is struggling to attract new recruits. After a few years of practice, many teachers are throwing in the towel. A 2014 study conducted in the United States on a sample of 50,000 teachers² shows that more than forty-one per cent of them (primary and secondary education levels combined) leave the profession within five years of entering it.

Low wages, limited career advancement, strong societal pressures and a lack of resources are all factors that discourage young people from pursuing this career.

Yet, over 69 million teachers will have to be recruited by 2030 to achieve the SDGs.

Sandrine teaches at a school in Burkina Faso, which has no water or electricity. A still from the shooting of the documentary, Teach Me If You Can, produced by French film production company, Winds, in partnership with UNESCO.

Of these, 48.6 million new recruits will be needed to replace teachers leaving the profession. There is already an acute shortage of teachers in South and West Asia and in sub-Saharan Africa.

In this context, how can we attract a new generation of motivated teachers? This question inspired the theme of the 2019 edition of World Teachers' Day, 5 October: *Young Teachers: The Future of the Profession*.

But beyond the alarming numbers, statistics and headlines, there are still teachers who are not discouraged by the difficult situation. Teachers who continue teaching in the most impoverished settings, in overcrowded classrooms. Teachers who choose to focus on learners with troubled backgrounds, those who are out of the school system or in remote areas. Teachers for whom teaching is a commitment, a daily struggle. It is these teachers that the *Courier* is honouring today.

Vincent Defourny and Agnès Bardou

© Winds/Émilie Théron



1. Freud, S., 1937. *Analysis Terminable and Interminable*.

2. Ingersoll, R., Merrill, E., Stuckey, D. and Collins G., 2014, updated October 2018. *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force*. Consortium for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) Research Reports.

Contents



WIDE ANGLE

7

**A second-chance school
in Montreal**
Lyne Fréchet

10

**The school under a bridge
in New Delhi**
Sébastien Farcis

12

**Mohamed Sidibay:
The role of teachers is to restore
our confidence**
Interview by Agnès Bardou

14

Congo: A class of seventy-six
Laudes Martial Mbon

15

**Teach Me If You Can:
From classrooms to the big screen**

16

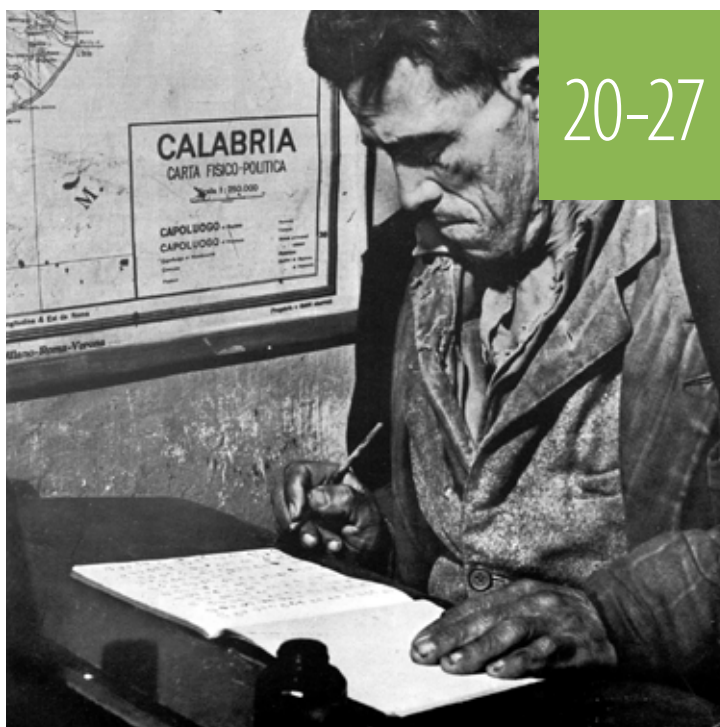
Teaching behind bars in Valparaiso
Carolina Jerez Henríquez

18

**A teacher brings hope
to a remote Chinese village**
Wang Shuo



6-19



20-27

ZOOM

**Archive treasure: The unpublished
album of David Seymour**

The story of the discovery of
a forgotten album by the co-founder
of the Magnum agency
in the UNESCO archives

Photos: David Seymour/Magnum Photos
Text: Giovanna Hendel, UNESCO



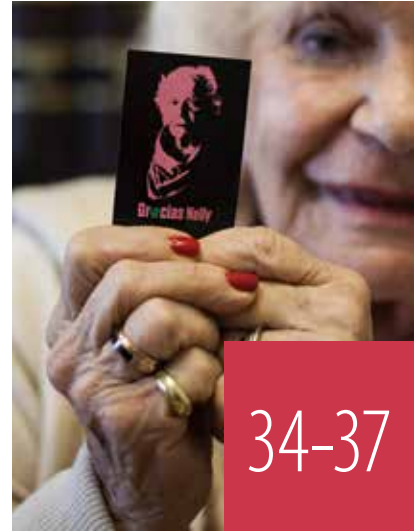
28-33

IDEAS



29

Architectural lessons for the future, via the past
Amin Al-Habaibeh



34-37

OUR GUEST



Nelly Minyersky: The green queen
Interview by Lucía Iglesias Kuntz



CURRENT AFFAIRS

38-45

39

An Inca suspension bridge is restored in Peru
Jordi Busqué

42

From the holds of the *Clotilda* to Africatown
Sylviane A. Diouf





Wide Angle

Teachers: Changing lives

Kénia Alvarado-Lara, a teacher at the Centre d'intégration scolaire in Montreal, comforts a student during an exam. Many of the children here suffer from psychological and behavioural problems, and are unable to study at regular schools.

© Robert Etcheverry

A second-chance school **in Montreal**

Lyne Fréchet, Canadian journalist

To succeed where traditional schools have failed. This is the challenge that teachers at the Centre d'intégration scolaire (Centre for academic integration, CIS) in Montreal, Canada, face every day. The French-language school takes in students whose educational paths have been rocky – gaining their trust is a prerequisite for any learning.

With its brick walls, drawings hanging on the walls and worn-out lockers, CIS looks like any other school. Classrooms open onto rows of desks, aligned and facing a blackboard. From eight in the morning, students noisily invade the wide staircase that leads to the top floors. But the comparison ends there.

This is because the school, located in the city's Rosemont district, has been welcoming vulnerable students – students with learning disabilities or psychological problems – for nearly fifty years. Many of them have chaotic backgrounds and complicated family histories, and some have even been in conflict with the law. Aged from 6 to 18, many students have also had a difficult past in schools they have attended. They have experienced academic failure, successive expulsions or been relegated to the back of the classroom in special programmes for difficult students. CIS is a new beginning for them – on a completely different basis.

At the end of June, a week before the summer holidays, the atmosphere is charged. The grade six students are preparing to take their "social universe" exam, a subject taught at the elementary and secondary levels, which covers the social and political history of Quebec. The children fidget in their seats.

Their young teacher, Kénia Alvarado-Lara, announces that the questions will focus on the Roaring Twenties [the decade of the 1920s in Western culture] and the baby boom [a period marked by a significant increase in the birth rate, coined after the one that occurred in the United States and other parts of the world following the Second World War].



© Robert Etchevery

Dull noises are then heard in the next classroom. A few staff members – all connected by walkie-talkie – head to the classroom, ready to intervene. Inside, the teachers have already managed to calm the young boy who was hitting a wall. He lies on a small mattress in a space away from the others and two of the interveners stay with him to soothe him.

Tossed from one school to another

These outbursts are not uncommon, especially at the end of the year. "Many of these youth suffer from attachment disorders," says the principal, Ysabelle Chouinard, who has taught

An educator at the Centre d'intégration scolaire for twenty-eight years, Luc Fugère gives instructions to Flora. Listening and empathy are key to building trust with the students.

at the school for seventeen years. "When the holidays arrive, the students are anxious. They don't know what to expect and are afraid of parting from their teacher."

There is an immense need for affection in some of these young people, who have been tossed from one school to another and from one family to another.



Taking a break with educator Mélanie Bélanger. In each classroom, a specialist is present to help the teacher manage the students' emotions.

The teachers have to deal with sudden changes in behaviour, emotional distress and violence, which sometimes requires police intervention. If the school is a little too big for the eighty-four students it takes in, it is because the unpredictable behaviour, yelling and fighting do not allow the school to share the premises with other students.

Working at CIS requires a solid constitution. In addition to the principal, social workers, a dozen teachers and specialized educators are responsible for this unique school in Quebec. Many teachers or trainees who come with the idea of helping young people resolve their problems leave after a few months, bewildered.

Alvarado-Lara admits that she has painful memories of her first year in the school. "My class consisted of sixteen students from Secondary I [grade seven in Quebec], who were very difficult cases. In a traditional school, it's already a difficult age. But with them, I also had to face insults, physical violence and fights. I cried a lot and felt personally targeted by the insults. I couldn't sleep."

Over time, Alvarado-Lara has found ways to respond to these demanding students. "The relationships I've managed to develop with these young people, have allowed me to overcome all the challenges," she continues. "We have developed a mutual respect over time. The other crucial factor was that my director trusted me. When I couldn't take it anymore, she'd encourage me to take a day off. It's important to take care of yourself."

Roxanne Gagnon-Houle, who has been teaching at CIS for ten years, has also learned to deal with strong emotions. She loves her work and the students love her. She only doubted this once – the day her ribs were broken in a fight. "At the secondary school level, I had students who had experienced homelessness, drug addiction and psychiatric disorders. The only way to intervene is to build a relationship of trust. You have to be honest and make a sincere commitment to them," she says.

Honesty. Trust. Respect. Empathy. These words are often repeated by the teachers and educators at CIS. Without these patiently constructed relationships with students, nothing is possible.

"You cannot approach a student with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) in the same way as you would a student with an attachment disorder. But in any case, you have to be reassuring. If a student insults me, I have to get beyond that. There are days when a child is incapable of verbalizing what he feels. I need to spend some time with him. A young person who spits or bites is a child who is trying to tell me something," explains Luc Fugère, a specialized educator. He has worked at the school for twenty-eight years and his role is to help young people manage their emotions.

The teachers at CIS have all completed four years of university training in special education – a speciality that equips them to teach children with special needs.

Rekindling the desire to learn

Teachers have been trained to identify certain disorders, to respect the learning rhythm of a dyslexic child and to manage a classroom. But not everything can be learned at university. To restore the desire to learn in these youth who have a troubled relationship with school, it is also necessary to demonstrate initiative and creativity.

“When I arrived,” says Alvarado-Lara, “I had only a blackboard, chalk and books. What could I do with these? I was convinced I couldn’t work here as I would in an ordinary school.” She then borrowed a projector from her brother and asked the principal for a laptop. She prepared interactive lessons, adding videos and photos, and succeeded in capturing the attention of her students. “I no longer had to do any class management. I integrated this method for each subject and gave the students pencils to take notes. It worked!” she enthuses.

Emma Chouinard-Cintrao, a third-year teacher, is completing her university degree in special education. She has been teaching at CIS for only a few months. To encourage learning, she takes every opportunity to think outside the box – by using educational games. To stimulate a taste for mathematics, she organizes cake and lemonade sales outside the school to familiarize students with fractions.

Pet therapy, developed with the help of specialists, is also part of the school’s therapeutic arsenal. Several animals have been included in classrooms – guinea pigs for the youngest children, a trio of rats in the first year of primary school, and ferrets and rabbits in the first year of secondary school. Pet therapy days are also held with specialists, to help some students to communicate. Some shy children learn to become more assertive when a dog obeys their commands, for instance.

These efforts are paying off. Andrew, 15, who was dismissed at the end of elementary school, attended several anger management sessions until he felt better. “I’m impulsive and when I get angry, I hit out. Here, I was helped to find ways to change,” he says.

His testimony is echoed by Joé, 12. “I have a behavioural problem. In my old school, I used to fight all the time. Here, there are people to supervise us when there are fights.”

© Robert Etchevery

“The only way to intervene is to build a relationship of trust. You have to be honest and make a sincere commitment to them.”

This painstaking work with students to allow them to express themselves and to channel their aggressiveness, makes learning possible. “At first, I felt I was teaching for nothing,” explains Alvarado-Lara. “I thought they had too many behavioural problems to progress academically. But in fact, they’ve advanced very far in developing their skills. There are so many ways to teach differently.”

“The younger the students are when they arrive, the more successful they will be in returning to mainstream school,” says Chouinard. The principal cites cases of students who have flourished after leaving CIS – such as Stéphanie, who earned a master’s degree in communication, or another student who went on to join a professional basketball team in the United States. “We don’t necessarily aim for university studies for all,” she stresses. “The important thing is for students to find fulfilment. Leading them towards their adult lives already means a lot.”

Social worker Pascale Montcalm (left) and teacher Emma Chouinard-Cintrao work to calm a student down, using great sensitivity.



The school under a bridge in New Delhi

Sébastien Farcis, French journalist based in New Delhi

For the past nine years, Rajesh Kumar Sharma has been operating a makeshift school between two pillars of the aerial metro that runs across India's capital. More than 200 children from the surrounding slums attend this open-air classroom every day.

This school does not appear on any map. It does not have whole walls or a complete roof, let alone tables or chairs. Like the small street shops that keep the Indian capital alive, the "Free school under the bridge" has simply merged into New Delhi's sprawling urban space. It nestles between the massive number five and number six pillars of the aerial metro of this megalopolis of over 20 million inhabitants. And for the past nine years, the school has provided free education to hundreds of poor children from the surrounding slums on the banks of the Yamuna River – a no-man's land located in the heart of a city that is prosperous in pockets, but badly overcrowded.

The district is a concrete grey, the sky low and heavy in the monsoon season. But the street school is full of life and colour. The three walls that make up its space are painted sky blue, with a forest of tall trees and giant roses surrounding the five blackboards that hang on the back wall. As soon as they spot him, the students run up to the teacher from everywhere, shouting "Namasté, teacher!" The man held in such esteem by the children is Rajesh Kumar Sharma, 49, founder of the "Free school under the bridge". He considers it his mission to help break the cycle of poverty by improving the education of the poorest.

Personal vindication

His battle is also a personal vindication. Sharma, who comes from a poor family of nine children in a rural area of Uttar Pradesh state in the country's north, had always wanted to study but could not finish university because he lacked the means. "The school was seven kilometres from my home," he says. "It took me over an hour to cycle there. When I was in high school, I always missed chemistry, which was the first class. As a result, I didn't get good marks in this subject, and couldn't go on to study engineering, which was my dream."

Sharma still managed to obtain a high school degree, a feat that none of his eight older brothers and sisters had achieved. He enrolled in university, selling his textbooks to pay the registration fees. To get there, he had to travel more than forty kilometres by bicycle and bus. But after a year, the elders in his family cut off the funds for his education. His dream was cut short.

The next phase in Sharma's life was challenging. When he was about 20, he moved to New Delhi with his brother. "I sold watermelons, worked on construction sites, did anything I could to earn a few rupees," he recalls. One day, on the metro construction site, he was shocked to see the workers' children, most of them out of school, wandering amidst the rubble. At first he offered them candy and clothes, and then he considered providing them more sustainable help. And thus, in 2006, he began helping two children with their homework, under a tree. One of them, now 18, has just entered university, and wants to become an engineer.

Four years later, in 2010, he set up his makeshift school under the newly-built aerial bridge, where he now welcomes more than 200 children a day – at levels ranging from the first year of primary to the third year of secondary school. The students are divided into two groups – boys in the morning, and girls in the afternoon, for almost two hours each.

Most of them also attend the local school, but come to him for academic support. "We have sixty-three students in my class," says Mamta, 13, who attends the third year of high school. "Sometimes we can't understand everything, so we come and ask Mr Rajesh."

A primary school student attends a Hindi class at the makeshift school under a bridge in New Delhi. Rajesh Kumar Sharma, who started the school, can be seen in the background, teaching other students.



Outdoor classes

There are many other children who do not attend school because their parents – migrants or informal workers – are undocumented. Sharma helps them to get papers, so they can enroll their children in school. He does this for free, relying on the meagre income from his family grocery store and occasional donations. So far, he has refused to create a non-governmental organization (NGO). “It’s a way to avoid paperwork, but also because I’m afraid that with a formal structure, the metro authorities will be afraid that we’ve settled in, and will kick us off their property,” he explains. But in the absence of a legal organization, donations are received in his personal name, which has recently exposed him to criticism. “I do the best I can, but I can’t provide an invoice when I use the donated money to feed the children,” he says. To dispel such doubts, he has stopped accepting money and only receives donations of clothing, food and books.

On this hot July afternoon, the outdoor classroom is a little disorganized. The 105 students are divided into groups of different levels. Three teachers, all volunteers, assist Sharma and have to shout as they point to the letters on the board, to be heard above the noise of the metro overhead. One teacher does his best to hold the attention of the youngest pupils. Sharma, meanwhile, is busy interpreting a Hindi text to a group of very attentive girls. “We use the national

textbooks and do everything we can with the few resources we have, to help them progress,” explains this improvisational teacher. “In the old days, classes were held outdoors, so I don’t think it’s essential to have closed classrooms to teach properly. In India, it is said that the most beautiful lotuses are born in the marshes.”



“Sharma considers it his mission to help break the cycle of poverty by improving the education of the poorest”



Mohamed Sidibay: The role of teachers is to restore our confidence



© Stefanie Gliniski/AFP

**Interview by
Agnès Bardón, UNESCO**

Orphaned at the age of five, Mohamed Sidibay became a child soldier during the civil war in Sierra Leone, and owes his survival to school. A tireless advocate of education, particularly through the Global Partnership for Education, he tells the story of his debt to a teacher who knew how to reach out to him.

You were recruited as a child soldier at an early age. How were you able to go to school?

It was in 2002, a year before the end of the war in Sierra Leone. I was part of a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) programme for the Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) of child soldiers. I was nearly 10 at the time, and had never been to school. All I knew was how to load an AK-47. But UNICEF made sure that I received an education by providing my primary school with books, pencils and equipment. Without this help, the story of my life would undoubtedly have been very different from what it is today. Going to school has aroused my curiosity to learn, and it is this curiosity that continues to be my driving force today.

A ceremony to release child soldiers in Yambio, Southern Sudan, in February 2018.

It is estimated that more than 250,000 children worldwide are still directly or indirectly involved in armed conflict.

After what you had been through, what were your first days at school like?

The first time I sat in a classroom, I felt lost. I was upset. I didn't feel like I belonged. But above all, I felt alone. At the age of 10, most of the children who were there knew how to spell their names, read, write and count. I didn't know how to do any of that. I was ashamed and didn't feel welcome among them. But I stayed, not because I was aware of the importance of education, but because school, in spite of everything, was the safest place for me.

What was your relationship with the teachers?

Having grown up during the war, I did not trust adults. When I came into contact with them, my only goal was to make myself very small, so as not to attract their attention. Being invisible is the only way to survive a civil war. At first, my relations with most of my teachers were not good. Their anger at losing everything during the war, my frustration with what I had lost myself, and my fear of adults, made relationships difficult. I was very tempted to give up everything.

Do you remember any teacher in particular?

When you are only one of eighty students in a public school in a slum, you are just one face among others. But one teacher left a lasting impression on me. She was special for many reasons. As a homeless child, I had nothing to eat at lunch-time. So, from time to time, she would share her meal with me. In class, she didn't make me come to the blackboard because she knew that, as I couldn't read, the other students would laugh at me.

And then she had the good idea of making me sit next to the brightest girl in my class, who became my tutor. And even though the teacher knew what my life was like outside her classroom, she always asked me about my day. When she realized that I didn't like school, she had the intelligence not to force me.

In fact, she did her best to make me feel safe. She knew that if I felt good, I would keep coming to school. And she was right. It is by this kind of attitude that you recognize a good teacher.

In your opinion, how should teachers approach children suffering from trauma?

There is always a time when wars come to an end. But the scars they leave on the lives of men and women last a lifetime. Teachers are the architects of the reconstruction of society. Their job is not only to pass on knowledge, but also to make sure that children feel safe. They must understand that children like me come from a world where adults have not only failed to protect them, but also robbed them of their childhood and innocence. The first thing we see when we enter a classroom is not teachers but adults, ready to exploit us once again. The role of teachers is therefore to restore our confidence. At first, we do not go to school with a desire to learn, with the idea of growing up and becoming better citizens. Sometimes all I needed was someone to sit next to me.

How can we help teachers to meet this challenge?

It requires resources. Teachers working in war zones or in post-conflict regions often lack adequate training. In fact, their work is less about passing on knowledge than about retaining students until the end of the year. If they do not manage to inspire their pupils, it is not because they lack imagination, but because maintaining discipline becomes more important. This is why teachers must be given the means, particularly through appropriate training, to play their full role with children who have suffered.



A still from the short film Mohamed Sidibay: Teaching Peace, directed by The MY HERO Project, a non-profit educational organization based in the United States.

© permission provided by The MY HERO Project (myhero.com)

Better training for teachers who care for traumatized children

Many migrant children and school-age refugees have suffered traumatic experiences. These may have occurred before they left home, during their journey, or after arriving in the community or country in which they find refuge. Teaching these vulnerable children requires appropriate training, which teachers often lack.

This is the conclusion of a policy paper, *Education as healing: Addressing the trauma of displacement through social and emotional learning*, released by UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report (GEM) in June 2019. This publication emphasizes the need for better training for teachers to provide psychosocial support to children in need.

In Germany, twenty per cent of refugee children suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Unaccompanied minors are particularly vulnerable. Almost a third of the 160 unaccompanied children from Afghanistan, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Somalia seeking asylum in Norway suffered from PTSD. In another study of 166 unaccompanied refugee children and adolescents in Belgium, thirty-seven per cent to forty-seven per cent had "severe or very severe" symptoms of anxiety, depression and post-traumatic stress.

The rates of psychological disorders following trauma in refugees in low-income and middle-income countries are also high. For example, seventy-five per cent of the 331 displaced children in camps in South Darfur, Sudan, had PTSD and thirty-eight per cent showed signs of depression.

In the absence of health centres, schools often play a key role in establishing a sense of stability – provided that teachers understand the symptoms of trauma to better support students. However, in Germany, the majority of teachers and educators say that they do not feel sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of refugee children. In the Netherlands, twenty per cent of teachers with more than eighteen years' experience report having great difficulty interacting with traumatized students.

A review of early childhood education and care facilities for refugee children in Europe and North America revealed that, although many programmes have recognized the importance of providing care, the necessary training and resources are "almost universally lacking".

Congo: A class of seventy-six

**Laudes Martial Mbon,
Congolese journalist**

Saturnin Serge Ngoma, a teacher at La Poudrière primary school in Brazzaville, Congo, gives geometry and grammar lessons to a seriously overcrowded class every day. Teaching in a school that lacks everything is a constant struggle.

In the dusty courtyard of La Poudrière primary school, the cries of the children have been temporarily silenced since the beginning of June, with the start of the holidays. Only the roar of airplane engines at Brazzaville's Maya-Maya Airport – whose runway is separated from the school by a simple paved road and a few houses – occasionally disrupts the tranquility of this hot summer afternoon.

Just a few weeks ago, seventy-six students, twenty-seven boys and forty-nine girls, crowded every morning at 7 a.m. into the first-year elementary school class (CM1) – the penultimate level of the primary cycle – taught by Saturnin Serge Ngoma. "If I add the six children I have at home, I took care of eighty-two children this year. Exhausting!" smiles this almost six-foot-tall giant, sitting at the foot of a mango tree.

The primary school – named after this neighbourhood where a powder magazine [gunpowder store] was located before independence – was Ngoma's very first post after he was recruited by the state in 2017. "You could say that I was spoiled," he says, pointing to the school premises – two makeshift shacks that house six classrooms, surrounded by tall grass and vegetable gardens.

On rainy days, the clay courtyard turns into sticky mud. The school is not enclosed. During the year, teachers give their classes with the doors open, under the gaze of passers-by who cross the courtyard to walk from one part of the neighbourhood to another.



Teacher Saturnin Serge Ngoma in the makeshift barracks of La Poudrière school in Brazzaville.

The reign of making do

Everything is lacking in this school, which has no fences and no latrines. Before more tables were found at the start of the school year, Ngoma's students were packed in, four to a desk. The others sat on the floor. Faced with such deprivation, making do was the order of the day.

© Laudes Martial Mbon

Teach Me If You Can:

From classrooms to the big screen

“The students collected small planks here and there, on which they settled. It was really not an easy situation,” the teacher sighed.

The children also have to share the few textbooks available at the school, getting together in groups of three or four to do exercises, or during reading time. The situation is all the more critical because many students are experiencing learning difficulties. Learning French is particularly hard for them. “I have to pay close attention during the reading exercises because some students don’t have a good grasp of the language and so they recite something other than the text – they make it up.”

Nor is it easy to enforce discipline among such a large number of pupils. Ngoma has his own special methods to avoid being overwhelmed. The first is to send his most restless students to the blackboard. “They’re afraid they won’t know how to do an exercise in front of the others, so they make sure they don’t get themselves into that situation. If they don’t behave, I also give them punishments – verbs to conjugate, and in the most extreme cases, I send them outside to clean the yard.”

In spite of these precarious conditions, sixty-two students from Ngoma’s class successfully moved up to the next grade at the end of the school year. He takes pride in the fact that one of his students topped the whole school, with a 12.5 overall average.

A graduate with a master’s degree in sustainable development economics, this 40-year-old teacher came to teaching late – after working as a security guard and giving courses in private institutions. Yet, in spite of his demanding daily routine and a paltry salary, he has no intention of changing professions.

In September, he will take the same road he walks every day for half an hour to get from his district of La Frontière to La Poudrière. “Mr Ngoma always tells us that he doesn’t know many people who have succeeded without going to school,” Guelor, one of his former students, sums up.



“To give back to teachers their status as life’s great heroes, because they change the destinies of children, and they change the future of the world”. This is the ambitious goal of *Teach Me If You Can* (working title), a feature-length documentary currently being produced by Winds, a French film production company. The idea, inspired by UNESCO – which is a partner in the film – is to present several portraits of teachers across the world who go above and beyond their job requirements, and to show the universal nature of their commitment.

Sandrine in Burkina Faso, Taslima in Bangladesh and Svetlana in Siberia (Russia) are each heroines in their own way. The three teachers featured in the film, whose vocation is part of who they are, overcome many obstacles to accomplish their tasks. These include poor infrastructure, geographical isolation, extreme climate conditions, interruptions in teaching, cultural problems and nomadism. Resilient and prepared to make sacrifices, these women, like millions of other teachers around the world, live each day as an adventure – mainly educational, but also human and physical.

Svetlana, for example, made the difficult choice of moving away from her children in order to teach in the camps of Evenk reindeer herders, an indigenous people in eastern Siberia. Her nomadic school is set up on a sled, and is the only one of its kind in the world. Accompanied by her husband, also a reindeer herder, she follows the nomads of the Siberian

taiga – providing their children with an education wherever they go.

Barthélémy Fougea, the film’s producer, is still surprised at how isolated the region is. “In my thirty-year career, I have never had such long production trips,” he says. It took the film crew seven days just to get to the location, first by plane, then by train and truck and finally by snowmobile. Another challenge underlies Svetlana’s commitment – she hopes the nomadic children are able to be both Russian and Evenk at the same time. This is also a personal challenge – the teacher, born in the Soviet era, is herself Evenk and was sent away to boarding school, which distanced her from the traditions of her people.

Directed by French director and cinematographer Émilie Théron, this feature-length film is currently in post-production, and will be released in 2020. It is part of an international transmedia project that include a television series, books, children’s books and an exhibition, among other initiatives. Simultaneously, education projects are being funded through On the Way to School, an association named after the award-winning film produced by Winds in 2013, also in partnership with UNESCO.



A still from the shooting of the documentary, Teach Me If You Can. Taslima, a Bangladeshi teacher, works on board a floating school, the only way to continue to teach students in a country hit hard by rising waters.



© Sumon Delwar

Teaching behind bars in Valparaiso

**Carolina Jerez Henríquez,
UNESCO Office in Santiago, Chile**

Situated on a hill in the seaport city of Valparaiso, on the Chilean coast, the Juan Luis Vives school was founded in 1999. Today it has 550 students. What makes it unique is that it is located inside the city's prison. Every day, the teachers who work there are forced to cope with the challenges of the prison world – which include disparities in learning abilities, and emotions on edge. The school was awarded the UNESCO Confucius Prize for Literacy in 2015.

Far from the historic quarter of Valparaiso, which features on UNESCO's World Heritage List, the Valparaiso Prison is located off the tourist track – in a windswept neighbourhood in one of the city's most disadvantaged areas. This is where the Juan Luis Vives school welcomes prisoners, who attend to resume their often-disrupted schooling or to pursue vocational training courses. In all cases, the aim is to better prepare them for the life that awaits them outside, once their sentences have been served.

At the school, each day brings its own surprises. "It is not possible to plan anything," explains one teacher. "It all depends on what happens inside the prison, whether there are raids or searches being carried out, for example. There are days when a normal schedule is possible. And others when you can't even teach."

Sonia Álvarez is a history and civic education teacher. She has been campaigning for the right to education of people in detention for the last forty years. "Earlier, I felt that something was missing in my life. Now, I know that what I do is essential," she says, as she climbs the stairs leading to the second floor of the school. It is a completely new space that she designed herself and had built inside the prison, using public and private funds.

Working under the constraints that are typical of prison life, the school provides basic and secondary education and vocational training in cookery and catering to enable prisoners to learn a trade and increase their chances of finding work once they return to the outside world.

Giving lives a meaning

According to figures from the Chilean government's National Coordination for Youth and Adult Education, there were seventy-two educational centres in Chile's prisons in 2018. The Juan Luis Vives school is part of this network. Álvarez and her colleagues believe that education is a liberating process that renews the social condition of the individual – as the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire would say – both in prison and outside. That helps them reflect on and give meaning to the process.

Teaching in this context is a daily challenge. "It has a lot to do with teacher motivation and having a concept of quality education that is relevant to the student body," explains Jassmin Dapik, another teacher. "Here, it is vital that the teacher has the creativity necessary for what she or he teaches to be useful. As teachers, we need to teach them so they are able to continue their studies outside. And above all, so they can function as citizens and make the right decisions," she adds.

But the role of the teachers here is not limited to the transmission of knowledge. They also help prisoners to regain some of their self-esteem. "One of the most important things is that the teachers don't treat us like prisoners," says José, who is serving a sentence at Valparaiso prison and attends classes regularly.

"For them, we are people who have dignity and rights – they want us to be better people than when we enter here, and for that, they must have empathy," points out Carlos, another inmate. "And it is because of this characteristic that when we are with the teachers in class, we do not feel like we are in jail, but like free people," he adds.

The classes, held outside of prison time, are privileged moments where stories that are difficult to articulate, can be shared. "Behind each person here, there are terrible catastrophes – I call them survivors," says Leopoldo Bravo, another teacher. "As a teacher, one must assimilate that information and build the dynamics to face this reality. The students here are diminished in every way. More than providing an academic education, we are dedicated to the rescue of the human being."

To this end, teachers are supported by Jessica León, a psychologist who encourages the students to be more receptive to the learning process. Her work to actively support teachers is aided by the School Integration Programme (PIE). "This is very necessary, because in this context, it takes a lot of effort from the teachers to somehow fill in the gaps that the inmates have – at the academic and emotional levels," she explains. "For us as a team, it is very important to maintain harmony in a context in which there are conflicting emotions."

“The teachers help prisoners to regain some of their self-esteem”

The students themselves recognize that teachers working within the prison walls face a daunting task. They say that they have serious problems concentrating, and regret not having the necessary time to advance in their studies as they would in a regular school. “We depend a lot on what the prison guards decide, we don’t have a regular schedule,” José explains.

Surmounting difficulties

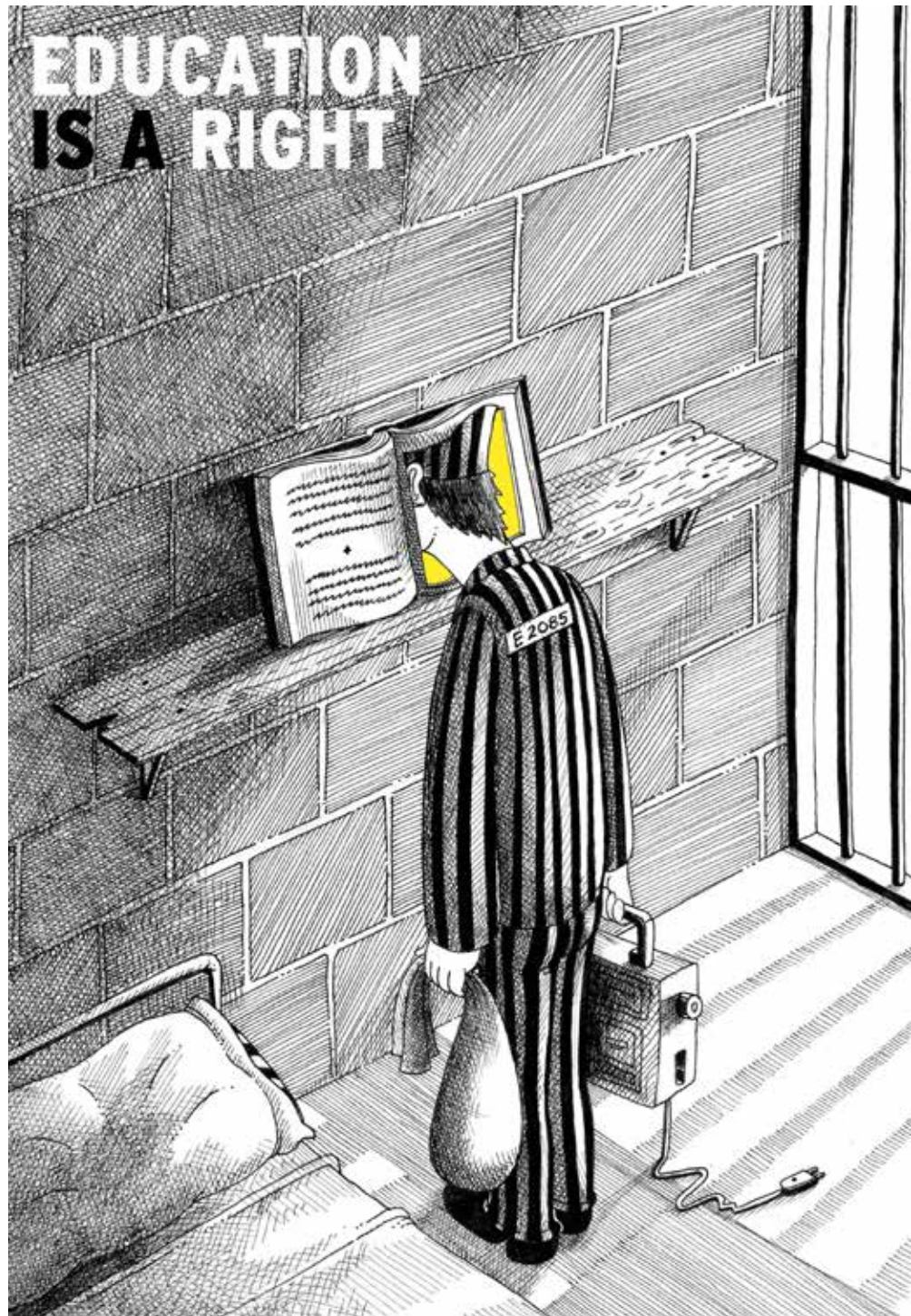
Another major challenge is the absence of educational programmes specifically designed for prisoners or adapted to their situation. In fact, it is the teachers themselves, without any specific training, who design strategies, plan activities and evaluate content – to ensure that their classes are relevant, and the learning useful.

Also, classes in prison are usually a mix of students with different backgrounds and abilities – which makes planning a class an essential task, but also a daily challenge. “We have to take all this into account when planning our day. We must consider what we are going to teach, and what values we want to give them – because our class is based mostly on concepts, we want them to retain something,” Dapik says. To do this, teachers at the school use the curriculum of Chile’s Ministry of Education as a starting point – and then adapt it to the different levels and needs of their learners.

Yet another challenge for teachers is getting students to attain a similar level, as many of them have had their schooling interrupted one or more times. There are also many instances of students not attending classes regularly, which makes it harder for them to keep up with their studies. But these repeated challenges are not likely to discourage the teachers. “We know that education transforms people,” concludes Bravo. “We see these changes taking place over time; it is this satisfaction that motivates us.”



© posterfor tomorrow 2011/Elmer Sosa



A poster designed by Mexican graphic artist Elmer Sosa, on the theme of the right to education.

A teacher brings hope

to a remote Chinese village

Wang Shuo, Chinese journalist

The people who live in Heihumiao, in central China's Henan province, often dream about leaving the mountains to find a better life in the city. Zhang Yugun also left. But once he graduated, he chose to return to the village where he grew up – to give the children a fighting chance.

Setting off from Zhenping county and heading along the mountain road to the peak that rises 1,600 metres above sea level, you can see the Heihumiao primary school, nestled in the valley below. This is where Zhang Yugun has been teaching for the past eighteen years.

The village of Heihumiao is far away from everything. In earlier times, inhabitants who wanted to leave the mountain had to follow the trails carved by cattle and sheep on the ridge, climb over the hilltop, and then pass through the precipitous hillside of Bali. The mountain road is so rugged, it is impossible to ride a bicycle through it – it would take at least five hours to climb the hill, with no transportation available. The harsh conditions meant that few teachers were keen to take up positions here.

"If teachers from outside won't come here, and the students we train won't stay, who would be responsible for the education of the children here?" asks Zhang. This question haunted him after he visited his old school, accompanied by the former principal, Wu Longqi. Even though he hesitated, due to the low wages and the tough environment, he finally decided to stay. He promised Wu that he would transform the lives of the children, and he has kept his word.

In the absence of parents, most of whom work far from home, it is the teacher who accompanies the students each morning, up the steep path to school.



© Shasha GUO/China Pictorial



© Shasha GUO/China Pictorial

Due to the lack of teachers at the school in his isolated village, Zhang Yugun has learned to take on many roles. In addition to mathematics and morals, he also teaches music.

Carrying hope on a shoulder pole

Books, textbooks, pencils and erasers – the school needed teaching materials, but also basic food supplies, such as oil, salt, vinegar, vegetables, rice. All these things had to be carried in from the city. From 2001 to 2006, Zhang carried these supplies all the way up the mountain, using baskets tied to a shoulder pole he inherited from Wu. This was the only way to make it possible for the children to attend school, and to give them the opportunity to leave the mountain one day – if they chose to.

One winter day, the mountain road was too slippery to walk on. It was almost the first day of school, and the children's textbooks were still in Gaoqiu, a town more than thirty kilometres away. Faced with this challenge, Zhang and another teacher rushed to the town in the early morning, carrying the shoulder pole through muddy roads. When they returned to the school, weighed down with their load of textbooks, they were almost completely covered in mud. But the books remained clean.

Conditions have improved in recent years. Since 2006, a concrete road provides access to the village, breaking its isolation. Buses have started plying the route occasionally, since the winter of 2017. Zhang now drives a motorcycle to ferry textbooks and daily necessities to the village – he is often weighed down by over a hundred kilos.

But conditions still remain difficult. Since the teacher's return, four of his motorcycles have broken down, and he has had to replace countless tires.

Zhang refuses to complain, however. "I think all my efforts have been worthwhile, because the students I taught were able to go out of the mountains," he says. Before he became a teacher in the village, he was the only student from Heihumiao to have attended college – the number has since increased to twenty-two.

A versatile teacher

Due to the lack of teachers, Zhang has trained himself to take on many roles. He is both the principal and a teacher of mathematics and ethical education. Over the last eighteen years, he has also acquired skills that go well beyond the scope of his initial training. In addition to teaching, he doubles up as a cook, a tailor after school, and even a nurse, in emergencies.

But his role of helping students goes even further. Most of the parents of the children work away from home, and Zhang understands the ordeals faced by each of the families.

"During all these years, none of the students in our village have dropped out of school because of poverty, especially the girls," the head of the village said. Zhang persuaded the parents of students whose families live far away from the school, to let their children live and eat on the school premises. Assisted by his wife, he has helped the students wash and mend their clothes, and has taken care of all their daily needs. With his meagre income, he has financed more than 300 students so they could continue their studies."

Fortunately, with the help of the education department, conditions at the school have continued to improve. With fifty-one students currently enrolled, the school now has new dormitory buildings, canteens, playgrounds, and computer classrooms.

Influenced and inspired by Zhang, four retired teachers have decided to return to the mountains to resume teaching. Encouraged by social recruitment, there are eleven teachers at the school today. "As long as children are there, so will we be," some of them said.



Zoom



50 - 3 - 10

One of thirty-eight contact sheets of photos taken by David Seymour for UNESCO in 1950. Most of them remain unpublished. They illustrate the campaign against illiteracy in southern Italy.

We see an adult classroom at the Rogiano Gravina People's Cultural Centre in Calabria. On several occasions, the photographer's lens focuses on the hands of older farmers who, not very skilled at handling a pen, try to trace the outline of the letters – some, for the first time.

Archive treasure:

The unpublished album of David Seymour

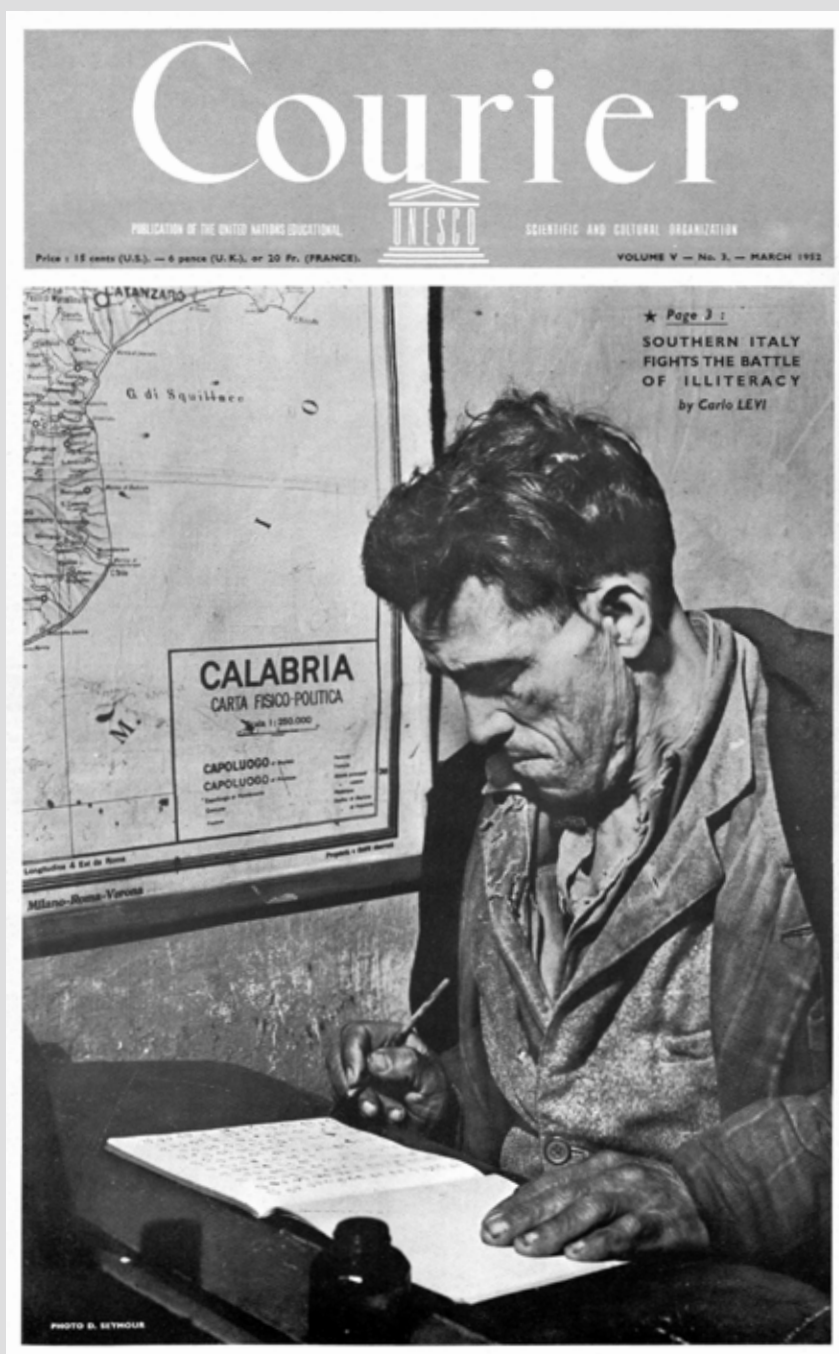
**Photos: David Seymour/
Magnum Photos**

Text: Giovanna Hendel, UNESCO

It all began in the autumn of 2017, with the exploration of UNESCO's audiovisual collection, after their transfer to the Organization's archives. Most of the collections had barely been indexed in their almost seventy years of existence. Walking through these archives was a bit like visiting Jorge Luis Borges' *The Library of Babel*. With thousands of documents in the archives, the only way to get an idea of how the collection was organized, was simply to open the drawers of the many old filing cabinets and take a look inside.

It was by opening one of these drawers that we made an amazing discovery: an unpublished album of thirty-eight contact sheets and accompanying texts by David "Chim" Seymour, one of the greatest photographers of the twentieth century. In 1947, Seymour, along with Henri-Cartier Bresson, Robert Capa, George Rodger and other leading photographers, co-founded the Magnum photography cooperative – now known as Magnum Photos.

In 1950, UNESCO commissioned Seymour to report on a major campaign to fight illiteracy in southern Italy. The *UNESCO Courier* published an article on the subject in March 1952, with Seymour's photos and the text by Carlo Levi, author of the famous 1945 memoir, *Christ stopped at Eboli*. The book is based on what the Italian intellectual experienced when he was exiled in the 1930s by the fascist authorities to a remote region, known as Basilicata today. It tells the story of the lives of its inhabitants, their customs, their beliefs and the misery they struggled through.



One of the pictures on the contact sheet shown opposite was used as the cover for the March 1952 issue of the *UNESCO Courier*. An elderly peasant learns to write. To his right, the map of Calabria, Italy, allows the reader to place the location of the reportage.

Sixty-seven years later, on the occasion of the publication of the book *They Did Not Stop at Eboli: The UNESCO Campaign against Illiteracy in Reportages* by David “Chim” Seymour and Carlo Levi (1950), which reproduces the entirety of the Seymour album, accompanied by analytical essays, the *Courier* reveals another perspective of the photographer’s work.

The historical context of Seymour’s reportage was the fight against illiteracy led by the post-war Italian government and non-governmental associations such as the *Unione Nazionale per la Lotta contro l’Analfabetismo* (UNLA, the National League for the struggle against illiteracy). Illiteracy was rampant in the country’s south. In some regions, like Calabria, where Seymour travelled for his reportage, nearly fifty per cent of the population was illiterate at the time.

To combat this scourge, UNLA has contributed to the creation of many schools offering basic literacy classes for children and adults, since it was founded in 1947. The organization’s most original initiative has been the creation of nearly sixty *Centri di Cultura per l’Educazione Permanente* (CCEP, cultural centres for continuing education) across the country. Under the direction of an UNLA teacher, adults who have already benefited from literacy classes are able to continue their education by asking questions about their practical lives, but also more theoretical questions. The UNLA teacher tries to answer them with the support of professionals in the community – such as doctors, pharmacists, veterinarians, parish priests, etc.

UNESCO first took great interest in, and then supported the Italian campaign – clearly considering it very important, since the report was commissioned from one of the great photographers of the time.

***They Did Not Stop at Eboli: The UNESCO Campaign Against Illiteracy in Reportages* by David “Chim” Seymour and Carlo Levi (1950). Edited by Giovanna Hendel, Carole Naggar and Karin Priem. UNESCO/De Gruyter, 2020.**

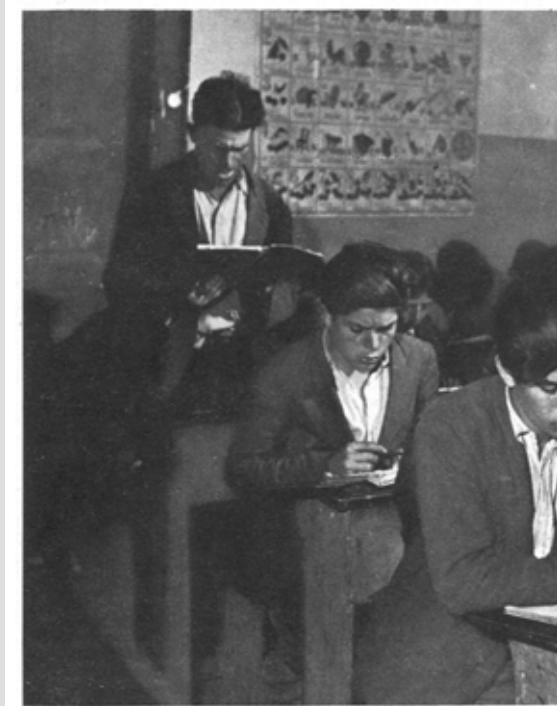
For his reportage, Seymour not only took hundreds of photos, but also wrote very detailed notes to accompany them. He provided distinct storylines or themes for groups of photographs, and even made suggestions of possible editorial selections. Some, but not all, of these choices were followed in the 1952 *Courier* article, and only a small part of the text was used. Sixty-seven years later, it is time to do justice to what Seymour noted.

For instance, very little attention was given to Seymour’s detailed observations on the condition of women in the context being analysed. In particular, in the text accompanying another series of photos of women learning to read (including the photo of the woman learning to read with her daughter reproduced in the 1952 article), Seymour highlights the linking of the literacy campaign with the application of equal opportunities measures to promote social progress.

The 1952 *Courier* article also reproduced one of Seymour’s photos of women carrying loads on their heads (In this article, we have reproduced another photo from this series [p. 26], digitized for *They Did Not Stop at Eboli*). However, the caption accompanying this photo restricted its role. It was used to illustrate the fact that the workers had to be taught at evening classes, after a hard day in the fields.

Similarly, the 1952 article reproduced one of Seymour’s photographs of men working in the fields. However, once again, the role of the photo was reduced by the caption, which illustrated the day’s hard work, followed by evening classes. Reading Seymour’s comments on one of his series of photographs of men working in the fields, however, one can appreciate the depth of his observations – as he stressed that educational campaigns had to go hand in hand with social and economic reforms.

This mise en abyme of the *Courier* illustrates how UNESCO’s archives continue to shed light on past campaigns that remain of great relevance today – while highlighting how these campaigns were brought to the attention of readers.



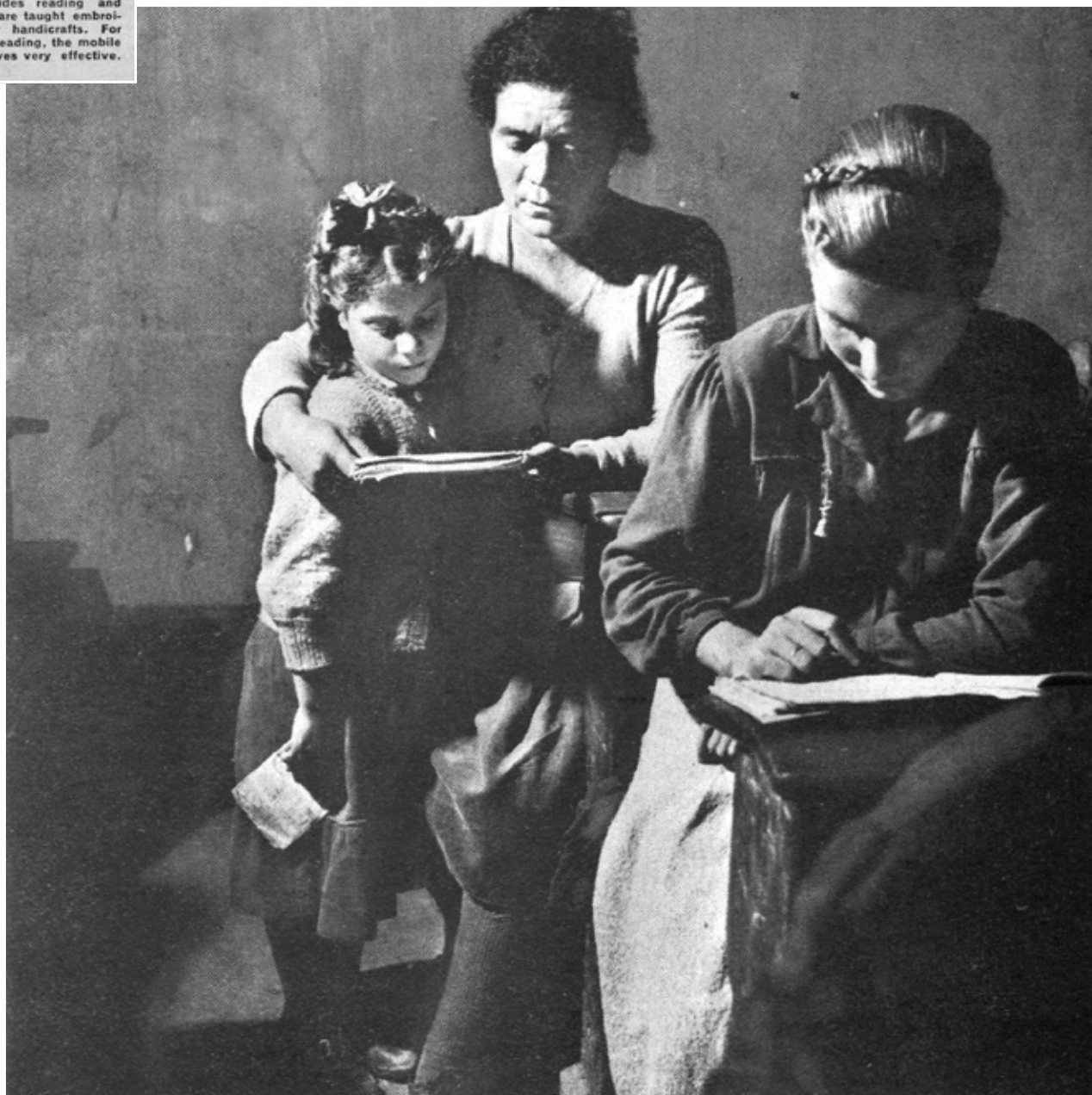
A composition of photographs, as they appeared in the Courier, March 1952.

Caption from the Courier, March 1952

After a hard day’s labour in the fields, peasants of Rogiano Gravina attend evening classes, often accompanied by their children. Illiteracy is more widespread among women than men. Besides reading and writing, women are taught embroidery and other handicrafts. For the teaching of reading, the mobile letter system proves very effective.



After a hard day's labour in the fields, peasants of Rogiano Gravina attend evening classes, often accompanied by their children. Illiteracy is more widespread among women than men. Besides reading and writing, women are taught embroidery and other handicrafts. For the teaching of reading, the mobile letter system proves very effective.



David Seymour's note

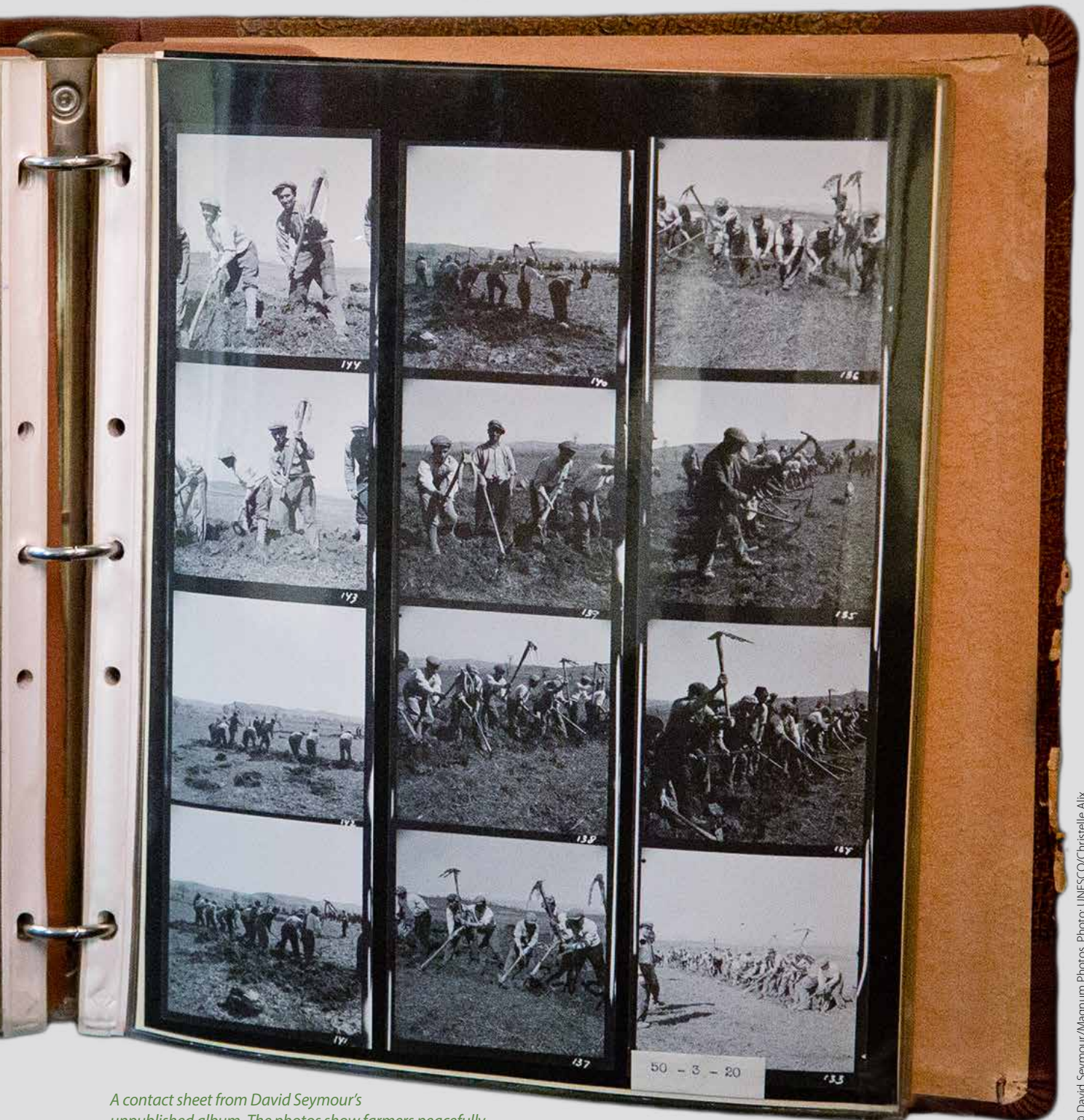
Women's evening classes in reading. The problem of the students' small children is handled in various ways. Sometimes they are brought to school and sit in class with their mother and father. In the case of infants, mothers and fathers take turns – one stays at home while the other goes to school on alternating evenings. The old established traditions in Southern Italy in which the woman has been kept in a very inferior position are changing here.

SIAM
100% FRAN
N° 2624

139 - The need for agrarian reform in Southern Italy is recognized by everybody. The Italian Parliament is discussing at present a project of law concerned with agrarian reform. However, poor peasants of Calabria went ahead and started occupying uncultivated land. This occupation is not taking over the land. It means only that the peasants will work the land, harvest the crop, and give the owner the usual share of the harvest which varies from 30 to 40 per cent. The average holdings of Rogiano Gravina peasants and agricultural workers are from two to four acres (the minimum land holding for a peasant family to assure an acceptable standard of living being from 15 to 20 acres). The extent of the occupation goes to one or two acres per family and still doesn't solve the basic problems of living. The occupation was peaceful, with no police or carabinieri present. The man in center, Oreste Rossini, has a family of five, land holding of three acres and is a very active pupil in the evening school of the Centro.



Photo taken from the contact sheet reproduced opposite.



© David Seymour/Magnum Photos. Photos: UNESCO/Christelle Alix

A contact sheet from David Seymour's unpublished album. The photos show farmers peacefully occupying and working on uncultivated land. It is accompanied by detailed facts and observations from the photographer (see below).

David Seymour's note

The need for agrarian reform in Southern Italy is recognized by everybody. The Italian Parliament is discussing at present a project of law concerned with agrarian reform. However, poor peasants of Calabria went ahead and started occupying uncultivated land. This occupation is not taking over the land. It means only that the peasants will work the land, harvest the crop, and give the owner the usual share of the harvest which varies from 30 to 40 per cent. The average holdings of Rogiano Gravina peasants and agricultural workers are from two to four acres (the minimum land holding for a peasant family to assure an acceptable standard of living being from 15 to 20 acres). The extent of the occupation goes to one or two acres per family and still doesn't solve the basic problems of living. The occupation was peaceful, with no police or carabinieri present. The man in center, Oreste Rossini, has a family of five, land holding of three acres and is a very active pupil in the evening school of the Centro.

David Seymour's note

One of the many pictures of women carrying different loads on their heads. I have a general idea that these pictures can be used as a sort of symbolic introduction to the story. I couldn't find yet the verbal slogan for it, but the general idea is that people in Calabria were using their heads to carry loads, and sometimes very heavy loads, and at present they are discovering that they can use their heads for education.





David Seymour's note

First class in reading for peasant women in Rogiano Gravina. Illiteracy is much more widespread among women than men and the League for Struggle Against Illiteracy is making special efforts to attract women to evening classes. Besides reading and writing, the women are taught embroidery and other handicrafts and their evening classes are divided between reading, writing and sewing. The very successful device of embroidering the letters combines all in one. For reading, the mobile system shown here is very effective.



Ideas

A Marsh Arab, who lives in a traditional reed house, drinks fresh buffalo milk on a cold morning. This photo, taken in March 2017 in the marshy regions of southern Iraq, is from the series Iraq's last Eden: Mesopotamian marshes by French photographer Emilienne Malfatto.

© Emilienne Malfatto



Architectural lessons for the future, via the past

Amin Al-Habaibeh

Modern cities, with their paved roads and glass towers, are hardly adapted to cope with the expected rise in temperatures. Designed to provide shade and air circulation, traditional buildings in the Middle East, Gulf and African countries could inspire more sustainable and environmentally-friendly habitats in other parts of the world.

As a result of global warming and the rise in greenhouse gas levels, cities across the world are increasingly likely to be exposed to extreme temperatures. This is particularly true in the Gulf countries, where temperatures are expected to rise to over 50 °C during the twenty-first century. But these heat surges have not spared other regions of the world – particularly Europe, where during the summer of 2019, record temperatures were reached in France, the United Kingdom and Switzerland, among other countries.

Today, lifestyles and architecture are dependent on air conditioning, and modern materials such as concrete, asphalt or glass. These materials, however, are not adapted to high temperatures. Glass reflects solar radiation to the surrounding area, creating heat islands and the risk of a greenhouse effect inside buildings.

Asphalt also absorbs a large part of the sun's rays, which it converts into a heat flux – thus contributing to warming the local environment. Concrete, on the other hand, consumes a lot of energy during its production, contributing to global warming through carbon emissions. In addition, modern urban planning does not favour public transportation. This makes private cars a necessity, creating more pollution and localized heat islands, especially when combined with the air-conditioning systems of buildings.

Historically, before the adoption of the modern way of life, most people on the planet lived in a more harmonious way with their environment. They were either farmers within oases, agricultural or fishing village communities, Bedouins or nomads living in tents in the desert, or urban dwellers living in cities.

The materials they selected to build their dwellings came from the environment. They were sustainable, adapted to their way of life, and based on what is now termed a circular economy. Due to their travelling lifestyles and animal herding, the Bedouins lived in tents that were optimized for protection against the weather, and for flexibility.

A typical Andalusian patio in Cordoba, Spain.



© kelvinjay/Stock/Getty Images Plus

“ In Jordan, the Nabatean people took this symbiosis with nature even further, by using the thermal inertia of the ground ”

The tents were designed and built to function effectively with the environment – they were woven using available resources like goat hair and sheep’s wool. This is why they are called “houses of hair” in Arabic.

Environmentally-friendly materials

The tent’s material allows the air to circulate. The fibres become swollen and waterproof when wet, which is ideal during the rainy weather. In the hot and dry weather, the Bedouins would wet the tent and its surrounding area, and also humidify additional pieces of cloth and rugs to reduce temperatures by water evaporation. The tent’s high insulation capabilities allow for cool conditions in the summer, and warmth in the winter, created with a small fire. Nothing prevents us from using similar materials to create modern architecture, to make temperatures more bearable.

The buildings of the past, on the other hand, were designed with very thick walls, using natural and environmentally-friendly materials such as limestone and natural mud, mixed with local desert plants in some cases. This provided a construction material with a high thermal capacity to regulate the temperature of the buildings. The material had the advantage of being able to absorb humidity during the night-time, which would evaporate during the hot and sunny days, to provide the required cooling effect. This effect is evident at the Red Palace in Al-Jahra, Kuwait – an excellent example of the architecture and building technology that once existed in the Gulf region.

In warm climates, cities and buildings were designed to optimize shade, reduce the direct or indirect thermal gain of sun radiation, regulate building temperatures and enhance air circulation for cooling. The streets were paved with natural stones, or simply left covered with sand. That meant they reacted much better to high temperatures without storing heat, as is the case with the asphalt used today. With the narrow roads and alleyways, and buildings built adjacent to each other, the ratio of the area exposed to the sun relative to the total volume of the buildings was reduced to a minimum – as was the heat gain during the day.

Opting for shade and air

Buildings were designed with internal courtyards surrounded by rooms or walls – in most cases, from all sides. This created a large area for social activities in the late afternoons and at night, due to the maximization of shade provided by the surrounding rooms. In most cases, the central courtyard contained trees and a fountain or a well, which could also be used to collect rainwater. At midday, the courtyard functioned as a chimney for the hot air to rise and be replaced by cooler air from the surrounding rooms, improving air circulation and the cooling effect.

This type of architecture was very common in Damascus, Syria, and in Andalusia, Spain. The narrow streets could be covered with lightweight materials from date palms. This improved air circulation between the streets and courtyards of the buildings, via the rooms. The texture and the sandy colour of the walls limited the absorption and emission of the radiating heat.

Glass was not a common building material in the past. Some rooms had only two windows. The first was a small skylight, placed very high, and kept open for air circulation and natural light, while maintaining privacy. A second larger window was usually kept closed, with wooden shutters allowing a flow of air into the room, while protecting privacy.

The mashrabiyya, a projecting window with carved wooden latticework, usually located on the top storeys of buildings, ensures better air circulation and protects against direct exposure to the sun.

Built in 2011, the Sewing School Steel-Earth in Niamey, Niger, combines know-how and local materials with contemporary technological advances. The durability of the structure, which uses materials including banco, a mixture of soil and straw with good thermal inertia, is ensured by a double metal roof.



© photo: Gustave Deghiliage/architect: Odilie Vandermeeren

This was a common feature of buildings in many regions of the Middle East, including Egypt, the Hejaz region in Saudi Arabia, and Iraq – where the windows are known as *roshan* or *shanasheel*.

Some buildings in the Gulf had a wind tower to create natural ventilation, where it was possible to open and close doors in the ceiling, depending on the wind direction – performing a similar function to that of modern air-cooling systems.

Other building design characteristics were high structures and cloisters, to maximize shade and enhance air circulation. They were often used with domes, to increase the air volume internally, and decrease external thermal gain. The idea was to create a thermal differential that caused a cooling breeze, regardless of the actual wind speed.

CC BY-SA 2.0 photo: Dennis Jarvis



A troglodyte house in Matmata, southern Tunisia.

Symbiosis with nature

In Africa, mud huts are still being built today. With a sustainable and simple design made from clay and thatch, the huts not only provide passive cooling, but are also quick to build, affordable, and recyclable. The same is true of the traditional reed houses made by the Madan people, or Marsh Arabs, in the swamps of southern Iraq – their unique design and structure provide protection with enhanced air circulation.

In Petra, Jordan, the Nabatean people took this symbiosis with nature even further, by using the thermal inertia of the ground. They created an ingeniously planned city, with innovative dwellings and an efficient rainwater harvesting system. The original inhabitants took advantage of the natural mountains in the area, carving out their dwellings in the mountainside. This ensured well-regulated temperatures in both the summer and the winter – unlike in modern buildings, where temperatures fluctuate with the season.

Similar structures and concepts using the ground's thermal inertia can also be found in Cappadocia, Turkey; the cliff dwellings of the Sinagua Indians at Montezuma Castle in Arizona, and the *cavates*, or man-made caves, and pathways carved from soft tuff rock at Tsankawi, New Mexico – both in the US.



One of the most fascinating historic architectural designs, the underground troglodyte dwellings, can be found in the Berber village of Matmata, in southern Tunisia. Built by digging a large pit in the ground, usually on a hilly site, caves, which serve as rooms, are carved out from the central pit, which becomes a central courtyard. This design ensures excellent thermal insulation. One of the Matmata dwellings, now converted into a hotel, featured in the 1977 film, *Star Wars: Episode IV - A New Hope*, as the home of Luke Skywalker on the fictional desert planet, Tatooine.

Adapting their lifestyles was yet another way that people dealt with extreme weather conditions in the past. The working day began just before dawn, and people sought refuge from the midday sun until the late afternoon – when they resumed their business and socializing in cooler temperatures. This culture is still practised in the Middle East and Spain, where a siesta is observed. Drinking water is stored in clay jars or water bags made of animal skin, and kept in the shade. The evaporation process creates a cooling effect for both the stored water and the surroundings.

People dressed in clothes made from natural materials – the loose-fitting styles were designed to enhance cooling and air circulation, while covering most of the body to prevent sunburn. The heads and faces of both men and women were most often protected by scarves – designed to reduce water loss through breathing, filter dust, protect from sunstroke and prevent aging of the skin. This versatile fabric is known by different names, depending on gender, region and design – in all cases, it serves as an important device for health protection.

Modern solutions from traditional concepts

In Europe, people have used wine cellars to preserve wine at a specific range of temperatures, using the thermal inertia of the ground. This concept could be enhanced to provide regulated temperature in both hot and cold weather. Incorporating traditional designs into modern architecture may be yet another solution for tackling climate change. The use of traditional architecture has worked well for some modern buildings in Seville, Spain, for example. A water fountain in the middle of a courtyard surrounded by trees and the building structure, works well to reduce the temperature.

Masdar City, a planned urban project in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, has sought to combine lessons from the past with modern technologies – with the use of mashrabiyya windows, narrow streets and traditional colours.

Other Gulf countries are also working to design sustainable eco-buildings. With ongoing research and the improvement of building and pavement materials, building design and urban planning, insulation and the use of renewable energy, cities in the Gulf and other countries with high temperatures are able to maintain their comfortable lifestyles – with considerably lower levels of carbon emissions and fossil fuel use.

In Europe, where temperatures are expected to fluctuate between extreme heat and cold in the future, a good start would be to increase the thickness of building walls by adding insulation and natural materials. This would reduce the need for heating in winter, and air conditioning in the summer.

Fortunately, the rise in temperatures also allows for an increase in renewable solar energy. In most homes, the use of photovoltaic solar energy combined with better insulation could provide the power needed to run air-conditioning systems. But this would create heat islands on the roads – particularly those made of asphalt, as is currently the case. Planting more trees would help to regulate temperatures in these conditions, and provide a cooler environment.



© Laurent Weyl/Argos/Saif Images/courtesy of Foster + Partners

“ Over centuries, people have designed buildings to be sustainable in terms of heating and cooling requirements, using ingenious techniques and sustainable materials sourced from the local environment ”

Construction of a modernized wind tower, by global architectural firm Foster + Partners, at the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology, in Masdar City, Abu Dhabi, in the United Arab Emirates. This forty-five-metre-high structure made of recycled steel, is equipped with atomisers, which reduce air draughts to promote freshness.



The use of insulation would also reduce air-conditioning loads and electricity consumption. Natural or innovative new materials that absorb moisture and increase thermal capacity could regulate heat gain and aid the natural cooling process. Intelligent urban planning that simulates old cities could make the use of clean public transportation a more feasible option. Since the temperature of sea-water is more stable than that of air, replacing existing air-conditioning systems with large-scale cooling and heating systems at the district level could provide a sustainable alternative. The same technology could also be applied to river water and water from flooded coal mines.

There are many lessons to be learned from traditional buildings around the world. These lessons will help us to appreciate our global heritage – while aiding us to transfer some of this knowledge to the design of future buildings and urban developments. Over centuries, people have designed buildings to be sustainable in terms of heating and cooling requirements, using ingenious techniques and sustainable materials sourced from the local environment. If we want to reduce global warming for future generations, we must integrate these lessons with our modern technologies to create sustainable and zero-carbon cities.



Professor of Intelligent Engineering Systems at the School of Architecture, Design and the Built Environment, Nottingham Trent University in the United Kingdom, **Amin Al-Habaibeh** (United Kingdom) also heads the university's Innovative and Sustainable Built Environment Technologies (iSBET) research group.



Our Guest



At 90, Nelly Minyersky is a major figure in the fight of Argentinian women to denounce gender violence and decriminalize abortion.

© Sebastián Hacher

Nelly Minyersky:

The green queen

Interview by
Lucía Iglesias Kuntz, UNESCO

Through their campaigns to protest gender violence and femicide, such as #NiUnaMenos (Not one less), and their fight for the legalization and decriminalization of abortion, Argentinian women are breaking new ground and transcending borders. The 90-year-old lawyer Nelly Minyersky is one of their most active representatives. So much so that some call her “the green queen”, because of the colour of the scarves worn by supporters of free and safe abortions – who demand, in short, a law “to not die”.

Where does your commitment to human rights come from?

My father emigrated to Argentina from Bessarabia, now Moldova, at the age of 23. His entire family was in Europe, so we lived very intensely through the Second World War. I remember hearing Hitler's voice on the radio – that pungent voice was a very hard thing that marked me, and undoubtedly predisposed me to do what I do.



© Gala Abramovich

Nelly Minyersky with activists from the National Campaign for the Legal, Safe and Free Right of Abortion, outside the National Congress of Argentina on 13 June 2018, during a debate on the law to legalize abortion.

What about feminism? Did you have role models?

I would be lying if I said that I was inspired by the great figures of the movement. My role models have been independent women. The women in my husband's family were all professionals – chemists, French teachers... I have always been surrounded by progressive people. I came through the law, and became interested in feminism as part of human rights in general, as I have lived under various dictatorships.

I specialized in family law and began to realize that a woman's legal incapacity mainly concerned a married woman. The single woman had very few limitations or constraints, and enjoyed practically all the rights. However, due to the economic model and the desire to preserve the family income, the married woman was far more limited. When I became interested in changing things, I became interested in feminism.

How did the current campaign for the right to abortion in Argentina, in which you are involved, come about?

The campaign for the right to abortion started in 2005, but it had its origins in the Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres (national women's encounters), which was created in 1986, shortly after democracy was restored¹. The encounters are spaces for meeting and discussing values, principles and forms of organization, by and for women, and are held every year in a city in Argentina. When they first started, about a thousand of us attended – now, we are more than 60,000 women who attend.

The meetings are held over two and a half days, where all the activity revolves around gender issues – with workshops, plays, craft fairs, and panels on health, on breast-feeding, and literary debates with a gender perspective. It's a unique experience that unites different social classes, different ages.

1. Democracy was restored in Argentina in October 1983, following a bloody dictatorship that began in 1976.



*"A legal, safe and free abortion".
Drawing by Argentinian artist Andi Landoni, part of the Linea Peluda campaign for the legalization of abortion.
© Andi Landoni*

You were one of the drafters of the bill on the decriminalization of abortion approved by the Argentinian Congress in June 2018, but you failed to obtain Senate approval two months later. What does this bill contain?

Our campaign slogan is: "Sexual education to decide, contraceptives to not abort, legal abortion to not die". These three principles demonstrate that there are solutions. And our proposal advocates the decriminalization of abortion, but also its legalization. The law criminalizing abortion is discriminatory because the women who die – pregnant girls who are forced to be mothers – are the girls and women who belong to the most excluded and vulnerable sections. If abortion is not legalized but simply decriminalized, these sections won't have the right to decent and safe health services. Between 2007 and 2018, there were seven attempts in Argentina to introduce a bill for the right to abortion, and soon we will make an eighth proposal. In the meantime, the campaign, which brings together more than 500 organizations, persists and continues to work on the issue, which we consider essential, and the right to abortion is experienced and transmitted as a fundamental human right.

What has been the reaction to this bill?

When, in 2018, the debate was finally opened in parliament, a unique phenomenon occurred, an incredible mobilization. We got 1.5 million to 2 million young girls and women marching in the streets to support us, we were invited to speak in secondary schools, where the boys politely asked me if I'd had an abortion. There were debates without screaming. We woke up and we communicated – and this is the most exciting thing – a message that went far beyond abortion. It was a message of freedom, of autonomy. It was thrilling to see these girls, young people, men, wearing the green scarf, which is the symbol of the law's supporters. And that's how we achieved something we had never dreamed of – an agreement between women representatives from opposing political parties who, together, managed to obtain approval for the law – what we call a "half sanction" in Argentina – from the Chamber of Deputies. It was something wonderful, unexpected.

Why does Argentina, which has legalized same-sex marriage and allows the free choice of sexual identity, remain opposed to an abortion law?

It is true that in recent years, Argentina has adopted those and many other laws that have granted many rights to women – a comprehensive protection law, the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women², retirement pensions for housewives, etc. My theory is that egalitarian marriage ultimately means allowing a group of people to enter into an institution that is a model, so they are under social control. But abortion, on the other hand, falls out of the desired model; it is completely disruptive. And it is also undoubtedly one of the most resistant strongholds of patriarchy.

2. The Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, ratified by Argentina in 2007, allows individuals and associations to file complaints of violations of the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) when they do not obtain prompt and effective judicial or administrative protection in their country, and to the Committee to open an ex-officio investigation procedure for serious or systematic violations of the Convention.

In my opinion, women have this particularity – it's easier for us to get together than for men, even though each one of us has our own political ideas. You get together with municipal workers, with young people from schools... and you breathe joy. These meetings are also pluralistic, so much so that now they want to change their name to "plurinational encounters", to include our indigenous peoples.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) estimates that more than 50,000 women worldwide are victims of femicide each year. How can we confront this problem?

I have a theory – which I'll probably never be able to explore in depth – that femicide will decrease as comprehensive sex education advances. The proof is that in all the countries where they receive this education seriously from a very young age, murder rates due to gender violence are lower. But in many countries, we are years away from getting there.

But the law still hasn't been passed...

The law was rejected by the Senate, but we were short of only seven votes (thirty-eight against, thirty-one in favour) and that was a huge triumph. We didn't lose. We didn't get the law passed, but times are changing. Abortion has been taken out of the dark zone, out of the criminal zone in society's imagination, it has been un-demonized. And now we talk about sexual and reproductive rights – young people talk about these. That's how greatly we have advanced. And we have opened a breach, because we are achieving a change in social consciousness. We have won over teenagers and young people, who consider abortion a human right. And other important sectors, because networks of professionals, doctors, nurses, lawyers have also emerged – a real green tidal wave.

After so many decades of work and activism, how do you view feminism at the global level?

There is no doubt that popular movements have succeeded in advancing the feminist movement. But this progress has also provoked a reaction, which is rather hidden, but which works in a permanent way within the United Nations and other international forums. A recent report by the Observatory on the Universality of Rights, *Rights at Risk*, very clearly demonstrates how the most extreme supporters of various religions are joining forces with the most conservative sectors to try to return, on gender issues, to before the Beijing Conference (1995).

The term "gender ideology" was coined there, for example. It is a movement that is advancing every day, and which, by the way, accuses UNICEF, or you at UNESCO, of promoting this supposed ideology. We must remain alert.



Born in 1929 in San Miguel de Tucumán, north-west Argentina, **Nelly Minyersky** is one of the most prominent women's rights activists in her country. She was named an illustrious citizen of the city of Buenos Aires in 2010 and has presided over the Women's Parliament since 2017. She was the first woman president of the Asociación de Abogados de Buenos Aires (Buenos Aires Bar Association) and of the Tribunal de Disciplina del Colegio Público de Abogados de la Capital Federal (Disciplinary Tribunal of the Buenos Aires public Bar Association).



"You are not alone". Drawing by Argentinian artist Lucia Seisas, part of the Linea Peluda campaign for the legalization of abortion.

© Lucia Seisas

“ I became interested in feminism as part of human rights in general, as I have lived under various dictatorships ”



Current Affairs

For three days every year in June, the inhabitants of Quehue district take part in a centuries-old ritual: the restoration of the Q'eswachaka rope bridge which spans the Apurímac River.

© Jordi Busqué



An Inca suspension bridge is restored in Peru

Jordi Busqué, photojournalist based in South America

Every year in the first week of June, the inhabitants of Peru's Quehue district gather to restore the rope suspension bridge that connects the two banks of the Apurímac river. This centuries-old secular Andean tradition has been inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2013.

This article is published on the occasion of the 14th session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, held from 9 to 14 December 2019 in Bogota, Colombia.

It takes about four hours of cautious driving on winding roads to reach Quehue from Cusco. In the first week of June 2019, as the rainy season ends, this village, located in the southern Andes in Peru, is about to experience a very special moment. As is customary at this time each year, the inhabitants take part in a centuries-old ritual that lasts three days: the restoration of the Q'eswachaka rope suspension bridge.

This bridge is built over the Quehue gorge of the Apurímac (which means "oracle of the mountain god" in Quechua) river. It connects the Huinchiri, Chaupibanda and Chocayhua communities, which live on the left bank, to the Qollana Quehue community on the right bank. It is the last remaining bridge made of vegetable fibres in Peru. A symbol of the link between the inhabitants and nature, their traditions and their history, Q'eswachaka is considered sacred.

A few days before the ritual begins, the inhabitants cut *q'oya*, a hardy grass that grows in the humid highlands of the Andes. It is then twisted and extended, to form *q'eswa*, a long cord. The villagers learn how to weave the fibres from an early age. Sitting on a sidewalk in the village, a woman weaves one of these ropes with amazing dexterity.



A few days before the work begins, the inhabitants cut q'oya, a special grass that grows in the high Andean areas, and twist it to form long cords. They learn how to weave these ropes from an early age.

Another beats the grass with a round stone and then soaks it in water from the river, to make it more pliable. Everything must be ready for the next day, when the reconstruction of the bridge begins.

A remarkable network of roads

The construction, which uses a technique that is over 600 years old, is testimony to one of the most remarkable achievements of the Inca civilization. They built a network of roads – the *qhapaq Nan* – to connect their vast territories. This could only be achieved by challenging the rugged geography of Peru, crossed by the deep gorges and canyons created by the rivers.

As the country has relatively high seismic activity, the flexibility provided by rope suspension bridges was an advantage. The downside was that these bridges were less resistant to bad weather than stone bridges. In a climate where it rains almost every day during the course of several months, the ropes eventually deteriorate, and the bridges have to be reconstructed periodically. Although the bridge is no longer the only road that links the two banks of the Apurímac, the tradition continues year after year.

During the first day of the reconstruction, men gather around the old bridge and weave the smaller ropes – woven by the women – into bigger ones. The head of each household brings a *q'eswa*, about seventy metres long. The roads leading to the bridge are packed with motorcycles loaded with ropes.

© Jordi Busqué



On the third day of the ritual, men on either side of the bridge attach the last cords that make up the bridge's guard-rail.

A traditional master of ceremonies, called *paqo*, presents offerings to the *apus*, the mountain spirits that are believed to protect the locals. A small altar, on which llama fetuses, corn-cobs and other ritual objects are placed, is put up near the bridge. The elder men, acting as traditional priests, offer alcohol to the men participating in the reconstruction. A sheep has been sacrificed to the *apus*, and its heart is burnt in a small fire maintained at the foot of the bridge. The priests want to make sure that the workers are protected by the gods and that no accidents occur during the reconstruction.

The ropes are installed on the second day, once the old bridge has been detached, and falls into the river, where it is carried by the current and floats downstream. It will simply decompose, as it is made only of grass. Tradition dictates that only men are allowed to work on the actual reconstruction.

The women remain in the upper part of the gorge, weaving the smaller ropes. The main support of the bridge comes from six large three-ply ropes, each about a foot thick, made up of about 120 thinner ropes. Four of the large ropes will form the floor of the bridge, while the other two serve as handrails. All six ropes are securely attached to large anchors made of carved stone, on either side of the canyon.

Pre-Columbian tradition of community work

Giving these heavy ropes the necessary tension, by human traction alone, takes up most of the second day. The pulling is done in rhythm, according to the instructions of the lead architects. The various stages of construction are supervised by the elders and two *chakaruwaq*, specialized craftsmen whose weaving techniques are passed

down from generation to generation. This reconstruction draws on *mink'a*, a pre-Columbian tradition of community service, which consists of Andean farmers carrying out important work, the benefits of which are shared by the entire community.

On the third day, a handful of men who have no fear of heights, walk the length of the structure, attaching small ropes from the handrail to the floor of the bridge. This makes it possible for everyone to safely cross the bridge. Two groups start on either side of the bridge, and eventually meet at its centre. When the last rope is in place and the bridge is finally ready, the workers raise their arms, causing the crowd to cheer loudly.

The workers are the first to use the new bridge, but everybody is eager to emulate them. For safety reasons, no more than four people are allowed to cross the structure at any one time.



“ A symbol of the link between the inhabitants and nature, their traditions and their history, Q'eswachaka is considered sacred ”

The crowd is large, and it takes a long time before everyone has crossed the gorge. No modern materials, tools or machines have been used during the entire reconstruction process of the bridge – only ropes of grass and human power.

The annual rebuilding ritual ends with festivities in which all the inhabitants participate. A stage has been set up and a music group plays traditional songs from the region. Schoolchildren from neighbouring villages take part in a dance competition. In a few years, it will be these boys and girls who will take over, to rebuild the Q'eswachaka suspension bridge.



No more than four people are allowed to be on the structure simultaneously.

© Jordi Busqué



From the holds of the *Clotilda* to Africatown

Sylviane A. Diouf

In May 2019, the news that archaeologists had discovered the wreck of the *Clotilda* – the last recorded slave ship to arrive in the United States, fifty-two years after the international slave trade had been outlawed – made headlines around the world. But all the attention focused on the ship’s owner, its captain, and the ship itself, rather than on the victims of this appalling journey.

It all began in 1859 in Mobile, Alabama, when planter and ship captain Timothy Meaher bet that he could bring in “a shipful of niggers” right under the noses of the authorities. By then, the slave trade to the United States – which had been legally prohibited since 1 January 1808 – could only be conducted illicitly, with offenders risking the death penalty. Nevertheless, the trafficking continued unabated and demands to reopen the slave trade had grown since the 1840s.

Short of labour for their expanding cotton and sugar plantations, slave-holders in the Deep South had to buy enslaved labour from the Upper South, at prices they considered exorbitant. A man sold in Virginia could fetch \$50,000, whereas a smuggled African could be bought for \$14,000. Meaher recruited and financed William Foster, the builder and owner of the *Clotilda*. As an improvised slave-ship captain, Foster arrived in Ouidah, in the kingdom of Dahomey, on 15 May 1860.

The terrible ordeal of the 110 children and young adults – half male, half female – who became the *Clotilda*’s prisoners, had begun a few weeks earlier. After a deadly raid by the Dahomey army on a small town, a group of survivors were brought to Ouidah. Among them was 19-year-old Oluale Kossola, who was later renamed Cudjoe Kazoola Lewis. Others, including a group of traders, had also been kidnapped.

The prisoners came from various areas of Benin and Nigeria, including Atakora, Banté, Bornu, and Dahomey. They belonged to the Yoruba, Isha, Nupé, Dendi, Fon, Hausa and Shamba ethnic groups. Among them were Muslims, and initiates of the Oro society, or Orisha convents. All of them had been brutally snatched from their families and communities, and held in a barracoon, after Foster had selected them from among hundreds of captives.

As Ar-Zuma, Oroh, Adissa, Kupollee, Oluale, Abache, Omolabi, Sakaru, Jabar, and their companions set foot on the *Clotilda*, they were stripped of their clothes, as was customary on slave ships. The humiliation and the suffering they endured was such that even fifty years later, they could not bring themselves to speak about it – except to say that they were very thirsty, and that two people had died.

Hidden in a swamp

On 8 July 1860, after forty-five days at sea, the captives arrived in Mobile, under cover of night. To remove any trace of the landing, the *Clotilda* was set on fire. Even so, news of the “secret” arrival spread from coast to coast. The federal government was forced to intervene, and a crew was sent to search for the young Africans.



© Equal Justice Initiative / Human Pictures

Detail of a sculpture by Ghanaian artist Kwame Akoto-Bamfo. Dedicated to the memory of the victims of the transatlantic slave trade, it is on display at the National Memorial for Peace and Justice in Montgomery, Alabama.

“The ship-mates never lost their deep-rooted sense of belonging to a land and a people far away.”



They had been hidden in a swamp, completely naked for several days, until some rags and skins were handed out to them when they were discovered. A sale was organized discreetly, and the group went through another heartbreaking separation. As some of them were leaving for places that were far away, they all sang a parting song, wishing each other a safe journey. About seventy-six people were divided between Meaher and his two brothers, and Foster.

The cases against the slave-owners were ultimately dropped, and the “ship-mates” – as Africans who travelled on the same slave ship generally called each other – were put to work, openly, on steamships, in the fields, and as domestics. They were a tightly-knit community, and were said never to accept brutality – they stood up to authority and were unafraid of the consequences. An African American enslaved on the same plantation as some of the newcomers recounted that once, when a supervisor tried to whip one of the women, they all jumped on him and beat him up.

When a cook slapped a young girl, she screamed. Her companions ran to her rescue, tools in hand, and banged on the door of Mrs Meaher’s bedroom, where the cook had taken refuge. Often mocked by their enslaved companions born in the US, the *Clotilda* passengers kept to themselves and continued to adhere to their original cultures – including their funeral rites.

In April 1865, at the end of the Civil War, the ship-mates were finally free. But it was not the kind of freedom they had longed for. They wanted to go back home. As one of them, Ossa Keeby, said, “I go back to Africa every night in my dreams.” The men found work in the lumber-mills and powder-mills. The women, who were self-employed, made their living gardening and selling their produce, and the baskets that the men wove at night. They saved their money to pay for their return. When they realized they would never make enough, they sent Cudjoe Lewis to ask Meaher for some land. They argued that they had families, homes, and land before he had forcibly brought them to Mobile and made them work hard for nothing, for five years. Meaher refused.

Africatown

Redoubling their efforts, the ship-mates accumulated enough money to buy plots from the Meaher family and other local owners. By 1870, they had established a small village in Alabama that they proudly called African Town – it was later renamed Africatown.

It was a clear way of demonstrating who they were, who they wanted to remain, and where they wanted to be. To manage their settlement, they elected a chief, Gumpa, who was a nobleman from Dahomey, and two judges. They built the first church and the first school in the area and some of them learned to read and write. They also stayed in touch with the ship-mates, some of whom lived several counties away.

As they married within – and sometimes outside – the group, a second generation was born. They were given one American name and one African name. These children learned about their origins – some were fluent in their parents’ languages and even acted as translators. The ship-mates talked fondly about their hometowns – which became a paradise, a refuge, for the children, where they could go to in their dreams when white racism and black derision became too hard to bear.



Cudjoe Lewis (1841-1935) was one of the founders of Africatown, a village created in 1870 by the people who were brought to Alabama on the Clotilda.

Having stood up while they were enslaved, the people of Africatown continued to fight for their rights. When the men decided to vote in elections in 1874, an incensed Meaher blocked their way. Undaunted, the men walked from polling station to polling station, finally succeeding in casting their ballot. Kohenco, who ran a dairy farm with her American husband, became a member of the first reparations movement that sought pensions for freed people. In 1902, Lewis was hurt by a train and sued one of the largest corporations in the South. Against all odds, an all-white jury awarded him \$13,000, but the judgement was overturned by the Alabama Supreme Court. Gumpa also sued, after being injured by a train. He died before the case went to court, but the claim was later settled, with a small amount of money awarded to his grandchildren.

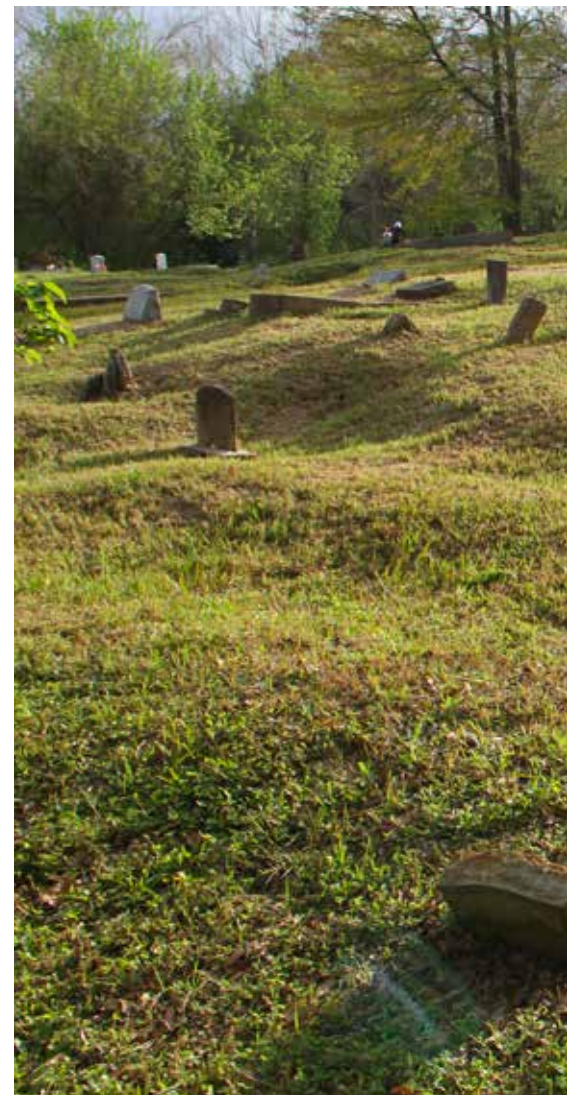
When the ship-mates were interviewed, starting in the 1890s, they systematically refused to belittle their former religions, or to criticize polygamy. They also refused to condemn those who had taken them prisoners, attributing their fate to “bad luck”.

They patiently, and sometimes exasperatedly, explained and defended their cultures. Asked whether they preferred Mobile or their erstwhile homes, they forcefully picked the latter.

Clotilda's last survivors

When Emma Langdon Roche, a teacher, told the last survivors, now in their seventies, that she wanted to write about their lives, they asked to be called by their original names – so that if the story reached home, their relatives would know they were still alive. The book, with their photos taken fifty-four years after their brutal uprooting, was published in 1914. The author, Zora Neale Hurston, also interviewed Lewis at length and filmed him in 1928. Cudjoe Lewis, who lost his wife, Abile, and their six children in short succession, was the last survivor of Africatown. He passed away in 1935, aged 94, and was the second-to-last known survivor of the Atlantic slave trade. Two years later, Redoshi, a woman captured in the same raid, died in Dallas. She too had been photographed, interviewed, and filmed.

“They did all they could to ensure that their stories were recorded, shared and remembered”



The ship-mates of the *Clotilda* lived in Alabama as much as they could on their own terms. But in spite of their deliberate insularity, they were involved in a series of events that marked their times. Yet, they never lost their deep-rooted sense of belonging to a land and a people far away. Today, the Africatown they created as an alternative, is still home to some of their descendants. But this once-vibrant community has fallen on hard times. Polluting paper mills, streets blocked by factory walls, roads cutting through the neighbourhood – environmental racism has devastated the place. Only the Union Missionary Baptist Church and the graveyard where the ancestors are buried are tangible reminders of the first generation. The residents hope that the discovery of the *Clotilda* will encourage tourism and result in a much-needed revival of Africatown and its fascinating history.

The shipwreck of the *Clotilda*, and whatever it reveals, is only a disgraceful symbol of the basis of the economic development of the US. More important is the history of the experience of the young people who lost everything, but transcended their awful circumstances. Through the ordeals of the trans-Atlantic crossing of slave ships from Africa to America, slavery, the Civil War, Jim Crow [the state and local laws that enforced racial segregation in the southern states of the US], and for part of the Great Depression of 1929, they retained their dignity, their confidence in themselves and their abilities, their unity, their sense of family and their pride in their cultures.

The graveyard of the original enslaved people who arrived on the Clotilda, and their descendants, in Africatown. The neglect is apparent, with some graves disappearing into the ground.

What is more, they did all they could to ensure that their stories were recorded, shared and remembered. Theirs is a dreadful tale of loss and calamity, but also of triumph over adversity – a story of unsung heroes.



A historian of the African diaspora, **Sylviane A. Diouf** is the author of *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America* and several other books. She is a Visiting Professor at the Center for the Study of Slavery and Justice, Brown University, in Providence, United States.

“A dreadful tale of loss and calamity, but also of triumph over adversity”



© Maarten Vanden Eynde



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

UNESCO Publishing

www.unesco.org/publishing
publishing.promotion@unesco.org



They Did Not Stop at Eboli
The UNESCO Campaign Against Illiteracy in Reportages by David "Chim" Seymour and Carlo Levi (1950)
Edited by Giovanna Hendel, Carole Naggar and Karin Priem
ISBN 978-3-11-065163-8
180 pp., 170 x 240 mm, hardback, €86.95
UNESCO Publishing/De Gruyter

The analysis of UNESCO's audio-visual archives for their digitization has brought to light a forgotten album of thirty-eight contact sheets and accompanying texts by Magnum photographer David "Chim" Seymour – a reportage commissioned by UNESCO in 1950 on the fight against illiteracy in southern Italy's Calabria region.

A number of Seymour's photographs appeared in the March 1952 issue of the *UNESCO Courier*, accompanied by an article written by Carlo Levi, who gained worldwide fame with his 1945 memoir, *Christ Stopped at Eboli*.



Manual for Developing Intercultural Competencies
Story Circles
Darla K. Deardorff
ISBN 978-0-367-19997-5
116 pp., 142 x 224 mm, hardback, €50
UNESCO Publishing/Routledge

Intercultural competencies refers to the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to improve interactions across differences, whether within a society or across borders. This book presents a structured, yet flexible, methodology for developing intercultural competencies in a variety of contexts, both formal and informal.

Piloted around the world by UNESCO, this methodology has proven to be effective in a range of different contexts. It is an important resource for anyone concerned with effectively managing the growing cultural diversity within our societies, to ensure inclusive and sustainable development.



Behind the Numbers: Ending school violence and bullying
ISBN 978-92-3-100306-6
70 pp., 210 x 297 mm, paperback
UNESCO Publishing
Available on <http://unesdoc.unesco.org>

School-related violence in all its forms, including bullying, is an infringement of children's and adolescents' rights to education and health and well-being.

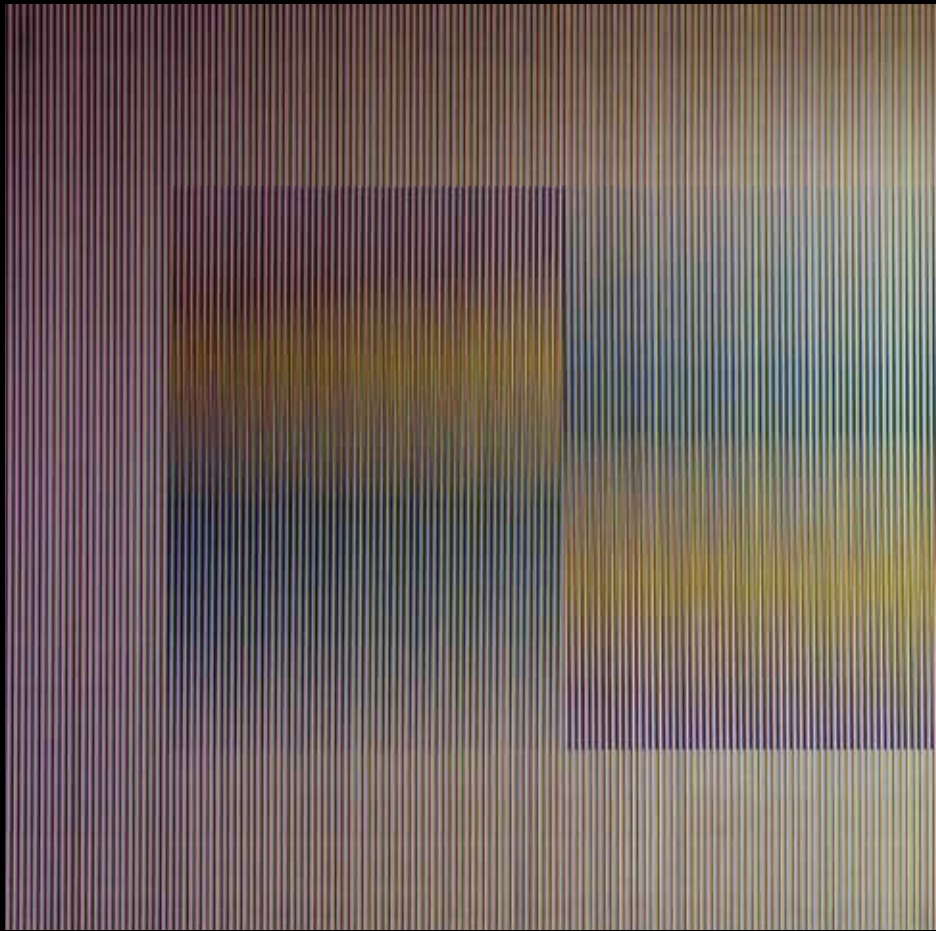
This report provides an overview of the most up-to-date evidence on school violence and bullying in 144 countries.

The publication also includes an analysis of factors that contribute to effective national responses, based on a series of case studies commissioned by UNESCO, of countries that have succeeded in reducing the prevalence of school violence and bullying.

Many voices, one world

The *UNESCO Courier* is published in the six official languages of the Organization, and also in Portuguese, Esperanto, Sicilian and Korean. Read it and share it widely across the globe.





Physichromie, work by Venezuelan painter and kinetic artist Carlos Cruz-Díez (1923-2019). This diptych, made from acrylic painting and metal, has been part of UNESCO's art collection since 1978. The left part of the work is at the top, the right part is shown below.