

AUDACIOUS WOMEN FESTIVAL

AUDACIART WEEKLY

Footprints

3 July 2020





AudaciArt – Footprints

This week's theme, *Footprints*, is inspired by a quotation from Leymah Gbowee, 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate.

Leymah Gbowee is a Liberian peace activist, social worker and women's rights advocate. She is Founder and President of the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa.

You can never leave footprints that last if you are always walking on tiptoe.

AudaciArt

Hallo Everybody

Here is the 13^h AudaciArt publication: an exciting collection of words and pictures. We're delighted to have our very first quilt this week. And some wonderful and thought-provoking work by contributors old and new!

Many thanks to all of you. And, of course, to those who helped to make this possible.

The theme for Friday 10th July @ noon is: On Being a Pretzel

And for the following week, 17th July: The Courage to Stand Up

Women are invited to create and submit work in any medium or genre inspired by the themes.



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What Did You Do In the Crisis Mama? Sitting, Striking and (Nearly) Undressing for Peace

Sally Wainwright

Leymah Gbowee was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2011, jointly with two other African women, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Tawakkol Karman, "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work."

Her story is extraordinary in many ways. And her fight for peace – successfully bringing an end to 14 years of civil war in Liberia – includes one of my favourite pieces of women's activism, demonstrating a formidable audacity and imagination. *(Read on, dear reader! Ed)*

She was born in 1972 and hoped to study medicine. But in 1989, when she was 17 and preparing to go to university, the first Liberian civil war broke out putting paid to her plans. Instead she trained as a social worker and trauma counsellor and began working with child soldiers.

She followed her partner to Ghana but there they lived virtually as homeless refugees, nearly starving. She eventually fled with her children back to the chaos of Liberia and her family.

The war ended in 1997, with the election of Charles Taylor as President. Gbowee said that Liberians did not elect Taylor because they had forgiven him for his involvement in the civil war, but as an opportunity to redeem himself. Unfortunately he did not, and growing opposition to him meant the peace did not last long. In 1999 Liberians found themselves facing the second Liberian civil war.

By this time, Gbowee had become involved in the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WAPNET) – Africa's first regional peace organisation – which was starting to actively involve women in its work. In late 1999 Gbowee was invited to a WAPNET conference in Ghana and a second conference in October 2000.

There she met Thelma Ekiyor, a Nigerian lawyer who specialised in alternative dispute resolution, and who was planning to start an independent women's peace organisation. A year later, Gbowee attended the first meeting of Ekiyor's Women In Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET). Women from almost all the 16 West African nations attended, shared experiences, learnt about conflict and conflict resolution and discussed why they should become involved in addressing those issues. This was the first organisation in Africa to focus on women and specifically on peacebuilding. When WIPNET was launched in Liberia, Gbowee was named as the co-ordinator of the Liberian Women's Initiative, a role which she filled unpaid in the evenings, continuing to work as a trauma counsellor by day.

Gbowee, a committed Christian, began to work closely with a Muslim woman named Asatu Bah Kenneth. It was unheard of at the time for Muslims and Christians to work together, but Gbowee understood that they had much in common through their



position as women. As she saw it, when soldiers came to a village, they didn't first separate the women into Christians and Muslims before deciding which group to rape. The warring factions were from many different ethnic groups (there are 16 in Liberia) as well as from both the major religions, so it was essential to build a diverse coalition of women. Conscious that religion has often been used to disempower women, they met separately with Christian and Muslim women, reconceptualising the narrative of some of the great women in the Bible and the Qu'ran respectively, showing how they engaged in political issues, so helping to change their time.

This unprecedented collaboration gave rise to a non-violent interfaith movement known as the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace. They started going to Mosques on Friday afternoons and Churches on Sundays, as well as Saturday markets, handing out fliers reading '*We are tired. We are tired of our children being killed. We are tired of being abused! Women, wake up – you have a voice in the peace process.*'

As the war and the killings continued, Gbowee and her colleagues decided to take matters into their own hands. Thousands of Christian and Muslim women, barefoot and dressed in white (to signify peace, and to distinguish them from the dark colours of war) gathered daily, praying for peace, holding sit-ins and non-violent demonstrations. When the men continued to not take notice, the women initiated a sex strike – withholding sex from their partners until a peace agreement was signed. Despite the stereotypes that sometime abound about Muslim women being quiet and obedient, it was actually Asatu Bah Kenneth who came up with the idea. Some women took their husbands to church and made them promise to abstain until then, so taking the pressure off the women themselves. Gbowee says that although the strike had little practical effect, it was very successful in gaining the attention of the media.

They invited Charles Taylor to meet with them to discuss their three demands: an unconditional ceasefire, a dialogue and an international intervention force. Taylor had explicitly ruled all these out. Knowing that he would pretend not to have received the invitation sent directly to him, the women cannily also sent copies to 5 other senior officials, who were able to confirm that they had handed the invite to the president.

Eventually in 2003 Taylor agreed to meet the women. But when they got to the Presidential palace the guards told them that they could only come in if there were at least 20 of them, Taylor being confident that there would be little support. And if there's more than 20? Gbowee asked. The guards shrugged – then they could all go in. One quick phone call later and some 2,000 women dressed in white came down the hill towards the palace. Suddenly there was a call from the president's office saying that he wasn't feeling well and would only meet 10 women. Gbowee was furious, retorting that if he wouldn't see all of them they would leave. Eventually he came to meet them. The women refused the seats he offered them, and sat on the floor instead, saying that his war had taken all their furniture so why would they sit on a chair when they met him?



Ignoring her prepared statement, Gbowee spoke to Taylor from her heart but also made sure to address Grace Minor, the only female official present. (Minor later gave a considerable sum, at enormous personal risk, to the women's protest movement.) Gbowee told them

We are tired of war. We are tired of running. We are tired of begging for bulgur wheat. We are tired of our children being raped. We are now taking this stand, to secure the future of our children. Because we believe, as custodians of society, tomorrow our children will ask us, "Mama, what was your role during the crisis?"

Taylor eventually promised to go to the peace table. However, he said, first he would have to go to find all the warlords in the bushes and bring them to the talks. This meant the process went on for many months. The women kept up the pressure during this time, continuing to protest and invading spaces where women might not normally be seen, such as conducting a sit-in in a football field. But eventually they'd had enough.

After nearly 3 months of talks, some 200 women barricaded the hall and said they wouldn't let the men out until a peace agreement was signed. When the security forces tried to arrest Gbowee, she threatened to disrobe if they did. Seeing an elderly or married woman deliberately bare herself, according to traditional beliefs, would bring down a curse of terrible misfortune on the men who saw her. She says that voluntarily removing her clothing was quite different from a woman being forced to when she was being raped. That the voluntary act would signify that she was giving up her last shred of dignity.

The threat, combined with growing international pressure, turned out to be a turning point in the negotiations. Within weeks the 14-year long civil war was brought to an end, a peace agreement was signed providing for a transitional government, and on 11 August 2003 Taylor resigned and went into exile.

But there was much work to be done consolidating the peace. Over 250,000 people were dead, over a million – mostly women and children – were at risk of malnutrition and disease and one in three of the population was displaced. Appalled at what she saw as the arrogance, ignorance and cultural insensitivity of the UN agencies supposed to be supporting the transition to a peaceful society, Gbowee continued to advocate for the involvement of women's organisations in building the peace, writing that

People who have lived through a terrible conflict may be hungry and desperate, *but they're not stupid*. They often have very good ideas about how peace can evolve, and they need to be asked..

In 2006 she co-founded the Women Peace and Security Network Africa, and spent six years as its Executive Director. WIPSEN-A is a women-focused, women-led, pan-African organisation dedicated to promoting women's strategic participation and leadership in peace and security governance on the continent.



In the same year, one of her co-Nobel Laureates, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf was elected president of Liberia, becoming the first woman president in Africa.

In 2012 Gbowee formed the Gbowee Peace Foundation Africa, to provide educational and leadership development opportunities for women, girls and youth. She is currently head of the Women Peace and Security Network Africa, based in Ghana.

Gbowee's achievements did not come without personal cost. She has 8 children, but much of the time they were brought up by her sister or mother to allow her to continue her work. The pressure got to her and she increasingly turned to drink to alleviate the pain of being separated from her family. One day she passed out and on coming round, saw in her children's worried faces the fear that they had lost her. Easy it was not, but she stopped drinking there and then.

Taylor later became the first head of state to be tried at the Hague, and he is now serving 50 years in a British jail after being convicted on 11 counts of war crimes and crimes against humanity, including terror, murder, slavery, atrocities against personal dignity, using child soldiers and rape. But the trial did not refer to his actions in Liberia, but only to those carried during his involvement in the civil war in Sierra Leone. Gbowee points out that whilst Taylor has a bed, toilet, shower and 3 meals a day, the same is not true for so many of his victims.

Today Gbowee is an inspirational speaker, travelling round the world to teach and encourage peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as well as continuing with her commitment to empowering women and girls.

More information about, and talks by, Leymah Gbowee:

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2011/gbowee/facts/>

<https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/peace/2011/gbowee/biographical/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MV5oNBFkuQA>

https://www.democracynow.org/2015/4/27/liberian_nobel_peace_prize_laureate_leymah

Autobiography: *Mighty Be Our Powers: How Sisterhood, Prayer, and Sex Changed a Nation at War*, Leymah Gbowee with Carol Mithers. Beast Books, 2013

Documentary film: *Leymah Gbowee - Pray the Devil Back to Hell*

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A Walk In The Park

Andrea McMillan

This is a stitched wall hanging featuring footprints.

The grass is slashed/faux chenille, the boot prints are free-machine stitched, using my wellies as a pattern, and the daisies are made from sheer and dissolvable fabric.



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Footprints in the Cloud

Jo Cameron Duguid

I switched my energy supplier to Bulb a few months ago (other energy suppliers are available, but frankly I think they're all much of a muchness). Bulb like to make their customers feel special and, when all the bureaucracy had been completed, I received an email congratulating me on now being "a certified Bulberino". I wish I could tell you I was joking.

One of Bulb's plus points is that they market themselves as a green energy provider. I only have electricity in my home, and Bulb supplies 100% renewable electricity from solar, wind and hydro power. Last week they invited me to calculate my carbon footprint and consider joining their offsetting scheme, funding projects to cut CO₂ emissions around the world. Suggested monthly payments depend on one's carbon footprint.

Carbon footprint. Now there's a term unfamiliar in my childhood and young adult life, along with many others that are now common parlance, such as kerbside recycling, microplastics, single-use plastic and global heating. This new vocabulary has become necessary so that we can have meaningful discussions about the action needed to combat the disastrous impact human "development" has had on our planet.

Keen to reassure myself that I wasn't an irredeemable environmental criminal, I clicked to answer the online questionnaire. Lifestyle areas covered were: modes of transport used; dietary choices; spending on new clothes and shoes in the past year, spending on toiletries, health and beauty, spending on electronics, and on furniture and appliances; whether I used renewable energy (yes, thanks to Bulb) and whether I used gas. It turned out that my carbon footprint was 5.6 tonnes per annum, which, Bulb told me, is 57% smaller than the UK average of 13 tonnes per annum. It would cost only £3.29 a month to at least go some way towards offsetting this through their scheme. So far, so smug.

The fact that I haven't flown in an aeroplane since 2016 and don't drive a car obviously made a huge difference to my final score. In fact, Bulb helpfully informed me that my purchase of electronics was the biggest contributor to my carbon footprint, accounting for 2.3 tonnes. It was, however, atypical that I happened to have bought my first ever smartphone within the past year, replaced my PC at the end of 2019 when I could no longer avoid updating to Windows 10, bought a tablet to replace my four year old one which had finally given up the ghost, and acquired my first ever laptop when my PC screen failed right at the start of the coronavirus lockdown. Three of these four items were refurbished and only one (the tablet) new, and I don't anticipate replacing any of them for several years, so I suspect my carbon footprint would be lower if Bulb had thought to take this into account.

"But hang on a minute", I thought, "they didn't mention the cloud"! I still remember the shock I felt a couple of years ago when I read an article about the huge



environmental impact of storing data in “the cloud” (another of those new terms). I hadn't previously even considered what and where the cloud was. It was something nebulous in the ether, not part of the real world at all. But of course the cloud is actually a physical infrastructure, a huge network of computers in warehouses, often in desert areas away from centres of population. These generate enormous quantities of heat, and demand massive amounts of energy to keep them cool and optimally functioning. Every email we send, every photo we share on Google

Drive contributes to global heating, due to cloud storage relying on thousands of servers operating 24/7 to ensure continuous access to data. I couldn't believe I hadn't known about this, or even questioned how exactly all of this worked.

The global corporations that dominate modern mass communications, who own the servers on which the cloud relies, haven't always had a good reputation on environmental awareness, and it was certainly the case in the past that there was little investment in renewable energy to power the cloud. This is changing, and companies like Amazon, Facebook and Google have made progress in moving towards 100% renewable energy in their cloud facilities. But there's no avoiding our personal responsibility for questioning how every aspect of our lives is having an impact on the planet.

I am constantly reminded of the folly of ever resting on my “green laurels”. I learned about the cloud. Then I was shaken out of my complacency all over again by learning that many of the yogurt pots I had been so diligently washing and putting in the recycling were made of polystyrene and not recyclable at all (check out The Everyday Plastic Report at www.everydayplastic.org). Footprints in the cloud, footprints in the plastic. How lightly can any of us really tread upon the earth?

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Leaving Footprints While Shielding
Heidi Goehrke



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Granny's Digital Footprint: Is your Grandmother all she purports to be?

Hilery Williams

(with acknowledgments to Alexandra Petri, Satirist at the Washington Post)

- The knitting pattern she has downloaded is for a ... Balaclava! Need I say more?
- She gathers online with a miscellaneous, rowdy group of people to play quizzes, governed by mysterious rules issued by an ill-defined central authority: clearly a stratagem for disseminating information below the radar.
- She repeatedly asks for help in using her new phone, yet always appears upside down in WhatsApp calls. This requires a sophisticated understanding of hacking skills.
- At set times of the week she zooms with a decentralised group of people with no apparent leader. They claim to be discussing a book. No one seems to have read the book and all they do is drink wine. Is this likely? Some subterfuge is going on.
- She purchases enormous quantities of peppermints (chemical irritants?), nuts (ammunition?) and crisps (reward for duties undertaken over and above what has been asked?). Alternatively, perhaps different comestibles indicate different instructions to the delivery drivers. Cryptic messages can easily be spread throughout the town this way. Who is funding these purchases?
- Likewise, she orders multiple boxes of Gaviscon. For what reason? Surely this is to build up strength for a coming confrontation.
- In conversation, she has a complete and bewildering lack of nostalgia for the good old days; and she does not display the picture of the queen you send her for her birthday. Very suspicious behaviour.
- While recounting endless stories from the past she unaccountably falls asleep. Is this to put you off your guard while she submits subliminal messages? When awake, the exhausting and incredible detail about her life flummoxes you. How does she remember all this while losing the thread of your life? She cannot even recall what job you are doing. This is clearly cover of some kind. Is this code?
- She sends articles and satires about prominent personalities, including politicians, claiming that you will enjoy them: some sort of recruitment or propaganda?



- She 'Likes' every single photo, post, video, etc. you put on Facebook. Could this be to create a veneer so the real messages get overlooked by all but a select band of rabble-rousers?
- Has spent an inordinate amount of time debating what name she would like to be called by her grandchildren: Nana, Granny, Maman. These may well have a more sinister meaning: possibly indicating the various persona she embraces when infiltrating networks.
- She plays Monopoly online with her granddaughter: a game invented (by a Quaker, that leaderless, subversive group) to illustrate the evils of capitalism. This amounts to indoctrination of an innocent child.
- She has an extremely wide vocabulary in baby-talk: surely encrypted ciphers to further plots under the radar.
- Her YouTube history is entirely comprised of songs with titles like *I Want to Hold Your Hand* (denoting solidarity with the unnamed agent provocateurs), *We Can Work It Out* (the ends justify the means), *Here Comes the Sun* (clearly a call to arms), *Don't Let me Down* (self-explanatory), and, most tellingly, *Help!* and *Revolution*. Is there any more to be said?
- Additionally, she is always talking on the phone with an 'aunt' you've never actually met. Is this Aunt TIFA???
- Finally, she is filmed walking non-threateningly at a protest march.

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Making Miles of Footprints

Anne Conrad



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Kinlochleven

Margaret Bremner

I love to find a path in the rough terrain that makes it easier to climb a hill or cross a bog. I look out for footprints, even those of sheep, or gravelly tracks deepening between heather and bracken. Sometimes the footprints are so ancient I can picture the coffins carried across for burial, or maybe just the postie bringing a longed for missive.

It's been a while since we ventured on to the hills up north, confined to walking the local golf courses instead. But soon, soon, we'll don our boots and refresh the footprints on some old favourite paths.



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The Landing
Patricia Goldberg

Pippa Papa, Pippa Papa,
Strangled my soul,
I prepared myself for an emotional and psychological procedure.
In his marigold boots and gloves he stepped along the landing's length
And stood over my bed.

Nightie on and breath caught,
He reached to perform the operation
Without waking sister behind the main wall,
And grazed my bare skin.

He struck quickly to the heart of the matter
Sawing through the darkness
The electric laser pressure on his palms
Deadened my mind.

The mile high neighbours near their radomes were on Holiday.
Making bread and visiting circuses.
And I had nightmares of war as the wind howled.
The little flash light lit up the pain
As it guided its dots and dashes across the deep dale.

Curtains for me according to mother beneath,
Where she perused Emma and Mr Woodhouse
Amongst the stock trying not to hear
The electric creaking above.
Sad Reggie Foxton smiled on from his corner.



And after the files the surgeon director directed me to enter
The putrid plucked
Poultry filled bog below.
Creaking creature has croaked now
And I was too late to prevent mother's rise
Amongst the ranks of the bench.

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