

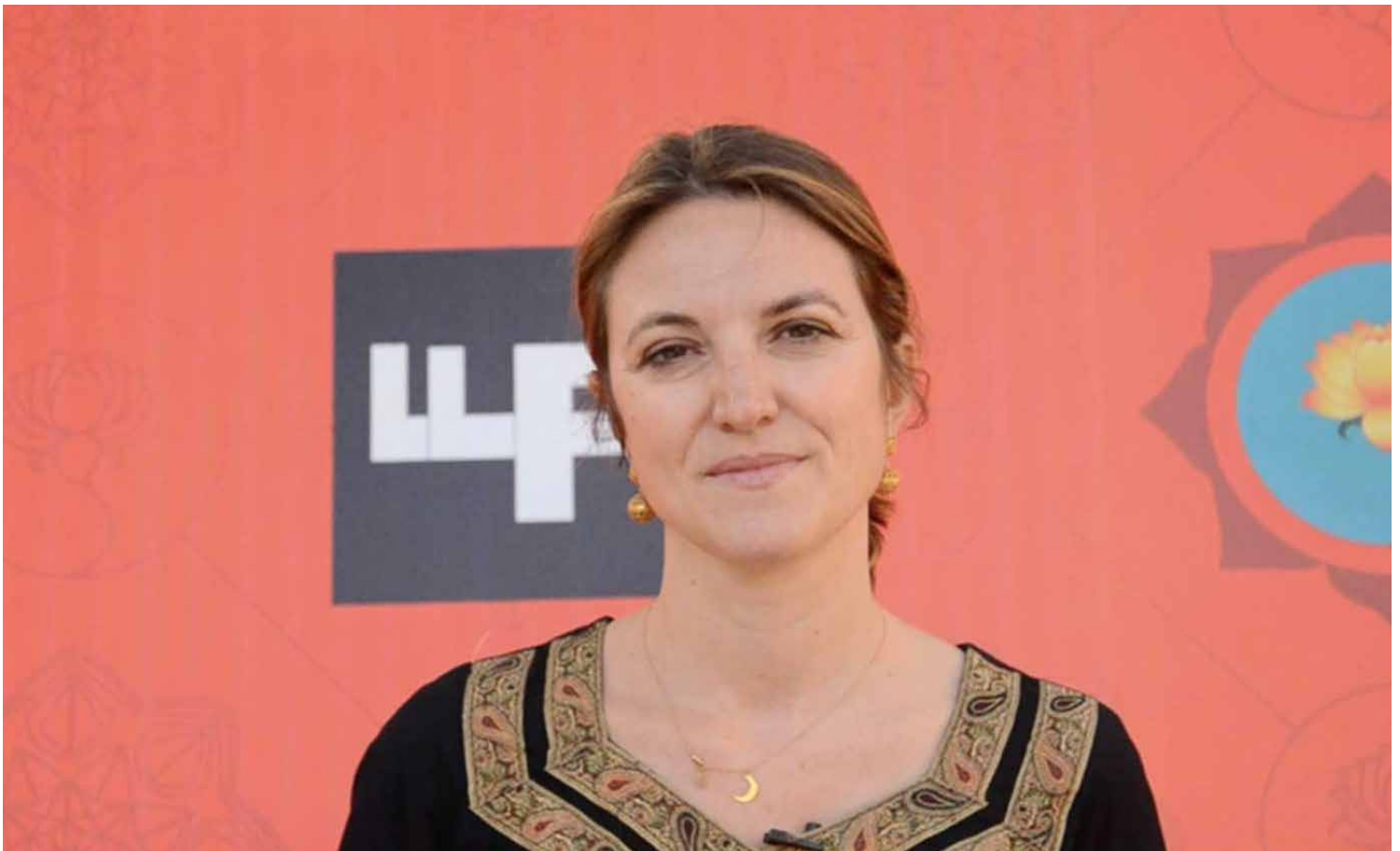


PUBLICATION  
Jul 1, 2020

CHIME THROUGH THE YEARS

## **“TIME TO SHIFT BALANCE” BY AURÉLIE SALVAIRE**

*CHIME FOR CHANGE Through the Years: The Female Fabric is a series curated by CHIME Managing Editor Mariane Pearl featuring stories from the CHIME journalism platform archives by women around the world.*



I grew up in the South of France, and for all the hype about how liberated French women are, men there were considered worthier by virtue of their gender alone. Men would sit at the dinner table exuding authority, while women would serve them food. Men would talk, women would listen. Teenagers would routinely slut shame their dates, and it was believed that occasionally slapping your wife around “didn’t hurt anyone.”

There is a term for it coined by French anthropologist Françoise Héritier, she calls it "la valence différentielle des sexes," or "the differential value of genders." Even as a child, this infuriated me. Libra is my astrological sign and I am and will always be someone who strives on balance and justice.

So, when my mother decided to stop working in order to raise us children, I became keenly aware growing up of how dramatically this would impact her financial independence. Then, I witnessed how emotional abuse progressively destroyed her self-esteem. I saw how she was deemed crazy when she fell into depression; it was a coping mechanism, the only one available to her.

I knew her condition had nothing to do with mental illness. I knew she was simply yearning for respect but was denied the support of our family. I knew she was facing an uphill battle, one that can hardly be won by one single individual versus all of society. So she finally gave up.

Patriarchy killed my mother.

Patriarchy is when you denounce the sexual abuse in your family and nobody hears, sees or says anything, just like the three wise monkeys.

Patriarchy is when at family dinners, guests joke about domestic violence in front of their children.

Patriarchy is when your husband regularly insults you in private or in front of your kids, saying that you're crazy, that you're broken.

Patriarchy is when your own therapist advises you to endure the abuse rather than fight it.

Patriarchy is when you can't take it anymore and you check yourself into a psychiatric ward.

Patriarchy is when your new psychiatrist listens condescendingly to you for ten minutes and then prescribes you enough antidepressants to kill a horse.

Patriarchy is when pain and humiliation are silenced by an endless supply of drugs.

Patriarchy is when, at the end of the day, you are only remembered in your family as the depressive suicidal crazy woman who lost her mind.

Patriarchy is when all the women in your family die before their

husbands but nobody asks why.

Patriarchy is when there are countless victims but not a single prosecutor.

So yes, patriarchy killed by mother.

And it got away with it.

For a long time, I thought my family story was unique, an isolated incident. But today, after years of reading and studying about gender issues, I came to understand that we are one of many, that this is a collective struggle, a systemic fight that knows no borders.

But then there is me, her daughter and my understanding that I could pay tribute to my mother and do justice to her. I could stand up and help women the world over because I know what they are going through in this endless variation of abuse and violence.

So I wrote a book identifying fifteen topics ranging from education to violence, from leadership to sex. Using infographics, I aimed to provide concrete solutions, strategies and advice to tackle gender problems whoever and wherever you might be.

My book became an antidote against the helplessness one can experience when confronted with problems of that magnitude.

It's a cry against collective denial and apathy when it comes to helping women break free.

I wrote it to put an end to the fear and depression that keeps women down and help the next generation of female role models rise.

So during two years, I studied grassroots initiatives around the world that are leveraging new media and triggering a change from the bottom-up.

My world tour, started with Pakistan, where I discussed my work in schools, universities, literature festivals and corporate companies as to engage young people to contribute. Adults (parents, teachers) may have been reluctant, but I saw how the new generation is craving for change and equality. In each of the schools, I visited in Pakistan, young boys came to me because they too needed a renewed definition of masculinity. Young girls shared the Facebook page, blog or Youtube channel they are planning to launch. Given that 60% of the population there is under 30, it is clear that we have to tap into this considerable potential for social change.

In the end, my mother won, her voice has been heard by me her daughter and all the people I hopefully inspired. Today, I fully measure how when one person stands up she can rewrite the narrative of her family forever.

Here are a few of my favourite thoughts about Feminism:

*"I'm no longer accepting the thing that I cannot change. I am changing the things I cannot accept." –Angela Davis*

Davis' words remind me of the many heated conversations I've had with people who believed there is little we can do about the state of the world. Nothing infuriates me more than the passive acceptance of injustice.

*"The true focus of revolutionary change is never merely the oppressive situations that we seek to escape, but that piece of the oppressor which is planted deep within each of us" –Audre Lorde*

Even if I am a feminist, sexist beliefs are still present in my mind. And in situations where I belong to the dominant class or race, I can definitely become dominant myself. It is vital that I constantly keep myself in check.

*"Being a feminist is like being pregnant. You either are or you are not." –Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie*

Often, people say: "I am feminist but..." or they'll call themselves "selective feminists." There is no such thing. Either one believes any human being regardless of gender should enjoy the same rights and opportunities or one doesn't. There is no middle ground.

*"When you're accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression."*

When men complain about the fact that "now you can't say anything anymore", or that they are being oppressed by changes in their company in favour of female staff, I remind them that when we are used to privilege, its loss suddenly feels like a terrible injustice.

*"The future is in code and I want women to write it." –Kathryn Parsons, Cofounder of Decoded*

I am especially worried by the absence of women in technology. We expect 80% of jobs in the near future to require technological skills. In a world run by robots programmed with potential sexist and racist biases, the only solution is to teach all girls to code as soon as possible.

*"Give us a world where half of our homes are run by men, and half of our institutions are run by women." –Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook COO*

Feminism is frequently accused of having a hidden domination agenda. Yet the objective here is not to reverse roles but to actually share power.

*Feminism has never killed anybody. Machismo does every day." –Benoite Groult*

To those who believe feminists are mostly angry or violent trouble-makers, a reminder that machismo kills every day while feminism has never killed anyone so far.