



Women and conflict



Eritrea 1995. Women meet to decide what they want to put into the new constitution.

It is a potent metaphor: children gaze out from their grinding mill posts in the Ethiopian town of Adwa, knowing no other reality than the crushing daily round of oppression and poverty bred by the internal 17-year conflict in the country.

Taken in 1994 by photographer Jenny Matthews, the picture is part of a collection compiled from war-ravaged regions over two decades. She was already in her thirties when she first took up a camera. Having taught French at a north-London girls' school, she embarked on a very different way of life in the early 1980s, returning to turbulent Latin America, where she had already lived and studied.

The lives of the women who survived the constant buffeting of violence, hunger, harrowing poverty, exhaustion and decay intrigued her. "I started taking pictures in Nicaragua because things were changing there, but women's lives are much the same all over

the world, although some have much bigger odds to contend with."

In 1990, she realised the central theme of pictures shot in Asia, Latin America and Africa was the women who held their families together in the midst of the bombing and despair. "I became interested in the women bringing up their children with a background of conflict and the tremendous responsibility women have."

It is not a cliché, she says, that children bring hope. "The whole thing of children is so important to women. They have a very strong sense of the future, because you know there is a next generation that you are very personally responsible for. In order to get through, you have to know that things will get better."

Rachelle Thackeray.
Excerpted from *The Independent*.



Adwa, Ethiopia, 1994. The Grinding Mill. For 17 years Ethiopians lived with war.



Managua, Nicaragua, 1984. Martha Lorena on guard duty outside the main telecommunications office.

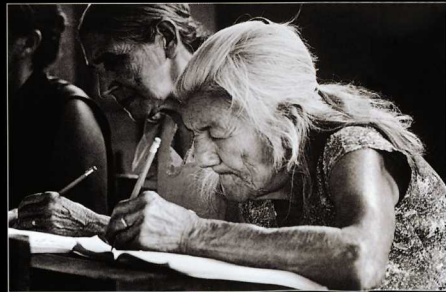
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Mostar, Bosnia, 1995. Stopping for a chat.



Goma, Zaire 1994. After the genocide a million refugees fled to Goma. Cholera struck.



San Salvador, El Salvador, 1982. Displaced women learn to read and write for the first time.



Kabul, Afghanistan, 1996. Razia and her wedding photo. Her husband disappeared four years ago.