



Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance

By Beverly Bell, Edwidge Danticat

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Haiti, long noted for poverty and repression, has a powerful and too-often-overlooked history of resistance. Women in Haiti have played a large role in changing the balance of political and social power, even as they have endured rampant and devastating state-sponsored violence, including torture, rape, abuse, illegal arrest, disappearance, and assassination.

In *Walking on Fire*, Beverly Bell, an activist and an expert on Haitian social movements, brings together thirty-eight oral histories from a diverse group of Haitian women. The interviewees include, for example, a former prime minister, an illiterate poet, a leading feminist theologian, and a vodou dancer. Defying victim status despite gender- and state-based repression, they tell how Haiti's poor and dispossessed women have fought for their personal and collective survival.

The women's powerfully moving accounts of horror and heroism can best be characterized by the Creole word *istwa*, which means both "story" and "history." They combine theory with case studies concerning resistance, gender, and alternative models of power. Photographs of the women who have lived through Haiti's recent past accompany their words to further personalize the interviews in *Walking on Fire*.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

"What I have witnessed, I have no tongue to tell," says one of the 38 Haitian women who express themselves here. A lyrical but trenchant foreword by Edwidge Danticat and succinct author introductions by Bell (director of Albuquerque's Center for Economic Justice) provide historical and personal contexts for the narratives, or "istwa" (a Creole word "meaning both story and history"), that follow. Many of the women address the random arrests, sadistic torture, savage beatings and violent sexual abuse inflicted upon them by the state and by a sexist social structure. Taken collectively, the women (interviewed largely between 1991 and 1994, during Haiti's brief period with a popularly elected government) tell the same story "survival, resistance, and occasional triumph by women with little formal power." Individually, each voice is unique. One has been a minister of the Status and Rights of Women; another was given away as a child slave. There's also a market woman, a labor organizer and a nurse; a woman with graduate degrees, women who have lived abroad and women who have never left their villages. They are joined by their resistance to oppression. For some, mere survival is an act of resistance. Others resist through poetry, journalism, dance or painting. Some are even involved in political activism, women's advocacy and reestablishing economic and political structures. This is painful reading; it shows much suffering but also much remarkable transcendence. Bell's book vocalizes this, but its point is not merely archival. These testimonies are meant to move readers to action. "I want to make the big ears listen," says Lelenne Gilles. "I'll die with the words on my lips."

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From Library Journal

Most people know that Haiti is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, but what that means for the Haitian people is usually lost in a morass of statistical data. In this moving book on opposing tyranny and degradation, activist Bell, who is the founder and director of the Center for Economic Justice in Albuquerque, NM, gives face to the numbers by providing a forum for indigenous women to speak about their lives. Some of the 38 oral histories here come from illiterate farmers and market women. Other informants are well schooled, earning far more than subsistence wages as teachers and writers. Nonetheless, all of Bell's sources are dedicated to the alleviation of poverty and believe that food, housing, and education are entitlements and that gender equity is inseparable from economic justice. Their articulate views make for exciting reading. Likewise, their resistance to the status quo is inspiring. An antidote to cynicism, the book not only introduces American readers to an array of courageous role models but also proves that change is possible. Highly recommended for all public and academic libraries. Eleanor J. Bader, Brooklyn, NY

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Review

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"In this moving book on opposing tyranny and degradation, activist Bell . . . gives face to the numbers by providing a forum for indigenous women to speak about their lives. . . . An antidote to cynicism, the book not only introduces American readers to an array of courageous role models but also proves that change is possible." *Library Journal*

"The women Bell interviews, many of whom are veteran activists in Haiti's grassroots democracy movement, recount stories of being raped, struggling to feed their families, and being subject to political torture. . . . Bell does her best to balance the painful lives of the women she interviews with the recognition that under such conditions, mere daily survival of the body and the spirit takes tremendous resilience. . . . Perhaps one day the small acts of rebellion that Bell celebrates may help to create a movement capable of political transformation, so that the example of Haiti once again frightens the powerful of the world." *Voice Literary Supplement*

"*Walking on Fire* provides powerful, moving witness to the desperate struggle of these women to protest and more important survive. The women who speak out in the pages of Beverly Bell's book offer an eloquent portrait of a poverty that is unrelenting in its meanness." *Women's Review of Books*

"Rarely does the voice of Haitian women in Haiti fighting for their rights emerge so clearly to relate their own experiences, battles, and hopes. . . . Despite the harshness of their lives, the honesty and healing potential of the women somehow rises above the unimaginable and lands at the readers' feet." *The Haitian Times*

"*Walking on Fire* illustrates how the dynamics of corporate globalization overlay with local hierarchies, prejudices and systems of patriarchy to impoverish and marginalize women. Most searingly, *Walking on Fire* reveals the raw violence embedded in these overlapping systems of domination. . . . The emotions of horror stirred by the book are matched by a sense of awe and inspiration of the women, many of whom do struggle just to survive, . . . to fight for justice." *Focus on the Corporation*

"Beverly Bell's remarkable book allows thirty-eight Haitian women to speak for themselves. Defying victim status, together they tell the story of how Haiti's poor and dispossessed women have fought for their personal and collective survival. They weave together an inspiring study in resistance and alternative models of power." *Susan Sarandon*

"In transcribing the istwa?stories and history?of these Haitian women, Beverly Bell opens a door that has

been closed for much too long. Oppressed beyond imagination, these voices convey sensibility, courage, creativity and power. I am moved at my core."?Margaret Randall, author of *Sandino's Daughters Revisited*

"*Walking on Fire* is an extraordinary work. The stories are tremendously moving, powerfully told, and leave one gasping for breath, both at the horror and at the enormity of women's heroism, perseverance, and resistance."?Bettina Aptheker, Professor and Chair, Women's Studies, University of California, Santa Cruz

"The future of engaged feminism is secure if it embraces, without ambivalence, the struggle of women living with a very different kind of violence than that encountered in North America or Europe. Beverly Bell has done us a great service in bringing to light these varied and vivid testimonies of Haiti's cruel modernity and women's resistance to it. Many of the authors of these essays do indeed walk on fire. Some, like Alerte Belance?left for hacked to death after being dumped, along with other activists, in a notorious potter's field?have survived a long, barefoot walk on hot coals and emerged with a message for all of us: 'In my mutilated state, my neck nearly cut in two, my tongue cut in two, my left hand cut in two, my right arm cut in two, God rescued me for a reason. He put his force in me so I could struggle for women, not only to have life, but rights and freedom.'"?Paul Farmer, author of *Haiti after the Earthquake*

"*Walking on Fire* is a book of exceptional merit and makes a significant original contribution to general understandings of women's resistance to poverty and oppression in many forms. Beverly Bell is able to provide a deeply compassionate understanding of narratives, physically crushing and morally uplifting experiences, and structures of poor women's lives who seem to be in chaos."?Josh DeWind, Director, International Migration Program at the Social Science Research Council

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Katherine Herron:

What do you regarding book? It is not important to you? Or just adding material when you need something to explain what your own problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy particular person? If you don't have spare time to try and do others business, it is gives you the sense of being bored faster. And you have free time? What did you do? Everybody has many questions above. They have to answer that question since just their can do which. It said that about publication. Book is familiar on every person. Yes, it is right. Because start from on jardín de infancia until university need that *Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance* to read.

Stephanie Dillard:

Spent a free time to be fun activity to complete! A lot of people spent their spare time with their family, or

their friends. Usually they performing activity like watching television, planning to beach, or picnic from the park. They actually doing same every week. Do you feel it? Would you like to something different to fill your own personal free time/ holiday? Could possibly be reading a book can be option to fill your totally free time/ holiday. The first thing that you ask may be what kinds of guide that you should read. If you want to attempt look for book, may be the guide untitled Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance can be fine book to read. May be it might be best activity to you.

Connie Medina:

Reading a book to be new life style in this yr; every people loves to read a book. When you learn a book you can get a lots of benefit. When you read ebooks, you can improve your knowledge, mainly because book has a lot of information in it. The information that you will get depend on what sorts of book that you have read. In order to get information about your examine, you can read education books, but if you act like you want to entertain yourself you are able to a fiction books, such us novel, comics, along with soon. The Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance will give you a new experience in examining a book.

Randolph Urban:

This Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance is new way for you who has fascination to look for some information because it relief your hunger associated with. Getting deeper you upon it getting knowledge more you know otherwise you who still having little bit of digest in reading this Walking on Fire: Haitian Women's Stories of Survival and Resistance can be the light food for you personally because the information inside this particular book is easy to get simply by anyone. These books build itself in the form and that is reachable by anyone, that's why I mean in the e-book application form. People who think that in reserve form make them feel drowsy even dizzy this publication is the answer. So there is absolutely no in reading a book especially this one. You can find actually looking for. It should be here for an individual. So , don't miss the idea! Just read this e-book sort for your better life as well as knowledge.

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