

**AMNESTY
INTERNATIONAL**



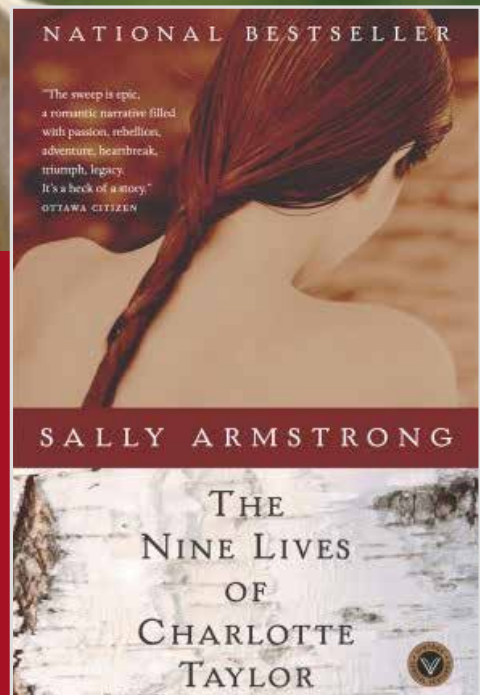
BOOK CLUB

**MARCH 2016
DISCUSSION GUIDE**

***The Nine Lives of
Charlotte Taylor***

By Sally Armstrong

Recommended by guest reader
Ann Walmsley



“There are questions about whether I was drawn to Charlotte because her story resonates with the articles I have written for over two decades about women who dared to take on the culture and religion of their time and seek emancipation,” writes our featured author Sally Armstrong.

“Pieces on the veiled women in Afghanistan, who thumbed their noses at the misogynist Taliban; on the entire village of women in Senegal who said, ‘Never again, not my daughter’ and ended female genital mutilation; and on the women who wrote Sections 15-28 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms to attempt to ensure that the lives of women and girls would be fair and just...These are women who stir my soul and feed my appetite for changing the status of women and girls. They were very much on my mind as I researched Charlotte Taylor.”

Join us as we celebrate International Women’s Day this March with Sally Armstrong’s bestselling novel *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*. Charlotte Taylor is our featured author’s ancestor, and while the novel itself is fiction, her story is based upon handed-down pieces of family folklore and government documents.

Using a seamless blend of fact and fiction, Charlotte Taylor’s great-great-great granddaughter, Sally Armstrong, reclaims the life of a dauntless and unusual woman and delivers living history with all the drama and sweep of a novel.

This month’s book club will also introduce you to four women who, like Charlotte Taylor, have had to fight for their rights in the face of adversity. Though each one lives in a different country with different barriers, they all experience discrimination or persecution,

not only because they are activists, but also because they happen to be women.

Thank you for being part of the Amnesty International Book Club. If you have any questions, suggestions or comments, we’d love to hear from you. Just send us an email at bookclub@amnesty.ca.

—The Book Club Team

About Amnesty International

Amnesty International is a global movement of more than three million supporters, members and activists in over 150 countries and territories who campaign to end grave abuses of human rights.

Our vision is for all people to enjoy all the rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standards.

We are independent of any government, political ideology, economic interest or religion, and are funded mainly by our membership.

Until everyone can enjoy all of their rights, we will continue our efforts. We will not stop until everyone can live in dignity; until every person’s voice can be heard; until no one is tortured or executed.

Our members are the cornerstone of these efforts. They take up human rights issues through letter-writing, online and off line campaigning, demonstrations, vigils and direct lobbying of those with power and influence.

Locally, nationally and globally, we join together to mobilize public pressure and show international solidarity.

Together, we make a difference.

For more information about Amnesty International visit www.amnesty.ca or write to us at: **Amnesty International, 312 Laurier Ave. E., Ottawa, ON K1N 1H9.**

MARCH 2016 BOOK: *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*

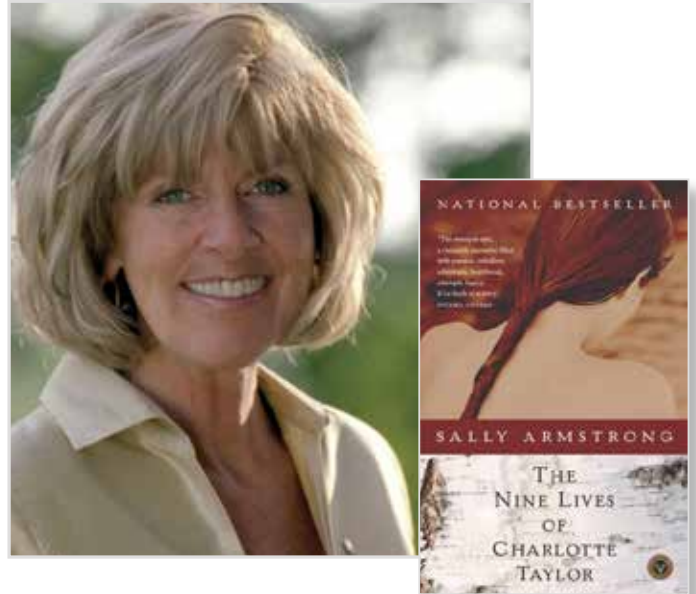


About this month's guest reader, **Ann Walmsley**

Ann Walmsley's memoir, *The Prison Book Club* (2015 Viking, Penguin Canada), is her first book and was longlisted for the 2016 RBC Taylor Prize, the 2016 BC National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction and named as a best book of 2015 by the National Post and Book City. It is also published in the UK and Commonwealth by Oneworld Publications. Shanghai Joint Publishing Co., Ltd. will publish a forthcoming edition in translation in China, and Kinokuniya Co., Ltd. will produce a Japanese edition.

Ann is a magazine journalist whose work has appeared in *The Globe and Mail Report on Business Magazine*, *Maclean's* and many other publications. She is the recipient of four National Magazine Awards, a Canadian Business Journalism Award and two International Regional Magazine Awards. Her most recent literary dispatch was for English Pen and can be read on her website: www.annwalmsley.com.

Ann founded her first book club at age nine. She lives in Toronto.



About this month's featured author, **Sally Armstrong**

Sally Armstrong is an Amnesty International Media Award winner, a member of the Order of Canada, holder of eight honorary degrees, a teacher, journalist, human rights activist, and contributor to *Maclean's*, *Chatelaine* and the CBC. She is a member of the International Women's Commission, a UN body that consists of 20 Palestinian women, 20 Israeli women and 12 internationals whose mandate is assisting with the path to peace in the Middle East. A bestselling author of *Veiled Threat: The Hidden Power of the Women of Afghanistan* (2002) and *Bitter Roots, Tender Shoots: The Uncertain Fate of Afghanistan's Women* (2008), she is also the author of a fact-based novel about her settler foremother, *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*.

Her latest book is *Ascent of Women: a New Age is Dawning For Every Mother's Daughter*.

Ann Walmsley on *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*



Sally Armstrong's novel about her great-great-great grandmother came my way just as I was questioning whether I might write a book about my own ancestor. The author faced all the same problems. Should it be fiction or non-fiction or a blend? Because her relative was an 18th century pioneer and not a public figure, archival documentation was spotty. How would she fill the gaps?

Based on her research and family stories from many descendants, Armstrong believed she knew certain things about her subject. Charlotte Howe Taylor ran away from her aristocratic English family in 1775 in the company of her lover, who may have been a black man. Her lover died soon after they crossed the Atlantic on a sailing ship and she settled on the Miramichi River in what is now New Brunswick. There she survived three husbands and raised 10 children in extremely difficult pioneer circumstances, facing harsh winters, raids by American revolutionaries and their First Nations allies, a massive forest fire and primitive medical care. Charlotte earned a reputation as a fiercely independent, flinty homesteader who fought for title to the land she and her husbands had cleared and worked. Stories of a liaison with a Mi'kmaq man and a 200-km trek by snowshoe to Fredericton to transfer her lot licence to a proper deed under the new province made her all the more intriguing. And unlike her many husbands, Charlotte lived a long life – to age 86.

Despite Armstrong's many years as a journalist covering women in war zones, the author chose fiction for her narrative – and happily not a romanticized account. The

Charlotte she brings to life is gritty, practical and outspoken. The young settler takes on each new husband with surprisingly little reflection and with an expediency that recognizes the difficulties of widowhood on the frontier. And we learn, along with her, how to survive in those circumstances: how spruce, not pine, boughs are best for bedding, how to boil meat using fire-heated rocks in water, and how husbands who die mid-winter can be buried in a snow bank until spring. Many of these skills she learned from the Mi'kmaq.

This is a story of land and the labour required to clear and keep it. As Loyalists move into the territory with land grants, pre-Loyalists like Charlotte have a fight on their hands. Meanwhile returning Acadians and Mi'kmaq assert their own property rights. And because Charlotte's early months in the region were spent in a Mi'kmaq and Acadian camp, she is sensitive to their interests. As historian Charlotte Gray pointed out in a review of Armstrong's novel, this openness wasn't unusual among early Canadian pioneer women, and settlers like Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill accepted that "Indigenous Peoples' world view might have as much validity as their own."

A delicate thread of longing pulls the narrative forward as Charlotte tends her growing family with no word from her family in England. The puzzle of why Charlotte Taylor turned her back on that life becomes clearer toward the end of this engaging book, as we share her delight in creating a life from scratch.

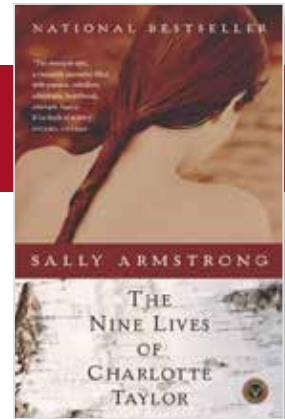
—Anne Walmsley



She survived three husbands and raised 10 children in extremely difficult pioneer circumstances, and lived to age 86.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM ANN WALMSLEY

- 1 *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor* is a story of remarkable determination. I was struck by the good cheer with which Charlotte greeted her many hardships. How did she muster wit under those circumstances and what role did her husbands and children play in making things easier or harder?
- 2 The author imagines that Charlotte Taylor felt guilty about claiming title to land that had previously been occupied by Acadians or Mi'kmaq. How reasonable is that assumption in your view? Reviewers are split on whether it is credible or anachronistic.
- 3 When Charlotte mailed her family a “memorial” letter 10 years after leaving England, I began to feel a powerful longing for Charlotte to reconnect with them. Perhaps I was hoping that there might be some relief from her toil. Or maybe it was just a desire to give her children and parents a chance to know each other. Did you feel also feel the tug of this narrative device?
- 4 It's not until page 340 that Armstrong gives us Charlotte's rationale for persevering with her life on the frontier: “...here you could make your life and not inherit it or have to accept your place in it.” How important is it to be the author of your own life?
- 5 Do you think that Sally Armstrong made the right choice in electing to tell her story as fiction?
- 6 Is there an ancestor in your family whose story might be worthy of a book? Would you choose to tell it as fiction or non-fiction?
- 7 The novel invites us to consider the idea of home: is it land, birthplace, family, or community? What thoughts occurred to you as you encountered this theme?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FROM AMNESTY

- 1 Keeping in mind that the novel is based upon true events, and that Charlotte Taylor was indeed a real person, did you resonate with the character more deeply by knowing her story derives from non-fiction?
- 2 Charlotte continually needs to navigate the permissions and approvals of men for her freedom and rights. How have things changed today, and how have they remained the same?
- 3 Strength and insight can come from quiet lives – lives too easily overlooked in storytelling when not depicted as the hero of a novel. For instance, the Mi'kmaq women teach Charlotte how to survive and help her through friendship and support. Who in your life is a quiet hero, and what have you learned from them?
- 4 Through family folklore Charlotte Taylor's true story has survived and gives a different kind of perspective in a history that overlooks many voices. Consider previous books from the Amnesty Book Club – how has reading different narratives changed your understanding on Canadian history and our current world?
- 5 The novel gives voice to women in history, a perspective that has been often overlooked, yet it also uses a settler's lens to shed light upon the lives of Indigenous People, rather than exploring their stories directly. When reading a novel, do you consider the question of perspective and how it colours a story? How can an author's choice of protagonist(s) reinforce or challenge our society's dominant narratives?
- 6 Who around you could shed a unique perspective on how you see the world? This month's action is a pledge to not only listen to Indigenous Women's stories, but take action to defend their rights. How could this kind of pledge be applied in your everyday life, and with those around you?



BACKGROUND

Sharmila Setaram speaks at the Amnesty International Mississauga Reception

In the month of March we are pleased to deliver a book, in recognition of International Women’s Day, whose main protagonist is an inspiring woman.

International Women’s Day is celebrated around the world on March 8. This is a day when women are recognized for their achievements and provides a rallying point to build support for women’s rights.

Charlotte Taylor’s life is a reminder that recognizing and claiming rights for women has not come without a struggle. Over the course of her life she fought for many rights including the right to live with a partner of her own choosing, irrespective of race or social class. She was deeply aware of the risk of sexual violence she faced as a single woman, and the perception that without a man to protect her she was ‘free game.’ She fought for her economic rights, including the right to own property, a right which was not easily awarded to women in British North America.

Charlotte Taylor defied societal expectations and cultural mores to embark on a journey for which she

could never have predicted the outcome. Whether driven by stubbornness, a sense of justice, or a longing for adventure, she faced life with a determination and strength that allowed her to survive in a world hostile to independently-minded women.

As a pioneer, Charlotte faced isolation, deprivation and hardship. While survival for herself and her children was paramount, she also believed it necessary to provide for the generations to follow. The persistence and fortitude which enabled her to do this are admirable and seen in many other women across time and around the world. Many women like Charlotte face seemingly insurmountable battles as pioneers of a different sort. These are women who stand up for their rights or the rights of others in the hope of seeking justice and providing a better future for their children and the generations to follow.

Charlotte’s story is not without criticism. No matter how much sympathy she may have shown toward the Mi’kmaq, Charlotte assumed she had a right to move onto and claim land that was already occupied. First Nations

communities in Canada today continue to suffer from the impact of outsiders who move into their communities and pillage the resources with little thought, as discussed in our discussion guide for *The Inconvenient Indian* by Thomas King (November/December 2015).

As we consider the importance of perspective within our current discussion guide, it is important to keep in mind Charlotte's story is not the full picture, and there

are challenges of exploring the Mi'kmaq's women's lives through a settler's point of view. In this month's action, we are given yet another viewpoint by being asked to listen to the voices of Indigenous women and girls.

This month's book club will introduce you to four women who, like Charlotte Taylor, have had to fight for their rights in the face of adversity. Read on for inspiring stories of women enacting change.

♀ CANADA



"When we're together, there's so much strength." — Connie Greeyes

Connie Greeyes

Connie Greeyes is an outspoken advocate for missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. A member of Bigstone Cree First Nation in Alberta, Connie lives in Fort St. John, a small community in the heart of the oil and gas industry in northeastern British Columbia. Connie volunteers with the Fort St. John Women's Resource Society and has been at the heart of a movement to honour the lives of Indigenous women and girls and to celebrate Indigenous culture and traditions.

This is what she had told us about her community:

"It really is quite shocking when you think of the numbers of women here who were friends and that are missing right now or have been murdered.

I had [a] banner made a couple of years ago and we

started putting the names of the women on there. I took a look at it one day and thought, wow, these aren't just names, these are women who were in my life.

We're a small community here and our lives are intertwined. It's not just one family that's been affected. One woman would go missing and all our families would be affected. They were either someone who used to babysit us or we used to babysit for them. The traumas were just overlapping each other and so heavy for families to carry.

Fort St. John is a huge industry town. It's really good money and in this town you need good money to live here. It's either feast or famine in this community. You either work in the oil patch or have someone in your family that works in the oil patch and makes a lot of money, or you're in poverty.

It's mostly women who face the consequences.

The rental places can ask what they want. It can be a dive and they're still getting \$1,500 for it.

How do you feed your child and put a roof over your head as a waitress at one of the restaurants? You don't. Do you go to places like the Women's Resource Centre that are already spread so thin and seek help that way? The consequence of having an economy like this is that either you have it made or you're one of the ones that are unfortunate and lives on the street, or has to rely on food banks to get by. That's the way it is here.

It's a terrible, terrible way to live for the women here. They put up with a lot from their spouses. The ones that are [in] abusive relationships really don't have much of an option. You stay, generally, because you can't afford not to.

The majority of workers coming into the community I would say 90% are men. And they don't owe the community anything. They can come here and behave however they want and then go back to their lives down south or wherever they're coming from. And the people

who pay for that are the people who are on the streets and the women and children.

But I do think our youth are starting to pull together. We've got youth like Helen Knott who is organizing all kinds of wonderful events in the community to talk about women's issues, to talk about the youth rising up to make change for themselves, to talk about protecting the land. We have youth like my niece who has beading and sewing groups trying to bring culture back because we know that that's what's going to help our children and our women.

When we're together, there's so much strength. There's so much strength and resilience in a room full of women that have had so much tragedy but they can still come together and share a meal and laugh and teach their children.

How can you not be inspired? How can you not be inspired by women who have been to hell and back over their children? You know, fighting, trying to find justice. How can you not be inspired and want to continue fighting?"

♀ CHINA



Su Changlan's story is the story of many Chinese women.

Su Changlan

Like Charlotte Taylor, Su Changlan from southern China understands how property, land and inheritance provide security for women; and that their ability to claim these rights does not come without a struggle.

Su Changlan was a primary school teacher from 1990-2001 and began working with rural women in Hainan Province to defend their rights to inheritance, and to ensure profits derived from community properties were shared. In later years, she focused on women's and children's rights issues such as trafficking of children, child brides, family planning, and violence against women related to the one-child policy. She has also focused on migrant children's rights, land rights, forced eviction, and democracy. Due to this peaceful activism and outspokenness, she was forced to resign from her job as a teacher in Hainan and has been detained several times.

Su Changlan was taken away from her home by police in October 2014 and was formally arrested and charged

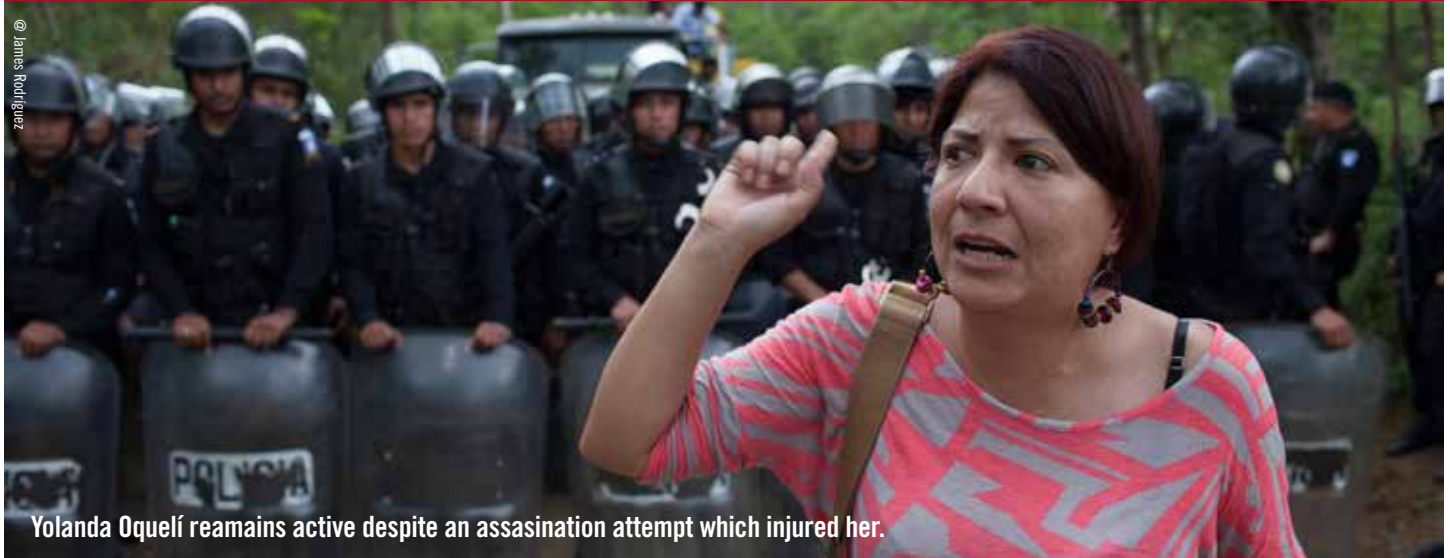
with ‘inciting subversion of state power’ two months later. She was only allowed to see her lawyer for the first time in May 2015. The charges against her are believed to be a result of online posts she made in support of the pro-democracy protests in Hong Kong in September 2014, and due to her activism on women’s rights issues.

Su Changlan’s health has not been good and has deteriorated over the course of her detention. She has a heart condition which has worsened as a result of the prison’s poor conditions. She regularly feels numbness in her hands and feet and experiences headaches and regular tearing in her right eye. She does not receive adequate medical treatment for her illnesses.

In China, many other women human rights defenders have paid a high price for their activism to defend human rights. Human rights activist Cao Shunli died on 14 March 2014 after being denied medical treatment while in detention. Today, many other women human rights defenders are in jail, detained, under house arrest or otherwise harassed by the authorities in China.

“Su Changlan continued her fight not completely without fear, but with determination and a willingness to accept what would happen. She is little known outside her circle of friends, but she has a courageous, loving heart and spoke out for numerous women. Her story represents the stories of numerous Chinese women.”
—Maggie, friend of Chinese activist Su Changlan

♀ GUATEMALA



Yolanda Oqueli remains active despite an assassination attempt which injured her.

Yolanda Oqueli

Yolanda Oqueli is a Guatemalan activist who has been fighting to protect the land in her community from the potential negative effects of a gold mining project known as El Tambor. The mine was originally established by a Canadian company, Radius Gold. This stake was sold to the current owner in 2012.

A continuous protest campsite has been maintained outside the entrance to the mine since March 2012. Those opposing the mine claim that it will pollute the water supply, and that local communities were not consulted about its potential impact.

In June 2012, Yolanda was shot at while driving home after taking part in a protest outside a mine site in San

José del Golfo. She was hit by a bullet which lodged close to her liver. Yolanda survived the attack and, despite great risk, remains active in the protest against the mine.

The attacks and threats against Guatemalan human rights defenders who work to protect their communities from the negative impacts of mining is part of a wider trend across the Americas. The expansion of mega-projects – such as large scale extractive industries, highways, tourism developments, wind turbines and hydroelectric dams – in Latin America has brought increased conflict over control of land and natural resources.

Many cases of abuses and attacks against human rights defenders have taken place in contexts of the

lack of consultation and free, prior and informed consent; attempts to cause social division; violence against affected communities; and, frequently, serious concerns about the environmental and health impact of such projects. Too often, those who have been the most visible, active and vocal in the defence of human rights have been singled out and attacked. These attacks have frequently been preceded by public vilification and accusations of being “subversives” or the “enemies of progress.”

In July 2015, a Guatemalan appeals court ordered the suspension of construction works at the El Tambor mine in Yoldanda’s community until proper consultations with the affected communities are conducted. The ruling is considered a huge victory by the communities. In spite of this, the Guatemalan government has permitted trucks and equipment in and out of the mine site. The ongoing clash has created an unstable and frightening situation for the women, men and children on the front line of the campaign to defend their lands from unwanted development.

♀ MYANMAR



Phyoe Phyoe Aung has been in detention since 10 March 2015 after being arrested during student protests against the newly adopted National Education Law.

Phyoe Phyoe Aung

Throughout *The Nine Lives of Charlotte Taylor*, we are reminded of the value which Charlotte Taylor placed on education and her efforts in the cold winter months to ensure that her children learn the basics of reading and writing.

In Myanmar, Phyoe Phyoe Aung is a young activist who has gone to jail as a result of her activism and support of academic freedom. She is the Secretary General of the All Burma Federation Student Union (ABFSU) – one of the largest students unions in Myanmar. She has been in prison along with other students and protesters since March 2015. They were arrested during a student protest against the newly adopted National Education Law. Phyoe Phyoe Aung and the student protesters claim the law curtails academic freedom, and are calling for it to be amended.

Phyoe Phyoe Aung and over 100 other student protestors have been charged with a range of criminal offences in connection with their protest, and many are facing sentences of over nine years imprisonment. In January 2016 Phyoe Phyoe Aung and her husband James received additional charges and face up to an additional six months imprisonment.

Phyoe Phyoe Aung is not unfamiliar with Myanmar’s jails. In June 2008, one month after Cyclone Nargis devastated the Irrawaddy region and left thousands dead, she and other activists, including her then boyfriend James, drove to the affected area to provide humanitarian support and help to bury the dead. On their way back they were all arrested and later imprisoned. Phyoe Phyoe Aung is a determined woman. She refused to wear the prison uniform shirt while in detention, and was punished as a result – her blankets and mosquito net were taken away and she was sent to solitary confinement. After a month in solitary confinement, an agreement was reached and Phyoe Phyoe Aung finally agreed to wear the prison shirt only when external and officials were visiting the prison. She served three years and four months in prison at that time for her political and humanitarian activities.

Student groups and unions have played a significant role in uprisings against the military government in Myanmar and, in the past, student led-protests have quickly evolved to become wider calls for political change. The authorities perceive students movements as a threat to their power, and will often respond strongly to student activities. Members of student groups have often spent long periods of time in jail for their peaceful activism and student unions are not legal in Myanmar.

TAKE ACTION to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people



This International Women's Day, we call upon people from all over Canada to stand with Indigenous families and communities to end violence against Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people.

I stand with Indigenous families to end violence.

I AM CONCERNED that Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people continue to experience violence, go missing, and be murdered, far more than other women and girls in Canada.

I AM HOPEFUL that the public inquiry on missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls will concretely address this national tragedy.

I STAND WITH INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND FAMILIES AND COMMIT TO:

LISTEN TO AND LEARN from the voices of Indigenous women, families and other expert witnesses;

ENGAGE RESPECTFULLY in the public dialogue around this crucial inquiry; and

TAKE ACTION to make sure that government and law enforcement act on what the inquiry reveals.

Sign the pledge with Amnesty International, the Native Women's Association of Canada, the Canadian Federation of Students, and Kairos.

Visit bit.ly/the_pledge to sign, and share this important pledge.

For further reading

- Conversation with Connie Greeyes
<http://bit.ly/ConnieGreeyes>
- Nine Lives, All of them Hard
<http://bit.ly/9LivesReview>
- *The Prison Book Club* reviewed
<http://bit.ly/PrisonBookClub>
- Ascent of Women: A look at how women's conditions have improved globally
<http://bit.ly/AscentWomen>



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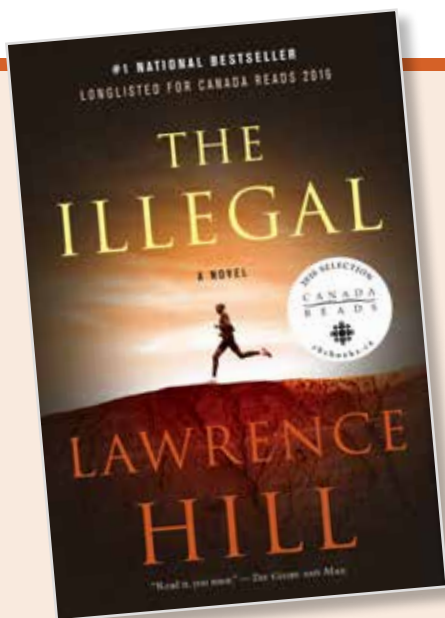
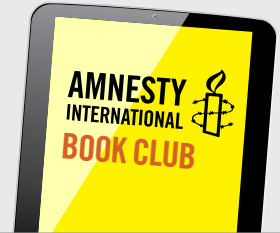
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- Instagram: **@AmnestyBookClub**

- And join our discussion group on **Goodreads.com**



COMING UP IN IN APRIL

THE ILLEGAL

A novel by Lawrence Hill

Recommended by guest reader Tracey Lindberg

To mark Refugee Rights Day, **AmnestyBookClub.ca** is hosting a very special novel this April: *The Illegal* by Lawrence Hill. You may know the novel from CBC Canada Reads, or from Hill's own book tour that coincided with the ongoing Syrian refugee crisis. Now dig deeper to where fiction meets reality as both the Amnesty International Book Club and Hill discuss the vivid story of *The Illegal* and its real-world implications.

With *The Illegal*, Hill challenges Canadians to consider a different perception of the refugee – not focused on the families in the camps, but rather those in limbo between systems. Keita is a runner who has fled the politically motivated violence of his homeland, and arrives in a land called Freedom State. But Keita has no true freedom, and must keep running within this new home that hunts down refugees. He runs from the authorities, but also runs to train in hopes of winning an important race – the prize money could save the life of his sister.

Through this novel, the Amnesty International Book Club will share Canada's own refugee story, both past and present, and discuss how we can offer a place of safety and opportunity in our own country and worldwide.

Also, don't miss our special webcast featuring Lawrence Hill himself in discussion of *The Illegal*.

This discussion guide will be sent out in early April



Lawrence Hill