

## **Review of the film *The Stoning of Soraya M***

*The Stoning of Soraya M* is a 2008 American movie adapted from the book *La Femme Lapidée* by French-Iranian journalist Freidoune Sahebjam. It is based on the true story of Soraya Manutchehri (played by Mozhan Marnò), an Iranian woman who was stoned to death by her village for doing nothing but being wrongly accused by her husband of adultery.

Freidoune Sahebjam, played by James Caviezel, was traveling through Iran and happened to stop in Soraya's village, the day after she was stoned to death. Soraya's aunt, Zahra (Shohreh Aghdashloo), approaches the journalist with the story of what happened. As secretly as possibly, she sits down with Freidoune and tells him the story of what happened, which he records.

Zahra recounts her niece's plight, which began with her abusive husband Ali (Navid Negahban) when he decided he wanted to divorce Soraya in order to marry a "younger woman"—a 14 year-old girl. However, in order to be granted a divorce, he needs permission from the mullah of the village.

When Soraya begins working for a man in the village who was recently widowed, Ali devises a plan to spread rumors that Soraya is being unfaithful to him with the widower. Through further lies and manipulation, Ali succeeds in convincing the village and the mullah of Soraya's "infidelity," as it the word of three men against the word of a woman, and Soraya is sentenced to be stoned to death.

Zahra does what she can to try to persuade the village mullah to let Soraya live, but after a devious plan by Soraya's husband and lies on behalf of other men in the town, Soraya is convicted of the crime and sentenced to be stoned to death.

Freidoune barely escapes with the recording of his interview with Zahra; the mullah orders a guard to stop him at gunpoint. But Zahra saves the day, and hope of letting the whole world know what happened is realized.

The violence of the stoning scene at the end is, I believe, quite appalling, and I was certainly not without tears, especially when Soraya's two young boys throw stones at their own mother. However, the slow motion shots of Soraya being hit by stones were an unnecessary over-dramatization of something that is on its own very dramatic and horrible, and did not need any extra effects from Hollywood to make its point.

With the exception of that one bit of criticism, *The Stoning of Soraya M* tells a fascinating and true story that is definitely worth seeing.

## **Review of *The Dud Avocado* by Elaine Dundy**

*The Dud Avocado* by Elaine Dundy is, on the surface, perhaps not a very original plot line: it is the story of an American's adventures in Paris. However, digging beyond the surface and looking at the book's finer details, *The Dud Avocado* is the unique tale of one woman's exploits and experiences in 1950s Paris.

I picked up this book purely by chance at a lovely little bookstore in Washington, D.C. The title intrigued me, and the book was on sale, so I bought it. As it turns out, it was a great purchase; *The Dud Avocado* is probably one of my favorite books.

The book opens with Sally Jay Gorce, the main character and narrator of *The Dud Avocado*, wearing an evening gown walking down a Parisian Boulevard in the middle of the day. She goes to a cafe with an actor friend, where she sees her Italian diplomat lover, and the story tumbles along from there.

Sally Jay is a vivacious young American woman who has impulsively left to live in Paris and died her hair red, as part of her new "Parisian look." Throughout the story Sally Jay throws herself into life, moving about between nightclubs, cafes, and even jail at one point, and wandering the streets of Paris amidst it all.

Reading *The Dud Avocado*, you want to have Sally Jay's life: carefree, uninhibited life that is never dull for one second. Sally Jay strives only to not be bored; she can't stand sitting around with nothing to do, and so she creates things to do if she has to.

Dundy based her first novel to some extent on her own experiences in Paris, and wrote that, "Of the various things that happen to Sally Jay, some had also happened to me. I must add, however, that often when I got stuck I would say to myself, 'What would I not do?' And then have Sally Jay do it; and I would be off again."

*The Dud Avocado* was an immediate huge success, climbing to the tops of bestseller lists. Dundy received a letter from Groucho Marx that said:

"Dear [Ms. Dundy], [...] I had to tell someone (and it might as well be you since you're the author) how much I enjoyed *The Dud Avocado*. It made me laugh, scream and guffaw (which incidentally is a great name for a law firm). If this was actually your life, I don't know how on earth you got through it. Sincerely, Groucho Marx."

*The Dud Avocado* is a must-read book for the person with an adventurous spirit, or someone looking to live vicariously through someone else's adventures.

## **Tostan International**

Tostan International is an NGO based in Senegal whose main focus is to educate and empower people through a variety of grassroots development projects. They have hundreds of employees and volunteers from all over the world that make the organization possible.

The NGO was started by an American woman named Molly Melching. She first went to Senegal in 1974 as an exchange student and then went back as a Peace Corps volunteer. She felt that the development work being done was not enough, and so she worked to change this.

Tostan International was officially founded in 1991 thanks to the research and work by Molly and Senegalese cultural specialists with whom she worked to develop the organization on always focus on the true needs of the people. Molly still lives in Senegal, working with Tostan and helping its mission to grow and spread.

Tostan is a really great organization because from its inception, it has been led by people who understand the culture and respectfully worked with communities, relying on their feedback, in order to help develop the country. This need to be culturally sensitive is so important for any NGO or foreign organization to keep in mind when trying to “help” any group of people. In fact, 99% of Tostan’s paid workers are African.

The word Tostan means “breakthrough” in Wolof, the language principally spoken in Senegal. Tostan has expanded to work in seven other African countries besides Senegal. They have a variety of projects that are often community-led to make sustainable changes in these eight countries.

Tostan’s main program is called the Community Empowerment Program, or CEP, and it is a 30-month informal education program that gives people practical information about topics such as health and management, and trains people how to design and implement projects in their communities.

Tostan International has won various awards and was also featured in Nickolas Kristof’s *Half the Sky*. Forbes Magazine recognized Molly Melching as one of the “Most Powerful Women in Human Rights,” and she has been acknowledge by many other publications and organizations for her work.

You can learn more about Tostan International and how you can get involved at [www.tostan.org](http://www.tostan.org).

## **Zainab Salbi, Founder, Women for Women International**

Zainab Salbi is the founder of the NGO Women for Women International and was the organization's CEO from 1993 to 2011.

Zainab was born in Baghdad, Iraq in 1970, to a pilot father and a teacher mother. Her mother was a huge influence on her and gave Zainab books to read about strong women and feminism while she was growing up.

She grew up during Iran-Iraq War, and in 1990 her parents arranged a marriage for her with an Iraqi immigrant in the US and sent her out of the country for safety reasons. Her marriage, unfortunately, was very unsuccessful; her husband was abusive, so three months after her arrival to the US, she got out of her marriage and got a job.

She went on to study at George Mason University, where she earned a degree in Sociology and Women's Studies, and later received her Master's degree in Development Studies from the London School of Economics.

In the early 1990s, Zainab saw a picture in Newsweek of five rape survivors from Bosnia, and she was deeply affected. It was at that moment that she decided she had to do something, that she had to help those women and women like them.

In 1993, when she was only 23 years old, Zainab started the NGO Women for Women International. Women for Women International emotionally and economically empowers women who are survivors of war. Zainab says, "Our focus is on the combination of economic access and education for women," she says. "The formula for change is not simply giving women more money. And education is very important, but without economic power, it's very frustrating. So we need them both."

Zainab goes back to war-torn countries, like the one from which she escaped, and talks with the women in these places and listens to their stories. Women for Women International now operates in eight different countries harmed by war and conflict: Afghanistan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iraq, Kosovo, Nigeria, Rwanda, and South Sudan.

Zainab is one of the leaders of today in terms of human rights. She believes that a person has to be healthy and happy in order to help other people, and that when she is healthy and happy, she can do her job better.

## **High Rates of Violence against Native American and Alaskan Women**

Did you know that Native American and Alaskan women are three times more likely to experience violent crimes such as rape and sexual assault than non-native women? And that one in three Native American women will be raped during the course of her lifetime? The statistics are shocking, and what is even more appalling is the amount of impunity surrounding these cases.

In more than eighty percent of cases, the perpetrator is a non-native male against a native or Alaskan female, which differs from rapes against white and black females, which are largely intraracial. This poses a huge problem because non-native people cannot be persecuted in tribal courts, and it is often very difficult for Native American and Alaskan women to access the resources necessary to persecute the non-native perpetrator in a non-native court, and thus impunity is abundant.

There is very little recourse for many of these indigenous women who suffer from rape and sexual assault, and due to the lack of repercussions for the perpetrators, the violence continues. Native Americans are the most marginalized group of people in the United States. They have the highest rates of poverty, disease, and crime.

Governments and legislation are of particularly important in combating these inequalities that indigenous women face, and American Indian and Alaskan Native women need assurance of their welfare and safety by both the federal government and their tribal governments.

Not only are the acts of sexual violence against indigenous women often discriminatory in that they are targeted specifically because they are indigenous and because they are women, but laws or the lack thereof are also discriminatory for the same reasons. In 2008, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD), a branch of the United Nations, held an International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Within the report they published, they include discrimination against indigenous peoples, and in particular the discriminatory sexual violence that occurs at such high rates among American Indian and Native Alaskan women.

They state that they are concerned about the high incidence of rape and sexual assault indigenous women, especially domestic workers, experience. The UN has recognized the discrimination that indigenous groups face in the United States, especially women, against whom discrimination often manifests itself in the form of sexual violence. The CERD report is further authoritative evidence supporting the need for action to be taken to end sexual violence against indigenous women.

It is important to recognize that some action is being taken to reduce rape and sexual violence against indigenous women, although more certainly needs to be done. A report by Amnesty International and the CERD report exemplify efforts made in response to these issues on a large-scale, international level, while groups such as the Native American Women's Health Education Resource Center demonstrate action being taken on a ground level. Both are essential to reducing the

high incidence of sexual violence against indigenous women. Policy and laws are needed from the top and individual attention is needed from the bottom to ensure equal rights and to provide indigenous women with tangible resources. Awareness, education, and legislation in regards to sexual violence against indigenous women must all occur in order for violence to stop.

## Best Bathing Suits for Spring Vacation

Where are you planning to travel this spring? Hopefully somewhere warm with lots of sand and water. If that is the case, Worldette has chosen the best fruitfully colored swimsuits for your spring vacation, and they're so delicious, you won't be able to wait to put them on and jump in the water.

Seafolly, an Australian brand, has this scrumptious little [Blue Raspberry Tri Bikini](#). The top has triangle cups with removable pads and the bottoms ties on the sides. Both have matching box pleats, adding nice detail.

This [Berry Pink Tankini](#) found at Macy's looks great on every skin tone and body type. The bottoms have adjustable ties decorated with beads, and the top can be worn as strapless or with a thin halter strap. Great if you're near the equator and need a little extra protection from the sun!

Created by French designer Herve Leger, this [Lime Green Wide Strap Bikini](#) with thick straps that crisscross along your back, is a delightful springtime vacation treat. Whether you'll be relaxing at the beach or the pool, you'll look stunning in this bright green bikini.

Victoria's Secret brings us the [Purple Grape Liya Push-Up Halter Bikini](#), a sexy push-up bikini in mouthwatering grape. Imagine wearing this while lying on a gorgeous European beach, maybe somewhere along the Mediterranean... it's the ideal beach bathing suit.

If you're looking for a little more cover, this [Apple Red Natalie One-Piece](#) from Anthropologie is too yummy. It's a halter that ties at the neck with boy-short cut legs, and has a fifties-esque feel to it. You'll be the star of the cruise in this vintage piece.

This [Mandarin Orange Bikini](#) from H & M is a strapless bandeau bikini with a decorative metal clasp in the middle and matching bottoms. Perfect for sunning yourself somewhere, whether it be the pool, the beach, or your backyard, as it will give you minimal tan lines.

If you're looking for a bathing suit that's a little bit fancier and more unique, this [Lemon Yellow Ruffle Swimsuit](#) found at Harrod's is just the thing. From the back, it looks like a normal halter tie bikini, but the front has a ruffle running diagonally from the bust to the bikini bottoms. You'll definitely stand out in style in this vibrant yellow piece.

## Fashion Week in Paris 2012

What's the best way to combine fashion and travel? Spring Fashion Week in Paris, of course!

Paris is considered the fashion capital of the world; many innovative designers have been French or studied in France, and some of the best fashion design schools can be found in Paris. Paris is a city that just never goes out of style, so what better place to host world-famous fashion shows?

Paris Fashion Week is *the* place to be to see all of the latest styles by the world's most famous *haute couture* designers. The 2012 Spring Fashion Week in Paris will begin on January 18 and will feature shows from designers such as Versace, Christian Dior, Valentino, Paul Smith, and many, many more. There is a lot of speculation about the collections to be displayed, but no one knows for sure until the models come out on the catwalk.

The event is organized by the *Fédération française de la couture, du prêt-à-porter des couturiers et des créateurs de mode* (English: French Federation of Fashion and of Ready-to-Wear of Couturiers and Fashion Designers) which was created in 1973, but grew from an older organization of fashion that had been around in 1868. In addition to arranging Fashion Week, the Federation governs and establishes standards for French fashion.

And, if you are planning to spend time in Paris during fashion week, don't get so caught up in the new trends that you forget to enjoy Paris! Go see the sites, people watch in an outdoor café, and check out vintage clothing stores (there are some good ones in St. Germain).

For those of us who cannot jet off to Paris at the drop of a hat, a variety of magazines, websites, and newspapers will be covering the event, so you don't have to miss the incredible shows and new trends. Put on some French music and make some French food while flipping through a magazine, and it'll be the next best thing!

You can find the full schedule and more information on the official website [here](#).