

The Broken Rifle #106: Resisters' Stories

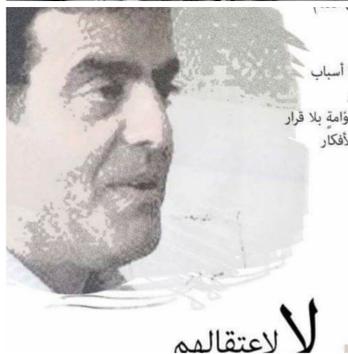
Editorial

The call out for this edition of The Broken Rifle read:

"Activist magazines can be 'heavy', analysing war and other systemic violences. We want to make the next edition of The Broken Rifle more personal. We want to hear about the incredible people within our movements taking action for social change, and what has led them to become part of our struggle against militarism. Their stories are likely to be inspirational, sometimes emotional, and definitely thought-provoking. They will all be different. Our hope is that hearing these stories will help us to better understand what brings people into our movements. This in itself is a political act, asserting that we are not all interchangeable consumers, but unique individuals, with our own particular motivations and experiences."

We hope you are inspired and challenged by the seven activists featured in this edition of The Broken Rifle.

Andrew, Hannah and Semih



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Odette Ntambara

Finding healing and prosperity

In 1989 I was born, in the Southern province of “the land of a thousand hills”, Rwanda. In 1994 I was forced to abandon my birth land due to the then ongoing conflict in the country, the world now knows as the “Genocide”. Rwanda consists of two main ethnic groups Hutus and Tutsis with the majority of the population being Hutus. In April, chaos erupted as Hutus and Tutsis clashed in the streets and in homes across the country lasting 100 days, with countless bodies in the streets where most killings were done by knives and machetes. Although only five years old, I still remember. I remember death, children crying, houses burning, people running and screaming, I remember my father’s pain and decision to continue moving when he was told that our mother had perished in one of the houses. I remember being on his back and my sister walking beside him on the road to anywhere. We slowly made our way to Kenya, Tanzania, and Swaziland staying a few months at a time and eventually settling in South Africa.

South Africa became my home for over fifteen years. It’s here I met the Religious Society of Friends, commonly known as Quakers. Quakers inspired my teenage

years, and without their guidance and support I am not sure I would be the person I am today. They provided me with the opportunity to learn, to communicate articulately, and above all they encouraged a relationship with my spirituality. It’s only recently that I got to truly understand all that happened with my family during that dark time, as father never talked about it. I’ve been a refugee, stateless, a foreigner and at times left confused but it’s because of all that I have been through I have come to understand the world I want to see. It’s also the reason I feel stimulated to do more so the next generations don’t have to endure the same pain. Being reunited and getting to know my mother after twenty years of believing she had died in the genocide has further encouraged me in continuing my path of peace activism.

For seven years I worked as media monitor for a non-governmental organisation known as The Ceasefire Campaign, a peace movement campaign aiming for a demilitarised society, a non-violent society and a society of peace. In this time, I represented the youth in

international conferences such as the world gathering of War Resisters' International, an NGO advocating for demilitarisation. In addition, I was responsible for organising numerous campaigns such as campaign to ban Cluster Bombs, workshops on domestic violence, workshop for the 16 days of activism, talk on the South African Arms Deal saga with Andrew Feinstein, workshop on the global week of action and promotion for a gun free zone at a taxi rank in Johannesburg, through an organisation called Gun Free South Africa. Unfortunately The Ceasefire Campaign has since closed due to low funding with members having to continue with peace education in other capacities.

I have been a member of Johannesburg Quakers for over twelve years as a regular attendee at meetings, uplifting my faith further. I am enthusiastic in the daily work of the Johannesburg meeting and in the past years, I was the office manager at the Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meeting (C&SAYM) and gained a great sense of responsibility and caring for self in my role as Co-Clerk of Young friends. As a Young Friends Co-Clerk for the C&SAYM my work focused on work plan implementation, community project development and, maintaining communication amongst the youth, report writing, workshop facilitation and chairing of meetings. Currently I am actively involved in the Young Adults programs within Quakers with a focus on equality in its most expansive sense as a way to explore the need for justice, the power of Truth and Love, our own growing edges as individuals and as a community, and what it means to create the adored nation here and now. We intend to encourage a daring learning space within which to unpack privilege and power, and to develop greater capacity to challenge and break down the many interconnecting systems of oppression.

In July 2011 I completed my training as an Alternative to Violence Projects (AVP) facilitator – by Phaphama Initiatives, an AVP organisation based in South Africa. I have since been facilitating in basic and advanced workshops for the Johannesburg Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) from 2012 to date. The Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) is an international volunteer-run conflict transformation programme. Teams of trained AVP facilitators conduct experiential workshops to develop participants' abilities to resolve conflicts without resorting to manipulation, coercion, or violence. Workshops are now offered in communities, businesses, churches, neighbourhood centres, community associations and women's shelters all over the world.

Campaigning to ban cluster bombs, 2010
Campaigning to ban cluster bombs, 2010
I am working to create a world where everyone's Human rights are respected, a world where violence is not the everyday news, a world where peace is the consensus. A world where we not separated by our diversity but united in our diverse nature. "No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite" by Nelson Mandela. I will be the first to agree with his words for the simple reason of humanity, how is it that it's so much easier to hate than it is to love, when this two emotions are interlinked? Surely if you can hate it must mean you had loved before.

In 2012 I had the opportunity to travel to Kenya for the Friend

World conference (FWCC) where I got to spend time with a diverse group of Quakers from all over the world. The conference themed "Salt and Light" gave me so much comfort and reignited my hope that as diverse as we are, we are not so different. We tend to walk around with feelings of loneliness and emotions of hurt, but it's during this conference I saw unity I have felt a sense of togetherness among Friends not just talking about Salt and Light but to practice living Salt and Light in this broken world.

We live in the world crippled by prejudice, xenophobia, poverty, environmental and health issues, race, inequality and violence. I work towards building a culture of peace; this is however characterised by people who are committed and able to deal with the inevitable conflicts which arise when using dialogue and committed to building and rebuilding respectful relationships between themselves and others. This is a continuous process as it is not easy to transform a negative situation to one that is positive without some sort of disagreement...peacemaking and peace building is the responsibility of everyone. We have to make sure we maintain peace in society, promoting culture of peace through a ministry of Peace.

I believe that as the future generation it is my responsibility as a young person to change this life for the better through activism, lobbying and volunteering in an environment that shares my vision.



An interview with Greg Payton

*This interview was originally published in *Conscientious Objection: A Practical Companion for Movements*. The editor interviewed Greg Payton, an African American veteran of the Vietnam war, turned international peace activist with Vietnam Veterans against War, Veterans for Peace, War Resisters' League, and Black Veterans for Social Justice. He talked to us about how race and racism have played out in his experience of this activism.*

Can you tell us what got you involved in your activism?

I'm a Vietnam veteran. I got drafted, conscripted to Vietnam. And I really wasn't into politics, I only went because I didn't want to get locked up, I didn't want to go to jail. That was the number one reason I went to Vietnam. <--break- />The military wasn't difficult for me, I was pretty physically active so it was OK. But when I went to Vietnam, I began to understand what the war was really about. I realised we were being used for the benefit of others. When I spoke about white soldiers and black soldiers and the problems of racism in the military, I became a target. I got attacked several times by American soldiers. It led to a lot of conflict. I had to leave the army, I left without permission and went to stay with a Vietnamese family. It gave me tremendous insight on the war. I got shot at a couple of times by American soldiers.

At the time I didn't realise there was an organised effort of Vietnam war veterans. The movement was a lot of young, white students primarily. They started organising for people not going to war: they never came to my community. We didn't know about conscientious objection, we didn't know that you could maybe go to Canada – we didn't have any idea. I got released from the military and I came back home. What happened was that when I was in Vietnam I started using drugs. I used drugs for about 15 years. In the beginning it was manageable, at the end I ended up being homeless. Doing a lot of different things.

Were there any support networks for you when you came back?

I didn't know anything. I didn't try to link up with any organisations; I kept moving on and tried to develop my life. But I went to the Veterans Administration, to a drug programme. There was some veterans in that programme who were members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Was that when you became involved with conscientious objection activism and antimilitarism more generally?

That was a good experience. I hadn't realised it, but Vietnam was the catalyst of my drug addiction. I began to get a real education about what was happening politically, how we were using soldiers and not looking after them when they got back home. I became very involved in the veterans unit. Then through Matt Meyer, I got involved in War Resisters' League (WRL) and started going to different things: there was a link between veterans and the Vietnam war campaign.

You mentioned that the movement against the Vietnam war was mainly white, middle class students – how were the race dynamics when you got involved with Vietnam Veterans against the War and WRL?

A lot of meetings I was the only black person. It was a long time before other black people got involved. There was a brother named Clarence Fitch who was the one who mentored me into the programme, but he was one of only a few. He got AIDS, so again a lot of the time I'm the only black person at a meeting. It was years before there was more black involvement – some peripheral people maybe, but by and large the movement was white.

Why do you think that was?

How many black people are there in your social circle? Not many? That's the problem – people stayed in their own social circle – you only organise with the people that you know. It wasn't a conscious thing where they didn't want to include

other people, but they didn't know how to get other people involved.

When you started getting involved, did that raise the white majority's awareness?

There was a lot of denial about white privilege really and how that works. People aren't really confronted with it – having not been involved in situations where race is an issue. They don't understand what it's like to be in that situation where everyone is systematically all white and you're another colour. You're immediately identifiable. I didn't know where they might be from from, but they knew I was black straight away. They could deal with me in a different way.

What would you say has improved or needs to be improved in the way white people deal with their privilege? How can groups be made more inclusive?

Early on there were a couple of people in WRL who knew that their meetings didn't include a lot of people other than those that looked like them. They were preaching to the choir. You have to reach out to other groups – the number one way is you find out what their issues are and you work with them on their issues and then hopefully they work with you on yours.

Militarism is all encompassing – black, white, etc – because of the way militarism works and what it does to a community – you find that white folks that are involved in the peace movement are adamant that whatever their niche is – environmental, CO, nuclear – whatever it is, they are passionate about it, but they don't know what the others struggles are. When you're fighting for survival, like in the Black Lives Matter campaign – we're dealing with a situation of militarism, where the police are killing people: I'm in a community where a black man was shot in the back eight times while running away from police. But what happens is that the struggles we're having with militarism, other folks, white people in particular, come from communities that don't understand that. So for example, WRL was talking about war. There was an issue about the police and police brutality and they didn't know whether or not to talk about it, because their issue is war. That was the beginning of our weekend meeting. That weekend there was a riot in LA about police brutality – they rolled out the army, tanks, all that militarism in front of local citizens. And right there, there was a link between militarism and race. It could have been a war zone in the Middle East or Latin America.

So you would say the problem is a lack of awareness among white activists, and an unwillingness to make themselves aware?

Some of that has been true. It's people from other cultures getting involved in new cultures. I was very uncomfortable in all white communities at first, I had to learn new terminology. What happened was that there was just a need to understand this stuff and I was interested so stayed the course. Some people don't have the time to do that, they're fighting for their lives.

What do you think would help more people stay the course? What might make movements more inclusive?

You have to prove to people that what you're doing relates to what they need done. So for example in South Africa, there

were many black South African groups that wanted to support the End Conscription Campaign, but they were also concerned about how that would work. If they don't do their military service, but they still have white privilege, are they then going to go back to their suburbs, become white citizens suppressing black people again – are they going support us if we support them?

As an organisation, you have to go and relate more to other folks, rather than you being central – in many instances, the organisation feels their issues are paramount: 'everyone needs to get on board with our issues'. Your issue is not paramount to other groups. When we were in South Africa for the WRI (War Resisters' International) conference last year – one of the greatest things I've seen happen – you reached out to all these other groups and people began to find out that, for example, homophobia and feminism – all these different things happen in a lot of places. A lot of times, people feel very isolated, but in reality the same pressures are also going on in other places. Prior to that there was very little – there wasn't a lot of direct relating.

Things have come a good way, since I started back in '80s and '90s. Things have got a lot better. But activists still don't always understand or want to understand other situations. What I like about WRI and WRL is that you're reaching out to me, the idea that we have this connection, and I could email you and get instantaneous support internationally. A lot of groups don't have that same mechanism, especially grassroots groups. So for example in the movement for divestment from Israel, a lot of people didn't understand what that was about, but now there's a whole community of people doing it around the world. That's wonderful!

So what I'm hearing is that you feel there's been a lot of improvement and more reaching out and solidarity.

'A lot': how do you qualify that? Things have improved. Still, I think we're facing the same issues. It's coalition building that's important, with other groups you can identify with and move with. Militarism affects everybody in all types of ways, especially economically. We need to reach out to younger people so that they can get a clear understanding of what's going on. Like with tobacco – there was a movement against tobacco 30 years ago. At that time smoking was a big thing. Over 30 years, tobacco activists have changed the culture of smoking. You can't smoke in meetings. Bottom line is that people understand smoking is not a good thing. Little kids at school could tell you you shouldn't smoke.

How do you think the antimilitarist movement could emulate that?

What we did as veterans was link up with people – teachers, for example. We went to schools and talked to the students. We never told young people what decision to make, but we said if you do go to the military, here's some of the things that you should know, like: your life is no longer your own. We have to begin an outreach to young people. You plant the seeds in younger people and when they start making social decisions, it shows. We need to interpret that in terms of language. So for example, I remember WRI arguing about whether they should put their things into Spanish. They were arguing about what kind of Spanish and how not everyone speaks the same kind – but you've gotta try! People will figure it out. We're so busy trying to get it just right that we miss the mark altogether sometimes.

So we need to communicate with people more widely, in a culturally sensitive way, but without paralysing ourselves being worried that we get it wrong?

We all have a long way to go in order to make things better for our children and for ourselves. I've lived in the southern part of the US – the cradle of slavery. There's still a lot of sentiment around that fosters these stereotypical ideas about black people. We're working hard to change minds, and I think we have. Many white Americans never thought a cop would do that – kill an unarmed black man, I mean. The media has portrayed black people in a very negative light. Many whites think 'they get what they deserve', and a lot of people don't even consider us people. And the same kind of militarism that's happening here, where we're getting killed by the police, is happening all around the world. It's horrible the way Muslims are treated in the US too. The US wants to blame everyone else for the violence, never wants to take responsibility for anything. I have to bite my tongue! I know some of the issues and people don't want to hear it, they don't want to be out of their comfort zone.

On that point: earlier I asked about how white people can make 'our' activism and 'our' movements more inclusive. Something that's interesting is to flip that dynamic...

Yeah, so for example, one of the major things that will happen is that white activists will plan a march, say, and then they call the black groups and see if they want to join the demonstration. But they never brought them in at the planning stages. Don't do all the planning and then tell the black groups where to go and what to do. If you want more black involvement, you have to bring them in initially, right at that planning stage. I might have had something to say about the objectives and tactics and all that. But you just want me to show up so you can think you're being inclusive! You're being dominant – you want black people as window dressing, not at the level of organising. And why don't you come and support black activists on issues that concern us? Take some time out of what you're doing and get to understand other people's issues. Don't just read about them – meet them, ask how you can help. It might sound simple, but make fliers and that kind of thing – something your group might be better equipped to do, if you have more resources. Little groups don't have the infrastructure to do that so it could really help them. You need to listen to what their problems are.

Obviously changing that dominant white behaviour is what needs to happen. But what would your advice be to black activists who are coming face to face with that very frustrating behaviour?

You have to understand different cultures. Most Americans look at white people and make an assumption – they assume they're the same. Understanding different groups, different European groups, for example, takes a while. People from different parts of the world have a different outlook on stuff. You have to understand where other people are coming from. I feel very blessed I was able to weather the storm. I had people I could talk to about these things – Howard Clark and I became very close – you have to be honest. We loved each other enough that we could learn from each other. We could ask each other's opinion. I could say I don't know much about x without worrying about being judged. For example, I didn't know much about gay culture, but I had some friends who

were patient with me. I also remember being in California at a conference early in my involvement with WRL there was an article in Playboy Magazine about Vietnam Veterans and I was mentioned so I showed it to someone, but they pointed out how sexist that magazine is. It was my first lesson in the peace movement about sexism.

How do you feel about black groups organising on their own?

When you have a war, the draft gets people from all economic backgrounds. Someone I met had never met a black person – everything he knew was from the media. We couldn't even communicate because we had different slang. But black soldiers could talk to one another so we came together. We had a lot of similar experiences. There was a lot of segregation. Certainly groups need to identify with their culture. I don't believe everything has to be homogeneous, not everyone has to be together all the time in everything. You can be in a black group and you have issues and you're trying to align yourself with other groups and everyone is trying to contribute collectively to a situation.

Being welcoming to other groups is hard, people don't understand your history, they might be coming up with things you've already done. Hearing them out is still important though, it's important not to dismiss anybody. If you start being dismissive, then people shut down. I've been organising with Black Veterans for Social Justice – they've been inclusive, but the primary focus is on black veterans: housing, educational opportunities, homeless shelters. They started organising as black veterans, and they're still inclusive. You don't have to lose your group autonomy to work with others. They work with Vietnam Veterans Against the War – many of us have come together for certain things. We've given each other awards! There are lots of opportunities for collaboration.

What about gender awareness and inclusivity?

A lot of my education about gender has been from being involved in these groups. As I mentioned, there were some things I learned about sexism and the exploitation of women in the peace movement. And then when you talk about black women, there's so many nuances. You'd have to speak to a black woman. But she couldn't speak for every black woman. I can't speak for every African American, you have to get some kind of sampling group. But yes, black women are marginalised in a lot of these situations. I remember when I started getting involved in activism, women were picking up on male dominance. They would point out if there were more male speakers than women speakers, or only one woman speaker. I'd never thought about it like that. You start to listen to more voices. When there's only one black woman, you miss the opportunity to get a more inclusive balance. It's not just one token person you need, you need several people.



Conscientious objection declaration from Hilal Demir

I don't want to live in a world that is sexist, hierarchic, authoritarian, militarist and patriarchal.

I do not want them to give me their system-based school education...

I do not want people to die in wars because they are deceived.

I do not want to have to prove that I am a fully intelligent being and individual, just because I am a woman.

I do not want to brush aside the state's war policies and their lies.

I do not want militaries that train dummies to die in wars...

I do not want people to decide for me about anything without asking me...

I do not want to see militarist concepts and behaviours within our movements...

I do not want to live under patriarchic rules and behaviors that invade my private life.

I do not want anybody to judge people's sexual identities.

I do not want to be ruled by labels such as

"mother", "wife", "daughter", "girlfriend" just because I am a woman...

I do not want to live fenced in by borders...

I do not want to kill and be killed...

And.. I am rejecting all of these by listening to my conscience...

Because I WANT to live free and happy, in a world where there is no war, or any kind of violence, anti-authoritarian, without borders.

And you?

Call out for Broken Rifle 107: Prisoners for peace, prisons for war

Every year - on 1st December - War Resisters' International and its members mark Prisoners for Peace Day, when we publicise the names and stories of those imprisoned for actions for peace. Many are conscientious objectors, in jail for refusing to join the military. Others have taken nonviolent actions to disrupt preparation for war. Supporters send cards and letters in solidarity.

Prisons are sites of violence and social control – for those imprisoned for nonviolent political actions, and for all. The prison-industrial complex is intrinsically linked with militarism.

The next edition of The Broken Rifle, is a collection of reflections from some prisoners for peace who have been incarcerated for taking actions against militarism.

It is also an opportunity to explore the idea of prisons as institutions that mirror the dehumanising violence of militarism, how profiteers make money from violent suppression (and the forced labour of people in prison), and reflect on how prisons are founded on an idea of security based on surveillance, policing and weaponry: prisons of war.

If you would like to volunteer to submit an article, or to suggest someone else that might want to write for it, please write to us at info@wri-irg.org with the subject 'Broken Rifle 107 article'.

WRI bookshop

War Resisters' International offers a range of merchandise via its webshop. These and many other books can be ordered online — and some are even available for reading online or downloading as PDF. Check out the WRI webshop at <http://wri-irg.org/webshop>



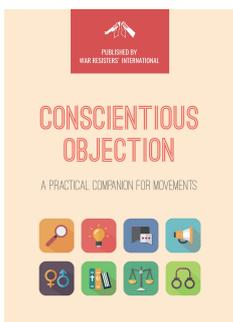
Sowing Seeds: the militarisation of youth and how to counter it

Through articles, images, survey data and interviews, *Sowing Seeds: The Militarisation of Youth and How to Counter It* documents the seeds of war that are planted in the minds of young people in many different countries. However, it also explores the seeds of resistance to this militarisation that are being sown resiliently and creatively by numerous

people. We hope the book will help to disseminate these latter seeds. It is not just a book for peace and antimilitarist activists: it is a book for parents and grandparents, teachers, youth workers, and young people themselves.

Author(s)/editor(s): Owen Everett

Orders: £5.00 + postage

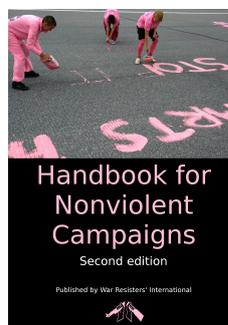


Conscientious objection: a practical companion to movements

This book is intended as a practical companion for conscientious objection movements and all those whose work forms part of the continuum of war resistance. It has been written by activists who are campaigning against all kinds

of injustice, all over the world. Learning from the lived experience of these activists, the aim is to help movements work together, surmount the external challenges they face, and enhance the concept of conscientious objection, using it in new and innovative ways - such as against war profiteering, or the militarisation of youth. The book also has a specific focus on gender, and the often invisible role of gender, both in the war machine, and in the movements which oppose it.

Orders: £7.00 + postage



Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns: second edition

Social change doesn't just happen. It's the result of the work of committed people striving for a world of justice and peace. This work gestates in groups or cells of activists, in discussions, in training sessions, in reflecting on previous experiences, in planning, in experimenting and in learning from others. Preparing ourselves for our work for social justice is key to its success.

There is no definitive recipe for successful nonviolent actions and campaigns. This handbook, however, is a series of resources that can inspire and support your own work, especially if you adapt the resources to your own needs and context.

£7.00 + postage

Hanna Sofie Utsi: resistance, mining and Sami culture



Translated from the original Swedish into English by Anna Björklund

Huge machines gouge wounds in the earth, and tears run down my cheeks. The police have cleared away the local population, Sami, and activists.

My tears are of anger, sorrow, and despair, but not of hopelessness. Not in the least. The fight for Gállok and the Sami is far from over. It has only just begun.

The Sami are Europe's only indigenous people. A people with their own language, own culture, own history, and own democratically elected body. A people who can be said to probably have it pretty good here in the Western world. We can go to school, have the same healthcare as the rest of the population, the same judicial system, and the same citizens' rights. But do we really have it that good?

In school, we don't learn about our own history and culture. We study Swedish civics over the course of many years, but knowledge of Sami and Sami civics

education is minimal. It's hard for our elderly to make themselves understood in their native language when they go to get medical care. Hospitals have no cultural knowledge of psycho-social illnesses, no understanding taught in school of our cultural practices such as reindeer herding, hunting, and fishing. It's hard for us to just be Sami: from the state's perspective, assimilating us has been a matter of successful policy.

My forefathers were able to live in peace on their traditional lands, until the countries that would become the present-day Nordic countries realized that they ought to tax the Sami for living here. During this period, Sami paid taxes to three separate countries. This was the beginning of a colonization which continues to this day. The state didn't care that the Sami paid taxes and owned land.

If the state found something they could grab, they did. Sami land rich in natural resources has time and time again been sold to forestry companies, private individuals, and foreign companies. But views differ on what is meant by

'resources.' If you ask me, 'resources' are fresh land and clean water that animals and humans can live off of in perpetuity. If you ask the state, 'resources' are something that can be mined, dammed, and exploited. This is happening today at a furious rate, without the Sami being able to say anything about it. Railways, predatory animals, wind turbines, and dammed waterways run the risk of leading to our culture's destruction. We can't preserve a culture by living in a museum. We must be allowed to live.

Today, the Sami Parliament has no power. When the Sami Parliament was created twenty years ago, it was intended to function as the law-giving body for matters concerning us.

But when it concerns the continuing colonization of our land, neither the Sami Parliament nor the local people have any voice. When the state allowed companies to exploit our land through generous financial incentives, we had no choice but to practice civil disobedience in order to force a discussion, and, critically, to stop these companies from draining our land of iron, copper, gas, and everything else Mother Earth has.

The good thing is that the Sami Parliament has unanimously spoken out against prospecting, new mining projects, and the re-opening of mines in Sami lands. All of this so that we can have a chance to survive, evolve, and be the people that we want to be, not just an exotic tool to fulfill the state's PR objectives. The state has to listen to this. Can it not be that the state doesn't want us to be here, disrupting their selling of our land?

A mine is never just a mine. The infrastructure that is currently being planned will cut through the land, and the railways are like living meat grinders. Whole herds of reindeer can be run over, and unfortunately too many lie there gravely injured before they finally die or get help from a reindeer herder who comes upon them.

I stand in my own land and watch as the police help foreign prospecting companies use force to destroy our land. Land converted to mines can never go back to what it once was, and the residual product remains forever, continuing to leech its poisons. The water and land that we all rely upon to live will no longer be left. I'm sorry to tell you all that this is happening all over the world. Indigenous people struggle to survive and to protect their lives and the nature. For example my sisters in North America are trying to protect their land and water against a pipeline. Police and military are using violence to stop peaceful demonstrations - right now in Standing Rock. Remember Wounded Knee.

The only thing we can do is keep fighting.



We need them: campaign against femicide in Cali

"We need them Because they were willing to love, they dressed up, all they wanted was to be happy as in fairy tales and they were unaware that many times they end like horror stories. Because they loved their neighbour - a neighbour - more than themselves. They obeyed the mandate to endure, to hope for love to change him, they abided solemnly "until death do us part".

The Valle del Cauca Department is located in south west Colombia. 10% of the nation's population is concentrated there, and it features a great cultural, ethnic and social diversity. It's also the destination area for displaced people fleeing from armed conflict mainly in Cauca, Narino, Putumayo and Choco departments.

Despite being one of the most cordial territories in the country, the Cauca Valley headed the list of departments with most cases of women murdered in 2015. This situation has become particularly acute because up to September of this year in the city of Cali (El País, 2016), capital of Cauca Valley, 73 women were reported murdered, 22% of the cases being alleged femicides and 63% of them in process of clarification.

The media daily reflects the consolidation of a patriarchal culture that naturalises, justifies and makes violence against women invisible. This is at the detriment to loving relationships, the enjoyment of sexuality and human dignity. Life is no longer sacred, and according to the anthropologist Rita Segato, a "pedagogy of cruelty" has been installed, which desensitises large sectors of society, including institutions, and normalises violence as if it were inevitable.

One of the principal indicators of this pedagogy of cruelty is gender-based violence and its most extreme form: femicides, extended as murders of persons for being women in the hands of their male partners, ex-partner of the victim or strangers "motivated by hate, disrespect, pleasure or belief that women are of their own property, that is to say, alluding to sexist motivations" (Lagarde, 1994).

In Latin America, the contribution of anthropologist Marcela Lagarde is worth highlighting. She is a Mexican feminist writing from a critical perspective, who introduces an analysis that intercepts the concept of femicide with gender,

economic and racial unfairness within a local context – in this case the City of Juarez, Mexico. "That new meaning includes it's consideration as a State crime, generated by the absence of state programs to guarantee a life without violence for women" (Monarrez, 2009).

In the Department of Cauca Valley, entities such as the Cali Municipality through their Social Observatory (SO), or the Regional Valley National Institute of Legal Medicine and Forensic Sciences (NILMFS) do not possess either the institutional technical guidelines for the classification of femicide cases, nor the specialised staff (qualified experts) in gender issues.

A reflection of this, as the SO, is that up until last year some feminicides were erroneously classified as crimes of passion, reducing the cultural implications and power relationships which "render a special role to the use of masculine strength in hierarchical gender relationships" (Jimeno 2002) and involve the perpetration of women's murders.

In addition to the previous scenario, other cases in which a relationship or bond between women and their aggressors does not exist are still considered homicides, disregarding - among other cases - crimes against women that are misogynist murders, those that are committed for the sake of honour, those that occur in armed conflict, others that are related to gender identity and sexual orientation, infanticide and foeticide, and those related to ethnicity and indigenous identity.

Likewise, there is no information available about passive or indirect feminicides, among which the death of women due to clandestine and unsafe abortions are found, cases caused by practices such as genital mutilation, dealing and trafficking of women, arms trafficking, drugs, gangs' activities, criminal mobs; death of girls due to negligence, nutritional deprivation or abuse, acts of neglect from public or State official, among others. (Latin American protocol of investigation in feminicides 2014).

Faced with this reality, the group Colectiva Reparando Ausencias (Repairing Absences group) emerges as a civic engagement movement that seeks to address social imaginaries which justify, naturalise and make invisible all violence based on gender in the private, public or institutional sphere. We are convinced that removing these beliefs and atavistic practices through education, communication and social mobilisation, it is possible to start a path towards the construction of respectful relationships between men and women, dignity and rights of women.

In the Repairing Absences group, we come together as women and men activists who claim women's right to a life free of violence. At present it is made up of family members of the victims of feminicides, people who participate in various social projects, politicians, academics and institutions of the city.

The group began in July 2015, and since then we have conducted several symbolic events, hands-on workshops and community gatherings to get the city involved with murals, stencils, performances and nonviolent direct actions and awareness-raising actions regarding the increase of violence against women in densely populated parts of the city.

In order to ensure a shared understanding, we construed the

campaign "We need them", through which we have been expressing several forms of interaction and dialogue among the people, we conducted follow-ups of the feminicides that took place in the city of Cali and in the Department, we distributed and led gender-related violence eradication campaigns in local areas so as to raise awareness of an issue that hides inside homes, which is believed to be within the couple's private sphere, but which requires an integral approach as a society to achieve structural changes.

Our endeavour summons the people of Cali to establish dialogues, reflections and collective actions against indolence and the exertion of masculine and patriarchal power that destroys dignity, bodies and lives of hundreds of women each year in the department. Art in action, or 'artivism', is what inspires us and brings us together: that dimension of culture that combines social urgencies, symbols, contents and poetic, creative and artistic language towards social movement.

That is the reason that our first symbolic event named "Embroidering the absences of women victims of feminicides in Cali" held on 13 November 2015 in a public space crowded with people, had a strong artistic, symbolic and creative component.

The group called on 80 male citizens to carry out a custom that for ages has been embraced by women's hands, this time they seized drum, needle, thread and canvas to embroider with patience, concentration and respect the name of one of the women victims of feminicides in the city of Cali. Each man embroidered with his own hands the history of a feminine life, the face of one of the 80 women murdered and absent from the city, reminiscing for the audience a life project murdered by male violence. See video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3OjXOI0q17I>

The embroiderers were accompanied by a group of 25 women who handed out guidance leaflets with tips about how to activate care routes in cases of feminicides and shared the relevance of the symbolic event for the city. Likewise, adolescents and young people set up a change mandala that invited the attendees to transform violence into love relationships.

Following our symbolic event, the group has focused its 'artivism' on emblematic places of the city of Cali painting murals, stencils and t-shirts. Together with other groups and urban artists, walls were painted in Libertadores (13 December 2015), Siloe (21 December 2015), Potrero Grande (7 August 2016) and Jovita Students Park (10 September 2016) with messages alluding to the murders of women in the city and the vindication of women's rights to a life without violence.

Likewise, social based organizations together with women leaders, mothers, female heads of households and young neighbours of populated districts where major incidence of violence against women is evident, have organized workshops to discuss, reflect and take action regarding physical, emotional, psychological and social impacts that go along with violence experienced by impoverished women in Cali.

Other cases of political incidence in which we have participated, in articulation with Women's Social Movement in Cali, feminist organizations and LGTBI community were the commemoration act of international women's day at the Municipality of Cali building on the 8th of March 2016, to

demand from the government the actual and effective implementation of a route of care to women victims of gender related violence, the protection of their lives and a restoration of their rights (Law 1257 from 2008 and Law 1761 from 2015 Rosa Elvira Cely), as well as the March for Raising Awareness of Sexual Diversity and the Pacific Region Gender (26 June 2016).

All these activities have allowed us to perceive several perspectives of how women cope with multiple violence in their daily life, their daily effort to overcome economic, cultural and social limitations, and more important, to be dear allies and partners in the political dispute to reassert their rights.

Without a doubt, as a group we have many challenges and changes to accomplish, for this reason we will continue mobilizing the people, denouncing injustices and promoting collective mournings to immortalize the names and histories of women victims of feminicides in Cauca Valley, singing as one "we need them".

Find us in Facebook as "Ellas nos hacen falta" (We need them) and in Twitter as @ellashacenfalta

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Kayla Mueller: Reaching across the great divide of differences

CAROL THOMPSON

The bright smile. Contagious laughter. Her sunshine drew others to her, to debate and argue, to learn and ponder. Energetic resolution, a passion for justice, for constant giving define Kayla Mueller; not her capture by ISIS, her torture and tragic death at age 26.

Kayla's decision to work for Turkish aid agency Support to Life, receiving Syrian refugees streaming across the border, came as part of her journeys to learn and share, from visiting rural communities in Guatemala, to assisting in an orphanage in India, working at an African refugee center in Tel Aviv, and joining vigils against Israeli settlements in Hebron, Palestine. She taught English to Tibetan refugees in Dharamsala, India, while learning from the practices of Tibetan Buddhism. As Kayla explains in letters to her parents (2010, 2013):

This reality is my life's work, to go where there is suffering. I suppose, like us all, I'm learning how to deal with the suffering of the world inside myself...to deal with my own pain and more importantly to still have the ability to be proactive.

...any struggle for greater freedom and justice is my struggle and any time innocent civilians are being slaughtered, they are my people and anytime the world is not responding to such things because it's not their concern, it becomes my concern.

Who she was not also defines Kayla: she was not the itinerant

tourist nor was she a naïve 'girl' just out to see the world. Her motivation was to gain knowledge across multiple cultures from those who continued to resist while profoundly suffering. She worked, ate and slept with those who sustained their resistance to violence and injustice.

While working in Turkey, Kayla briefly crossed the border into Syria and was captured by ISIS, in August 2013. The first email by the hostage takers only came to her parents the next May and in July 2014, they received a death threat, to be carried out in 30 days if ransom were not paid. In August we learned of the beheading of James Foley, followed by Steven Sotloff (September), and then Peter Kassig (November); it appears they were all held in the same hostage prison as Kayla in Raqqah, Syria. There is no official word verifying how Kayla died in February 2015. ISIS said she was killed by Jordanian aerial bombs, and we may never know the truth of how she died. These peacemakers all worked to stop the killing in Iraq and Syria, trying to amplify the voices of those outraged by the lack of international action, given the magnitude of the violence against civilians.

Kayla's life teaches us that reaching across the great divide of difference is necessary to increase understanding, and this reach is most difficult when the disparities are vast. Kayla's antimilitarism ('I would never stake claim to such a barbaric thing as war, any war anywhere. '), led her to work with the local peace center, to listen to veterans returning from the wars as they enrolled in her university. These programs responded to veterans' requests and needs for their next

difficult journey of reintegration into communities and classrooms.

COM-passion

A peacemaker cannot sustain her work, and will burn-out quickly, without compassion. The two parts of the word are equally important: com – passion. ‘Com’, resting in its Latin origin of ‘with’, signals connection, relationships. Although peacemakers can be very alone—as Kayla was for many of the 18 months in the darkness and cold of an ISIS prison—relationships direct their actions. As a young activist, Kayla decided to work with many different organizations to understand their diverse approaches; she found her experiences better than any university studies. Highly resourceful, she paid for her international travels (Guatemala, India, Palestine/Israel, France, Turkey) through her own earnings, such as working at an HIV/AIDS center in her home town while volunteering at a women’s shelter.

The spiritual journey for peace-making continued as Kayla joined a discussion seminar in Plum Village in southern France, summer 2010. Compassion in the Buddhist traditions involves ‘seeing yourself in everyone you meet’. Founder of Plum Village, Thich Nhat Hanh, explains, ‘Our method of practice should be non-violent. Non-violence... is the insight that everything is interconnected.... Doing violence to others is doing violence to yourself.’ (Anger, pp. 69-70)

Kayla paraphrased Hanh’s metaphor of taking garbage from within yourself to make compost to nourish the flower within you. In 2011 Kayla wrote, ‘The gardener knows how to turn garbage into compost. Therefore our anger, sadness, and fear are the best compost for our compassion.’ Kayla practiced compassion when she herself was under brutal physical and mental assault; two teenage Yazidi girls were being held with her (all raped regularly) and planned escape; Kayla declined to go with them, saying that as an American she would attract ISIS’ pursuit and revenge. The Yazidis successfully escaped.

Thich Nhat Hanh’s remembrance of Kayla connects to the hundreds of thousands of others: ‘...a beautiful flower and many other flowers have been stepped on and withered by bitterness and violence. Such a big pity for humans in the 21st century!’

Com-PASSION

The ‘passion’ side of ‘compassion’ gives the goals of the connections, of trying to learn how to ‘see yourself in everyone you meet’. For Kayla, those passionate goals directed her life’s journey, again, best summarized in her own words: ‘For as long as I live, I will not let this suffering be normal, something we just accept.’ Kayla was speaking out, because, as she said, 100,000 Syrians had died (2012). The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights now estimates 300,000 deaths; the UN estimates more than 4.8 million Syrians have fled abroad, and 6.5 million are displaced within the country. When about half the country’s pre-war population, more than 11 million people, have been killed or forced to flee their homes, tormented suffering has become all too ‘normal’.

Kayla gave up her privileged safety not just to name the problem, but to act on her ‘speaking truth to power’. She would not stay silent about the violence of the status quo in

the United States, which she linked to the ability of Americans to accept the violence rained down on ‘terrorists’, in the name of freedom. Peacemakers work not only to end wars, but to reduce economic oppression, the root cause of so many conflicts. Kayla worked equally at home and abroad for those suffering from economic inequalities, finding the struggles the same. She protested in an orange jump suit at Fort Huachuca, a military base engaged in training for ‘enhanced interrogation’, knowing full well that various forms of torture are also practiced in local prisons.

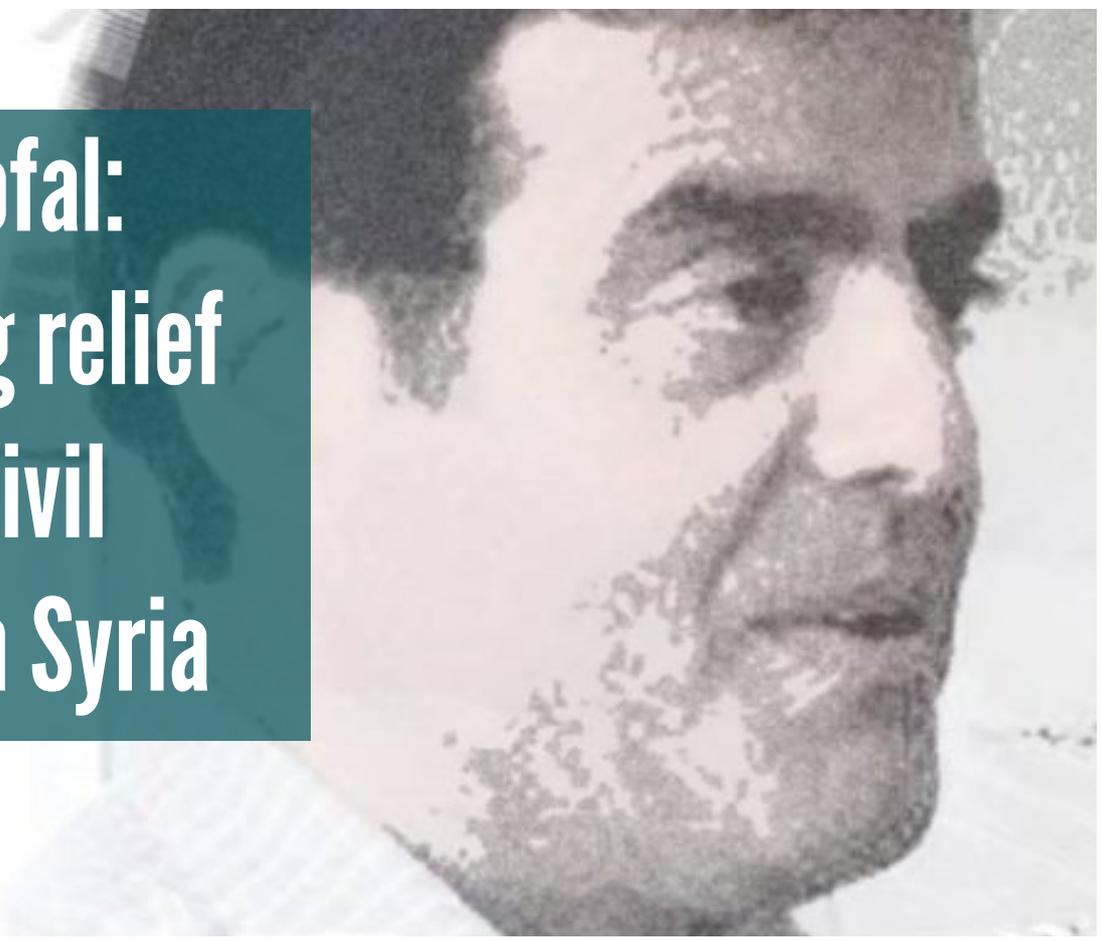
Kayla taught us all to ask questions, but most important to ‘question the answers’. She learned French, and was studying Arabic and the Koran. She read widely about the political economy of West Asia, never fooled into thinking the wars were about Sunni versus Shia. As early as 2012, she advocated for a ‘no fly zone’ to be enforced over Syria and condemned the drone bombings, finding them as vicious as any ISIS tactics. She organized during her short life to change U.S. policies of militarism and violence. Kayla chose to work with those who suffered from its consequences: ‘We are all too busy with our everyday routines, our work and our families. But because of my privileged American life, I’ve been able to purposefully build my life in such a way that this idealism [struggle for greater freedom and justice] can be my life and my work.’

Kayla’s words echo the famous ones of Daniel Berrigan during the Vietnam War (No Bars to Manhood, p. 49):

Of course, let us have peace, we cry, ‘but at the same time let us have normalcy.... There is no peace because there are no peacemakers. There are no makers of peace because the making of peace is at least as costly as the making of war—at least as exigent, at least as disruptive, at least as liable to bring disgrace and prison and death in its wake.

Kayla Mueller gave up normalcy, to help us see that the worst humanitarian crisis in a century across West Asia is not normal. Her life as a peacemaker calls us to action. My choice, your choice may not be the same as Kayla’s, but we all can choose a concern, a passion and dedicate much thought and countless hours in that struggle for peace with justice.

Carol Thompson, Ph.D., activist scholar and retired professor (international political economy) at Northern Arizona University, where Kayla Mueller took her classes on Southern Africa. They worked together in the Flagstaff New Day Peace Center. In Carol’s words, ‘Quickly, Kayla became my professor’, teaching her about resistance against injustices across West Asia. Carol is also co-author of *Biopiracy of Biodiversity – Global Exchange as Enclosure*, Africa World Press.



Dr. Jalal Nofal: connecting relief work and civil activism in Syria

OMAR ABBAS

Dr. Jalal Nofal, born 1963 in Damascus to a working class family from as-Sweida', is a prominent psychiatrist and activist who has been involved in politics and relief efforts throughout his lifetime.

In 1978 Nofal joined the Communist Action Party (CAP), after rejecting the Syrian Communist Party's pro-regime stances, particularly during the Muslim Brotherhood uprising (1976-82) and the ensuing government crackdown. "With regards to the Hama massacre (1982), for me as a leftist, the Communist Action Party took the most balanced and satisfactory stances," explained the doctor.

Nofal, a medical student at Damascus University at the time, remained an active party member until his arrest in 1983, when the regime launched a nationwide crackdown against leftists. He was released in 1991 after more than eight years in prison. Like many of his contemporaries, Nofal decided to resume his studies, graduating from medical school and specializing in psychiatry.

Ideologically, the imprisonment further reinforced the democratic tendency of Nofal's leftism, perhaps at the expense of

his socialist beliefs, not unlike other former prisoners who brought their new ideas back with them to the Communist Action Party. Nofal recalled about how "the party (together with other groups) took a greater focus on democracy and countering the BaA th party's propaganda." Despite these efforts, the nineties ultimately witnessed little change, as the regime rejected democratization efforts.

A banner condemning the detention of Dr. Nofal when he was arrested in Damascus on January 6, 2014A banner condemning the detention of Dr. Nofal when he was arrested in Damascus on January 6, 2014This political dormancy lasted until 2000, when Bashar al-Asad's rise to power and promising rhetoric prompted many Syrians to renew their engagement in the democratization of society.

Nofal enthusiastically received these developments and joined the Committees to Defend Democracy and Human Rights [CDF, a member of the Coalition for the International Criminal Court (CICC) and Euromed Rights), and participated in the Damascus Spring, when leftists and liberals worked on uniting the opposition and exposing the lack of reforms under "reformist" Bashar al-Asad. After sensing the danger of this movement, the regime

cracked down on it as well, once again forcing political activity into secrecy.

With the eruption of the so-called Arab Spring, however, Syria rediscovered outspoken political activism, as reformism and solidarity protests returned to the forefront.

Before the start of the revolution in March 2011, Nofal was working on a campaign to improve public transport under the slogan “Public Transport that Respects Citizens”. After the revolution began, however, he transitioned from reformist calls to participating in the revolutionary activism sweeping the country. Nofal was convinced that “all democratic movements and individuals must take part in revolutionary activism, regardless of ideology or religion.”

Nofal worked with the Damascus Neighborhoods Coordinating Committee to organize a protest in the capital’s Arnus Square on May 2, 2011, demanding democracy, an end to the regime’s violence and sectarianism, and the lifting of the siege on the southern city of Dar’a. He was arrested at the protest and spent ten days in Adra prison before being released in an amnesty. He then returned to work with the committee, though it was soon dissolved after its founders were arrested.

After that, he joined the Damascus Doctors Coordinating Committee, which was set up to cure patients, especially protesters, who were routinely arrested, abused, and tortured at hospitals in the presence of Dr. Nofal and his colleagues. This campaign was effectively halted, as were most others, by widespread arrest campaigns.

Nofal also worked with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent (SARC), which in his words was “one of the few organizations where revolutionary humanitarian workers were allowed to operate.” Nofal’s relief work focused on psychological and social support for internally displaced persons (IDPs) living in Damascus and victims and witnesses of conflict and siege throughout Rif Dimashq. “Working in Damascus with IDPs was far more dangerous as we were accused of supporting terrorism, while we had more liberties in Rif Dimashq due to the looser grip of the regime,” clarified Nofal.

The government continued to clamp down on relief efforts, accusing any aid agency of supporting terrorism and arresting and exiling many field workers. In April 2012, Nofal himself was arrested while on SARC duty in Rif Dimashq and subjected to torture while in prison.

Despite all the hardships, Nofal went on to contribute to the foundation of a new political movement, the Syrian Left Coalition, upon his release, though it failed to gain traction.

Towards the second half of 2012, the armed struggle began to take an increasingly prominent role, but Nofal persisted in his peaceful initiatives. In 2013, he was a founding member of the National Call Movement, which had over 200 members in Damascus and “called for the establishment of a democratic civil state that rejects sectarianism, Islamization and civil war,” as Nofal put it.

The National Call Movement members aimed to revive the peaceful movement and along with the Syrian Revolutionary Youth they installed speakers chanting anti-regime songs across Damascus. By early 2014, the network was exposed and disbanded; its members, including Nofal, were arrested and

forced to confess under torture at the capital’s Military Intelligence Branch 215.

After his release in early July, Nofal continued his relief and civil society work, only to be arrested less than two weeks later. He was accused of funding terrorism by the Counter-Terrorism Court for having provided relief with his wife in Yarmuk, and spent six months in prison. When Nofal was let out in January 2015, he was smuggled out of the country and fled to Germany to join his wife, poet and activist Khawla Dunia, who had fled the country earlier.

Nevertheless, this reunion did not last long. “What I could offer in Germany was far less than that which I could in Turkey,” explained the doctor. Nofal currently resides in the Turkish southern border town of Gaziantep, where he is a regular guest on programs such as those of Alwan FM, Radio Hara, and Radio Rozana. He is also part of a team of psychiatrists and social workers who work in schools and orphanages, while training therapists and supporting similar activities inside Syria.

Jalal Nofal is an example of how many Syrian revolutionaries have never drawn a line between two inextricably intertwined realms: relief work and civil society activism. In their opinion, it is in fact impossible to ignore the political dimension that has led to the current suffering.

Omar Abbas was a medical student in Damascus and is now residing in California.

This article was originally published on SyriaUntold, an independent website exploring the storytelling of the Syrian struggle and the diverse forms of resistance.

