



Standing up to repression



Image: Action against construction of naval base on Jeju Island, South Korea Photo: WRI

Fear is something that every social movement has to deal with, whether in situations of severe repression or in relatively open societies. Discussing fear under the Pinochet dictatorship, the Chilean social commentator Manuel Antonio Garretón referred to two archetypal childhood fears: the fear of the dog that bites, and the fear of the darkened room. The specific threat that we can see, assess and work out how to handle, and the generalised threat of an unknown - a room where something bad might be waiting for you. In a dictatorship or under an occupation, the presence of fear is tangible - yet there are always episodes where somehow people overcome that fear and take action. In relatively open societies, the fears may not be so obvious - yet they are there, somehow always a factor in maintaining obedience and conformity, in inhibiting people from questioning authority or sometimes simply from being who we want to be.

With the help of people who care for us, we can generally overcome these archetypal childhood fears - either those people are with us or they help us know what to do. And it's more or less the same with social action - either through togetherness and solidarity, or through personally preparing ourselves, people in social movements overcome the barrier to action. When we have the motivation, and when we believe we are

doing right, we find ways to put fear in its place. And we do this not just once in our lives, but repeatedly in a variety of situations, and against a range of threats. We see the example of someone else, and learn from it. We feel a passion, a hope or a desperation that 'drives out fear'. We find some shields, or sometimes we ourselves can serve as shields, a little bit of protection, going places together, making sure there will be witnesses to an action. We keep open 'safe places', somewhere to retreat and regroup. We find ways of turning the threat against those who make it - we 'name the violence', record the repression, and publicise it in order to undermine the legitimacy of those responsible for it.

I say 'we' because every activist - even those whose physical wellbeing is not in danger - has moments of fear and times when they have to assess risks. And I say 'we' because, as Barbara Deming used to say, by listening to each other's stories and by acting in solidarity and playing our part in exposing violence and brutality, 'we are all part of one another'.

Repression alone is weak

Looking at fear from the point of view of those who hold power, nobody can rule for long by fear alone. Even dictatorships and even occupations

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Editorial

As Howard notes in his introduction, all social movements feel fear. This is often engendered by repression. However, there are ways to overcome them. This edition of Broken Rifle looks at various experiences of fear and repression, and how they can be addressed.

Abraham and Myungjin's articles remind of us the personal implications of repression. Myungjin gives a powerful account of how he coped after an eighteen-month prison sentence in South Korea. Abraham speaks of the fear the Eritrean diaspora feels in speaking out against the regime. Members of this community find mutual support and empowerment online.

Miguel's piece also points to the use of social networking in bringing people together - in this case the 15M movement in Spain.

Will and Ruth tell us how their respective movements - in the UK and Israel - have responded to direct state repression, giving examples of investigation and infiltration.

In Christine's contribution, we read about the role of international solidarity through accompaniment. This theme continues in Hannah's article, as she explores fears she experienced as an observer in the occupied Palestinian territories.

Sarah writes about the power of international group-to-group support, in her case between Germany and Belarus.

Finally, Owen's article examines the repression that can occur within activist movements - which produces a different kind of fear.

We hope that this collection of experiences will give you ideas of how to counter fear and repression in your own contexts.

Owen Everett & Hannah Brock



Standing up to repression

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rely on more than repression - they need sources of support, internally or externally. Today, Palestinians are resisting not just the violence of Israeli occupation, settlement and expansion, but also the efforts of those who they perceive as trying to 'normalise' the situation - that is, to hide the criminality of Israeli policy behind a cloak of 'normality'. The Pinochet dictatorship in Chile became notorious for its ruthless attempt to eradicate all organised opposition. This reign of terror was laying the foundation for a subsequent phase - repression and torture would continue but with a facade of 'normalisation' where capitalist prosperity would be presented as one of the benefits of 'strong government'. Such 'normalisation' required ceding some social space for people to organise, which in turn entailed risks for the regime that new forms of opposition would emerge.

Pinochet's dictatorship was eventually one of the more than 20 authoritarian regimes to be toppled since 1979 by mainly unarmed movements of 'people power'. These episodes have been studied not just by researchers interested in civil resistance but also by the remaining authoritarian leaderships. They recognise that overt state repression is a two-edged sword. It is meant to be a sign of strength, intimidating opponents and especially potential opponents. Yet it also indicates weakness, not least the regime's failure to convince the population to internalise restrictions. The most severe measures of state repression against unarmed protesters - massacres, murders and torture - often prove to be counter-productive. This is not automatic - it usually requires movement action in activating new sectors or new forms of opposition. It often takes time, requiring movement persistence. The end result, however, is likely to be that regime violence against unarmed protesters undermines the regime's own legitimacy.

The changing face of repression

In most of the world, the days of naked military dictatorship have gone. In Latin America, it seemed that the 2009 Honduras coup was turning back the clock, but in contrast June's 'parliamentary coup' in Paraguay maintained its legal facade - the traditional authoritarian right returned to power through constitutional manoeuvring without overt recourse to direct military intervention.

Putin's Russia has been used as an example of how authoritarian leaders have become more sophisticated in handling dissent. The opposition's utter failure electorally - at national and provincial level - showed the success of technocratic strategies of 'managing democracy' and strengthening the centres of power on which the regime depends.



Image: A 1980s 'lightning' nonviolent action under the Pinochet dictatorship, as people began to overcome their fear: Santiago, Chile. Photo: Archives of Roberta Bacic

Repression and intimidation remain, yet it is more selective - not least the combination of assassinations of investigative journalists and direct pressure on media outlets. Dissent is also 'channeled', especially into government-controlled 'non-governmental organisations', and so contained. It is not clear where the current crackdown fits into this - perhaps it is a question of timing and opportunism, bashing the opposition while they're weak, and making an example of Pussy Riot, a feminist punk band disapproved of by most of the population.

In societies with a longer tradition of representative democracy, the patterns of repression have been changing also. Since the announced 'war on terror', there has been less of what used to be called 'repressive tolerance'. Many movements complain of 'the criminalisation of protest'. Indeed, often police have orders to punish protesters simply for turning up on demonstrations, using pepper spray or 'kettling', a supposed crowd control technique called which has now been ruled lawful by the European Court of Justice ('kettling' - sometimes called 'corralling' - involves confining protesters in a restricted space, usually with just one exit, sometimes none). Meanwhile, in the anti-'austerity' demonstrations in Greece and in Spain (where I live), it seems that riot police have a licence to carry out violence more freely than since the days of dictatorship. The activities of 'infiltrators' and agents provocateurs pose other problems for movements.

Should we see this kind of repression as a sign of weakness? Potentially. In various countries, already some police complain about being used to do the state's or the

banks' or the nuclear industry's dirty work: for instance, German police deployed against the Castor demonstrations to make sure nuclear waste trains can reach Gorleben, or Spain's largest police union, which condemns the use of police in house evictions.

One of the keys to nonviolent strategy is establishing groups and through them movements which put people in touch with their own sources of power - the power of communicating, of organising and building support, of opening social spaces, of refusing or disrupting what is wrong and of showing an alternative. To withstand repression and to handle other fears, these groups need solidarity, members taking care of each other. They also need a spirit of learning, which means the flexibility to adapt to the changing situation, and to draw lessons from their own actions or events that affect them. Such groups are then in a position to carry out effective forms of nonviolent defiance that steer a course between submission or bravado posturing. Ultimately we all need hope that the inhuman shall not triumph.

Hherded into a football stadium in Santiago de Chile in 1973, shortly before he was killed the singer Victor Jara composed his last poem:

*...Within these four walls only a number exists
which does not progress,
which slowly will wish more and more for death.*

*But suddenly my conscience awakes
and I see that this tide has no heartbeat,
only the pulse of machines...*

Howard Clark



Fear and repression of campaigners and how best to deal with these

The East African nation of Eritrea is amongst the highest refugee-producing countries in the world. There are a number of reasons for this. People flee from 'national service', or as it could be called, 'a campaign of forced labour or slavery'. Or, they leave because of the lack of freedom of expression - the imprisonment of journalists, government Ministers and Generals in 2001 in particular made Eritreans lose their confidence in their ruling party.

Some who have left the country have joined campaigns against the dictatorship in Eritrea. They do so at great cost: they face social, political and personal rejection - from the government, from their families and from supporters of the regime.

In Eritrea, there is no freedom of speech, no freedom of worship or organisation, and no right to refuse military service. To speak about these abuses in public is frightening for many Eritreans.

Although the proclamation of 1994 states that military service is 18 months in duration, in reality it can be unlimited. Some of my friends and relatives are still in the army after ten years or more. However it has been a challenge for many Eritreans to oppose this. Many remain passive, despite all the inhumane treatment. Those of us who are engaged in campaigns have been suffering from fear regarding the social, political and personal repressions of this work. But why all those challenges of fear? I will try to pin point some of the reasons.

There are many reasons why Eritreans in Diaspora fear expressing their true attitudes towards the policy of the regime. In the Eritrean Diaspora, there are some fanatic Eritreans who blindly support the dictatorial policies of the government. Some are ex-fighters for independence, who left the country soon after it was achieved. Others were supporters of the armed Eritrean People's Liberation Front, which fought until 1991. Those people have not experienced the present Eritrea, under the repressive single party 'Peoples' Front for Democracy and Justice' (PFDJ). Some are members of PFDJ, or they are organized by the Eritrean security office (under Embassies or Consulates) to disrupt the action of campaigners or attack any campaigner, physically or morally. The motive of the supporters can be private interest, or they might wish to act against anyone who opposes the government's policy. Those people have a problem differentiating between the government as an institution, the country of Eritrea, and the concerns of the Eritrean people. For them, anything against the present government's policy is against Eritrea, or against Eritrea's independence. They refer to the martyrdom of 65,000 fighters, the disappearance of thousands of civilians, and

the destruction of people's property. But the so-called martyrs were fighting for the freedom of the Eritrean people from all kinds of injustice and abuses - abuses that are now common under the current Eritrean administration.

For many centuries, Eritrea was not independent. The country was an Italian colony from 1890—1941, under British authority from 1941—1952, and under Ethiopian rule from 1952—1991. Although the independence of the country is guaranteed after the UN supervised referendum of 1993, for political reasons the government propagates the idea that Ethiopia represents a current threat. The machine of fear and intimidation is used 24 hours a day by the Eritrean government and its supporters, making people live in a state of fear. The system pretends through its radio channels that the country is threatened by outsiders and insiders, sponsored by those who are against Eritrea, and against Eritrean independence.

The other problem is the fear of threats and harassment by the government against the families of campaigners, and those who escaped successfully from military service and emigrated. The families of people who have migrated have been punished, either by being taken to prison, or by being fined 50.000 Nakfa (Eritrean currency) - \$5.000 - a figure that is totally unaffordable for an Eritrean farmer. Diaspora campaigners also fear social rejection by the Eritrean community. They face social rejection at community events: at holiday times, weddings and other social ceremonies. Moreover, if someone is campaigning against the bad policies of the government, he/she can face rejection/isolation from his/her own brothers and sisters and the whole extended family, in everyday life. A family conflict can also occur when there is disagreement between couples/partners. This might lead to a family conflict which can also affect their children. So, some people prefer not to be involved in any action against the government. Many Eritreans also fear of losing their identity. The regime taxes 2% of the income of Eritreans in the Diaspora. Anyone who can't pay, or is not willing to pay, will not be able to get any basic citizen services back in Eritrea. This can even include obtaining your birth certificate, academic certificates or any other legal document from the government-controlled office. In other words, there is no possibility of legally staying in Eritrea. The 2% tax and additional payments ordered by the government are always put as preconditions for obtaining government services.

How to deal with fear

Challenging the fear and repression of campaigners is not an easy matter. It requires a commitment and determination from activists.

'Symbolically defining space: Cacarica's "Wire of Life"'

In the late 1990s, Afro-Colombians living in Bajo Atrato were displaced by military and paramilitary groups, who had the dual objective of establishing military control and exploiting the land. The displaced population initially lived in refuges, but with the support of local and international organisations, they began a campaign to return to their lands. Regrouping, they established CAVIDA - the 'Communities of Self-Determination, Life and Dignity' - and lived in two settlements together. CAVIDA nurtured a prolonged process of resistance. One of their objectives was to avoid military and paramilitary access to the settlements. The community built a fence surrounding them, with small wooden posts and three single strands of barbed wire, little more than a meter high. They called it the *malla de vida* (wire of life). It sounds like a frail obstacle, in an armed conflict in the jungle with hundreds of soldiers surrounding them. But the fence, despite its structural weakness, became a point of reference for the army, who frequently alluded to it, saying that when ordered to do so, they would enter and remove it. All this from outside the fence. The fence was perceived as a reality and a problem, not an insignificant detail. The control of access it provided was symbolic, yet it was representative of the space for resistance the community had acquired. The fence acquired meaning on being recognised by those outside it, and in turn, fed the notion of a community space, for those inside and outside the fence. The people remained the target of pressure and attacks, and the risk of a new displacement persisted. Yet, as one tactic in an ambitious strategy, the *malla de vida* offered a symbol of the safe space for which the community was struggling.

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Overcoming trauma

Dealing with the memories from prison

The invisible prison after prison

Reading a newspaper recently, I came across the words of some young girls who left home: 'If I want to survive I should not trust people'. These are the exact words I repeatedly heard while I was in prison.

I didn't write after I got released. I wanted to, but it felt too hard. Although I sensed something simmering inside me, I was not able to figure out what it was. I felt helpless; I couldn't be bothered to do anything. I didn't want to meet people. Those were the times when I was obsessed with the thought of staying alone. I felt like I had forgotten how to have equal relationships. I was overwhelmed by the fear of how I would be accepted by others. I didn't do anything that might have caused loss to me either. I've asked myself if I am using the fact that I was in prison as an excuse to cover up who I really am. What if prison is not different from society at all, and I was just bewildered to be thrown out to the wild reality I had not recognised before?

I kept trying to analyse myself, but it was difficult to think objectively. Or perhaps I was avoiding doing so by telling myself hypnotically that I was doing OK. I did not want to appear to be playing the victim.

What I am left with - the memories from my experience in prison

I have come to reflect on what types of

relationship I experienced in prison, what kinds of memories I am left with, and how they have caused me to remain helpless. Is it natural to become as I am now *without* spending time in prison?

I have tried to identify the origin of my avoidance of relationships. There are two attitudes that I have acquired from my time in prison: reservation in showing hospitality to others, and the belief that I must take things on on my own. They are connected: as long as I have no intention of making gestures of goodwill to others, I don't expect to receive hospitality from them. Thus, I seek to survive on my own.

Several experiences in the totally new environment of prison made me accustomed to 'reading' others. I needed to know whether my cellmates were on my side or enemies, so as to protect myself. As I got better at reading others, I became more defensive regarding relationships. I usually hesitated in appearing friendly for fear that I might be considered weak and/or manipulated. This could be called a strategy of showing indifference. Eventually I came to internalise the pretence of not recognising others' hardship. Instead of approaching people, I wanted them to approach me; I blamed and judged those who did not. The next step was to fall into a vicious circle of blaming myself for not being the person I would have hoped to be. I assume that this is the origin of my current aversion to meeting people.

I tried to deal with problems on my own out of consideration for those who would support me outside prison and who might get worried if I let them know about my difficulties. However, after further trouble with both guards and other prisoners, I realised that it was kind of inevitable that I tackled problems on my own to survive. I shrank more and more with the thought that I could not trust others because it was likely that I would get hurt if I did. It was easier to decide things for myself than to communicate; I came to avoid the fuss or conflict that might have occurred from interacting with cellmates.

Still not out of prison

After getting released, I encountered a new challenge when I participated in a nonviolent training for trainers. There was one session called 'Buddy Time'. I would have liked to break the wall around my heart by showing unconditional friendliness to my buddy, who I had never met before. During the session he received a call telling him that his relative had died. He asked me for a lift: I was in a dilemma because I wanted to help him but it would have meant missing the rest of the workshop. Someone told me to stay. I froze. I got cold feet and started shivering rapidly. I was unable to remain there. A few days later I found out that the person who told me to stay had only been trying to help: they didn't order, they advised me, thinking I would benefit more from doing so. Reflecting on the

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Many Eritrean human right activists have been working individually and in an organised way in the form of civic societies in different countries. Despite all the personal and organisational challenges, in the last 11 years they have tried their best to face the reality in Eritrea and speak out publicly. Those actions opened the door for many Eritreans to break the yoke of fear and repression. Through the limited media organised by Eritreans, activists have been working hard against social rejections and have contributed in showing how Eritreans should face the government in Eritrea.

Hundreds of thousands of articles and blogs have been published in the last few years. The number of websites and radio programmes (available on satellite and the internet, as well as short wave radios), are increasing from season to season. Thousands of Eritreans that oppose the policies of the government are communicating on Facebook, following

what is going on in Eritrea. Everyday, especially during the weekends, thousands of Eritrean activists are on Paltalk rooms (an internet chat service), discussing the current affairs of the country. Unlike 11 years ago, there are now many high ranking ex-members of the PFDJ who are ready to share their experiences, and expose the true nature of ruling party to the new generation.

Moreover, civic societies are organising demonstrations in almost every major PFDJ meeting, conference and seminar in the Diaspora, mainly in EU states and the USA. The message is very clear. Eritreans have been continuously calling upon the international community to put pressure on the Eritrean government: to release political prisoners, to open a constitutionally-guaranteed forum, and to respect the Eritrean human rights situation and the rule of law.

Despite ups and downs, it is generally

becoming easier for Eritreans to talk openly about the current situation. However, there is still a long way to go to mobilise the Eritrean Diaspora to face the reality in their homeland.

Having a better-organised movement, empowered with alternative strategies, having unified actions, making good friendships and contacts with international peace and human right organisations, are some of the main things that can break fear and repression. These things can build a strong sense of confidence among the activists.

Abraham G. Mehreteab.



Image: Myungjin out of prison Photo: World Without War
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significance of the way I had responded I realised I had had the familiar feeling of humiliation that I had repeatedly experienced encountering authority in prison. Clearly there are more latent memories etched into me than I had previously thought.

The trauma healing programme

Three months after my release I took part in the trauma healing program for conscientious objectors who have finished their prison sentence. The facilitator told us a story that invoked my memories of prison. It was about survivors of torture she had met among her clients. The most difficult memory for them is not just being physically assaulted but the authorities' threat that they would harm their family. They were traumatised that they had had to 'surrender' despite their convictions.

I recalled a time when I had had to keep begging forgiveness in front of the guards even though I did not believe I had done anything wrong. Whenever I remember this I start to shrink, and feel helpless, and my neck becomes stiff with rage. The guards knew only too well things prisoners wanted, such as an early release or a family visit, and used this to bring about submission. Despite the injustice, I had no choice but to show that I was surrendering in order to get what I wanted. I felt a great sense of shame and helplessness.

Many times I heard people say: 'other COs have also been like you.' These were consoling words in a way, but they also made me hesitate from speaking about my own experience, afraid of being accused of repeating what others had already said. I shrank as well as feeling uncomfortable when I heard someone say

'You're about to talk about your prison story again, aren't you?' Given this, it was very helpful for me to participate in the trauma healing program, because there I felt comfortable talking about my experience. Hearing stories of what other COs went through I realised it was a kind of collective memory, which also reassured me that I was not the cause of the problem. What the facilitator stressed during one session, that we convert the sense of shame into the sense of being insulted to visualise the perpetrator and escape the state of self-blame, seems to have remained with me for the time being occurred.

Moving on

'Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console; to be understood, as to understand; to be loved, as to love.' This passage touched me when I went to a Catholic service in prison. I myself did not console nor love others. Of course sometimes I did try to commit to a relationship, but I usually felt ashamed with memories of the past. It could be on the one hand shame from the fact I did not connect with others as human beings because I pre-judged them. It could also be a sense of shame in myself stemming from memories of how I too easily gave in to the authorities without being true to myself.

I hold on to the belief that all time is worthwhile; this helped me to endure prison. I will not inadvertently judge this period, nor blame others or myself. Let me not forget that there are those who are still willing to listen to and support me with affection. To live without regretting my decision to go to prison: this at the moment is what I would like most of all.

Myungjin Moon

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Impacts of police infiltration on the UK climate movement

The past few years have seen a change in the UK climate movement. Though all signs point towards an exciting resurgence of direct action on climate, until a few months ago there was a distinct lull in radical grass-roots action on climate change, dating back to the failed COP15 climate talks in Copenhagen (December 2009), where the movement's biggest mobilisation ended in disappointment and despair. For a movement in turmoil, the 2010 revelations that it had been infiltrated by undercover police officers contributed to the confusion, frustration and anger prevalent in the movement over the past couple of years.

Late one evening in autumn 2010, several hundred people received a text message: 'Bad news. Mark Stone/Flash [later revealed as Mark Kennedy] was confronted by people, turns out he's a copper. Please forward to anyone who might have known him. If you need to talk about it ring: ---'. Dutifully, I forwarded it and went online to see what other news there might be. An article outlining the situation, with pictures of Mark, appeared on indymedia – soon to have several hundred comments from activists, observers and trolls, all disgusted, shocked and fascinated by a man who had lived undercover as an activist for nearly nine years.

The story took a couple of months to reach national media; those who had been closest to Kennedy, and consequently were most affected by the revelations, took great care to limit the sensationalisation of this extremely traumatic event. When the extent of the damage was revealed, however, the story dominated the mainstream media for quite some time. The public outcry and subsequent inquiries led to the exposing of several other undercover police officers, all of whom quickly disappeared from the activist scene – as did a number of other activists, about whom there remains uncertainty as to whether they were working undercover as well.

The specifics of the work they were involved in and the damage they caused has been chronicled numerous times elsewhere. Without dwelling on specifics, Kennedy's involvement with the climate movement led to the biggest pre-emptive arrest in UK history when 114 people were arrested the night before the planned shutdown of Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station in 2009. Twenty of those arrested stood trial and were found guilty of conspiracy to commit aggravated trespass after a lengthy and costly legal process. Their convictions were later dropped, as the Crown Prosecution Service considered them 'unsafe' because

the prosecution concealed evidence gathered by Kennedy that had led to the initial arrests.

Unfortunately, several of those involved had already served their community service and compensation for the group is still pending. A further six had their cases dropped just days before they were due in court following a request by the defence to see all evidence relating to Kennedy.

However, not even this gross miscarriage of justice compares to the personal trauma he, and other undercover police officers, put activists through by engaging in personal, emotional and sexual relationships with them. The campaign 'No Police Spies' calls for an end to 'political policing' and highlights the consistent and systematic sexual misconduct of those working in the field. Five women who had had relationships with undercover police officers have since attempted to sue the Metropolitan Police following the psychological damage they have suffered after the officers were exposed. They describe how, given the person they thought they were having a relationship did not actually exist, they cannot have given consent to having any relations with them. This means that the government and police are complicit in – and possibly even encouraged – statutory rape.

Two years later, issues remain as to how we - as a movement, and as a group of people who trust and care for one another - continue to deal with the knowledge that infiltration has already occurred and may be ongoing. The first, and most pressing, is the need to continue to support those personally affected by the traumatic experience of losing someone they loved, and the absolute betrayal by a police force and government that at no point gave a second thought to the welfare of the innocent people they were investigating.

Second to this comes the issue of how to continue to organise and take part in radical, direct action on climate change given the possibility of continued infiltration. The answers to deal with this are multiple, but underpinning all of them is the need to assume that there is always a possibility that an undercover police officer is attempting to gather information on us. Security is therefore important; using tools such as the Activist Security Handbook can help overcome potential security risks. Sadly, this does mean there is a need to not take anyone absolutely at face value – to question whether we know the people we organise with well enough to rule out the possibility of whether or not they are police officers. This must be done in the knowledge that the best

infiltration could well provide backstories for any of the markers we might use to establish how well we know someone; such as meeting their family, visiting their workplace, knowing their university or school friends.

However, this leads onto a final, major issue: how do we do this whilst remaining an open and accessible movement – a network that anyone with the desire to take radical, direct action could be a part of? There are no easy answers, and one of the traces that the Mark Kennedy operation has left is that newcomers are sometimes viewed with suspicion. I've witnessed meetings where people (particularly those who are young-ish, self-employed and energetic) have been made to feel extremely unwelcome at the hand of activists who question everything they say and refuse to enter smalltalk that might reveal personal information with them. I've seen how those people have often not returned to meetings having failed to make a personal connection with anyone there, and deciding that it might not be worth the effort.

Somewhere there must be a balance. If we refuse to open our arms to newcomers - people who are steadily becoming radicalised and feeling the need to take action against a system that is driving us towards catastrophic climate change - then we are not a movement. Instead, we will have become a cliquey group of friends and associates more interested in ourselves than the bigger picture. We should remember that the years when Mark Kennedy was working amongst climate activists also saw some of the best and most inspirational climate activism in the UK – direct action campaigns that contributed significantly to the shift away from a new wave of coal-fired power stations and the shelving of the third runway at Heathrow. Even when the state is throwing hundreds of thousands of pounds into stopping us, amazing actions are still possible. We should be safe and secure in how we organise but it should never come at the cost of preventing people getting involved.

We can only do our best to safeguard against infiltration disrupting the necessary action we're taking, and accept, unfortunately, that sometimes our best might not be good enough, given the immense resources of repression that the government has at its disposal. The most important action we can take is supporting those most seriously affected emotionally by the experience. Following this, we just need to get on with doing what we need to do: keep on taking action.

Will McCallum



Using Fear to Silence Opposition

Most Israelis believe that an ongoing state of emergency is justified, and that a large conscript and reservist military will help to keep them safe from surrounding enemies, who desire to annihilate Israel and 'push us into the sea'.

Palestinians had lived in the region for centuries before the establishment of the Jewish state in 1948, but the collective memory of most Jewish Israelis fails to acknowledge what transpired during the war and its immediate aftermath, when hundreds of villages were systematically wiped off the map. Israel, however - envisaged as a safe haven - is considered worldwide as the land of the Jews.

Currently, 20% of the Israeli population is not Jewish, but Muslim, Christian, or another religion. These various faiths celebrate different holidays. Since Israel considers itself a Jewish state, Jewish holidays are as national holidays.

Every spring, Israel observes three national holidays that define the Zionist nation: Holocaust Remembrance, Memorial to Fallen Soldiers and Independence Day. One recalls the horrors of the Holocaust. The next pays homage to fallen soldiers and terrorist victims. The next, straight after Memorial Day, is Independence Day. For my Palestinian friends this is Nakba Day, and commemorates their catastrophe - a memorial not included in Israel's official calendar. These days are emotionally-charged, and full of grief for many. They focus on the many victims, the great suffering and loss of life during the Holocaust, and on the fallen Jewish soldiers who died so that a Jewish State could exist. Simultaneously, they project the possibility of victimisation in the future.

On April 26 2009, one day before the Memorial Day for Fallen Soldiers, in a well publicised act that exploited the day's charged character, police interrogated and raided the homes of six New Profile activists. They confiscated their personal computers, and, in some cases, those belonging to their families. The detained

activists were released on bail but their computers were impounded for thirty days. Over the next fortnight, police summoned a ten more activists for interrogation, but with less fanfare and media coverage.

The activists were accused of inciting opposition to conscription (calling for a refusal of military service) - an act of treason. The attempt to incriminate New Profile amounts to a declaration of war on youth, as rising numbers of Jewish Israelis, as well as the Druze minority, were unable or unwilling to accept the over-used Israeli dictate 'We have no other choice', and refuse to do military service.

The investigation into New Profile was initiated because of a concern in government and defence circles about the growing trend of draft evasion. In July 2007 Defense Minister Ehud Barak and Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi declared publicly that they would fight this trend.

But clearly it was not really New Profile that they were worried about. New Profile is a nonprofit organisation with no more than 60 active members at any given moment. It is just that we seemed an easy and visible scapegoat through which the authorities hoped to plant fear and intimidate future draft resisters.

The criminal investigation subjected us to new and difficult challenges, but we decided to actively investigate the investigation as an act of resistance. Our feminist approach inspired this response, and this is how we claim a sense of involvement - by documenting, discussing, and analyzing the events, and riding out the media coverage, good and bad. Our decision to meet the challenge of the investigation by conducting our own counter-investigation added a new and valuable dimension to the experience.

Today, though New Profile fulfils legal requirements for NGOs, and our status has been approved by the High Court of Justice, we are subject to harassment,

particularly by extreme right-wing factions in the Knesset. It is easy to feel confused by public life in Israel because it is riddled with ambiguities. The newspaper Haaretz is a good example of this. It reflects the relatively small population of Israeli progressives and liberals that forms its readership, because it does occasionally publish articles that are critical of mainstream militarist policies and of the occupation, creating an illusion of progressiveness. But the opinions of the radical left are not represented, and this amounts to a policy of silencing.

For many of us silencing also occurs in our closest circles. Often it is difficult for us to find a safe space for dialogue and discussion even within our own homes and with our families. We are discredited: at best we are told we are hypersensitive and over-reacting. At worst we are perceived as not having an inkling of an idea of what is 'really' going on and what 'really' matters. And what is really going on and what really matters is that 'they want to drive us into the sea' and 'only know the language of power'.

One recent example of how fear affects our judgment is the fact that during the recent Egyptian uprisings, most Israeli opinion was loyally in favor of Mubarak, while the rest of the world ecstatically cheered on the revolution. As we witness an historic phenomenon, Israeli politicians speak of the threat to Israel's existence.

Today the same official rhetoric that regards Iran as a nuclear threat to Israel - designed to promote panic amongst citizens and Jews in the Diaspora - is used to mobilise people across the board. Fear is used as a tool to achieve compliance and reverence. This, among other things, is militarism. Fear promotes and sustains ignorance. As Israelis, we secure national identity or international standing by 'othering' and playing the blame game. It is them, not us. We have no partners for peace. The blame game leaves little room for dialogue, forgiveness, or accountability.

It is crucially important to create awareness in the international community about what is going on in Israel. I believe that our youth is our salvation. As Israeli law offers virtually no provision for conscientious objection, young people have voted with their feet. Despite the ongoing draft, more than half of all eligible Israelis no longer serve or complete their obligatory service in the military. I am the proud parent of four sons who refused to do military service.

Ruth Lackner Hiller
New Profile, movement for the demilitarisation of Israeli society



Image: Rally on Israeli Independence Day, Jerusalem, 2012. Photo: Hannah Brock.



Repression within nonviolent activist groups

Usually when we think of repression and activism we focus on that enacted by the state through bodies such as the police. This article explores repression *within* activist groups. By this I mean the inhibition of the views and contributions of certain members of a group by other group members.

In a piece in the previous issue of *The Broken Rifle* the South Korean LGBT Human Rights activist Tomato described the hostility she felt from many villagers in Gangjeong, on Jeju island, for being a lesbian. She was one of many activists from all over South Korea who have gone to Jeju to support locals in their resistance to the construction of a new naval military base. However, she experienced repression within a *movement* – a movement encompassing people with more diverse views than you would probably find in a smaller activist group, who did not share the same values and approaches, despite their common goal. I examine repression by fellow group members - internal repression on a micro level.

Using points from the critique of nonviolent resistance by Peter Gelderloos (a response to his assertion that an adherence to nonviolence is itself repressive to minority groups would require an extended or separate article), I focus on the problem of patriarchy, although I also address the process-based power inequalities present in consensus decision-making, which Howard Ryan discusses in his critique. I do not have space to explore other manifestations of intra-group repression, such as that of ethnic minorities. Gelderloos notes that during a U.S. antimilitarist group's discussion on oppression in 2003 only the non-white, non-middle class members raised the issues of internal repression. It is important to recognise that our awareness of individual privilege and unequal power dynamics allows us to challenge repression within our activist groups, thus strengthening our affinity and our work.

Patriarchy

As Gelderloos states, 'Patriarchy is a form of social organisation...[which defines] clear roles (economic, social, emotional, political) for men and women, and...asserts (falsely) that these roles are natural...True to its name, it puts men in a dominant position'. Patriarchy 'is not upheld by a powerful elite...but by everyone'; its 'distribution of power' is very diffuse. Most commonly it is visible in sexism (gender-based discrimination).

In the UK in July 2012, the city of Liverpool hosted a small 'Sexism in



Image: taken from <http://beautifultrouble.org>. The more subtle comment, and the one most relevant to my article, is that on the far right: 'It's not really as bad as you say it is.' Image by Suzy Exposito

Activism' meeting, organised by Angry Women of Liverpool (coincidentally I am writing this on a coach to the same city). Attendee Adam Ford reflected that the event was particularly timely as it followed 'a number of misogynistic incidents in and around the Liverpool activist "scene"'. He observes the sad paradox that 'sexism is endemic in groups avowedly committed to equality for all.' Those present at the Liverpool meeting considered the gender ratio within their own groups, almost all of which were found to comprise a male majority. The suggested reasons for this included 'practical considerations such as childcare arrangements' (two women said that children not welcome at activist meetings), but there was a strong feeling that a culture of sexual discrimination existed, which was 'severely' discouraging women's participation. They discussed ways to counter this, citing the importance of providing safe, child-friendly spaces, but Ford admits that 'As the meeting ended, the atmosphere was heavy...what about all the people who weren't there?'

Advice to male activists (but also relevant to females) on tackling sexism from Sisters of Resistance includes: taking on jobs 'typically still carried out by women' such as cleaning, looking after children and administration; ensuring that 'the male to female ratio of speakers, facilitators, participants or chairs is always 50/50'; and (perhaps most importantly) incorporating 'an awareness of gender and feminism into your everyday life; for if you want to bring about revolutionary change, you must begin with yourself.' This last point is in keeping with the need to 'call each other out', in a non-accusatory way, on our sexism, which was stressed during a discussion I attended at Warwick University's Women's Week earlier this year. The

nonviolent activism trainer George Lakey recently observed that people don't like being "called out", partly because they don't find it helpful, but perhaps more importantly as he considers this a classist practice. However, I have found that moments of discomfort are often when we learn the most, and as long as we do so sensitively - perhaps in private – and making it clear that we ourselves (like everyone) need to be picked up on our own repression, and that it's nothing personal. This ties in with Lakey's request that we re-frame 'anti-oppression' groups or sessions as (the far more positive) 'liberation' workshops.

Consensus decision-making

Consensus decision-making is frequently used by activist groups, but Ryan highlights three main problems with it. Firstly, 'Every member of the group has the power to block a decision.' This disproportionate capacity to influence the outcome often leads to unsatisfactory compromises, as the alternative would be complete 'immobilisation'. Indeed, the threat of a block alone can have this effect. Secondly, consensus favours the voice of more confident, experienced activists. I have seen this myself, where better-informed and more assertive people dominate the discussion, and thus have a unrepresentative influence on the final decision. Thirdly, consensus can be a very protracted process, and long meetings are often not feasible for those who work long hours and who have children to look after, this privileging those who work less and who don't have dependents.

Ryan advocates the incorporation of

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On being an observer

Earlier this year I lived for three months in Bethlehem, in the Occupied Palestinian Territories. I served as part of the Ecumenical Accompanier Programme in Palestine and Israel (EAPPI). Ecumenical Accompaniers (EAs) are human rights observers that seek to monitor and report violations of human rights and international humanitarian law; offer a 'protective presence' (more on this later!); stand in solidarity with vulnerable communities; and do advocacy work. We work to build respect for international law and to end the occupation of Palestinian territories.

I'm going to talk about three types of fear that I experienced as an EA:

- 1) Physical fear felt by people in close proximity to people with guns
- 2) Fear that your work will be inhibited
- 3) Fear that you're not making a difference and how I dealt with them.

Firstly, there's the fear that comes from being around weapons (it's interesting, though perhaps uncomfortable, to remember that these same weapons make other people feel safe.) This can be a physical fear, felt on the back of your neck, in your stomach, and in a thousand other ways.

I experienced this when providing 'protection by presence': occasions when our presence was requested by local Palestinians or Israeli activists, because our visibility as international observers was likely to reduce the risk of violence. Taking photographs, filming, and making notes enhances this protection, because it sends out a message: if you do something wrong, someone is watching you and the world will find out about it. Of course, this isn't always successful – some soldiers or radical Israeli settlers, living in the West Bank illegally, are immune to international criticism (as, of course, are some militant Palestinian

groups) – but we were still invited.

In Bethlehem, we used this presence regularly at military checkpoints, at nonviolent demonstrations against the building of the separation barrier, and on the 'school run' – outside a primary school in the Palestinian village of Tuqu', where the Israeli military visit twice a day as the pupils arrive at and leave school. A powerful memory for me is the image of standing directly in between the children walking into school and the soldiers, as much as an emotional shield as a physical one.



Image: An EA with boy, Tuqu' school run.
Photo: Hannah Brock

What's worrying is how fear of weapons dissipates with familiarity. In a militarised society, shock at being near machines that can

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voting, because as 'it does not require complete unity, [it] makes it easier for people to disagree[.]', yet it also allows more timid members to assert their individual preference through a simple raising of the hand, and it tends to be less time-consuming and less tiring. Nonetheless, as he acknowledges, voting is itself coercive because 'the will of the majority holds sway'. He fails to mention that unless a secret ballot is used voters may feel peer-pressured into voting differently from the way that they actually consider to be best. There are several ways we can maintain the use of consensus whilst addressing some of its

problems. One is to learn best practice to avoid unnecessarily-long sessions where the discussion goes around in circles. Training for this is available, both through practical sessions and courses, and online. We should ensure that those best-informed on the issue or issues related to the decision share as much of that knowledge with the others as possible before the discussion itself begins. Another positive response is to provide a child-friendly space, so that parents are incentivised to participate fully.

Conclusion

Tomato pointed out that the Gangjeong villagers 'are not so different from me: a minority.' Activists generally are a minority. It is imperative that we address repression within our own groups, and to do this we need to start by concientedly looking to identify it in its different forms. Then, employing positive actions – as advocated by Lakey - we can move towards liberation.

Owen Everett

Quaker Peace & Social Witness Peacemaker at War Resisters' International and Forces Watch.

Committee of Victims Against Impunity

After 13 years in power, there are many unresolved problems in Venezuela, despite the promises of President Chávez's government. One problem is the impunity of the police and military, and their violation of the right to life. In the poor neighbourhoods of Barquisimeto, Venezuela's fifth largest city, families whose relatives have been assassinated or abused by the police or military cannot hire lawyers to represent them. In 2004 they formed a popular committee to organise themselves, called the 'Committee of Victims Against Impunity' (Covicil in Spanish). Covicil members include direct and indirect victims, who haven't received responses to their demands about human rights violations.

In the last 8 years, Covicil has denounced 400 cases of human rights violations by police and military officers. Only 3 of the cases received a court sentence, which demonstrates the high level of impunity. In addition to the denunciations, Covicil helps the families of victims with official paperwork. Recently their work has been compiled in a book "Impunity and Power: History of human rights violations en Lara (2000 - 2011)", the book was supported by WRI Council member Rafael Uzcategui who has been working with Covicil for many years.

Last year Rafael organised a WRI delegation, who visited Covicil and heard first hand the impact of the military and police impunity. They met with Victor Martínez, the father of Mijaíl Martínez who was assassinated, aged 24, probably as a consequence of Mijaíl's support of Covicil. In Covicil, families can feel safe to share their stories and where they support each other dealing with the trauma of police violence and the lack of justice.



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kill people is tiny compared with communities that rarely see them.

This normalisation happened to me. When travelling in Israel itself, I barely notice the prominence of guns. Regular visits from other internationals that were less accustomed to witnessing live violence – seeing the shock in their eyes when I told them about children held at gunpoint in their homes in the middle of the night because the military wanted to access the roof - reminded me that this behaviour is not OK, and helped me regain my own sense of alarm. It might have become common under these circumstances, but it shouldn't be normal, and it certainly isn't humane.

Secondly, there's the fear of repression. Israeli soldiers regularly reminded us that they don't much like 'activists' (a sarcastic understatement), and could be extremely verbally aggressive. More aggressive still were the private security guards employed at checkpoints. They ejected us from the checkpoint, threatened us with detention, and temporarily confiscated our passports to do 'security checks'. Working for an organisation that works throughout the West Bank, I was aware that my interactions with the military could have negative impacts on people working for EAPPI elsewhere or, worse still, on local Palestinians or Israeli activists. This awareness makes one extremely cautious.

On the other hand, some soldiers were courteous and curious. One, Russian-born, told me how bored he got at checkpoints; another told my colleague that he was a pacifist from Tel Aviv, and said how hard he found it doing this job. Such moments were crucial for me, since they reinforced the humanity of the people inside the military institution.

Finally, there's the fear that you're not helping. Internationals who offer solidarity are mostly met with open arms by Israeli anti-occupation activists and local Palestinians, but this welcome can become a pressure, as life under occupation - you might call it desperation – raises expectations to an unrealistic level.

Whilst this fear might sound trivial, it's this worry – of letting people down – that has stayed with me. The only time when I don't feel guilt at being able to leave and live a life of freedom in Europe, is when I am telling other people about what is going on, because at these times I feel like I am making a difference.

It's important to say that I found the solidarity of my fellow EAs, as well as my friends and family back in the UK, invaluable. Of the latter group, most knew

nothing about the conflict; a few knew a great deal. Either way, they were interested and happy to listen to me when I needed to talk. Being in contact with people outside the situation can also maintain your sense of perspective; whilst this situation is urgent and compelling, as observers you also have a life and responsibilities back home .

When talking about my fears it's important to remember that I had privileges: a vest displaying my status as an observer, the support of EAPPI staff, and a British passport.

My fears were nothing like those of many Israelis and Palestinians who are affected by the conflict.

In Wadi Rahal, a village with 1000 inhabitants near Bethlehem, everyone is related. There's a family atmosphere when you walk through the streets. From there you can see the illegal Israeli settlement of Efrat, 50metres from the edge of the village. The proposed route of the 'separation barrier' will separate the villagers from much of their farmland, and will be metres away from the village school.

A few years ago, the young people of Wadi Rahal started a popular resistance committee: every Friday the villagers prayed and protested in the land that was to be taken from them. They were joined by internationals and Israeli peace activists. Anas, a student from Wadi Rahal, was grateful for their support: "I will never forget the Israeli solidarity with us. They came many times to help us, all the way from Tel Aviv".

Recently, these protests have stopped. Personnel from the Efrat's private security force told the group that if they didn't cease their activities, everyone from the village with a permit to work in Israel would have these revoked.

Anas doesn't see this as a failure. He says that this threat is evidence that their campaign had an impact: "Some people say that popular resistance doesn't make any difference, but I say, why would they come and talk to us if we weren't making a difference?". Whilst the Wadi Rahal protests are suspended, people in the village are attending protests in neighbouring villages.

In Sderot, an Israeli town just by the Gaza Strip, I met a Jewish-Israeli lady called Roni. She told me of the alienation she felt from her family when she joined an activist group - with members from Israel and Gaza - who are looking for creative non-violent actions to promote hope in the region. Whilst she shares their sense of panic and dread (her grandson was injured by a rocket fired from Gaza), she said she cannot let them blind her. These fears - the consequences of losing your work permit, or estrangement from your family – are tangible and debilitating. My life in Bethlehem was nothing like this. However troubled I may have been by things that I witnessed, I tried to keep these fears into perspective, next to the fears faced by people such as the activists of Wadi Rahal, and Roni in Sderot.

So, in response to the fears that I faced when living in the West Bank, I used three tools, which are by no means new, but which were very potent:

- Keeping things in perspective (both through contact with people outside the situation, and through comparison with the fears of those living under occupation)
- Looking for the humanity in others at all times
- Cherishing the solidarity of those close to me

These are lessons that I will try to take with me in my future work.

Hannah Brock



Hannah monitoring Qalqilya checkpoint. Up to 4000 people pass through this checkpoint from 4.00 - 6.00am each morning. Photo: Steve Hynd.



The role of accompaniment

To know that one is not alone is a basic psychological tool for dealing with fear. It becomes crucial if those you are with are able to reduce the risk that you face. Though there is often also a certain strength in numbers – 1,000 protesters are less likely to be arrested than 50, because arresting 1,000 may test the capacity of those doing the arrests and lead to more public attention – a capacity for protection normally requires something more than just bigger numbers.

Definition

'Accompaniment', or 'protective accompaniment' has a narrow and a broader meaning. Its narrow definition refers to the physical act of being with someone's (unarmed) bodyguard, to maintain a presence at a site such as an office, to monitor protests or maintain a (proactive) presence in threatened villages, with the intention of deterring violent attacks or police harassment because the accompanier would be a witness and could respond.¹ In a wider sense accompaniment may also be used almost synonymously with what is called elsewhere 'solidarity work'. Unlike the usual definitions of accompaniment, for example in Mahony and Eguren's classic study 'Unarmed bodyguards', it shall be pointed out here from the beginning that it is not only internationals who provide accompaniment, but often – and probably much more commonly – nationals protecting other nationals.²

How it works

From the point of view of the activist under threat, the accompanier comes into the equation which can be found in many manuals and courses on security and safety under "capacity":

$$\text{Risk} = \frac{\text{Threat} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity}^3}$$

If they share the same risk with the accompanied, they indeed only add numbers. But accompaniers become more effective when they have influence to affect the behaviour of those from whom the threat emanates (for example police, paramilitaries, hostile mobs etc.).

Sources of power for achieving this may be the following:

1. To be well-respected and trusted because of your profession, age, membership (e.g. to a religious order or a political party) etc. This is one of the instruments that nationals are most often able to use. For example, in Sri Lanka it



Image: Nonviolent Peaceforce in South Sudan, 2011. Photo: Christine Schweitzer

has often been Catholic Bishops who have helped to protect human rights defenders. In many countries, especially in rural areas, it is Elders who play such a role.

2. To be well-respected because you are a privileged foreigner. This works in those countries where foreigners – or certain categories of foreigners, particularly white-skinned ones – have higher prestige than average nationals. This is the idea on which most of the older peace team organisations are based.⁴ However, often this power-by-privilege is due to the colonial past or to current world power politics, and therefore has the problematic connotation of playing on the effects of racism and domination, a fact most peace team organisations are painfully aware of.

3. To have influence because of trust gained through your work in the community or the area, for example being part of a known humanitarian organisation or a civilian peacekeeping mission. The non-governmental organisation (NGO) Nonviolent Peaceforce (NP) has found that this is a major reason for their effectiveness in protecting civilians. Employing at least as many staff from the Global South than the Global North, NP had to build its power on different elements from the aforementioned peace team organisations, and found that it was trust-building in the communities that made a difference.

4. To be feared because of instruments of response to an attack at your disposal. The most obvious cases of this category are of course armed body-guards, police or military. But unarmed civilians may also have such tools at their disposal.

a) (The best-known) The capacity to raise the price of an attack through international pressure. This is what the theoreticians of accompaniment from Peace Brigades International call the power of "deterrence".⁵ Alert networks of people standing by to send protest letters to a government, involving Embassies and influential international politicians, and of course using international media are tools for this purpose.

b) Naming and shaming in the personal context of the perpetrators. For example, the Belarusian NGO "Our House" writes letters to colleagues or neighbours of officials who have harassed activists, thereby making their misbehaviour known with their colleagues, neighbours and friends. This has proven very effective in changing the behaviour of the officials thus targeted (see the article by Sarah RoSa in this Broken Rifle).

Of course, these four qualities and capacities are not mutually-exclusive – often two, three or even all four may be combined by a person or group.

Some examples

As stated, there are different types of accompaniment. Although here one organisation is used to exemplify each approach, this does not mean that those organisations engage exclusively in that one activity.

1. Protection by nationals for nationals: One example is the above-mentioned Belarusian NGO Our House. Others include local NGOs and umbrella organisations in Mindanao (Philippines),

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Protection against repression in Belarus

Given the sharp increase of repressive measures by the Belarusian government and its security services against the opposition it is currently almost impossible to be socio-politically active. However, for *Nash Dom* ('Our House' in Russian), a network for the protection of citizens' rights – which since 2005 has cooperated with the *German Bund für Soziale Verteidigung* (Federation for Social Defence) – it has become easier to protect activists from state repression in the last couple of years.

In order to analyse methods of repression and to develop strategies with which the Belarusian opposition can deal with it, we distinguish between different levels of repression and different types of victims. Repression occurs both by order of the local authorities and the central government. It is directed at both random people and targeted people. The means of repression at the local and central level are mostly of an administrative nature, such as dismissal from work or expulsion from university. In addition, activists are intimidated by threats from the security forces or are sometimes forcibly admitted to a psychiatric ward. These measures affect not only the activists, but also their relatives. Mysterious deaths and

disappearances of political opponents ordered exclusively by the central government have occurred (for example in 1999), although they are rare. At the governmental level political repression occurs in waves and in the past it was used as propaganda to mobilise the population and the state apparatus against the 'enemy within', diverting attention from other problems. At the local level, however, the repression is personal and long-term, since officials and activists from the opposition and the civil society usually know each other and frequently come into contact with each other. Random victims are the ones arrested during political actions. During central waves of persecution local officials also use targeted repression against the 'usual suspects' (persons and organisations), active in the specific sector. The systematic repression of individuals, which has the objective of eliminating or warning them, is only a small aspect of political persecution. However, the victims find it difficult to oppose it.

Countering the repression

The Federation for Social defence (FSD), a German peace organisation dedicated to nonviolent conflict transformation,

works with Our House. In their collaboration the FSD support various strategies of nonviolent defence of activists against state repression. After its foundation in 2004, Our House concentrated on the defence of activists, developed strategies and methods, and gained experience. In the first couple of years "Our House" acted unobtrusively and exclusively at the local level, dealing with problems such as the paving of roads and the urgent need for renovation of houses. With its increased strength the network became nationally-recognised, entered the public sphere and could finally confront the government. The methods and strategies of Our House can thereby be divided into four levels of action:

1. To avoid being made a target
2. To develop solidarity with the persecuted
3. To pursue the repressors
4. To protect their own structures from destruction

1. To avoid being made a target by the state means not to make yourself easy prey by being in the limelight. Young men,

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such as Bantay Ceasefire, which began unarmed civilian peacekeeping to supervise a ceasefire between the government and Moro rebels on the island long before the international NGO Nonviolent Peaceforce began work on this.

2. Longer-term proactive presence of international or national peace teams or civilian peacekeepers to protect communities:

Nonviolent Peaceforce is currently doing this, alongside others, in the Philippines and in South Sudan. It deploys teams of mixed national-international composition in affected communities. Through a vast array of activities, ranging from visible presence and monitoring to 'good offices' for (2. (informal facilitation of) dialogue, setting up early warning structures, and rapid interventions if acute violence threatens, it is quite successful in protecting civilians in the areas where it operates.

3. 'Unarmed body-guarding'

Undoubtedly the 'classic' example is the occasional 24-hour accompaniment that Peace Brigades International volunteers offer to human rights defenders threatened by death squads or police in numerous countries, particularly in Latin America. No PBI-accompanied activist

has been killed, and the fact that unaccompanied activists are frequently killed in these areas shows the effectiveness of PBI's carefully-conducted activities.

4. Short-term visits by international delegations:
Especially in Latin America some US-based peace organisations have developed what has almost become a tradition of sending delegations to places where human rights defenders are at risk - Witness for Peace and Christian Peacemaker Teams are two examples.

5. Accompaniment from afar by international organisations:
The gay and lesbian group GALZ in Zimbabwe, a member organisation of War Resisters' International, has repeatedly faced police harassment and arrests of some of its leading activists. The WRI office, which is in regular contact with them, informs groups in its network, asking them to send protest and/or solidarity letters. Another well-known example of this kind of work is of course Amnesty International with their prisoners campaigns.

Capacities and limitations of accompaniment

Accompaniment has certainly saved the

lives of many activists, and has given the space to continue their activities. But as with all nonviolent action, it must not be seen as all-powerful. It can fail. A well-known example is the Colombian peace community San José de Apartadó, which faced several attacks and killings in spite of the ongoing presence of accompaniers from more than one organisation. Illegal arrests, torture and extrajudicial killings are happening in many countries despite attempted 'accompaniment from afar'. Therefore it is always necessary to conduct a careful risk assessment before engaging in any kind of protective accompaniment. A strategy that may work in one context may not work – or may even be counter-productive - in another because the accompaniers may not have the same sources of power available, or simply because the determination of the opponents in pursuing their unlawful activity may be so strong so that they are undeterred. Having said that, I would like to end the article as it began: Even in cases where accompaniers do not have additional power or influence available, the mere knowledge that there are people who care, that you won't be forgotten, and that your family may count on support, is a powerful factor to overcome fear.

Christine Schweitzer.



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whose political activities are often described as an act of vandalism and who targeted for this, are harder to protect than grandmothers. Young men can be easily represented as enemies of the system, which legitimises their persecution. The experience shows that it is better to entrust elderly people or retirees with risky tasks instead of young activists. They can afford to take more risks when facing the police, because violence against them is condemned not only within society, but also within the police itself.

To avoid being made a target also means never to open your apartment door voluntarily to the police, even if the KGB or the police ask for 'just an interview'. The police cannot break in without a warrant and especially in cases of random repression it is effective not to open the door. Through selective persecution, in contrast, it may even be necessary for an activist to leave the country for several months (if possible). Thanks to modern communication tools voluntary exile has become far less of a restriction on political activity than before. The coordinator of Our House Olga Karatsch even used it as an advantage to act as the face of the network in the public sphere, so that others could operate undetected.

2. To develop solidarity with the victims of political repression has proven to be effective. Our House not only sends cases of police checks or arrests to experts in legal protection, it also mobilises as many activists and sympathisers as possible, leading to a group of people gathering in front of the police station, who put pressure on the officials.

This solidarity is very effective in cases of random persecution and can prevent an arrest or lead to the quick release of detainees. During trials Our House also mobilises supporters, who show their solidarity with the accused and make their cases public.

Active solidarity can encourage the persecuted to continue their political work. In order for the to be supported by their social environment, it has proved to be important to include their family and friends in the solidarity work. This is very pertinent because the relatives of activists can also be objects of repression and may lose their jobs. Although these are often just threats, ill-informed relatives of activists are often not aware of that.

3. The work of Our House proves that the protection of victims of repression can hardly be separated from the confrontation of the responsible officials. To pursue the repressive officials, Our House exploits the weaknesses of the state apparatus, which although it seems



Image: Solidarity action in front of the court building. Photo: Nash Dom

like an indestructible monolith, is a subject to internal power struggles and conflicts. President Lukashenko intentionally plays his opponents against each other to secure his power. Our House can use the same tactic: through formal complaints, objections, appeals and other similar measures, activists make demands in the language of the bureaucracy – for regulated responses, reactions and procedures. They force the affected officials to explain decisions in writing (forcing them to take responsibility), which can later be used against them. As a result, the officials get entangled in contradictory rules, which are often unconstitutional. At this point, it is difficult even for judges loyal to the regime to publicly justify disputed interpretations. Thus, procedural errors by officials can also become exposed. In addition Our House makes the formal or moral misconduct public, in order to put pressure on officials. To increase this pressure, Our House appeals to the families and the neighbours of the repressive officials, as well as to their colleagues. This has already led to the public release from duty of police officers and mutual control between colleagues. Our House is currently asking over 1000 police officers for help in overcoming police violence against women nationwide. The activists of Our House are treated with courtesy and care.

4. In addition to the strategies described above the opposition's structures must be protected. As size and visibility of the opposition movement in Belarus increase, so does the risk of a targeted destruction by the central power. Previously, this was not particularly difficult, as parties and movements usually rely on a strong leader and are structured hierarchically. If the leader gets imprisoned or publicly defamed, the organisation becomes

paralysed. To protect themselves against this, organisations, networks and campaigns must adjust their structure accordingly and develop a security culture. Every organisation must work out for itself how this can be achieved. The practice of Our House will not be described here for security reasons. An important aspect is protection from political defamation in government propaganda. In order to achieve this Our House tries to present itself as an "Advocate of the small people" and to build a solid network of supporters and its own communication channels with the local population. This ability to mobilise the population in its defence makes the authorities scared of the possible scandal if Our House were broken up.

The work of Our House shows that despite increased repression it is possible to defend the people of Belarus nonviolently. However, this is unfortunately not the case for large parts of the Belarusian opposition, whose roots in the population are weak and whose strategies and methods of defence against repression fail because of discord and disillusionment. As 'normal' people are becoming increasingly aware that state repression affects them in their daily lives, they are offering more solidarity and support to victims of political repression. This has led to a greater interest in monitoring the police and the secret services.

Sarah Roša and Björn Kunter
(translated by Tanya Vasilev)



Technical-political tools against repression: the case of the 15M movement in Spain

On 25 September 2012 and the following days, tens of thousands of people surrounded the Congress of the Spanish Government in Madrid, with the MPs inside, in an action called '25S Rodea el Congreso' (Surround the Congress). The objective of 25S was to request the resignation of the government as a first step in the putting in motion of a process to create a real democratic society. The action, announced almost two months in advance, vaguely reminded one of the counter-summits of the anti-globalisation movement a decade ago, and the government didn't hesitate in putting in place the same type of measures to attack the movement. Congress was surrounded by fences and 1,350 riot police who didn't hesitate from savagely attacking peaceful demonstrators, using police infiltrators dressed in 'black bloc' to act as provokers. The large majority of the demonstrators resisted peacefully, including many who, despite being charged at, remained for hours in front of the doors of Congress in a large sit-in. There were others who, when the police began to charge indiscriminately, decided to defend themselves, throwing stones. It was nothing new: the police looked to create fear and violence, and to an extent they found it. The media talked of 'clashes', and 'confrontations', largely omitting the images of police indiscriminately attacking people who were resisting peacefully, or who were only trying to reach safety. However, there was a surprise a few days later, when polls showed that 77% of Spanish citizens share the views of the 25S demonstrators, and 50% also support the course of action that they took. Moreover, some 61% of voters for the Popular Party (the conservative party in government) share the arguments of the protest. What has happened here? Why haven't the government's strategies of repression and criminalisation against demonstrators worked? On the contrary, despite the fact that the images of the encapuchados ('hooded' - infiltrators or otherwise) attacking police have been shown a thousand times in the news, 57% of respondents consider the police action excessive. Why do police strategies no longer work in Spain?

To find an answer we need to get to know the movement behind the protests a bit better. Since 15 May 2011, a massive protest movement has emerged in Spain demanding a democratic revolution. Organised through the internet and social networks, millions of discontented citizens rallied across the country demanding 'real democracy' and camping in the main



squares of each city. Between 6.5 and 8 million people participated in the movement which took the name 15M. This movement is configured in a similar way to other movements like those of the Arab Spring, Occupy and other European anti-austerity movements. But the main difference between the movement in

Spain and those in other countries is that 15M has what is probably the biggest critical mass of activists using social networks in the world. And by activists on social networks we aren't referring to 'clickactivists' sharing change.org petitions, but to people who use social networks to organise themselves to carry

Bon voyage, Andreas

After 11 years in the WRI office - and a period before that in which he was WRI treasurer and principal organiser of the 2001 study conference on Nonviolence and Social Empowerment - Andreas Speck is leaving the WRI office. From 1 January onwards, he will be cycling from Buenos Aires northwards.



One of the best compliments for an anarchist - or indeed any nonviolent activist - is to describe them as a practical visionary, and Andreas has been the epitome of a practical visionary. As the main architect of WRI's Right to Refuse to Kill programme, he has worked for the rights of objectors yet keeping firmly in mind that the point of war resistance is to prevent war and build a better future. Through this programme, WRI has effectively interceded with international institutions while keeping our character as a mutual support network trying to change the world, rather than becoming yet another "NGO". All over the world - from Turkey and Egypt to Russia, South Korea and Latin America - there are objector groups who have benefited from his understanding of their context and support in making them more effective.

Initiatives from the CO Identity Card (useful for Colombians seized by recruiters) to the European Anti-NATO network have come to fruit thanks to his work. He has consistently argued the patriarchal character of war and the corresponding need for anti-militarism to embrace alternative analyses of gender. Within the office, as well as his political work, he has done everything from woodwork, financial book-keeping to making a portable system for simultaneous interpretation. In setting up our computer networks, he has demonstrated that there is no need to be in thrall to Microsoft (or Apple Mac).

Andreas's clarity of purpose will serve as a reference for WRI for many years to come. Thank you for everything, Andreas - and we wish you a fair wind.



out actions in the streets. Mass demonstrations, actions to stop evictions, occupations against cuts in educational centres, campaigns to denounce and bring to trial those responsible for the economic crisis...every week the Spanish networks seethe with messages that attack the foundations of a political system that causes more and more injustice.

This composition of the movement, in which action on social networks is intertwined with civil disobedience on the streets, allows the creation of new tools to confront police repression and criminalisation. In fact, 15M has managed to use the attacks by the police and the media in its favour. In the first days of the movement, after the mass demonstrations that demanded 'Real Democracy Now', the police evicted a small camp that had been installed in Plaza de Sol in Madrid. Immediately, the web was full of videos of the eviction, in which the protestors are seen resisting by sitting on the ground, and the police remove them one by one. These images are seen by the demonstrators, indignant about the media's misinformation on the day of demonstrations (15 May) as the best proof that we don't have a true democracy. The next morning, small groups of people were setting up their own camps in all the main cities of the country. That same evening, tens of

thousands of people occupied the Plaza de Sol, and many other plazas, with the police unable to do anything to prevent it. The next day, the camps had already become massive permanent venues, where millions of people from across the country were participating.

Two weeks later, the Government of Cataluña said that the moment had arrived to put a stop to the camps, ordering riot police to violently dismantle the ones in Barcelona and Lleida. At the time, live footage began to circulate on the web of riot police hitting peaceful resisters, sat on the ground. The images are shocking: a totally deranged police force that charges against thousands of peaceful demonstrators and shoots rubber bullets indiscriminately. During that day, all the 'trending' topics on Twitter in Spain were related to the eviction of the camp in Barcelona. The images, videos and commentaries 'went viral'. Again, hundreds of thousands of people occupied the city squares, including Barcelona's, from which the police were expelled.

This process has been repeated time after time during the year and a half that the movement has been underway. When the police attack protestors, non-stop images of what happened spread online, bringing together the responses to the repression of indignation, creative

organising, and empowerment. In those moments, the web is completely taken over by the movement, and the politicians, media and police have capacity to influence public opinion. This was the case with 25S. Throughout the entire action the activists broadcast all that was happening live: from the civil disobedience sit-ins at the doors of Congress facing police charges non-violently to the encapuchados who first attacked the police and then switched sides and began to arrest protestors.

Technology is allowing movements to create tools to overcome their communication limitations and disrupt the tools that state powers use to discredit them. Since the Arab Spring, a radical change has been happening in the forms of organisation of grassroots activist movements. We are still experimenting, but everything indicates that in the next few years we will see many more examples of synergies between social movements and information technologies. We are getting increasingly nearer to profound social change.

Miguel Aguilera
(translated by Edward Neinhardt)

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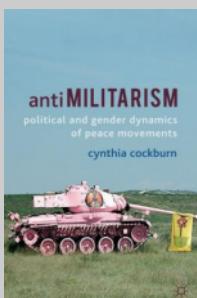
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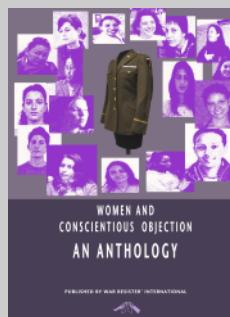
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proliferation of guns, and of singular campaigns addressing aggression against Palestinians. Cynthia Cockburn lives in London, where she is active in Women in Black against War, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

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Conscientious objectors are generally seen as male — as are soldiers. This book breaks with this assumption. Women conscientiously object to military service and militarism. Not only in countries which conscript women — such as Eritrea and Israel — but also in countries without conscription of women. In doing so, they redefine antimilitarism from a feminist perspective, opposing not only militarism, but also a form of antimilitarism that creates the male conscientious objector as the 'hero' of antimilitarist struggle.

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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

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