Call for Papers for Issue #13 can be found in the middle of this issue. More information will be announced on our web page and our Facebook page.

Tvergastein accepts submissions in two categories: Shorter op-ed pieces (2,000 - 5,000 characters) and longer articles (10,000 - 20,000 characters), in either English or Norwegian.

UiO : Centre for Development and the Environment
University of Oslo

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as the absence of conflict?
as a feeling, a thought, a journey?
Is it the loud celebration of a free nation,
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Is it inside you, or me?
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In unified cities, in restored battlefields,
Or is it perhaps in the quiet spaces of nature?

In what ways do peace and the environment interact?
Does the environment breed conflict,
or can it preserve peace?
In this issue we will explore the many different
interpretations of peace, conflict, and their interplay
with the environment.

Norway's Security Challenges in the Arctic

Claire Mabille

As environmental changes are increasingly understood as being part of a change of geological epoch, the Arctic region can be described as a 'laboratory' of these changes. In the High North, security issues are emerging because of these changes. However, scholars disagree on the balance of the region and its likeliness to last. As a Western country, an Arctic state and Russia's neighbour, Norway is a major actor of the security of the High North. By trying to answer the question "why does Norway see Russia as both an asset and a threat to the security of the Arctic?" I will try to show the impact of security issues in the Arctic on Norway's foreign policy towards Russia. My conclusion will be that whereas environmental issues have been drivers of Russo-Norwegian cooperation since the end of the Cold War, the revival of military activities since the invasion of Crimea in 2014 has triggered a security dilemma that Norway is still trying to handle.

At the outset, I will link the transformation of the environment in the Arctic to security issues. Then, using different international relations approaches to security, I will show that depending on what one defines as 'security', the Arctic resources can be viewed as strategic stakes justifying a tough competition or drivers of cooperation. Last, I will explain how these diverging interpretations explain the dual but still coherent Norwegian policy towards Russia.

The Arctic and climate change
The Arctic, a 'laboratory of the Anthropocene'

The term 'Anthropocene' was popularized by Paul Crutzen, 1995 Nobel laureate in chemistry, and Eugene Stoemer in 2002. It refers to a new geological epoch characterized by a significant human impact on Earth system, for instance global warming, erosion, the change of biodiversity or the accumulation of some chemical products[1]. With regards to these characteristics, the Arctic region can be viewed as a 'laboratory of the Anthropocene'[2]. It does indeed hold several 'tipping points'[3]; that is to say, elements that will both be irreversibly affected by the phenomena associated with the Anthropocene and affect in return by their transformation of the whole Earth system. Finger (2016) highlights four tipping points related to the Arctic: the albedo effect (as the ice is melting, the amount of light surfaces able to reflect the heat is decreasing), the acidification of the Arctic ocean, the changing Ocean currents and the effect of methane release both on land and in the

sea. These tipping points raise several issues, including security challenges.

Security challenges related to these tipping points

First, the Arctic coastal states are already (or are preparing for) applying for an extension of their continental shelves, which might trigger territorial disputes. The international framework applying to the Arctic Ocean is the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea). By extending their continental shelves, costal states obtain the sovereign right to explore and exploit the natural resources (such as oil and natural gas resources). In addition, since the melting of the ice opens new commercial roads, the designation of the key Arctic shipping roads is becoming increasingly controversial. So far, Norway, Russia, Canada, and Denmark have already submitted claims to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS), created by the UNCLOS, and some of their claims overlap (for instance Russia's and Denmark's claims). Secondly, as the environmental effects from the use of hydrocarbons create new possibilities for oil, gas and mineral exploitation in the Arctic, the use of these newly discovered resources will fuel a self-reinforcing phenomenon that has been coined as the 'Arctic paradox'[4]. The Arctic states also have to handle the evolution of the behaviour of Arctic species. The mass migration of fishes to the north might challenge the cooperation that Artic states have already developed to manage fishery stocks. Last, there is a growing military activity in the Arctic region. Because of all these issues, the Arctic is increasingly studied and referred to as a security challenge.

"THE ARCTIC REGION CAN BE VIEWED AS 'LABORATORY OF THE ANTHROPOCENE'"

Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavík, Iceland.
UN Photo: Rick Bajornas

Security approaches

Depending on the actors they choose to study and the definition they give of security, the scholars analysing the Arctic region, and the High North in particular, have very different understandings of the balance of the region and of its likeliness to last.

Approaching security through realism

The main common assumption of realists is the belief in an anarchical international system. It is made up by rational and unitary states that wish to maintain or increase their power[5]. From a neorealist point of view, for Russia, the Arctic is its main strategic resource, and the region is still a major place of rivalry between the West and Russia like it used to be during the Cold War. As a consequence, all the means available are to be used to defend it[6]. While for the US, there is the revival of competition between great powers in the Arctic region as well as the potential threat of the recent Chinese interest in the Arctic[7].

Approaching security through constructivism

Whereas the realist school analyses security in the Arctic through the prism of states' interest, the constructivist school broadens its scope by defining the actors in international politics as products of social construction and emphasising subjectivity[8]. Hence, constructivists have a broader understanding of security. It is not only limited to military issues anymore, but it also encompasses other issues, such as food security. In the Arctic, dealing with these security issues has been proved critical in the creation of a unique cooperative environment after the Cold War. For instance, the entanglement of bilateral relations and multilateral institutions such as the Arctic Council, the Northern Dimension, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the European Union is key to ensuring food security in the Arctic-Barents Region[9]. Interdependence *does help* keep the tension at an exceptionally low level.

Approaching security through critical geopolitics

Recently, the topic of the security in the Arctic region has been studied through a critical perspective. Like the constructivist school, the critical school of geopolitics views security as a process in which a wide range of actors participate. The main characteristic of this school is that it replaces the territory at the centre of its analyses. In an analysis of the contemporary geo-political and geo-economic challenges of the Arctic, Pic and Lasserre (2017) raised three points. First, it is unlikely that Arctic roads will become major axes of the commercial traffic and therefore will become new objects of though rivalry; even though there are ongoing tensions over them. Secondly, because of the costs of oil, gas and mineral exploitation in the region, there is nothing like a 'rush' to the Arctic resources. Last, the fear of conflicts over the limits of continental shelves has been disabused by the cancellation of the most worrying dispute between Norway and Russia over the Barents Sea by a UN Resolution in 2010[10]. As a consequence, a revival of the 'cold war' in the Arctic is highly unlikely.

FNSP. Sciences Po - Atelier de cartographie

Analysis: Norway's dual policy toward Russia
A unique cooperative environment
The cooperation between Norway and Russia is part of a unique cooperative ecosystem whose

"THE COOPERATION BETWEEN NORWAY AND RUSSIA IS PART OF A UNIQUE COOPERATIVE ECOSYSTEM WHOSE CREATION WAS LED BY THE NECESSITY OF ENSURING ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AFTER THE COLD WAR"

creation was led by the necessity of ensuring environmental security after the Cold War. It rests on both bilateral and multilateral means. Bilateral means include the Joint Management of the fishery stocks in the Barents Sea or the annual Pomor Exercise between Norwegian and Russian forces. Multilateral means include the Arctic Council, the NATO-Russia Council and the recent cooperation agreement on information sharing and joint operations between Coast Guards of the eight Arctic countries. These forms of multilateral environmental resource management in the High North is key to understand the exceptionally low level of tension in the Arctic region, and it is still a major axis of Norwegian foreign policy today. Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, assessed at 2018 Russia Conference, organized by Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) on 14 September, that "cooperative relations in the Arctic and between Norway and Russia in particular in quite simply a precondition for success in our warming but still demanding neighbourhood."

Deterring Russia: the revival of an old concern

On the other hand, experts highlight that military activity in the Arctic is at a level never seen since the end of the Cold War[11]. NATO's exercise in October-November 2018 is one example. It is highly unlikely that Norway's politicians would have accepted to hold this exercise without thinking of the message it would send to their Russian neighbour. How is it then possible to explain the coexistence of two contradictory trends in Norwegian foreign policy? Three factors are to be taken into account. First, Norway inherits from Cold War a tradition of policy of deterrence that makes it more willing to increase NATO's presence in the North[12]. Secondly, Norwegian politicians are more willing to take military measures since the change in the country's strategic culture following the participation of Norwegian soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) deployed in Afghanistan in 2001. According to J.H. Matlary (2013), *"there is no longer general reluctance to talk about and recognize war fighting for what it is"*[13]. Last, the invasion of Crimea by Russian forces in 2014 has triggered a security dilemma that has impacted the way Norway views its Russian partner. This security dilemma is illustrated by Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs' statement that "while we recognize that Russia's strategic activity in the North is not primarily aimed at Norway, we cannot ignore what takes place so close to our territory." All these elements have contributed to the development of a dual policy towards Russia, one that theoretically manifests some characteristics of realism, constructivism and geopolitics.

Because the High North has a critical role in the Earth system, several issues have come out with the transformation of the environment, many of which are related to security. Norway has played a key role in transforming environmental security challenges into drivers of regional and bilateral cooperation with Russia. However, at the same time, for Norwegian policymakers, the invasion of Crimea in 2014 has revived the fear of the Russian threat, leading to a security dilemma between the two countries. It remains to be seen whether one of these dynamics will strengthen at the expense of the other in a near future.

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Greetings from the Field

Amy Harlowe

An important part of some graduate studies is the master's thesis. One current student and member of *Tvergastein* reflects on this thesis process and the fieldwork component.

Waterway in a protected area. Photo: Amy Harlowe

Many of the members of *Tvergastein* journal are students at the Centre for Development and the Environment (SUM), and all are Master's students. A crucial component of some master programs is the Master's Thesis. From our varying research projects, each of us begins to create a new capstone work for our current studies. Summer and fall see many students going off on fieldwork exploring new places and familiar locations with new eyes. Another critical element of this research, that many of my classmates have mentioned, is the idea of finding topics that are meaningful and exciting to us. This year, students are exploring topics such as relocation in Belen (Peru), BT cotton in Telangana, India, and people's recycling attitudes and opinions in Oslo, Norway. Other projects include the Political Economy of planted forests in Brazil, and renewable energy

transition: policy-making in Belgium. My fieldwork took me back to Boston, the region in the United States from which I originally come, where I researched water accessibility and consumption for people around the area. This has involved exploring these issues in Boston through several avenues of data collection, including a series of interviews with individuals who have a connection with the water systems in the region. Indeed, the research process is also a learning process, be it mastering new concepts or even ways of interacting with people. Many of us know that research also requires flexibility, change, and an open mind as new information is gathered. Challenges can emerge, including adjusting to life in a new setting than from where you have been, identifying and arranging interviews, and fitting it all in to a limited time frame.

Wachusett Reservoir dam. Photo: Amy Harlowe
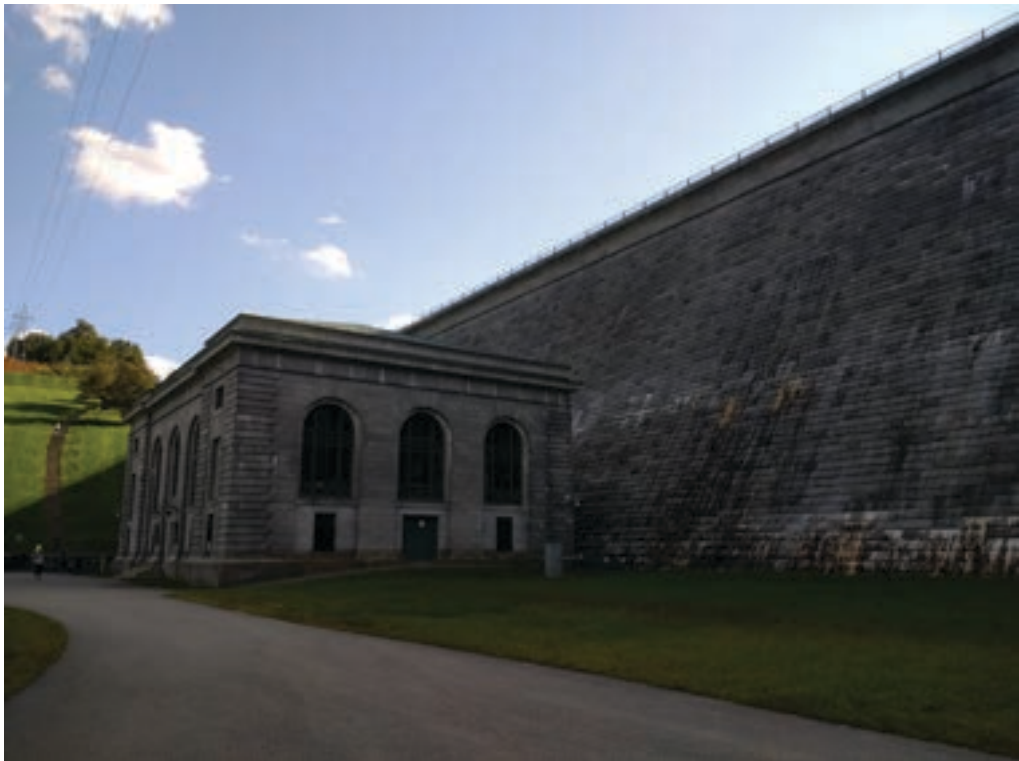
Nevertheless, it is exciting to see the thesis grow with each discovery of new information or interaction.

While examining issues related to the environment and similar studies, the following question can emerge: in what ways do humans and the environment interact or intersect? The focus in this issue of Tvergastein is *Environment and Peace*, which connects to this idea of the human and the environment systems. Additionally, this intersection is a point of consideration in some of the different Master's theses. One concept I have been drawing upon in my research to help inform some theoretical background in particular, is that of Environmental Justice. Environmental Justice is an important concept that has legal definitions and also theoretical definitions. The concept of Environmental Justice links the idea of environmental concerns with at-risk or disadvantaged communities. Boston, where I conducted my research, has certain legal protections. The US EPA provides a larger framework for Environmental Justice and equal protection;[1] likewise, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has also developed legislation and definitional concepts around Environmental Justice.[2] Overall, the extensive literature on the topic provides critical perspectives on Environmental Justice and its role in the environmental movement as well as how certain populations face burdens and inequalities.[3,4,5] For my research, I find this idea of how particular people may have to deal with environmental issues in different ways significant. With the possibility of such differences in environmental impact and experience, one can seek an understanding of: what is happening, to whom, and why? Looking into this, there may remain questions of fairness and structural inequalities in the systems where they could occur. Moreover, as an idea, it has further significance and it can be considered in a multitude of locations throughout the world. Therefore, in this thesis'

process, taking into account this theory has been a useful tool as I have considered frames and broader world implications.

Doing fieldwork has been a rewarding and formative experience in my studies. It has allowed me to explore an issue of great interest to me, while utilizing, practicing, and learning research skills. Speaking with others and viewing research from a specific location gives exciting perspectives and allows the research to see through new eyes. With my fieldwork coming to a close, now I can dive into the next step: writing.

"MANY OF US KNOW THAT RESEARCH ALSO REQUIRES FLEXIBILITY, CHANGE, AND AN OPEN MIND AS NEW INFORMATION IS GATHERED"

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Reflections from Fieldwork

The Paradox of the Promised Land

Andrea Pittaluga

Most communities that go through voluntary or involuntary planned resettlement processes are marginalized and vulnerable populations with limited agency, depending on the territory they live in to earn their livelihoods. Disaster risk response policies such as preventive resettlements, are designed to reduce risks and thus improve life conditions, facilitate the implementation of progress and development policies, and provide better opportunities for the resettled community.[1] Unfortunately, these policies sometimes face collateral effects like violence and conflict. The following article is a brief reflection of my fieldwork and it is not intended to either evaluate the relocation itself or enter into a deep academic discussion of the matter.

Photo: Andrea Pittaluga

Belen is a district that serves as the main port and market in the Peruvian rainforest and it is one of the poorest areas in the country. It has been built in the periphery of the city of Iquitos, over the Itaya river, which floods 6 months a year, turning it into a floating city where their habitants have lived for over 70 years. The lower area of Belen (LAB), lacks access to basic services such as water and sanitation, which forces the people to use the river for both waste disposal and water supply, resulting in alarming rates of contamination and health problems.[2] These conditions led the Peruvian Government in 2014 to declare it an emergency area unfit for livelihoods and recommended with utmost urgency, to relocate the people living in LAB and provide them with adequate housing and access to basic services in an appropriate environment for their human development.[3]

New Belen, the current resettlement project, was approved by the central government in 2014 without prior consultation to the community or the local authorities. The project promises to include schools, medical centers and basic services absent in LAB, such as water and sewage. Additionally, entrepreneurial training for the relocated citizens that would allow them to earn their livelihoods away from the river and 40 square meter houses would be provided for everyone affected by the relocation.[4] A sort of Promised Land "where kids get to be kids", said the media coverage.[5] To date, approximately 20% of the people has been relocated and the project intends to be finished within the next couple of years.

    During the months of September and October 2018, I had the opportunity to visit both LAB and New Belen and discuss the perceptions of the relocation project with the people. In most cases, the environment turned tense when I touched upon the resettlement project and the response among the people seemed almost unanimous: *"not even bullets will move*

us." What can explain this?

Evrard and Goudineau explain that a resettlement is a double-sided coin.[6] On one hand it involves a deterritorialization, which besides leaving a territory means changing ways of life (ecologically, culturally, technically) and on the other hand, it involves a reterritorialization, which means not only adjusting to a territory but also accepting the new dynamics tied to it. The social impacts can be seen on the relocatees, the areas they leave behind, and the areas in which they resettle.[7] In that sense, resettlement projects should ensure that not only houses are rebuilt but also "livelihoods, local markets and social networks,"[8] which is why the people affected with these processes should actively participate from the early planning stages.[9] Therefore, it is no surprise that the citizens of LAB resist moving.

The first evident issue that I find is that a team entirely based in Lima designed from scratch a new Amazon settlement without the technical and sociological support from the local authorities, or feedback from the people, evidencing the excessive centralization that still exists in Peru. This top down intervention has made the citizens feel afraid for their future, objectified and disrespected by the central authorities. *"They show up once in a blue moon, and when they do, they scare us and we never see them again,"* says one of the residents. Moreover, the fact that New Belen is located in a remote area approximately 13 kilometers away from the original location (1h30m by bus) gives the community the sense of marginalization and intents of invisibilization by the central government. This impression ultimately generates disharmony and friction between the two, leading to violent confrontations in the past and likely in the future.

Additionally, Belenians rely on the Itaya river

Photo: Andrea Pittaluga

to provide them food and even business. The fact that the new settlement is far from the commerce center and does not have a natural water source nearby not only means that a new transportation budget is required to go to work, but also that the possibility of fishing or resorting to their crops when money is not enough to buy food is now gone. Moreover, many families who have two or more household heads working in the market back in the city, cannot afford transportation budgets anymore and therefore, less income is now earned and food is no longer secured. The negative response from the people in LAB to move has also contributed to the unpopularity of New Belen, which makes the citizens of the latter feel poorer and even more isolated, making life harder as the economic and social ties have been disrupted.[10] Thus, the diminished integration of New Belen with other urban centers, slow flow of socio-economic relationships and the lost jobs due to the relocation seems to be causing lower employment rates in young men, which seems to be encouraging gang formation, violence and insecurity among the residents, consequently aggravating the vulnerability of the community.

However, the remoteness of the new settlement is not the only thing people that makes people discontent for they have further reasons to be mad at the government and demand changes. Four years into the relocation project, they still lack basic services such as water and sewage, as well as a medical center. As Desmaison explains, "not having these services available from the onset seriously jeopardizes the livelihoods, health, and security (…) as they find themselves far away from the infrastructure and institutions that currently provide these services while lacking alternatives nearby."[11]

Members of a similar research project that I met in Iquitos and I were lucky enough to be granted permission to attend a neighbors' assembly in New Belen. It's a Friday night and one of the other researchers and I agreed to meet the others at the site. This my first time commuting to New Belen at night and it turns out that the buses going our way are less frequent past 6pm and that they completely stop running at 7pm, so we have no other choice than to take another bus to the terminal first. On the way, we realize that we are the only two women in a bus full of men, in the area with the highest rates of violence against women

Photo: Andrea Pittaluga

in Peru, and it's getting dark now, and we still have at least an hour ahead through the jungle, and we are putting on our toughest faces, and our hearts are racing, and we avoid eye contact with everyone, and I pretend to tell my location to someone on the phone and I'm afraid that my phone could be stolen, and besides it's obvious that I'm lying because everyone knows that there's no signal in most of the highway, and now we still have another 50 minutes until we get to the terminal to catch the second bus, and we get there and it's pitch dark, and we end up riding a *mototaxi* to New Belen, and we talk to the driver the whole ride hoping he takes us safely to our destination, which he does. And we feel lucky. As we share our adventure with the women in the area, we learn that this is a routine terror-ride for women returning home to New Belen from the city past 6pm.

At the meeting, there were no extraordinary demands but the basic elements for a dignified life, which they have been waiting long enough for, considering that some have been living in the new location for two and three years. *"Are*

we supposed to shower with sand?", "is only Lima entitled to progress?" they asked, justly. The people feel betrayed, and after sharing 4 weeks with this community, I do too in a way.

As agreed, a protest took place three days later, in which the citizens of New Belen blocked the highway with stones and tires and requested the government to pay attention to their needs. Besides water and sewage, the demands included the completion of the housing construction and transportation infrastructure to enhance commercial ties and promote employment. The strike required police intervention and resulted in 4 people injured by pellets, a few visits of central Government officials to attend the city's demands and a brand-new set of old commitments with a renovated conflict potential. Just as I write this, exactly a month has passed and sand showers are still a trend, it still takes over an hour to get to the city, buses still run only until 7pm, and the Promised Land is still an unfulfilled promise.

It is undeniable that the New Belen project has reduced the risks that originate from the in-

creasing river flooding and its collateral effects; but it also seems to have worsened the living conditions by "separating the relocated people from already-existing livelihood sources,"[12] failing to reconstruct sustainable alternatives, resulting in exacerbated socio-economic vulnerabilities and enhanced patterns of violence instead[13]. Furthermore, it would result interesting to explore whether the State is providing the basic humane living conditions or if the circumstances in New Belen have turned it into a human rights violation case.

On my last day of fieldwork in New Belen, the morning after the neighbors' assembly, Olga, my 4-year-old friend, who has been following me around everywhere for a month, tells me that she wants to ask me something before I leave, and I am sure she is going to ask me to buy her a toy or maybe candy. But she only wanted some water.

As I ride the bus back to the city for nearly two hours to catch my flight home, I reflect upon the past 4 weeks and think about the bus ride last night, and how afraid we were for a moment, and it's so hot now, and boy, we were lucky, and I always get so dizzy riding buses, and I think about Olga again, and I swear it must be about 38 degrees today, and no, we weren't lucky, we *are* lucky, and I wonder how the protest on Monday will turn out, I'm so thirsty, I could really use a cold shower, and I should have asked her when her birthday is, and my throat is so dry, and God, I could *kill for some water*. And it sinks in why, where there's no justice, there's no peace. I feel powerless, and this is all suddenly so frustrating, so sad.

"(…) we revolt simply because, for many reasons, we can no longer breathe."[14] Socio economic inequalities, marginality, poverty, poor government services, high unemployment, environmental degradation and resource scarcity have historically predisposed conflict and

"WE REVOLT SIMPLY BECAUSE, FOR MANY REASONS, WE CAN NO LONGER BREATHE"

violence.[15, 16] The situation in Belen is just a tiny pixel in a bigger picture. Have we become so arrogant and ruthless that we dare ignoring these links? Have we become so oblivious that we have forgotten our past? Or is it that we've lost the fear of being reminded?

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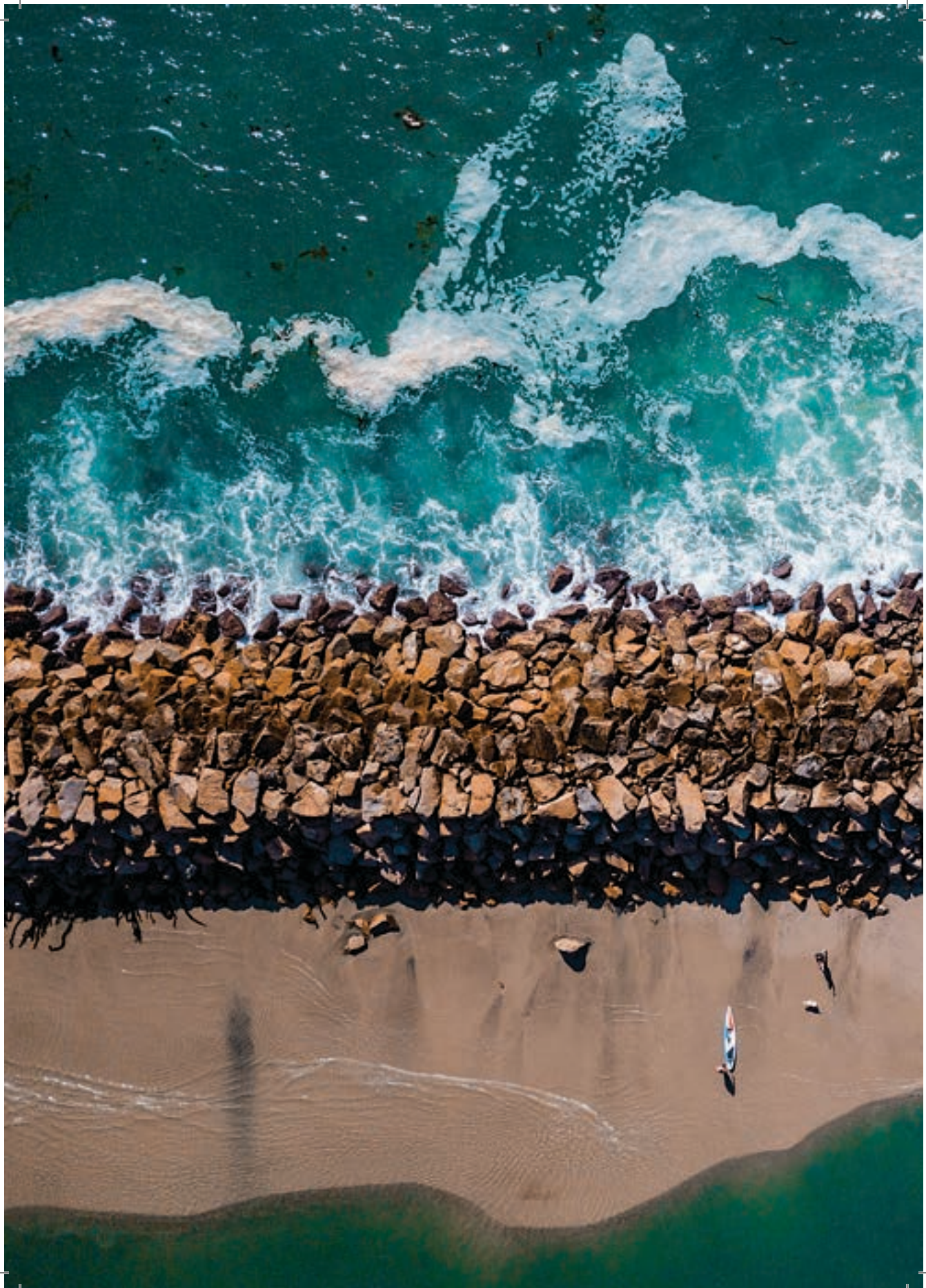
Water War and Peace in Times of Scarcity

Nassim El Achi

Despite the general assumption that water scarcity leads to water wars, for the last 4500 years of human history, water has rarely been the sole reason for conflict. However, with climate change and increased global population, serious efforts should be undertaken by stakeholders at all levels to use water as a platform for cooperation and peace, rather than conflict. By combining Integrated Water Resource Management with peacebuilding practices, political mechanisms can be developed which promote cooperative sustainable management of transboundary freshwater resources.

Photo: Austin Neill/Unsplash

Freshwater is a finite resource that is fundamental for sustainable development and livelihoods. It presents a unique challenge as it is irreplaceable for most of its uses and is very expensive to transport over long distances. Thus, achieving water security requires more than the international, long-distance trade deals that are used for other commodities like oil, metals and mineral ores.[1]

Water is also one of the primary elements to be highly influenced by climate change. For instance, climate models predict increased variability of precipitation in terms of amount, timing and geographical distribution with increased droughts in certain areas around the globe and increased flooding in others.[2,3] These stressors, coupled with the world's burgeoning population, which is projected to be 9.8 billion by 2050, render freshwater to be one of the most overexploited resources, and its scarcity will only augment with time.[4,5]

Historically, access to resources has been a key determinant of war and peace; and with the growing uncertainties regarding the future of water, it is no wonder that conflicts over this valuable resource may range between local and mild disputes, to armed interventions or "water wars."[6] Indeed, such a gloomy view is anticipated by three successive UN Secretary Generals who explicitly considered water as a major tool for war.

Photo: Matteo Redaelli

SIMPLY PUT, WATER IS A GREATER PATHWAY TO PEACE THAN VIOLENT CONFLICT IN THE WORLD'S INTERNATIONAL RIVER BASINS

"The next war in the Middle East will be fought over water, not politics." - Boutros Boutros-Ghali, 1985.

"Fierce competition for fresh water may well become a source of conflict and wars in the future." - Kofi Annan, 2001.

"The consequences for humanity are grave. Water scarcity threatens economic and social gains and is a potent fuel for wars and conflict." - Ban Ki Moon, 2007.

So, is water a cause of conflict? Maybe not…

Viewing water as a tool for conflict has been very popular among the UN, the World Bank, and other high officials, 6 and thus, is part of a prevalent mindset which is strongly implemented in the media. However, there is another inconspicuous notion that considers water wars as a "non-existing hyperbole". [7] This perception is strongly supported by the pioneering work of Aaron Wolf, that traced the water encounters among international and national riparian states. For instance, between the years 805 and 1984, 3600 water-related treaties were signed.[7] In the second half of the 20th century, the number of instances of cooperation within transboundary river basins has outnumbered that of conflict by more than a factor of two.[7,8] Notably, and as reported by Peter Gleick & Matthew Heberger[9], the last time two states had full-scale war specifically over water was 4500 years ago; between the two Mesopotamian city-states of Lagash and Umma.[9] Moreover, 30% of the 37 recorded occasions of water-related forms of military action were between Israel and one of its neighbors that already have hostile bilateral relations.[8] This shows that water on its own has not appeared to be the main trigger for conflicts, but rather a consequence of pre-existing tensions. Water's vitality renders it a tool for cooperation rather than dispute, and thus it is central in the peace paradigm. "Simply put, water is a greater pathway to peace than violent conflict in the world's international river basins".[10,11] Indeed, the idea of "water wars" can be replaced by cooperative efforts for solving transboundary water disputes. For instance, Singapore is one of the countries that focused on improving its water governance and on cooperating with Malaysia to avoid conflict over scarcity.[12] However, it should be highlighted that the concept of cooperation should not be framed as "all or nothing," and thus, not to be limited only to the extreme opposition of war.[13,14]

The Singaporean-Malaysian border with water pipes for transfer of water to Singapore.
Photo: Calvin Teo

Photo: Aaron Burden/Unsplash

Global mechanisms for resolving water disputes and promoting transboundary cooperation are emerging. For instance, the Strategic Foresight Group (FSG) has developed the Blue Peace framework which constitutes structured processes that create regional mechanisms for cooperation by engaging political leaders from riparian nations and providing them with a platform to negotiate trade-offs between water and other goods.[15] The group's recent report listed that out of 148 countries with transboundary water resources, only 37 face the risk of dispute if they continue to avoid active water cooperation. According to FSG; "any two countries engaged in active water cooperation do not go to war for any reason whatsoever, including land, religion, economy or terrorism."[15]

FSG reports also include detailed analysis of successful regional water cooperation arrangements from different places in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America, to be used as lessons for promoting peaceful cooperation and sustainable use of transboundary freshwater resources in other places around the globe. Those existing models can thus be adapted or blended to be relevant to the specific political or cultural contexts.[15]

Note that in most of these arrangements, water scarcity is not the main driver behind dispute but rather poor water management. As a result, Integrated Water Resource Management (IWRM), whose goals are to achieve economic efficiency, social equity, and environmental sustainability by the formation of institutions, tools, and skills to manage water resources, is crucial to mitigate conflict.[16],[17]

In the same course, peacebuilding approaches, which build vertical and horizontal relationships among stakeholders at different levels of power should also be considered, as these relationships create trust and shared visions that make dialogue easier when conflicts arise. The peacebuilding framework also indicates that any group which is excluded

"IF WE CAN LEARN ONE THING FROM THE PAST, IT WOULD BE THAT WATER HAS HARDLY BEEN A TOOL FOR CONFLICT BUT RATHER A PLATFORM FOR COOPERATION"

from the process of water management will most likely disrupt this process whenever possible.[16],[17]

Consequently, the combination of both approaches, i.e. IWRM and peacebuilding, provide a perspective that can identify rising water rights problems and provide them with reliable solutions. With water being a shared resource, it thus grants a notable platform for peacebuilding practices. However, both scholars and practitioners are still trying to find the suitable political mechanisms to correlate IWRM with peacebuilding.[18]

So, if we can learn one thing from the past, it would be that water has hardly been a tool for conflict, but rather a platform for cooperation. However, this is not intended to exclude the possibility of having water wars in the future. After all, humans have had conflicts over limited resources before. Thus, for water to be a tool for cooperation, dynamic and adaptive water management mechanisms that increase the resilience to the growing challenges should be developed. Most importantly, these mechanisms should also be supported by rigorous political commitment, which is transformed into actions and programs, to attain sustainable management of transboundary resources.[10],[15]

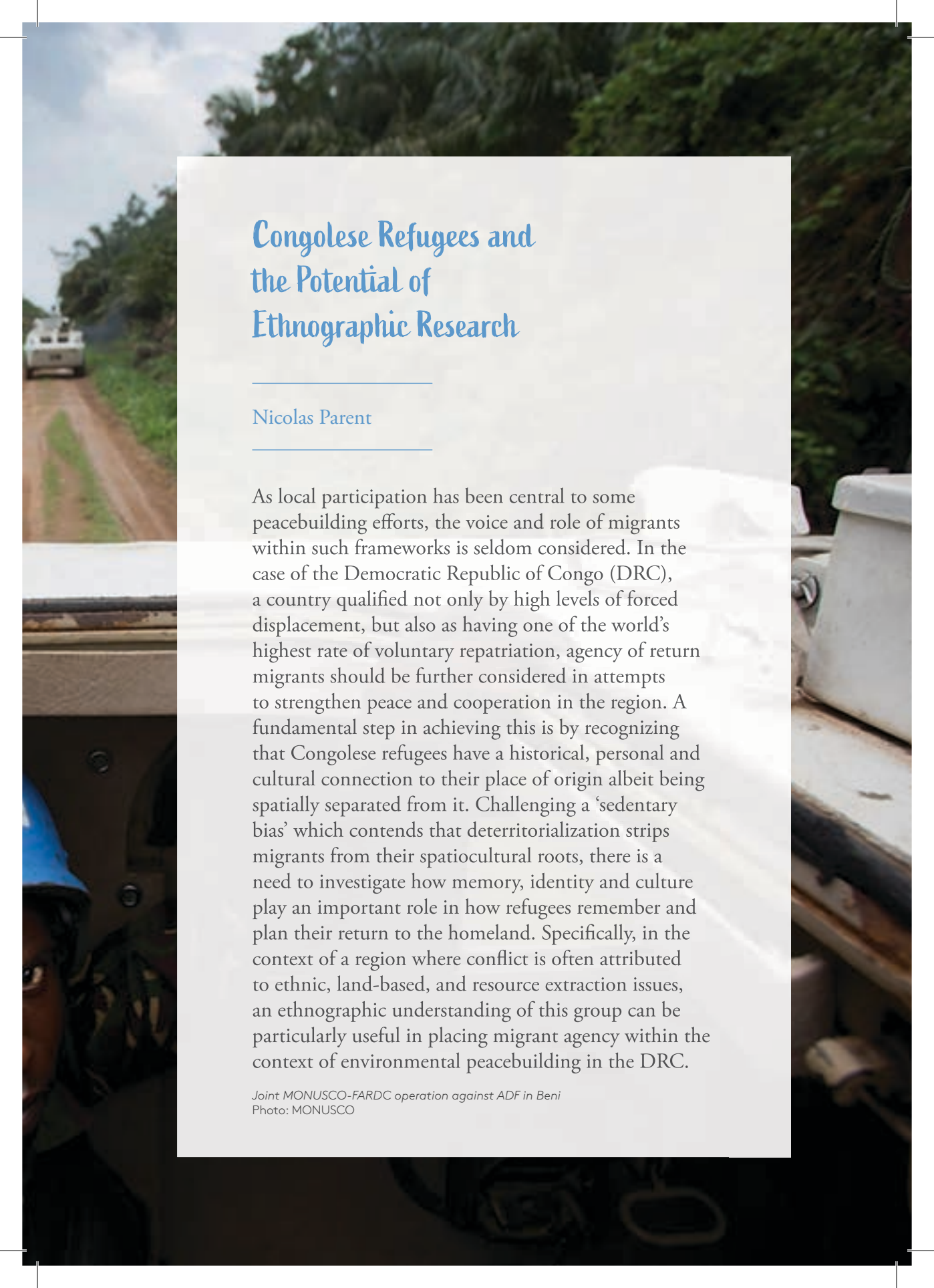**References:**
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Displacement, Return and Environmental Peacebuilding
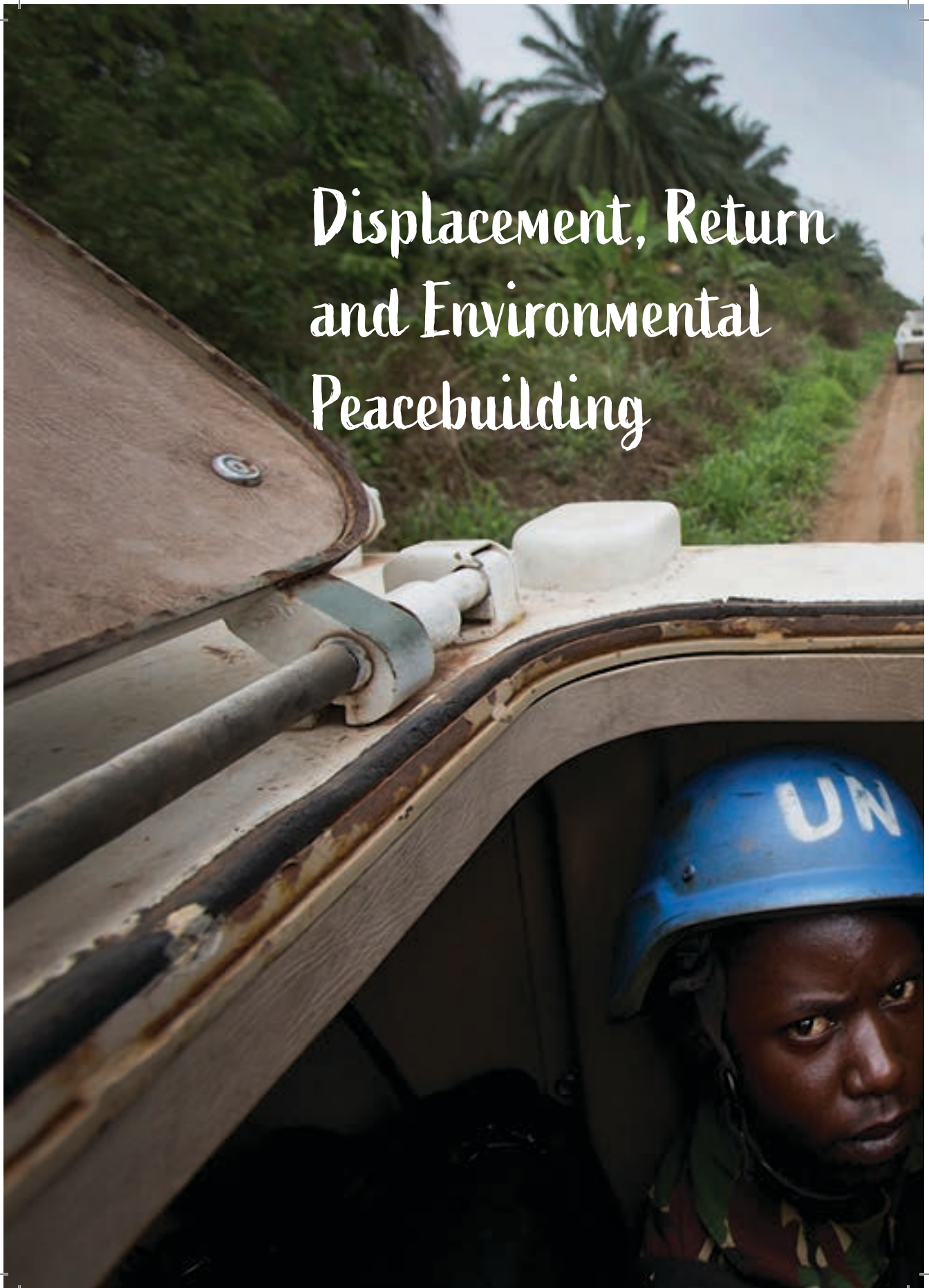
Congolese Refugees and the Potential of Ethnographic Research

Nicolas Parent

As local participation has been central to some peacebuilding efforts, the voice and role of migrants within such frameworks is seldom considered. In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), a country qualified not only by high levels of forced displacement, but also as having one of the world's highest rate of voluntary repatriation, agency of return migrants should be further considered in attempts to strengthen peace and cooperation in the region. A fundamental step in achieving this is by recognizing that Congolese refugees have a historical, personal and cultural connection to their place of origin albeit being spatially separated from it. Challenging a 'sedentary bias' which contends that deterritorialization strips migrants from their spatiocultural roots, there is a need to investigate how memory, identity and culture play an important role in how refugees remember and plan their return to the homeland. Specifically, in the context of a region where conflict is often attributed to ethnic, land-based, and resource extraction issues, an ethnographic understanding of this group can be particularly useful in placing migrant agency within the context of environmental peacebuilding in the DRC.

Joint MONUSCO-FARDC operation against ADF in Beni
Photo: MONUSCO

Relapsing conflict in the DRC

In the case of peace and conflict in fragile states, much of the literature has asserted that natural resources have a positive correlation to local, national and regional conflicts. Many scholars and practitioners in the field of humanitarian intervention and international development have qualified the African continent as having a 'resource curse,' "whereby easily obtainable natural resources and commodities have essentially hurt the prospects of several African national and regional economies by fostering political corruption and feeding violence and rebellion." In other words, natural resources have often been conceptualized as an aggravating factor to conflict.

As a result, this understanding has "led to a growing consensus that building national capacity to properly manage high-value natural resources and their revenues must be a prerequisite to their exploitation, and is a fundamental element of peacebuilding programs." This has often materialized in a concerted effort by international actors to focus their energies on institution-building and the maintenance of 'rule of law' which attempt to establish state control in resource-rich areas. In the case of the DRC, recurring conflict in its resource-rich regions such as the eastern provinces of North and South Kivu is a testament that such strategies to control these areas have proven ineffective, where:

> "postconflict institutions [in the DRC] promoted by international stakeholders – for instance, bolstering rule-of-law infrastructure to prosecute perpetrators of wartime violence – present opportunities for armed factions to further their political, economic, and military agendas behind the scenes while maintaining the outward appearance of cooperating with peace-building efforts."

State building as the de facto 'sustainable exit strategy,' as scholar and regional expert Severine Autesserre asserts, has also failed, where state officials in the army, police and administration continue to commit the majority of human rights violations. As conflict dynamics and actors at the local scale have been largely ignored by the international community engaged in peacebuilding efforts in the DRC, both state and ex-combatants have monopolized the peacebuilding process, largely resulting in them taking on self-serving and predatory roles in the control and management of Congolese territories. In addition to the tragic outcomes this has generated, most notably through near-continual armed conflict, mass rape of women, and forced displacement in eastern DRC, it has also further reinforced the paradigm that natural resources lead to or sustain conflict.

Environmental peacebuilding

While over fifteen years have passed since the end of the Second Congo War, and with the collapse of multiple peace agreements and ceasefires since, it is evident that interventions within the scope of traditional peacebuilding approaches have been largely unsuccessful in the region. Continued and cyclical displacement is one of several testaments of this fact. Stepping aside from the assumption that resource wealth aggravates conflict, there is a need to problematize the 'resource curse' paradigm, asking instead whether resources – mineral wealth, timber, fertile land, and the like – can instead make way for peace and cooperation. This is the main tenet of an emerging field of peace research; that of 'environmental peacebuilding.' Environmental peacebuilding, sometimes called 'environmental peacemaking,' is a concept that emerged at the turn of the 21st century, stemming "from a growing realization that although natural resources can fuel conflict, they can

Artisanal mining. Digging for copper, DR Congo
Photo: Fairphone

Housing in Gihembe refugee camp in Rwanda
Photo: USAID U.S. Agency for International Development

also provide a focus for cooperation." This approach has been applied to several contexts, around issues of water access between Jordan and Israel, land issues involving El Salvador and Honduras, and nature conservation in Southern Caucasus, Southern Africa, Altain Mountains, and between Rwanda and the DRC. There is credible evidence to believe that this approach has been successful in reducing conflict, but "there are still many questions and much to learn." For instance, nearly all analyses and implemented policies

have taken place within an interstate context, rather than focusing on its ability to build intrastate peace. Noting that the majority of security threats emerging in the 1990s were within states, Erika Weinthal suggests that we should potentially explore this lower level of analysis, asking "could we use the environment as a peacemaking tool *within* states and along tenuous border regions?"

Similar to those critiques of traditional peacebuilding efforts, which tend to exclude a wide array of stakeholders at a range of

Kiziba refugee camp
Photo: Jean Claude Uwihoreye

Learning from Congolese refugees

The UN Refugee Agency (UNCHR) has long considered voluntary return as one of its 'durable solutions.' Yet, as evidence from a vast number of contexts suggests, including the case of the DRC, returnees are often subject to new events of displacement. Where such cyclical patterns of displacement become common and normalised, it also becomes clear that voluntary return must be part of a larger trajectory of peacebuilding if it is to be considered a durable solution. The voice and role of displaced persons, however, has seldom been considered in peacebuilding. Although the reasons for this are unclear, it is perhaps the result of a well-documented 'sedentary bias' which largely considers forced migrant populations – the internally displaced and refugees – as powerless and apolitical victims who have been stripped of territorial and cultural identity. As research has shown the ability for migrant communities to mobilise on issues relevant to their homeland, there is a need to acknowledge the

> "WHERE SUCH CYCLICAL PATTERNS OF DISPLACEMENT BECOME COMMON AND NORMALISED, IT ALSO BECOMES CLEAR THAT VOLUNTARY RETURN MUST BE PART OF A LARGER TRAJECTORY OF PEACEBUILDING IF IT IS TO BE CONSIDERED A DURABLE SOLUTION."

geographic scales, established scholars in the field of environmental peacebuilding have underlined the importance of considering the voices of non-state actors such as civilians and civil society in building a practical understanding of how natural resources can be productive for peace. As the next section will outline, ethnographic studies exploring refugees' lived experiences and memories in a region with high levels of voluntary return can be particularly valuable in giving voice to a larger breadth of stakeholders.

role of forced migrants in the development of peacebuilding efforts in their places of origin.

A fundamental step in achieving this is recognising that refugees have a historical, personal and cultural connection to their places of origin albeit being spatially separated from it. The need to acknowledge such connections has been recognised by some working in the field of refugee studies. Anthropologist Liisa H. Malkki has challenged both the assumption that "in becoming 'torn loose' from their cultures, 'uprooted' from their homes, refugees suffer the loss of all contact to the lifeworks they fled," and that becoming uprooted necessarily leads to the loss of identity, traditions, and culture. In the case of the DRC, a country known to have one of the world's highest rate of return migration, it is evident that refugees maintain a strong connection to their places of origin. There is, then, a manifest need to understand the many constellations – abstract and concrete – involved in how such connections materialize in practice, and within the domains of individual-spiritual and cultural-collective. Where displacement and return in the DRC occur at the intersection of ethnic, land-based, and resource extraction issues, outputs and understandings gained from ethnographic research can be critical in developing foresight vis-à-vis the relevance of and potential for environmental peacebuilding in the region. Furthermore, this may help identify signposts as to how returnees can participate in and sustain peacebuilding efforts.

A more targeted rationale for ethnographic research involving Congolese refugees emerges from their unique position to comment on peace, conflict and the environment. Firstly, given their situation as individuals who have been failed by nationally and internationally-led peacebuilding efforts, their lived experience of these efforts – recounted through memory – may bring to light how traditional peacebuilding may aggravate resource and land issues at the local level. Secondly, as a result of living in 'warehoused situations' and 'vast zones of asylum' which are arguably outside of the 'state' as is typically understood, the voice of Congolese refugees may generate interesting ideas which stray from statist interpretations about peace. Thirdly, while it can be expected that refugee camps will comprise an assemblage of individuals of various ethnocultural backgrounds (Hutu, Tutsi, Mai Mai, Banyamulenge, speakers of several different languages, etc.), distance from the conflict and relationships within the camp may assist in mediating ideas of cooperation between various ethnic and cultural identities. Fourthly, as it has been recognized that a great deal of academic work has focused too greatly on post-1994 Rwandan Genocide causes of conflict in the DRC, "as if regional conflict starts from scratch with the genocide," the collection of life stories may prove fruitful in gaining a deeper temporal understanding of root causes of conflict. Lastly, as Laura Hammond recognizes refugees as 'highly politicized symbols,' research within a refugee community may draw out pathways of how they themselves can become agents of environmental peacebuilding in the future. All told, this approach comes from a recognition that there is a need for this type of ethnographic research within the context of peace and conflict in resource-rich regions.

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Ecocide as a Crime Against Peace

The Wooing of Justice

Margrethe Voll Storaas

The emergence of the call for an international criminal Law of Ecocide addresses the backfire problem of trying to "define ourselves" out of the consequences of our actions. As attentive studies beneath the hood of anthropocentric terminology and point of view displays, damage to nature is harm nonetheless, whether we call it legal, collateral, or military necessity. Proponents of a 5th Crime against Peace argue that only the term Ecocide properly acknowledges the extent of the harm done where ecosystems are destructed. It recognizes the suffering that injurious industrial activity imposes on nature, and on people reliant upon ecological stability for peaceful coexistence. Evidenced briefly in this essay, the pro-arguments for an ecological justice addition to the Rome Statute include not only "starry-eyed" philosophy of Man's duty to care and Nature's inherent worth. In addition, we find substantial judicial precedence laid down by national courts, empirical scientific evidence to the sensitivity of global ecosystems and the long-term consequences of daily human conduct, as well as solid theoretical evidence provided by social and humanistic sciences. This includes allowing a dedifferentiation of the legal and illegal domain to inform research to create methodological room for a greater understanding of harm. The foremost contributing discipline in this today is arguably green criminology. Its conjunction of all pro-arguments poses as basis for international criminal law institutions to reconsider their legality threshold. This basis, upon which judicial ethical change may come about, is a promising study indeed, as Ecocide as a Crime Against Peace outlines a new global ethics deriving from ecological justice.

Legality as a societal concept holds immense power over our lives. Deeming something a lawful act constitutes official acceptance for its exertion and consequences. Any actors operating within a legal frame enjoy a collective consensus of acceptance towards their conduct, their actions escaping further scrutiny simply by extension of principle. It is then a matter of society's ability to recognize substantial environmental harm when the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court works only to criminalize "widespread, long-term and severe damage to the natural environment" in war specifically. Systematic damage or destruction done unto ecosystems in peacetime, however, has yet to be made a matter of legal responsibility in international criminal law. Needless to say, the effects of environmental degradation are the same regardless of its political context. Take the bioaccumulation of TCDD in

Vietnam's mangrove forest and interconnected ecosystems for example. This would still have caused continuous uptake in the food chain, with the toxic and teratogenic chemical found in local newborns after the war, in the case that the dispersion of Agent Orange from 1962-71 had been a peaceful affair and not a weapon of war, specifically.[1] Air pollution is another example: when Hussein attacked 1250 oil wells during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait, he was personally responsible for the danger of imminent global-environmental threat from the smoke plumes climbing 45,000 feet.[2] Yet air pollution is just as harmful to all life dependent on clean air should the same amount be spread out by legal industrial activity. Why are severely harmful actions which are disallowed in the scenario of war, allowed in peacetime? Redeeming this lack of protection by recognizing environmental harm, in its absolute sense, is the main argu-

Political context: If you think about it, it is striking that pollution of a certain magnitude in peace-time goes unaccounted for, when the exact same damage conducted in war is internationally recognized as a criminal offense for its impact and its victims.
Photo: Sam Jotham Sutharson / Unsplash

ment for a Law of Ecocide in its current form. By this definition, the very concept of peace (as distinctive and isolated from that of war and conflict) drives forward an international legislative effort toward greater environmental protection.

Ecocide is "the extensive damage, destruction to or loss of ecosystems of a given territory, whether by human agency or by other causes, to such an extent that peaceful enjoyment by the inhabitants of that territory has been severely diminished."[3] Since 2010, an official legal document describing the Proposal for a Law of Ecocide has laid on the table of the United Nations, addressed to its International Criminal Court (ICC) in Hague. Based on the above-mentioned Rome Statute entering into force in 2002, the ICC is recognized as the legitimate prosecutor on behalf of the world community of individuals accused of one of the "core four" Crimes Against Peace: war crimes, where legislation began; crimes against humanity; genocide; and crimes of aggression, the latest addition to the Court.[4] In the words of its sitting President, Chile Eboe-Osuji, the ICC is "the only permanent international criminal court, established to ensure some hope for victims of atrocities."[5] Its member base of 123 member countries from across the world speaks to its legitimacy. Yet it has recently received criticism – notably from President Trump and his administration – for entertaining a slow and costly procedural progress, finalizing only 6 cases in 16 years. In response to this record, Eboe-Osuji unwaveringly asserts that "justice is a cumbersome process. Anyone who tells you that it can be done speedily - with respect - probably doesn't know how it works". Borrowing a quote from the famous American jurist Benjamin Cardozo, he concludes that "Justice is not to be taken by storm. It is to be wooed by slow advances."[5]

The ICC President's words gives weight to the tempo with which change of substantial (as opposed to procedural) law is made. The grave issue of climate change is undeniably a pressing one, but is this enough to make a binding Law of Ecocide come into force?[6] A key academic figure in international criminal law, Antonio Cassese, describes a thorough, accumulative and empirical process of development within this field:

> International crimes proper (…) results from the cumulative presence of the following elements. 1. Violations of rules of customary international law as well as treaty provisions. 2. Such rules are intended to protect values of the whole international community as such and consequently bind all states and individuals. *The values at issue are not propounded by scholars or thought up by starry-eyes philosophers.* Rather, they are laid down in a string of international instruments (…). 3. There exists a universal interest in repressing these crimes.[7]

Rising to the challenge is barrister and corporate turned environmental lawyer, Polly Higgins. She asks: Which universal values are not protected by our global criminal law institutions at this point? Which violations do we see that go under the radar of justice? Her proposal posits that ecocide offenders have breached a non-human right to life, and consequently are guilty of a crime against nature.[8] The ethical recognition of this as an offense would have been unattainable through traditional conceptualization of lawful conduct. Higgins notes that it was the judicial domain that initially paved the way for big industry's feasibility in pollution, or what she calls "the commercial take-over of the world."[9] The approach of viewing the planet as a commodity has informed environmental policy since the '70s, through for example permit allocation, soft regulation

Repotting knowledge: Just like a houseplant that has grown too big for its original pot, our knowledge on global ecosystems' vulnerability to industrial activity has outgrown current international legislation.
Photo: Brina Blum / Unsplash

and inadequate enforcement provisions. The Proposal instead constitutes a transition from "owning Nature" in a commoditizing approach, to "owing Nature" in a stewardship sense, Higgins maintains.[10] This calls for a transition to a moral and legal duty to care.[11] Whereas the "owning Nature" paradigm was by default limited to national legislation, practical implementation of a "owing Nature" philosophy would require the notion of moral obligation to care to be pushed up to the highest level of criminal prosecution, the ICC. This moral universalist approach can be said to be the case with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. There exists precedence for the approach in the established consensus regarding *distributive* justice as an international affair as well, a defensible position by way of recognizing the interconnectedness between inhabitants within and outside a given territory.[12] As it is,

Higgins argues that "the capacity of ecocide to be trans-boundary and multi-jurisdictional necessitates legislation of international scope."[13] Evidently, a Law of Ecocide would require a universalist approach to environmental governance, as much a practical necessity for the law to have effect at all.

Yet, justification of the Law of Ecocide also springs out of opposing institutionalized anthropocentric perception of harm. In current

THE APPROACH OF VIEWING THE PLANET AS A COMMODITY HAS INFORMED ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY SINCE THE '70S

legal frameworks, human perception and experience function as the sole point of reference for acknowledging harm. Is this action a war or peacetime activity? Do these results pose as excessive damage to nature, or collateral damage, deriving from military necessity? Instead of this relative basis, green criminology and the Proposal alike consider substantial harm done unto certain natural entities a crime on an absolute basis, regardless of its (original) legality. With regards to ecocide, harm is unapologetically assessed as it is experienced by the ecosystem in question. What degree of damage can the environmental entity withstand and still be in ecological balance for its own sake, the global ecology, and those people that rely on it as a natural resource?[14] "Contribution to the pool of greenhouse gases by any industrial activity that places human life at risk can be said to be ecocide," Higgins upholds, and shows existing EU case law that obliges states to ensure protection of the individual's right to life.[15] Indisputably, people need healthy ecosystems to survive and to thrive. Harm that exceeds the limit of the life-sustaining ability of that ecosystem should be the threshold for illegality. This is a case in point on *humans'* right to life, and not just the above-mentioned non-human right (where ecocide equals a crime against nature itself). For argumentative and theoretical purposes, these may be separated. Yet, in practice they are very much interdependent: consistent injury to Nature is accumulative harm to a codependent humanity. Realizing this when the harm becomes evident in the conventional (macrovisible) sense is too late.[16]

A definitional shift in point of reference requires a dedifferentiation of the legal and illegal domain of human activity. A governmental crop eradication program may be intended (only) to hurt an illegal drug industry, but its ecological effects nonetheless exist far beyond and independent of this strictly political target: The program may also diminish health and

quality of life for all local inhabitants, including the non-human biosphere.[17] The same logic goes for countless other cases: extensive logging that affect local fauna and global climate whether it is done on a legal quota or not; water pollution by synthetic chemicals affects the health of locals and aquatic wildlife whether caused by lawful shrimp farming or criminal dumping activity, and so forth. Once the previous line separating legal and illegal is so questioned, there are countless examples. In her studies on the Russian Far East Forests, Tanja Wyatt also finds that several high-ranking individuals in the scene operate with a dual role in the logging industry, affiliated with both legal and illegal companies.[18] Her findings highlight the point and validity of dedifferentiation between the two. Through dedifferentiation, one can raise the bar for what is to be considered legal in the first place, interplaying with lawyers as well as actors with political power.

One example is an examination of how laws and regulations which actually uphold and legitimize intolerable exploitation of non-human animals and of nature are passed by means of the legislation processes supported by capitalist and consumerist interests, despite the increasing importance of environmental issues in modern contexts.[19]

The same method of a definitional rollback has been applied to traditional victimology. Whereas victims of the four existing Crimes against peace are visible to the blind eye, seeing the bloodshed of an ecosystem under attack requires sampling tests. Counting the casualties after the use of bioweapons such as "tactical herbicides" requires expert prior knowledge on the target area, and documenting disaster takes not only a camera and a reporter, but sophisticated sampling gear, techniques, and competent professionals. Lastly, much environmental consequence analyses require time. Where

a bombed city instantly speaks for itself, an ecological infrastructure in ruins and its effect on human well-being may be invisible to the human eye for decades. With the four anthropocentric Crimes Against Peace in mind, we are just beginning to realize the look of ecological atrocities, their victims and causality.[20],[21] In essence, "our growing awareness of the interconnectedness of global climate systems calls for the reassessment of harm," green criminologists unequivocally assert.[22],[23]

A tedious process this, the reconceptualization of old ideas and definitions upon which our modern institutions are based. To this end, a joint force effort of all disciplines is of exceptional value. As one prominent author puts it: "Interdisciplinary thought may help create a firm theoretical and empirical ground from which to develop convincing arguments and effective strategies for altering the present course of exploitation which endangers so many people, plants, and animals, both now and in the future."[24] Cassese demanded indeed that there be a "universal interest in repressing these crimes." With peace as an ultimate common value, our global judicial institutions have been given the mandate to ensure the prevention of harmful, peace-diminishing practices. In that case, harm done unto non-human entities to the extent that it threatens peace must be addressed. It has become apparent that addressing harm includes efforts beyond the ability of political and civil society that would normally push for legislative change.[25] Insights from scholars and philosophers then, such as the reassessment of lawful practices that may have unknown and severe effects on people and planet, are arguably welcome contributions to the judicial development of international criminal law. Equally, redefining current harmful practices as unlawful where deemed to breach the right to life, is defensible.

There is the counterargument that, if anything, it would be the implementation and

HARM DONE UNTO NON-HUMAN ENTITIES TO THE EXTENT THAT IT THREATENS PEACE MUST BE ADDRESSED

practice of a Law of Ecocide that would disrupt society to an unprecedented degree. And yes, the repercussions of adopting such a law could become of similar magnitude to that of abolishing the transatlantic, unethical yet once legal slave trade. CEO's of all multinational corporations profiting from extensive damage to natural complex ecosystems (as caused by fracking, exhaustive logging, drilling in sensitive areas, and more) could be prosecuted. This would go for state leaders responsible for harmful practices as well. Environmentally injurious industries would be forced to readjust their practices, not out of the market value of a trustworthy CSR image, but out of strictly law-abiding concerns. Environmental organizations and nations would have a new tool in their tireless conservation efforts where individuals on the top of the industry food chain could be held fully accountable for their decision-making. This would depart from what in law is called "superior responsibility," as opposed to having to drag the whole company to court and fighting its often bottomless judicial defense apparatus. Symbolically, the flag would be raised for recognizing the bigger picture of human activity and how we fund our ways of life; changing the rules of the game as to what is to be considered legitimate profit-making, moral consumption, adequate governmental regulation, and responsible industry conduct.

Ecocide as an accepted production externality would come to a halt.

No matter the urge behind the call, and the promise change may hold, justice must be wooed. According to Higgins though, consciousness must be wooed too.[26] A holy matrimony between the two could create an axiological shift from relative (anthropocentric) to absolute (ecocentric) harm assessment in international criminal law. This would deem ecocide a recognized offense in peace-time as well as in war, making possible the prosecution of the ones responsible where whole or parts of ecosystems are irreversibly destroyed today. However, "seeing" damage invisible to the layperson's eye and acting upon the complexity of environmental harm requires changing the legality of currently detrimental industrial and state-run practices. Bridging the gap between knowledge and power, interdisciplinary cooperation between practitioners of law, politics, and a joint academia may then possibly forge its way to a new global ethics, where threats to lasting peace will no longer be tolerated by the international community. Because justice founded on outdated knowledge may very well not be just. Peace is a common project. Earth a common fate. Justice, then, must include all life – including those of non-human entities – as pieces in the puzzle of our global interconnectedness. The promising inclusion of a Law of Ecocide into the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court would mean including Nature in the bigger picture of successful preservation of people, planet and peace for the future.

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Less is More

Tiny Houses as a Tool to Reduce the Consumption of Diverse Resources

Pauline Kohlhase

Tiny houses demonstrate an alternative form of housing which can increase equitable housing access while decreasing resource use in multiple ways. Given the nature of tiny homes, limited household space opens the door to creative planning and selective ownership; reducing everyday consumption of goods. Furthermore, the improved efficiency, use of green technology, and the increased sharing of spaces and goods characteristic of tiny homes; can protect natural habitats and fertile land by lowering resource demand.

Photo: Fritz Lorber

Less is more – the current trend of downsizing has now arrived to the living domain. The so-called "Tiny House movement," emerged in the United States and has spread around the world during the last few years. Is this movement an answer to the urgent question of how the housing demand for a growing world population can be satisfied?

In contrast to usual homes, tiny houses are between 6 and 42 square meters wide and are often built on wheels. They usually contain multifunctional furniture, which makes it possible to integrate a kitchen, bathroom, living room, and sleeping area into a very small space. In this manner a shelf transforms easily into a table, and storage space is integrated into stairs. Multifunctional furniture is crucially important in tiny living.

Less space also leads to ownership of fewer goods like clothing or furniture, which protects resources. Tiny-homeowners must decide carefully which things are worth the space.

The need to downsize is reflected in reducing clothing, home furniture, and waste. "How much do I need?" Is a central question when moving into a tiny house. Owning fewer things reflects the sufficiency strategy of sustainability, which is described as reducing resource usage through consuming or needing less.

Empirical studies have demonstrated that in addition to financial considerations and importance to individual identity, environmental concerns are a motivation for moving into a tiny home.[1] Solar panels on roofs, composting toilets, and wood-burning stoves almost always are included in its basic equipment. Besides technical gadgets which produce clean energy and treat excrement via natural cycles, some tiny house communities also have shared cars, washing machines, or gardening tools. Sharing can reduce the amount of goods being produced, thereby reducing the use of raw materials and energy for production, transportation, and recycling.

Photo: Brooke Porter

Little house on the trailer. Photo: Nicolás Boullosa

From an economic perspective, in metropolises with limited building space, scarcity leads to an increased willingness to pay. Related to the housing market, this means only rich people have the privilege to live in certain areas in metropolises. Van Bo Le Menzel, the tiny house pioneer of Germany, is trying to solve these matters of inequality. He launched the project *Tiny 100* to promote his vision of access to affordable housing for everyone. The model tiny home is 6 square meters in size and contains sleeping area, kitchen unit, living room, working area, and guest space, rented for 100 Euros a month.[2,3]

Smaller residencies can increase public and natural spaces for people and living beings. In Germany an area of land as big as 200 soccer fields is newly opened to development each day.[4] Fertile land cannot easily be regenerated. When soil is destroyed and compressed by buildings, natural habitats and agricultural land is lost—endangering species and food production. Therefore, tiny houses can be seen as a symbol for protecting fertile land and natural habitats.

"HOW MUCH DO I NEED?"

Not only does construction and housing contribute to land and habitat loss, but it is one of the most resource and energy intensive sectors. Rather than taking up excessive amounts of land and resources, tiny homes can stand as an affordable and environmentally-friendly solution to counter environmental degradation, and build awareness to reduce consumption of energy and everyday goods.

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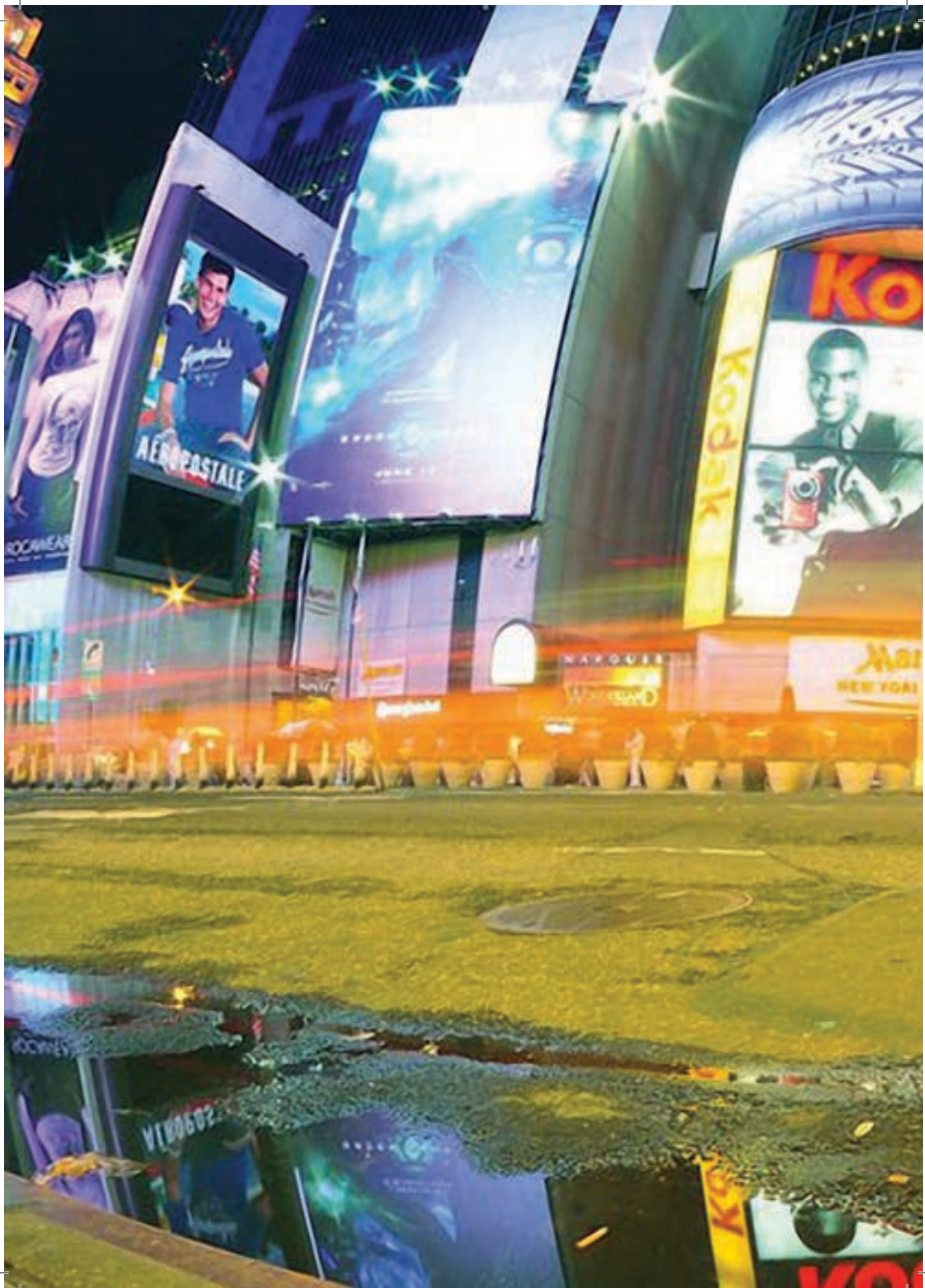
CALL FOR PAPERS

WRITE FOR US!

Economists and politicians affirm that limitless economic growth brings about more job opportunities, more products available in the stands, and more revenue. Business as usual is good for the country's GDP and, therefore, good for the people. Or, is it?

The next issue of Tvergastein will aim at questioning our societal consumption habits; our ideals of "The Good Life"; and where these are taking us in the light of environmental damage and climate change. Potential themes range wide from energy production to meat consumption to philosophical debates to political reflections. We need critical interdisciplinary perspectives, fresh ideas, hopeful messages of change, and articles that connect the dots of climate and consumption.

Does this edition about consumption consume you with enough eagerness to write for us?

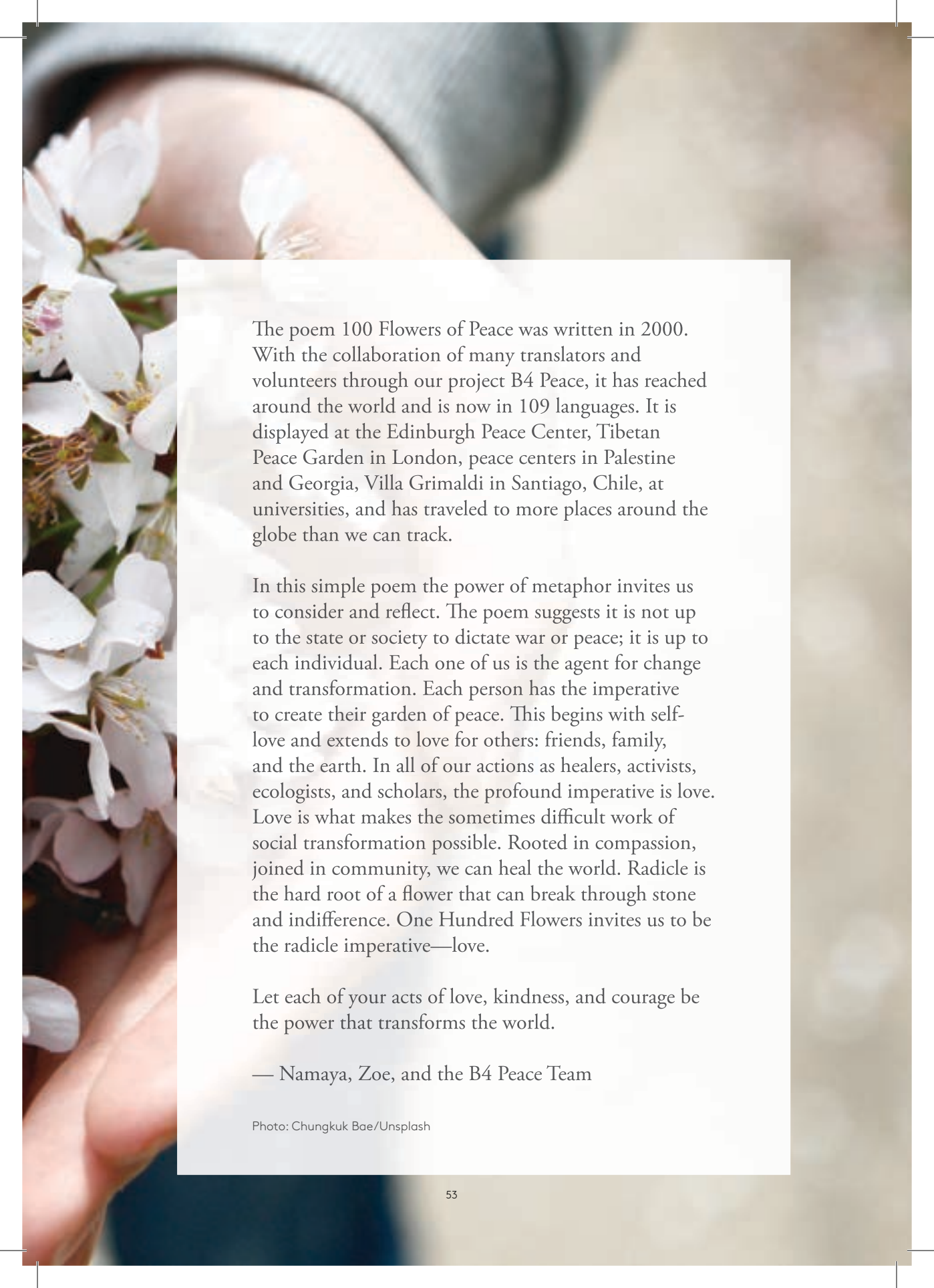If so, find more information on our website at www.tvergastein.com

Photo: Andrea Pittaluga

100 Flowers of Peace

The Imperative is to Love

Namaya

The poem 100 Flowers of Peace was written in 2000. With the collaboration of many translators and volunteers through our project B4 Peace, it has reached around the world and is now in 109 languages. It is displayed at the Edinburgh Peace Center, Tibetan Peace Garden in London, peace centers in Palestine and Georgia, Villa Grimaldi in Santiago, Chile, at universities, and has traveled to more places around the globe than we can track.

In this simple poem the power of metaphor invites us to consider and reflect. The poem suggests it is not up to the state or society to dictate war or peace; it is up to each individual. Each one of us is the agent for change and transformation. Each person has the imperative to create their garden of peace. This begins with self-love and extends to love for others: friends, family, and the earth. In all of our actions as healers, activists, ecologists, and scholars, the profound imperative is love. Love is what makes the sometimes difficult work of social transformation possible. Rooted in compassion, joined in community, we can heal the world. Radicle is the hard root of a flower that can break through stone and indifference. One Hundred Flowers invites us to be the radicle imperative—love.

Let each of your acts of love, kindness, and courage be the power that transforms the world.

— Namaya, Zoe, and the B4 Peace Team

Photo: Chungkuk Bae/Unsplash

One Hundred
Flowers of Peace

Let there be one hundred flowers
of peace that bloom in the garden

Let there be one hundred hours
of peace for every moment of war

Let there be one hundred acts
of kindness for each instance of hate

Let there be one hundred years
of love for each minute of violence

Let there be one hundred voices
of peace for each one of war

Let there be one hundred flowers
of peace that bloom in the garden

The following are two of more than 100 translations to date of this poem. The poem has been translated to Northern Sami especially for this issue of Tvergastein, as a contribution to B4 Peace's work of spreading this poem and its message of peace in as many languages as possible.

Ett hundre blomster	Ráfi čuođi rási
La det blomstre ett hundre fredsblomster i hagen.	Lehkoset ráfi čuođi rási lieđđumin rássegárddis
La det være hundre timer med fred for hvert øyeblikk i krig.	Lehkoset ráfi čuođi diimmu soađi juohke bottu guovdu
La det være hundre handlinger i vennlighet for hvert øyblikk av hat.	Lehkoset láđisvuođa čuođi dagu juohke vaššivuođa guovdu
La det være hundre år med kjærlighet for hvert minutt vold.	Lehkoset ráhkisvuođa čuođi jagi veahkaválddi juohke minuhta guovdu
La det være hundre stemmer i fred for hver stemme i krig.	Lehkoset ráfi čuođi jiena soađi juohke jiena guovdu
La det blomstre ett hundre fredsblomster i hagen.	Lehkoset ráfi čuođi rási lieđđumin rássegárddis
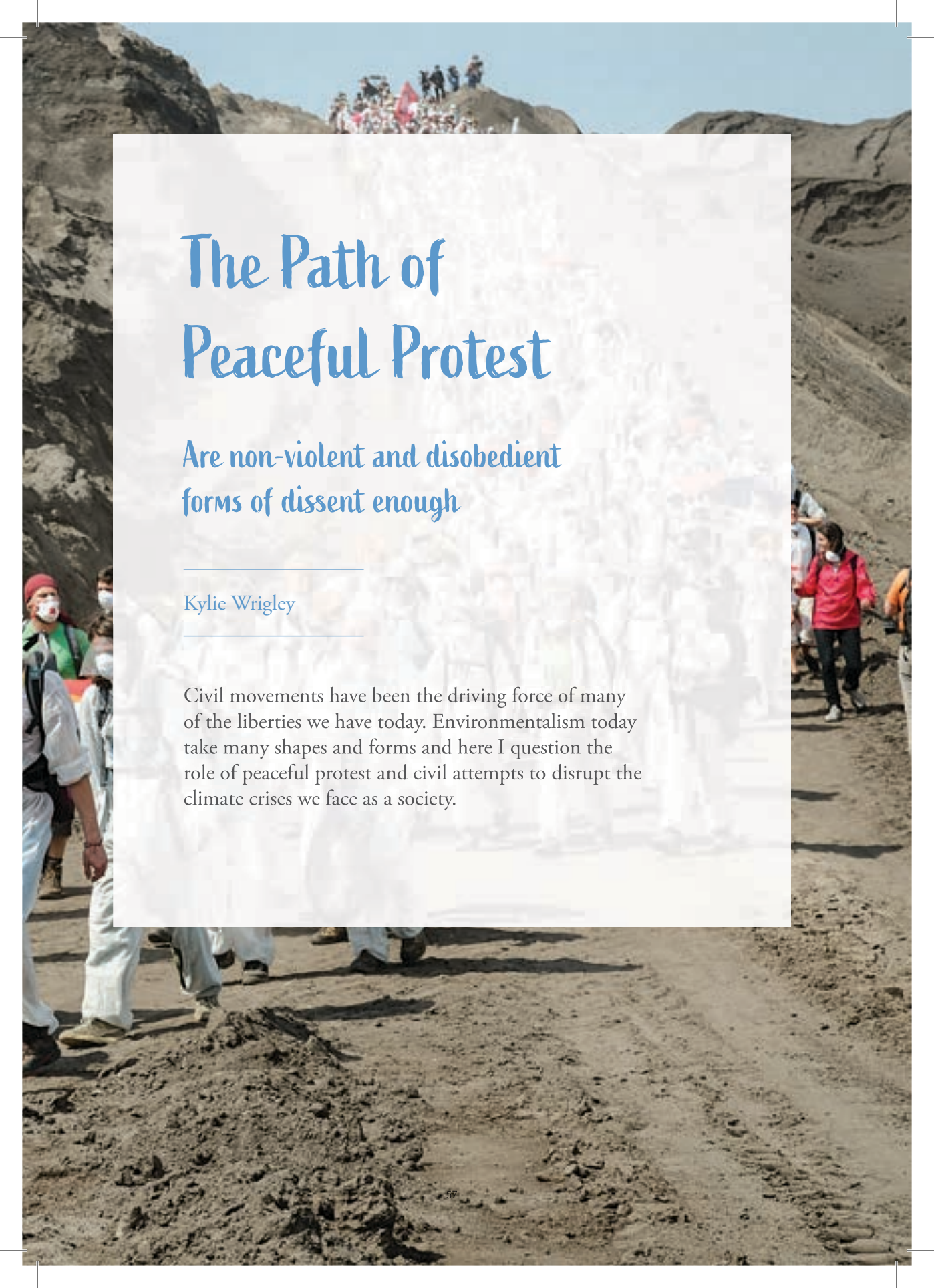
Translated by Anja Firing

Translated by Pekka Sammallahti

The Path of Peaceful Protest

Are non-violent and disobedient forms of dissent enough

Kylie Wrigley

Civil movements have been the driving force of many of the liberties we have today. Environmentalism today take many shapes and forms and here I question the role of peaceful protest and civil attempts to disrupt the climate crises we face as a society.

History tells a hopeful story with massive gains for human justice. Consider the powerful gatherings performed by the suffragette, civil rights, marriage equality movements. These are sometimes disruptive, often creative, and always demonstrations of people power. However, today there are still many atrocities that humans are inflicting on each other and our natural environment. Island nations drowning in rising seas, gas fracking on traditional lands without consent, the wholescale destruction of forests, woodland and species for food and feed. The impacts of climate change are likely to be massive[1] and are largely agreed to be the greatest challenge humankind has ever faced. However, there is a lack of willingness to change our ways. Fingers are pointed in every direction to say who is to blame and who should respond while heads turn the other way.

Despite the resolutions that are available right now, climate action in some countries is stalling. I write this while passing through a huge Austrian wind farm and reflect on my home country. Australia, in contrast, continues to burn hydrocarbons, explores for new coal, gas and oil fields and avoids targeted commitments for renewable energy and emissions reductions. In this developed nation, the Minister for Environment responded to the special IPCC report by criticising the world's leading scientists for calling to end coal power.[2] A piece of coal has even been brought into the Australian parliament by the now prime minister as a prop so to say there is no need to fear it. This, coming from an affluent man who will never be forcefully removed from ancestral land or risk losing the family's livelihood and crops to flood or drought.

While some see no issue with using fossil fuels at all, others are apathetic or distracted. Research supports what I have heard in the movement building conversations I have had. People do care, they are just overwhelmed,

unmotivated and despairing.[3] This is hardly surprising given the scale of the global response necessary to keep warming to 1.5°C (or even 2°C)[41]. Can we do it? How must our systems and behaviours change? How large an uprising is necessary to overcome political heel dragging?

Fortunately, there are thousands of people who refuse to stand idly by allowing this environmental devastation to continue without opposition. There are many ways in which people are digging deep within themselves to dutifully, disruptively and dangerously dissent.[5]

Peoples climate march. Photo: 350.org

I've observed and been part of many of these disruptive) dissent actions. They are as diverse as the people within the movement. I've helped train and prepare people to put their bodies on the line as they risk arrest to stop traffic and lock down the headquarters of oil and gas giants or the politicians who are in bed with them. We've been inspired by visuals from the front line of people young and old locking onto freight rail tracks or walking purposefully onto mine sites and taking over machinery. Our community is learning to stand in solidarity with first nations people and hold space for marginalised people's stories to surface. Other times our resistance efforts are theatrical, family friendly and creative. We've enjoyed 'craftanoons' to make heavenly wings and climate angel gowns to be worn at sit-ins,

protests, marches, and media opportunities. We've seen banners dropped from iconic landmarks and flotillas of kayakers in coal exporting ports. A personal favourite are the knitting nannas who stage multi day knit-ins to pester, in the most elegant, non-confrontational way the politicians who are preventing progress.

To some this work is threatening. It confronts people who have made certain career choices, people with routine behaviours that cause unconscious damage and reminds busy people that their lack of interest is another way they are not good enough. Civil disobedience feels good for some but is our dissent enough to be mildly annoying and mostly legal? Could there be different paths in places like Norway and Australia where our protest is, for now and for many of us, less of a safety risk? The catch to

CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE FEELS GOOD FOR SOME BUT IS OUR DISSENT ENOUGH TO BE MILDLY ANNOYING AND MOSTLY LEGAL?

Climate angels arrested. Photo: 350 australia

On May 8, 2016, the world's largest coal port in Newcastle Australia as part of the international Break Free action. An armada of kayakers blocked the Newcastle harbour entrance while 70 people blocked a critical rail crossing preventing any coal from getting to the port for over six hours. In total 2,000 people took part in the action shutting down the world's largest coal port for a day, preventing the shipment of almost 2 megatonnes of coal during the protest. Photo: 350 australia.

this being, for those outside of white middle class comforts, this risk is huge. Aboriginal deaths in custody are not to be taken lightly when asking people to fight to protect their traditional land. Marginalised people and those who are already in financial hardship are putting more on the line when they dissent the structures that oppress them. We have a role to act in solidarity too.

Our right to protest should not be taken for granted. I recall learning about the school children who demanded to be treated as equals during the South African apartheid regime. They marched in the streets and were met with gunfire. In 2017, 207 environmental defenders were murdered (although there are likely too many more that have gone unreported), most of whom in Latin America.[6] Our right to protest should be protected. I find it perplexing

that my colleagues and activist friends in Australia have been protesting to defend our right to protest. In my home state, parties have been attempting to pass a bill that would criminalise obstruction of work
While the stakes are being raised, so too are temperatures - extreme weather events are forcing people to leave home and legal battles of young people and first nations people are being ignored. Will the peaceful path lead the way to a better system and safer climate? Will colourful marches that barely make the media suffice? Will politics in the pub change votes? Will civil disobedience in city centres or extraction fields do more than bother a few workers.

I believe to some extent yes. Constant and escalating pressure from the public is necessary. I am momentarily motivated by sharing

On May 14, 2016 more than 3500 activists from all over Europe shut down the opencast coal mine Welzow-Süd in the Lusatia coal fields in Germany and cut the power plant Schwarze Pumpe - Europe's tenth largest emitter of CO2 - off from all coal supplies. Many entered the mine, others blocked coal trains and conveyor belts transporting coal to the power plant. Swedish energy company Vattenfall reduced the power plant's capacity by 80 per cent. After more than 48 hours, the activists stopped the blockade on Sunday, 15th May 2016. The mass action Ende Gelände ('here and no further') demanded the end of coal now. Photo: 350 australia.

Logging protest with forest angel.
Photo: Rainforest Action Network Australia.

disruptive experiences with veteran or new parent, migrant, student and retiree activists. The experience of taking action, standing up and making a noise is enlivening. It feels good to compare police issued move-on notices and debrief after successfully locking down a building in response to demanding political accountability. But a week later that action seems to have barely caused ripples in anyone's lives but our own. This can be exhausting. My fellow activists have been forced to meet in secrecy and leave phones on the other side of doors. Some have received violent personal threats. We have lost friendships and sleep so as to pursue justice. We have met in living rooms to grieve the loss of the world we have come to love.

Perhaps more peaceful rainbow worriers are needed. Perhaps peaceful protest is no longer enough. Only time will tell if our uprisings today will change the system of tomorrow.

WILL THE PEACEFUL PATH LEAD THE WAY TO A BETTER SYSTEM AND SAFER CLIMATE?

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Climate Brides

The Impact of Climate Change on Child Marriage and Conflict Creation

Radina Ugrinova and Sofie Van Canegem[1]

Climate change is a fundamental threat to humanity which has impacted many communities around the world. However, the worst effects of climate change have been experienced by poor households in the Global South, which are increasingly lacking the resources and capacities to mitigate the negative consequences environmental degradation has on their livelihoods, food and water security. One especially disadvantaged group is girls from families living in poverty. Girls usually experience some of the worst forms of inequality and violence due to their gender, reduced social status and financial subordination. One example is the practice of child marriage, a major violation of girls' human rights. It is also a phenomenon which is increasingly influenced by climate change and the cumulative loss of agricultural land. As a result, many communities are struggling to sustain their livelihoods and are employing child marriage as an adaptation strategy. In turn, the proliferation of child marriage can be viewed as a warning sign to peace preservation. This paper argues that child marriage is an important indicator of threats to peace. The conception of peace here goes beyond negative peace as the absence of war and armed conflict, and centers on positive peace, including the presence of social justice, equality, the absence of poverty and insecurity, and the elimination of structural violence. Thus, child marriage is examined as an indicator of conflict and violence in society, which is exacerbated by the vulnerabilities caused by climate change.

Photo: Pixabay

Climate change is a fundamental threat to humanity which has impacted many communities around the world. However, the worst effects of climate change have been experienced by poor households in the Global South, which are increasingly lacking the resources and capacities to mitigate the negative consequences environmental degradation has on their livelihoods, and their food and water security. One especially disadvantaged group is girls from families living in poverty. Girls usually experience some of the worst forms of inequality and violence by virtue of their gender, reduced social status and financial subordination.

One example of this disadvantage is the practice of child marriage. This is a major violation of girls' human rights. Climate change has a particularly insidious impact on communities in the Global South which have traditionally lived in conditions of poverty and disadvantage. Global warming is causing wide-scale droughts and deforestation. In turn, these phenomena result in the cumulative loss of agricultural land. Poor communities are impacted most severely by these conditions, and as a result, many households are struggling to sustain their livelihoods and are employing child marriage as an adaptation strategy. Consequently, the proliferation of child marriage can be viewed as a warning sign to peace preservation.

This paper argues that child marriage is an important indicator of threats to peace. The conception of peace goes beyond negative peace, i.e. the absence of war and armed conflict, and centers on positive peace, i.e. the presence of social justice, equality, and the absence of poverty and insecurity.[2] The absence of such core social anchors are strong indicators of structural violence and must be viewed as a serious threat to peace. Structural violence is defined in this work as the existence of structural impediments to

peace, which not only inhibit human rights and development, but are also preconditions of violence.[3] In this sense, child marriage embodies the proliferation of social injustice, inequality and insecurity in society. Thus, the phenomenon is examined as an indicator of conflict and violence in society, and as a threat to future peace (both in the negative and positive sense), which is exacerbated by the vulnerabilities caused by climate change.

The paper conducts a literature review of the existing academic works on the links between climate change, child marriage and peace. Due to the insufficient number of studies assessing the link between child marriage, climate change and peace, these issues will be assessed within the theoretical framework of structural violence. The link between climate change and child marriage will be discussed in terms of how environmental degradation adds to pre-existing poverty and vulnerability, and weakens social stability, as well as access to justice and to vital resources. Such processes, in turn, can be viewed as catalysts for conflict and a direct threat to peace.

Part 2 examines the general impacts of climate change, while part 3 focuses specifically on its effects on women and girls as an especially vulnerable group. Part 4 analyses the link between climate change and child marriage, by assessing this practice as an adaptation strategy to environmental degradation employed by poor households in the areas worst impacted by climate change. Finally, part 5 assesses child marriage as an indicator of the presence of conflict through the prism of poverty and structural violence.

Climate Change: Overview
According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, global warming is mainly caused by the increase of greenhouse gas emissions in the earth's atmosphere, resulting

Photo: Pixabay

in climatic changes.[4] Climate change is a catch-all term for all phenomena related to the changing environmental state which can be divided into two distinct, but interrelated categories. First, as short-term events that destroy property, livelihoods and lives in a single day, and second; as long-term processes that gradually change the landscape.[5] Some core events are desertification and floods, deforestation and rising sea levels.

First, the increasing temperatures, changing rainfall patterns, solar radiation and winds cause land desertification, for instance, in Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru.[6] The rise in temperature and subsequent decrease in water availability deteriorates the soil and decreases crop production. Desertification and drought can result in loss of livelihoods and displacement of communities. Temperature rise also cause glacier retreat rate inclines, which induce glacial lake outburst floods, for

example, in Nepal and Bangladesh. Glacial lake outburst floods cause loss of life, land and agricultural production; leading to unemployment, increased disease and property damage.

Second, deforestation causes both periods of limited rainfall, whereby the soil dries out, as well as periods of heavy rainfall, generating floods and erosion.[7] Many people in rural regions depend upon the water, food, medical herbs and timber provided by the forest. Therefore, deforestation increases (food) insecurity and livelihood instability, e.g. in Tanzania, Sudan, Cameroon, Kenya and Mali.

Third, global warming causes rising sea levels which results in loss of territory and flooding, causing increasing rates of casualties and the destruction of essential resources, such as water and food, properties and agricultural production.[8] Moreover, the salinization of soil reduces crop yields in cultivated areas

and contaminates drinking water due to salinity intruding into coastal aquifers. This might lead to health problems, as salinity in drinking water is associated with gestational hypertension, which can be lethal in low-income countries. Additionally, the sea level rise might reintroduce endemic tropical diseases as it creates a perfect breeding ground for anopheles mosquitoes (which spread malaria) and tsetse fly larvae. Consequently, rising sea levels threaten ecosystems, livelihoods and lives.

In conclusion, the catastrophic events related to global warming significantly disrupt food and water security,[9] and disturb agricultural production. Thus, environmental change impacts essential resources, such as clean water access, food security, sanitation, health and access to housing, and can be detrimental to vulnerable households and communities.[10]

Vulnerability of Women and Girls
"The continuing environmental degradation that affects all human lives has often a more direct impact on women."[11]

Due to social inequality, women and girls are increasingly exposed to violence during and after climate disasters.[12] For example, gender-based violence in Haiti increased after the 2010 earthquake.[13] Moreover, such events diminish resource availability and accessibility, and thereby create a scarcity of vital resources.[14] Water scarcity especially affects women and girls, as water is needed for hygienic purposes during menstruation and pregnancy,[15] and contaminated water results in significant health issues.[16] Food shortages also lead to a disproportionate decline in women's and girls' health. Women and girls from the Global South are in general disproportionately affected by resource scarcity.[17] The search

Photo: Pixabay

to diversify livelihoods and to access vital resources increases child migration among girls.

Along with economic, political and social factors, climate change instigates displacement and large-scale migration as a form of adaptation.[18] This encompasses significant risks, especially for women and girls. The 2015 Trafficking in Persons Report states that to reach another country, women and girls rely on smugglers, who may traffic and exploit them for sex work and other connected types of labour.[19] The 2016 Save the Children Report confirms this, linking climate change to an increase in human trafficking.[20] Moreover, during displacement, women and girls are exposed to sexual and gender-based violence and are likely to exchange sex for money or precious resources to support themselves and their family.[21]

A Driver of Child Marriage

Although climate change has been proven to have particularly negative impacts on women and children, there is increasing evidence that it has an especially insidious effect on girls' rights, as it exacerbates the practice of child marriage. For the purposes of this paper, child marriage is defined as "a formal marriage or informal union before age 18" which is widespread in many communities in the Global South and disproportionately affects girls.[22] This practice inhibits development, and hinders girls' and women's independence and autonomy, by violating core human rights,[23] such as the right to equality and non-discrimination, the right to education, the right to life and girls' sexual and reproductive rights. Women who marry before the age of 18 are also significantly more likely to experience domestic violence, compared to women who marry in adulthood.[24]

Recent studies on child marriage in the Global South indicate that the practice is on the rise, especially in regions experiencing the worst forms of poverty. For instance, UNICEF reported that in 2017, the rate of girls married before reaching the age of 15 or 18 in West and Central Africa was among the highest in the world; with 1 in 3 girls in the Central African Republic, Chad and Niger married before the age of 15.[25] In the same year, in Bangladesh 52 percent of girls were married before the age of 18.[26] These remain some of the poorest and most vulnerable regions in the world in terms of the destructive impacts climate change has on local communities. It is estimated that by 2030, more than 1.5 million girls worldwide will be married before the age of 18, in addition to the current 650 million women and girls who married as children.[27]

There are several factors which drive the practice of child marriage. For instance, tradition and social norms, gender stereotypes, inequality and discrimination, poverty and insecurity.[28] Poverty is especially important in relation to climate change, which further exacerbates financial insecurity and vulnerability. Due to the large-scale loss of agricultural land and diminished access to drinkable water, many households and larger communities are losing their livelihoods, food and water security. Those impacted most severely by such processes are households living below the poverty line, as they have diminished resources and capacities to mitigate the negative effects climate change produces on their income and survival strategies. A prime example is Bangladesh, where the large-scale loss of agricultural land diminishes the capacity of poor households to diversify their livelihoods and puts them at risk of starvation.[29] Thus, to cope with the added insecurity and vulnerability produced by climate change, they seek different adaptation strategies. Such strategies are aimed at reducing and managing the risks of climate change.[30]

One strategy employed by the families of young men in countries where the practice of dowry is widely accepted, is to seek to marry

Photo: Asif Man/Unsplash

off their sons to girls. For instance, in rural Bangladesh, child marriage has been directly linked to the increasing financial difficulties and diminished agricultural production caused by climate change, because as the family of the bride is traditionally expected to provide some capital to the groom's family in the form of a dowry, an increasing number of men marry girls as a survival strategy.[31] An additional adaptation strategy is employed by the families of girls who increasingly cannot afford to sustain their daughters. This is so, especially for poor families with many children, who seek to marry off their daughters as they struggle to cope with the increasing financial burden of feeding and housing their children.[32]

Another adaptation strategy for poor households is to push their daughters to seek employment in more affluent regions. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimated in 2013 that approximately "a third of the migrant flow from all developing countries is in the age range of 12 to 24 years," a large proportion being girls who migrate to seek employment as domestic workers.[33] However, the ILO also identified girls during migration as especially vulnerable to exploitation by smugglers, recruitment agencies and human traffickers. Many are sold into child marriage. Thus, climate change and the necessity to seek employment further exacerbate child marriage. A well-documented example is the large increase in child migration in India, where the combined effects of poverty and loss of livelihoods, have placed girls in additional danger of child marriage.[34]

Child Marriage: A Threat to Peace

In addition to the increasingly negative impacts of climate change, the practice of child marriage is also deeply rooted in gender inequality, discriminatory social hierarchies and the perceived inferiority of women and children in society. Recent data by UNICEF

suggests that although child marriage has been slowly declining in some regions, most areas where the practice is prevalent have shown little progress in reducing the number of child brides, and some regions were even identified as likely to see increased rates of child marriage in the future.[35] Simultaneously, the same study indicates that girls from poor households are at greater risk of child marriage today than in the past. Thus, given the direct adverse impact climate change has on food and water security, livelihood diversification and vulnerability, environmental degradation has an alarming capacity to drive more girls into child marriage. This practice is already being utilized as a survival strategy by poor households. Therefore, if the negative impacts of climate change on poor communities remain unmitigated, it is likely that the practice of child marriage in the most vulnerable regions will increase.

As a result, child marriage can be seen as an example of the lack of protection afforded to poor households impacted by climate change, and to girls at risk of child marriage. This practice is representative of systemic social injustice and weak socio-political institutions. This not only stifles development and poverty alleviation, but also increases the vulnerability of traditionally disadvantaged societies and/or specific social groups,[36] such as rural communities impacted by climate change, women and girls.

Structural violence is a direct threat to positive and sustainable peace in society, even in the absence of armed conflict presently.[37] It intensifies poverty and insecurity, and existing inequalities and grievances among different social groups, thus creating added vulnerability for traditionally disadvantaged groups, and eliminating the socio-political structures which safeguard communities from violence and exploitation. As a result, child marriage can be viewed not only in the context of girls' human rights violations, but also as an indicator of

large-scale structural violence and a potential threat to peace. Due to the growing negative impacts of climate change, the proliferation of child marriage can be symptomatic of an increasing trend of social violence and conflict. Therefore, it is crucial that this issue is conceptualized in the context of structural violence and the related impacts climate change has on poor and vulnerable groups.

In conclusion, climate change has a significant impact on child marriage, and the proliferation of conflict and violence by aggravating the vulnerabilities of poor communities, and by further entrenching existing inequalities and disadvantages. However, this inter-connectedness is insufficiently explored in academia. More research on the effects of climate change is necessary, regarding both poverty rates and practices such as child marriage, which produce structural violence and threaten peace. This issue is also reflective of the need for more gender-sensitive strategies in the fight against climate change. The fact that child marriage remains outside the mainstream debate surrounding climate change and conflict, indicates that the perspectives of the most vulnerable groups to the adverse impacts of climate change are insufficiently explored. In consequence, analysing child marriage as an adaptation strategy to climate change is one outlet which can allow the viewpoint of the most disadvantaged groups to be heard. Examining the issue of child marriage in this context can allow researchers and policy-makers to gain a fresh perspective on the struggles and survival strategies of those communities which are worst affected by climate change. The authors of this paper hope to open a fresh debate on the crucial link between child marriage, as an indicator of structural violence and a threat to peace, and climate change, as a driving force behind human suffering, inequality and disadvantage.

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Interview with a former SUM-er

Erin Dumbauld

A former SUMmaster's student talks about her exciting, current work with the Refugee Greenspace Initiative in this interview.

Photo: Brooke Porter

You were a master's student at SUM, when you were there what was (were) your focus(es)?

Before I moved to Norway, I had been active in educational garden programs in many forms and was particularly interested in food systems – including everything from production, to distribution, to consumption, to waste. So when I arrived at SUM, I was fairly certain I wanted to look at food in some way. My academic background is anthropology so the human element of food is often what I find most interesting. In my thesis, I explored how and why people choose to eat the things they do and in turn how this impacts food systems more generally.

Can you tell a little about the work of the organization?

The organization collaborates with refugee centers to create projects that connect people more closely with the environment and each other. Most often, we do this by setting up gardens. The idea is to engage refugees and asylum seekers in activities that connect them to nature while simultaneously nurturing their physical and psychological health. It also offers an opportunity for cultural exchange - the volunteers in the organization easily learn just as much or more from the residents of the centers as the residents learn from the volunteers. For example, when refugees come to Norway they may be overwhelmed with new information (e.g. advised to master Norwegian and learn a new set of social norms… they are essentially taken out of their comfort zone). However, when speaking to refugees, several have come from an agricultural background back in their home country. Even those who have not lived on a farm have shared that during times of intense conflict their family had a small-scale kitchen garden to subsidize the lack of fresh produce in their urban community. There is a wealth of agriculture experience and knowledge among the residents and although they come from different climates/environments, they know a lot about what makes a plant grow.

How did you get involved with the organization?

Interestingly enough, I learned about it through my network. Haha. That sounds aloof but it is true. My husband was speaking with an alumnus from the university where the two of them studied (though in different decades). I believe the topic came up because my husband and I had recently moved to Norway and this alumnus was asking how I was adjusting to Norway, what my interests were, and what kind of jobs I was looking for - trying to be helpful, I think. And when he learned about my work in educational gardens and volunteer efforts for social and environmental justice programs in the States, he mentioned that his daughter-in-law had started an organization that works with refugees using gardening as a platform for connection. When my husband told me about it, I was immediately interested and contacted Anise, the co-founder. She was very welcoming and we planned a meeting a couple weeks later. At the meeting, I met the other founder, Anne-Marthe, and I learned more about their vision, mission, trajectory, work on the ground, and other team members. It is an inspired yet simple idea implemented by a dream team of volunteers consisting of a small group of people from all over the world who have diverse experience and interests. I was super keen to get involved. Unfortunately, my life got a bit hectic after that meeting, so I did not become active in the organization until many months later. Luckily, they were still keen to have me on the team!

Photo: Markus Spiske/Unsplash

Had you been involved in similar organizations before? / Have you heard of other similar kinds of organizations?

There were aspects that were new to me and other aspects that were very familiar to me. As I mentioned briefly before, I have been active in different organizations that specifically use gardens and gardening as a way for people to connect - to either nature, plants, food, or one another. There are so many advantages to gardening - the social, psychological, physical, and societal benefits are innumerable (and backed by research!) so it is an excellent approach to social and environmental justice. What was new for me was working with refugees and asylum seekers. So, I have learned a lot about that since I joined RGI, such as the Norwegian political attitudes towards refugees and the challenges that confront refugees while they live in Norway.

There are similar organizations in the sense that there are many organizations that work at refugee centers, offering free language classes, swimming lessons, etc. The number of organizations and the volume of volunteers surprised me actually. However, there is not another organization in the Oslo area that solely uses gardening as a platform for interaction and engagement.

Have you faced any challenges with this process/work?

There are always challenges in any process. That is where inspiration and opportunities are born. It is about finding the right balance – for example, creating opportunities for people to interact with one another in ways that feel comfortable and appropriate for everyone. In the beginning, when we are first speaking with residents in a center, trying to discern if they are interested in having a garden or

Photo: Brooke Porter

not and what kind of role they want to fill and what kind of role we can fill - that can be uncomfortable. We are all individuals who do not know one another, who come from unbelievably different backgrounds, and who carry diverse cultural and social frameworks with us. Being aware of this is important but this is also challenging. It is important, to be honest with ourselves and acknowledge that we will make mistakes along the way, perhaps unknowingly do or say something wrong, inappropriate or offensive. This is part of the process. Everyone is learning by doing.

A recurring systemic challenge relates to the centers themselves. Refugee centers can close down unexpectedly. Since the current administration has essentially closed the Norwegian borders, this means fewer refugees are allowed into Norway and more and more centers are being closed. On the ground, this means that families and individuals are moved

from one center to another and the gardens we have established and the relationships we have built are uprooted.

What do you see the role/significance of this kind of work?

With the principal goal of building community - as transient and fleeting as it may be – the organization offers a platform for interaction and connection at a time when it is critical to connect with people, particularly communities that are removed from mainstream society. I think that the more bridges we collectively build, the more differences dissolve and the more the mentality of 'us' and 'them' diminishes. When this happens, then local, regional, state, and global agendas prioritize propositions that are fundamentally based on the inclusion and consideration for everyone. This becomes the only possible way forward. To me, this is the logical (maybe

a bit optimistic) development of creating opportunities for people to come together. Of course, I think it is particularly pertinent that gardening is the platform. Gardening gives us a hands-on opportunity to actively take part in ecological systems. There is something magical about watching a plant develop from a seed to a flower, to fruit, to seed again – and better yet, being part of that unfolding as a gardener! This involvement can open our minds to how profoundly connected we are to the planet, soil, insects, weather, everything. Gardening becomes a tool, or doorway, from which someone can actively connect with nature and relearn the innumerable ways in which we are part of much larger ecosystems. This requires us to move outside of our own lives, our individual thoughts, and our personal experiences and to contemplate the bigger patterns of nature.

What would you describe the effect of gardening etc is on the people you work with? / Does it have an effect on the community?

There is heaps of research suggesting that this kind of work is beneficial in many ways. However, I don't feel that it is my place to say what kind of individual effect this has on the children and adults that we garden with. We have tried to 'measure' the effects of this project but because participants are moved throughout Norway on a consistent basis throughout the project, often unexpectedly, it can be difficult to 'measure' how the project has impacted their physical and mental health before and after (e.g. how can we follow-up when we cannot connect to participants after they have left?). In order to achieve such an undertaking, we would need more support from UDI and more resources. Currently we ask our garden/project managers to evaluate how the project at each site has gone from their personal perspective. Ideally, we would like to better understand how the

Photo: Brooke Porter

residents feel about our projects and this is definitely on our long-term agenda. The organization is still young and we hope that we will gain the capacity to take on this work in the future.

I can expand a little on how it affects me, though. I learn new things every time and am amazed at the human capacity to be present in the moment. Many of the residents have been through hell and many are still processing the trauma they have experienced, often with very little formal support to do so. And the uncertainty and vulnerability that defines their life here in Norway – whether they are allowed to stay or have to go back to where they came from - unable to work, living apart from the rest of society in many ways, entirely dependent on political whims, and government support - this kind of liminal existence must be incredibly difficult. Yet when we come on Sundays to forage, garden, visit local farms, or play outdoors, the residents are keen to join in and interact. The families and individuals are able to live in and enjoy the present moment despite everything. That is a testament to the human spirit in some way.
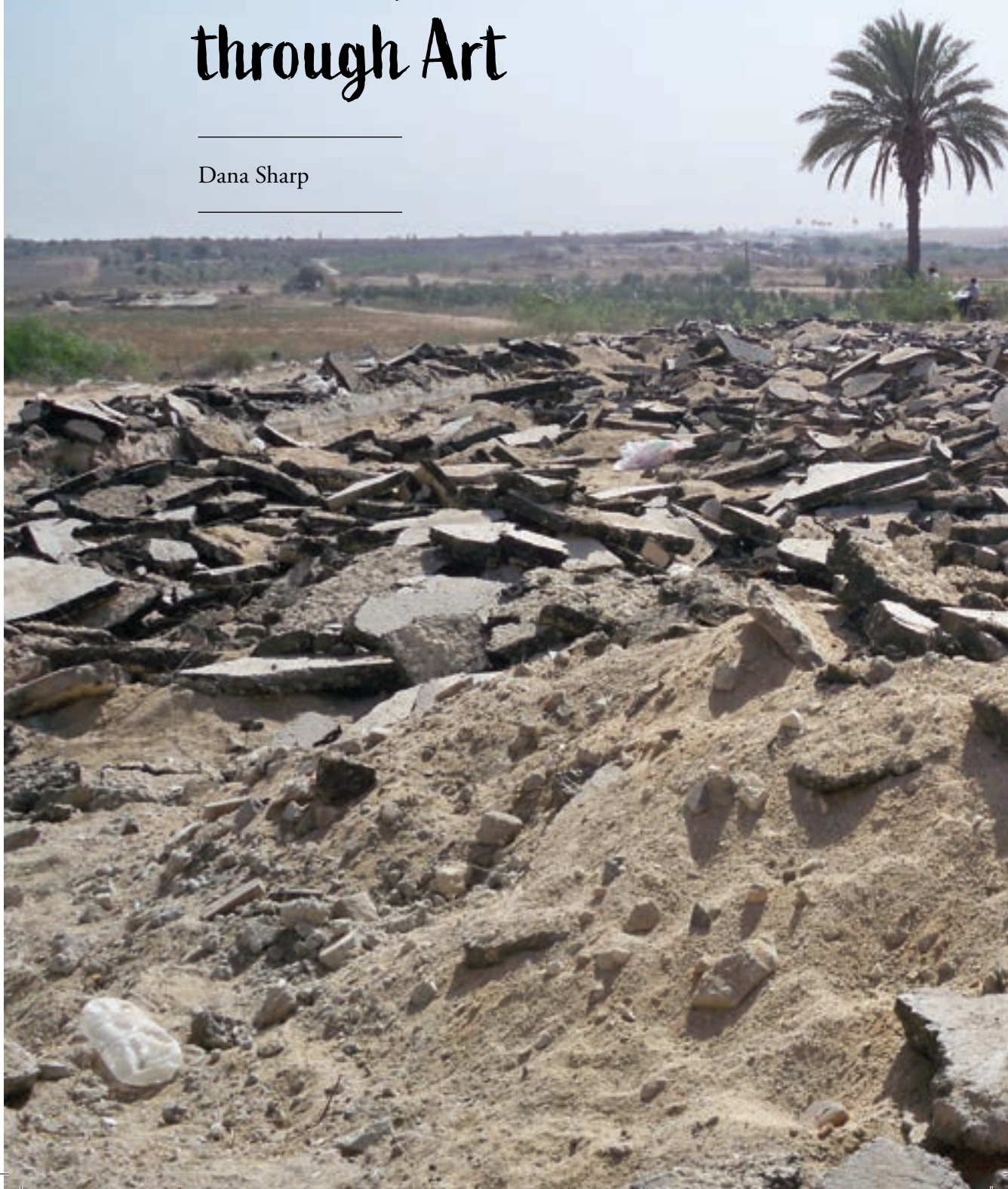
Learn more at:
https://www.refugeegreenspace.org/

Crafting Peace through Art

Dana Sharp

During the last seventy years, the Gaza Strip has seen vast changes and violence from land seizures and occupation, to bombardment and the ongoing blockade with Israel. In an environment where lives, infrastructure, and dreams endure continuous assaults, peace appears only a mere illusion. Fortunately, art can offer an outlet for creativity, self-expression, and community-bonding; helping Gazans to recover from trauma, and craft peace within a stressful and dangerous environment.

Photo: DYKT Mohigan

In the aftermath of conflict and face of oppression, art can offer a promising mechanism for finding peace and healing within a tense environment. Since the establishment of Israel in 1948, the Gaza Strip repeatedly witnesses occupation, bombardment, and the destruction of lives, infrastructure, and dreams. Yet, despite widespread poverty and the continuous threat of danger, art stands as a way of coping, overcoming adversity, holding on to hope, and retaining a voice and identity within a dangerous environment.

This article is adapted from my bachelor's thesis, The Art of Moving On: Crafting Artistic Developments in the Gaza Strip, which chronicled the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, highlighting the importance of art for relieving pain, providing opportunities, and addressing daily stressors. The following sections discuss different artistic interventions and events, helping Gazans to find peace amid the blockade and long-lasting conflict with Israel.

An Environment of Trauma and Oppression
Coloring History: Loss of Territory, the Intifada, and Now
In 1947, the United Nations developed a partition plan, seeking to create an Israeli and Palestinian state in the Middle East.[1] Under the plan, 55% of Palestinian lands would be taken to develop Israel.[1] However, in 1948, Israel seized 78% of the land[1] resulting in the destruction of towns and villages and the displacement of Palestinians in what is known as the Nakba or "Catastrophe." [2] At the close of the fleeting Arab-Israeli Six Day War in 1967, the remaining 22% of Palestinian land was annexed by Israel: creating an influx of Israeli settlers and forcing around 300,000 Palestinian refugees to flee their homes.[3]

Under Israeli rule, Palestinians felt oppressed, leading to "support for a mass popular rejection of conditions of life under

Image: Noorrovers

occupation."[3] Springing from northern Gaza's Jabalia refugee camp, the first Intifada or "uprising" began in 1987.[3] Using boycotts, violence, and collective measures of resistance, the Palestinian struggle against Israel continued until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993.[3] Unfortunately, peace and liberation from Israel never came. Erupting in 2000, the Al-Aqsa Intifada was a second revolution characterized by less support and more violence.[3] Following the death of the president of the Palestinian National Authority, the 2005 elections saw the fading of the second intifada and the gradual withdrawal of Israeli forces and settlers from the Gaza Strip.[3] The 2007 Gazan elections saw the transfer of power to Hamas, resulting in an Israeli-led air, land, and sea blockade making access to resources and supplies even more challenging for Gazans.[4] In 2008, the year long Israeli Operation Cast Lead to curb Hamas-led violence towards Israel, killed 1,400 Palestinians and only 13 Israelis.[5] Then, for 50 days in 2014, Israel's Operation Protective Edge bombed trapped Gazans, destroying schools, hospitals, factories, mosques, power plants, and agricultural lands.[6] The assault also saw the killing of 2,200, the injuring of 11,200, and the displacing of over 500,000 Gazans.[7]

Dealing with daily stressors of life under Israel's blockade of Gaza poses another set

of obstacles for Palestinians. According to the UN, 70% households only have running water for a handful of hours every few days.[8] Additionally, there is not proper sanitation or mechanisms for treating water, compromising hygiene and discharging untreated wastewater into the Mediterranean.[9] At least 47% of households in the Gaza Strip face some sort of food insecurity, 42% of workers are unemployed, and 55% of energy needs are not met.[10] The daily struggle to get food, make a living, and survive in a place with virtually no opportunities can lead to further depression and distress.[11]

Research of trauma-related psychiatric disorders from the Gaza Strip and Nablus in the West Bank, found that of 650 children under the age of 15: 51.8% witnessed murder or physical abuse, 36.6% had property lost or destroyed, 26.9% lost a close family member, and 22.3% were threatened.[12] Of 667 adults, 53.8% saw murder or physical abuse, 28.8% had property lost or destroyed, 36.0% lost a close family member, and 32.7% received threats.[12] Resulting from the violence, 33.8% were reporting anxiety related disorders, 19.4% felt fearful, and 19.9% felt sad.[12] Findings from another study of Palestinian kids shows only 2% had no signs of PTSD.[13] There is further research, revealing that even ten years following a traumatic event, children may still experience resulting symptoms,[14] such as difficulty forming relationships, challenges concentrating, anxiety, and depression.[15] With the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, discovering effective means of overcoming trauma and navigating daily stressors in a dangerous environment remains a challenge, but is critical to promoting Gazan wellbeing.

Artistic Methods of Recovery
Recreating Identity through Art Therapy
Art therapy provides opportunities for Gazans to heal their wounds, create a sense of community, and re-empower themselves.[16] Utilizing a wide range of visual arts, poetry, music, and dance, expressive arts therapies help "foster human growth, development and healing."[17] Art allows one to use non-threatening materials to communicate about tough events, while empowering and re-asserting individual identity through freedom of self expression.[18] Further evidence shows that making art creates neurological connections between emotions, the mind, and body, effectively mediating symptoms of trauma and PTSD through symbolism and the creation of narratives.[19]

Art therapy is especially useful in mending familial relations, allowing for communication and empathetic understandings to be developed through symbolic and metaphoric means, without direct confrontation towards individual family members.[18] In children, feelings of withdrawal and marginalization may result from the struggle.[15] To counter these symptoms, the Near East Cultural and Educational Foundation, launched the joint, Kids-to-Kids Program, between Palestinian kids in the West Bank and Gaza, and children in Canada.[18] This initiative let children interact,

"ART THERAPY PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES FOR GAZANS TO HEAL THEIR WOUNDS, CREATE A SENSE OF COMMUNITY, AND RE-EMPOWER THEMSELVES."

Photo: DYKT Mohigan

express, and exchange their interpretations of 'self' and 'community,' with the goal of building "empathetic bridges among children of different backgrounds."[20] A different study in Gaza saw many students reporting that drama, making art, and engaging in fun group activities were favorable strategies in collective trauma therapy.[15] Ultimately, for participants, "making art makes whole what has been shattered by trauma."[21]

A New Rhyme & Rhythm

Art is not just aesthetic, but also manifests in the creative wording of narratives, lyrics, and melodies of songs. Traditionally, Palestinian culture highly values oral art, such as poetry, whose popularity and cultural reverence stems from mysticism and Islamic Sufi poets.[21] The struggles of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lead to suffering, creating voices of bitterness, and solemn reactions to pain which may stifle other emotions.[17] For Palestinians, poetry's prominent artistic role for expressing pain,

loss, and despair makes it a legitimate and agreeable method for expressing emotion.[17] There is also a rich tradition of using music for rituals, self-expression, and healing purposes.[17] In Palestinian music, improvising is vital to the production of tunes, allowing for an individual's creativity to shine through,[17] providing a sense of empowerment vital to recovery.[18] Not only are there songs for a great variety of themes, but in group singing, one's voice can safely join alongside others, without feeling put on the spot, or needing to make eye contact with anyone.[22] By stimulating traumatic memories in a non-threatening way, music can address wounds and help remedy symptoms of PTSD.[23] Since kids naturally connect to music, it serves as an effective "voice for trauma" in overcoming pain.[23] Besides remedying psychological distress, music has other positive benefits. Since 2008, the Gaza Music School, has been engaging Gazan youth, by providing opportunities for students to learn to play instruments, perform in the Gaza

Orchestra, and offer training to open new doors like the possibility of one day touring abroad.[24]

Creating Opportunities and Restoring Hope
The Use of Graffiti in Overcoming Adversity

Graffiti has been around since ancient times, and can represent any sort of inscription, design, or defacement on public or private property without the prior consent of the tenant or owner.[25] Despite receiving a negative reputation, graffiti in the Gaza Strip serves as an important artistic device: uniting the community, maintaining hope, and bringing color into the lives of those being repressed. Graffiti and murals in Palestine took off during the first intifada in 1987,[26] when there were over 1,500 orders restricting the mundane practices of everyday life.[27] During this period, Gaza had no radio or TV stations, and even the Palestinian newspapers from Jerusalem were censored.[28] This led to the "battle of walls," spurring a fierce, hasty, and dangerous competition to paint slogans and messages without being caught.[27] Gazan graffiti spoke to a wide range of community members: spreading propaganda, mobilizing the public to support actions against Israel, justifying retaliations, and commemorating martyrs and other violent events riddling Palestinians.[26] Writing on the walls brought ideas of politics, gender, and religion into the public domain for

discussing and debating.[27] Additionally, graffiti was signed not by an individual, but with the name of a political faction or group: protecting the artist and promoting collectivity.[27]

The 1993 Oslo Accords, ushered in the new peace process, washing away the political slogans.[28] Years of fighting strained the flow of money, leaving houses free of paint and plaster, and making Gaza look exceptionally gray after the clearing of the graffiti.[28] Once more, graffiti became a mechanism for breathing life and color back into the walls and buildings throughout the Gaza Strip. Newfound freedom from Israeli forces meant no fear of arrest: allowing artists to spend more time on their imagery.[26] Messages of hope for a fully independent Palestine and of one day returning to the homeland kept marking the walls.[26] New themes also began appearing to celebrate the good things in life, including weddings, and the completion of hajj, or Islam's holy pilgrimage to Mecca.[28]

During the second intifada, graffiti was again aiding the resistance movement.[29] Under Hamas rule, artists took calligraphy lessons to learn to blend graffiti with calligraphy.[29] Merging calligraphy into graffiti writing, led Gazan street art to have a unique blend of modern messages spread through traditional and culturally significant Arabic styles.[28] Following the withdrawal of Israeli soldiers in 2005, the walls were free for painting, self-expression, and ultimately empowerment.[29] However, with Hamas's military takeover of Gaza in 2007 there became a new censorship: silencing voices of political opposition, while spreading issues of morality and other Hamas propaganda.[29] Despite changes in imagery and themes over the years, graffiti emerges as a means of communicating, motivating, and uniting Gazans to tackle injustice and improve their lives.[29]

Photo: Flickreview

Creations of Survival

During the second intifada in 2002, violence, roadblocks, and military checkpoints gave way to the A.M. Qattan Foundation's Young Artist of the Year Award, which brought Palestinians from the Gaza Strip and other territories to show their art in the West Bank.[30] Due to the escalating violence of the intifada, the event timing was significant, and as art critic Gerado Mosquera observed, "in situations like this, you need more art."[30] Under the harsh realities of Israeli oppression, self-taught artists used found materials to craft images reflecting their daily realities.[30] Palestinians, "suffering from both repression and defeat, regarded each artistic work that came to light under the grim Israeli presence as a source of national pride and self-reassurance."[30] The exhibitions became a rallying point for hope and healing, where Palestinians could unite through common heritage and observe artworks reflecting

their own experiences.[30] Besides bringing Palestinians together, the exhibition also presented vital opportunities for its finalists, such as the chance for artists gain international fame and potentially mobilize more support for the Palestinian cause by getting to show their work abroad.[30]

Similarly, an exhibition at the Museum of Children's Art in Oakland, California, showcased the drawings of Gazan children.[31] Though nearly canceled due to the controversial and politicized nature of the theme, the drawings shown gave outsiders a glimpse into the lives of those growing up in the Gaza Strip.[31] There were many images depicting bombings, water scarcity, and other disheartening conditions that no child should ever endure.[31] This exhibition was especially important, giving Gazan children an audience for their artwork, and offering an outlet to touch the hearts of others who could

Photo: DYKT Mohigan

potentially put pressure on Israel to change its policies towards Gaza.[31]

Bringing people together to create public art displays, murals help offer closure and healing by encouraging collectivity.18 Following an Israeli assault on Gaza in 2009, students from al-Aqsa University's College of Fine Arts met to make a mural.[28] In a place with few art galleries and no museums, a mobile exhibition of paintings could move around the city, brightening the hostile environment. [28] Besides feeling good by helping lighten fellow Gazans days, painting publicly felt liberating to the students: giving them the opportunity to recover, and tackle the challenges of everyday life.[28]

Years of struggle, violence, displacement, and longstanding injustices continue to threaten Gazans each day. Despite horrendous ongoing conditions from Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, and historic implications of the Nakba and intifadas, hope is not lost. Though art alone cannot be responsible for restoring peace in the region, art can serve as a mechanism to grow inner-peace within the restrictive, dangerous, and stressful Gaza Strip environment.

Overall, this article sought to offer a brief overview of the historical implications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, while giving a glimpse into how different art forms can aid in alleviating daily stressors, recovering from trauma, and cultivating new opportunities for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Currently, there stands a need for further research and increasing international awareness towards the struggles and oppression facing Palestinians today. Maybe in time, the environment in the Gaza Strip can transform from one of conflict, to one of peace.

Photo: The Advocacy Project

"MAYBE IN TIME, THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE GAZA STRIP CAN TRANSFORM FROM ONE OF CONFLICT, TO ONE OF PEACE."

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Chasing
Inner Peace

Mariandre Navas

The universe tends to advance towards disorder and chaos. The world's climate is marked by irregularities, abrupt hurricanes, unexpected earthquakes and other forms of chaos. Zooming-in further, politicians representing different nations often engage in disputes and show self-centered behaviour, which eventually leads to chaos. Murphy's Law all over.

Amidst all these macro-level examples of conflict, from the universe to the nation-state, I ask myself: What about the micro-level? What about our inner mental chaos? Are we putting this subject on the table? And most importantly, how do we handle this animal? Where can we find inner peace in this era? The answers may be closer than you think.

Photo: Pexels

The Rise of Prozac

Our era may be characterized by comfort, capitalism, technological fixes, longer life expectancies, cheap hot dogs, and an unprecedented level of heavy use of telecommunications; however, it is also witnessing the rise of mental health problems among human beings. According to the WHO, one out of four persons in the world will be affected by mental illnesses.[1] The WHO also reports that around 450 million people currently suffer from such conditions, placing mental disorders among the leading causes of ill-health and disability worldwide.[1] That's quite a big slice of the apple pie. Furthermore, mental illnesses of students from the UK, for example, have risen almost fivefold in the last decade.[2] Anxiety, OCD, bipolar disorder, depression are our new predators.

Why? Why are mental illnesses increasing? There are many factors at play, as we all know that life is complex, yet I found a compelling argument in Gro H. Brundtland's article, *Mental Health in the 21st Century*. She explains how "the radical shifts in society towards technology, changes in family and societal supports and networks and the commercialization of existence may account for the current epidemic of depression and other psychiatric disorders".[3] Let us allow this idea to brew in our minds for a moment. Focus on the radical shift in society towards technology. Social media tyrannosaurus, Facebook, has a slogan: "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life." Every time I am in the subway or train and I see people hunching their necks to scroll down their mobiles and many of them avoiding eye contact at all cost with the other fellow commuters, who are also scrolling on *their* mobiles, then I think to myself: No, Zuckerberg, you're doing exactly the opposite.

You are not connecting us. You are alienating us! You are building a cybernetic wall between people, making us social inepts and, I daresay, increasing depression, expectations and anxiety. Although this theory may sound far-stretched, the reasons why mental illnesses have increased is one thing; the other thing is how to combat them. No matter how or why one lands at these illnesses that produce mental conflict, the crucial question is: where do we find Inner Peace?

The Honest Mad Hatter

First of all, it is hard to get the skeletons out of the closet. Mental disorders are tabooed in our society. And I even dislike to call them "mental illnesses." I prefer the term "mental conditions." Nobody wants to be seen as the *Mad Hatter*, so we try to hide our true self behind the looking glass. Yet, accepting our conditions and being honest about them helps lighten the burden, in a weird magical way. It is like the guy that enters an AA meeting and says: "Hello, my name is Ralph, and I am an alcoholic." Ralph is being honest. At the very moment he lets the cat out of the bag, BOOM! There it is. Relief. Catharsis. The first step towards well-being. Honesty is the magical alleviating pill. The same goes with mental conditions. I know this for a fact. I have been diagnosed with bipolar disorder and OCD and every time I am open about it with people, I might get some weird faces in response, but it does not matter. Because I am being honest, mostly with myself. I am accepting my inner chaos. I am accepting my difficult bits, which, I have learned through time, can be the best bits. So, where to find Inner *Peace* in a frantic world? Place #1: In acceptance.

Depression, anxiety, addiction, panic attacks, eating disorders, or whichever. If we are able to accept our mental conditions, then we are closer at understanding their potential. Take

for example bipolar disorder. Virginia Woolf, Kurt Cobain, Van Gogh, Beethoven, Marilyn Monroe, Frank Sinatra, and Edvard Munch: all of them had bipolar disorder. All of them excelled in their artistic careers. Creativity may be the beauty of such condition. It is all about finding the brighter side of the shadow.

Gratitude is the Attitude

Buy more. Earn more. Travel more. Exercise more. Produce more. More. More! MORE! Our society injects us with advertisements, ideas, and media images that imply that we are supposed to be unsatisfied with our lives and constantly aiming at *more*. But what about the opposite? What about being grateful for what we have? What if less is more? What if we stop looking at the neighbour's grass? What if we stop placing our happiness and peace on something that is out there, something external, something others have, something in the future, and instead focus on the now, on what we have, on what we are?

Inner Peace and Happiness are internal conditions. Not something we find externally, in another place, another person, another state. Gratitude is a medicinal attitude for our inner dramas.

Therefore, place #2 where you can find Inner Peace: In your own back yard.

That means, in the present moment. In what's already there. And being grateful for it.

Photo: Pexels

Kind regards

So easily, so often, we tend to forget or maybe not even know about a crucial element that leads to mental progress and well-being. It acts like the chicken soup for our troubled brains: Kindness.

The word alone reflects warmth, compassion and empathy. It is by being kind to ourselves, by offering ourselves a hand instead of a critique or a judgement, that we can create a habit that is pivotal for healing. I am not talking about treating ourselves to a day at the

"GRATITUDE IS A MEDICINAL ATTITUDE FOR OUR INNER DRAMAS."

Photo: Pexels

spa; I'm talking about the inner monologue that goes on in our heads, the voice that tends to be our most critical, our worst enemy. That is the one we need to target, change, and tune into a kinder voice. We need to be careful about the messages we are telling ourselves. Negative words in our head can result in the three nasty amigos: shame, guilt, and fear.

Hence, place #3 where you can find Inner Peace: in kindness towards yourself.

Breathing Anchor

While Disneyland may market itself as the "happiest place on earth," there is in fact another happy place that is much closer (and might I add much cheaper) than any amusement park. It is recommended by psychologists and mindfulness gurus alike.

What mysterious place might this be? Look no further than your own diaphragm. It is a space that exists within each and every one of us: our breathing. It's an anchor point that can always be visited when our mind is going through turbulence. Breathing is the underrated panacea.

Through mindfulness meditation, I have learned that focusing on your breath is a powerful tool. It disconnects you from your everyday worries and focuses on the reassuring expansion and contraction of the diaphragm. It may sound very simple, but 10 minutes daily of mindfulness meditation that focuses on breathing has been clinically proven to help people cope with their psychiatric conditions.5

So, place you can find Inner Peace #4: In your breathing.

It may feel as though one concentrates in a repetitive, boring action, but your breathing, after a while of daily meditation, can become a calm and peaceful sanctuary that one can always visit when in trouble, when in need. Your breath is the anchor that keeps you still and calm, no matter how big the waves are
.

Wrap-up

So, there you have it. Four places, in a nutshell, where you can find Inner Peace: In acceptance, in gratitude, in kindness towards yourself, and in your breathing. If you reflect upon it, we all expose some degree of neurosis throughout our lives. Sigmund Freud would agree with me on that one. Mental conditions are the elephant in the room; and whether or not these conditions are a by-product of our lifestyles is debatable. Yet, they are currently present and inevitable. However, we always have a choice of how to deal with them, and the ability to find peace and contentment with our present and with ourselves is within us. It's always there. Always has been.

Lastly, being at peace with ourselves is only the beginning. Conflict and chaos may be able to filter and "zoom in" at many levels, but Inner Peace has the power to "zoom out" and spread at incredible speed. If we can understand that how we treat ourselves can be transmitted to others, that Self & Others is really the same thing, and that Inner Peace can become Outer Peace, then we can create a ripple-effect in the world. By cultivating Inner Peace within ourselves, we can sow the same seeds into other people: treat them how we treat ourselves, start a trend, watch them treat others the same way: in their social network, in their own country, from country to country, and why not? Worldwide. A better world due to a single person's inner-peace revolution. That's all.

"WE ALWAYS HAVE A CHOICE OF HOW TO DEAL WITH [OUR MENTAL CONDITIONS], AND THE ABILITY TO FIND PEACE AND CONTENTMENT WITH OUR PRESENT AND WITH OURSELVES IS WITHIN US. IT'S ALWAYS THERE. ALWAYS HAS BEEN."

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