



Around Europe

Quaker Council for European Affairs

No. 320 March 2010

Freedom and Violence

For the past two months I have been teaching ensemble building and movement at The Freedom Theatre, Jenin. During this time, power has been both my study and practice. What sort of power should a teacher have over her students? What sort of power is anger, violence? What sort of weakness? The insidious nature of violence has become apparent to me. I have been challenged to recognise it, acknowledge it as a function of life.

To build a strong ensemble of actors is to cherish the individual within the group, finding a shared vocabulary of movement with which everyone can 'speak'. Yet standing inside the West Bank, every power dynamic is complicated by the knowledge that the occupier is the stronger partner in an unequal dance. The power of the occupier, in fact, reaches into the realm of semiotics, to define violence as something done or not done by Palestinians, who find themselves defined by it. The Freedom Theatre sees theatre as resistance, and that resistance as not necessarily 'non-violent', though the live rounds fired are theatrical, not bullets. Though inspired, I also recognise that this definition embraces the semiotics of the occupier.

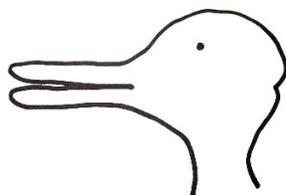
The insidiousness of hatred which renders violence mundane, is nowhere more apparent than in Hebron. The tombs of Abraham and Rachel are located in the heart of the old city. These sites are holy to both Muslims and Jews - the shared religious history combining with a shared geography, to create a shared heritage. However the Jewish heritage being created now, is one of cultural, ideological, and actual apartheid. Every Saturday there is a tour of the Palestinian part of the old town, which when I witnessed it was comprised of teenage Americans and Israeli settlers. Soldiers form a cordon around them, clearing the way.

Above their heads, wire netting erected by the Palestinian inhabitants of the old town are littered with glass bottles, stones and refuse thrown by settlers who have occupied the buildings above them. The young people are being shown a selective history of the old town, the architecture of which entitles them to throw a molotov cocktail into the upper room of a house on the edge of the zone controlled by the Israeli military. Inside this zone, Hebron has become a ghost town. Forced evictions clear houses for settlers, on the basis of the ideology supported and propagated by the tours. Some cling on, harassed by settlers who are free to carry machine guns.

Some weeks ago my acting students were doing an exercise in which one follows the hand of another, mirroring in an interplay which becomes a seamless exchange between leader and follower, an exchange so subtle the movement becomes mutual. However this exercise uncovered a dynamic startlingly different to this: one student was lying on his back, face turned away from his partner, with one hand raised. As he moved his hand, she followed it with hers. Since he would not look at her, she could not do anything but follow. I gently prompted her not to allow him to lead for the whole time. She nodded, but in fact could only change the situation by disengaging herself from the exercise. The Palestinians do not have the option of disengaging.

In the international discourse on the resistance to the occupation, the onus is on Palestinian protesters to restrain themselves from violence and seek non-violent means of resisting the occupation. The very blatancy of the extremes of violence of the Israeli Defence Force towards those engaging in forms of civil resistance at Bil'in and in Hebron, counter-intuitively removes that violence from the

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debate: it is almost too obvious to be talked about. Amongst international peacemakers the question remains, 'is violent resistance viable for the Palestinians?' Simultaneously it is impossible to ask



Credited to Anne Paq/Activestills.org

the question 'is a non-violent response to Palestinian violence possible for Israel?' Our implicit answer to both questions is 'No'. The reason for this lies in the violence done before a canister of tear gas is fired, a stone thrown, a protester shot or a rocket fired. The systemic violence engendered by the occupation precludes all of this, it is a face turned away, refusing to see. It is for Israelis to challenge this. The tours conducted by Breaking the Silence, an organisation run

by soldiers speaking out about abuses they have witnessed or perpetrated, are one way of turning to make eye-contact. Similarly, being welcomed by Jean Zaru to Meeting for Worship in Ramallah on Sunday, for the centennial of the dedication of the Meeting House, gave me much needed access to a discourse in which freedom is not defined as gaining the upper hand in the dance.

In 2004 a group of Israelis released a document which included the following paragraph:

For years, Israeli leaders have and continue to work hard to portray Palestinians as sub-humans. ... We reject this racist vanity with disgust, knowing that Palestinians, like any other people, are neither demons nor angels, but, just like us, are humans created equal. - Israeli Activists, Intellectuals Recognize Right of Return, Miftah 2004

The student actors of The Freedom Theatre are capable of a power which reaches the heart of what it is to be human, created equal. When they turn their faces towards each other.

Jo Tyabji
Director, Open Space

Transforming impasse: the way through conflict with Quaker listening processes

Doubts about climate science, a series of cold winters, and the lack of agreement in Copenhagen have left many doubting that climate change is really happening. However scientists have confirmed 2009 as the second hottest year on record. New data increases the concern that the melting Arctic permafrost is releasing huge amounts of methane, which could amplify climate change.

The political process shows little sign of delivering the 85 per cent reduction in global greenhouse gas emissions needed by 2050 to prevent the risk of catastrophic change. Politicians and the public have difficulty in engaging with climate change for many reasons, including its scale and complexity. Policy analysts have recently begun to talk about the need for a 'war effort' to cut emissions. A common enemy can help build social solidarity and collective effort, but for most people climate change is not sufficiently tangible.

A new report from QCEA, Transforming Impasse, suggests that it may be in offering a model of social solidarity without an enemy, that Quakers have most to offer. The essential message is that Quaker listening processes are particularly well-suited to addressing the

current world situation. These processes are exemplified in the way Quakers make collective decisions.

Some aspects of Quaker decision making - e.g. not voting - are shared by the consensus methods used in many activist movements. However, Quaker process is different, in that it is not about participants agreeing intellectually with each other; nor is it a process of negotiation between positions. It involves a spiritual process of self-forgetting, letting go of personal positions, listening deeply to each other and the Spirit, and sincerely seeking unity in recognising the right way forward. When the discipline is followed benefits include:

- An ability to engage with complexity, seeing the many facets of a situation
- Deeper exploration of issues than in normal discussion
- Enabling people with conflicting positions to find understanding and compassion for each other so groups can find a way forward and collective will
- Ensuring everyone involved has ownership of the decision.

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European Union Conference on Tax and Development

The European Union recently held a conference on tax and development to fight poverty. By hosting such an event, the EU has raised the profile of an issue that many consider to be one of the most crucial concerns of economic justice and the pressing need for development to reduce global poverty. The conference reviewed the importance of the tax issue for developing countries and outlined the problems they face.

The critical role of tax systems and revenues lies at the heart of effective and sustainable development. Adequate tax revenues would enable developing countries to put in place essential building blocks of development, including transport and power infrastructures, education and health. In contrast, currently they generally have lower tax to gross domestic product ratios than developed countries.

Taxation is part of the relationship between a state and its citizens. Bad government often goes hand in hand with limited state reliance on tax revenues as the state has little need to listen to its people, weakening accountability and democracy. Shockingly, the political and economic elite of some developing countries are not part of the tax base.

Domestic tax is also a more predictable way of financing government investment and spending than other sources of revenue such as international aid. Reliance on this source can lead to aid dependency.

The Problems faced by Developing Countries

Domestically, developing countries are faced with economic structures that not amenable to being taxed, weak administrative systems and inadequate tax legislation. These are compounded by the global system of financial transactions and the abundance of 'non-co-operative jurisdictions'. These have given rise to illicit capital outflows and to facilitated tax evasion and avoidance at low risk. Non-co-operative jurisdictions are generally known as tax havens, though secrecy jurisdictions may be a more accurate term.

The illicit capital outflows that are often channelled through or into secrecy jurisdictions have two sources. The larger source is international companies using 'transfer pricing practices' that are not in accordance with international standards, known as transfer mispricing. This is where part of an international group of companies exports products to another part of the same

group at an unrealistic price (a non-market price) in order to minimise its tax liabilities. The other source is wealthy individuals and families transferring their assets into secrecy jurisdictions.

The conference report reviewed some of the estimates of the scale of these illicit capital outflows. A number of estimates have been made, usually measuring different aspects, though this is not a straightforward exercise due to the un-transparent nature of the flows. One speaker at the conference estimated that commercial illicit flows are over six times greater than the amount of aid flowing into the developing world. This means that the amount of lost tax revenues is a serious drag on the ability of these countries to develop their economies.



Conclusion

Combating illicit capital flight, including tax evasion and fraud, have been given a higher profile by the communiqués of G20 meetings since April 2009 and this EU conference helps to maintain the pressure for action. Grand statements of intent are one thing but the real test is action to remedy the injustice. Since April 2009, many developed countries have been taking action with respect to secrecy jurisdictions but it is crucial that changes also benefit the developing countries and help the fight against global poverty.

Christian Aid and Tax Justice Network participated in the conference and have further information on tax justice on their websites.



(continued from page 2)

Quakers should be sharing their practices with others. The processes and discipline are probably best transmitted through experience - they are easier to learn than to teach. Some of the best experiences have come from Friends making quiet suggestions about process in the non-Quaker groups in which they participate - perhaps to have a moment of quiet to prepare for the meeting, or to have someone draft minutes in the meeting and make sure everyone agrees the wording, or to have ground rules

about not interrupting and building on what has been said, rather than debating. But to offer support to others, Quakers need to have their own regular experience of practising our listening disciplines. We also need to develop our own corporate responses to climate change and energy security. So it is in practising and applying our own discipline that we may most effectively offer a witness in the world.

Laurie Michaelis

Programme Assistant for 2010

Everything in my life has just been a coincidence. Having parents who loved travelling the globe with their children, studying for and graduating from a multi-disciplinary magister programme of American Studies, Japanese language and culture, and Philosophy, joining a local peace group, working for public broadcasting television, studying and working in Japan, working in public relations, working for the German Development Cooperation, completing a postgraduate programme in Peace Research and Security Policy, working with the German Ministry of Development's division for peacebuilding and crisis prevention.

on peacebuilding and development, commenting on the EU's action plan on fragile states, attending a number of meetings on peacebuilding and development (the most recent one being an exchange between Somali civil society and EU officials) and preparing the QCEA Study Tour 2010 (for which you can still apply).



But then I don't believe so much in coincidences. If you coincidentally would like to contact me just go ahead: sgoertz@qcea.org.

Simone

The list goes on with me joining QCEA as Programme Assistant in October 2009, which has entailed me joining the EPLO working group on peacebuilding, development, and security, writing a preliminary report on the arms trade between EU Member States and Israel as well as on the European Security Research Programme (ESRP) for one of our project advisory groups, writing QCEA's position paper

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