



Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs

Storytelling from the Frontlines

Forefronting the voices of
communities most affected
by militarism and the climate crisis





This work is licensed under the **Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License**. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

Storytelling from the Frontlines

Forefronting the voices of
communities most affected
by militarism and the climate crisis

First published February 2023

**Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs**

Square Ambiorix 50
1000 Brussels
Belgium

www.qcea.org

NO. D'ENTREPRISE 0420.346.728
TRANSPARENCY REGISTER 3960234639-24

Acknowledgements

This project was coordinated by Saskia Basa. We are thankful to Atiaf Alwazir and Clémence Buchet-Couzy for providing the creative vision and planting the seed of this project. This publication would not have been possible without the editorial and research assistance of Laëtitia Sédou (European Network Against Arms Trade), and the valuable input of Maya Street (QUNO Geneva), Linda Craig, Kate McNally, Jeremy Lester, Phillip Spencer and Tracey Martin. We are grateful to Céline Monnier and Dima Daibes for their transcription and translation support and to Dovile Bogusyte for her efforts in editing and designing this report.

QCEA thanks all storytellers featured in this publication for their work and dedication to imaginative, locally-adapted, people-centred approaches to the global climate and ecological crisis. The world can learn valuable lessons from their steadfast pursuit of climate justice, while in many cases facing repression and personal loss for their activities. The cultures of resilience they have nurtured in the face of rising militarism and securitisation of the climate crisis continue to inspire our work.

About the report

This report presents a number of testimonies of people living at the frontlines of the climate crisis and at the receiving end of militarist policies. Inspired by the Quaker practice of storytelling, the report seeks to amplify the voices of communities most affected, and the traditions of resilience they build out of necessity. Their experiences make visible the connections that exist between militarism, climate, and environmental issues around the world. They also demonstrate the crucial role creativity and imagination play in restoring our relationships with nature and each other and in finding climate solutions adapted to local needs.

About QCEA

The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) is a non-governmental organisation based in Brussels and founded in 1979 with the mission of bringing a vision for peace, justice and equality to Europe and its institutions. Inspired by Quaker experience and commitment to peace and sustainability, QCEA advocates for nonviolent and non-military approaches to conflict resolution. QCEA's work is rooted in an awareness that the climate crisis requires us to act as stewards of the natural world, engaging in deep social transformation that acknowledges

the intrinsic equality of all people everywhere. QCEA seeks to build support for people-led, human rights focused, justice-based responses to the climate crisis, and to mainstream them across EU-led efforts, both inside and outside its borders.



Contents

	page
1 Storytelling: why and how?	6
2 Yara Hasan: Planting seeds of hope in occupied territories	12
3 Cristóbal Pop: A lake ecosystem polluted, an indigenous community criminalised	16
4 Tateh Lehbib: People-powered shelter for a population displaced	20
5 Tiara R. Na'puti: An island community under the grip of overseas military interests	24
6 Collectif Vietnam Dioxine: Leading the struggle for ecocide recognition	28
7 The ZAD through the eyes of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination: Resisting state-corporate land grabbing through creative experimentation	32
8 Conclusion	36
9 Points for reflection	37
10 Annex	38

Storytelling: why and how?

Stories are the raw material that constitute humans' political and social lives. By evoking emotion and mobilising empathy, they define individual and collective understandings of the world and shape interpretations of current and future events. While policy decisions should have a solid empirical foundation, scientific assessments cannot capture all the complex connections and interdependencies that our societies are built on, nor do they capture the subjective experiences of those affected by policies. Storytelling can fill in this gap, drawing important lessons, meaning and direction from the lived experience of communities around the world.

Quakers have historically given special importance to oral traditions as part of their spiritual practice. Core components of the faith rely on oral transmission, including anecdotes and stories that have been passed from generation to generation. Stories are shared as ministry and are regularly disseminated as a vehicle to reflect on a diversity of voices, mediate different interpretations, and foster community. As recorded by the Pacific Yearly Meeting, "Stories can teach gently, but the learning is lasting"¹

Many of us are exposed on a daily basis to disjointed narratives, stories and images of inflatable boats, cities reduced to rubble and

collapsing ecosystems. Information overload can also make us desensitised, disengaged and apathetic. In this context, storytelling can be a valuable means to interrupt the dynamics of information saturation, and engage with the issues in a more meaningful way, beyond simplistic soundbites or clickbait headlines.

Centring communities most affected

Centring, uplifting, trusting, amplifying, valuing, affirming, upholding. These are intentions we wish to honour as we explore approaches to centre the voices of communities most affected by militarist and environmentally harmful policies. The following stories show the breadth and complexity of environmental harm associated with militarism, but also the obstacles militaristic and securitised policies pose to communities that act as stewards of the natural world while trying to find the best solutions to their needs.

There is a colourful, diverse horizon of possibility that materialises when communities find the space, resources and agency to pursue their own solutions and create their own futures. This compilation of stories shows the urgency with which governments, groups and individuals need to support locally-informed responses to the climate and environmental crisis away from the logic of militarism and securitisation.

“Stories can teach gently, but the learning is lasting”



¹ Pacific Yearly Meeting 'Stories Take Us Deeper', available [here](#).

Frontline storytellers

The selection of storytellers is not exhaustive but provides a global overview of the issues. In choosing the case studies, we were mindful of keeping a reasonable thematic, geographical, age and gender balance.

Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination

- 📍 ZAD, Notre-Dame-des-Landes, France
- 🤝 Social movement, ecosystem preservation, creative resistance



Tateh Lehbib

- 📍 Sahraouian refugee camps, Algeria
- 🤝 Sustainable housing, community resilience, social innovation



Yara Hasan

- 📍 Bil'in, Palestine
- 🤝 Food sovereignty, community-supported agriculture, education

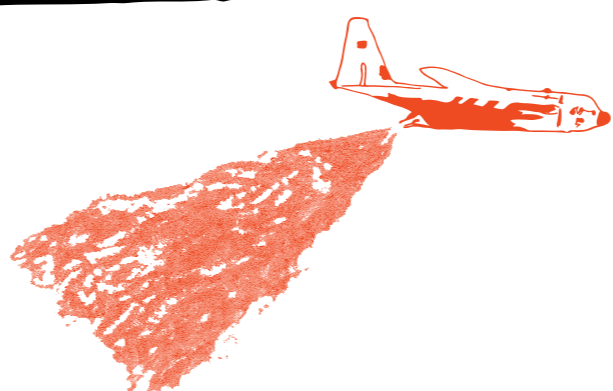
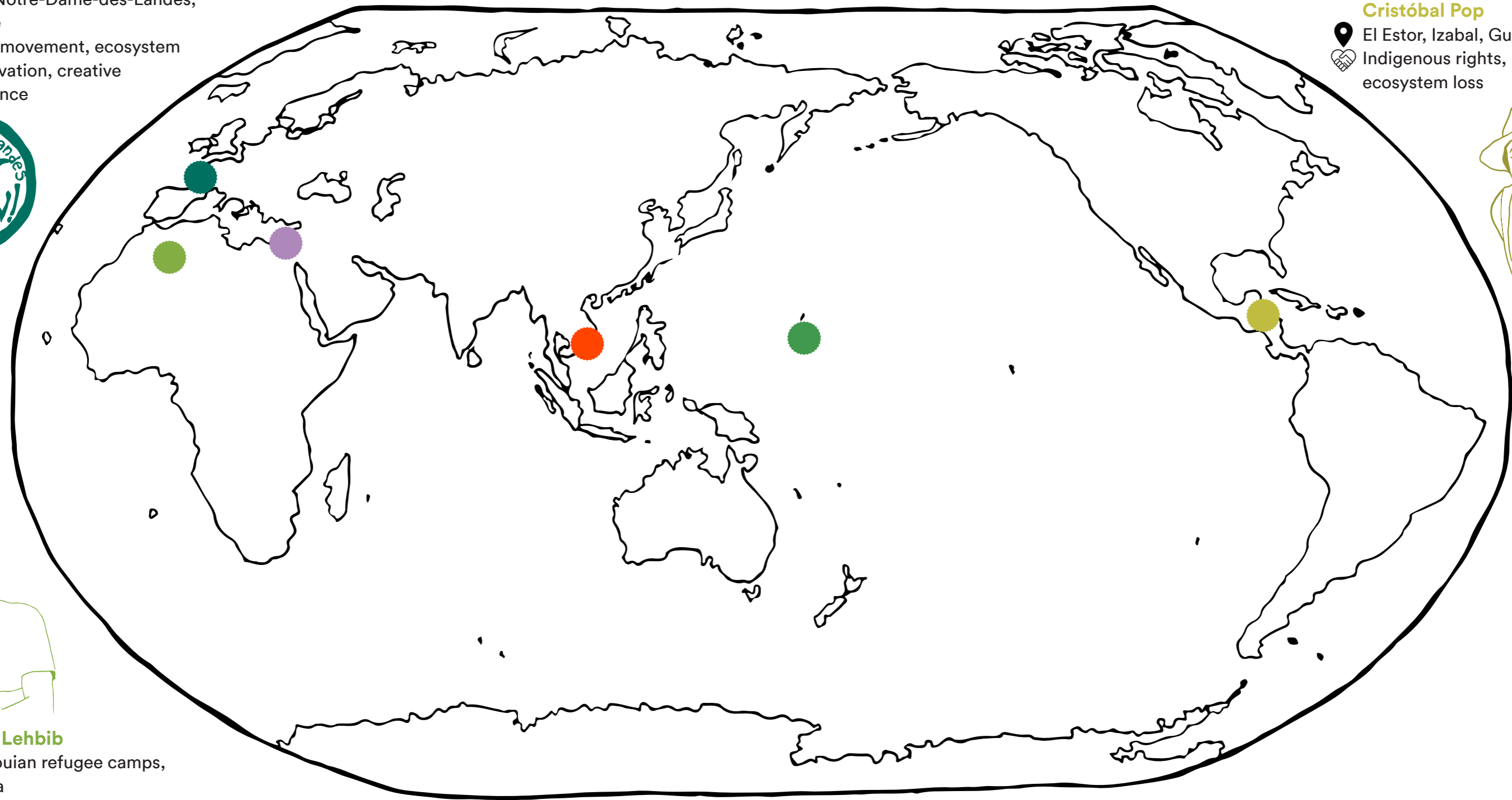


Tiara R. Na'puti

- 📍 Guåhan, Mariana Islands
- 🤝 Political education, indigenous rights, securitisation of climate

Cristóbal Pop

- 📍 El Estor, Izabal, Guatemala
- 🤝 Indigenous rights, mining, ecosystem loss



Collectif Vietnam Dioxine

- 📍 Vietnam/France
- 🤝 Ecocide recognition, social movement, victims' rights

☆ **Note on resilience**

In this report, the term resilience has been used to describe the resourcefulness that people show when facing new challenges that stem from changing circumstances. As much as resilience is something to be celebrated, this does not redeem state and corporate actors of responsibility. Resilience can help communities to cope with the effects of the climate crisis, but does not capture the full spectrum of action that is needed to address the root causes that drive the climate crisis and associated impacts. To strike the right balance, policy frameworks should acknowledge the structural and systemic issues at play, while recognising the positive effect and agency communities have in mitigating the impacts of the climate and environmental crisis.

With this understanding in mind, external actors can support resilience at the community level by building on what people are already doing, rather than importing ready-made solutions which are often laden with biases, and divorced from local needs, realities and expectations. In short, local ownership lies at the core of effective response and action, ensuring efforts can be sustained in time and do not generate new grievances or exacerbate existing tensions.

☆ **Note on transcription**

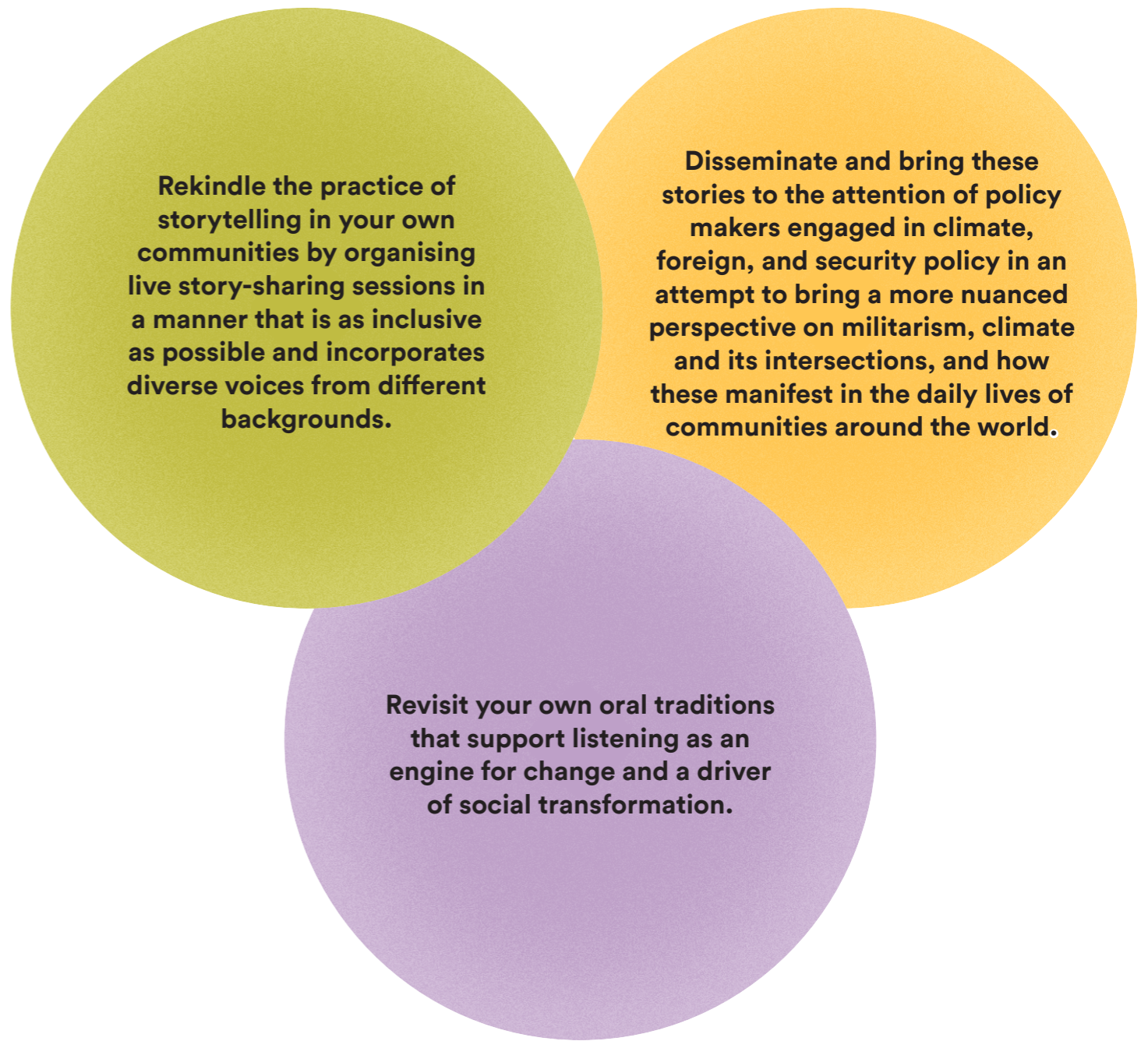
This publication is the result of interviews conducted between October 2021 and May 2022. The storytellers are people with individual lives and complex struggles, who inhabit diverse cultural and linguistic ecosystems.

The purpose of this publication is to amplify the voices of storytellers and let the stories speak for themselves. To honour this purpose and in hopes of remaining as truthful as possible to the story conveyed, we reproduced the words as they were spoken during the interviews. Square brackets were sparingly used to enhance readability, as well as footnotes with some additional information for context. The order in which ideas were narrated was lightly altered in some cases, and in agreement with the storyteller.



How can you use these stories?

Storytelling can enable expression of voices and narratives that are left out or overlooked by mainstream narratives, bringing a human perspective on complex, nuanced and intersecting issues. We encourage readers to:





Yara Hasan Planting seeds of hope in occupied territories

Yara is me. I was born and raised in Jerusalem until the age of 18, and continue to live in the city. I was raised in a middle class family, went to a private school, and then I went to Spain to do my BA there. I had a swimming scholarship to train for the Olympics: I was representing Palestine. (...) The beginning of my farming life started with a permaculture course. Permaculture stands for permanent agriculture and natural farming: how to design your farm in a way that it becomes a circle (...). So I started to do a course for two weeks and I was blown [away]. For the first time I thought: this is what I want to do and learn. And so I took the decision to quit my job and go to Spain again (...) to volunteer in farms and learn about food forests, natural farming and natural building also. And then I came back to Palestine and worked on a research on plants, local plants in Palestine. In 2018, I joined the farm.

Om Sleiman Farm: the story

Mohammed [one of the co-founders of the farm] was from Gaza. He (...) went to the US to study organic farming, and came to the West Bank to try to enter Gaza. He entered the West Bank by mistake but could not make it to Gaza. Because he was born in Gaza, he was not supposed to enter. So he (...) was stuck in the West Bank for a year. During this time he met Muhab, the other co-founder, from Jerusalem. Muhab had a hostel in Ramallah and when he met with Mohammed [they] started talking about the youth, unemployment, the economic situation, politics, farming... Mohammed convinced Muhab that they should start a farm. So they started looking for land, because land here is very expensive. (...) They met the landlord who is Abu Alaa Mansour who give [sic] them the land to use for five years without anything in return. He liked the project, he liked the

“ This project is not for the landlord, not for me, not for Muhab, not for the people who (work here)... is for everyone. ”

motivation, the idea of saving seeds, working with other farmers, etc. Of course the land was (...) completely damaged. (...) The land is around 1,5 hectares but we are slowly regenerating. We do a community supported model here which is a model that connects farmers to consumers. People sign up for the season they pay in advance and they get a weekly basket of what we have in the farm.

Bil'in: a militarised, waterless land, and a centre of resistance

Bil'in² is called Bil'in because it does not have any water. [Bil'in stands for] Bala (without) 'in (spring). (...) It is very dry. (...) That is a challenge but it is also [an opportunity] to transform places into lush and productive lands. (...) Bil'in is known for popular resistance. The Israeli government confiscated 60 percent of the land of the village to build the settlement Modi'in [also called Modi'in Illit, a settlement built on the land of five Palestinian villages: Ni'lin, Kharbata, Saffa, Bil'in and Dir Qadis]. (...) Before building the concrete wall they put a fence (...), and people started protesting. (...) And they were actually able in the court to push back the wall and get back 30 per cent of the land. So where the farm is located, is part of the liberated land. (...) So that is why we are very close to the wall and the settlement, because we are in the last part of the land that was taken back. It is also in Area C; (...) Area C usually are the lands close to the wall and settlements, or Israeli population centres,

² Bil'in is a Palestinian village located 20km west of Ramallah.

and it is very specific because it [constitutes] 62% of

the whole area of the West Bank³. It is mainly agricultural land, so places where you can't build any structure or even a fence or a greenhouse sometimes. You cannot have a well to (...) do rainwater harvesting. So basically, you cannot do anything. (...) The location of the farm was chosen not because it is beautifully

lush and full of rivers. It is mainly a symbolic decision. (...) If you can prove that you can do something here it will be easy to duplicate the model in easier places: in better, or easier, or greener, or less harsh environments.

The first year when they [colleagues] set up the greenhouse they had an order from the Israelis to stop building. Usually after this order comes a demolition order but we didn't have any updates [after] that. Demolition is always a threat of course. Our compost toilet is a structure, our shed for the tools... you cannot be here without structure. (...) We believe we do structures because we need them, because we believe it is our right and at any point, god forbid, they demolish it, we will build again. (...) [We are] challenging these restrictions in a way. (...) And if something happens we think that we have a really good support system as a farm or as a project. (...) We also believe that we are not alone, and this project is not for the landlord, not for me, not for Muhab, not for the people who [work here]... is for everyone: everyone

³ The Oslo Accords established a territorial demarcation dividing the West Bank into three zones: Area A (18%) Area B (22%) and Area C (60%). Area A includes territories where the Palestinian Authority administers civil and security matters, while in Area B the Palestinian Authority administers only civil matters. Israel maintains full control of territories in Area C, which includes all Israeli settlements and two thirds of the West Bank's fertile agricultural land. A report produced in the context of the UN Conference on Trade and Development concluded that "without access to Area C, sustainable recovery in the Palestinian agricultural sectors is not conceivable". UNCTAD (2015) 'The Besieged Palestinian Agricultural Sector', available [here](#).

who works, everyone who takes the vegetables, everyone who sees themselves as part of it. And with this feeling you don't worry I guess about what they will do or their threats.

Militarism, the climate crisis and the occupation

Not all people in Palestine are aware that there is something called climate change that is affecting our lives, that will affect our future generation, our kids. But of course we are aware [of] the occupation's effect on our environment and resources, how they took the most fertile land to build the wall, how they control your basic needs. And I think that is what justice is to me, to be able to have equal access to natural resources, to your land, to your trees, to harvest it, to irrigate it, to not worry about the basics in your life. (...) And to have equality. There is a constant building every day [in the nearby settlement] and there are three new buildings every two months. (...) You see how we live and how they live. How available the resources are for us, [how available they are] for them and what they do with these resources. (...) So as Palestinians we are aware how the occupation affects the environment (...). And how we are missing the basics of living a normal life. (...) We are aware but we don't have [the knowledge] around climate change (...). [Palestinian] people plant trees because the settlers burn their trees not because they are fighting climate change. People clean the water because they want to drink it. I think [climate change] is in our lives: It is present indirectly.

Regenerative agriculture and environmental education

Originally Palestinians are farmers all their lives and they eating from the land. It was only (...) in the 60s that pesticides and chemicals started being introduced with the formation of the occupation. And they started giving seeds to people and giving them sprays and telling them how to plant. Telling them you can make more money with this you can make more money

“ I think that is what justice is to me, to be able to have equal access to natural resources, to your land, to your trees, to harvest it, to irrigate it, to not worry about the basics in your life. (...) And to have equality. ”

with that. And people started stepping away from the traditional way of farming. Instead of planting 20 different crops in one piece of land you plant monoculture, one type, you spray it and the year after you need to spray it more, and the year after you need to spray it more, until it cannot produce anymore.

The problem with the consumers or the people is that they compare. They compare the prices of organic produce with what they see in the market. (...) There is nothing to compare and you cannot see it as the same thing. Nutritional wise, the time of work, the hours, the inputs, the knowledge, in all ways you cannot compare. I think people (...) are not aware how infested the products they buy from the markets are, they (...) still think that the vegetables are coming from small scale farmers, not big scale monoculture farms and full of pesticides.



We try to change the behaviour of the consumer with our model [community-supported agriculture]. In our model you cannot choose what you want in your basket, you give them a basket with what we have in the farm. (...) They cannot eat something that is not seasonal. We have people asking why they don't have tomatoes in December and we have to go back to basic: tomatoes don't grow in winter, so if you are buying tomato it is either planted in a controlled environment big scale or imported (...) So I think it is really exciting (...) that we always have communication with the members. You see them when they come and pick up their vegetables, you explain to them. (...) If people ask for healthier, organic, local movement will start growing local. Because the demand is controlling what the farmers plant.





Seeds of hope

With all our inputs we have a lot of challenges because usually the farmer should not worry about where to get the seed, and compost, and straw to cover the soil. You need the bigger institutions (...) [such as] the Ministry of Agriculture to make sure that these kinds of resources are available. So seed-wise, we try to save our own seeds but it is not always possible because you have to keep them in the ground for a longer period (...) and you need the right equipment to take them out of the plant

and save them in a freezer or a fridge. So we try as much as we can but we also get a lot of seeds from abroad. (...) There is an organization that produces heirloom seeds and every year we apply and we take and buy seeds from them. (...) You have to do your best and try to be as local and as sustainable as you can, but sometimes you have to make decisions that you are not comfortable with because you want people to eat healthy and you want the project to continue.

What gives me hope is to see the project continuing. (...) What gives me hope is when people come to visit and say 'wow'. When members are so happy about their basket, and they are appreciating it (...), but also when I see pictures of the farm 5 years ago or the trees, how lush and green they are. And now [in Autumn] when you see everything green and people [are] signing up. (...) Then you are on top of the world, and you see the value of what you are doing. You see that the land is giving you back and all the efforts you put are paying back. (...) So I think this gives me hope, and seeing more young people that want to come and volunteer and learn and be part of the project.

Further reading:

-  Follow the activities of Om Sleiman Farm on Facebook or Instagram.
-  Vice (12 July 2018) 'Farming as Resistance: Reviving Indigenous Agricultural Practices in Palestine', available [here](#).
-  Al-Jazeera (15 February 2019) 'Working towards food sovereignty in Palestine', available [here](#).
-  CounterPunch (27 May 2022) 'How Small Farms Are Reclaiming Culture in Palestine', available [here](#).



Cristóbal Pop

A lake ecosystem polluted, an indigenous community criminalised

My name is Cristóbal Pop and I represent the Gremial de Pescadores [Fishermen's Union] of the municipality of el Estor, Izabal [in Guatemala]. The Gremial de Pescadores emerged in 2017 due to an event that happened in the lake: a red stain that appeared and that [triggered the worries of] the fishing guild in the municipality of Estor. Never before in history had such a situation happened. Before the red stain appeared, we saw the deaths of manatees, we saw the deaths of turtles, we saw the deaths of lizards and fish. But nobody was aware of the origin of why all this was happening.

An environmental disaster caused by mining activity

In 2016, (...) there was an explosion in a boiler that blew up in the mine. And as the mine is very close to the lake, the mine has a 'tinel', a place where [the mine] is supplied from the

lake and at the same time it has another outlet that comes out into the lake. When this boiler exploded, all the liquid that they use to process the material, all of it, fell into the lake. In this investigation, we had to see why the manatees, the turtles, the lizards died. We were the first to be affected, without us realising what was happening and nobody was interested in investigating. (...)

The municipal government and the state of Guatemala never wanted to give us the report of what was happening. So we took samples (...) and the colleagues themselves sent them to countries like Germany and Mexico. From the samples that were taken, we found out that the pollution was caused by heavy metals: [it was confirmed that] the material coming from the company was the source of the pollution. So we were practically forced to advocate

and demand the environmental ministry to take action on the matter because it was quite dangerous [for the mine] to continue [polluting] the lake. Because the lake is for public use and not only for the Gremial de Pescadores, but also for everyone, (...) it was a real danger.

Voicing indigenous concerns through a fishermen's union

So in March 2017 we organised ourselves; (...) we were four people who went to the municipality to ask the mayor, the mayoral chief, to explain to us what they were doing, if they were concerned, if they were taking samples of what was happening. On the 7th of April [2017], (...) the mayor and the environmental council told us that they had already taken account of what was happening, they had taken samples from the lake and that they had sent them to a laboratory and that soon we were going to have an answer. But the answer they gave us was insufficient. [They said] that we could not participate in the civil society consultation group as four associations: we should form a Gremial so that only one or two people would represent us in the council. And that is how the Gremial de Pescadores came about. The assembly, the four organisations elected me as president of the Gremial de Pescadores.

Indigenous cultures endangered by ecosystem loss

We as indigenous peoples have our own culture.⁴ At the moment there are mountains that have been razed to the ground where the ceremonies were held, what we call 'mayahack'. And also what is most worrying is the water sources that supply the urban centre; they are disappearing in their entirety. This is the most worrying part for us because the people are

⁴ Cristobal belongs to the indigenous Mayan Q'eqchi' community, whose ancestral lands are primarily located in the north of Guatemala.

suffering every day. We have this very worrying part because nobody, not the state, not even with everything we have done and the efforts to advocate, nobody has been able to stop it and they continue (...) to raze the mountains, mountains where our grandparents have taught us all our culture and our tradition. (...)

[The trend] is not changing and it is not going to recover. They are no less than the springs and the waters that we consume as indigenous people. This is worrying for us. And also with the communities, for example, the [communities] sowing cardamom and other crops. They have had losses (...) because the company continues (...) to operate and all the toxic material that comes out of the chimney falls directly into the communities. We are directly exposed to many illnesses and pollution because of the red dust that comes out of the chimney, which falls onto the communities, [leaks] into the water source. It is quite regrettable what the company has been doing in our municipality. (...) We have made a great sacrifice, we have made an effort but to this day we have not been able to stop it. And we continue to resist, [while they continue] destroying everything in its path.

Criminalisation and militarised responses

The situation that the Guatemalan state has created, introducing a state of siege (Estado de Sitio) and a state of precautions (Estado

“ We are directly exposed to many illnesses and pollution because of the red dust that comes out of the chimney, which falls onto the communities, (leaks) into the water source. ”

“What motivates us is always thinking about what will happen in the not so distant future: the future of our children.”

de Prevenciones), is a way of provoking a psychological blow, not only to us but also to our family. (...) In other words, (...) the response of the Guatemalan state is to send these people, these authorities, so that we as a people cannot demand our voice, cannot demand our rights. And this is also something very regrettable because throughout 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021 there have been three or four states of siege (Estado de Sitio), plus a state of precautions (Estado de Prevenciones), and this has strengthened the power of the company and not the people. (...) It has really changed our lives. It has propagated fear. But despite this we continue to move forward (...).

In Guatemala, a defender has always been criminalised, imprisoned or killed. (...) We are exposed to anything that may happen. This (...) affects our family life a lot emotionally and economically. In 2017 we experienced the death of Carlos Maaz, which was directly caused by the police who murdered him.⁵ We have filed a complaint, including the exhumation of our colleague. And to this day there has been no progress. (...) Everything has to do with protecting the company. We have lost the life of our colleague, since 2017 and to this day when we take action, when we resist, the authorities

⁵ Carlos Maaz died during a wave of protests that was violently repressed by the National Police and led to the criminalisation of numerous local leaders and journalists. Guatemala's Constitutional Court suspended the project's operations until a structured consultative process would be completed. Local communities have expressed that the consultation has so far been unsatisfactory and unfruitful.

come. They are sent to repress the people.

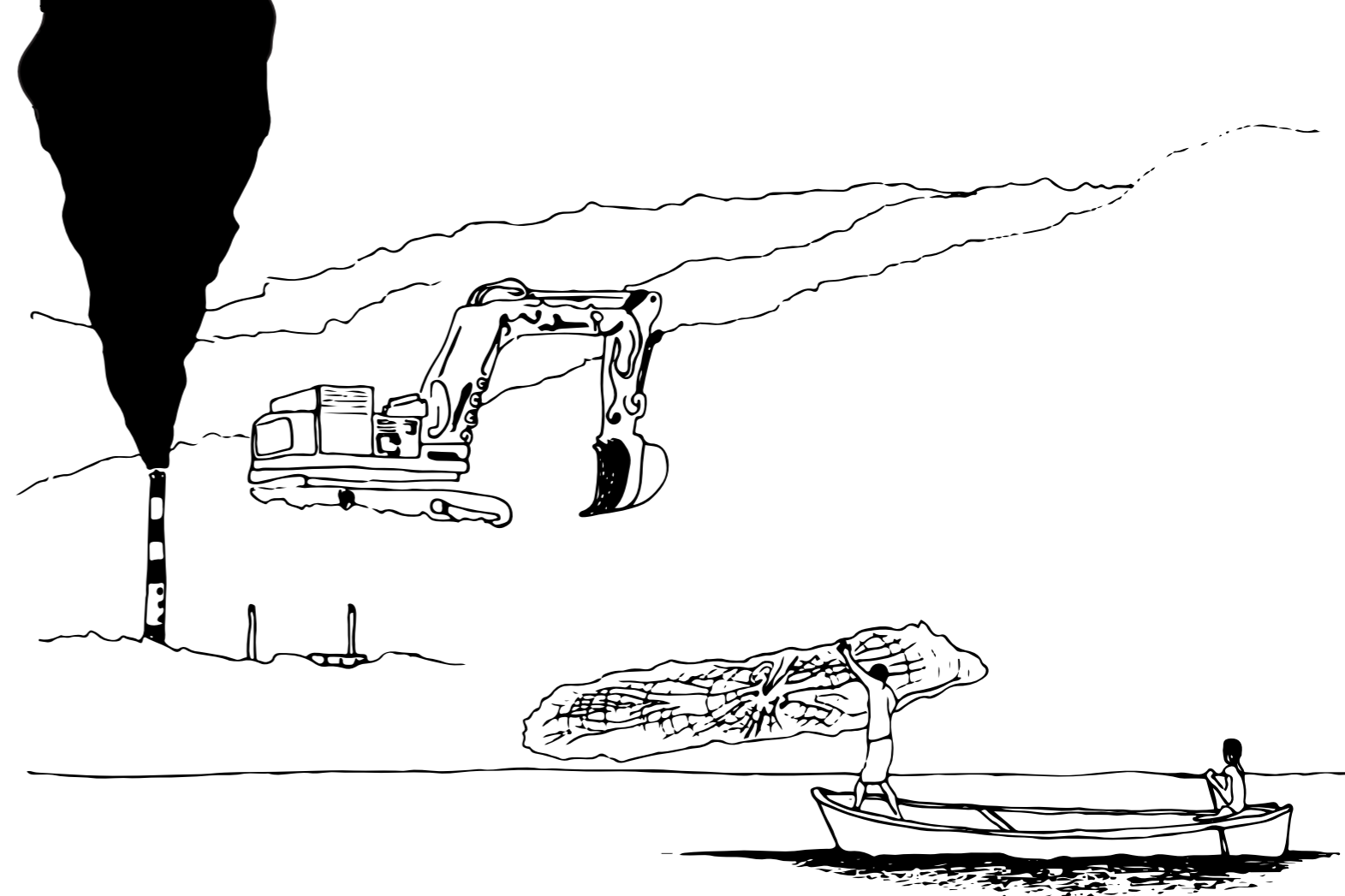
[Repression] is continuing to this day. A clear example was the 20-day resistance we did in 2021. They send a large number of army regiments, J8s,⁶ helicopters, coastguards, speedboats. In other words, we are practically treated as if we were terrorists or drug traffickers when in reality we are claiming our rights. (...)

And so what else is left for the people? It is to resist, to put up resistance. But the Guatemalan state intervenes and instead of supporting and listening to our demands, what it really ends up doing is criminalising us, like what I have suffered. I was imprisoned for defending, for insisting, for demanding justice. Several of us were imprisoned for the simple fact of defending the territory and the environment. I am still awaiting trial, I am under house arrest, and I only was released with a bail of 40,000 quetzals. (...) Every 15 days I have to go to sign. When we hold meetings, we have seen the appearance of armed patrols to intimidate us. So our story is quite sad, but God has helped us up to this point and we continue to fight. We hope to present the case to the Inter-American Court [of Human Rights] (...) and through awareness raising and collaboration we can make progress.

A struggle for the rights of the next generations

What motivates us is always thinking about what will happen in the not so distant future: the future of our children. I had the opportunity to see a beautiful mountain, to see the species, the animals. I had the opportunity to see peace and quiet, enough water. Today and every day there is a shortage and there is no way to tackle it. I think of the lake that I knew when I started fishing at the age of 12. It was very beautiful, but what will happen, for example, [to my]

⁶ J8 is a light tactical vehicle used by military patrols.



daughter and three boys. With time they won't have this opportunity. (...)

I remember the day when I arrived at a ceremony on the mountain. That mountain no longer exists, it has been destroyed. We had a ceremony where I swore, we swore (...) allegiance to Mother Nature. I swore that if there is a need for me to sacrifice myself, I would do it for my children. If I had to sacrifice myself, I would do it. Because it was necessary to defend and see the sadness of how they are destroying everything that is beautiful.

Each one of us [in the Board of Directors of the Gremial] has this commitment; (...) [we know that] if we don't continue, it would be giving an advantage to corrupt people. We know that the risk is enormous, at any moment it can affect our family, our sons, our daughters. But we believe that it is necessary. (...) We are always thinking about the future that our children will

no longer have. That is what motivates us, what gives us the strength to continue fighting: because we don't want to see our children's future as a desert, as a place with a lot of illness.

Further reading:

- 🌀 Festivos Solidarios (26 August 2018) 'Soy Cristóbal Pop y esta es mi historia' (in Spanish).
- 🌀 The Intercept (27 March 2022) 'The Hidden Story of a Notorious Guatemalan Nickel Mine'.
- 🌀 Alianza por la Solidaridad – Actionaid (23 June 2022) 'Cristóbal Pop: Continúa la persecución a líderes indígenas en Guatemala' (in Spanish).
- 🌀 Follow and support the campaign #LibertadVocesLago



Tateh Lehbib

People-powered shelter for a population displaced

My name is Tateh Lehbib, I'm 32 years old, I live in Sahraouian refugee camps in the south-west of Algeria. I grew up in refugee camps. I'm an architect, I work on designing homes for refugees to alleviate suffering in refugee camps. I research simple designs that are adaptable to the Sahraouian desert climate. This is my profession.

Plastic bottle houses in the desert: a community-led project

Buildings and houses in refugee camps are built with mud and metal zinc plates, in a desert, in a region that is considered to have one of the harshest climates in the world. (...) I had the chance to study renewable energy in Algeria, and had the opportunity to join the Erasmus Mundus program funded by the EU to study sustainable energy. When I was studying at university in 2015, there was a flood in the

camps, that destroyed a lot of houses. One of them was my grandmother's. [Then] I had an idea. The idea was (...) to find an alternative construction design adapted to desert climates.

When I came back to the camp I started thinking of a way to apply the research. The first idea of the thesis was to build houses out of mud following Nubian Vernacular systems used in Egypt and Sudan. (...) [However] I started facing some obstacles. (...) But then I started collecting the plastic bottles and filling them up with sand (...) and asked whether it would be possible to build houses with them. I have seen this done elsewhere before, in India, in Africa and Latin America. I then said instead of throwing the plastic bottles, I will try to construct the first house, my grandmother's, with plastic bottles and sand, and construct it in a way to cool the house, and I build the

first house for my grandmother. This is how the project started.

The idea was crazy. Even for my family members, and especially my mom. My mom used to say when she saw me collecting plastic bottles and coming back with them to our house, she used to ask me "what are you doing? Are you crazy?" (...) My grandmother was very supportive, my grandmother supports me with whatever I do usually, even if it's wrong, she always encourages me. However, when people started seeing the results, and when I started posting about the project on social media, people started coming to me with plastic bottles, filling them with sand, helping me out with the construction. (...) But at first they thought I was a madman.

The diameter of the first house was 4 meters only, and it took 5000 plastic bottles. It takes a week to collect 5000 plastic bottles. (...) The hardest part is filling them with sand, that takes more time, and it needs a group of people working on it. That takes one or two weeks. [In total,] it takes about 3 weeks.

A scalable initiative?

When I started with the first construction, a representative of the UNHCR came with an architect to learn about the idea and see how it could be extended to other areas. 25 houses were funded (...) for elderly people and families with special needs. 25 houses were built with the help of the young men in all refugee camps. The idea was also transferred to Nouakchott, the Mauritanian capital. I came back to the refugee camp since, but I've been in contact with them recently and they told me that they were able to build a school. In Mauritania there aren't many recycling projects in refugee camps, so there are a lot of plastic bottles there and especially in the streets. (...) The idea can be exported.

There are [some] obstacles when it comes to the design. Those were resolved with time and experience. Now, I'm also thinking of other ideas, other materials that we find in

nature. Because in the end, we need to think of existing and available materials around us, that is the solution. What is nice about plastic bottles is that they pushed people to think about recycling. It is possible to better our life conditions with simple things. We can use plastic bottles to design other structures as well, barns, gardens, etc. The idea of recycling has entered our societies now, I think we should use all the materials possible to do things differently.

Saharai people: a history of displacement and separation

Military policies [of Morocco] made the Sahrawi people flee the area. My mom and my grandmother always tell me that they were living in peace in Western Sahara (...), and these policies displaced them. They were forced to flee to deserted areas that they weren't familiar with. The military policies divided a people, there are some who live in refugee camps, and others on the Occupied side. My paternal grandmother lives in Occupied Western Sahara,



my maternal grandmother lives in the refugee camps. To see my paternal grandmother, I'd have to travel to the Canary Islands, and she does as well, only to meet up. Because there is a wall between us, a wall filled with mines. She's close to me but we have to travel to other countries to meet up. This is racial segregation and apartheid. (...) There is tragedy in every Sahrawi family. (...)

Lost traditions

My grandmother was one of those who fled; she died in 2017. When she used to talk to me about her life in Western Sahara, she was living in peace on an island called Kahl, she used to live by the sea, fish every day. She'd walk in the desert, eat the plants that are in nature. She would wander through the desert with her cattle, she lived the Bedouin life, she lived in peace. But in a blink of an eye, her life transformed into hell. She lived in refugee camps for more than 40 years. Life in the refugee camps is static, the place never changes. (...) But they used to live freely, travel, move to places rich with water for the cattle. This life no longer exists, and that's because of the Moroccan invasion.

Our regions are very influenced [by the climate crisis]. For example, the droughts. Sometimes we witness harsh droughts, which make summers really hot because the earth is dry. Sometimes we witness floods that destroy buildings, and this has a great effect on the population, including the Bedouins. The floods force them to travel to other far regions. The droughts and the heat kill a lot of their cattle. The climate has an important influence on the occupied Western Sahara. I used to witness harsh weather conditions but it wasn't as rough as it is now. There's an evolution of natural disasters in the region. (...) [Now] we live under the mercy of humanitarians. Our lands are rich with natural resources, [but] we depend on humanitarian aid for food that comes from our lands. Allied countries buy them from Morocco, and then it is given to us as humanitarian

aid. It is very unfortunate. It has affected the Sahrawi people, it has affected my dreams and aspirations.

Greenwashing and extractivism in occupied lands

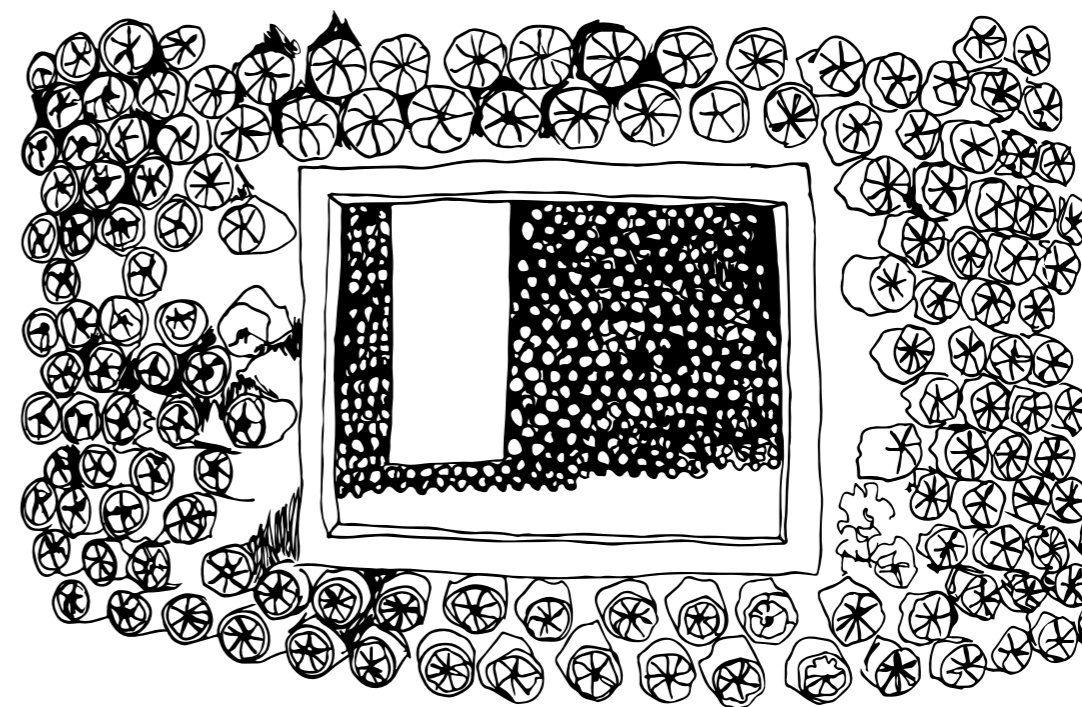
In the occupied Western Sahara, the Moroccans are draining the Sahrawi natural resources. Green energy, wind energy, and renewable energy. There is deliberate exploitation of

“ I am inspired by the will of the Sahrawi people. I am inspired by their love and will for life and for justice. ”

natural resources. Sometimes I talk with friends who live in the occupied side, they tell me that Moroccan authorities have workers working 24 hours a day, every day. There's a day shift and a night shift, there's a lot of draining and exploitation. This exploitation means that they know that the land isn't theirs, so they have to exploit it as long as they control it. 24 hours, day and night. Even the sea resources and fish, there are fishing boats working around the clock. There are many renewable energy projects, which are there to show that they are a country that cares about the environment, and is interested in green energy, but in reality it is only a way to legitimise their occupation of Western Sahara. Everyone who dares to talk about the occupation is oppressed and persecuted by the authorities.

A vision for justice

I am inspired by the will of the Sahrawi people. I am inspired by their love and will for life and for justice. I am inspired by how these people who came with only their clothes on to this harsh environment, (...) were able to build houses,



first with clothes then with mud. (...) When Algeria opened its borders, they built their tents with the clothes they had on. (...) Then a bit by bit they were able to build (...) mud houses with zinc plates roofs. Even though they're not resistant to natural and climate conditions, they were able to create that on their own, something that is theirs, to live. This is a great achievement. They were able to build organised refugee camps, schools, hospitals, [and] to show their voices to the world, from/to the refugee camps to the farthest regions of the world (...).

The international community needs to pressure Morocco to respect international law and to have justice prevail for the Sahrawi people. We need to support human rights, human dignity, and the right to self-determination. We have the right to live in dignity. (...) We have the right, but we don't have the power. We are the victims of a humanitarian crisis, and a crisis of values. A lot of countries in the international community and the UN support Morocco. (...) We should support (...) those with no power, those whose voices

are unheard. (...) There's a wall, 270km long, that's dividing a people. (...) The international community is obliged to show the truth, the reality of the situation, to give peace a chance. To think of human values, this is all I ask for.

Further reading:

-  El Pais, UNHCR 'El Ingeniero con un Gran Plan para su Pueblo', available [here](#).
-  World Economic Forum (18 May 2017) 'Meet the refugee building homes out of discarded plastic bottles', available [here](#).
-  The Guardian (30 June 2017) 'The house that Tateh built...out of sand-filled plastic bottles', available [here](#).
-  Middle East Eye (19 May 2017) 'Meet the Sahrawi refugee building homes from plastic bottles in the desert', available [here](#).
-  EU Neighbors (18 January 2018) 'Tateh, the Hamada Eco Builder', available [here](#).



Tiara R. Na'puti

An island community under the grip of overseas military interests

I am a Chamorro Indigenous scholar from the Mariana Islands, specifically Guåhan or Guam. My work, my mind and my actions are focused on issues of Indigenous movements, and addressing militarism and colonialism particularly here in the Mariana Islands. (...) I am currently working directly with an organisation called Independent Guåhan, which is a community organisation educating the islands' public about sovereignty and addressing climate change as an urgent challenge right above our colonial political status. I have also joined several delegations at the United Nations to speak about political status issues in Guåhan, and I am currently a 2021 Mellon/ACLS Scholars and Society Fellow. (...)

I have been working with these community groups here in Guåhan for over a decade now and part of that is because of my ancestor ties. (...) My family line comes from the Mariana Islands. (...) Over a decade ago, I first learned about the plans that the United States government and the Japanese government

had made together: a bilateral agreement to relocate the military base from Okinawa in Japan to Guåhan. (...) I [then] joined others who have been for so long advocating for decolonisation, for justice and Indigenous rights and our right to self-determination. Because the military base is just one example in the contemporary 20th /21st century [trend] of how colonialism is upgrading still to this day, particularly in the Pacific region. (...) Throughout the Mariana Islands, our archipelago, and throughout other places of Oceania, the military is really testing out their policies [and] practices without prior consent or consideration.

Challenging securitisation responses to the climate crisis

For a long time, I think that too many people in positions of power with regards to climate have thought those things were separated [militarism and climate]. Militarisation goes hand in hand with pollution and climate change that is caused by fossil fuel use and consumption. (...)

If we are going to talk about climate change (...) in actionable items, we have to talk about the military. (...) The United States federal government, the United States military and the Department of Defence are every day in their routine activities generating so much fossil fuel, waste, pollution and poisoning. (...) We do not even really know the scale or the scope because of the ways that the government has prevented themselves from having to report [on] the military and the military bases.

We need to challenge this idea that climate change can be 'securitised'. We have been hearing more and more about that: "who better to serve and protect the environment than the military." (...) And while the military has done branding and campaigning around their capability as a sustainable (...) industry, they are not. And the truth of the matter is that we do not have the time or the luxury to wait for them to clean up their messes because every mess that they have created is inundated by the previous one they still have not cleaned up. A lot of the policy discourse around military bases right now is that the bases are susceptible to climate change. Rather, (...) the [way they] should be thinking about it is that the root cause of climate change is overwhelmingly their production. (...) They are using climate change to justify their existence (...) in places where the people have been saying for decades or centuries that it is not something we want for our land, our lives or our future... for anyone. That's not creating a planet that is just or sustainable for anybody.

Military bases and environmental damage in the Mariana Islands

30% of the island (...) [of] Guåhan is occupied by the US military. They have set up their bases, they have their fences and they have occupied these lands. They are currently building a new base and this base — Camp Blaz— is part of this massive military relocation plan that was decided by foreign governments. (...) Just driving around the village today, there were military helicopters flying over;

there are activities happening on the island that are related to training and testing. The construction that's happening for the new base has already turned up on human remains and ancient artefacts. (...) So we are talking about a community that is overly militarised (...). Because the military is one of the largest economies here it is seen as one of the only ways (...) for many of our people to... to prosper. My family comes from that background (...) serving in the US military. (...) Wherever you go, you are going to be asked for a military discount, you are going to have this kind of dual economies of privileges associated with the military (...). But also, it goes into the psyche, because of our long history of colonisation and because of this idea that foreign militaries have saved the island and saved the people. (...) My grandparents (...) were forced to learn English and be "Americanised" and that kind of assimilation policies really are linked to racism and colonialism are still [issues] that impact us today. (...)

One of the dangers right now with the military build-up plan is [that it is located] in this area that has our freshwater aquifer. That water aquifer [The Guam Northern Lens Aquifer] provides water to basically 85% to 90% of the fresh drinking water on our island. And that is the exact same site where they want to put a training range and they are currently under construction for that. (...) What we're talking about is an issue that is so vital to our community as water: (...) it's the danger of seeing the military potentially poisoning our water by having these live bullets fly by. (...) Not to mention the cultural significance of those [sites] (...) and the deep-seated ways that we believe in (...) protecting our water in our land. In our own language, the way we think about land and even the words that we use for ourselves as people are tied to the land. We don't treat it as something different separate from us but rather it is a living ancestor and something that we want to protect. And everyone (...) should be able to understand why fresh water is important. But unfortunately, I

think some of those dangers get hidden by (...) the grand narratives, the bigger and louder stories that have been told over and over again: that the military is the only option or that is exactly what we need for the economy rather than thinking about what we need for a just and sustainable environmental future.

Global connections

We have a lot in common and we learn from each other. (...) Recently we made connections with other islands such as the Hawaiian islands where currently in O'ahu they are facing a poisoned water supply at Red Hill by the US Navy. (...) We see that Red Hill is an example of what could happen to our aquifer, just as we stand in solidarity with the communities in Okinawa who have been saying they don't want those bases [in their lands]. (...) These are decisions that are made about our lands and our lives without our consent. (...) We have on-going securitisation of the region without genuine security, which would be a really important value that we could use to challenge militarisation instead. From Standing Rock⁷ to the continuing resistance to the construction of the Enbridge Line 3 tar sands pipeline that would carry thousands and thousands of barrels of Canadian tar sands oil across Indigenous lands and fragile ecosystems. We feel all connected, whether we are talking about Okinawa or Palestine or Puerto Rico. These (...) are examples of how Indigenous communit[ies] (...) are joining in this effort to show that militaristic state interests do not have the final say.

7 Standing Rock is an Indian Reservation inhabited primarily by Lakota Oyate and Dakota Oyate indigenous groups that stretches across North and South Dakota in the United States. Following plans to build the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, Native American communities led a campaign to stop its construction. Communities were concerned that the pipeline would threaten vital water sources and destroy sites of cultural significance such as burial grounds. Protesters were met with repression by militarised police, which drew media attention across the world. Despite the mobilisations, the construction went on and was completed in April 2017.

Uprooting colonial dynamics through self-determination and indigenous sovereignty

One of the biggest policy changes [needed] would be to exercise self-determination and decolonisation for these islands (...) We are constantly deferring decision making to (...) other governments, (...) so the bigger question again is why are those governments [the United States and Japan] even involved over here? (...) Indigenous people are trying to achieve sovereignty, the right and liberty to practice self-determination over a land, over a culture, over political and economic systems. And to challenge colonialism that historically but also now has been a global project to occupy and to dictate and exploit those Indigenous peoples and their resources. (...) So decolonisation (...) is absolutely necessary for climate justice: we can't (...) have a clean sustainable environmentally friendly future for the globe in a world where anyone is unfree. (...)

I think [a second] policy change would be to talk about demilitarisation, [particularly] defunding the military industrial entity (...) and holding them accountable for their fossil fuel (...) use and abuse. (...) The COP26 had a lot more conversations about demilitarisation than had happened previously which is a really good thing. People all across the world are saying if leadership is really going to take action then they need to take action where it matters most (...) And [finally] I think that there are other kinds of policies as well which is the 'people policy': (...) people (...) on the ground [are] demonstrating that we can, and do, and will make change even in the midst of these foreign decision makers doing nothing. (...) We can learn from each other about how to protect our land, how to protect our water, how to re-heal. Even if the military gives those places back they are often time so destroyed. It is a real loss but it is not impossible. [It] can be useful to think about different ways that people are doing sustainability work and resilience work on the ground, informed by Indigenous ways of knowing, (...) and practising those same values that we have been practising since time

immemorial but also doing it with an eye to the 21st and 22nd centuries. (...)

(Re)imagining the future through climate action and art

In Guåhan there are a lot of climate resilient actions that have been taken. (...) There are revitalisation efforts that are happening that preserve our ecosystems. (...) I (...) see active and symbolic resistance happening through farming practices and sustainable growth. There are [many] really great projects that are vibrantly demonstrating the ways that people can help heal themselves through healing our land. That could be everything from small scale to larger efforts like gardening, (...) sustainable practices, learning how to take care of our food, and learning about the abundance that we have. In Chamorro [language] Guåhan means 'we have'; that really talks about a gift, right? [It is important that] we remind people that we have a language, we have a vibrant history, we have so much more than US occupation and militarisation and we have so much more to offer and to give. Independent Guåhan has done murals and works to reclaim space in different ways that would ignite and remind people of those deeper stories about how and where we came from and how we always have been people that have decided things for ourselves. And that is really energising.

These [actions] (...) are a mighty reminder about how the power of the people can and does make changes every day at a local level, even under some of the heaviest circumstances of colonisation and militarisation. I hope that these bigger ways of both imagining and practising a future that is more climate resilient, does not get deluded by this idea that only foreign entities (...) or only the capitalist structures that have been imposed upon us are the way out. (...) Because we've seen unfortunately time and time again that that tends to get the louder voice of perspective.

I am uplifted by everyday conversations and the work of community organisations. [Sharing and connecting] really helps sustain

our hearts in our minds because it is big work, it is exhausting and we need to sustain our solidarity. My love, joy, excitement, and hope for future generations would be that they get to tell a story that is different. (...) That they get to tell stories that are about how they came into [a] world [where] solidarity was sustained, and genuine security was achieved. (...) I would love to think that the future generations see themselves as contributing their gifts to co-conspiring a different world. [I hope] it is not just something that they have to imagine but that they can experience it. (...) [I hope] that future generations are connected to their roots in a way that doesn't have to be about fighting these global conundrums of empire and violence.

Further reading:

- * Social Media: Independent Guåhan, Facebook; Independent Guåhan, Instagram; Fanachu!, podcast.
- * Na'puti, Tiara R., "Disaster Militarism and Indigenous Responses to Super Typhoon Yutu in the Mariana Islands" Environmental Communication (2022). Advanced online publication.
- * The Atlantic (1 November 2021) 'To Hell With Drowning', available here.
- * Na'puti, Tiara R. "Pandemic in the Pacific: US Military Bases Are Hot Spots for More Than Just Covid-19 - They Also Make Island Territories Targets for Climate Disasters," Common Dreams, September 12, 2020
- * Na'puti, Tiara R., "Archipelagic Rhetoric: Remapping the Marianas and Challenging Militarization from 'A Stirring Place'" Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies, vol. 16, no. 1 (2019): 4-25.

Collectif Vietnam Dioxine



Leading the struggle for ecocide recognition

☆ **Note to reader:** This narrative is based on the testimonies of four contributors and members of the collective, Kim Vo Dinh, Tom Nico, Pauline Payen and Tran To Nga.

Agent Orange: a devastating weapon



Tom Nico:

Agent Orange is a defoliant substance, which was used to destroy the forests during the Vietnam War between 1961 and 1971. What is toxic in Agent Orange is

dioxin, which is an extremely toxic production waste. Its effects are still felt to this day. In fact, it affects third and fourth generations. (...) According to the Stellman report the estimated number of people exposed to Agent Orange is approximately 4,8 million victims.⁸ The VAVA, the Vietnamese Association of Victims of Agent

⁸ Stellman, S.D., Stellman, J.M. (1986) 'Estimation of exposure to agent orange and other defoliants among american troops in vietnam: A methodological approach' American Journal of Industrial Medicine Volume 9 Issue 4, available [here](#).

Collectif Vietnam Dioxine brings together volunteers and charitable organisations. Together we are leading a campaign to officially recognise the crime of ecocide and claim compensation for the victims of Agent Orange. (...) [Our work is twofold] there is both memorial recognition work and actual victims' support. We are supporting the victims that are suing the manufacturers of Agent Orange but also those who live in Vietnam, trying to support humanitarian and medical assistance to the victims.

Orange, estimated the number of victims at 3 million. (...) It is clear that Agent Orange impacts entire generations. Today, there are still babies born with malformations due to Agent Orange (...), but also missing limb births, blindness, tumours, miscarriages, and premature deliveries [are common] in the most affected regions of Vietnam. 80 million litres of Agent Orange were sprayed and if we are looking at the consequences on the environment, on the ecosystems, more than 2.5 million hectares had been contaminated. The spraying destroyed about 20% of the forest in South Vietnam and polluted 400 000 hectares of agricultural lands. Added to this is the destruction of tropical forests, mangroves, and the loss of abundant wildlife in Central Vietnam.



Tran To Nga:

The consequences of Agent Orange and of the Vietnam War (...) are transferring from one generation to the next (...) because children inherit the diseases of their parents. That is what is the most tragic. I transmitted my disease to my children and my children have already transmitted the disease to my grandchildren. It will not stop. (...) When we think about Agent Orange and defoliants, we only think about the aerial spraying from Americans during the Vietnam War. Today, Agent Orange is not being used anymore but (...) it is important to note that a number of countries are still using pesticides and that their consequences are similar to those of Agent Orange. We can see that children born from parents that use these pesticides also have malformations similar to the ones of Vietnamese children born from victims of Agent Orange. (...) Agent Orange is the predecessor of actual pesticides. Not only am I fighting against Agent Orange, but I am also fighting against the use of pesticides. Monsanto was there during the Vietnam War and was the first company that destroyed human life and nature. You will see that the consequences of this destruction will still be present in the future and that they will

not stop unless we manage to stop Monsanto's production.

A failed attempt and continuing legal battle in France

Tran To Nga:

There are a lot of victims of Agent Orange all around the world. In Vietnam, where most victims are, there is no legislation like the one in France and Vietnamese people cannot press charges against manufacturers. (...) [Moreover], not a lot of them can meet the requirements to be able to sue in France [being a French citizen, who is also a victim of Agent Orange]. I am fighting to have jurisprudence for the other victims, so that the victims can find a way to seek justice for themselves. (...)

My legal case started already 7 years ago. When the trial began seven years ago, I was almost on my own. I only had the support of my lawyer Maître William Bourdon and of André Bouny.⁹ We were only the three of us. Now, even if the trial is named after me, I have millions of friends from France and from all around the world, even from the United States. (...) Personally, I think that even if my complaint has been dismissed, I have already taken a major step toward achieving my goal. (...) I did not win in the eyes of justice, but I won in the eyes of the world. (...) More than 120 articles were published, people talked about the trial on television, and all said that it was a historical trial.

So now, where are we going? Of course, confidence has been shaken, but we still have faith in French justice. We need to. And we need to move on. There are friends who told me: "Nga, you should stop. You're too old for this. You have done too much. We don't know how long it will take and you might not survive". But stopping means giving up. Even if in three years my complaint will still be dismissed, I still must fight. In two or three years' time, more people will have joined us. (...) If I have that much

⁹ Other lawyers supporting Tran To Nga's case include Maître Amélie Lefevbre et Maître Bertrand Repolt

support, it is because our cause is righteous. It is not Tran To Nga's cause, it is our cause, and it is a righteous cause. (...) The younger generations are going to replace me, and we will still fight. We will fight until we can (...) save the world and above all the really poor victims of those pesticides, even if the crime stays unrecognised.

We are awaiting the decision of the Appeal Court of Paris after the pleadings which will take place in the second half of 2023. It will be a matter of knowing if the Court of Evry, which considered itself incompetent in 2021, is considered competent. If it is the case, the Evry Court will have to study and judge the merits of the case. If not, it will be the other court. Whichever the decision, the road is long, and I don't know how many years it will take. In the beginning, when the trial began, I was only thinking about the victims of Agent Orange. But over time, I realised that the (...) victims of Agent Orange, (...) link humanity and nature. (...) That is why, even as an 80-year-old woman, I feel responsible for both the victims of Agent Orange and the environment. I don't know how long I will live but I can guarantee that I will be with you, and you will be with me until my last breath.

Ecocide recognition: policy responses to address crimes against nature

Tom Nico:

The concept of ecocide was born with Agent Orange so by talking about it we can understand [it] better and make sure that it is not something exclusively theoretical. We must connect this issue to the reality, to our daily lives, and to the victims, [and] (...) to [the impact] it has made on people's lives.

Several points are important in terms of public policies. The first one is the importance of memorial recognition: (...) acknowledging the crime of Agent Orange. (...) Secondly, it is important to have laws that allow us to legally (...) sanction multinationals that cause damage to humans and nature. In fact, nature and humans are always linked; environmental

damage has direct consequences on human life. (...) It is essential to include the crime of ecocide in legislation, whether at a national, European, or international level. (...) These kinds of public policy will allow history not to repeat itself. (...) [Learning from the experience of] several wars in Vietnam such as the First Indochina War and Vietnam War, it is extremely important to limit the crimes committed during war time. Above all, we must learn from what happened. (...) We must never forget [ecocide crimes].



Kim Vo Dinh:

Thanks to public opinion, chemical weapons have been prohibited. Even if they are not prohibited everywhere, some progress has been made. Even if the

desired level of recognition has not yet been reached, more and more people know about the concept of ecocide. (...) [Thus] what we need is criminal penalties (...) for those who are responsible and know the danger of those products and their effects on human health, but will nevertheless allow them to be used.

Repairing the damage of a human and environmental disaster

Kim Vo Dinh:

Compensation for damages has been amounted to billions of dollars. Hotspots where (...) dioxin levels (...) continue to contribute to environmental pollution should be made pollution free. (...) Programmes to help victims of Agent Orange and disabled people should be funded. (...) [Finally], we should also fund scientific research on dioxin [to] see how we can prevent parents from contaminating their children and (...) continuing to affect several generations in Vietnam.



Tran To Nga:

Obviously the victims in Vietnam are the poorest and live in very, very difficult conditions. [But] we must also think of the victims of Agent Orange from all around the world, including from the United States.

Seeking stronger links between peace and environmental movements

Kim Vo Dinh:

We can clearly see that wars can have environmental consequences. Bombing, mines and chemical weapons are not only dangerous to human life but also to nature. They destroy forests, animal species, biosphere, water sources and ecosystems in general. We can also see those environmental issues as global warming, water contamination and soil depletion can lead to conflicts. The fight for resources can also lead to conflicts. So, we do think that synergies [between climate and peace issues] are necessary (...) and important.

Tom Nico:

We have mutual concerns [with other movements]. For example, we communicate with organisations that fight against chlordecone. Chlordecone is a pesticide that was used in Guadeloupe and Martinique by the French government. 80% of the population in those two countries is affected.

Looking ahead: a horizon of hope in the next generation

Tran To Nga:

I always see hope in victims' eyes. So, my duty is to move on and accomplish my mission. I do not have the right to be discouraged. Sometimes, we feel tired, but I do not think that I have the right to give up. I often get asked why I do not accept a negotiation to get monetary compensation and stop suing. But that is not why I fight. (...)

I also have hope in the younger generations. A year ago, when all the young people from the collective joined me, I was very surprised but very very happy to see that, even in this difficult world, there are still young people that do not think about themselves (...) and become defenders of a righteous cause. (...) This young generation is a force [of nature]. I always said that the young people are my army. I am fighting directly with the opposing party, but they are my political army that gives me strength and faith. Honestly, from the bottom of my heart, I have faith in these people. They will also lead the battle. (...) Sometimes, we must make sacrifices and only think about our goal which is, to me, a sacred goal and our cause is righteous, much more than our personal cause. That is why not only do I have faith in them, but I also have faith in the future. Even if our future is not always a rosy picture, we still must move towards the future.





Pauline Payen:

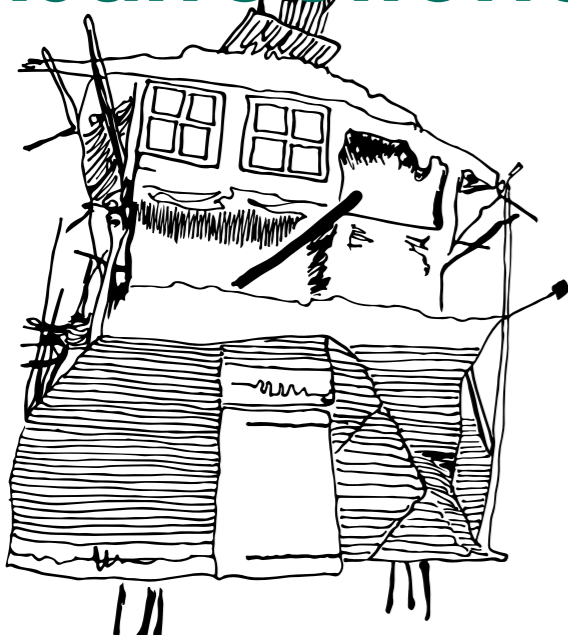
I find hope in a lot of things. Obviously, there are a lot of things that make me lose hope but, personally, what helps me is the feeling of

acting with integrity. Even if our goals are not reached, we still acted in the most righteous way possible. I think that it is a human need. Today, we see [more people] realising that it is completely arrogant to think that humans are not connected to nature and animals. More and more people try to find a way to respond to those issues and to address them differently. That is what gives me hope.

Further reading:

-  Social media: [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).
-  Follow the developments of the case at: <http://vietnamdioxine.org>

The ZAD through the eyes of the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination



Resisting state-corporate land grabbing through creative experimentation

I am Isa, my pronouns are she/her. (...) I was a university lecturer in London where I lived for almost 20 years, and where, in 2004, I co-founded with JJ my partner in life and crime, (...) a collective called the Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination that has been bringing together artists and activists to co-dream, co-design and deploy creative forms of disobedience and resistance. We have done this in a diversity of contexts, (...) from squats to theatre schools, to cultural institutions, to social movements like climate camps, (...) G8 mobilisations and COPs. (...)

A transformational trip through Europe's self-organised communities

We felt that we were integrating art and activism quite well, but grew more and more frustrated with the (...) observation that that kind of activism was quite event-based. (...) We would put a lot of energy and deploy a lot of creativity in these ways of resisting, but then come back home: (...) to our flat, our job, our mortgage and [our life] in London, in

a metropolis. We realised that (...) we were spending (...) a large part of our life fighting capitalism and a large part of our lives reproducing it. (...)

And so that led us to do a big trip around Europe where we went to visit and document self-organised what we call 'utopian' communities – in our own words. We got so inspired that we decided to leave London and so a few years later [we] (...) moved to France. And after getting lost in a few detours we ended up here on the ZAD.

The ZAD: a diverse ecosystem in struggle against an airport project

The ZAD¹⁰ is what we call (...) a liberated territory against a nefarious piece of life-threatening infrastructure – i.e. an international airport. [It consists of] 4,000 acres of wetlands

¹⁰ ZAD is a neologism that stands for 'zone to defend' in French, and used refer to places that are occupied by popular movements to protect them against development and infrastructure projects. The ZAD referred to in this story is located in Notre-Dame-des-Landes, near the city of Nantes in France.

and farmland.(...) The airport project was planned in the 60s and was immediately resisted, initially mostly by farmers, who rejected the idea that you could concrete over nourishing land. The [airport] project went into dormancy for a few decades, (...) mostly because of the oil shock, and it came back about again in the year 2000. The resistance returned and extended beyond just farmers to more citizen groups that (...) [launched] legal procedures and did a lot of awareness raising and mobilising.

In 2008, people who lived here on the zone realised that (...) the government was (...) buying up land and farms to make way for the airport; (...) the territory was being literally gutted out. (...) So they wrote an open letter saying, beautifully: "to defend a territory, you need to inhabit it". They invited people to squat the land to be able to defend it against the airport project. The letter was amplified during a Climate Camp on the zone; people responded to the invitation, (...) and started building the commons in the way of the airport: making links with farmers, opening farms, starting to produce [agricultural goods], building tree houses inspired by British struggles, etc.

Military repression of a citizens' movement

This was obviously not seen with a very 'positive eye' by the authorities who, in October 2012, deployed a massive military operation called 'Operation Caesar'. It was just after an agreement with the government had been reached with farmers who (...) had carried out a hunger strike (...) [stating] that until all the legal procedures would come to their end, evictions of "legal inhabitants" would not take place. So they went for those that were squatting. The resistance was absolutely incredible. There was a diversity of tactics, of people and a determination in the resistance to this military operation that took everybody by surprise. (...) Despite this resistance, 12 farms and houses [were] destroyed. (...)

About a year before a call out had been

published saying that [in the event of] eviction, people would come back exactly one month later. And therefore from the [first] day of the military operation, (...) the organisation of a big demonstration started in earnest. (...) The [purpose] was (...) to rebuild what had been destroyed. I remember thinking there would be a few hundred people [to] build a symbolic cabin and that would be it. It is not quite what happened, because 4,000 people turned up with enough building material to actually rebuild an entire hamlet in one weekend. There were some collectives who had spent the whole month pre-building cabins and brought them from as far as 900km. (...) So (...) what sprouted out of this absolutely astonishing energy was a hamlet with three dorms, a kitchen, a forge, a tavern, a workshop. It was an extraordinary moment.

A few days later the cops attacked that hamlet with tear gas, grenades inside the dorms, etc. That was their second massive strategic mistake because when you have 4,000 people that have put that much energy into rebuilding something in one weekend, they are not going to let it be destroyed by just watching it on TV. And so the conflict really peaked and there were lots of tear-gas and concussion grenades being [used] and for a few days it was really intense. There was an open letter to the president written by local doctors who were treating injuries here who (...) said 'what we are treating are war injuries'. Our interpretation of the situation is that the president (...) decided that he could not weather the scandal of a potential death and so the troops withdrew. From the Spring of 2013 the cops had disappeared and never set foot on the zone for 6 years.

Saying 'yes' and 'no': exploring possibilities in radical imagination

[An] incredible laboratory of commoning blossomed on the territory where (...) collectively people put life in the way of the airport. (...) Where they wanted to put a runway there were fields of buckwheat that were planted, where they wanted to put the duty-

free there was a barn with a sawmill that was built, where they wanted to put a control tower, there was a lighthouse (...) that I can see from here. What was demonstrated was we call the DNA of revolutionary practice: being able to say 'yes' and 'no' in the same gesture; (...) proposing and resisting on the same territory at the same time. Not confining oneself to the 'no', to the resistance, to the confrontation which can make you (...) brittle, fragile, [and] despaired because you never experience the world and the joy that you are fighting for. (...) And not confining [oneself] to the 'yes', to the alternatives. If you don't dismantle the infrastructures that are destroying our climate and our ecosystems, your community gardens are soon going to find themselves under water or in the desert.

[In the ZAD] there is the capacity to try things out again and again, to [imagine] (...) something else than what has been imposed upon us. (...) I think that this is what is necessary, to not get self-satisfied with what one has when it works, and not fall into despair when things don't work. But to keep trying. The project of the modern has been to take apart what was once or at least what should be, entwined. The idea of culture [has been] taken out of the idea of nature, and nature has been taken out of the idea of culture, but also art from life. [Separating] the genius from the skill, the beautiful from the useful. What we need to do it to reweave these notions and therefore to no longer think of art as this thing that is separate from everyday life.

Defending the commons: continued resistance among eviction threats and state repression

In 2016 the legal procedures (...) came to an end, [and] from January everyone was evictable, including farmers who had been here for six generations. (...) The movement against the airport deployed again an astonishing energy and creativity to resist it. In January 20,000 people, 500 tractors, 1,000 bikes occupied the bridge that connects with Nantes. A month later 60,000 people occupied a

highway – where the works would start for the airport building. In October (...) people were invited to bring a walking stick or a shepherd's staff and plant it in the soil of the ZAD, making the pledge that they would come and pick it up again if there was a government attack. 40,000 people came, 25,000 thousand sticks were planted. (...) It felt like the movement had just become invincible.

And so in January 2018 the government announced that the airport would be cancelled, and in the same breath that all the squatters would have to either legalise or be evicted. (...) For many of us it was unthinkable not to keep all the relationships we had been developing with the land, with each other, with the more than humans. These were not purely utilitarian relationships. It is a love affair. We are caring for this land that has been caring for us. And so we proposed this global lease, which would have made us legal, and the response came in April in the form of 4,000 [armed police] and drones and helicopters. 11,000 grenades were thrown in 3 days. (...)

After a few days that felt like weeks (...) a simplified form was presented by the state representative, who said those that will sign this will be able to stay, all the others will have to go. The movement hacked the form and presented a complex folder of documents that were signed by individuals but in the name of collectives and demonstrated the intricate nature of life and work as commons. The trick was that all those who wanted to take part in the gamble could be 'covered' by the documents. Seven collectives decided not to sign and their cabins destroyed within a few days. So the message was very clear: it is either on these terms or it is not. 63 collectives [continued negotiating] to be able to stay, to be able to keep caring for this place and each other. And so we are still here, in this gamble which is immensely complicated and immensely exhilarating. The French legal framework is not adapted to the commons. We are now about 180 people that are trying to organise their life collectively, with monthly assemblies and other

practices to make a kind of resurgence of the commons. The commons were destroyed and we are trying to revive it.

Drawing parallels between militarism and the climate crisis

Militarism and the climate crisis emerge from exactly the same destructive system. (...) The militarisation project is all about 'control and submit'. (...) And when one thinks about it, the modern project is about controlling and submitting nature, that is supposed to be separate from culture. We talk about the environment as though we are not in it, as if we are surrounded by it. It is very telling in a way. I think that the climate crisis comes from the multiplicity of practices, (...) [particularly] the fact that we have been totally and very violently disconnected and taken out of the living. In fact we are (...) made to think that we are almost not part of life. That it is this thing that is outside of us and that we need to control.

A living organism thriving on global connections

The ZAD could only win because it was connected with other struggles. It never wanted to be a withdrawn bubble, but always was and needs to be very porous territory. (...) We have links with other movements against infrastructures, anti-nuclear struggles, but also other territories, such as the Zapatistas, people in Kurdistan, in Palestine, (...) [in] Standing Rock, when it was still active. During the two waves of evictions in 2012 and 2018, [we] receive[d] so many messages of support. A territory in struggle (...) needs to be linked. Like any living organism, [it] needs to remain in relations with other living organism[s] otherwise it just perishes. (...) You can't live without having the oxygen of other experiences.

We are nature defending itself: the bocage and the people

When I wake up (...) I hear the birds. (...) [and] I can very quickly see the forest. Most mornings I think to myself, well, this should be covered in concrete. What I should hear right now,

standing here, is the massive roar of enormous planes. [But] what I hear are the birds and what I see is the forest. Because we fought. The land and us fought together and we won together. And (...) that feeling makes me overcome a lot of the [bad] moments where I think (...) we are just so far from having learnt to do things together. Because (...) I genuinely feel that the capacity to be together, to live and work together, has been taken away from us. (...) And so we need to relearn it and it takes a lot of work and a lot of patience.

And so when I run out of patience and I say 'It is too hard', I look at the forest and I think 'it is this, this forest, this is what we have achieved'. The fact that we are here deserves that we carry on. There have been so many amazing moments of togetherness, of courage, and audacity. So many people devoted so much energy to something that was not supposed to be (i.e. defeating a piece of infrastructure). You are not supposed to win that. (...) All that we actually gained, from women's rights, to wear[ing] trousers, the weekend, the right to strike, the right to vote, etc. all (...) started by being unrealistic and determined. (...) I very profoundly feel that I am a descendant of people in struggle, people that have actually gone through so much more hardship than I ever did. [So] I have to carry on.

Further reading:

- Website: www.labo.zone
- Social Media: [Twitter @labofji](https://twitter.com/labofji) [Facebook ZAD NDDI](https://www.facebook.com/ZAD.NDDI) Info@zadnddlinfo
- Isabelle Fremeaux and Jay Jordan 'We are 'nature' defending itself. Entangling art, activism and autonomous zones.' Vagabond/ Pluto Press, 2021.
- Mauvaise Troupe & Kristin Ross 'The Zad & No Tav. Territorial struggles and the making of a new political intelligence.' Verso, 2018
- Henfrey, T., Kenrick, J. (2015) 'Climate, Commons and Hope: The Transition Movement in Global Perspective', available [here](#).

Conclusion

The stories in this publication testify to the value of community resilience and the resourcefulness that individuals and groups show in facing challenges to their lives and livelihoods. Be it through creative expression or community-led action, people are carving out a new path for themselves that enables a new relationship with the natural world, their material realities, and their social and political systems. This new relationship is grounded in local meaning and shies away from utilitarian understandings of nature.

The stories in this publication offer concrete examples in which the intimate connections between militarism, climate and environmental issues come to the surface. Militarism is manifested in the lives of storytellers in a myriad of ways: they may live in a war zone, in a location of strategic military interest, or in a territory under military occupation. They may face disproportionate policing, police violence, or may be targeted by the military or by armed state and non-state actors as a result of their political activity or civil society engagement on climate and social justice issues.

Stories in this publication show how military activities leave an environmental footprint that in some cases can be seen for generations

(see Vietnam Dioxine, Tiara R. Na'puti). On the other hand, policies aimed at responding to climate-related impacts can also have a negative impact on communities, be it because of increased militarisation, criminalisation, or continued displacement from lands used for green and renewable energy projects (see Tateh Lehib).

Through storytellers' eyes we see not only how militarisation and securitised responses negatively impact the natural environment that communities depend on to survive and thrive; they also illustrate how militarisation hinders local efforts to tackle climate and environmental issues at the community level. These include: regenerating land and contributing to food security (Yara Hasan); opposing environmentally harmful infrastructure projects and experimenting with new ways of organising collective life (see ZAD/ Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination); or preserving vital ecosystems that sustain life and provide spiritual sanctuary to indigenous communities (Cristobal Pop).

Yet in the face of overlapping obstacles, viable people-led climate solutions are emerging in villages, towns and cities around the world: initiatives that are born out of people's

connectedness with the land and creativity when facing challenges. Communities around the world are building traditions of resilience out of necessity, informed by an intimate knowledge of the needs and wants of their communities and an awareness of the interdependence of all forms of life.



Points for reflection

This publication attempts to bring communities back to the centre of the conversation on climate and militarism. Rather than specific policy direction that encompasses all the storytellers' distinct realities and demands, we wish to conclude by offering some points for reflection for actors engaged in areas affected by militarist, securitised responses and climate and/or environmental issues. To engage in a necessary degree of critical analysis and self-reflection, the following questions may provide some guidance:

 **To ensure action is rooted in local meaning by listening to people and their stories, consider:**

 **Centring the most affected**


In what ways is the activity or engagement centring the lived experience of communities who are most affected by the climate crisis and militarism?

 **Taking time**

Is sufficient time being dedicated to listening and finding out how people are already coping?

 **Honouring experience**

Are stories being conveyed in a way that honours the storyteller's experience and avoids extractive or instrumentalising attitudes? Is critical self-reflection sufficiently integrated into the process?

 **To build on actions, aspirations and knowledge that is already there, consider:**

 **Existing possibilities**

What are the populations' own existing mechanisms for managing natural resources and conflict in a militarised context? Which are the pockets of peace between people and nature that can be nurtured and expanded?

 **Positionality**

As an external actor, am I bringing an awareness of power relations at play, my own position within them and the sensitivities this entails?

 **Aspirations and Dreams**

What do the stories, dreams and aspirations of populations tell us about how they envision and mobilise for the future of their communities? What opportunities would emerge from engaging with stories that capture the experience and imagination of whole communities?

 **To work across silos and bring a holistic approach to policy, consider:**

 **Breaking silos**

Is my work/analysis helping to break silos between topics that are often seen as separate/distinct, but that are inseparable in the daily experience of those affected?

 **Building connections**

Is my work/analysis making connections, both in policy and practice, between rising militarism, and worsening climate and environmental impacts? Are my actions contributing to higher awareness of these links, while also taking into account the human rights implications of climate action?

 **Interrupting negative feedback loops**

Are my actions disrupting harmful trends of climate and environmental harm or inadvertently contributing to them in the name of security?

Annex

Organisations working on the intersections between militarism and climate, human security and securitisation in the context of the climate crisis include:

- Northern Friends Peace Board
- Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW)
- Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) – Human Impacts of Climate Change
- Scientists for Global Responsibility
- Conflict and Environment Observatory
- Transnational Institute

A diverse group of organisations active on these issues established the Arms, Militarism and Climate Justice working group, an informal space for dialogue and advocacy coordination under the umbrella of the European Network Against the Arms Trade (ENAAT). For a comprehensive overview of initiatives, actors and resources visit climatemilitarism.org.

Images

Drawings on pages 1, 8-9, 12, 15, 16, 19, 20, 21, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 made by Saskia Basa.

Picture on page 5 made by Lena Hofmaier.

Images on pages 7, 10, 36 retrieved from <https://www.canva.com>.

Icons by Dovile Bogusyte.



Quaker
Council for
European
Affairs

www.qcea.org

