

nonviolence works

12 people
stories

Z **KURVE**
Wustrow

Centre for Training and Networking
in Nonviolent Action

nonviolence
works

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40 years of KURVE Wustrow—that's a good reason for us to look back and get inspired for our future work. In this brochure, we introduce you to twelve people who have helped to shape the history of our Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action and are still connected with us today. Some of them have been active in the anti-nuclear resistance movement of the Wendland for years, if not for decades, others work in our project regions in the Balkans or the Middle East.

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These twelve people are living examples for our conviction that nonviolent action can bring about social change. They demonstrate that effective resistance can be fun when it's informed by creativity, as became obvious during many demonstrations against the Castor transports of nuclear waste to Gorleben. Margrit Albers and Wolfgang Hertle, who belong to the founders of KURVE Wustrow, talk

humourously about their occasional cat-and-mouse-games with the police and other amazing activities that also helped to win over the local population of the rural Wendland. With similar creative ideas, Katja Tempel kept the Gorleben resistance movement alive some years later, Hagen Berndt added an international perspective.

Further portraits illustrate the international peacebuilding efforts of KURVE Wustrow. Albulena Karaga and Nenad Vukosavljević show how the diverse ethnic groups of the Balkans can reconcile when they learn to perceive their previous "enemies" as human beings and accept that, during the war, the "opposite side" suffered, too. Lihi Levian Joffe and the women from Al-Walajah, amongst them Ilham Zeda, apply nonviolent means to oppose Israeli policies of occupation in the Middle East. Mai Ali Shatta describes how nonviolent action in Sudan contributed to bringing down the previous dictatorship. Here, the commitment

of women was of the utmost importance.

The work of KURVE Wustrow couldn't have been successful for 40 years without young people joining regularly to uphold the principles of nonviolent resistance in the next generation as well. A prime example is the involvement of Jana Burke in peace initiatives of the youth at European Union level. Michael Schneider and Fin Kuhl also belong to the group of younger activists who resort to civil disobedience when fighting injustice, for example the sometimes harsh treatment of refugees by the authorities.

What unites these twelve people is their unequivocal commitment to human rights, peace and social justice. Their manifold actions demonstrate the need for developing long-term strategies, just like Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Emmeline Pankhurst and Bertha von Suttner did—sometimes even planning beyond one's own lifetime which re-

quires much courage and also a lot of patience.

The twelve activists are aware that social injustice can't be eliminated within a few days. They are convinced, however, that they can induce changes in perception and contribute to a long-term social transformation. Thus, they corroborate the principle that nonviolence is definitely working. At the same time, they are an inspiration for us to continue our work in the next 40 years with vigour, courage, strategic planning and patience.

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Jochen Neumann
(Director)

Margrit Albers



“Bad Boys Won’t Get into our Home”

**Resistance should be fun—
Nonviolence as the leading
principle**

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Margrit Albers, born in 1946, attended the meetings to found KURVE Wustrow four decades ago. From 1981 to 1983, she was, next to Wolfgang Hertle, the first full-time trainer at the then very young “Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action”. At that time as well as in later years, she played a leading role in integrating KURVE Wustrow into the Wendland’s resistance movement against nuclear energy.

“If you want to create a world without violence, you have to get there without violence.”

Margrit Albers has no doubts about the positive impact of nonviolent action. “There is clear evidence of this in scientific studies”, says the educationist who has been closely associated with KURVE Wustrow from its very beginnings. One might get more public attention with violent means, but this would destroy the very goal one is trying to achieve. “If you want to create a world without violence, you have to get there without violence”, is Margrit’s deep conviction. “You have to anticipate your goal in the course of your action.”

Nevertheless her nonviolent activities were spectacular enough to raise a lot of public awareness and reach more and more people. It started in the 1970s with her involvement in the organisation “Nonviolent Action Husum”. She took part in sit-ins to protest against the atomic power station at Brokdorf and government plans

for further nuclear plants in the tidal mud flats of Northern Germany. “At Whitsun in 1977, we organised a big protest march which was also attended by anti-nuclear activists from Denmark”, Margrit remembers. “The Danes came across the border singing cheerfully which really impressed me. At that time, we Germans were far too serious and dour to be able to sing during demonstrations.”

Her later campaigns, however, displayed creativity and a great sense of humour, too. After moving to Wustrow in 1981, Margrit got involved with the “Gorleben Women” who protested against the nuclear waste repository at Gorleben and the transport of so-called Castor containers with burnt-out nuclear fuel rods to this site. “A particularly nice initiative in the early 1980s was our ‘living room’ right outside the intermediate waste disposal facility”, she recalls laughing. “On their

Photo: Margrit Albers



"I'm convinced that the principle of nonviolence has given a high degree of credibility to the anti-nuclear resistance movement in the Wendland."

tractors, local farmers delivered furniture items like a settee, a coffee table, arm chairs, a sideboard and even a vanity table, thus demonstrating in a self-ironic manner that the anti-nuclear resistance movement in the Wendland was spearheaded by women.”

The slogan of this activity: “Bad boys won’t get into our home!” Obviously, policemen arrived and were promptly offered chocolates on a silver tray. Some officers accepted them, looking a bit embarrassed, but still repeated their order to remove the “living room”. At least, they didn’t intervene straight away, but waited until the farmers came back with their tractors to pick up the furniture items. A potentially nasty confrontation was thus averted.

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“Resistance should be fun”, says Margrit. She and her fellow activists certainly did have fun in the mid-1990s when they spread soft soap over the road to the nuclear waste repository, shortly before the arrival of another Castor transport. “We make the nuclear industry skid”, was the slogan of this nonviolent initiative. During an earlier demonstration, the activists wore black clothes, carried scythes and chanted “Death is a Grim Reaper from Gorleben”. The letter X, a symbol of the anti-nuclear movement in the Wendland, was re-enacted by wearing bright yellow gloves and

crossing arms. And in later years, some activists who had grown older thought of yet another creative way to protest against the incoming nuclear waste containers: Instead of sitting down on the road, they brought chairs to the loading crane area. There they sat, sang cheerful songs and offered coffee and cake to all bystanders, including the police.

“I’ve never seen policemen as ‘evil enemies’, just like I see political opponents first and foremost as human beings”, Margrit stresses. She recalls one blockade at which she bumped into a policeman who ironically had just attended one of her educational training courses on public speaking. “When the Castor with the nuclear waste finally rolled into the repository, he had tears in his eyes like me, and he told me that, just like us activists, he had never wished this to happen in his home area.”

Margrit is convinced that the principle of nonviolence has given a high degree of credibility to the anti-nuclear resistance movement in the Wendland. It had thus been possible to gain support from the local farmers who had initially been very skeptical and suspicious when more and more activists moved into their area. At the same time, groups prone to violence had been prevented from hijacking the Wendland resistance movement. In

Margrit's opinion, this is also a great merit of KURVE Wustrow: "This organisation lives and acts according to the principle of nonviolence and could thus convince more and more people of their goals." Furthermore, it was a great achievement to create public awareness for the problem of nuclear waste disposal and keep it alive over decades until today.

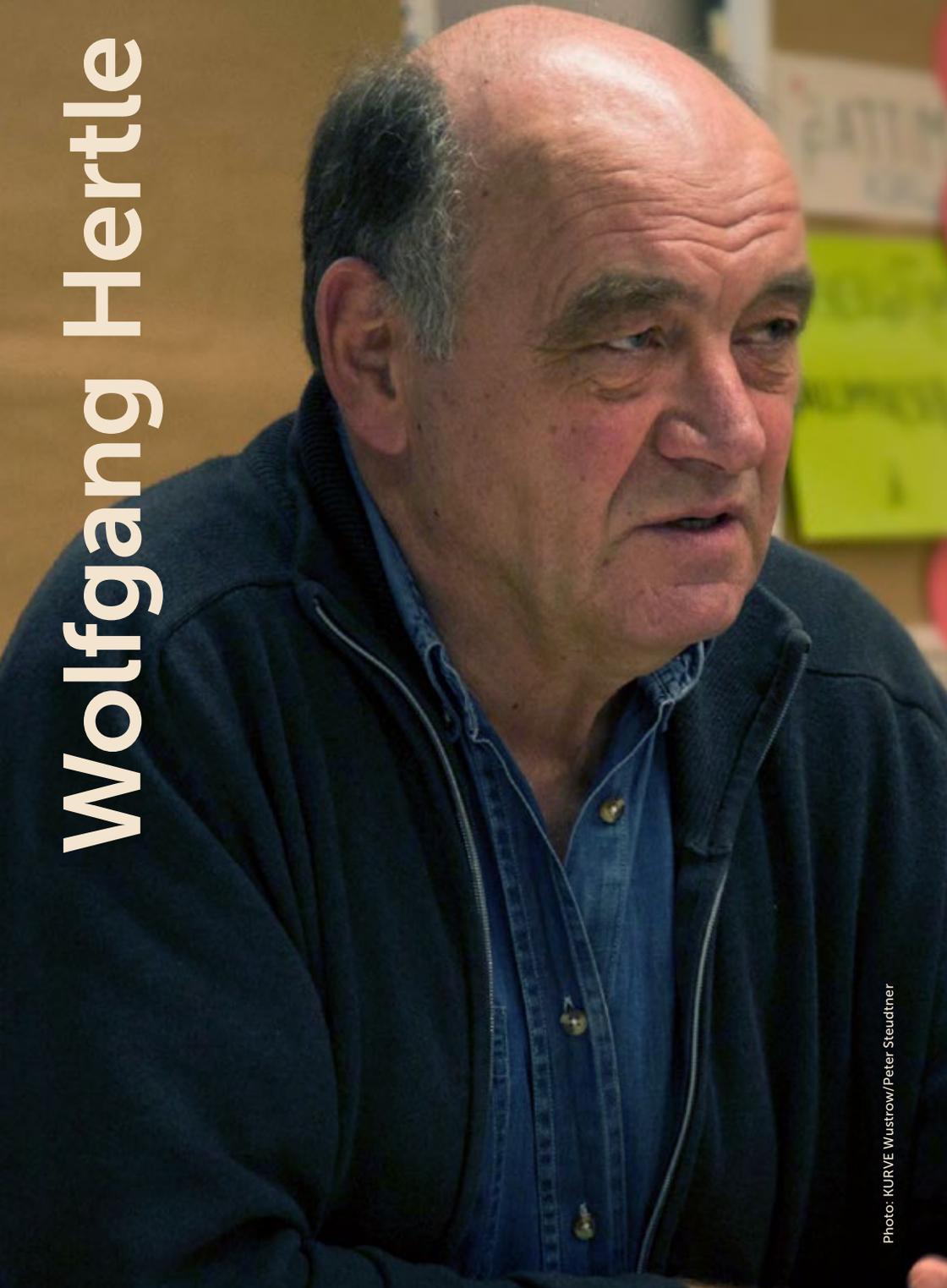
Nonviolence does certainly not exclude determined action when principles of human rights are being violated, as Margrit stresses. In the late 1970s, she lived in the village of Schreyahn where Neo-Nazis moved into a vacant flat. On 20th April, they celebrated Hitler's birthday and bawled out right-wing messages of hatred. Convinced that this had to be nipped in the bud, Margrit and other villagers went up to these people and told them clearly that their behaviour was not being tolerated. Further determined intervention by a united local popu-

lation finally paid off: The Neo-Nazis gave up and moved away from Schreyahn.

What has motivated her to remain involved in nonviolent action for such a long time? Margrit emphasises her deep conviction that such action is necessary to ensure peaceful coexistence of human beings and avert potential danger. She considers it vital to promote personal encounters and cooperation and to involve even opponents as much as possible rather than ostracising them from the very start. The principle of nonviolence was instilled into her by her parents already, and it has, as she says, determined her whole life, at the public-political as well as the private level.

"Instead of sitting down on the road, we brought chairs to the loading crane area. There we sat, sang cheerful songs and offered coffee and cake to all bystanders, including the police."

Wolfgang Hertle



Nonviolent Resistance with an International Dimension

**From Larzac in France to the North-German
Wendland—Exchange of experience as a catalyst
for successful action**

Wolfgang Hertle, born in 1946, is a founding member of KURVE Wustrow and became the first full-time employee of the new “Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action” in 1981, together with Margrit Albers. At that time, the political scientist had already been involved in nonviolent resistance against military facilities and nuclear power plants for about 15 years and had gained profound international experience in political action and training. Nowadays, Wolfgang is, amongst other things, campaigning for the rehabilitation of forced labourers at the arms corporation Rheinmetall during World War II and against the continuing production and export of weapons.

We wanted to combine political education with nonviolent action in a region immediately affected by conflict." That's how Wolfgang Hertle explains the idea to found a "Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action" in the North-German Wendland four decades ago. It was triggered by the decision of the German Government in 1977 to make Gorleben the site for a nuclear waste repository. The opposing citizens' group in the local town of Lüchow-Dannenberg asked for support from the wider anti-nuclear resistance movement, and Wolfgang was happy to take his long-term national and international experience in nonviolent action to the Wendland.

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The conscientious objector to military service because of Christian principles had gained this experience particularly in the 1970s on the Larzac in Southern France. On this plateau, local farmers and armament opponents protested against the planned extension of a military training ground for the French Armed Forces. At one stage, they occupied a farm and founded a so-called centre for nonviolent action and social defence. This peace centre "Le Cun" served Wolfgang as a model for the future KURVE Wustrow. He was associated with the Larzac resistance movement, which successfully prevented the extension of the local military area, for

several decades. He also wrote his PhD thesis about this struggle and has stayed in contact with activists in the region until today.

The experience gained in France proved very useful during the anti-nuclear protests in Wyhl at the Kaiserstuhl in the South-German State of Baden-Württemberg, as Wolfgang recalls. Plans for an atomic power plant at that site were eventually shelved in 1977 after massive resistance from local wine-growers and other activists as well as a court order to stop construction. "I suppose the success of our action can be measured by what could be prevented", says Wolfgang. The later abandonment of plans for a nuclear reprocessing plant at Wackersdorf as well as a fast breeder reactor at Kalkar could also be ascribed to successful resistance, even when taking into account economic considerations by the nuclear industry. For Wolfgang, it seemed vital in this context to create effective networks amongst as many anti-nuclear groups as possible, as long as they were committed to the principle of nonviolence: "The exchange of experience is a key catalyst for successful action."

Such an extensive exchange preceded the formation of KURVE Wustrow as well. Wolfgang contacted many groups of the ecology and peace movement active at that time in order to recruit members for the

“In our makeshift camp, tailor-made training courses in nonviolent action were conducted in order to convince even those activists who didn’t want to exclude violence categorically.”

Supporting Association. One of the most important protest campaigns took place in May 1980 when the “Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action” was still in its infancies. Anti-nuclear activists occupied the building site section number 1004 in the forest of Gorleben and proclaimed the “Republic Free Wendland” on these premises. “This was one of the most intensive phases of our resistance”, Wolfgang remembers. “In our makeshift camp, tailor-made training courses in nonviolent action were conducted in order to convince even those activists who didn’t want to exclude violence categorically. At the same time, it was possible to raise larger national and international awareness for the Gorleben issue.”

When building works for the intermediate nuclear waste repository commenced in January 1982, Wolfgang and his fellow campaigners managed again to draw attention to themselves. They didn’t assemble at the building site where the police was waiting for them, but occupied a small strip of land at the border of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). This strip actually belonged to the GDR, but there were no fortifications like everywhere else. Neither the police nor a border patrol of the British Armed Forces dared to remove the demonstrators, since they were not allowed to step on GDR territory. Radio programmes and other media outlets reported extensively about this creative campaign.



Photo: KURVE Wustrow/Peter Steudtner

"I go along with Gandhi who claimed that one always has to develop new methods of nonviolent resistance and exploit their full potential. That's the only way how resistance can be successful in the long run."

About ten years later, Wolfgang was one of the protest organisers in the community of Wendisch Evern near Lüneburg, just outside the Wendland area. Activists set up a tented camp and occupied railway tracks to stop the trains with the Castor containers full of burnt-out nuclear fuel rods. The transport schedule was thus disrupted by four to five hours. "What was really crucial was the positive response of the villagers who initially were very skeptical", Wolfgang stresses. "They realised that we weren't brutal thugs like referred to in government propaganda. Eventually, they even offered us their houses to have a shower or stay overnight. And, most important, they set up a new anti-Castor initiative group."

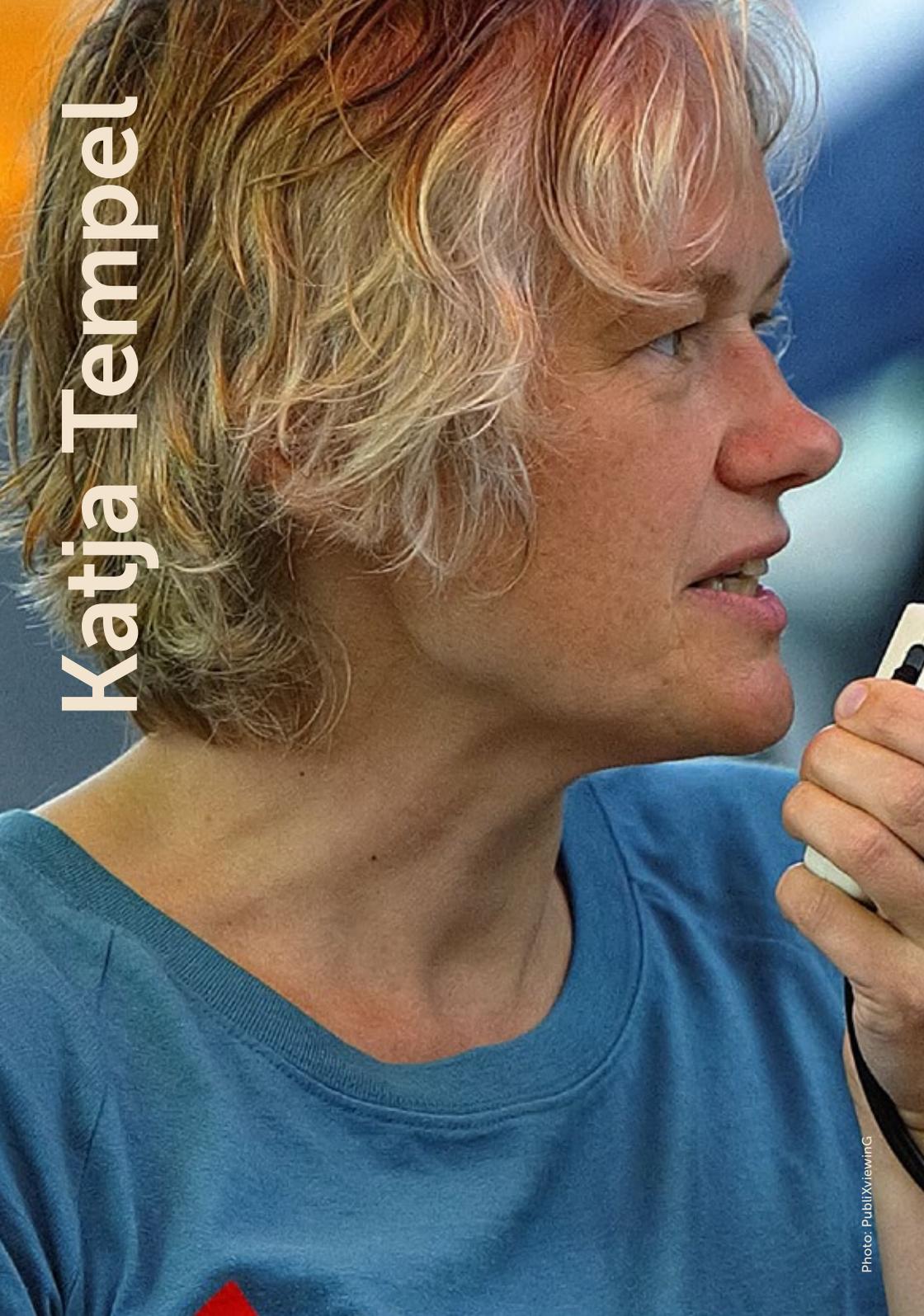
There is no doubt for Wolfgang that only the principle of nonviolence had convinced most of the local population in Wendisch Evern as well as in the Wendland to join the anti-nuclear resistance movement. And KURVE Wustrow has played an important part with its related programmes for training and networking: "Broad support was certainly necessary, as nonviolent resistance requires a very long-term commitment in order to have a genuine impact."

Wolfgang, who in 1972 founded the magazine "Grasswurzelrevolution" (grass roots revolution), has upheld the principle of nonviolence for all

his life. At a young age already, he felt a leaning towards the teachings of Gandhi as well the American Civil Rights Movement of Martin Luther King and was also in touch with the War Resisters' International. In the various protest groups he got involved in, he has always demanded an unequivocal commitment to nonviolence. Not all activists were ready to embrace such a principle and rather wanted to keep up the option to use violence, if that seemed useful in a given situation.

Wolfgang, however, is convinced that such usefulness can only prevail for a very short time, if at all: "I go along with Gandhi who claimed that one always has to develop new methods of nonviolent resistance and exploit their full potential. That's the only way how resistance can be successful in the long run."

Katja Tempel



“At least there was One Hour less Training for War”

**Blockades to disrupt operations—
Nonviolent resistance against atomic
weapons, nuclear waste transports
and genetic engineering**

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Katja Tempel, born in 1963, has been associated with KURVE Wustrow since her youth. The midwife and social worker from the North-German Wendland has been active in the anti-Gorleben resistance movement for decades. In 2011, she initiated the campaign “gorleben365” which set up blockades in front of the nuclear waste repository for a whole year. Until today, Katja is organising similar events at the military airfield of Büchel in the Eifel hills, which stores nuclear weapons, or in the Altmark area of Brandenburg. Civil disobedience against injustice has been a principle of her whole life, and she has even gone to prison for this.



've grown up with the principle that we can only live well if all human beings have equal chances and minority rights are observed, too. Whenever this is not the case, there has to be resistance." For Katja Tempel, resistance is more than just protest to get one's opinions noticed in public. Rather, resistance implies interfering action and civil disobedience in order to disrupt the operations of opposed institutions, even if it might be for a short time only. "At least there was one hour less training for war", the activist from the North-German Wendland comments on her "go-in" at the military airfield Büchel in the West-German Eifel hills.

In line with the campaign "büchel65" in 2016, some 35 resistance organisations gathered for 65 days at this airbase which until today stores 20 atomic bombs of the United States Armed Forces. Repeatedly, routine operations were disrupted so severely that the nuclear weapons would not have been ready-to-use during those hours. Most spectacular was the following action: Notice had been given of a blockade in front of the well-guarded main gate only, but in an area further afield, activists managed to dismantle the connections between two fence sections. Carrying balloons and protest banners, they reached the runway without being observed and were only removed after they themselves informed the police and

military about their presence on army grounds. One of the leading organisers of this "go-in" was Katja's then 20-year-old daughter Clara who thus continued the family tradition of nonviolent resistance in the third generation.

All participating activists were charged with trespassing. They refused to pay the imposed fines and, instead, went to prison for several days. One of them was Clara Tempel. To demonstrate their readiness to be imprisoned, the activists presented their tooth brushes at the final rally of the "büchel65" campaign. Katja had already been in gaol for civil disobedience in the 1980s, once for 40 days and another time for ten days. She announced that she would now go to prison again rather than paying her fine of 30 daily rates. Three activists appealed to the German Supreme Court on constitutional grounds with the aim to end the storage of atomic weapons on German soil once and for all—which would be in line with international treaties.

Peaceful resistance has been an intrinsic part of Katja's whole life. Her parents Helga and Konrad Tempel, committed pacifists and Quakers, were co-founders of the German Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in 1960 and are closely connected to the international peace movement until this very day. At the age of 17, Katja first participated in



“We as activists are not powerless at all, as long as we join up with many other people to fight for a common cause together.”

“We should never say people at the top will do what they like anyway. They can only do this, if we let them.”

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the solemn vigil “Fasting for Peace”: For ten days, she and other activists camped without eating on the market square of her hometown Ahrensburg near Hamburg in order to protest against the NATO Double-Track Decision of December 1979, which increased the number of nuclear weapons on German soil. Together with her parents, she later took part in blockades of US military sites, particularly at Mutlangen in Southern Germany, to oppose the deployment of Pershing-II missiles.

More than 2,000 court cases in this context led to legal revisions with the result that nonviolent sit-ins are no longer classed as coercion under German law.

In the mid-1980s, Katja graduated in social pedagogy from the University of Bremen, years later she also trained as a midwife. After her studies, she went to India for a while where she met Narayan Desai, the son of Mahatma Gandhi’s personal secretary. His Institute for Total Revolution in Vecchi north of Mumbai has been a long-standing partner of KURVE Wustrow whose board member Katja became in 1985. Later, she was Educational Coordinator at this Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action and organised many training courses, especially to promote resistance against the transport of nuclear waste to Gorleben.

That’s where Katja played a leading role for decades. She was a founding member of the anti-nuclear initiative “x-tausendmal quer” (x thousand times obstructive) whose activists staged regular sit-ins across the roads towards the Gorleben site. In March 1997, as many as 9,000 people took part in a blockade of the loading crane—an outstanding success in Katja’s eyes. On behalf of “x-tausendmal quer” and in cooperation with KURVE Wustrow, she initiated “gorleben365” in 2011. During this campaign, di-

verse resistance groups staged daily blockades in front of the nuclear waste repository site throughout a whole year. KURVE Wustrow thus became visible again as a prominent actor in the anti-nuclear movement of the Wendland.

According to Katja, the continuing resistance contributed to the final decision of the German Parliament in June 2011 to phase out atomic energy for good. And Gorleben, where building works were repeatedly disrupted, is no longer an option for a potential long-term nuclear waste repository within Germany. All this might have been influenced by a multitude of factors, including the accident at the Japanese nuclear plant Fukushima. Still Katja is convinced that nonviolent resistance can bring about desirable changes. "We should never say people at the top will do what they like anyway. They can only do this, if we let them", she stresses. "We as activists are not powerless at all, as long as we join up with many other people to fight for a common cause together."

Another success for her was the occupation of an agricultural field in the Wendland on which genetically engineered maize of the meanwhile outlawed brand MON 810 of Monsanto was supposed to be grown. Katja and other activists blocked tractors, planted an alternative maize variety and pulled the few

remaining genetically altered plants out of the soil by hand. After two months, the involved farmer gave up, and the Wendland has remained free from genetically engineered produce ever since. "This is another example that nonviolent action can work", says Katja.

The principle of nonviolence does not stop her from being a fighter and breaking a superficial peace, as many of her blockades have shown. "For me, this isn't a contradiction at all, but a necessity in order to draw public attention to conflict situations", she stresses. "If keeping the peace is equalled to being quiet and doing nothing, I'll say no. However, nonviolence means that you never vilify your opponents and don't cause them any personal harm deliberately."

Hagen Berndt



“International Peacebuilding has to Begin at Home”

**Cooperation across borders only successful
at eye-level—“Logic of peace” as the basis for
nonviolent action**

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Hagen Berndt, born in 1959, was the Educational Coordinator of KURVE Wustrow from 1992 to 2000 and afterwards Managing Director until 2002. During those years, the International Trainings were set up, and the Civil Peace Service (CPS) was established as a programme financed by the German Government. Hagen studied Indology, Islamic Science and Communications Research and has worked in India and Sri Lanka. Nowadays, his prime field of action is Communal Conflict Transformation in German cities and communities.

“We have been engaged in professional international peacebuilding long before the German Civil Peace Service was officially established in 1999.” Hagen Berndt likes looking back to the 1990s when he decisively shaped the profile of KURVE Wustrow. As Educational Coordinator, he was responsible for the “International Trainings” which have been offered since 1994 and have remained a hallmark of the Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action. In this context, the following point has always been of utmost importance to Hagen: “International cooperation must not be a one-way street where we Europeans impose our own concepts and methods upon the rest of the world. What really matters is an exchange at eye-level and mutual cross-fertilisation.”

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A prime example for a reversal of alleged European superiority was the „Gorleben International Peace Team“ (GIPT), set up in the late 1990s. Representatives of various peace organisations from Europe as well as North and South America, Asia and Africa were invited to the North German Wendland in order to monitor local resistance against the transport of nuclear waste to Gorleben and document the response of the security forces. These observer missions were registered and officially approved by the German authorities, even though some

questions were raised why delegates from outside Europe, of all people, should monitor proceedings in Germany.

“On many occasions, GIPT has had the effect of de-escalating conflict situations”, Hagen emphasises. “Often, its members were allowed access to critical locations where demonstrators were barred, and they were also permitted to monitor the interrogation of arrested people. The presence of international observers reduced the potential use of intimidation and violence on the side of the authorities.”

GIPT can be seen as a successful means of nonviolent conflict transformation in a volatile situation. The final report comes out with a clear yes to the question whether this international monitoring mission was useful. Not only did it increase the number of observers and thus the number of documented cases: “Even more important is the fact that GIPT could enhance an awareness of the Gorleben issue all over the world, since it made use of international contacts and published its report in various languages. This will secure international support for the resistance movement.”

The latter prediction was confirmed many times during the anti-nuclear protests of the following years. Initiated by KURVE Wustrow, GIPT also became a model for other interna-

tional monitoring missions. Similar teams, for instance, observed the proceedings at the German border to Poland just before the latter country joined the European Union in 2004. Hagen believes that their presence prevented potential human rights violations by the authorities, be it arbitrary rejections or offending interrogations of people wanting to cross the border.

“Effective peacebuilding always has to start within one’s own country and must be fully established there”, Hagen stresses. “At an international level, one can then offer logistical and strategic support.” An example of this was the provision of safe spaces for peace organisations from the Balkans during the Bosnian war. Serbian and Croatian activists thus got a chance to meet each other at the premises of KURVE Wustrow around 1995. As Hagen recalls, the goal was “not to present our guests with our own suggestions for a solution, but to build up mutual trust and, if wanted, give some strategical input. Eventually, however, only peacebuilders from the conflict area itself can decide which strategies are best for their region.”

Another opportunity to offer protection to people from conflict areas arose around the turn of the millennium during the civil war in Sri Lanka, where Hagen had been deployed as a peace worker back in the 1980s. Representatives of the

“The presence of international observers reduced the potential use of intimidation and violence on the side of the authorities.”

Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) tried to extort money from Tamils in German exile. Those who resisted were severely intimidated or beaten up; most of the victims were women. Under Hagen’s leadership, KURVE Wustrow offered support to a female activist who announced detailed documentations of such incidents and supplied a phone number for confidential whistle-blowing. Initially this woman was threatened, too, but her pending publications obviously did the trick: the violent intimidations stopped.

In Hagen’s opinion, the most important prerequisite for effective non-violent resistance is a strong civil society. Its organisations should be committed to a consistent “logic of peace”, based on solidarity and cooperation of all stakeholders in any given conflict: “That’s the only



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“Only on the basis of a consistent logic of peace can civil society offer a genuine alternative to government institutions which are usually resorting to the logic of security in conflict situations.”

way how civil society can offer a genuine alternative to government institutions which unfortunately are usually resorting to a logic of security.”

The “logic of security” implies relying on confrontation and the demonstration of power in order to safeguard one’s own interests in a conflict situation. The consequences are restriction, exclusion, surveillance and finally rearmament and military intervention. To offer an alternative, civil society should lead the political discourse into a direction in line with the logic of peace. This means that there will be no preconceived solutions which are then violently enforced, but dialogue at eye-level, mutual listening, a willingness to learn from each other and a broad cooperation in finding solutions. “Only under these circumstances is nonviolent action likely to have a genuine impact”, Hagen stresses.

For him, this holds good even in extreme conflict situations when fundamental values of peace should still not be relinquished. He refers to the attacks of 11th September 2001 in New York after which KURVE Wustrow started a broad campaign against the military intervention in Afghanistan. This was symbolised by a post card showing geese running into different directions under the motto: “Goose-stepping straight ahead? Take a turn!” For alternative

solutions, contacts were established to peace groups, women’s networks and democratic organisations within Afghanistan. The KURVE Newsletter presented examples of nonviolent action in conflict areas and explored the roots of terrorism from the angle of a thorough conflict analysis. Readers were invited to come together and discuss crisis exit strategies based on the very logic of peace. Hagen wishes for such an invitation to be still offered in present-day conflicts as well.

“International cooperation must never be a one-way street. What really matters is an exchange at eye-level and mutual cross-fertilisation.”

Nenad Vukosavljević

To Perceive the “Enemy” as a Human Being

**Difficult efforts for reconciliation in
former Yugoslavia—Nonviolence as a
means of overcoming hatred based on
selective commemoration**

Nenad Vukosavljević, born in 1967, grew up in Belgrade in former Yugoslavia. He refused to do his military service, which brought him a short-term military detention, and fled to Germany in 1990. There, he attended the first International Training in Nonviolent Action at KURVE Wustrow. With their support, he went to Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Balkan wars in 1997 in order to promote reconciliation between the ethnic groups that were bitterly hostile towards each other. The Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA), which he founded and which has been a KURVE Wustrow partner ever since, is still one of the Balkan’s leading organisations for peacebuilding. It specifically addresses war veterans as key actors in an effective reconciliation process.



t's only when you meet the 'enemies' personally and perceive them as human beings that you can overcome the hate-filled black-and-white picture of friends and enemies. As long as this isn't working, there is always a danger of violent conflicts flaring up again." This belief has motivated Nenad Vukosavljević for the last 25 years to promote direct contacts between the previously warring factions of former Yugoslavia. By facilitating such personal meetings, the Centre for Nonviolent Action (CNA), which he founded, has furthered peace-building in the Balkans decisively and has always been supported in these efforts by KURVE Wustrow.

When Nenad got his draft call for military service in the Yugoslav armed forces, he refused to comply. For the next three weeks, he was held in military detention and, after his release, he faced the strong risk of being imprisoned again. So he eventually fled from his home town of Belgrade, went to England and Ireland and ended up in Germany in 1990. There, he made contact with various peace groups, including KURVE Wustrow—the latter being of interest to him because of connections to the Balkan Peace Team. In 1995, he attended the organisation's first International Training.

"From the very beginning, I was impressed by KURVE Wustrow's competence to deal with differences

amongst human beings", Nenad stresses. "There were no fixed patterns that one had to fit into or rigid expectations that one had to fulfill. Their main goal was to convince us that we can achieve something with nonviolent action. This seed of nonviolence certainly germinated for me. I also appreciated the international solidarity which I experienced in Wustrow, and I wanted to spread it myself in later years."

Supported by KURVE Wustrow, Nenad went to Sarajevo after the Bosnian war and founded CNA with the aim of initiating reconciliation between the ethnic groups that were then bitterly hostile towards each other. It was a very hard beginning, as he remembers: "The term nonviolence didn't exist in the Bosnian vocabulary in 1997. People talked only in categories of perpetrators and victims of violent conflict, and all sides insisted upon their specific views and interpretations of what had happened. We wanted to break through this vicious circle and build bridges."

To achieve this, a lengthy process was required which had to be started very carefully with a cautious step-by-step approach. "For about seven years, we were just engaged in preparations and were hardly visible in the public eye. We had to win over people in key positions, connect them with each other, built up trust and prepare them for further



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“When more and more war veterans started to embrace dialogue and reconciliation, it sent out a much stronger signal than when civil society activists were the only ones to call for peace.”

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personal meetings”, Nenad explains. “In this context, it was vital to make each side aware that their so-called enemies were human beings with feelings and that they actually all had suffered during the war. Only this revelation made it possible to overcome the fear of each other and eventually also the deep-seated hatred.”

The protagonists of such a reconciliation process were often vilified as traitors, sometimes they were also

put under pressure by the authorities. Nevertheless, Nenad and his CNA team were not perturbed in their untiring efforts. They organised workshops and public discussions which soon got noticed in the media. And in the end, they specifically involved war veterans and their associations into peacebuilding. “When the latter started to embrace dialogue and reconciliation, it sent out a much stronger signal than when civil society activists were the only ones to call for peace”, says Nenad. “This resulted into proper chain reactions.”

Ex-combatants of diverse ethnic groups started to show each other their home towns, including local landmarks with a specific significance regarding the war. In another project, participants from both sides marked such important sites that had officially been ignored and set up monuments which do not glorify just one side but commemorate all those involved. “During official memorial services, it is common that the views of only one side are represented. This selective commemoration, however, is, in its final consequence, a continuation of war and can permanently poison our whole society”, Nenad deplures. “We have always tried to counteract this by an inclusive approach which implies acknowledgement that everyone involved had suffered as a human being and not just as a social stereotype. And sometimes we

were even more successful than we would have dared to hope for.”

Nenad recalls a very impressive example. Around 2008, a colonel of the Bosnian-Serb armed forces attended a CNA workshop. Initially, he showed contempt for the trainings in nonviolence and started to praise the Serbian general Ratko Mladic who was later found guilty of genocide during the Bosnian war and got a prison sentence for life. “I thought this colonel was beyond redemption and felt like throwing him out of my workshop”, Nenad remembers. “Nevertheless he stayed on and, a few years later, we were all taken by surprise how he had changed.”

After thorough preparations until 2012, previously hostile ex-combatants from Nenad’s workshops were finally ready to visit Srebrenica together—the site of a massacre of more than 8,000 Bosnian Muslims in July 1995. The aforementioned colonel declared totally unexpectedly that he had been to this place before and really wanted to go there again. When the site was reached, he suddenly asked for permission to lay the groups wreath. He then expressed his deep shame for the atrocities committed by members of his armed forces against the Bosniaks and conveyed his sympathy and condolences.

“I’m very glad that I initially underestimated this colonel”, Nenad em-

phasises. “This, however, is the very power of nonviolence which eventually wins the upper hand. Surely this doesn’t extinguish the memories of war, but once people have opened up to the idea of reconciliation, there is bound to be a permanent impact. They can’t just return to unlimited hatred.”

“Once people have opened up to the idea of reconciliation, there is bound to be a permanent impact.”

Albulena Karaga



Education as a Strong Agent of Social Change

“Dealing with the past” a very sensitive issue in North Macedonia—Divided ethnic groups unite in nonviolent action

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Albulena Karaga, born in 1988, is a peace worker and trainer for the KURVE Wustrow partner Peace Action in North Macedonia, focusing on peacebuilding and “dealing with the past”. As a peace activist, feminist and ethnic Albanian, Albulena is very much aware of the social injustice often experienced by minority groups in her home country. She believes that education is a strong means to overcome such injustices and divisions and sees it as a form of nonviolent resistance against stereotypes which harm peaceful relations in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment.



Photo: KURVE Wustrow/Peter Steudtner

“We just have to try hard and long enough and provide the necessary resources in order to be successful with nonviolent action. And one of the most effective means is education.”

consider it an illusion to think that nonviolence isn't working when we haven't given it a chance. After all, violent interventions haven't achieved much in decades. We just have to try hard and long enough and provide the necessary resources in order to be successful with nonviolent action. And one of the most effective means is education." For Albulena Karaga, education can bring about sustainable change and is thus a powerful form of nonviolent resistance against social injustice. In her trainings in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, she and her team are particularly focused on "dealing with the past"—a highly sensitive issue in her home country North Macedonia.

As an ethnic Albanian, Albulena was confronted with the social injustice often experienced by minority groups at a very early age. She also lived through the armed conflict of 2001 when the Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) rose up against the wide-spread discrimination meted out against minorities by the Macedonian majority. As she recalls, the experience of her childhood and youth made her aware of how important it is to work for peaceful relations. So she took up studies in this area, eventually finishing with a Master's Degree in Peace and Conflict Transformation from the University of Basel in Switzerland in 2013.

A couple of years before, Albulena incidentally attended a ten-day training course offered by the non-governmental organisation Peace Action in cooperation with KURVE Wustrow. "This was a turning-point in my life", she says. "Until then, I had thought I knew a lot about peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and I probably did in terms of theory. But I was not at all conscious of practical peace work. Now, however, I came across action tools for practical implementation, and I was fascinated with the interactive methodology. From then onwards, I knew exactly which area I wanted to work in, and I wanted to do it within Macedonia."

Originally, Albulena had planned to go as a volunteer to Nepal after university, but now she decided to stay in her own country. "There was and still is so much to do at home, and I want to be part of hopefully bringing about social change", she stresses. She eventually took up a post with Megjashi, the First Children's Embassy in the World, another KURVE Wustrow partner with a strong focus on peace education and the rights of children. Here, she mainly worked with teachers, focusing on the need for better inter-ethnic relations in schools in Macedonia. Since 2017, she has been a peace worker with Peace Action where she is also co-facilitating training courses, thereby applying similar methodologies like

the ones that have fascinated her so much since 2012.

Albulena's main focus lies on "dealing with the past"—not a topic that is usually discussed between people from different backgrounds in North Macedonia. The dominant narratives related to the past do not communicate with each other, not even chronologically. "In the eyes of ethnic Macedonians, the country's inter-ethnic problems started only with the Albanian uprising in 2001", Albulena explains. "Ethnic Albanians, on the other hand, talk of a long history of discrimination which led to the armed conflict. So we have to promote dialogue and reflect upon these narratives." For Albulena, it is vital to build trust and overcome the fear of "the other side" by instilling curiosity into the participants of her trainings. By this, she means an interest in different cultures and a willingness to listen to a different point of view, even if one doesn't fully agree with it. And most of all, it is important to see "the others" as human beings instead of upholding stereotypes.

The participants are chosen mainly by their motivation which they have to describe when applying for these trainings. Interesting enough, many of them stress that they want to discuss about what is being officially ignored, since the armed conflict and its legacy are hardly ever addressed openly in North Macedonia.

Peace Action tries to offer a forum for uttering grievances so that both sides can exchange their views and perspectives and also learn about the pain they all have suffered. In other project activities, implemented by some of Albulena's colleagues, such stories are collected and then published in the Macedonian and Albanian language so that eventually an equal voice is given to all parties, including the other minority groups in the country.

Albulena is convinced that this can transform a divided society and promote unity based on mutual respect. "This is reflected in lasting friendships that evolve from these trainings", she emphasises. "Participants begin to see themselves as members of the same community with shared values, and there is a growing willingness to work together on issues that concern all of them. For example, people from our trainings came together in various demonstrations for issues that are important for everyone in our society: women's rights, climate change, fighting pollution and so forth. Our educational trainings are thus contributing to nonviolent action for social change, and I always feel highly motivated when I observe such developments."

Nonviolent action is highly important to Albulena. "We should always ask ourselves what we, as individuals, can do to address injustice and

transform our society”, she stresses. “Our trainings make people aware of the power they have, as individuals and even more so when they unite in action. At the same time, we always stress that we all have a responsibility to act.”

Albulena has no doubts about the long-term impact of nonviolent action: “It seems unfair that people start to question its usefulness when they haven’t achieved all their goals within a very short time. One has to accept that peacebuilding is a lengthy process requiring patience, dedication, creativity and imagination. You can’t build trust in a day and overcome decades of grievances quickly. Also, the resources given to peacebuilding are so much smaller than those invested in military interventions. We just have to expand more energy on peaceful solutions. In the long run, this is the only way to spread hope and overcome social divisions.”

“We should always ask ourselves what we, as individuals, can do to address injustice and transform our society.”

Ilham Zeda



Gardens and Upcycling Products as Symbols of Resistance

Defiance of Al-Walajah's women against Israeli occupation—The human face of an unbearable situation

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Ilham Zeda, born in 1980, lives in Al-Walajah in the occupied West Bank. Israel is planning to extend illegal settlements in her area and has already annexed large parts of the Palestinian village. But a women's committee is defiantly opposing the occupational forces. These Palestinian women remain in their houses, around which they cultivate beautiful gardens, and they run a workshop to produce up-cycled handicraft items. Their very existence thus becomes an act of nonviolent resistance. The initiative "Sumud" (steadfastness) has been supported by KURVE Wustrow since 2016.

“We are frightened, of course, but our resolve to stay is stronger.”

thorities have kept full sovereignty over security matters. This implies, amongst other things, that Palestinians are usually not granted any building permits. Many houses that were built nevertheless were subsequently destroyed, and large parts of the village were annexed for the construction of settlements which violate international law. All this is creating a climate of fear amongst the villagers. However, more and more women from Al-Walajah are absolutely determined not to be intimidated: “We are frightened, of course, but our resolve to stay is stronger.”

Steadfastness means “Sumud” in Arabic, and this is the very motto of this women’s initiative which has been supported by KURVE Wustrow since 2016: “Existence is resistance”, they proclaim. Their gardens give a human face to an otherwise unbearable situation in their village, and this alone is a contribution to change and nonviolent resistance. Notwithstanding all political and social obstacles, the women have also started a small income generating project: They have founded the carpenter’s shop “RWEISAT for Wood Art” in which they produce upcycling craft items out of used wood. The workshop is named after the nearby hill of Rweisat which Israel wants to annex for the extension of settlements. The women’s committee now calls itself the “RWEISAT Team”.

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“**T**he best thing in the world is to have a house for yourself with some land around and some space and calmness. This is ultimate stability!” Ilham Zeda from Al-Walajah in the occupied West Bank can certainly not take stability for granted. Like all other villagers, she is constantly facing the risk of being evicted and having her house demolished. Yet, Ilham and other Palestinian women won’t give in to the threats of the Israeli army. Defiantly, they remain on their plots and have created beautiful gardens around their houses. “Each garden is a symbol of resistance”, reads their message.

Al-Walajah near Bethlehem is surrounded by Jewish settlements, checkpoints and the wall between Israel and the West Bank. As the area is of high strategic importance to Israel, the military au-

To make a life-long dream come true, Ilham wanted to start building her own house on her husband's family plot in Al-Wajalah more than a decade ago. Only with a lot of patience could she convince her husband that it was worth a try. However, she had a long way with many obstacles to go before her aspirations could be fulfilled. "Soon after we had started, we received a call saying that Israeli military soldiers were at our house. When they left, I reached the house and found a final notification of demolition within 24 hours", Ilham recalls. "We were mentally destroyed. We were scared and sad and lost, on our nerves."

Miraculously though, Ilham's family was spared the destruction of their future home. Although Israeli soldiers came to the immediate vicinity with their bulldozers, Ilham's building structure was not touched. Yet, it took several years before the outstanding construction works were continued. Ilham's husband just couldn't bear the thought of working so hard for a house that might then be demolished by the Israeli occupying forces. But Ilham persisted. As money was scarce, she took up a loan from the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), and finally her husband gave in.

"I would never forget the first day of construction, when he came back

home from work and I insisted on going to see the house", Ilham recalls. "He said it is only the first day, you cannot see anything yet. But I insisted. We went there, and I truly cannot describe my feeling back then. I will never forget it. It has been more than seven years already, and I still remember it very well. The best feeling ever!"

The house is still not totally completed, but Ilham is very happy there, as she stresses: "I was always focusing on having a house for myself with some land around, even if it was in a besieged village." Such perseverance of a woman faced with objections from the authorities as well as her husband is undoubtedly remarkable in Arabic society, but it characterises all the women from the Al-Walajah initiative. By staying in their homes, despite harsh living conditions and permanent pressure

"I was always focusing on having a house for myself with some land around, even if it was in a besieged village."

from the military, these villagers live “Sumud”. Al-Walajah has thus gained great importance for the Palestinian resistance movement.

In their gardens, many women grow fruits and vegetables to provide better nourishment for their families, and with their upcycling products they have increased the wealth of the whole village. Alone the fact that women run a carpenter’s shop has raised much attention. Proudly, the “RWEISAT Team” offers alternative tourists’ trips through Al-Walajah in order to showcase the success of this unusual project and raise awareness for the social and political challenges local people are facing. Again, this generates some income for the village community—as well as more visibility.

The women love to compare themselves to a more than 5,500-year-old olive tree in their village: “I’m staying put like the tree. I can resist. The tree doesn’t bid defiance just for its own sake, no, it is there for others as well. It provides shade and is thus helping all those around. I see myself as part of this tree, as if I were the tree. Beautiful, strong and proud. I defy any weather conditions and all other abject circumstances, no matter what happens.”

46 In cooperation with KURVE Wustrow, the women’s committee has also produced a photo book. It gives a deep insight into the life in Al-Walajah and describes how the garden project has strengthened the women’s resilience, enabling them and their families to stay where they are. Like the subsequent workshop project, it can be viewed as a form of effective and creative resistance which is characterised not by fury but by beauty.



“The tree doesn’t bid defiance just for its own sake, no, it is there for others as well. I see myself as part of this tree, as if I were the tree. Beautiful, strong and proud.”

Lihi Levian Joffe



A Feminist Perspective of Peace in the Middle East

Jewish and Palestinian women united against Israeli occupation—Young people encouraged to nonviolent action for human rights

Lihi Levian Joffe, born in 1985, has been active in the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP) for many years. She has been involved in nonviolent action of women within Israel and at the border to the West Bank, thus giving protests against military occupation a feminist perspective. As an expert in gender mainstreaming, she has held seminars at KURVE Wustrow together with her Palestinian colleague Fida Nara, and both have also trained KURVE Wustrow's partners in the Balkans. Furthermore, Lihi is one of the organisers of the Alternative Youth Summer Camps which teach young Israelis sustainable lifestyles and equip them with action tools for promoting peace and human rights.

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omen can achieve a lot when they work together, and their feminist perspective can help to transform society as a whole. This is of particular importance in Israel.” For Lihi Levian Joffe, a feminist perspective implies empathy and solidarity as well as the willingness to learn from each other with an open and inclusive mind. This can help to promote peace and the observance of human rights in a country prone to military confrontation. “Women need to be encouraged to stand up for their rights as a group”, stresses the long-standing board member of the Israeli Coalition of Women for Peace (CWP), a KURVE Wustrow partner. “The certainty of not being alone gives you the confidence needed to get involved in effective nonviolent action.”

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To prove her point, Lihi recalls an experience at the time of the Arab Spring in 2011 which inspired women from all over the Middle East. Jewish and Arab women from Israel demonstrated for peace at the Qalandiya border post to the occupied West Bank. Palestinian women on the other side of the border joined the protests. “We created a big circle of women and started to sing and dance which took the military totally by surprise. It was a very impressive demonstration of solidarity which gave tremendous hope to all those participating. No wonder that this event is still being

remembered until this very day”, Lihi rejoices.

For her, this was a powerful example of nonviolent action working effectively. The situation could have easily turned nasty, but it didn’t because of the peaceful character of the demonstration. So the event had a lasting impact, even though on a small scale only. “We obviously couldn’t end the military occupation of the West Bank”, Lihi admits. “However, we motivated many women to stand up for their rights and beliefs which in itself can be seen as a great step forward on the way to a possible solution. It showed that women are important in the context of peacebuilding.”

Lihi lives in Neve Shalom Wahat al Salam which means “oasis of peace” in Hebrew and Arabic. It’s a cooperative village where Jews and Arabs prove on a daily basis that peaceful coexistence is possible. To spread her specifically feminist perspective of peace, Lihi has become a training expert in all aspects of gender mainstreaming. She has held several seminars at KURVE Wustrow in order to sensitise peace workers for the need to consider gender issues at every step of their project planning and implementation. If they want to promote human rights, they unequivocally have to observe the rights of women. They have to end discrimination at all levels of society and foster equal chances for all



“Women need to be encouraged to stand up for their rights as a group. The certainty of not being alone gives you the confidence needed to get involved in effective non-violent action.”

“We learnt so much from each other, and we have certainly put the gender question on the agenda of all the participating organisations.”

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living beings. For Lihi, this includes animals as well. Therefore, the professional dietician eats only vegan food.

KURVE Wustrow has always seen it as a bonus that such professional training is being offered by experts from outside Europe, thus proving how very beneficial worldwide cooperation at eye-level can be. This became particularly evident when, in 2018, Lihi and her Palestinian colleague Fida Nara conducted a gender workshop for KURVE Wustrow’s partners in the Balkans. “This was absolutely amazing, powerful and inspiring”,

Lihi recalls with enthusiasm. “We learnt so much from each other and understood better than ever what opportunities a two-way exchange can offer. And we have certainly put the gender question on the agenda of all the participating organisations.”

Gender issues also feature in the Alternative Youth Summer Camps in Israel, organised every year by volunteers, including Lihi. Up to 100 young people aged 14 to 19 years are brought together at a camp site for up to six days in order to experience solidarity and cooperation in a sustainable environment. There is only solar electricity, vegan food is prepared by the participants themselves, ablutions take place in ecological bathrooms. Workshops focus on a great variety of topics like healthy living, human rights and animal rights, climate change, alternative energies and economies, democracy at large, the political situation in the Middle East and the options for peace. There is extensive space for discussions and trainings in nonviolent action with the provision of vital tools like organisational skills, strategic thinking, safety awareness and introduction to support networks.

Lihi stresses that these camps are also ideal for acquiring personal and social skills which often become stunted when communication takes place mainly via the in-

ternet and hardly at a personal level. Admittedly, the participants are predominantly Jewish youths from liberal, left-leaning families like her own one back in Tel Aviv. However, those coming from West Bank settlements or religious backgrounds are integrated as well. Israeli Arabs hardly ever take part because of language barriers, since all workshops are being held in Hebrew. Occasionally, there was an exchange with similar summer camps organised by Palestinian groups within Israel, but they were not as frequent as one might have wished.

Nevertheless, Lihi is convinced that the impact of these camps goes beyond the actual participants: "Every year, there are up to 100 young people who have been made aware of alternative lifestyles as well as different ways of thinking. This is something they certainly won't forget as their subsequent activities have proven at numerous occasions. They become multipliers of alternative ideas and shared values, including the power of nonviolent action."

Often, these youths are later seen at demonstrations of the Israeli peace movement. Frequently, they organise protest marches themselves. "What helps them is the certainty that they are not alone at such events", says Lihi. "This gives them confidence just like I've seen it hap-

pen within the women's movement. Some even felt bold enough to refuse military service, facing up to all the negative consequences. Obviously, we then try to give them as much support as possible."

Some of the participants later also become trainers in the Alternative Youth Summer Camps. This in itself is proof of the impact, as Lihi emphasises: "It's like a breath of fresh air to watch young people realise how important it is to accept diversity and work for a peaceful society. And I'm very pleased when they want to give something back of their own experience. Whenever these youths become agents for social change, I think we really have achieved something."

Michael Schneider



Opera Arias and an “Oscar” for the Home Secretary

As peace worker from the Wendland via Zurich and Berlin to Nepal—Memorial work as an element of nonviolent resistance

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Michael Schneider, born in 1985, grew up in the North German Wendland and got involved in the nonviolent resistance movement against nuclear energy at an early age. After graduating in environmental studies, he worked with the Swiss Centre for Asylum Seekers and later with Sea-Watch, the Berlin-based rescue initiative for shipwrecked refugees. Between these two assignments, he attended KURVE Wustrow’s training for a peace and movement worker. This involved a practical session in Nepal, and in this country he is now deployed as peace worker at Nagarik Aawaz, a local partner organisation of KURVE Wustrow.

“Especially when dealing with issues that raise a lot of public emotions, it is important to be perceived as definitely nonviolent, otherwise you will give ammunition to your opponents and be classed as a criminal.”

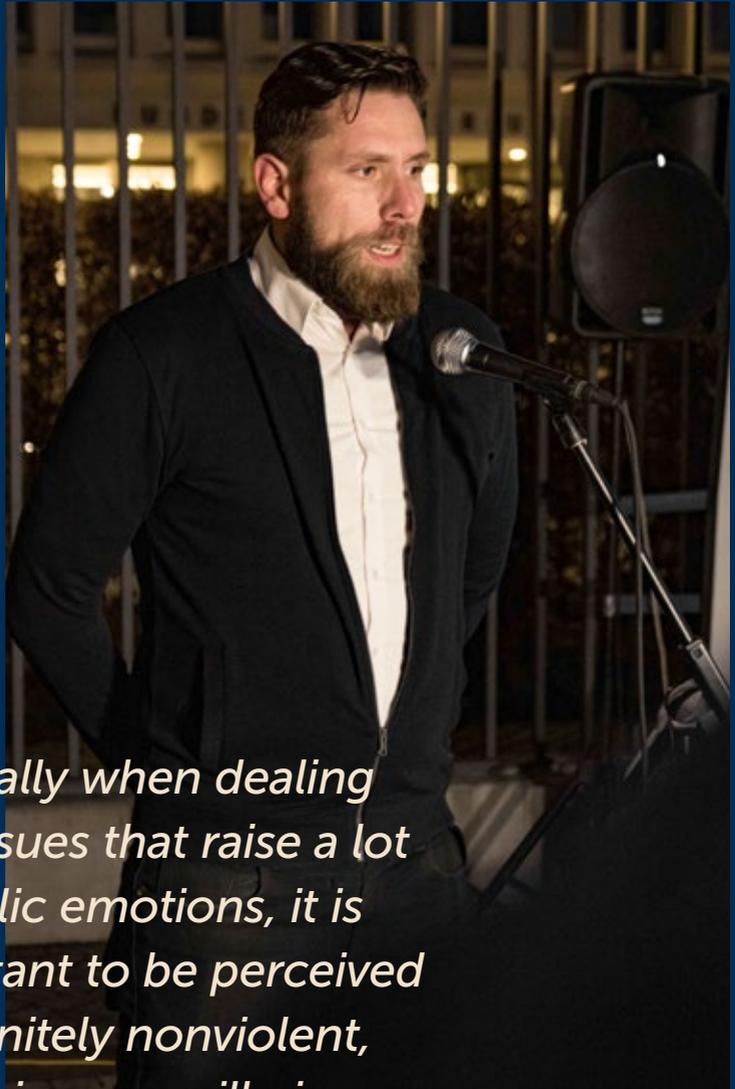


Photo: Michael Schneider/Sea-Watch

“Nonviolent resistance against the transport of nuclear waste to Gorleben has been a crucial part of my upbringing”, says Michael Schneider from Lomitz in the Wendland. His parents were activists in the anti-nuclear movement, and there were many discussions at home about the significance and potential impact of nonviolent action. International peacebuilding played an important part, too. Michael’s father was once a coordinator for the German Development Service (DED) in Tanzania. His Swiss mother worked in the water supply sector in Nepal for a while. The latter country appeared particularly interesting to Michael, and he is very happy to be deployed there now on behalf of KURVE Wustrow.

First, though, he did an apprenticeship in forestry in Switzerland, followed by environmental studies. In 2013, he took up employment with the “Zentrum für Asylsuchende” (Centre for Asylum Seekers) in Winterthur near Zurich. “It seemed very rewarding to me to work for a refugee support organisation”, says Michael. In 2015, when more and more refugees came to Europe because of the war in Syria, his work load increased tremendously, as he remembers: “At the same time, we had an increasingly intensive debate within our organisation about the most adequate methods to offer the best support to refugees and

asylum seekers and foster their integration into the society of their host country. Our principal focus lay on nonviolent action which, however, was also supposed to have maximum impact.”

In this context, one activity was especially spectacular: The Swiss opera singer Christoph Homberger founded a choir of refugees and Swiss citizens in order to aid integration and organise public performances to enhance awareness for refugee-related issues. Up to 80 people met once a week to rehearse opera arias as well as Swiss folksongs. Michael joined the singers enthusiastically and coordinated their meetings as well as the choir’s public relations efforts.

In the spring of 2016, there was a grand performance inside the Central Railway Station as well as in front of the Opera House in Zurich. “The response was overwhelming”, Michael recalls with satisfaction. “More than a thousand people came along and cheered us. Even the local transport authorities gave us their support. They provided three tramcars free of charge just for us so that the participating refugees could get to Zurich from their lodgings and later back home again.”

To enhance his knowledge about peacebuilding, Michael eventually attended KURVE Wustrow’s trainings to become an advisor for non-

violent conflict transformation and social movements. "I deliberately chose KURVE Wustrow because their seminars and training courses focus much stronger on nonviolent action than the programmes of other like-minded organisations", he stresses. "The variety of methods that I was made familiar with proved very useful in my subsequent assignment with Sea-Watch in Berlin."

Michael is particularly pleased with one event he helped to coordinate: In February 2019, the film "Lifeboat" about the rescue of refugees in the Mediterranean was nominated for an Oscar in the category "Best documentary short subject". On the night of the Academy Awards ceremony, Sea-Watch showed this film on a big screen in front of the Home Office in Berlin. A special cinema seat was put up for the German Home Secretary Horst Seehofer who, in absentia, was awarded an "Oscar for hindering the rescue of refugees". Michael gave a satirical laudatory speech.

"We got a tremendous response in the media", he recalls. "We could thus increase the public visibility of Sea-Watch and our rescue efforts, even though there weren't many people around on that cold February night and 'Lifeboat' didn't get an Oscar in the end." The organisers made a point of avoiding confrontation. Initially, they had planned to project the film directly on the

walls of the Home Office building through the surrounding fence, but this was given up when the police ordered them to stop the attempt.

"We have often asked ourselves whether we can really have an impact with our nonviolent methods. For me, there is no doubt about that", Michael emphasises. "Especially when dealing with issues that raise a lot of public emotions, it is important to be perceived as definitely nonviolent, otherwise you will give ammunition to your opponents and be classed as a criminal. Thanks to our nonviolent action, we could enhance our networking and win further target groups for raising public awareness. Had we been violent, we would have never got such broad support", Michael is convinced.

For example, the idea of the "Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland" (German Protestant Church) to send their own rescue boat to the Mediterranean had been influenced by contacts to Sea-Watch. Another success, as Michael points out, is the growing support for the international association "Seebrücke" (Sea Bridge) resulting in more and more cities and communities embracing the appeal to "Create Safe Harbours". By now, more than 220 German cities and counties describe themselves as such "Safe Harbours" with a commitment to offer protection and shelter to

refugees saved from the waters of the Mediterranean.

Eventually, however, Michael wanted to be involved in international peacebuilding as well. He felt attracted to Nepal where he had done his practical sessions during his trainings at KURVE Wustrow. Already at that time, he could make use of what he had learnt: For his then partner organisation, he conducted seminars on conflict analysis and worked as a trainer in the Master Degree Course “Peace and Conflict Studies” at the University of Katmandu.

Within the project “Youth for Change” of Nagarik Aawaz, Michael now contributes to setting up a “Peace Building, Learning and Memorial Centre”. He considers it most important for post-conflict societies to promote the preservation of the collective memory in order to learn from the mistakes of the past. And he finds it vital, in this context, to involve young people whose views, concerns and needs might be crucial for a peaceful future. “For me, memorial work is an element of nonviolent resistance”, says Michael. “It’s nonviolent resistance against forgetting.”

“Thanks to our nonviolent action, we could enhance our networking and win further target groups for raising public awareness.”

Mai Ali Shatta



Nonviolent Action for a Peaceful Revolution

Sudanese Women inspired by the power of cooperation for change—Necessity to protect and enhance their achievements

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Mai Ali Shatta, born in 1984, was confronted with violent conflicts in her home country Sudan at a very early age already. To break the vicious circle of spiraling violence, she embraced trainings in nonviolent action which led to her imprisonment and finally expulsion. In German exile, Mai became a trainer for KURVE Wustrow, conducting the courses "Strategising for Nonviolent Change in Social Movements" and "Campaigning for Nonviolent Change". She has also continued to train Sudanese activists, especially women, and is convinced that their peaceful demonstrations contributed to bringing about the Sudanese Revolution of 2019.

"Peaceful demonstrations by civilian activists have definitely contributed to bringing about the Sudanese Revolution. This alone is proof of the powerful impact of nonviolent action. And I'm particular proud of the part that women played in this context." For Mai Ali Shatta, the recent changes in her home country Sudan are the fulfilment of a long-time dream: "Women from all over the country came together in unity, independent of their class, ethnic or religious background, in order to campaign for a new society. With their rallies, they took a leading role in promoting 'Freedom—Peace—Justice', the slogan of the Revolution."

Many of these women had undergone trainings in nonviolent action which Mai had facilitated with support from KURVE Wustrow. It was a totally new concept for most Sudanese people, as she explains: "We were all raised in an environment of violence with ongoing armed conflicts in the southern and western parts of the country, draconic Sharia laws, suppression of all anti-government voices and harsh punishment for any act of dissent against the ruling regime. Consequently, we took it for granted that violence could only be fought with counter-violence." Mai admits that she got involved in fistfights herself during political controversies at her university where she studied computer engineering with a special

focus on fiber optics—a rather unusual career for a Sudanese woman.

Her change of mind occurred when she was about 20 years old: In 2005, her father was attacked and beaten up so severely that he sustained permanent disabilities. Mai gave up one year of her studies to accompany him on numerous hospital visits: "I was full of anger and longing for revenge, but I realised at the same time that the continuing spiral of violence would eventually destroy our family altogether. So I began to look for alternatives." In 2007, she came across the Sudanese Organisation for Nonviolence and Development (SONAD) which offered workshops in nonviolent conflict transformation. These trainings convinced her to become an agent for nonviolent change.

Initially, it was not easy to win over her fellow student activists, as Mai remembers. They viewed a renouncement of fighting as mere cowardice and felt vindicated by the observation that nonviolent action against the long-term dictator Omar al Bashir led to imprisonment just as often as acts of violence did. Still, Mai persevered in trying to convince more and more people that the power of words would eventually prevail over the power of fists or guns. During a big demonstration at her university, she spoke for half an hour about the teachings of Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Mar-



"I know what it's like to live with constant threats and intimidations, and I want to support all those who need assistance for leading a life in safety."

“It was the first time in Sudan that women became that visible and took such a prominent role in nonviolent action for change.”

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tin Luther King and other freedom fighters, and eventually she found more and more followers to support the concept of nonviolent conflict transformation. She became a renowned trainer in this field and coordinated, in particular, women human rights defenders.

It still took more than a decade, however, before these efforts helped to bring about the Sudanese Revolution of 2019. Mai got imprisoned and tortured several times and was finally exiled to Germany in 2012 after an intervention by Amnesty International and other human rights groups. She often points out how important it is for oppressed activists to get international support. Whilst settling in Germany, Mai was also assisted by

KURVE Wustrow and the organisation Act for Transformation in Aalen near Stuttgart. She is very grateful to all the people who supported her in those difficult times, as she stresses.

For KURVE Wustrow, Mai became a trainer in campaign strategies for nonviolent change, including related aspects of safety and digital security. Furthermore, she supports refugees and asylum seekers in Germany and the whole European Union, especially when they are threatened by expulsion. She also became a founding member of “My body belongs to me”, a campaign against female genital mutilation (FGM). This campaign made sure that the threat of FGM is now widely recognised as a ground for asylum. Mai always encourages migrant women to stand up for their rights: “It’s not enough for me to be safe in exile. I know what it’s like to live with constant threats and intimidations, and I want to support all those who need assistance for leading a life in safety.”

Meanwhile, Mai continued to train Sudanese activists who were brought together in safe spaces outside their country. In 2017, she facilitated the formation of the Bana Group for Peace and Development, a network of women human rights defenders from all parts of Sudan. The name stands for the medicinal Bana tree which symbolises the

African movements for liberation from slavery and marginalisation. Activists of this network joined the street protests which started in December 2018 and finally contributed to toppling the Al Bashir regime in April 2019. "It was the first time in Sudan that women became that visible and took such a prominent role in nonviolent action for change", says Mai. "To watch this, even though only from abroad, was one of the greatest moments of my life."

Sudan is now ruled by a transition government with a civilian prime minister and a largely civilian cabinet. However, the process of true democratisation has only just started, as Mai emphasises. She is working closely with KURVE Wustrow to set up a Civil Peace Service (CPS) project in partnership with the Bana Group. In her opinion, it is vital for civil society to make sure that the achievements of the Revolution don't get hijacked by antidemocratic forces during the ongoing transition process. Some recent developments made her fear that this could happen, therefore civil society has to be on guard, she stresses: "Our achievements have to be protected and enhanced, and our dream has to be followed further. We need freedom, peace and justice for all people in a united Sudan."

Only then will it be possible for her to return home without having to fear for her own safety or that of her

family. Mai is still hopeful that her dream of a peaceful and democratic country will come true. For this, she relies especially on the power of nonviolent action by women. "Sudanese women have become a strong unit to build a new country. That's my hope for the future."

"Our achievements have to be protected and enhanced, and our dream has to be followed further."

Jana Burke



The Voice of the Youth for Peace

Demanding acknowledgement of young people's views—Advocacy for the implementation of United Nations accords for peace

Jana Burke, born in 1992, spent a year in India as part of the International Voluntary Service of KURVE Wustrow. When she returned in 2013, she took up degree courses in Comparative Studies of Culture and Religions and later also Peace and Conflict Studies. At the same time, she attended courses to become a trainer in conflict transformation. In recent years, she got actively involved in the "United Network of Young Peacebuilders" and, in 2018 in Marburg, organised the worldwide first academic conference for the implementation of the UN Resolution 2250 on "Youth, Peace & Security". This document demands acknowledgement that young people are making a positive contribution to peace and should be represented in political decision-making processes for peace on a basis of equality.

“I’m always asking myself in what kind of a world we’d want to live in the future and, in this context, the concerns of the young generation must not be ignored.” Jana Burke is convinced that young people can make a vital contribution to a peaceful world, therefore their views have to be given consideration at the social and political level. That’s why the former international volunteer of KURVE Wustrow got involved in the “United Network of Young Peacebuilders” and its advocacy efforts for the implementation of the UN Resolution 2250 on “Youth, Peace & Security”. The aim of this accord is to give young people—i.e. those aged from 18 to 29 years—a stronger say in peacebuilding and the related decision-making processes.

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When Jana decided in 2012 to go to India for a year, she had no clear picture as yet of what peacebuilding was all about: “I just wanted to do this, and I definitely wanted to do it with KURVE Wustrow whose views on peace had fully convinced me. I also liked their support programme. The seminars in preparation for my assignment abroad as well as the follow-up courses were simply fantastic.”

Jana was sent to the Indian Centre for Environment Education (CEE) and was deployed in the north-eastern region of Assam. First, however, she had to stay in Ahmedabad for

a month since her future working area was considered as unsafe due to armed struggle. After the conflict had died down, she was allowed to work in the city of Guwahati and the whole State of Assam. “This was a totally new experience for me to be immediately confronted with security problems”, Jana recalls. “The more so I considered it necessary to do active peacebuilding.”

This, however, she initially found lacking at CEE. The organisation rather concentrated on environmental issues and educational work in schools and colleges—for example on how to save water, observe

“I had a very limited picture of peacebuilding at that time. Only later did I realise that environmental protection and educational projects are certainly promoting peace.”

“All generations have an important part to play in peacebuilding, so it’s important to deal with each other at eye level.”

effective standards of hygiene and also protect the local tiger and tortoise population. “I still had a very limited picture of peacebuilding at that time”, Jana admits. “Only later did I realise that environmental protection and related educational projects are certainly promoting peace. Nowadays, I view such efforts as elements of nonviolent resistance against the destruction of our natural resources and thus as projects for peace.”

This holistic concept has also determined Jana’s further commitments in the area of peacebuilding. Parallel to her comparative studies of culture and religions, she took up courses to become a trainer for conflict transformation. “In the Newsletter of KURVE Wustrow, I came across a ‘Betzavta’ seminar

in Denmark, and I was really overwhelmed by this mind-blowing method”, Jana states full of enthusiasm.

“Betzavta” means “Together” in Hebrew. With this method, developed in Israel, conflicts can be dealt with in a particularly creative way. It is tested in interactive seminars based on the participants’ experience and allowing constant reflection as well as open-ended results. The goal is acknowledgement that all human beings have an unequivocal right to free development. Jana applies the methods she has acquired in her peace seminars also as a free-lance diversity trainer for the German Employees’ Academy with the aim of reducing discrimination in administrative institutions. For her, attitudes like racism and sexism are clear manifestations of violence and have to be counteracted by nonviolent resistance.

When Jana heard about the United Nations Resolution on “Youth, Peace & Security” which was adopted in December 2015, she contacted KURVE Wustrow again and promptly secured support for her efforts to contribute to the implementation process. In January 2017, the Centre for Training and Networking in Nonviolent Action conducted, for the first time, the seminar “Youth in Peacebuilding—Living in Diversity and Peace”. It aimed at making the goals of the Resolution



Photo: Jana Burke

70 *“We continue with systematic advocacy work for the full inclusion of young people in peace processes. One could describe this as nonviolent resistance against inactivity and indifference.”*

better known to potential multipliers, thus promoting more youth representation in peacebuilding and the relevant decision-making processes. It was the first-ever seminar on the UN Resolution 2250 in Germany, and Jana was one of the trainers.

In November 2018 in Marburg, she eventually convened the worldwide first international academic conference on the Resolution's implementation. At that time, she was already involved in the "United Network of Young Peacebuilders" whose international members engage their respective governments and the European Union for the goals of Resolution 2250. "Unfortunately, there haven't been many specific efforts as yet, not by the German Government either", Jana, meanwhile an active member of the "European Youth Advocacy Team", states with regret. "However, there are now 'Youth Focal Points' at EU level, and Finland has even submitted a detailed action plan. That's exactly what we want to achieve in all countries."

The Marburg conference under the theme "Young People's Participation in Peacebuilding—an Underestimated Contribution on the Way to Sustainable Peace?" was certainly a mile stone in this context. Workshops, lectures and discussion panels focused on how peace should be defined, how young

people could actively contribute to a peaceful world and what steps should be taken to support them in this endeavour. "We continue with systematic advocacy work for the full inclusion of young people in peace processes", Jana emphasises. "One could describe this as nonviolent resistance against inactivity and indifference."

Vital for her is the aspect of "Everyday Peacebuilding"—the question of how all human beings in their everyday life could feel enough integrated so that diversity is guaranteed and conflict prevented. And in this very context, it should be explicitly acknowledged that young people can make an invaluable contribution to a peaceful future. "All generations have an important part to play in peacebuilding, so it's important to deal with each other at eye level", stresses Jana, who is now studying in Marburg for a Master's Degree in Peace and Conflict Studies. "Fortunately, it's becoming more and more visible these days that young people are advocating for peace, for example in groups like 'Fridays for Future'. I always feel newly motivated in my work when I see how young people become active for peace."

Fin Kuhl



Civil Disobedience against Injustice

An ecological lifestyle according to the teachings of Gandhi—Identification with the needs of asylum seekers

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Fin Kuhl, born in 1995, took part in anti-nuclear protests already whilst at school in the North German Wendland. At a very early age, he also got to know KURVE Wustrow, and with their International Voluntary Service, he went to India for one year in 2013. There, he worked with Narayan Desai, the son of Mahatma Gandhi's personal secretary, and became aware of the wide spectrum of nonviolent resistance. At present, Fin is studying Ecological Agriculture in Witzenhausen near Kassel. His lifestyle is distinctively ecological, too, and he campaigns actively for the rights of asylum seekers.

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hen I come across blatant injustice, I just have to get involved in action for change”, says Fin Kuhl from Blütlingen near Wustrow. For him, solidarity with people suffering under injustice is an important principle which—whenever necessary—also motivates him to commit acts of civil disobedience. It’s a principle he grew up with: His parents have been involved in the anti-nuclear movement of the North German Wendland for decades, and Fin, when still a teenager, organised a protest of pupils against the transport of Castor containers with nuclear waste to the repository of Gorleben. Later it was formative for him to go to India with the International Voluntary Service of KURVE Wustrow and study Gandhi’s teachings of nonviolent resistance directly at source.

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“The anti-Castor protests have certainly left a mark on me, and I tried to get other youths involved at an early age”, Fin remembers. In this context, he made a remarkable experience when he was 17: Without thinking much about it, he went to a demonstration hooded in black clothes, and promptly he got beaten by a policeman who obviously saw him as a potentially violent protester. “That’s when I suddenly understood how important it is to uphold the principle of nonviolence very clearly, even from an optical point of view. This may not protect you from being attacked by the po-

lice, but at least you don’t send out the wrong message.”

Fin got to know KURVE Wustrow during his childhood and, after leaving school in 2013, he opted for their Voluntary Service in India. His partner organisation was Sampurna Kranti Vidyalay, the Institute for Total Revolution in Vecchi north of Mumbai. It was founded in the 1980s by Narayan Desai, the son of Mahatma Gandhi’s personal secretary. “That was a very enriching experience for me to live in an Ashram with this remarkable person and to be so immediately confronted with the legacy of Gandhi”, says Fin. “I started to read many books of Gandhi as well as about him and also studied Nelson Mandela. This inspired me tremendously. Only then did I become fully aware of the complexity of nonviolent action.”

After four months with Desai, Fin joined an agricultural project near Nainital in the Indian Himalayas. Doing practical work as well as living with other international volunteers in a close community under very sparse conditions was another important experience for him, as he stresses. After returning to the Wendland, he first took up an internship with KURVE Wustrow because he wanted to learn more about their workshops for international volunteers. He also took part in organising such a training session.



"I read many books of Gandhi as well as about him and also studied Nelson Mandela. This inspired me tremendously. Only then did I become fully aware of the complexity of nonviolent action."

“For me, it is a case of blatant injustice when the right to asylum is undermined by certain authorities.”

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In the autumn of 2015, Fin started a degree course in Ecological Agriculture in Witzenhausen near Kassel. Could sustainable agriculture be viewed as a way of nonviolent resistance against the destruction of natural resources? Not really, says Fin. Strictly speaking, any form of agriculture is an intrusion into nature, therefore it can't be totally nonviolent. As this is inevitable, though, one should at least strive for keeping the damage as low as at all possible. “I want to leave a very small CO₂ footprint on this earth, and I feel very strongly about upholding an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. Again that's something I've learnt from Gandhi. We have to be very economical with our resources and think of future generations”, stresses the father of a two-year-old daughter.

Fin's way of life in Witzenhausen is consciously ecological indeed. With his family and some friends, he lives in a trailer park under very modest conditions. His wooden construction trailer was designed and built by himself. Fin is very active politically, for example in demonstrations to block the marches of right-wingers. Furthermore, he frequently takes action against military sites and the export of weapons—be it against the German armament corporations Rheinmetall in Unterlüß and Kraus-Maffei Wegmann in Kassel or the training ground of the German army in the Colbitz-Letzlinger Heath near Magdeburg.

In addition to that, Fin is involved in the “Arbeitskreis Asyl Witzenhausen”, the “Working Group Asylum” which supports asylum seekers in their right to stay and also campaigns against racism and social isolation. The main focus lies on practical assistance: legal advice, sessions with social workers, translations, transport issues etc. When necessary, however, the group also resorts to targeted acts of civil disobedience.

Fin refers to one situation, amongst others: An asylum seeker was arrested by the police in the middle of the night in order to be deported to Bulgaria where he entered the European Union. Immediately, about 60 activists were mobilised to block the streets. For several hours, they

Photo: Fin Kuhl



stopped the police-car from departing with the hand-cuffed asylum seeker. Eventually, the man's lawyer was reached who could prove that a deportation to Bulgaria would be unlawful because of impending human rights violations. Thus, the planned deportation was successfully prevented.

"For me, it is a case of blatant injustice when the right to asylum is undermined by certain authorities", says Fin. "So I just had to take action. And we have often been quite successful with our resistance." However, he admits that, whilst spectacular action may get a lot of attention, it usually doesn't result in immediate and profound social change—since the latter will take much longer.

Nevertheless, it's always a success story when public awareness for injustice can be raised, as Fin em-

phasises. And this is best achieved with determined nonviolent action, although the borderline to violence is not always totally clear, he adds. This also depends upon the definition of violence—for example whether it's directed against people or against things. On the whole, however, Fin is convinced: "As a rule of thumb, nonviolence is indispensable for long-term success."

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