







Conscientious Objection: a practical companion for movements

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Introduction

Why this Book?

Conscientious objection to military service is most often viewed, and written about, as a moral stand that an individual takes against an injustice in a particular conflict, or against the injustice that is war itself. But conscientious objection is also a form of political action, and a focus for campaigning and organising. As such, it has its particular strengths, and faces particular challenges.

This book has been created by and for organisers and campaigners working on conscientious objection all over the world. It contains short articles, brief case studies written by conscientious objectors and experienced activists from five continents, who tell about their actions and campaigns, share tips for successful campaigning, and discuss the difficulties their movements are facing. The chapters of the book cover a broad variety of political and social contexts in which conscientious objection movements operate and address the specific features of conscientious objection on different ideological grounds. They also pose some tough questions conscientious objectors have to face if they want their movements to be sustainable and to avoid reproducing the very same militarised and patriarchal social structures that created the injustice to which they respond.

Conscientious objection movements find themselves in a peculiar position: their curse is their blessing and their blessing is often their curse. The existence of a state conscription system on the one hand, and the presence of active conflict or war on the other, are among the main things conscientious objectors are working to end, but these same things also create the conditions for conscientious objection movements to form and to gain strength. When thousands of young people are faced with the possibility of joining an army, of going to war, it is inevitable that – in one way or another – some of them will choose to resist. For conscientious objection movements this means a steady influx of young activists, some of whom maintain a long term commitment to the movement. It also helps maintain a sense of urgency and a practical motive to continue working in support of the conscientious objectors who face imprisonment and other forms of retribution. An active conflict also helps make resistance movements the focus of international solidarity.

But conscientious objection movements can also easily become the victims of their own (relative) success, in a number of ways. For example, they are even more likely than other social movements to become male dominated (and heterosexual male dominated), reflecting the fact that, throughout the world, military recruitment focuses predominantly on (mostly heterosexual) men. The act of going to prison as a focus of campaigns can easily lead to movements reproducing the same militarised hero worship that the army peddles to recruits. Often the more





declared and openly ideological forms of resistance that are the prototypical forms of conscientious objection are more likely to attract young members of privileged classes and ethnic groups, while members of disadvantaged communities are more likely to opt for more 'quiet' forms of avoiding enlistment or discontinuing their military service – sometimes called 'draft evasion' or 'draft dodging'. This can again skew a movement's commitments, and create ideological rifts and dilemmas. Finally, when a war resistance movement is successful enough to lead to full recognition for conscientious objectors, or even to the end of conscription in a country, it often loses the focus of its work, fails to make a transition or broaden the concept of war resistance enough, and eventually dies out.

This book was designed to address all these issues, the challenges and opportunities of organising around conscientious objection. It is also deliberately international in its scope. The worldwide conscientious objection movement is in a process of rapid change in terms of its geographical spread. Half a century ago, the most active conscientious objection movements in the world were in Europe and North America. Today these old movements have grown much weaker, and the focus has shifted to Latin America, the Middle East, and some active conflict zones in Asia (e.g., South Korea). New conscientious objection movements are forming as we write (e.g., in Egypt and in Thailand), in ever new political and cultural circumstances. This book is meant to be especially geared towards the needs of such emerging movements and tries to be as international as possible in the scope of experiences it reflects.

Chapter Overview

This book comes in four sections. It opens with this introduction of course, as well as an overview of conscientious objection in history. The historical overview explores the question of who have been conscientious objectors, and what this might mean for conscientious objection movements today. The next section, 'Working Together', does what it says on the tin: it aims to help groups work together in the face of power dynamics which privilege some and oppress others. The book as a whole pays particular attention to question of gender. The first question addressed in the section on working together is therefore why such a focus on gender is appropriate for this book. This 'gender preface', written by feminist academic Cynthia Cockburn, is accompanied by a short note on the intersectionality of gender – the way gender intersects with other power dynamics – reproduced from queer activist Cattis Laska's contribution to the *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns* produced by War Resisters' International (WRI) in 2014. There is then a short account by Ferda Ülker of the gender dynamics she encountered in 'coming out' as a woman conscientious objector in Turkey. Alongside this account, there are two interviews, one with African American activist Greg Payton on the race dynamics of the US peace and antimilitarist movements, and one with Israeli conscientious objector Noam Gur on the dynamics of class in





Israel's conscientious objection movement. Some of the insights from these pieces, and the experience of the editor in social movements more broadly, are drawn together in the following chapter: *Working with Privilege and Difference*.

The section moves on to discuss working together with different motivations, with some of the different motivations for coming to a conscientious objection movement are outlined in a series of personal accounts or 'stories'. Rafael Uzcategui gives us an overview of the political tendencies in the Latin American movement, from his own anarchist perspective. Richard Steele, who conscientiously objected to fighting in the South African Defence Force during apartheid, gives us his account of that experience. Julián Fierro writes from Colombia on the pacifist motivation for his conscientious objection. Oscar Quinto, explains how his pacifism is animated by his religious beliefs as a Mennonite, and how this in turn animates broader social justice work on his part. Jungsik Lee writes about belonging to a gender and sexual minority in South Korea, and of being lead by this experience to refuse military conscription. Finally, an extract is reproduced from Idan Halili's contribution to the 2010 anthology of women conscientious objectors produced by WRI, in which she writes about refusing to serve in the Israeli Defence Force on the grounds of her feminism. These case studies of the different motivations which might lead one to conscientious objection are followed by material on how to arrive at group decisions by consensus, as one way of working creatively with such difference.

The next section of the book deals with movement strategy. It opens with a chapter by Sergei Sandler, who belongs to the Israeli feminist organisation New Profile. He gives some useful direction on organising support for those who refuse to join the armed forces. Alexia Tsouni, an active member of Amnesty International Greece, then suggests a few ways to go about seeking international solidarity, and presents the cases of two conscientious objectors in whose cases international solidarity played a vital role. Rachel Brett, from the Quaker United Nations Office, gives us an overview of conscientious objection in international law, which is followed by a chapter on how international mechanisms might be put to use in local cases, based on the example of Colombia. This chapter is co-written by Andreas Speck, a German conscientious objector and nonviolent activist, and Milena Romero, who is currently active in the Colombian movement. Next to this are two chapters on supporting conscientious objectors and deserters in times of war, one written by Bojan Aleksov, from his perspective as an objector during the Balkan wars, and one by Rudi Friedrich from the German organisation Connection e.V., which supports the asylum claims of conscientious objectors and deserters. There is then a discussion by Wendy Barranco, of Iraq Veterans against the War, on the role of, and difficulties faced by, veterans in peace and antimilitarist movements.

This section also includes an exploration of the arguments for and against campaigning around alternative civilian service in situations of conscription: two Finnish antimilitarists, Kai Uwe and Ruka Toivonen, give a general overview of





these arguments; Russian lawyer Alena Karoliova gives a synopsis of why her organisation, Citizen.Army.Law., chooses to campaign exclusively around alternative civilian service; Andreas Speck explores how alternative civilian service 'depoliticised' the German conscientious objection movement, possibly delaying the end of conscription. The section closes with a chapter co-written by members of Spanish antimilitarist group AA.MOC, which discusses what happens to conscientious objection movements after conscription.

The final section is about extending conscientious objection. Javier Gárate, a Chilean conscientious objector and nonviolent activist, opens the section with a chapter on conscientious objection as a springboard for radical social change, and Yong-suk Lee writes about how conscientious objection is making fissures in the militarism of South Korea. Ferda Ülker writes about the intersection of gender and militarism in Turkey, which is followed by a chapter on the role of women's and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) conscientious objection,¹ written by Turkish PhD student Dogu Durgun. Bülent Küçükaslan, a disability activist, writes about disability, conscription and masculinity in Turkey. Sahar Vardi, an Israeli conscientious objector, questions whether conscientious objection in Israel may not be dismantling the 'master's house' of militarism with the master's tools. This is followed by a chapter on what other forms of resistance to militarism – beyond refusing to join the armed forces – might be considered conscientious objection, and the pros and cons of considering them as such. Hannah Brock, a member of staff at WRI, discusses possibilities for objecting to war profiteering; AA.MOC write about their campaign of war tax resistance (the refusal to pay that portion of tax which would go to the military); Christine Schwetizer – the WRI chair – gives examples of whole communities resisting war; Igor Seke, from Mexico, makes the case for seeing resistance to gang recruitment as a form of conscientious objection. Hannah Brock then writes again about possible ways of building alternatives to militarism, especially where military recruitment capitalises on poor economic conditions.

The book closes with a chapter co-written by Hannah and Laura Pollecutt, from South Africa, on conscientious objection in wider nonviolent struggles, such as against apartheid. This will hopefully give readers food for thought about how conscientious objection can be used in struggles for peace and justice happening around them, and how to take conscientious objection forward, using it in new and innovative ways.

1. WRI have decided to use the acronym LGBT in this book, as we believe it is the most widely recognised shorthand for gender and sexual minorities. However, we also acknowledge that there are other gender and sexual minorities, who face similar struggles but are not covered by this acronym. These include intersex, genderqueer, and asexual people, among others. We also fully recognise that 'women' and 'LGBT people' are not mutually exclusive categories!





Conscientious Objection in History

Hannah Brock works in the War Resisters' International office on the Right to Refuse to Kill programme, working with conscientious objector movements, anti-conscription campaigners, and those challenging the militarisation of youth. She has also been involved with grassroots nonviolent movements in the UK and Palestine. Here, she gives us an overview of conscientious objection in history and who have been conscientious objectors.

Being forced to join a military group is not new. For millennia, enslaved and bonded peoples – usually men – have been compelled to leave their homes and risk their lives in defence of their masters' or their monarch's wealth and power. Much more common, however, have been powers and principalities relying on 'professional' or mercenary armies to wage their wars.

The process of conscription – compulsory mass enlistment, mostly of men only, into the armed forces of a nation state – is usually traced to France after the 1793 revolution. Just prior to this in North America, conscription or 'the draft' had also been enacted by Washington during the 1775–1783 'War of Independence'. Conscription in this and the century that followed would become an important process in the identity building and creation of nation states, as well as a product of them especially in Europe. At this point, Suadi Aydın argues, a nation 'in its entirety' became the actor of war.¹

Rejection of the idea of personally having to join the military, and opposition to armed violence for everyone, goes back much further. Maximilianus is recorded as an early 'conscientious objector', for refusing to join the Roman army when they came looking for soldiers to swell their ranks in Numidia (today's Algeria) in 295 CE. He said that as a Christian he could not use violence and he was executed.

Religious grounds for conscientious objection, such as Maximilianus', were often the most visible in the early history of conscientious objection, and it was to religious conscientious objectors that modern rights of exemption from conscription were first granted, for example in Holland for Anabaptists and Quakers in the 16th Century. However another stream of influence for antimilitarists and War Resisters' International (WRI) is the history of draft resistance, evasion, and desertion within the military. Sometimes less organised, such resistance is often less visible and therefore less recorded, with notable exceptions like opposition to the Vietnam war from US draft evaders in the 1960s.

In Egypt, when conscription was introduced under Muhammad Ali in the early 1800s, many people injured themselves hoping they would be declared unfit for military service. Many had limbs amputated, were blinded in one eye, pulled out their own teeth (teeth being crucial in tearing open shot packets), or removed a





finger (so as to become unable to fire a rifle). Instead, the army set up a corps for disabled musketeers. Many people also fled, primarily to Syria. For WRI, you could say that the individual conscience and unarmed collective refusal come together to influence conscientious objection as an antimilitarist tactic. Resistance to conscription has also prompted armed revolt, including in Palestine in 1834, when Muhammad Ali's taxation and conscription triggered what's known as the Peasants' Revolt.

Much of the history of conscientious objection that is well known and historically recorded in the 18th and 19th Centuries relates to Europe and religious European émigrés – for example in north America – and is associated especially with often persecuted groups like Jehovah's Witnesses, Quakers, Mennonites, Brethren and other Anabaptist groups. Their rejection of state laws, such as conscription, was often one explicit motivation cited by those who persecuted them. These groups offered organisation and internal solidarity. Such mechanisms are necessary when taking action which is firstly unusual, secondly illegal, and thirdly often deeply unpopular. The resistance of other non-religious groups, and across the world beyond Europe in this period, is often less well recorded and celebrated – particularly if we take a broad view of CO, as this book does. This does not mean that such resistance did not exist, just that many historical and pacifist explorations from majority European groups (as WRI was in its foundation) were ignorant of them, and so have not helped maintain their legacy as living history. This chapter cannot help but be a product of what has been well remembered in books, personal and institutional memory of pacifist groups, and therefore may suffer from the limitations of this 'known' history.



A protestor at a 1921 rally in Germany holds a placard that reads 'Never Again [to war]'.

WRI was founded in 1921 in Bilthoven in the Netherlands by European conscientious objectors who had lived through the 1914-18 war. They arose chiefly from humanist, socialist and anarchist movements as well as some from religious movements (many Christians were instead part of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation [IFOR], founded in 1919, also in Bilthoven).²

The pacifists and antimilitarists active in these movements were struggling against conscription as a whole and 'total war' – the 'absolute mobilization of all technical and human resources'³ that occurred at the turn of the twentieth century more generally,





whilst many of the religious objectors previously had been concerned with campaigning for their own exemption primarily from conscription – though this does not apply to all. This struggle against total war was articulated memorably in Dutch anarchist and antimilitarist Bart de Ligt's 1934 'Plan for Struggle against War and War Preparation', of which conscientious objection was one of what Bröckling calls an 'encyclopaedic' list of tactics against militarism.

Recognition of conscientious objection as a right was also recognised increasingly from the early 20th Century onwards – though only in a very few states, firstly in Protestant Europe. In Norway, protection of conscientious objection rights became law in 1900, Denmark in 1917, and the British government's conscription law of 1916 was the first to allow for conscientious objection at the moment of conscription's introduction, though many conscientious objectors still went to prison in Britain during the 1914-18 war. Conscription there was a deeply controversial measure – the first introduction of forced enlistment in Britain – and provision for conscientious objectors was therefore seen as a necessary concession.⁴

After the 1914-18 war, cooperation at first among European movements, and later in the century with movements across Latin and north America, Africa and elsewhere, was fostered by networks like WRI and IFOR, including at regional levels, like the International Conscientious Objectors' Meetings, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection and by the 1990s ELOC (the *Encuentro Latinoamericano de Objecion de Conciencia*, later CLAOC: *Coordinadora Latinoamericana de Antimilitarismo y Objeción de Conciencia*, the Latin American Coordination for Antimilitarism and Conscientious Objection). Cross border solidarity was also a key part of some of the more prominent refusal movements of the 20th Century, such as conscientious objectors in the USA in the wars on Korea and Vietnam. Many objectors fled to Canada, for example, and found support there initially at a grassroots level and latterly from the government.

In Latin America, an emergence of antimilitarist movements occurred in the 1990s, sometimes in places affected by civil war – Colombia, El Salvador – and elsewhere as military dictatorships were coming to an end – in Chile, Ecuador, Paraguay, etc. Young people in societies that had been so deeply impacted by these dictatorships, with their militarism and repression, found conscientious objection as a way to 'express their political awareness and developing identities, with new sets of values, distancing themselves from violence and arms struggles'.⁵ Rafael Uzategui writes in the next section of this book that these movements developed with three main tendencies: religious initiatives, including SERPAJ [the peace and justice service], active in Colombia, Ecuador, Chile, Argentina and elsewhere; Marxist and anti-imperialist groups using anti-conscription campaigning as a tactic; and anarchist groups. In that context, the three tendencies did not much collaborate – as Rafa puts it: 'antimilitarism as an identity has never had its own development, separate from the three tendencies described'.





Often, campaigning for conscientious objection has taken the form of pressing for legal recognition on a national basis. Where this has been granted, there are many occasions when it has first been granted as an exemption on certain religious grounds, which is a discrimination against all other conscientious objectors. Since the foundation of international bodies such as the League of Nations and later the United Nations, many have also been campaigning for international recognition as a way of pressuring nation states. The Human Rights Commission of the UN first formally recognised the right to conscientious objection on 10th March 1987, and appealed to states to implement it. Continued efforts before and since have demanded recognition of CO, and provision for it, at various international levels as well as at regional level.

In many countries, concentrated but not exclusively in Europe, conscientious objection and anti-conscription movements have seen 'success': being part of the process that forced the end or suspension of conscription (for example in the last 20 years in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain and Sweden, Morocco, Peru and Argentina). There are some clear examples here of antimilitarism breaking down conscription – we can name Insumisión in Spain and Serbia for example. The end of conscription results in a vastly different atmosphere in which for antimilitarist groups to work, but it's not as simple as just a 'win'. Ending conscription has in many cases become expedient for a defence strategy where 'Lean and mobile armies with well trained soldiers were needed.... The large conscription armies became a relic of the past'.⁶ Moreover, ending conscription means one of the main streams for bringing people into conscientious objection and antimilitarist movements ends. What happens for conscientious objection movements when conscription ends is discussed further in chapter 20.

In any case, conscription does still affect millions around the world today. Conscientious objectors are still imprisoned, punished, and ill treated in many countries throughout the world where the right is not recognised – in South Korea, Israel, Finland, Eritrea, Turkey, Cyprus, and Azerbaijan, to name but a few. So the journey to conscientious objection recognition is by no means complete, nor is it – for antimilitarists – the real aim anyway.

Who have been conscientious objectors?

The history of conscientious objection is not the same as the history of war refusal in general, and is even more different from a history of those who do not go to war. What choice you make when faced with an obligation to join the military is to do with what options you have open to you. In many contexts, it's been said that the middle class become conscientious objectors, while the poor evade the draft. This is by no means true at all times and in all places, but there are many reasons why this might be the case in some circumstances. For example, where a state





that does provide some kind of substitute service to the military uses a 'conscience committee' to judge the 'validity' of a CO's application: this is a potentially very daunting experience, more attractive to the more highly educated who are used to debating, having to speak in public, and so forth – aside from the political choices to be made around whether to accept such a test of one's own conscience. In today's campaigning culture where being a conscientious objector can often involve giving a lot of media interviews, this could also be deeply intimidating, depending on your aptitude, background and experience. Does it lend itself more to middle and upper class people? (see Noam Gur's interview, chapter 6).

Things are also much more complex than a working class/ middle class dichotomy, however. How do you evade the draft? Do you flee abroad, go underground, continue to study, work in a 'reserved' profession whose workers do not get called up? Ability to take such action relates to privilege and status in different ways. The reverse is also true: by no means all conscientious objection movements have been devoid of working class participation and leadership.

Because it's mostly men who are called to war by the state, it's mostly men who are conscientious objectors to military service. This is not the case everywhere: today, women are conscripted in Eritrea, Israel, Mozambique and Norway. In Israel, one of the largest conscientious objection groups is a feminist group – New Profile – with many women members. But conscientious objection movements historically have been male dominated, and it takes decisive effort to ensure that their work not only – at the absolute least – includes women in a meaningful not-just-making-the-sandwiches type way, but also recognises the ways patriarchy and militarism relate.

Women have also organised separately using conscientious objection as a tool, declaring themselves objectors to militarism in their own lives – for example in Turkey (see chapters 23 and 24). WRI's 2010 book *Women and Conscientious Objection – An Anthology* goes into much more detail on this. In this volume however, see chapter 24 for some examples of ways of both including patriarchy in an understanding of militarism and power, and chapters 7 and 27 for ways of ensuring that this understanding translates into organising differently.

Books about conscientious objection and its history will talk about pacifists, religious adherents and activists working from 'conviction politics', who organise campaigns together. Just as important, you could argue, is opposition on what you might term 'personal' grounds: 'I have a family to feed, food to grow, elders to look after – I cannot just leave my home and join the army'. Or, 'I do not want to die'. These aversions to enlistment are just as relevant to anti-conscription campaigns as political convictions. Firstly because they represent compelling arguments about the importance of personal liberty and power over our own lives; secondly because they are widespread; and thirdly because they highlight the inherent horrors of war and life in an itinerant, hierarchical killing force – i.e. the military – in





a less abstract way than many ideological arguments. But such opposition is harder to harness than a shared ideological commitment between people who might be organising together anyway, such as left wing groups. Moreover, it might not seem as 'worthy' to the states they are trying to challenge, and could therefore be less likely to provoke sympathy among opponents or command respect from the military they are trying to evade.

If the history of conscientious objection has been originally religious, overwhelmingly male, and often the choice of those from more privileged backgrounds, what has conscientious objection to offer women, people of colour, and antimilitarists from the majority or 'third' world? We hope this book answers some of these questions with examples of feminist movements as well as anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist campaigners from the majority world. But it is also our hope that some of its contents are a challenge to movements who might be male dominated, or white dominated, or middle class dominated. This is not because the authors of this book, or WRI and its network, do not suffer from being male dominated, or white dominated, or middle class dominated. At times we have and we do. We do not have all the answers, but we wish to engage with the questions. We also recognise that whilst conscientious objection is an important tool against militarism, it is only one, and other tools might at different times and places offer a more radical alternative to the trappings of militarism like heroism, sacrifice and hierarchy.

And what of the future? Conscientious objection movements have often been inspired by the old expression 'imagine if there was a war and no one showed up?' Well, soon perhaps hardly anyone will need to 'show up' for there to be a war, as technology advances and can do the killing of 1000 armed people at the touch of a button. Conscientious objection movements are especially threatening to militarist states when acting as a challenge to the kind of 'total war' mobilisations of the so called 'world wars' of the 20th Century. As increasingly professional armies, and robots, take over from the 'boots on the ground' mentality that needs men, and men in their droves, to act as soldiers, we will have to be inventive and flexible in how conscientious objection is used. We do that best together, and that's one of the reasons WRI exists, and pacifists around the world continue to invest in cross border communication through organisations including WRI.

1. Çınar, Özgür H. and Üsterci, Coskun (eds.) 2009, *Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarized Society*, (London and New York: Zed Books).
2. This is not a coincidence! But rather testament to the role played by Kees and Betty Boeke, who hosted meetings that founded IFOR and WRI.
3. Bröckling in Çınar, p. 55.
4. The whole island of Ireland, then part of the United Kingdom, was exempted from conscription, for fear of a popular revolt. (cf. Çınar, p. 22).
5. A quote from Javier Gárate, who founded Chile's *Ni Casco Ni Uniforme* conscientious objection group; correspondence with the author.
6. Lammerant, Hans 2013, 'The end of conscription and the transformation of war', in *The Broken Rifle* [online] May, <<http://www.wri-irg.org/node/21760>>, accessed 12th June





Section 1: Working Together

Throughout this book, readers will find there is a particular focus on 'gender'. But why is such a focus pertinent? Dr. Cynthia Cockburn is a feminist researcher and writer, living in London, where she is active in Women in Black against War, and the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. She holds honorary chairs in the Department of Sociology, City University London, and the Centre for the Study of Women and Gender, University of Warwick. Here, she addresses this question.

Why Gender?

The clear conviction of authors and editors that 'gender matters' is a welcome feature of this book. But why does it matter? What do we gain by employing a gender analysis in the study of conscientious objection, the movement of those who refuse to be enlisted into the state's preparations for war? The answer to this question, I think, may come in three parts.

First, just as it is impossible to fully appreciate and understand any social matter – and war is nothing if not profoundly social – without an analysis of economic class relations and the ethno-cultural and 'racialised' difference structuring populations, so it calls for a gender analysis, since all aspects of the social are gendered through and through, even if it has taken a couple of centuries of feminist persistence to bring this to the forefront of the sociologist's mind. Practising war involves the mental preparation and orientation of populations to commit to increased government budgets on armed forces and weaponry at the cost of spending on other public services, and to the death, destruction and loss of wellbeing the war will involve. Those populations are made up of individuals variously related to power, with complex belongings and needs. People differently situated by class, gender and ethnicity pay an unequal price for war readiness and war fighting. Leaders know well to appeal to class and ethnic solidarity – migrants often gain legitimacy by enlisting – and in their call to arms they often appeal to manhood to 'protect women and children' against the putative aggressor.

Second, a gender analysis is important because it alerts us to matters in militaries, militarism and militarisation of which we might otherwise not be fully conscious. For example, it reminds us to notice, and to question, the current trend to recruit women, even into combat roles. A gender lens applied to militarism, as ideology, a mindset that values armament and warfare, shows this orientation often expressed differently by women and men – but it can also disabuse us of prejudices. For instance, former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher surprised many by proving to be, 'despite' being female, a keenly militarist politician. Applied





to militarisation this same lens reveals, as Cynthia Enloe has so strikingly shown, not just the enlistment of men into militarising practices, but the shaping of many aspects of the domestic economy and family life as well.¹ Third, a gender analysis of things military in turn tells us a great deal about the relationship between femininity and masculinity. It has a lot to say in particular about men and masculinisation, features we might otherwise be liable to underplay. For instance, the apparent reluctance of educationalists to counteract the stereotypically 'rough and tumble' culture of boyhood, despite the well understood detriment to women and girls, may be explained by the state's perceived need for masculinity in each succeeding generation to maintain a readiness for combat. Men as men, too, have an interest in this. As Ayşe Göl Altınay puts it, 'the military is as much a site of (masculine) national desire and production, as it is a force of coercion'.²

Conscientious objection, an individual's refusal, for various reasons, to participate in military service, even when this is a legal obligation, is a dramatic moment of fusion in relations of power, in several dimensions. Military service in premodern times was sometimes voluntary, sometimes enforced by the ruling classes, and at times 'mercenaries' were paid to fight. With the consolidation of the nation state system in 18th century Europe, the practice developed whereby the state obliges males of a given age to serve in its national army. Conscientious objection developed in parallel, a critical instance of relationship between the male individual and the state, wherein responsibility – his obligation to serve as the state's soldier – became associated with rights: the state's obligation to reciprocate with citizenship. Sometimes the conscientious objector is obliged to flee his state, on pain of prosecution and imprisonment, and then finds himself in the 'no man's land' of statelessness. That, in most cases, only males have been the subject of military conscription has been one cause of women's inferior rights as citizens. Thus the importance of a gender analysis is not diminished, as might be thought, in the till-now rare circumstances in which a state (as Israel today) extends conscription to women. On the contrary, it is all the more necessary if the trajectory over time of that society's power relations, the deeply intertwined systems of nationalism, militarism and patriarchy, are to be understood in their specificity.

Conscientious objection is of course scorned and despised by those who value and promote a militarised model of manhood and citizenship. On the other hand, within peace movements, where on the contrary refusal to kill is respected, the conscientious objector may be represented in two rather different ways, both of them gendered. On the one hand he may be represented as a kind of alternative masculine hero. Just as the soldier is heroised for his willingness to 'be a man' and die for his country, so a conscientious objector may be praised and admired within peace movements for 'his' heroic preparedness to suffer trial, subjection and imprisonment for his antimilitarist beliefs. He becomes an alternative masculine role model. Alternatively, a man's act of refusal may be a progressive move within two kinds of power struggle – not only that between the individual and the state,





but that which characterises relations between women and men, feminine and masculine qualities and values. This occurs when the conscientious objector refuses both of the two readily available masculinities, the one macho and heroic, the other shamed, degraded and de-masculinised by evasion of military service. This conscious stance of 'neither/nor' is an anti-patriarchal choice that can only be made if gender is made fully visible in the social field of militarism and war.

When women are subject to obligatory military service, as they are in Israel, of course conscientious objection, as refusal to serve, becomes a choice available to them as well as to men. However in most states, it continues to be only men who are conscripted. And in this case conscientious objection implies a different set of strategies for women than for men. At the very least, the situation is one in which women, often including friends and family members, are likely to engage 'in' conscientious objection by supporting male conscientious objectors who are known to them. But in some countries, women have extended the meaning of the concept to include many other kinds of antimilitarist, anti-state, activism. They may withhold 'defence' taxes, protest against military involvement in schools, or the rampant militarism of many video games and films. Women applying a gender analysis to the situation are likely to perceive a connection between the legislated violence of the state against 'the enemy', and the all-too-habitual violence of men, whether militarised or civilian, against other men and above all against women, in domestic contexts and in sexualised forms. Such women's feminist perception of the continuum of gendered violence is likely to precipitate them into activism of more extensive scope than 'mere' direct support for conscientious objectors. It will shine a light on the malign intersectionality of nationalism and militarism with patriarchy, aligning the movement of 'women against violence' with the movement of 'people against war'. At best it will help mobilise a society wide awareness in which antimilitarist men join in alliance with the women's movement and in partnership with (and as) lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans activists, to subvert the contemporary relations of ruling.

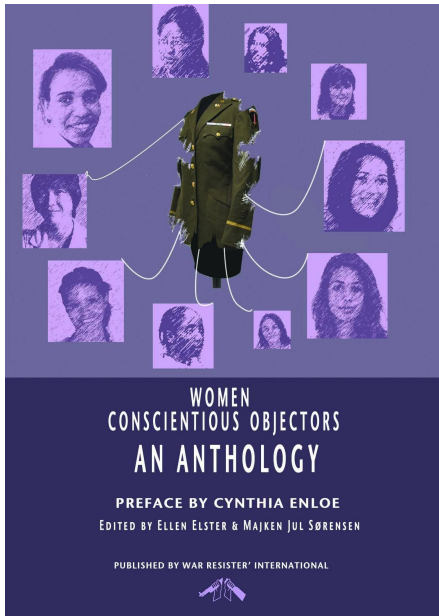
A Note on the Intersectionality of Gender³

Ideas about male and female behaviour, of masculinities and femininities, interact with and change depending on other social categories such as race, age, ability, class, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and religious beliefs, and also vary over space and time, but affect and influence all of us our whole lives [...] The gender identity we are assigned to and that we ourselves and society form us into, gives us a very different amount of power over our lives and the decisions that affect them. However, our access to power and privilege also relies heavily on other social categories (such as race, class and age, among others), which means people get advantages and disadvantages from gender privilege in very different ways.





Ferda's Story



In an extract reproduced from WRI's 2010 anthology of women conscientious objectors, Ferda Ülker, a feminist and antimilitarist activist, as well as one of the first women to declare herself a conscientious objector in Turkey, explains how she came to make the decision to do so in 2005, and the gender dynamics she encountered along the way. Her declaration itself is also included.

Conscientious objection has been associated with men who declare themselves conscientious objectors. The issue has been molded and defined by them, most importantly by the compulsory military service duty they face. We women saw ourselves not as agents but supporters of the struggle. As we got involved however, we started to see the crucial importance of women's inclusion in the conscientious

objectors' struggle. On the other hand, it still took us a long time to find the courage to say 'yes, here we are'. One of the reasons for this may be the militarist culture which has had its effect on us. Having been raised in this cultural environment, even when we participate in oppositional movements, we may fail to get rid of the marks of it. We get fearful as women even when we are a part of the oppositional movement's gatherings. When we come up with a claim and need to make it, we wait to make our point intact, clear enough to deny any space for discussion. But time passes while we wait.

We failed to argue that conscientious objection is not an area limited and peculiar to men, that if accepted as such this might lead us into sexism and that conscientious objection, though it points to the army and military duty, still necessitates a broader perspective. It has taken a considerable amount of time for women to pluck up our courage and come out with our views. On May 15, 2004, at the first 'Militourism' gathering in Turkey, five women friends declared their conscientious objection. Their courage despite the criticisms levelled at them, which implied 'OK, what is it to do with you?' encouraged more of us to declare our conscientious objections later on. Currently, there are 62 conscientious objectors





in Turkey and 13 of them are women. These numbers may seem small but when the short history of this struggle and the effect of militarist culture are taken into account, it is not to be underestimated.

What happened to make women pluck up their courage and 'come out' as conscientious objectors? In my opinion, the main reason for this was that we reached a point where we had to decide whether we wanted to stand up and be counted. What we were fighting for was more than to be associated solely with demanding exemptions from military service for conscientious objector men. It would be possible to broaden the agenda of conscientious objection only through the appearance of women in the struggle and questions being asked. Yet we were expecting a difficult process and we were waiting for the suitable time. For me the right time came when some 'pioneer' women appeared and came out before me. For those five women, on the other hand, the right time was the National Tourism Festivity preparations which had taken a great deal of time and which had excited all of us. That all five women had decided to acknowledge their objection together can be accounted for by their togetherness encouraging them. We knew that there would be many 'why' questions but we had come up with and matured our answers to such questions over the past years. The time had come.

Men still try to explain women's role in the conscientious objection movement as her being a wife, sister, or mother to a male conscientious objector. This view has been generally accepted. Even if no such connection exists, men say 'maybe the woman has a close friend among male conscientious objectors'. But obviously all these reasons for women's involvement in the conscientious objection movement define women's existence as necessarily relative to men. Our declarations elaborate why we are here, in the struggle, on our own terms. Of course we support the stances of male conscientious objectors refusing to comply with compulsory military service, as everybody else sensitive to the issue does. But what we do primarily is make visible the militarism which penetrates all sectors of social life and social relations. We want it to be clearly visible, so that we can fight against it.

Ferda's Declaration

Since I have defined myself as an anti-militarist and a feminist, naturally, I believe I am an objector. By means of this declaration, I turn this 'informal' situation into a 'formal' situation!

The conscientious objection movement is not only a struggle against 'compulsory conscription'. This expression includes a wider dimension. And we, women, have a bigger voice and status, than only being a 'supporter' of the movement. Conscientious objection is the direct opposition of militarism and every aspect it entails. Militarist thought does not only remain within the border of the military, but it envisions a military world that affects daily life. And in this world,





women are degraded and disregarded. Her status is always positioned behind, even though occasionally circumstances require her to further her position. Its terms are: authority, hierarchy, and obedience.

These expressions are very familiar and significant to us, women.

These are the well known barriers of a world that continuously pushes us back. Militarism is always like an unannounced and shameless guest in every aspect of life, especially for women living in this geography; in the streets, at home, at work, in our relationships, at our fields of struggle, and everywhere.

I declare that, today, as much as before, I shall defy every secret and obvious form of militarism and to show solidarity with anyone who defies militarism.

As much as militarism is determined to affect my life, I am determined to continue my struggle.

I OBJECT!

An interview with Greg Payton

Gender is not, of course, the only power dynamic of which conscientious objection movements should be aware: there are many more, which in turn intersect both with gender and with militarism. One of these is race. For this book, we interviewed Greg Payton, an African American veteran of the Vietnam war, turned international peace activist with Vietnam Veterans against War, Veterans for Peace, War Resisters' League, and Black Veterans for Social Justice. He talked to us about how race and racism have played out in his experience of this activism.

Q: Can you tell us what got you involved in your activism?

I'm a Vietnam veteran. I got drafted, conscripted to Vietnam. And I really wasn't not into politics, I only went because I didn't want to get locked up, I didn't want to go to jail. That was the number one reason I went to Vietnam. The military wasn't difficult for me, I was pretty physically active so it was OK. But when I went to Vietnam, I began to understand what the war was really about. I realised we were being used for the benefit of others. When I spoke about white soldiers and black soldiers and the problems of racism in the military, I became a target. I got attacked several times by American soldiers. It lead to a lot of conflict. I had to leave the army, I left without permission and went to stay with a Vietnamese family. It gave me tremendous insight on the war. I got shot at a couple of times by American soldiers.





At the time I didn't realise there was an organised effort of Vietnam war veterans. The movement was a lot of young, white students primarily. They started organising for people not going to war: they never came to my community. We didn't know about conscientious objection, we didn't know that you could maybe go to Canada – we didn't have any idea. I got released from the military and I came back home. What happened was that when I was in Vietnam I started using drugs. I used drugs for about 15 years. In the beginning it was manageable, at the end I ended up being homeless. Doing a lot of different things.

Q: Were there any support networks for you when you came back?

I didn't know anything. I didn't try to link up with any organisations; I kept moving on and tried to develop my life. But I went to the Veterans Administration, to a drug programme. There was some veterans in that programme who were members of Vietnam Veterans Against the War.

Q: Was that when you became involved with conscientious objection activism and antimilitarism more generally?

That was a good experience. I hadn't realised it, but Vietnam was the catalyst of my drug addiction. I began to get a real education about what was happening politically, how we were using soldiers and not looking after them when they got back home. I became very involved in the veterans unit. Then through Matt Meyer, I got involved in War Resisters' League (WRL) and started going to different things: there was a link between veterans and the Vietnam war campaign.

You mentioned that the movement against the Vietnam war was mainly white, middle class students – how were the race dynamics when you got involved with Vietnam Veterans against the War and WRL?

A lot of meetings I was the only black person. It was a long time before other black people got involved. There was a brother named Clarence Fitch who was the one who mentored me into the programme, but he was one of only a few. He got AIDS, so again a lot of the time I'm the only black person at a meeting. It was years before there was more black involvement – some peripheral people maybe, but by and large the movement was white.

Q: Why do you think that was?

How many black people are there in your social circle? Not many? That's the problem – people stayed in their own social circle – you only organise with the people that you know. It wasn't a conscious thing where they didn't want to include other people, but they didn't know how to get other people involved.

Q: When you started getting involved, did that raise the white majority's





awareness?

There was a lot of denial about white privilege really and how that works. People aren't really confronted with it – having not been involved in situations where race is an issue. They don't understand what it's like to be in that situation where everyone is systematically all white and you're another colour. You're immediately identifiable. I didn't know where they might be from from, but they knew I was black straight away. They could deal with me in a different way.

Q: What would you say has improved or needs to be improved in the way white people deal with their privilege? How can groups be made more inclusive?

Early on there were a couple of people in WRL who knew that their meetings didn't include a lot of people other than those that looked like them. They were preaching to the choir. You have to reach out to other groups – the number one way is you find out what their issues are and you work with them on their issues and then hopefully they work with you on yours.

Militarism is all encompassing – black, white, etc – because of the way militarism works and what it does to a community – you find that white folks that are involved in the peace movement are adamant that whatever their niche is – environmental, CO, nuclear – whatever it is, they are passionate about it, but they don't know what the others struggles are. When you're fighting for survival, like in the Black Lives Matter campaign – we're dealing with a situation of militarism, where the police are killing people: I'm in a community where a black man was shot in the back eight times while running away from police. But what happens is that the struggles we're having with militarism, other folks, white people in particular, come from communities that don't understand that. So for example, WRL was talking about war. There was an issue about the police and police brutality and they didn't know whether or not to talk about it, because their issue is war. That was the beginning of our weekend meeting. That weekend there was a riot in LA about police brutality – they rolled out the army, tanks, all that militarism in front of local citizens. And right there, there was a link between militarism and race. It could have been a war zone in the Middle East or Latin America.

Q: So you would say the problem is a lack of awareness among white activists, and an unwillingness to make themselves aware?

Some of that has been true. It's people from other cultures getting involved in new cultures. I was very uncomfortable in all white communities at first, I had to learn new terminology. What happened was that there was just a need to understand this stuff and I was interested so stayed the course. Some people don't have the time to do that, they're fighting for their lives.

Q: What do you think would help more people stay the course? What might





make movements more inclusive?

You have to prove to people that what you're doing relates to what they need done. So for example in South Africa, there were many black South African groups that wanted to support the End Conscription Campaign, but they were also concerned about how that would work. If they don't do their military service, but they still have white privilege, are they then going to go back to their suburbs, become white citizens suppressing black people again – are they going support us if we support them?

As an organisation, you have to go and relate more to other folks, rather than you being central – in many instances, the organisation feels their issues are paramount: 'everyone needs to get on board with our issues'. Your issue is not paramount to other groups. When we were in South Africa for the WRI (War Resisters' International) conference last year – one of the greatest things I've seen happen – you reached out to all these other groups and people began to find out that, for example, homophobia and feminism – all these different things happen in a lot of places. A lot of times, people feel very isolated, but in reality the same pressures are also going on in other places. Prior to that there was very little – there wasn't a lot of direct relating.

Things have come a good way, since I started back in '80s and '90s. Things have got a lot better. But activists still don't always understand or want to



Greg addresses a group at the WRI triennial in South Africa, 2014





understand other situations. What I like about WRI and WRL is that you're reaching out to me, the idea that we have this connection, and I could email you and get instantaneous support internationally. A lot of groups don't have that same mechanism, especially grassroots groups. So for example in the movement for divestment from Israel, a lot of people didn't understand what that was about, but now there's a whole community of people doing it around the world. That's wonderful!

Q: So what I'm hearing is that you feel there's been a lot of improvement and more reaching out and solidarity.

'A lot': how do you qualify that? Things have improved. Still, I think we're facing the same issues. It's coalition building that's important, with other groups you can identify with and move with. Militarism affects everybody in all types of ways, especially economically. We need to reach out to younger people so that they can get a clear understanding of what's going on. Like with tobacco— there was a movement against tobacco 30 years ago. At that time smoking was a big thing. Over 30 years, tobacco activists have changed the culture of smoking. You can't smoke in meetings. Bottom line is that people understand smoking is not a good thing. Little kids at school could tell you you shouldn't smoke.

Q: How do you think the antimilitarist movement could emulate that?

What we did as veterans was link up with people – teachers, for example. We went to schools and talked to the students. We never told young people what decision to make, but we said if you do go to the military, here's some of the things that you should know, like: your life is no longer your own. We have to begin an outreach to young people. You plant the seeds in younger people and when they start making social decisions, it shows. We need to interpret that in terms of language. So for example, I remember WRI arguing about whether they should put their things into Spanish. They were arguing about what kind of Spanish and how not everyone speaks the same kind – but you've gotta try! People will figure it out. We're so busy trying to get it just right that we miss the mark altogether sometimes.

Q: So we need to communicate with people more widely, in a culturally sensitive way, but without paralysing ourselves being worried that we get it wrong?

We all have a long way to go in order to make things better for our children and for ourselves. I've lived in the southern part of the US – the cradle of slavery. There's still a lot of sentiment around that fosters these stereotypical ideas about black people. We're working hard to change minds, and I think we have. Many white Americans never thought a cop would do that – kill an unarmed black man, I mean. The media has portrayed black people in a very negative light. Many whites think 'they get what they deserve', and a lot of people don't even consider us people. And the same kind of militarism that's happening here, where we're getting





killed by the police, is happening all around the world. It's horrible the way Muslims are treated in the US too. The US wants to blame everyone else for the violence, never wants to take responsibility for anything. I have to bite my tongue! I know some of the issues and people don't want to hear it, they don't want to be out of their comfort zone.

On that point: earlier I asked about how white people can make 'our' activism and 'our' movements more inclusive. Something that's interesting is to flip that dynamic...

Yeah, so for example, one of the major things that will happen is that white activists will plan a march, say, and then they call the black groups and see if they want to join the demonstration. But they never brought them in at the planning stages. Don't do all the planning and then tell the black groups where to go and what to do. If you want more black involvement, you have to bring them in initially, right at that planning stage. I might have had something to say about the objectives and tactics and all that. But you just want me to show up so you can think you're being inclusive! You're being dominant – you want black people as window dressing, not at the level of organising. And why don't you come and support black activists on issues that concern us? Take some time out of what you're doing and get to understand other people's issues. Don't just read about them – meet them, ask how you can help. It might sound simple, but make fliers and that kind of thing – something your group might be better equipped to do, if you have more resources. Little groups don't have the infrastructure to do that so it could really help them. You need to listen to what their problems are.

Q: What would your advice be to black activists who are coming face to face with very frustrating white behaviour?

You have to understand different cultures. Most Americans look at white people and make an assumption – they assume they're the same. Understanding different groups, like different European groups, takes a while. People from different parts of the world have a different outlook on stuff. You have to understand where other people are coming from. I feel very blessed I was able to weather the storm. I had people I could talk to about these things – Howard Clark and I became very close. We loved each other enough that we could learn from each other. We could ask each other's opinion. I could say I don't know much about x without worrying about being judged. For example, I didn't know much about gay culture, but I had some friends who were patient with me. I also remember being in California at a conference early in my involvement with WRL and there was an article in Playboy Magazine about Vietnam Veterans and I was mentioned so I showed it to someone, but they pointed out how sexist that magazine is. It was my first lesson in the peace movement about sexism.

Q: How do you feel about black groups organising on their own?





When you have a war, the draft gets people from all economic backgrounds. Someone I met had never met a black person – everything he knew was from the media. We couldn't even communicate because we had different slang. But black soldiers could talk to one another so we came together. We had a lot of similar experiences. There was a lot of segregation. Certainly groups need to identify with their culture. I don't believe everything has to be homogeneous, not everyone has to be together all the time in everything. You can be in a black group and you have issues and you're trying to align yourself with other groups and everyone is trying to contribute collectively to a situation.

Being welcoming to other groups is hard, people don't understand your history, they might be coming up with things you've already done. Hearing them out is still important though, it's important not to dismiss anybody. If you start being dismissive, then people shut down. I've been organising with Black Veterans for Social Justice – they've been inclusive, but the primary focus is on black veterans: housing, educational opportunities, homeless shelters. They started organising as black veterans, and they're still inclusive. You don't have to lose your group autonomy to work with others. They work with Vietnam Veterans Against the War – many of us have come together for certain things. We've given each other awards! There are lots of opportunities for collaboration.

Q: What about gender awareness and inclusivity?

A lot of my education about gender has been from being involved in these groups. As I mentioned, there were some things I learned about sexism and the exploitation of women in the peace movement. And then when you talk about black women, there's so many nuances. You'd have to speak to a black woman. But she couldn't speak for every black woman. I can't speak for every African American, you have to get some kind of sampling group. But yes, black women are marginalised in a lot of these situations. I remember when I started getting involved in activism, women were picking up on male dominance. They would point out if there were more male speakers than women speakers, or only one woman speaker. I'd never thought about it like that. You start to listen to more voices. When there's only one black woman, you miss the opportunity to get a more inclusive balance. It's not just one token person you need, you need several people.

An interview with Noam Gur

Another important dynamic to be aware of alongside race and gender is class, or socioeconomic background. We spoke to another activist and conscientious objector, Noam Gur, from the Israeli feminist organisation New Profile, about her experience as a conscientious objector coming from a less socioeconomically





privileged background than is typical in the Israeli conscientious objection movement.

Q: Can you give us an overview of your involvement with the conscientious objection movement in Israel?

It started when I was 18. I refused to join the Israeli army. That was the first time I took part in the conscientious objection movement in Israel. Before that I'd been in touch with New Profile, which is a feminist organisation that also works with conscientious objectors. I contacted them to get help getting out of the army. After spending some time in jail, I moved to Jerusalem and started taking a more active part. I joined New Profile and I've been a member for the last three years.

Q: And what have been the main things you've noticed about class and socioeconomic dynamics in the movement?

New Profile is working hard to change things, but it's a very white organisation. Not just white: it's changed lately, but New Profile has been around for 15 years and it's mainly older women, people who have the time and ability to volunteer and be a part of that without getting anything back. But going into other organisations working with conscientious objectors, the situation was actually a lot harder. There it's mostly men in their 40s and 50s who are getting money from their work. So it's not just New Profile, it's a much deeper problem. But when you work with New Profile you can see that there are two ways to go. One is to go and be a conscientious objector and talk to the media and go to prison and that's for a very certain type of person. There are people who can't do that, but that's not just about what's going on inside conscientious objection organisations, it's the whole system. Although New Profile does promote this model of CO, it's also working really hard to change things. It's going to take a while to change though. But, for example, there are a lot more jobs in New Profile than there used to be. People understand that you can't volunteer if you don't have the privilege to do this – if you're not already settled and have a lot of money, which isn't the situation of most of the younger people in New Profile. You read the stories, you see what's going on in prisons, that's going to be a lot harder to change.

Q: So what I'm hearing is that the work culture in the conscientious objection movement, 'volunteerism', isn't accessible. What about education and peoples' educational background – how does that affect how people can interact with conscientious objection?

That's interesting – right now we're starting a new project. I and a few others are working on a project that will first check what the situation is with university scholarships, hopefully later we can give them out. Coming from a family that doesn't have any money – Mum is a teacher, Dad works for the minimum wage – they can't pay for my studies, but I don't have access to scholarships. I have to





stop my studies once in a while to get back on my feet financially. It's not just me either, it's a lot of people. Which is why we've started this project.

New Profile has kind of old school ideas about conscientious objection and antimilitarism, but you can see that a lot of members are students, so that's interesting – why is that? Because on the other hand, there are a lot of people who are frustrated, people who don't have access to scholarships. That'll affect access to university. A lot of us in New Profile say to people we advise that it doesn't have much affect on your life if you don't go to the army. But something big from my perspective as a student is that you will not see a lot of people who didn't go to the army who have access to scholarships. People who didn't go to the army and who don't have money from their parents don't study. So I disagree with saying it doesn't affect your life. 90% of scholarships are closed to you if you don't go to the army.

Q: You said that one way of being a conscientious objector is to make your declaration, speak out publicly, do interviews and so on: does peoples' educational and socioeconomic background affect their willingness to speak out?

Yes – it's kind of funny for me to say that because I come from a small town far away from Tel Aviv, I'm a Sephardic Jew – I fit the criteria of what we're talking about, in terms of not coming from the privileged background of most people who do conscientious objection like that. On the other hand, I did go to prison and do the whole media thing, but that's very rare. I don't know about many people who are Sephardic Jews who come from outside Tel Aviv who do that. It also makes you very visible when you go to prison. I was there and I think looking back, I was seen as a woman who comes from Tel Aviv and who has the privilege to be able to do that. It wasn't true, but I see why the other women in prison thought that.

You're risking so much, if you come from a place where you don't have much and you're already struggling, not going to the army means losing a lot. I can understand why people wouldn't do that, and why they would go to the army so as not to close so many doors. Not going to the army closes a lot of doors. Then the media thing is even worse, it stays there forever, every employer will google me and find out! It's very visible, and if you look though the past refusers in Israel, it's not just who they are but what they're saying. There's no one who's said they did it, not because of the occupation, but because they can't afford to lose three years of their life, because they're raising a family. But in prison, you see a lot of people who don't go to the army because they can't afford it.

No one comes out and says that though: it means losing even more. It's important to look at the declarations and interviews of refusers, you can see how blind they are to what's going on outside Tel Aviv – they're in a small bubble. A lot of declarations are about refusing as 'the only moral option', how these people are 'heroes', and it's the option everyone has to take – you hear that and you think, 'not





everyone has the privilege of being able to go to prison for their principles'. Reading these interviews, you can't think 'maybe I'll go to the army and that will be fine, I don't have any other options'. The declarations make it sound like being a hero is the only option. But you will not see a lot of Sephardic Jews refuse: they don't have the privilege to afford it.

Q: So conscientious objection is a middle class, privileged thing? How does that affect the conscientious objection movement and its potential as an antimilitarist social force?

There have been uprisings by Ethiopian Jews, with violence in the centre of Tel Aviv, and people were using antimilitarist slogans. There were protests about police violence and it was very unexpected. But I think that shows how many voices against militarism there are in Israel, so it's not just our voices, it's not just New Profile. A lot of people actually talk about militarism. But we never talk about what they're saying, we don't see how it fits with what we're doing, and in a way it counts less in some peoples' eyes. And that pushes away a lot of potential power. You can look into the Ethiopian community and see that those people are talking about militarism, but they will never be part of a bigger antimilitarist movement because when you're perceived as so inferior already and you're told that going to prison is the only way to do conscientious objection, and the conscientious objection movement is seen as a white, middle class thing, those people will never join you. There are a lot of people who will never take part in what we're doing.

We're losing a lot of people. A lot of people will never hear about us. We have the ability to do something more, to try and see what's going on outside. We're missing a lot of people, and I think those people see us as lefties who are just going to prison and being annoying. Even though a lot of people are doing things in their own way, we will never be part of what they're doing, and they will never be part of what we're doing – that's a problem.

Q: Do you think this can change?

I think if the way we talk to the media, to 'outsiders', and to people in Israel generally, if it was less about being heroes and going to prison, and more about refusing as a very different thing, if we were talking about militarism in another way, talking about all kinds of militarism and all kinds of refusal, then things could change. We also need to start talking about conscription itself, not just refusal. There are a lot of problems with conscription, but a lot of people think that advocating the end of conscription actually promotes another kind of militarism, and no one's talking about that. I think promoting the end of conscription in Israel is the smartest move right now, but no one really agrees! There are people who can't go to the army because they have to provide for their families, or because they just don't want to. And if we didn't have conscription, and if not going to the army didn't affect your life so much, that would be so much more of an achievement than five

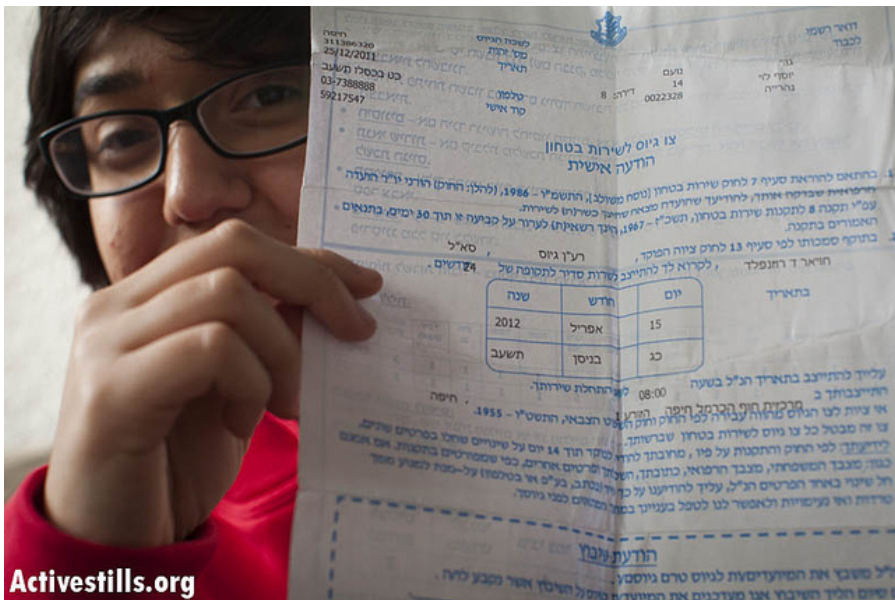




guys who go to prison for a month or whatever.

Q: Why don't people agree with you on that?

Well, there is a very small group within the conscientious objection movement trying to promote it. But people see it as a capitalistic approach. A lot of leftist conscientious objectors – people around us – think we're promoting a military that would have more problems than we have now. A lot of what we hear is about the US military, where a lot of black people have to go because they don't have any other options – that would happen in Israel too. But it's actually more complicated than that – and that's the situation now anyway! Those who go to the army are those who don't have the privilege not to.



Noam with the paper eventually exempting her from military service (Photo by: Oren Ziv / Activestills.org).

1. Enloe, Cynthia 2000, *Manoeuvres: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press).
2. Altınay, Ayşe Gül 2004, *The Myth of the Military Nation: Militarism, Gender and Education in Turkey*, (New York & Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan), p3.
3. Written by Cattis Laska, and taken from 'Gender and Nonviolence', in *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns*, 2nd ed. (London: War Resisters' International), p23.





Working with Privilege and Difference

In this chapter, an activist whose main experience has been in the UK's intersectional feminist and student movements takes a more general look at privilege and difference, and suggests some practical ways of working with these.

'We have been taught either to ignore our differences, or to view them as causes for separation and suspicion rather than as forces for change. Without community there is no liberation, only the most temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretence that these differences do not exist.'¹

These words were spoken by Audre Lorde, a black lesbian feminist from the USA, in 1979. How to work with difference is not exactly a new problem, then. More than that, how to work creatively with our differences, rather than merely tolerating them, is an issue with which every movement should be grappling, if the full potential of all participants is to be engaged. Lorde wrote mainly about the differences between women in the US feminist movement of the seventies and eighties, but many of her insights can have a more general application too.

Acknowledging that differences exist is obviously the first step, but the crucial thing is to acknowledge what they mean. Differences tend to be marked as superior or inferior to each other: some ethnicities, genders, nationalities, religions and so on, are popularly and often unconsciously imagined to be 'better' than others. Assumptions and behaviours which reflect this still persist, even in situations where everyone is nominally considered equal. Indeed, these assumptions and behaviours can be harder to address in such situations, because it is easier to pretend they are not there.

As Lorde put it: 'for as long as any difference between us means that one must be inferior, then the recognition of any difference must be fraught with guilt'.² And I have to personally admit that it can be hard for me to acknowledge that I belong to a group of people which is unduly privileged over others, as this means I benefit from their oppression, whether I want to or not – privilege and oppression are always relative to each other, they are each other's inverse measurement.

It also means I have to acknowledge that this privilege of mine may account for things I enjoy which I would prefer to think I deserve on pure merit. In my personal case, for example, I can't claim that any luck I have had in areas such as education and employment – or, in the context of activism, the way my contributions are received by others – is entirely down to who I am as an individual: it also helps that, in my case again, I'm white and middle class. When I'm confronted with the fact that not everybody has these privileges, despite 'white' and 'middle class' being what we might call 'default markers' in my society, as well as markers of imagined





superiority, this can feel like a blow to my self esteem. Then the fact that I'm also a woman, which is neither a default marker nor a marker of imagined superiority, can make this feel quite galling: the fact that, in some ways, I have to overcome oppression to enjoy my 'luck', will be much more obvious to me than the fact that my privilege helps me in other ways. If I am used to battling against being marginalised, because men, with their imagined superiority over me as a woman in the eyes of my society, are given more of a platform than me in our joint activism, and their contributions are received as more authoritative than mine in any groups to which we belong together, then I may balk at doing anything that feels like giving away what authority and platform I have managed to gain.

But to borrow again from Lorde: 'if I participate, knowingly or otherwise, in my sister's oppression and she calls me on it, to answer her anger with my own only blankets the substance of our exchange with reaction. It wastes energy. And yes, it is very difficult to stand still and to listen to another woman's voice delineate an agony I do not share, or one to which I have myself contributed'.³ Equally, however: 'the angers between women will not kill us if we can articulate them with precision, if we listen to the content of what is said with at least as much intensity as we defend ourselves against the manner of saying'.⁴

Working with difference will obviously be a challenge, but there are practical things that can help, some of which are outlined here (see also the introduction to consensus decision making in chapter 9). In an inclusive and egalitarian movement, nobody should have to battle for a platform in the first place: meetings and so on – every meeting – should be structured with opportunities for everyone to have their say built into them. Going around the group periodically asking everyone for their thoughts, for example, instead of just letting people jump in ad hoc, can be a good idea. Asking everyone to be self-aware about how much they are contributing is also important, but those who are used to in fact having too much of a platform – the more privileged – may feel 'marginalised' when they have any less than they are used to, so asking for self-awareness is unlikely, by itself, to be enough.

Similarly, being marginalised will not necessarily feel like it to everyone – particularly those people who are used to being marginalised – and not everyone will feel the need to take advantage of opportunities to make themselves more heard than usual, though missing out on their insights would still be a shame for the group. Nobody should, however, be pressured into making contributions if they don't want to. Making it possible to contribute in a variety of ways – via written proposals in advance as well as during meetings, for example, or in smaller working groups – can help with this dilemma. It is also, in any case, a more creative way of working than simply going along unthinkingly with a pre-given way of doing things, though it is important to pay close attention to who is actually devising these alternative ways of working: if they are the same people who already benefited from the pre-given way, then they are not too likely to be drawing





in the greater variety of contributions they are meant to draw in. The option of making written proposals, for example, may appeal to those who find public speaking anxiety inducing, or who come from an educational background which didn't prepare them for it, but equally, the same kind of educational background may be required in order to feel confident in writing a proposal.

Sometimes smaller groups or caucuses of people from similar backgrounds are necessary so that those groups can collectively recognise their own needs and devise their own ways of working with them, which they can put to the rest of the group together. Such smaller groups can also have their own value as support networks in the face of shared oppression.



A feminist group gathered in solidarity with women at Yarls Wood immigration detention centre in Britain, under a placard which reads 'Women 4 Women'

Difference and the associated privilege or lack thereof is not only relevant to our organising in so far as it affects willingness or over-eagerness to contribute vocally during meetings, then: difference also means different needs. Lorde asked white women in the US feminist movement of the late seventies and eighties: 'how do you deal with the fact that the women who clean your houses and tend your children while you attend conferences on feminist theory are, for the most part, poor women and women of Color? What is the theory behind racist feminism?'⁵ Conscientious objection movements could do well to ask themselves a similar question: do the terms of participating in the movement structurally exclude anyone, for example those who have caring responsibilities and cannot afford to pay someone to take them over for the time it takes to attend a meeting? Are some people facilitated to attend at the expense of others? Are men expecting





their wives, mothers and girlfriends to take care of housework and childcare while they go out and work for the glorious revolution? Do better off women have similar expectations of poorer women, especially better off white women of poorer women of colour (or women from the dominant ethnic group of women from other ethnic groups)?

Of particular relevance to this book: is any expectation of the kind on the part of men abetted by a sense of entitlement which stems from being treated like heroes for taking such a brave stand as conscientious objection? For antimilitarists, it can be useful to compare our movements to what we are struggling against: if the people who are front and centre of our movements are the same kind of people whom the military would rate highly in terms of desired personnel – almost always young, heterosexual men without disabilities, and, for the higher ranks, those from the dominant ethnic group and a privileged socioeconomic background – then we know we are doing something wrong.

Some other ways in which movements may or may not be structurally exclusionary are listed in WRI's Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns: where does your group meet? Is it accessible by public transport? Does it have facilities which make it friendly to people with disabilities? Is it an open, comfortable setting generally? Meeting in someone's home or a pub/ bar/ cafe may make sense for some groups, it also may create barriers or unhealthy dynamics for others. Some people may not feel comfortable around alcohol, or others may be on a limited budget, or ideologically opposed to consumption, so buying a refreshment may seem like an imposition, among many reasons.⁶

The importance of listening to those who articulate needs which differ from the presupposed needs of the group majority is often stressed, but it is equally important to be mindful of what having to articulate certain needs may cost the person doing so. Lorde described the expectation that women should educate men, Black women should educate white women, and lesbians and gay men — and other sexual minorities — should educate the heterosexual world, as a constant drain of energy and a primary tool of oppressors to keep the oppressed occupied with the master's concerns.⁷ The same can be said when it comes to a myriad other exchanges: commonly, for example, between people with disabilities and people currently without. Alongside being receptive and accommodating when unforeseen needs are articulated therefore, it is also important to consider in advance the kind of needs the movement may have to accommodate. This is especially important because of how sensitive some of these needs may be: Wendy Barranto, in her chapter on the role of veterans in the peace and antimilitarist movements, describes the retraumatising effect of being expected to recount her traumatic experiences as a soldier, some of which preclude taking part in certain forms of action, such as loud marches, for example.

Scheduled workshops about the different needs of, and obstacles faced by,





given groups of people, are likely to be preferable to those people being expected to educate on demand, or on a case by case basis every time they come up against an obstacle. Such workshops also enable others who do not face these obstacles to take on the burden of education in future. It is important, however, that those others do not go on to present or think of themselves as the ultimate authority on the needs and obstacles about which they are educating on behalf of the people who actually face them. As individuals, we can also do what we can to educate ourselves.

None of this is easy. But doing whatever is easiest is rarely the most creative way to work. And working in a way that does not accommodate difference neither accommodates the reality of the world in which we live, nor the hope of the world we wish to create. This should be particularly clear to the antimilitarist movement, as uniformity is, very literally, one of the key features of any military: if we recognise that militaries are inherently oppressive, then this gives us a clue as to what our movements should strive not to look like. One of the aims of this book is also to draw out the ways in which militarism relies on gender, or patriarchal constructions of gender, which privilege men. To continue privileging men in our movements, therefore, is clearly counterproductive. Patriarchal constructions of gender are not the only nor the main pillar of militarism however, and others such as class, racism and (dis)ableism⁸ are also discussed in this book. If these uphold militarism, they should clearly not be upheld in our movements.

1. Lorde, Audre 2007, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* by Audre Lorde, (New York: Random House), p112.
2. *ibid.* p118.
3. *ibid.* p128.
4. *ibid.*
5. *ibid.* p112.
6. Denise Drake and Steve Whiting, 'Working in Groups', in *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns*, 2nd ed. (London: War Resisters' International), p91.
7. Lorde, Audre 2007, pp113, 115.
8. Disableism is a British term derived from the social model of disability, in which 'disability' is seen as stemming from social expectations that people will have certain kinds of bodies and minds: minds that are not depressed, for example, or ears that can hear unaided. A mind that is (sometimes) depressed is not seen as an inherent disability in this model. Ableism is an American term referring more broadly to prejudice and discrimination against, as well as lack of accommodation for, people with disabilities.

Different Motivations

Personal motivations are important, particularly in grassroots activist groups which rely on the people taking part to be willing to do the things the group has decided to do. Too often however, grassroots groups form plans without considering individuals' motivations, visions and resources. And, given the fact that





people in grassroots groups may come and go, it is important to include space to get to know people, and explore why they belong to the group or came to the meeting, what they can offer, what they expect from the group, and what they hope for on behalf of the movement as a whole. We are also all in different places on the journey in understanding the issue and our way of campaigning. Our personal theories of change – how we think change is achieved – and our views of what action or strategy will be effective, may be different, as may those of different groups within the movement. While there will be a degree of overlap in our concerns and motivations – otherwise we wouldn't have come together – some of our reasons for having done so and of how best to address the issue at hand are going to be different. While these differences can be a source of tension and conflict, they are also the ingredients for a vibrant group and movement, when we overcome them.

To illustrate the diversity of motivations which might bring someone to a conscientious objection movement, we have included the personal accounts of members of different conscientious objection groups, and movements in different parts of the world. These personal accounts deal with the question of why their authors turned to conscientious objection and are followed by material on how to reach decisions by consensus, as one way of working constructively with such diversity of motivations.

Different Motivations in the Latin American Movement: Rafa's anarchist perspective.

Rafael Uzcategui is a Venezuelan conscientious objector, author, and human rights activist who has been active with War Resisters' International, and in antimilitarism more generally, for many years. Here, he summarises the main tendencies of the Latin American conscientious objection movement, and details how his own nonviolent anarchist position fits into this picture.

During the eighties, many Latin American countries were living under military dictatorships or suffering the consequences of civil war. These were also the days of the Cold War, during which the US considered Latin America one of its 'zones of influence': almost like a back garden. The traumatic and progressive democratisation process meant that broad swathes of the continent's youth developed an antimilitarist sentiment, which began to take on an organised and political dimension. As an adolescent at the beginning of the nineties in Barquisimeto, a town 5 hours away from the Venezuelan capital of Caracas, my peers and I had to hide ourselves twice a year for fifteen days, to avoid compulsory military service. Otherwise they would seize us on the streets and, without wasting words, force us into a truck, with others just as terrified, and from there take us to the barracks. For many of us, these forced recruitment raids or 'press gangs' were





the starting point for our rejection of authority and of the military uniform.

It was a religious initiative, SERPAJ (the Peace and Justice Service), founded in 1974 in Colombia, which was responsible in many Latin American countries for promoting values such as active nonviolence, a culture of peace, and the idea of conscientious objection as a right which ought to and could be demanded of the authorities. Many of the initiative's offices, for example those in Ecuador, Colombia, Chile and Argentina, were the driving force behind the establishment of local conscientious objection movements, but it was in Paraguay that the initiative made the most significant advances: in 1992, the members of this branch managed to ensure that the Paraguayan constitution should formally recognise conscientious objection in one of its articles. The next year, the first Paraguayan conscientious objectors declared themselves as such, gaining media attention and managing to disseminate their message.

In 1994, the first Latin American meeting on conscientious objection took place in La Asuncion, and the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Conscientious Objection was established, which, even before the days of the internet, managed to coordinate activities in several countries and edit the magazine 'Objecting'. The network's different groups enhanced the subject matter with which it dealt to cover



'Yes to Peace': young people in Ecuador paint a mural with SERPAJ (credit: Waging Nonviolence)

a broader critique of militarism, such that with time, the network became the Latin American Coordination of Conscientious Objection, which existed until 2004. There are several reasons for its decline thereafter. The first is that many countries, across the continent, banned forced military recruitment raids or 'press gangs', which were the primary target against which activists had mobilised. They also allowed for conscientious

objection in various laws. The autonomy the network wanted to maintain from NGOs also left it with few economic resources for carrying out campaigns and organising meetings. Since 2005, War Resisters' International (WRI) has attempted, with relative success, to promote an antimilitarist network in Latin America, calling for meetings, joint declarations, and trainings for nonviolent direct action.





Three main tendencies developed within the Latin American conscientious objection movement: the religious tendency, the anti-imperialist tendency, and the anarchist tendency. SERPAJ and various NGOs represent the first, which forms part of a plethora of initiatives which fall under the rubric of 'liberation theology' and in which the objection is based on the commandment 'thou shalt not kill'. The anti-imperialist tendency was formed of broadly Marxist groups, which refused compulsory military service for tactical reasons, but supported the notion of a 'popular army' as much as they supported the national liberation struggles of the guerrillas. These groups were particularly active in denouncing the presence of North American military bases and the North American military school which trained a majority of Latin American top military brass (the higher ranks of Latin American militaries). The third tendency, with fewer adherents but an integral analysis of militarism and its consequences, were the anarchists, who rejected the proposition of an alternative civilian service to the state, but who were prepared to enter local coalitions which confronted concrete manifestations of militarism in every day life. Among the anarchists were to be found the punks, whose bands and fanzines helped disseminate the movement. Women were a minority in all three tendencies, and feminist critiques of the military received little attention. One shortcoming was that, despite the 'opportunity' represented by the separation of mothers from their sons due to compulsory military service, few women took part in the initiatives in their capacity as mothers and grandmothers.

The debates between anarchists and anti-imperialists, according to context, were tense within the conscientious objection movement. One bone of contention was the Cuban government. Another was support – or rather, the impediment of criticism, which is also a form of support – for guerrillas such as the Armed Revolutionary Forces of Colombia, Shining Path, and the Sandinist National Liberation Front, as well as the relationship with leftist political parties. In 1994, the emergence of the Zapatistas' National Liberation Army in Mexico brought the debate about the nonviolence/ armed struggle dichotomy to the fore. The anarchists rejected the notion that 'bad' militarism only emanated from the United States, in contradistinction to a potentially 'good' militarism of the left. Rather, they affirmed that the army, by its very nature, was a synthesis of negative values which they rejected: obedience to authority, hierarchy, xenophobia, machismo, homophobia, the valorisation of force, etc. It was for this reason that when a militarist 'of the left', Hugo Chavez, took the presidency of Venezuela in 1999 and became a point of reference for Latin American anti-imperialism, communication between anti-imperialists and anarchists became fraught. However, a faction of anarchism in Latin America today questions the peace culture of the conscientious objection movement and advocates 'spontaneous violence' and the 'social warfare' of so called 'insurreccionalism'.

In Latin America, antimilitarism as an identity has never had its own development, separate from the three tendencies described above. Participating in





a political meeting and describing yourself as an 'antimilitarist' can lead to one of two things: you will either be looked at like an alien from another planet, or you will be met with the prejudice that being a pacifist surely means not believing in anything, not wanting to get your hands dirty or having to deal with 'problems'. It has never been easy to promote antimilitarism in a continent where the model activist for social change is the patriarchal figure of 'Che' Guevara. After the abolition of compulsory military service in many countries, many thought that antimilitarism had already achieved its objectives, however the integral critique of what the military represents, as a weapon of domination, should continue to have currency in movements for social change today.

Translated from Spanish by Elisa Haf

Richard's Story

Richard Steele, from South Africa, was imprisoned three times in the 1980s for his anti-apartheid activism. During that decade he was caretaker of Phoenix Settlement, Gandhi's original ashram outside Durban, then worked for the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, also based in Durban. He was an activist in the End Conscription Campaign and describes this experience and his experience as a white man conscientiously objecting to the regime of apartheid.

On the 25th of February 1980 I was sentenced by a military court in Pretoria to 12 months in military prison for refusing to submit to compulsory military service. I was 23 years old, and had just finished a BA degree in Psychology and English, and a postgraduate teaching diploma at the University of Cape Town.

I refused to submit to military service because the ethics informing my conscience were based on the principles of respect for life, love, and nonviolence. Therefore, I could not participate in an organisation such as the South African Defence Force, which engaged in violence and killing and trained people in how to do it. I would have taken the same stand no matter which military force anywhere in the world was seeking to conscript me. I was, and still am, a universal pacifist. The ethics informing my conscience also caused me to object to and oppose the violence of apartheid and any institution which perpetuated it. I could see that the SADF was a major instrument in the maintenance of white domination, so my refusal to serve in it was also a deliberate effort to weaken the SADF and so weaken the apartheid government. Finally, I regarded my conscientious objection stand as a challenge to patterns of male conditioning and domination, where the military epitomises and perpetuates an association between masculinity and violence.

How did I develop my ethics, my conscience? I grew up in Kempton Park near to Johannesburg. My family lived in an all white area, attended an all white church,





and my brother and sister and I attended an all white school. However, my parents were 'liberals' and voted for opposition parties in the all white parliament, and



taught us to respect all people. In 1975, the year after I finished high school, I went as a Rotary Exchange student to Cortland, New York, where I experienced living in a non-racially segregated neighbourhood and attended 12th grade in a non-racially segregated high school. That year opened my eyes and my mind to a different reality.

Richard (right) holding a banner reading 'We Refuse to Serve in the SADF' at a Public Meeting in Durban, 1989

On my return to South Africa I went to university in Cape Town.

That was the year, 1976, of the Soweto student uprising. I could see that the political reality of South Africa was based on white arrogance and racial and economic discrimination. My first political anti-apartheid action was that year when I took part in a student demonstration in support of the Soweto students. For the next 4 years at university there were many ways in which I developed and implemented my ethics on a daily basis. I made an effort to become friends with black people, and I broke the apartheid laws whenever I could. For example, when I used public transport I rode in the black section of trains and buses.

The big challenge, though, was when I finished university and was called up for military service. It was not difficult for me to see that I should refuse to be conscripted because it was against my conscience to go into the SADF, but was I prepared to face the consequences? Was I prepared to go to jail, and possibly even die there, because of my beliefs? Earlier that year there had been a story in the local papers about a prisoner in the jail to which I would be sentenced, who had died as a result of punishment drill and being beaten by fellow prisoners. I knew I would not cooperate with punishment drill, but had no control over how other prisoners might treat me. I considered leaving South Africa and becoming a political refugee in Zimbabwe or the USA, or Holland or England, but then I thought 'No, this is where I belong, this is where I should make my stand'. So when those call up papers arrived, I sent them back with a letter saying that I refused to accept them. I was then charged, tried and sentenced to prison, as stated earlier.

Prison was hard. Because it was a military prison where all the prisoners were





soldiers, I was expected to wear the military uniform and to conform to military discipline such as marching, standing at attention, saluting etc. However, I refused to cooperate with any military activity so I was sentenced to many periods of solitary confinement as further punishment. Eventually, they decided to suspend the additional punishment and I spent the last few months working in the prison gardens. This change was largely due to the volume of local and international publicity about my case and that of Peter Moll who was also in prison with me at the time. Peter is my first cousin – his mother and my mother are sisters, and we spent a lot of time together as children and university students. We were among the first conscientious objectors to go to jail. I recognise that our relative social privilege, as highly educated white young men, helped to attract attention to our case which was protective in a way, and helped generate publicity. My parents were 100% supportive of me, although my father did not agree with my decision to break the law. They visited me regularly, and made numerous representations to government and military authorities regarding my case.

Looking back at that experience, I can see that publicly saying 'No!' to the system of apartheid, violence and male domination, and not being intimidated or bullied into acquiescence by the possible consequences, was very powerful indeed for me, morally and psychologically. I am happy that we ended apartheid, and ended conscription. I am happy to be living in a democracy in which people of all races are at least legally equal. Now I am a homeopathic physician, living in Durban. I am no longer an activist, but I am still a peace worker. Healing work is peace work.

Julián's Story

Julián Andrés Ovalle was born in Bogotá, Colombia, in 1991. For ten years, he was part of Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objetoras de Conciencia (ACOOOC, Conscientious Objectors' Collective Action), an organisation which aims to create the concrete conditions for people to be able to opt for alternatives to militarism, specifically alternatives to obligatory military service in Colombia. Currently, he is working towards the consolidation of a Latin American and Caribbean Antimilitarist Network. Here, he writes about being a conscientious objector on the grounds of his pacifism in Colombia.

The persistence of wars is shocking evidence that people are the ones who sustain them. It's not just the major powers, those with industrial interests or armies; we individuals from all over the world provide financing and legitimacy which keeps weapons firing indiscriminately. It is not just neoliberal interest in controlling land for the exploitation of its natural resources, it is also our everyday consumption which enables large companies to continue extracting, producing, and selling for profit.





When we speak of war it evokes the image of a soldier – a warrior, armed from head to foot, advancing through hostile territories. But little attention is paid to the patriarchal aspect of the military, to the uniformed man, at once one who submits and one who attacks, one who rejects any questioning of his masculinity. That odious figure pressing men — and women — towards a state of social normality where sexually different bodies seem to be a mismatched rarity, where the only way of being a man is to be a warrior always at the ready. Talk of war focuses awareness on the need to maintain the unity of states and national borders, making legal use of force in accordance with personal, institutional or even business interests. When you leave aside the subject of war, then we can talk about gender diversity and nationality. We can even speak about the power of diversity in the international meeting of individuals and peoples, an encounter which gives rise to interracial dating and working together, as has been possible in Latin America, where I was born.

The history of Latin American countries makes many people approve of armed struggle as a means to achieve independence and human dignity. However, there are millions of us who, having evaluated it as a strategy for social change, do not believe in violence. And it is not only ideological rejection: it is a rejection of violence borne from analysis and historical reflection, from the results of armed confrontations between the states and insurgent groups that they have unleashed – and still unleash – in our countries.

Dictatorships have shown that lack of legitimacy requires force to be used. Armed insurgent struggles in Central and South America have demonstrated and continue to demonstrate the cost of rebuilding a broken social fabric. Colombia, the country where I was born, has been at war for over sixty years. A war which has caused millions of deaths and internally displaced persons and which, after several failed peace processes, is now in a new phase which would appear to be the final one. Or at least this is what the majority of the population hopes.

Before the groups in confrontation decided to negotiate, thousands of innocent people were shot. For example, my father, who after a military attack – which, it goes without saying, was illegal – is still alive and kicking; and we go on living because we stopped the cycle of violence that they wanted us to engage in, the one that never ends.

I feel motivated to continue to resist violence because we are still alive and I know that changes are only achieved through perseverance and persistence. So, in addition to not enlisting myself in the Colombian army and doing compulsory military service, I decided not to pay for the issue of the 'Military Booklet', a document which would certify me as a reservist (even without any training) and which would allow me to graduate as a psychologist from university. Because of this, it was only after a long struggle to make visible this and other restrictions to civilian life which are imposed on those of us who are decidedly outside the entire





A poster produced by the 'Libre de libreta' (free of the military certificate) campaign in Colombia, celebrating the first conscientious objector to graduate without the certificate (credit: Peace Presence)

violent military system that, ten years after starting my studies, on 25 March 2015 I was able to receive my professional title.

I think listening to the despair of people around me who have grown up with and are victims of the war, and at the same time being aware of the achievements of the conscientious objectors in Colombia, reaffirms to me that whilst we still cannot perceive a less militaristic world, I will continue building new and creative ways for the countless millions of people dissatisfied with the violence. We will continue gaining space to live a happy life and have a death that is the result of living life and not from someone else's decision.

Translated from Spanish by Ruby Starheart

Oscar's Story

Oscar was born in Medellín and is a member of the Medellín Network for Conscientious Objection (*Tejido por Objeción de Conciencia de Medellín*). He is also a leader of Medellín's Mennonite Peace Church social action group and the secretary of the Medellín Network of Peace Churches, as well as being a nonviolent activist and a restorative justice facilitator at two detention centres in Medellín. Here, he gives us an account of working in Colombia's conscientious objection movement on the grounds of his Mennonite interpretation of Christianity.





For many people, Christianity is synonymous with ecclesiastical hierarchy, the Crusades, economic exploitation, dark alliances with sectors of the far right, and other phenomena of the kind. That branch of the Church which has worked for justice and dignity over the course of centuries, and which has assumed a historic commitment to resisting any kind of oppression, in the name of Jesus, has been rendered invisible. In this branch of the Church however, we have been steadfastly promoting the struggle for the protection of human rights, the environment, all forms of life, and dignity as the most important property of every human being, considering God the primary interested party in this struggle, based on our interpretation of Jesus' summary of the Ten Commandments: 'Love God above all things and your neighbour as yourself'.



Mennonite Church members in Bogotá march for the right to claim conscientious objector status in the midst of their nation's mandatory military service requirement (credit: Justapaz)

This has, however, caused us problems with the more traditional, institutional branches of the Church, though we know that this is part of believing and trying to live according to our beliefs and that Jesus Himself was executed by the religious and political powers of his time.

Since 2006, I have been involved with Justapaz, an initiative of the Mennonite Association for Peace, in trying to build a network of protestant churches and individuals who promote nonviolence, peacebuilding and reconciliation as an alternative to the situation of armed urban conflict in Medellín: conscientious objection forms part of and expresses this nonviolent alternative. In Colombia, men who are found physically and mentally fit are obliged to complete at least 12 months of military service. Justapaz offers accompaniment to those men who choose to become conscientious objectors and campaigns for the recognition of their right to conscientious objection. Although they are not conscripted, women from Medellín's protestant churches also take part in the struggle for the recognition of conscientious objection to compulsory military service as a fundamental right.





They have played a fundamental part in this struggle: they themselves suffer directly from militarism, as an ideology which glorifies masculinity and men whilst denigrating femininity and women. Women also suffer when a man who is close to them is militarised. Diana Correa is one such woman, and she describes the value the military attaches to the life of a young man: 'burying a son is painful, it moves a whole community, but for the military, young men are just statistics'. Here, she is referring to the young men who die in combat, but I also think of the young men who have been killed in extrajudicial executions, or those innocent victims whom the military in Colombia takes, executes, and dresses in the uniforms of the so called enemy in order to present themselves as making some kind of gains over the enemy.

Jennifer David, another young woman who is taking part in the churches' struggle, opposes compulsory military service based on the example of Jesus as a model of nonviolence, but also because she has suffered the direct consequences of her twin brother's militarisation: the changes wrought in his personality and attitude towards women, having spent time in the military and an illegal gang, killed the connection between them. In her words: 'my brother joined the military and got involved in paramilitarism and changed his view of women and of life. Now he's in prison, and I don't see him as a brother'. She also argues that many women turn to such young men because they feel protected by them and the image of power projected by the military uniform. Women themselves, meanwhile, are considered too weak to participate in military activities, as reflected in the fact that women do not even have the 'opportunity' to do military service: they do not have the physical or mental capacity to carry out such 'men's work'. Indeed, they do not have the capacity to do evil and thus do not aspire to join armed gangs either: according to this thinking, then, women, can only support those who go armed – in return for their protection.

This is the dominant, militarist view. My own is different: I cannot speak of women as 'the weaker sex'. This would fail to acknowledge their strength in the face of a myriad examples of it, such as the case of the 'Orion Children', who are the children of the soldiers and police officers who took part in Operation Orion, invading and occupying District 13 of Medellin since 2002: the soldiers and police officers who fathered these children then abandoned them completely when they came to be posted elsewhere, leaving the entire burden of caring for them as well as providing for them economically upon the mothers. Nonetheless, these children still dream of becoming soldiers and police officers themselves, or otherwise of entering the subculture of the black market, which has become an alternative in which nobody is discriminated against, as these poor, often mixed race or black children would be in the conventional economy.

On the topic of discrimination, churches are, shamefully, often the most guilty of it, especially when it comes to gender and sexual identity: many conscientious objection and antimilitarist groups ignore the issues of the lesbian, gay, bisexual





and trans (LGBT) community, but the churches actively condemn them.

I spoke to Diegeo Acevedo, director of a group called the Community of Brotherhood, who articulated the conscientious objection struggle from an LGBT perspective, or the perspective of the 'maricas', some of whom have reclaimed this derogatory Spanish term for their struggle. He argued that compulsory military service is the ultimate expression of patriarchy, being aligned with norms which emerged after heterosexuality became a compulsory sexuality, homosexuality having existed long before, signifying relationships between equals in terms of affection. In contrast, being a man within the paradigm of compulsory heterosexuality means being potent, an economic provider and protector of the home, which is the 'natural' place of woman in this paradigm. Yet this model of masculinity has to be constantly reaffirmed and demonstrated: there is a constant risk of becoming a 'second rate' man, unable to live up to the demands of masculinity. For a gay man to whom this model of heterosexual masculinity does not apply however, compulsory military service is a particularly intimidating experience: gay men are often seen as female proxies in the military, with all that this entails.

In my own case, I grew tired many years ago of seeing so many people die and decided to refuse military service and live according to my beliefs and that verse of the Bible in which Jesus tells us that 'whatever you do for one of the least of my brothers and sisters, you do for me'. Besides which, I don't believe in symbols such as that of the 'homeland': I believe that we have more brothers and sisters beyond our borders than 'enemies', which have been specifically invented during this low intensity conflict through which we have been living in Colombia for decades.

I don't need to carry a gun to be a man, my masculinity is not at risk, I am a man in my own way, as I want to be, but I am tired of seeing how pain, suffering and discrimination is promoted from church pulpits, though our work should be to love without discrimination. I stand with those who stand up to stigma and shame, with the 'nobodies' who refuse to be treated as anything other than who they are, and continue to share the good news of the Gospel, that we are not compelled to kill each other on the orders of multinational capital, which profits from wars between peoples who are in fact brothers and sisters.

Translated from Spanish by Elisa Haf and Candela del Mar Nogueroles Marzo

Junsgik's Story

Jungsik Lee is a South Korean writer, theatre director, video artist and conscientious objector who served a prison term from the 25th of February 2010 to the 9th of May 2011. Since being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS on December 9, 2013,





Lee's work has focused on topics related to those 'diseases of modern society': alienation, loneliness, despair, and hunger. This personal account discusses the experience of belonging to a sexual and gender minority in South Korea, and of deciding to become a conscientious objector because of that experience.

A note on the content: this is a personal account, which describes traumatic experiences such as social and family exclusion, gender dysphoria, suicidal ideation, medical malpractice, and imprisonment. There are no graphic details however.

Alice in Wonder Armed Forces

I was in wonderland when I was young. Of course, I never fell down a rabbit hole or got lost in the middle of a maze garden. I've only seen a giant bunny and card soldiers in pictures of fairy tales. But this place where I belong is more frightening and weird than the world in which Alice had her adventure.

When I was a little kid, I once went to my kindergarten in a green dress of my cousin's, which she used to wear a long time ago. She kept it deep inside her closet. The grown ups laughed at me because they thought a boy wearing a girl's dress was cute. Other boys in the class also laughed because they thought it was funny. I felt a little bit ashamed, but I thought my cousin's dress was really 'me'. I thought a dark skinned boy with short hair looked better in the mirror with girls' dresses on. Why were the clothes I loved girls' and why did those kids have to laugh when I wore them? Why did I love to be told that I was pretty? But I couldn't express these thoughts, and I grew up and went to middle school.

My voice and my behaviour could have been the reasons people laughed at me. I had to suppress and hide myself from the horror of their reactions to me. So I think my everyday life back then might be the weirdest time I've known. That time wasn't enough for me to get to understand my body. There was no one to listen to my agonies about it and my sexual desire. I was estranged from my home and school since I felt I was growing up 'differently'. Some think I opened the door of this society and crossed the borderline. But in fact, my society closed its doors and windows on me: I couldn't show my real face, I couldn't get in.

Even I used to deny my body. When my shoulders, tiny hands and feet grew bigger just like my dad's and uncles', I frequently noticed that there was a penis on my body, which was boys' and men's main target for making vulgar jokes, showing off, and ridiculing others. And I thought I had to change my body when the 'thing' grew hairs and frequently became hard. I wanted to have a curvy, rounded and voluptuous body like my mother and sisters had. I wished I could meet a man some day, with my body like a woman's, and make a family with him as my parents had done.





I left home when I was too young. I was on the road and couldn't stay in one place for a long time. Sometimes I obsessed over extreme thoughts, like a suicide. The thoughts came so often and suddenly from inside of me, they blinded me so I couldn't even see the sights in front of me. But I found words again after I spent some years in a youth shelter and at my grandmother's home – the right words, the words I wanted to speak: I love men and I want to be loved by men. Other people's attitudes were the most weird and terrible thing. They wanted to trample on my love.

I wandered for a long time in my teenage years, then I received a notice in the mail that I would be conscripted or 'drafted'. In South Korea, a man who is aged 19 has to have a physical examination by the government. It's mandatory. The physical examination has 4 steps, which are: psychological inspection, physical check up, aptitude test and determination. These allow people to be classified from Grade 1 to Grade 7. Grade 1, 2 and 3 have to answer the call up. Grade 4 and 5 will do a job at the government's offices as a national service, though they also have to have 4 weeks of military training. And If someone gets a Grade 6, he will be exempted from military service. When I was a teenager I considered a gender confirmation or 'sex change' operation and got counselling from a professor of psychology. At that time, if a man wanted to get a prescription of female hormones, he (in fact, she) had to have an opinion paper of psychological counsel. But the professor dissuaded me and my family relationships were getting worse, so I dropped out of school and moved to a youth shelter, though I also went through a process of physical feminisation at the same time.

After that my depression got worse, so I had counselling and psychotherapy at hospital, where my youth shelter entrusted me. When I turned 19, I had a physical examination, and they gave me a Grade 7. This meant I had to have a reexamination. I presented papers from my counselling and psychotherapy, but the manpower administration gave me a grade 3. So I was classified to be drafted. The army surgeon in charge said I couldn't have a conscription exemption if I didn't have physical feminisation surgery. So he advised me to prepare for the after processes of hormone medication and genital surgery. But I didn't want to choose surgery at that time. I just needed time to understand my sexual identity and to recover from the experience of isolation from my family and society. Then I entered university and delayed my military service – in Korea, a university student can delay military service until the age of 29. A few years later, I dropped out of university. Then I got a notification from the manpower administration again, telling me my date of enlistment and where this would take place.

I was worried. I was worried that someone would laugh at my feminine face and behaviour. And I also worried that I would be a victim of bullying or an outcast of the military base. It was a source of anxiety and horror that I would have to share everyday life with other 'men' and expose myself to men who had different types of bodies.





Some say bad words about conscientious objectors because they think they are 'unpatriotic' and selfish. But when I introduce myself as a sexual minority, they say 'Oh, I feel sorry for you. I don't think a person like you should be enlisted as a man.' Whether I argue or not about the culture of the armed force, what strikes me as most obnoxious about it, even now, as I write, is that this system just has unilateral sway. The administration simply notifies people of their mandatory service, without offering any alternatives or exceptions. I needed time to understand myself. And I wanted to know if I could fit into the armed forces. But this conscription system only gives you the date of enlistment and doesn't listen to the people who have to serve in the armed force. This makes me so angry.

Where is my freedom? What is my obligation and why do we the people always have to do this? Did this state, this society, make any attempt to protect or understand me in my youth? There's no argument to be had about these questions. I simply called the administration and said I would refuse the military service. So I was imprisoned and I had to spend 14 months in a cell. Prison is the place where I had a cold room, where I had to shower with cold water, and where I could only get letters prison officers had already read. I even had to go to toilet under surveillance. Yeah, this place still has so many weird things about it. But I feel I'm back from the adventure called life and in the place I belong. That's one thing I want to thank Korea and Korean military culture for. Now I have an attitude of mind that contemplates the things around me, or those that will be around me, at one or two removes. For this, I am so thankful to Korea. If I go back to my youth by accident, like a miracle, I think I can proudly ask my friends and the older folk as I wear my cousin's green dress: am I pretty in a girl's dress? Don't you think this is really 'me'?

Translated from Korean by Akhee Ahn



An army uniform painted by the South Korean organisation World Without War as part of a street demonstration





Idan's Story

Idan Halili became the first Israeli conscientious objector to refuse military service on the grounds of feminism in 2005. In an extract reproduced from WRI's 2010 anthology of women conscientious objectors, she recounts the experience and gives us her rationale.

The story of how I got discharged from army service ended when I was 19 years old. Here, I try to describe the story of my refusal, the process I went through and its implications.

It was my belief then, and it still is today, that army service would force me to take part in an organisation whose principles clash with the feminist values in which I believe, and which are reflected in the commitment to human dignity, equality, consideration for the specific needs of different groups and individuals within the population, and a rejection of oppression.

Originally, I had thought that my way of contributing to society would be in the form of feminist work within the army. So I turned to the Chief of Staff's Advisor on Women's Affairs – which, among other things, handles sexual harassment cases in the military – and asked to do my military service there. This was a phase of strong personal consciousness raising for me, and the more I became aware of feminist dilemmas, the more often, too, did I have to seriously face the issue of enlistment. Here I had to cope with a difficult conflict between the notions on which I had been raised from an early age – according to which the military is a positive institution and serving in it is a particularly respectable way of making your social contribution – and, on the other hand, feminist values of dignity and equality.

The army is an organisation whose most fundamental values cannot be brought into harmony with feminist values: it is hierarchical and this, by definition, does not allow for equality. The army's demand for uniformity and conformity also makes it impossible for individuals to express different identities and needs. The army, then, entrenches a distorted approach to equality, measured, in the case of gender, by the degree to which women have become included in male identified areas of activity. Since it is a violent organisation, the army is also responsible for an increase of violence in society – and, as a result, of an increase in violence against women.

Typical organisational and structural attributes of the army, like its hierarchical organisational structure as well as male majority, the clear identification of newcomers, and a non-professional work atmosphere, have also been identified as factors encouraging sexual harassment. The demand that a woman enlist, then, is tantamount to demanding that she cope with sexual harassment within an environment which encourages it and since the army is such a central institution in





Israeli society, a culture of sexual harassment is also exported to and further entrenched in civilian society. When men spend a formative period of their lives in the military they are likely to receive positive reinforcements for the use of brute force and violence. In an organisation whose main values include superiority and control, these behaviours are likely to be encouraged not only in specific military activities, but also in interpersonal relations.

I feel committed, as a feminist woman, to ensure women's rights in society. I cannot join an organisation which, either directly or indirectly, encourages violence, of any kind, against women. Therefore there is, in my opinion, a contradiction between my being a feminist and my ability to enlist. But whilst I felt clearly that army service collided with the values I believed in, I knew that a feminist ideology is not an option for receiving an exemption and I found it hard to get away from the ideas I grew up with about the importance of the army and about refusing being unthinkable. I tried at first to understand what options I had. One option that is valid for women is religious belief. I am certainly not religious, and it would not be an exaggeration to say that the place where I grew up is known as quite secular. I immediately assumed that even if I tried to get an exemption for religious reasons, nobody would believe me. Another option is marriage. The thought of a marriage of convenience passed through my head, but quickly disappeared, because I didn't want to feel as though I was 'cheating', and I certainly didn't want to contribute to the institutions in charge of marriage in Israel, which are, to say the least, quite patriarchal.

The option of getting pregnant and giving birth, which also enables women to get an exemption, I did not consider seriously for one moment, for obvious reasons, so I was left with two options. One was to try and get an exemption for 'psychiatric' reasons. I do not believe that most people need to lie in order to be found mentally unsuitable for a military organisation, but I felt that such reasons did not describe, in the most accurate way, why I objected to military service.

The last option left to me was to apply to a military body called 'The Conscience Committee'. This is a military committee that is authorised to grant an exemption on grounds of conscience. In practice, the committee only approves applications that indicate that the applicant is what they consider to be a pacifist: only those who object to any kind of violence, and who would not join any army at all, can sometimes receive an exemption on grounds of conscience in Israel.

Today it is easy for me to define myself as a pacifist, but at that stage of the process I was going through I still had not defined myself as such. Due to the exaggerated demands I posed to myself, to be completely confident and without any reservations in my actions, I didn't want to apply for an exemption for reasons of pacifism. I visualise the stage in which I ultimately decided not to enlist as an image often seen in cartoons, when a light bulb appears above a character's head: I had an epiphany. I understood that even though there was no option of applying





for an exemption 'on grounds of feminism', there was nothing to prevent me from doing so. It was clear to me that the feminist objection is an objection to any army, rather than a specific government policy. So, I started drafting a letter for the 'Conscience Committee, in which I described my feminist beliefs in detail and tried to explain in as much detail as possible the link between feminism and objection to militarism.



A photo from an action held by the Israeli feminist organisation New Profile, in December 2001. Kites were flown with names of recently imprisoned conscientious objectors. However, New Profile has since become more skeptical of such actions, as implying a kind 'hero worship' of conscientious objectors

I was put on trial in front of army representatives and sentenced to two weeks in a women's military prison, where I joined about 50 other women of my age. Most of them were sent to prison for desertion, caused, in many cases, by the inability of the military system to handle their problems: a soldier who escaped from her commander's sexual harassment, for example; a girl who was a sole provider in a large family with disabled parents, who didn't receive permission from the army to work and provide for her family; a soldier who was locked in her house by a jealous partner and therefore could not arrive at the army base. Instead of showing understanding for their problems, the army's way of handling such 'useless' soldiers was by sending them to prison.

Spending time in prison was depressing and I do not recommend it to anybody. But I feel that the choice to go to prison made by some objectors is seen as heroic in the refusal movement. You can feel the appreciation for your determination and for the willingness to sacrifice your freedom as well as your mental health, which is bound to be shaken by imprisonment. In my opinion, this is a duplication of a militaristic pattern of behaviour that I do not wish to be part of.

I reached this realisation only after entering prison and experiencing what it means, on the most emotional level. I decided that I didn't want to cooperate with





the image of the 'heroic objector'. At the same time, the processes I went through during the period of my final encounters with the army allowed me to understand that in order to be confident in my beliefs and the reasons for my objection, I didn't need the army's seal of approval. Therefore I decided not to insist on getting an exemption as a conscientious objector.

After being released from prison and following an appeal, I was given the dubious right to appear in front of the 'Conscience Committee' again. It was an absurd experience. A few days later, I received an exemption on the ground that I was 'unsuitable for military service', backed up by the reason that 'feminism' was not a cause of exemption as a conscientious objector. One of the most 'amusing' manipulations that the 'Conscience Committee' tested on me was to try and make me think that my choice to refuse to serve in the army was a choice to be 'passive', as opposed to an 'active' way of making a change 'from within'. Somehow, it is not clear to me how joining the most male chauvinistic organisation in this country can produce feminist action. It is true that in academia, in many work places and on the street there also exists an atmosphere of hierarchy, force, or patriarchy, but only in the army is there a combination of so many oppressive elements in such an extreme manner, and only in the army are these elements vital to the essence of the organisation. A non-hierarchical, non-aggressive or nonviolent army would not be an army at all. And whilst male chauvinism does exist everywhere, it is not a foundation stone everywhere: without a worshipping attitude towards fighting masculinity, people will start to lose interest in combat units, which are the essence of an army. Without the repression of emotion and admiration for superiority and aggression, people will have to develop more compassion, humanity and other characteristics that may render them unable to drop bombs into the heart of a populated area, to shoot the person standing in front of them, to humiliate entire families on a daily basis, to agree to be killed at any given time, and other routine army matters.

In my act of refusal and in my life in general, I have tried to make a difference from within. Not to change the army from within, but to influence, from within, the society in which I live. I would like to live in a society which is less militaristic, more equal and respectful and less violent and oppressive. I do not think that my single act of refusal can cause all that, but I am happy to have had the strength to join a growing movement of people who are willing to ask questions.





Consensus Decision Making

Here, an introduction to making group decisions by consensus is reproduced from War Resisters' International's Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns. This is one way of working constructively with differences in terms of privilege and with different motivations.

There are many ways a group can make decisions, and it's important to choose the method that is best for the decision that needs to be made. This may be voting, one person decides (usually a 'leader' or another person tasked with that responsibility), a randomised method like flipping a coin, or consensus decision making.

Often in a democratic vote, a significant minority is unhappy with the outcome. Whilst they may acknowledge the legitimacy of the decision – because they accept these rules of democracy – they may still actively resist it or undermine it, and work towards the next voting opportunity. Compromise is another method of reaching a decision, often through negotiation. Two or more sides announce their position and move towards each other with measured concessionary and mutual steps. However, this can often lead to dissatisfaction on all sides, with nobody getting what they really wanted.

Many activist groups use consensus decision making believing that people should have full control over our lives and that power should be shared by all rather than given to the few to make decisions for the many. Consensus is especially useful when a group is preparing to carry out nonviolent actions with each other because it aims to encourage all to participate and express opinions, and cultivating support for decisions by all group members. To avoid new forms of dominance within a group, its discussion and decision making processes need to be participatory and empowering, and consensus aims to do just that.

While consensus implies freedom to decide one's own course of life, it also comes with responsibilities to the collective. The consensus process is based upon listening and respect, and participation by everyone. The goal is to find a decision that is acceptable to all group members, that everyone consents to. Be clear, however, that consensus does not necessarily mean that everyone is completely satisfied with the final outcome, but everyone agrees the decision is acceptable and in the best interest of the collective. It is a decision that people can live with.

Consensus is not a compromise however. A compromise may result in everyone being dissatisfied with the decision, and does not contribute to building trust in the long run. And majority decisions, like voting or 'the leader decides' can lead to a power struggle between different factions within a group who compete rather than respect each other's opinions. They use their brilliance to undermine each other.





The consensus process taps into the creativity, insights, experience, and perspectives of the whole group. The differences between people stimulate deeper inquiry and greater wisdom.

The opinions, ideas and reservations of all participants are listened to and discussed. Differing opinions are brought out and noted. No ideas are lost, each member's input is valued as part of the solution. This open and respectful discussion is vital in enabling the group to reach a decision on the basis of which – in nonviolent action – people will put themselves and their bodies 'on the line'.

The consensus decision making process, step-by-step:

1. The problem, or decision needing to be made, is defined and named. It helps to do this in a way that separates the problems/questions from personalities.
2. Brainstorm possible solutions. Write them all down, even the crazy ones. Keep the energy up for quick, top-of-the head suggestions.
3. Create space for questions or clarification on the situation.
4. Discuss the options written down. Modify some, eliminate others, and develop a short list. Which are the favourites?
5. State the proposal or choice of proposals so that everybody is clear. (Sometimes it might be useful to break into small subgroups to write up each proposal clearly and succinctly).
6. Discuss the pros and cons of each proposal – make sure everybody has a chance to contribute.
7. If there is a major objection, return to step 6 (this is the time consuming bit). Sometimes you may need to return to step 4.
8. If there are no major objections, state the decisions and test for agreement.
9. Acknowledge minor objections and incorporate friendly amendments.
10. Discuss.
11. Check for consensus.

Consensus in large groups: the spokescouncil

The model of consensus decision making described above works well within one group. However, bigger nonviolent actions require the cooperation of several affinity groups; one method to do so is to use a spokes council. The spokescouncil is a tool for making consensus decisions in large groups. In a spokes council, spokespeople from smaller groups come together to make shared decisions. Each group is represented by their 'spoke'. The group communicates to the larger meeting through their spokesperson, allowing hundreds of people to be represented in a smaller group discussion. What the spoke is empowered to do is up to their affinity group; spokes may need to consult with their groups before discussing or agreeing on certain subjects.





Section 2: Movement Strategy

Organising Refuser Support

Supporting those who refuse to join the military is likely to be a key activity of the movements for which this book is intended. How to go about organising that support is the question addressed by Sergey Sandler in this chapter. Sergey is a conscientious objector and antimilitarist activist from Israel. He is one of the founders of the Counselling Network for Refusers operated by the Israeli feminist and antimilitarist movement New Profile, and is also an International Council member of the War Resisters' International.

On March 2nd, 2001, about thirty people met in a small conference room in the Druze Palestinian town of Isfiya on Mount Carmel. A few of us had had some years of experience supporting declared conscientious objectors. Others had been helping friends and acquaintances obtain medical exemptions from military service. A few more came to learn from the rest. Working under the aegis of the feminist antimilitarist movement, New Profile, we formed a network of volunteers committed to counselling and supporting any person refusing to perform military service in Israel. More than fourteen years later, this network receives, and successfully resolves, well over a thousand calls for support every year, from people from all walks of life, genders, and ethnic backgrounds. Many more use us to help themselves: our Internet forum and other resources posted online have hundreds of thousands of hits a year. We were even enough of a menace for the Israeli police to start a criminal investigation against us (for 'inciting draft evasion', i.e. encouraging people to resist conscription) a few years back. All in all — a nice little success story, especially if measured against the bleak backdrop of Israeli political realities.

So, how did we do it? Actually, it wasn't all that difficult. We didn't have any special resources to tap into (beyond the commitment and dedication of a dozen or so volunteers), and for the first couple of years we didn't have any funding either — funds came later, on the footsteps of earlier success. Moreover, we are operating in a rather hostile environment, although admittedly, more repressive regimes can make things considerably harder and require extra care and confidentiality of activists. But most of what we did, you can do as well, if you haven't already, so, please, do try this at home! Here are a few tips for organising refuser support, based on our experience. Apply liberally...





Be there for the people you are supporting

It may sound obvious, but in doing refuser support, you should be there for the refusers, aid them through difficult times and respect their choices and limits. You are there to support them, not to pressure, or indoctrinate, or idolise. This is actually not an easy lesson for many refusal movements to learn. Refusal comes in many shapes and forms, while political movements often pressure their members in the direction of ideological uniformity. If your idea of refuser support is to make it conditional upon them toeing your party line, you are not going to be providing real support to most refusers, and your movement will remain marginal. Respect for people's motives and autonomy in making decisions about their own lives is a perquisite for developing an effective support system.

Another common error is creating group pressure on refusers to push their limits. Here in Israel, where refusers can pursue several avenues for legal exemption from military service, and – assuming they were getting good counselling from the outset – only reach prison if they choose to openly confront the authorities, we have had several cases when refusers were under peer pressure to choose going to prison, and even to further escalate their confrontation with the authorities while in prison – by refusing to wear a uniform or going on hunger strike and so on. Now, when such escalation is the refuser's free and informed choice, there is much work to be done in supporting it — by effective campaigning around the case, as well as by trying to keep as close and frequent contact as possible with the refuser while in prison and by applying all sorts of external pressure on prison authorities to make sure they know they are being watched. But if such escalation is really motivated by external pressure or by a culture of hero worship within the movement, it can be a recipe for disaster and for alienating many potential refusers (see the interview with Noam Gur in chapter 6).

Even where a refuser chooses escalation freely, there is good reason to take pause and have a good discussion with the refuser about tactics, their relative effectiveness, and about back up options and exit strategies. As a refuser, once you declare something as your red line, you have to stick to it. Your leverage against the system and your psychological 'shield' in the process are based on your ability to stick to your refusal at all costs, never to reach a situation in which you feel you have betrayed your own conscience. This implies that if you are not sure something is a true red line — you shouldn't declare it as such. What would be the point of, say, starting a hunger strike, keeping all your friends and supporters worried sick about your wellbeing, only to break it later under pressure, not on your own terms but on the army's? So, one aspect of effective support is openly discussing limits and hardships and setting the terms of your struggle wisely: how much worse would it be for the refusers you are working with, and for the entire movement, if they were drawn to push their limits and undergo severe trauma not as a free choice, nor even as a result of a confrontation that the state forces on them, but merely because this is what you expect them to do.





A sustainable movement openly accepts its members' fears, weaknesses and psychological limits, and values everyday commitment no less than 'heroic' exploits in prison cells. This way your movement can also remain open to all forms and definitions of refusal, to conscientious objection by all genders, ethnicities, and social classes. The value of a refuser's contribution to the movement would not be determined by the value the military attaches to their potential service as a soldier (this point is addressed in more detail in Sahar Vardi's chapter on whether conscientious objection in Israel may be an attempt to dismantle the 'master's house' of militarism using the master's tools). Also, remember that, at any given time, far more people are likely to choose easier ways of avoiding conscription, and this multitude of people is a group of potential allies in your struggle, if you can offer them the support they need.

Accumulate and share knowledge

Effective refuser support relies quite a bit on good knowledge of how the system works. Such knowledge can then be used to make the act of refusal into an effective intervention. If you are helping an individual escape the military's grip, you will be able to lead the refuser through all the necessary procedures to get their exemption papers. If you are running a campaign of public civil disobedience, you will know how to plan that campaign so as to confront the establishment at the points and circumstances that favour your cause.

Now, the things you need to know will differ from one place and time to another, so there's no point in me getting into the technical detail, but there are a few general principles to apply, and a bit of good advice to share about how to obtain the relevant knowledge and keep it up-to-date.

Refusal, of any kind and everywhere, requires dealing with the military and state bureaucracy. This aspect of it may not be the first thing to come to your mind, but it is in fact what refusers more often than not end up doing, and where a good support structure could be particularly useful.

Now, in some ways, bureaucrats are the same all over the world. For example, they fear personal responsibility more than vampires fear the light of day, so when refusers – or their family members, if they are supportive – play the 'if anything goes wrong, you will be held personally accountable' card at the right moment, it can go a long way. Bureaucrats, of course, follow rules and regulations, often blindly. It is thus usually futile, and often damaging, to try to bargain with officials, let alone plead for their mercy. They will not break the rules for your good, or for anybody else's. When the rules dictate what the refuser you are working with should be doing, expect them to go out of their way to avoid transgressions. Here in Israel, for instance, military officials will routinely lie and make empty promises or threats to make sure a potential recruit goes through her or his enlistment





procedures in due order. On the other hand, bureaucrats sometimes like to play God, pop up with an arbitrary decision that blocks you from exercising legally held rights — a step that can usually be dealt with by applying external (e.g. legal) pressure or even by bringing the case to the attention of higher ranks in the hierarchy.

Above all, you have to be familiar with all the relevant rules, regulations, orders, criteria and practices, and with how they are being applied, and follow changes in all of these as they happen. Some of this information will be publicly available. For other matters, you will be able to get good advice from friendly lawyers (see below). In most cases, especially when it comes to practices and to the application of rules, your best source of information will be the people you are helping and what they are going through. In New Profile, our method for collecting and storing this information is by regularly consulting among ourselves on difficult cases. We have a network of volunteer refuser counsellors who have been initially trained by more experienced counsellors, and are then encouraged to share questions and concerns — preserving confidentiality as appropriate — with the whole network of volunteers, either by email or in face-to-face meetings. This way, the whole network gets to benefit from the knowledge we gain from following each case to its resolution.

פרופיל חדש
חברת לאדריכלי התורה בישראל

חזמינה ליום לימוד בנושא סירוב והימנעות

**אני?
בצבא?**

בואו בראש פתוח
לשמוע ולהשמיע דעות, לחלוק חוויות
ולחזק את היסודות והלחצים
של מי שהיו במדים ומי שחיכו בחוץ,
בטירות ובכלא, אצל הקב"ל ובלשכת הניסוס,
בבק"מ, ב- "ועדת מצפון" וועדת "אי-התאמה"
וחזרו משם עם סיפורים שלא נשמעים בתקשורת
על איך אפשר אחרת.

יום העניין יתקיים:
ביום שבת 22.6.2002
בית רוטנברג, שד' הנשיא 77, חיפה
התכנסות בשעה 11:30 זמן סיום משוער 17:00

לפרטים נוספים:
053-374501 04-8622932
(ניתן להשיג לינייה בטלפון 24 שעות) (מאגדל מנחת) (מאגדל מנחת)
דמי ההשתתפות: 20 ש"ח לעיסוי חוצות
אתר פרופיל חדש <http://www.newprofile.org>

Illustration : A New Profile flyer used to promote an open event for the public in 2002, that focused on counselling refusers. The slogan says 'Me? In the army?'

One last point: the way armies treat refusers is often inconsistent and arbitrary. Things that worked a hundred times before may not work this time around, and vice versa. Good refuser counselling is based on reliable and tested knowledge, but it should not be over confident. Do prepare the refusers you are counselling to expect the unexpected. This way, they will be better prepared for whatever is in store, you will get to learn of changes in policy and special procedures sooner rather than later, and other refusers will learn to trust the information you are providing.

Media and Communications

Everybody knows media work is important in campaigning on behalf of refusers, especially when they are on trial, in prison, etc. Less conspicuous, but equally important, is the role of





media – and I don't only mean mass media – in reaching your potential target audience. Let me briefly discuss both (do consult a proper media work guide for more detail).

In our regular work – beyond the occasional special campaign – we in New Profile have found that the doors of the mainstream media are practically closed (you may have better conditions in this respect in your country). The only time our refuser support work gets significant media coverage is when a media outlet runs venomous exposés on our oh-so-seditious organisation, and when the police came after us. Not that negative publicity is necessarily bad – quite a few refusers learned of our existence and the support we can offer them this way – but you can't initiate it, and it comes with risks. A steady web presence – including our all important anonymous support forum – and strategically placed bumper stickers worked much better for us (very occasionally, we managed to place paid online ads too). But be careful and mindful of possible risks and downsides. Thus, we considered creating a presence on Facebook, which would make us accessible to many young people considering refusal, but opted for a very minimal version, not much more than a static link to our website. The reason? Conducting refuser support, or even an active wall on Facebook, would by default reveal the identity of refusers seeking our help, and any military clerk or future employer would easily find out that they sought our assistance. In most cases, that would be detrimental to our cause.

As I noted, on top of this regular presence, there is also the need to manage campaigns in support of refusers in prison and on trial, making public declarations, and the like. Here, again, there is more to it than mass media. Regularly sharing news with supporters in your country and abroad, including international organisations (see the chapter on international solidarity) is no less important than running a media campaign. Such updates must be clear in the information they carry. They should propose to supporters concrete steps they can take – such as writing a letter to a list of addresses provided in the update, signing a petition, calling authorities by phone, joining a demonstration, and spreading the update itself to their contacts – with as much information as they will need to do these things easily. Most importantly, wherever possible, they should include the voice of the refuser on whose behalf they are sent, e.g. a declaration or statement by him or her.

When working with mass media, don't neglect the 'low hanging fruit' – alternative and radical media outlets and journalists in more mainstream outlets, with whom you may happen to have good contacts; such contacts often develop with time as a result of your media work. The timing and location of your actions may also generate extra media attention. Symbolic dates and locations may be useful, as may protests coinciding with an event in which the media is interested for other reasons, if you can make the link between your cause and the event.





Beyond that, remember that persistence pays off, at least in situations where the press is not under close military or government control. If you just send out press releases to a large mailing list of news desks on a regular basis, you are not particularly likely to get items into the news, but in time you will see that you have become a familiar name to these news organisations, and journalists start calling you when an issue related to your work comes up.

Call on professionals and VIPs

The professional skills (or other status) of your members and supporters could be put to good use.

Lawyers are a case in point. They could help a lot with giving you access to relevant rules and regulations (see above) and are indispensable when a refuser you are supporting is on trial. Having a legal license in itself can already be very useful, because of laws covering confidentiality and right to counsel. Here in Israel (this may also be the case in your country) a lawyer can visit inmates in prison at any time. We used this fact to start a regular programme of prison visits by lawyers. Lawyers may also be protected by law when giving refusers counselling, in countries where counselling refusers is illegal or borderline legal, as it is here.

Lawyers are professionals to whom social movements usually have good access. If you don't have any among you already, you might find out that some established lawyers and legal type human rights groups would be willing to help you on some cases free of charge, or pro bono, as they say in legalese. There are also legal professionals outside your country, who could be useful in applying pressure on your country using international legal mechanisms (see chapters 12 and 13). These you can contact via international organisations and networks, such as the WRI.

Another group of professional that can be useful are psychologists and psychiatrists, who could sometimes work with refusers around the trauma they are going through, and could counsel your volunteers on how to deal with some difficult situations, such as helping refusers who are at risk of suicide — unfortunately a situation we've had to deal with quite often. In New Profile, we have teamed up with a group of activist mental health professionals, called 'Psychoactive', for this latter purpose. You might be able to get in touch with professionals of all kinds through similar professional activist groups, if they exist in your country.

Other kinds of professionals may be more relevant to the situation in your country and to the particularities of your work. Journalists, medical doctors, university professors, construction workers, artists, musicians, graphic designers, and so on. They may all be easier to get on board than you might think.

In selecting professionals to work with, it is important that they be competent in





the subfield you need them to focus on, but it is even more important, simply paramount, that they be supportive of your cause. A hostile lawyer, for example, would damage your case more than having none, and an indifferent one may misunderstand the purpose of your campaign.

Another kind of links that can be beneficial for your work – but can also create distractions and nuisances – is with various VIPs and celebrities. This definitely works for getting media attention. Actress Jane Fonda generated a lot of media coverage for the US movement against the Vietnam war, and, in our experience, one refuser in Israel – Jonathan Ben-Artzi – received an exceptional amount of media time, not so much because of his own case, but because a prominent right wing politician – Benjamin Netanyahu – happened to be his uncle. A word of caution, though: sometimes you may have a lot of media potential with a case, where the 'celebrity' refuser herself actually prefers to keep her case out of the limelight. In this case, respecting the refuser's wish is much more important.

Beyond being media magnets, some VIPs may be of more practical use. For example, members of parliament enjoy parliamentary immunity in most countries, and under immunity rules they may be able to inspect prisons and visit prisoners.

Develop your work

Last but not least, never stand still. There is always room to develop your support network in important new directions. In our case, we have been working recently on outreach to disadvantaged groups in society, where it is very common for young people to first enlist, and then spend much of their tenure in the army as either deserters or prisoners, especially when they have to work to provide for their families. Another avenue for development we are exploring – as do other refusal movements around the world – is in supporting refusers after their direct struggle with the military ends, when they face all sorts of official and unofficial discrimination for not having served in the military. Where conscription ends, there is still work to do around conscientious objection and other means of getting discharged for professional soldiers, and there is counter recruitment work to do in order to prevent people from signing up.

Which would be the best avenues for development in your case? Listen to the stories of those you support and to the thoughts of your own volunteers. If your movement is alive, these people will sense the way forward, and so long as it is alive, volunteers and refusers will keep coming. So long as you keep moving and developing – your movement will stay alive.





International Solidarity

Alexia Tsouni is a Greek human rights activist and a feminist. She is a board member of the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO). She is also a member of the group on the right to conscientious objection of Amnesty International's Greek section. She writes about how conscientious objection movements can reach out for international solidarity, and the crucial role this can play.

In the vast majority, if not in all, of the countries which still impose compulsory military service, the right to Conscientious Objection is not popular at all – perhaps even less popular than the right to conscientious objection for serving soldiers in countries with entirely professional armies. Indeed, public opinion is overwhelmingly negative, or even hostile towards conscientious objectors. This makes the role of international solidarity particularly crucial, both for the encouragement of conscientious objectors themselves, and for pressurising national authorities. This has been proven several times in the course of history and there is a lot we have learnt from this.

Some things which movements may want to consider when seeking international solidarity are listed here.

Making your movement's case an international case

Writing your case down, and, if you can, translating it into several languages before publishing is often a good place to begin. The languages into which you translate will depend, of course, on your location and resources, but an international language could be the most useful. Including the languages of the so called enemies can be important too, if the authorities of your country think that there are 'enemies' around. Language is a tool of communication and this is important in all cases and at all levels, from lobbying to campaigning, and from the declaration of conscientious objection to any protests against prosecution or sentencing.

Translation Resources

For help with translating your site, conscientious objection declarations, communications etc into other languages try:

- Contacting War Resisters' International (WRI) (info@wri-irg.org) – we have a team of volunteer translators you could use.
- You can also register and use websites that connect campaigning and not-for-profit groups with volunteer translators. For example:

Translations for Progress <http://www.translationsforprogress.org/main.php>

Translation Commons <http://trommons.org/>





Choosing dates and places of international importance

You could announce the date of your action well in advance, so that you raise public and media interest. Otherwise, announcing nothing and making it a surprise during some other very important event, such as a congress, press conference, or festival, can work too. You could choose a date which is relevant internationally: International Conscientious Objection Day on the 15th of May, for example, or International Peace Day on the 21st September, or International Nonviolence Day on the 2nd October. Otherwise, you could also choose the anniversary of an important event, either positive – marking recognition of conscientious objection, a release from prison, or the end of a war, for example -- or negative: the anniversaries of arrests, imprisonments, or the beginning of a war. If possible, choose an internationally recognisable and relevant or symbolic place, such as a military camp, wall, court, or conscription centre, a 'buffer zone', or a war/anti-war monument.

Contacting international organisations and actors

Getting in touch with human rights organisations, media, and political bodies at international level can be a good way of attracting attention to your case and putting pressure on your state. You could ask human rights organisations to take your movement's case on and advise you accordingly, and approach friendly journalists and ask them to write about your case. Other things you might try could include lobbying friendly members of international institutions – such as the UN, or a regional parliament in which your country is represented – and asking them to support your case and promote legislative reforms which would promote, protect, or at least recognise the right to conscientious objection – chapter 13 in this book may provide useful guidance on whether this is a good tactic for your movement. Other public figures, such as academics and artists, could also be worth approaching for the sake of attracting attention and putting pressure on your state.

Asking and facilitating urgent international support in emergencies

In case of prosecution or other emergencies, such as imprisonment, hunger strike, torture, armed conflict / war, you might want to ask for and facilitate international support. In which case, it is important to provide those you approach with all the necessary information in as timely and accurate a way as possible. If you can, publish a press release and a poster, organise a press conference and/or a public debate, launch a petition / prepare a sample letter of protest in as many languages as are available to you, and ask people and organisations to sign it / send it to the relevant authorities in your country and to the embassies of your country abroad. In addition, it may be worth seeking letters of solidarity to encourage the conscientious objectors themselves, in a more direct and human way, especially if they are imprisoned. You could also call for an international day





of nonviolent action and encourage protests, e.g. in front of the embassies of your country abroad, as well as other creative actions, e.g. artistic interventions. If you do this, it's great to take pictures, publish them as soon as possible, and use social media to share them widely.

International solidarity

Are you an individual looking for a conscientious objection or peace group in your country? Try:

- War Resisters' International affiliates list <http://www.wri-irg.org/cgi/datafeed-unicode.cgi>
- Housmans World Peace Database <http://www.housmans.info/wpd/>
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation affiliates list <http://www.ifor.org/>

Are you part of a conscientious objection group looking for international links? Try peace and antimilitarist networks like:

- War Resisters' International <http://www.wri-irg.org/> and info@wri-irg.org and +44-20-7278-4040
- In Europe, the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection <http://www.ebco-beoc.org/>
- International Fellowship of Reconciliation <http://www.ifor.org/>
- Human rights groups such as:
- Amnesty International <https://www.amnesty.org/en/>
- Human Rights Watch <http://www.hrw.org/>

For religious groups:

- In Central Asia and Eastern Europe, contact Forum 18 <http://www.forum18.org/>
- Churches and freedom of religion groups in your region, such as:
 - the Mennonite Central Committee: <http://mcc.org/>
 - Jehovah's Witnesses: <http://www.jw.org/en/>
 - Quakers <http://www.fwcc.world/>

For help on using international human rights systems:

- Check A Conscientious Objector's Guide to the International Human Rights System, which provides help in navigating the different international and regional human rights systems: <http://co-guide.org/>
- Contact the Quaker United Nations Office <http://www.quno.org/>

If working on under-18 recruitment, contact Child Soldiers International: <http://www.child-soldiers.org/>

In cases of LGBT conscientious objectors, especially when their sexuality is an issue, LGBT movements might also be helpful. Try the International lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex association <http://ilga.org/>





Fundraising at the international level

While many of us might wish that conscience was the most important thing in a conscientious objection movement, unfortunately, money is important too. Money is necessary, e.g. for actions, campaigns, meetings, trainings and networking. Money may be even more necessary in emergencies, for example to go to court or pay a fine. You can organise fundraising actions in your country, but if this is not enough, you may need to fundraise from abroad. Launching an international petition or crowdfunding appeal can help with this, or you could request funding from relevant organisations and friendly institutions

Case studies

Here, we have two cases – that of Michalis Maragkakis in Greece, and Murat Kanatlı in northern Cyprus – in which international solidarity has been important. They are both from the Eastern Mediterranean region, and regional solidarity was also important in them.

International solidarity with Greek conscientious objector Michalis Maragkakis

In December 1986 Michalis Maragkakis declared his conscientious objection in the Five Continent Conference on Peace and Disarmament, which was organised in Athens' Peace and Friendship Stadium on the 13-17th December 1986 by KEADEA, the Movement for National Independence & International Peace and Disarmament. Maragkakis was the first Greek conscientious objector on ideological grounds to make his refusal to enlist public. The right to conscientious objection was not recognised in Greece at the time and conscientious objectors were imprisoned.

During the speech of Andreas Papandreou, who was then the Prime Minister of Greece, Maragkakis walked around in the conference area wearing a placard bearing the words '300 conscientious objectors in prison. Why?' and another declaring his own conscientious objection to military service. He distributed a brochure to the participants, explaining the situation in Greece, while others opened big banners in solidarity with him. There were more than 250 representatives from more than 40 countries in the stadium. The atmosphere was friendly and participants applauded the action.

This action was prepared by just a few people (5-10), but several months in advance. The organisers were also in contact with conscientious objectors from other countries, Members of the European Parliament, and international NGOs including Amnesty International (AI), War Resisters' International (WRI), and the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection (EBCO). The action was very successful, gained media coverage, and gave the issue international prominence.





The role of the international solidarity was very important in preparing the action, promoting the campaign and increasing the pressure on the Greek authorities.

An impressive international solidarity movement was subsequently developed, which became particularly important when Maragkakis was arrested in March 1987 and sentenced to four years' imprisonment in June that year. AI, WRI and EBCO issued press releases and launched international campaigns in his support, calling for his immediate and unconditional release, and the full recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military service by the Greek government.



Maragkais with his placard

After his appeal hearing in February 1988, Maragkakis' sentence was reduced to 26 months' imprisonment. On the 22nd of the same month Maragkakis began a hunger strike which came to an end on the 1st May 1988 when the government, alarmed by the level of international support, stated that they would examine the issue of conscientious objection in a positive light. Meanwhile, on April 12th, Thanasis Makris, the second Greek conscientious objector on ideological grounds, was arrested and went on hunger strike in solidarity with Maragkakis. On May 26th, Makris was sentenced to five years' imprisonment, reduced later to 18 months, and began another hunger strike in which Maragkakis joined him. This strike came to an end in July 1988 when the government announced a new draft law. While these hunger strikes may be viewed as successful however, movements should take





extreme care, particularly in developing an exit strategy, before emulating the tactic, given the seriousness of the possible consequences.

During the imprisonment of Maragkakis and Makris, the prominent international campaign that was developed brought the Greek government under enormous pressure, putting them on the defensive. Thousands of protest letters to the Greek authorities arrived from all over the world, as well as solidarity letters to the imprisoned conscientious objectors, and dozens of concerts and other events were organised in their support. Media coverage was extensive, while more than 20 more people declared themselves conscientious objectors on ideological grounds.

As an evolution from the groups supporting Maragkakis and Makris, the Association of Greek Conscientious Objectors was founded by 12 people who declared themselves conscientious objectors on ideological grounds during a press conference in Athens on November 18th 1987.

Before the case of Maragkakis, there were many Greek conscientious objectors on religious grounds, the vast majority of them being Jehovah's Witnesses, who were serving long sentences in prison but without being interested in creating a social or political movement. In the past, for example during the Greek-Turkish war of 1919-22, the second world war, and the Greek Civil war of 1946-49, there were some Greek conscientious objectors on ideological grounds also, but they were isolated cases and never reached out to make a public issue of their case. In contrast, the movement in support of Maragkakis and Makris opened up a broad public discussion in Greek society, with the support of an international solidarity movement.

In March 2007, 20 years after the arrest of Maragkakis and 19 years after the arrest of Makris, Amnesty International Greece honoured the two conscientious objectors in a special ceremony during its General Assembly and thanked them for their struggle to have the right to conscientious objection recognised in Greece. Maragkakis and Makris donated the 5388 solidarity letters and cards they had received from 24 countries around the world during their imprisonment to Amnesty International Greece and thanked Amnesty International for its support.

In April 2008, on the occasion of the 10 year anniversary of the recognition of the right to conscientious objection in Greece, EBCO held its General Assembly in Athens in order to raise awareness and participate in public actions. Amnesty International Greece organised a series of public events, including an open discussion with panel speakers from EBCO, WRI, the Greek Ombudsperson and the National Commission for Human Rights, as well as Maragkakis and Makris, and, for the first time, publicly displayed all the solidarity letters and cards mentioned above. All these actions raised public awareness and gained a large amount of media coverage.





Women were key players in the movement, both in traditionally feminine 'supportive' roles, which are not to be denigrated, even if they should be divorced from expectations rooted in gender, but also as movement leaders and inspirers: Maragkakis, for example, has declared that the defining moment for his final decision was a speech during an event on conscientious objection at the Technical University of Thessaloniki, Greece, where he was greatly influenced by a woman speaker – a member of the War Resisters' International. When he left the event, he told himself that he would not enlist into the army. He would declare himself a conscientious objector. Maragkakis has also said that though his parents hardly welcomed his decision, from the beginning to the end they stood by him, and his mother, in particular, went to the military courts, gave interviews, and supported his struggle by all the means available to her and with patience, despite the negative comments of society.

Today, although the right to conscientious objection to military service is recognised in Greek law, there are still many problems in practice. The alternative civilian service is still punitive in duration and not under an independent civilian authority. Several conscientious objectors have their applications for alternative service rejected by the Minister of Defence following negative opinions by the relevant Special Committee of the Ministry of Defence. This unacceptable practice continues and it is a vicious circle. These young persons are then called up for military service, and if they do not enlist, they are repeatedly persecuted, since insubordination is scandalously considered a permanent offence in Greek law. So an endless circle of arrests and penal convictions begins, with suspended imprisonment sentences accompanied with huge administrative penalties (6000 euros each time).

International solidarity with Turkish-Cypriot conscientious objector Murat Kanatlı (open contemporary case)

In 2009, Murat Kanatlı, a member of the Initiative for COncscientious Objection in Cyprus and a board member of the European Bureau of Conscientious Objection, declared his conscientious objection, on ideological grounds, to carrying out reserve service. He has since refused, every year, to participate in annual military exercises, which are compulsory, in the northern part of Cyprus.

On 14th June 2011 Kanatlı was summoned to appear in the Military Court on charges relating to his refusal in 2009. After numerous postponements, on 8 December 2011 the Military Court accepted Kanatlı 's demand to refer his case to the Constitutional Court. The Constitutional Court, in its judgement on the 10th October 2013, said that there is a duty upon the legislature to provide in laws and regulations for civilian alternatives to military service. Then, there should be a review of that article of the Constitution which relates the 'right and duty towards the homeland' to military service only. After the decision of the Constitutional Court, Kanatlı 's trial proceeded to the Military Court, which delivered its judgement on 25





Northern Cyprus and conscription

Since the Turkish army invaded the northern part of Cyprus in 1974, the northern part of Cyprus is ruled by a Turkish Cypriot administration. In 1983, it was proclaimed 'The Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' (TRNC). The entity has not been recognised by any country except Turkey. TRNC has its own armed forces and conscription system. Conscription is included in Article 74 of the Constitution, which states: 'National service in the armed forces shall be the right and sacred duty of every citizen'. It is further regulated by the 2000 Military Service Law (59/2000). All men between the ages of 19 and 30 are liable for military service. The length of military service is 15 months followed by reserve service.

In both Cyprus and Turkey, though only men are conscripted, women not only participate actively in the conscientious objection movement, but also declare themselves conscientious objectors, in order to express their support for the right to conscientious objection, their solidarity with the conscientious objectors who face prosecution and imprisonment, and their own objections to the culture of militarism.

February 2014, stating that the right to conscientious objection is not regulated by domestic civilian law. The Military Court handed down a penalty of 500 Turkish liras or 10 days' imprisonment if Kanatlı failed to pay the penalty. Upon his refusal to pay the penalty, Kanatlı was sent to serve 10 days in prison.

The Initiative for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus called for the immediate release of Kanatlı and called upon the international community to express its solidarity with him. WRI and EBCO immediately published press releases and supported the call, Amnesty International issued an urgent action and WRI a conscientious objection alert, and an international mobilisation was rapidly developed during these 10 days, which saw press releases published, protests organised, and letters sent to the Turkish Cypriot authorities as well as Turkish embassies abroad. Among others, actions were organised in both sides of Nicosia by the Initiative for Conscientious Objection in Cyprus, in Istanbul by the Conscientious Objection Association of Turkey, in Athens by EBCO and Amnesty International Greece, and in Israel/ Palestine by a Palestinian conscientious objectors' group. Media coverage, and thereby political pressure, was greatly increased with these actions.

In the case of the action in Athens, six members of EBCO and Amnesty International organised a symbolic, peaceful protest in front of the Turkish embassy on 1st March 2014. After the protesters opened two banners in front of the Turkish embassy and took some photos, they were stopped and surrounded by policemen. The activists informed the policemen of the reason for their protest and explained that it was merely a matter of taking some photographs showing themselves with the banners in front of the embassy. Not only were they not allowed to leave, but





subsequently they were transferred by police cars to the General Police Directorate of Attica, where they were detained for more than two hours, without being given access to their lawyers when they arrived. The only person who was allowed to see them during their detention was Green MEP Nikos Chrysogelos, but even he was not admitted immediately. This police intervention caused new protests and increased media coverage. EBCO published a press release entitled 'EBCO offended at unprecedented harassment and detention of its activists in Athens and demands explanations and apology from the Greek authorities' and took this opportunity to again raise awareness of Kanatli's case.

A Note from Murat

It is very important to bring forward to the public, locally and internationally, the ongoing court cases of conscientious objectors. In this way the issue can be widely discussed in the media. Moreover, the behaviour of the police, the army and prison personnel is influenced and occasionally changes to be milder with regards to the issue of conscientious objection. Therefore, even in places where the conscientious objection movement is not very strong, the court cases of conscientious objectors may produce positive results. We have realised this in the court cases in the northern part of Cyprus. The issue can be brought to the media, with a wide outreach and the convicted conscientious objectors' time in prison passes more easily. Regional solidarity was very important in the two recent cases that were tried at the Military Court in the northern part of Cyprus, my own that of and Haluk Selam Tufanli. The solidarity which was shown and experienced was invaluable both for the widening and deepening of the conscientious objection movement but also for us ourselves.

Murat Kanatli





Conscientious Objection in International Law: an overview

Rachel Brett (LLM in International Human rights Law) is a British Quaker based in Geneva, Switzerland, where she is an Adviser to the Quaker UN Office, having just retired as their Human Rights & Refugees Representative after 21 years during which she helped to gain recognition of conscientious objection to military service as a human right. She serves on the War Resisters' International Right to Refuse to Kill Committee. Here, she gives as an overview of conscientious objection in international law.

Explicit international recognition of a right to conscientiously object to military service is relatively new with only two regional human rights standards doing so: the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Ibero-American Youth Convention. However, older international and regional human rights treaties – specifically the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the European Human Rights Convention – have been reinterpreted to include conscientious objection to military service, and various of the UN's human rights bodies and mechanisms have endorsed conscientious objection.

However, the international human rights system is not easy to understand. It can be difficult to assess which procedures are available for a specific case, and the possible benefits of using one process rather than another, either within the UN or between the UN and a regional system. This can lead to reluctance to use the system from those unfamiliar with it, or choices which might have been better if the relative advantages and weaknesses had been known.

In order to address these needs, in 2012, A Conscientious Objector's Guide to the International Human Rights System was produced by WRI, with the assistance of the Quaker UN Office, Conscience & Peace Tax International and the Centre for Civil and Political Rights. This online guide is available at <http://co-guide.org> in English and Spanish, and provides detailed, searchable and up to date information about the various international and regional standards and mechanisms and how to access them.¹

The international recognition of conscientious objection is important not only because of its direct relevance to States' obligation to provide for conscientious objectors but also because it means that lack of provision may give rise to a claim for asylum under international refugee law.²

The key elements are that conscientious objection to military service has been recognised as part of the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. Although it may be based on a recognised religion or belief, this is not essential: it can be based on a personal religious or non-religious belief or grounds of





conscience. Because it comes within the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion it is not one of the rights which can be derogated from (suspended or restricted) in time of war or other emergency threatening the life of the nation. Military or defence authorities should not be the ones to decide on claims of conscientious objection nor responsible for any alternative service required of such objectors, which must be of a civilian character and under civilian control. Although questions of conscientious objection most frequently arise in relation to conscripts, the standards are clear that even those in the armed forces whether as conscripts or as volunteers/professionals and those in the reserves are also entitled to become conscientious objectors.

Because of the different nature of the UN and regional human rights mechanisms, different issues and situations can be taken up through different processes. For example, the UN Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has been active in taking up the individual cases of those detained, imprisoned, or, in the case of Colombia, rounded up and held by the military, finding that not only is repeated imprisonment not allowed, but that any imprisonment of a conscientious objector is a form of arbitrary detention. Both they, and the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, have taken up the lack of recognition of conscientious objection when they have undertaken country missions.

General lack of provision – or discrimination against or inappropriate provision for conscientious objectors – has been taken up by the UN Human Rights Committee during the reporting process of States which are parties to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. A notable example of the impact of the Human Rights Committee's insistence that the Covenant protects conscientious objection to military service, was that this impacted on the Colombian Constitutional Court leading to its ruling that it was also protected by that Constitution. The Committee also takes up individual cases and has repeatedly held that the Republic of Korea is violating the Covenant by making no provision for conscientious objectors. A review of the situation there is awaited from the Korean Constitutional Court.

Unlike the UN human rights procedures, the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights – which covers all 47 Member States of the Council of Europe – are legally binding. Unfortunately, this does not mean that the Governments always comply with them. So far Turkey has failed to recognise conscientious objection despite a series of European Court judgements against it on this subject, but there are cases about this lack of implementation pending in the Turkish Constitutional Court. However, following the European Court's judgment in *Bayatyan v Armenia* and follow up action by the Court, Armenia has at last not only recognised conscientious objection in principle but provided a civilian alternative service for conscientious objectors.

It is clear, therefore, that the international and regional systems have been





important in creating international acceptance of the right of conscientious objection to military service, and can be a useful factor in bringing pressure to bear on governments to introduce or improve provision and to resolve individual cases, but in themselves, they are unlikely to solve the problems. The best strategies usually entail a combination of work within the country with the use of international or regional procedures. The latter often combine the more legal treaty based processes with the intergovernmental/political ones, such as recommendations from other States in the UN's Universal Periodic Review, and/or the thematic or country special rapporteurs or working groups of the UN Human Rights Council. Indeed, much of the progress in establishing the international legal recognition of conscientious objection has come about because of the actions of individuals and non-governmental organisations.

1. Reference should also be made to Brett, Rachel 2011: International Standards on Conscientious Objection to Military Service [online], <<http://www.quno.org/resource/2011/11/international-standards-conscientious-objection-military-service>>, accessed 2nd July 2015.
2. See UNHCR Guidelines on International Protection No. 10: Claims to Refugee Status related to Military Service within the context of Article 1A (2) of the 1951 Convention and/or the 1967 Protocol relating to the Status of Refugees. 3 December 2013, <<http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/home/opensslPDFViewer.html?docid=529efd2e9&query=Guidelines%20No.%2010>>, accessed 2nd July 2015 .





The Impact of International Mechanisms in Local Cases: the example of Colombia

Alba Milena Romero Sanabria is a political scientist at the National University of Colombia. She has worked for the recognition of the right to conscientious objection to military service for ten years, alongside participating in nonviolence training processes. She is a member of Asociación Acción Colectiva de Objetores y Objetoras de Conciencia (ACOOOC, Conscientious Objectors' Collective Action) and Conscience and Peace Tax International. Her co-author Andreas Speck is originally from Germany, where he refused military and substitute service in the 1980s. He has been involved in the environmental, anti-nuclear and antimilitarist movements ever since. From 2001 until 2012 he worked for War Resisters' International (WRI) and today lives in Spain. Together, they use the example of Colombia to illustrate how international human rights mechanisms can be put to use in local cases, and in combination with other tactics, when campaigning for the right to conscientious objection.

On the international level, the right to Conscientious Objection (CO) has been on the political agenda of the UN General Assembly, the Commission on the Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, the Human Rights Commission, and other UN institutions.¹ In addition, the right is addressed by other international institutions, especially the inter-American and European systems.² At the same time, different movements have implemented strategies to try to prioritise within states' agendas the recognition of the right to conscientious objection.

This is true of the Mennonite Church of Colombia, the Youth Network of Medellin, the Collective for Conscientious Objection, Conscientious Objectors' Collective Action (ACOOOC), and the National Assembly of Conscientious Objectors. The work of these bodies focuses on the imposition of a culture of violence as a consequence of the more than 50 years of armed conflict in Colombia. Their work is concerned with victims of forced disappearances, sexual violence, forced displacement and people unlawfully recruited into the armed forces via military raids or 'press gangs'. It also addresses the lack of guarantees and protection of the right to freedom of conscience, doing so via training, awareness raising, accompaniment and advocacy strategies, alongside using international human rights protection frameworks.

This approach successfully combines work at a local level with the use of international mechanisms to achieve goals like the constitutional recognition of the right to conscientious objection and respect, protection and restoration of that right. It also preserves the social fabric in communities affected by violence and encourages the growth of peaceful conflict resolution skills and the use of alternative channels of influence.





In the next few years, this approach will have to confront at least 5 challenges. The first is to get all authorities to comply with the 2009 ruling of Colombia's Constitutional Court, which recognised the right to conscientious objection, as well as the 2014 ruling that established processes for the implementation of this right and obliged the recognition of conscientious objectors. The second challenge is that 'writ of injunction' – which is meant to be an exceptional legal measure, issued at the discretion of the given court – is currently used as the only available measure for guaranteeing the right to conscientious objection: this needs to change such that the right to conscientious objection is simply recognised by the authorities. The third challenge is to free objectors from the 'military card' – ordinarily obtained via the completion of military service – and the requirement to show this in order to get a job. The fourth challenge has to do with accommodating the nearly 800,000 young men who have decided they don't want be part of the army and evade or desert in order to avoid complying with the obligatory military service established by the Colombian Constitution, but who do not openly challenge the system of conscription nor take a political stand against it. Lastly, there is the challenge of getting the Armed Forces to respect the procedures established in Law 48 of 1993 (the Law on Recruitment), the rulings of the Constitutional Court, and international standards when defining young men's military status: currently they often do not respect these, meaning they ignore legal reasons for exemption to military service.

Strategies

Colombian organisations have implemented diverse objectives and strategies to address the situation of violence in the country. There is a generalised sentiment amongst organisations that they don't want to contribute in any way to the war, whether in person or through the payment of taxes. On the contrary, they long for a society in which institutions and individuals reject the use of violence politically, philosophically, morally and ethically; a society that believes in and resorts to other mechanisms for the peaceful resolution of conflicts and is based on the respect, guarantee, and protection of human rights.

To achieve these goals, four strategies have been identified: the education of children and young people; awareness raising actions; judicial, political and psychosocial accompaniment; and advocacy at the national level.

- Education of children and young people: conscientious objector organisations and collectives have carried out educational programmes focusing on critical reflection about the armed conflict in Colombia, power, authoritarianism, the use of violence as a manifestation of power, the militarisation of society, and nonviolence. Information about conscientious objection has centred in particular on knowing the recruitment process and the procedure for exercising one's right to objection.
- Awareness raising actions: with the goal of disseminating information, efforts





An educational poster about press gangs produced by ACOOC

have turned to nonviolent direct actions which are informative and culturally engaging. These include advice sessions where young people and parents give advice about the recruitment process and illegal procedures during recruitment, as well as about how to access the right to conscientious objection. There are also concerts, public declarations, and street actions using contemporary dance, theatre, and other performance arts as tools for denouncing the status quo, reflection, and proposals for social transformation. An example worth highlighting is the creation of a spoof version of a free newspaper distributed in Colombia's main cities – in which the news published depicted an ideal Colombia, a Colombia that guaranteed the rights of disabled people, free of corruption, where it was possible to be a conscientious objector and not be required to show a military card to access fundamental rights such as work and education.

- Judicial, political, and psychological accompaniment and advocacy at the national level: since 2006, the *Red Juvenil de Medellín* (Medellin Youth Network) and ACOOC and its member organisations have, with help from War Resisters' Internatioanl (WRI) and the Quaker United Nations Office, adopted a plan to 'accompany' the cases of conscientious objectors, young people at risk of forced recruitment, and those who have already been recruited and want to get out. The plan consists of helping the objector to draft a document that expresses the political, judicial, ethical, moral, philosophical or humanitarian reasons motivating their objection. It is also meant to help objectors and their families confront situations arising from their exercise of their rights. The legal component, for its part, looks for legal mechanisms for requesting the right to conscientious objection, opposition to recruitment, and release from military service. The declaration is entered in the WRI database, and the conscientious objector is issued with a card that identifies them as such.

The declaration or petition is distributed, as appropriate, to the Office of Recruitment, the Military District, the Office of the Ombudsman, the municipal or district Human Rights Advocate, the Colombian office of the United Nations High





Commission for Human Rights, the Vice Presidency of the Republic, and the Ministry of Defence. Alongside the declaration is a letter of support from WRI and the organisation charged with accompanying the case in the hope of a positive response. Up until now, the institutions in charge of recruiting have highlighted that the right to objection does not have any legislation to support it, whereas obligatory military service is supported by the Military Recruitment Law (Law 48 of 1993). The institutions in charge of defending citizens' rights, meanwhile, have insisted that their job is to pass the declaration or petition onto the 'competent authority', as they don't have the legal authority to make final decisions on the matter. At the same time, recruitment by press gangs has become more visible.

To confront these responses, local organisations have activated the National and International Accompaniment Network formed by WRI, the Quakers, Conscience and Peace Tax International, Fellowship of Reconciliation, CIVIS, the Objectors Movement of Spain (MOC), the Objectors Movement of France, and others. These organisations deliver letters to national institutions demanding they respect young people's rights and comply with their legal duties towards them.

From when the strategy was implemented to now, ACOOC alone has accompanied the declarations of approximately 190 objectors, of whom 7 are women, one is a transgender man, and the remaining 182 are cis men of recruitment age (men who were called boys from when they were born). Thanks to this accompaniment, none of these declared objectors have been recruited and many illegally recruited young people have been released from military service. It would seem that the growing number of declarations speaks to an ever bigger group of young people rejecting enlistment into military service.

Advocacy in the state human rights institutions

Parallel to these declarations and political, legal, and psychosocial accompaniment work, Colombia's objector organisations have carried out advocacy and lobbying actions on a national level that have affected the perspective and practices of the authorities regarding conscientious objectors, recruitment via press gangs, and the requirements of the military card.

Collectives in support of conscientious objection and international organisations have met with national institutions to educate and pressure them to guarantee the right to conscientious objection. This work has slowly led to those institutions taking positions in favour of such a right: it has achieved the support of the Human Rights Office of Medellín (*Personería de Medellín*) and the Office of the Ombudsman (*Defensoría del Pueblo*), for example. Both institutions are familiar with the cases and have interceded in favour of conscientious objectors or young people recruited by force, including those recruited before the ruling of 2009.

They have also attended seminars, talks and meetings in order to create





dialogue around the guarantee of the right, the advantages of applying the framework of legal norms regarding conscientious objection including international standards which exist, and the consequences of failing to do so.

The use of international human rights frameworks by conscientious objector organisations in Colombia

For many years, the legal route to demanding the right to conscientious objection in Colombia was closed. The Constitutional Court ruled on various occasions against the right (T-409/92, C-511/94, T-363/95).³ To advance recognition of the right, the use of international human rights mechanisms and institutions was essential. A first step was the case of objector Luis Gabriel Caldas León (Case 11.596) before the inter-American Commission on Human Rights in 1995, though this was unfortunately shelved in 2010 for lack of information.⁴

Since 2000, efforts have focused on the diverse mechanisms and institutions of the United Nations human rights system. Conscientious objector organisations have established contact with the Colombian office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, alerting the office to violations of conscientious objectors' rights and young people's subjection to irregular recruitment processes in the form of raids or 'press gangs'. In 2010, the Office issued a report publicly criticising such practices for the first time and recommending an end to them as soon as possible.⁵

The inclusion of these two themes in the Office's reports has much to do with achievements in the international human rights arena. The global strategy – especially after the explicit recognition of the right to conscientious objection by the Human Rights Committee in its ruling on the case of Yeo-Bum Yoon and Mr Myung-Jin Choi versus South Korea in January 2007 – is to obtain concrete declarations on cases or situations in Colombia through various human rights mechanisms, in order to increase the pressure on human rights institutions as well as courts within the country, whose primary references would otherwise be the negative rulings of the Constitutional Court.

The focus has been on the use of three particular mechanisms:

- The working group on arbitrary detentions: In 2007, WRI submitted three individual cases of illegally recruited young people: two cases of conscientious objectors, and one young person who had been recruited by press gang. The result of the case was very successful, with two important aspects:
 - The working group strongly criticised the practice of raids, saying that 'raids, incursions, or round ups with the goal of detaining young people in public spaces who can't prove their military status, don't have any legal basis or justification'. Consequently, such recruitment and consequent deprivation of liberty in a barracks was declared 'arbitrary detention'.





- In addition, the working group clearly clearly stated that 'the detention of said people who have explicitly declared themselves to be conscientious objectors does not have judicial substance or legal basis, and their incorporation into the army against their will is a clear violation of their acknowledgement of conscience.'⁶ The working group also produced a similar statement during and after their visit to Colombia in October 2008.⁷

The *Human Rights Committee*: Conscientious objection was included for the first time in the 2004 Human Rights Committee's report in its recommendations and final observations. They recommended that 'The State Party should guarantee that conscientious objectors can opt for alternative service whose duration does not have punitive effects.'⁸ On this basis, Colombian conscientious objectors' organisations and their international allies – mainly WRI and Conscience and Peace Tax International – worked to raise awareness and inform the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva as well as the Human Rights Committee and its members. In the next review, various alternative reports on military recruitment and conscientious objection were submitted.⁹ As a result, the Committee recommended that Colombia 'should, without delay, adopt legislation that recognises and regulates conscientious objection (...) and reform the use of raids'.¹⁰

The *Universal Periodic Review*: Conscientious objection as well as raids were included in the information summary compiled by the Office of the High Commissioner. During the Universal Periodic Review in December 2008, Slovenia submitted a recommendation that Colombia recognise the right to conscientious objection in law and practice, and ensure that recruitment methods permit for this. However, Colombia didn't accept this recommendation (A/HRC/10/82/Add.1, 13 January 2009). Even though both topics were briefly mentioned in the report from the Office of the High Commissioner (A /HRC/WG.6/16/COL/3, 7 February 2013), during the second cycle of the Universal Periodic Review (16th session) there was no recommendation related to conscientious objection.¹¹

In addition to these three mechanisms, specific cases have been communicated to the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief. The declarations made by the institutions of the United Nations human rights system have created a strong shift in judicial opinion, as can be observed in the 2009 Constitutional Court ruling C-728 recognising conscientious objection as a fundamental right.

Increase the pressure: the unconstitutionality ruling

With the unfolding of international law and the declarations of international institutions regarding the lack of recognition for the right to conscientious objection in Colombia, space has opened on a national level for a new judicial initiative.

In May 2009, Gina Cabarcas, Antonio Barreto and Daniel Bonilla submitted a





claim of unconstitutionality before the Colombian Constitutional Court in which they argued that the lack of provision for the right to conscientious objection in the Military Recruitment Law is a violation of the Colombian Constitution. In this process, the Ministry of Defence testified against the petition. Testifying in favour there were law professors, *Dejusticia* (the Centre for Law, Justice and Society Studies), and the Colombian Commission of Judges, among others. It is also important to note that the Attorney General intervened with his own position paper, and the Medellin Human Rights Office supported the position of the Colombian Commission of Judges in favour of the unconstitutionality claim – demonstrating civil society's efforts to move public opinion towards supporting the right to conscientious objection.¹²

Even though the Constitutional Court formally rejected the claim of unconstitutionality under the reasoning that conscientious objection is not an exemption from Obligatory Military Service, the Court argued that as part of freedom of conscience there should be specific legislation regulating the right and ordered the Colombian Congress to enact a law on the matter. In addition, the Court provided some key points for understanding and demanding the right:

- The Court highlighted that despite the lack of legislation governing the right to conscientious objection, this right has immediate effect and protection can be provided via a 'writ for protection' (court injunction), in case it is not recognised (see section 5.2.6.5 of the court ruling).
- The Court clarified that conscientious objection can be based upon religious, ethical, moral or philosophical beliefs, and insisted that it cannot be limited to religious reasons (paragraph 5.2.6.4).
- The beliefs that give rise to the conscientious objection should be profound, sincere and fixed. As a result, the Court stated that all conscientious objectors would have to demonstrate the external manifestations of their convictions and beliefs, in order to prove that military service would force them to act against their conscience (paragraph 5.2.6.2).

Since then, there has been a lack of recognition of conscientious objection in practice

Five years since the Constitutional Court published Ruling C-728, the legislature has not complied with its duty to protect the constitutional right to conscientious objection. Between 2009 and 2014 there have been various proposed laws (66/2010, 135/2010) which have not been approved.¹³ The last attempt was a bill proposed in 2012, which was shelved in 2013 at the end of the legislative term. During the legislative sessions, national and international organisations recommended that the law not restrict the right to conscientious objection, for example only to religious objections. They described a clear and smooth procedure, and envisaged at least two levels of appeal to resolve objectors' cases: a social service which does not discriminate against the objector, and a credential





giving the same benefits as the military card. Relatedly, they worked on other matters, like Law 1738 of 2014, which eliminates the obligation to have a military card in order to obtain a professional degree.

Despite the failure of the legislation, a small group of young people have had their conscientious objection recognised on non-religious grounds thanks to the Supreme Court of Justice's penal appeals court having overturned a ruling issued by the criminal court of the Bogota High Court, which had denied that there was any infringement of the right to conscientious objection by the Ministry of Defence, the National Recruitment Office or Military District Number 59.¹⁴

In addition to the cases that have been successful however, there are many young people whose right to conscientious objection has not been recognised and many more who were and are illegally recruited by the authorities. The Ombudsman's Office recently published the report *Military Service in Colombia: Joining, recruitment and conscientious objection*,¹⁵ which includes a survey of the right to objection. The report documents the problems related to the right to objection: 'Given that conscientious objection is not recognised as a reason for exemption, the military authorities don't fully resolve the requests lodged by those who wish to be recognised as conscientious objectors.'

Practical problems with the protection of the right, and the problems arising from raids — despite these being classified as illegal by ruling C-879/11 of the Constitutional Court — led to a new ruling by the Court on the two matters in 2014, in which it described the right to conscientious objection in more detail:

- The right to conscientious objection does exist, even though no law exists on conscientious objection in Colombia;
- The right is recognised and protected at all times: before, during and after military service;
- The armed forces have to respond to a request for the right within a period of 15 days;
- They also have an obligation to inform young people regarding their right to conscientious objection.

In fact, because of the legislature's inaction, the Constitutional Court is dictating the terms of a conscientious objection law. But even though the Court may contribute positively to the development of the right, the gap between theory and practice in the country continues to be stark. Even in 1997, the Human Rights Committee observed 'with concern the large discrepancy between the legal framework and the reality in relation to human rights'.¹⁶ Ten years later, this concern remains relevant. So long after the recognition of conscientious objection by the Constitutional Court in 2009 as well as its ruling on the illegality of raids in 2001 (C-879/11), recruitment practices have changed little. There are serious doubts about whether the new ruling from the Constitutional Court will have a broader impact.





Conclusions

The achievements of the conscientious objector collectives in Colombia in the last 15 years are impressive. We are convinced that these achievements have only been possible through the use of a combination of strategies, including national and international legal means, as well as awareness raising strategies and young people mobilising for their rights. Social mobilisation — especially of young conscientious objectors — was necessary in order to put the issue of massive human rights violations on the agenda. This mobilisation and advocacy work have made it possible for some state human rights institutions to finally support the claim of unconstitutionality against the lack of provision for the right to conscientious objection, support that we consider important to the success of said claim. Furthermore, advances in international law and specific declarations from international bodies have increased the pressure on the Colombian judicial system regarding the claim of unconstitutionality. Obviously we don't know the content of the debates had by the Constitutional Court judges, but we believe the combination of the two factors — social mobilisation and international institutions — to have been very important. We also think it is strategically important to widen the cracks in the system and not consider 'the state' to be a monolithic system. The contradictions between different administrations within the same state have been made visible during the unconstitutionality case, for example in the intervention of the Ministry of Defence against the right to objection while the Attorney General and the Human Rights Office of Medellín were in favour.

Even though the successes are impressive, there is still much to do in order to achieve the political and social goal of freedom of conscience, namely societal demilitarisation and nonviolence. Though the protection of human rights — and in this case the right to conscientious objection — can only widen and protect the social space for young people, social movements, and their struggles, they don't in themselves change society. Additionally, the focus on the right to objection— by definition strictly related to obligatory military service — favours a focus on young men, even though militarism and violence also have a strong impact on the lives of women, and in Colombia women are important actors in the movement for conscientious objection.

Every country is different and lives within its own particular context. However, the example of Colombia can serve as inspiration for other struggles — adapted to the particular context.

Translated from Spanish by Denise Drake and Ian MacDonald

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3. These cases may be searched online at <<http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/>>, accessed 2nd July 2015.
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11. The archives of the UNHR Periodic Reviews may be accessed at <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/PublicationsResources/Pages/OHCHRArchives.aspx>>.
12. The details of this case may be accessed at <<http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2009/C-728-09.htm>>.
13. The archive of Colombian law may be accessed at <<http://www.archivogeneral.gov.co/leyes>>.
14. See for example Constitutional Court sentence T-455, 7th July 2014 <<http://www.corteconstitucional.gov.co/relatoria/2014/T-455-14.htm>>, accessed 16th July 2015.
15. Defensoría del Pueblo 2014, In Text [pdf], Gov.co, <<http://www.defensoria.gov.co/public/pdf/ServicioMilitarObligatorio.pdf>>, accessed 16th July 2015.
16. Human Rights Committee: examination of the reports presented by the state parties in accordance with article 40 of the treaty. Final observations of the Human Rights Committee: Colombia, CCPR/C/79/Add.76, 5 May 1997.





Supporting Conscientious Objectors and Deserters in Times of War: an objector's perspective

A native of Belgrade, Serbia, Bojan Aleksov became an anti-war activist in 1991. Since 2007, he has been a lecturer in Balkan history at University College London. His very personal perspective on anti-war activism in the former Yugoslavia appeared as 'Resisting the Wars in the Former Yugoslavia: An Autoethnography' in Resisting the Evil: [Post-]Yugoslav Anti-War Contention. Here, he writes from the same personal perspective about how to support conscientious objectors and deserters in times of war.

Conscientious Objection (CO) was never going to be easy, certainly not in Serbia during the 1990s.

Throughout history, people have strived for peace and yet our past often looks like a succession of wars. It's one thing to want peace, another to achieve and maintain it. 'Others' are usually blamed for war and aggression, while we see ourselves or our people as victims. We claim that we are defending ourselves from these vicious 'others'. Even big powers and their more imperially inclined elites usually justify their wars as preventative, defensive, 'good' wars, while enemies are only after 'bad' wars. Indeed, the greatest achievement of modern times in preventing war, or limiting its disastrous consequences, has so far only been to set some rules of how to wage war, and some conventions on war crimes.

Understandably, many have been dissatisfied with this partial solution, from the founders of great religions and philosophers, to grassroots peace activists. Grappling with the paradox of how to eliminate the very possibility of war, most have come to the conclusion that the only way to truly embrace and enable peace is to start from oneself, to set one's own example of refusing war. There have emerged a myriad strategies, from pacification, self restraint and discipline, to, last but not least, conscientious objection, which gained particular traction in the 20th century.

War Breaks

I grew up in the former Yugoslavia, where, for many reasons which would require a chapter of their own to explain, there was no tradition of pacifism. Conscientious objection was an unknown notion even though generations of religious objectors had been imprisoned for it. The war which erupted in 1991 came after years of preparations and a series of violent incidents but nevertheless, to all well intentioned people it was a huge blow and a shocking surprise: after all, we never think the worst will actually happen. Needless to say, without preparation and a pacifist tradition, it was impossible to consolidate and channel the rather massive resistance to war which emerged, ranging from fleeing the country, hiding from call





ups, to outright desertion from the battlefield.

I was in the army doing my regular military service and so my shock and disappointment were particularly great, as was my disgust with the war which unfolded before my eyes and in which I was supposed to pick a side. My objection was personal and based on experience. On one occasion we were attacked and had to return fire. I remember that event as the most idiotic situation – we were all scared to death, and no one knew where to shoot. I didn't even know how to formulate or express my feelings and just wanted to get out. After my attempt to escape failed I was sent to military hospital and eventually released on the grounds of being 'mentally unable to serve in the army'.

Embarking on Conscientious Objection Activism

Back in my hometown Belgrade I wanted to do more, to tell others about my experience and to stop this madness that was unfolding. But authorities repeatedly closed borders to prevent men from leaving the country, harsh legal and extra legal measures were employed against deserters, and the media focused on 'traitors' and deserters from our side as much as on the so called enemy. I joined anti-war protests and encountered a group of women called the Women in Black, whose feminist slogan 'not in my name', and insistence on the moral responsibility to face the truth, speak up, and resist, fitted very well with how I felt and what I later discovered was also a philosophy of conscientious objection. Unexpectedly for me, these women, who were older than me and the other (potential) deserters and objectors, became our most natural allies.

Working Together

There was a generational divide and gender gap to surmount and problems inevitably crept up. For the Women in Black, it was important that they were supporting deserters and conscientious objectors because of their political convictions and because they chose to do so, not because they were fulfilling a predetermined gender role of being supportive mothers or sisters. We the deserters and conscientious objectors, and the Women in Black themselves, had to think seriously about the division of labour in the informal group we formed, and ensure that tasks were not automatically assigned according to gendered expectations, whereby women, for example, would always perform caring work, often invisible to the public, and men would assume more public facing, authoritative, directive roles.

For many young men, it was difficult to accept the feminist ideas which the Women in Black advocated. And, having met other conscientious objectors from around the world at various conferences, I have come to realise that this is not only an issue for young men in Serbia. Our values and ideas often clashed but I became convinced that we young male conscientious objectors needed to learn





Another Women in Black group hold a silent vigil to commemorate violence against women and girls

and adopt feminist ideas and values. Working together with women inevitably undermined preconceived notions of masculinity too. Sharing the space with Women in Black and depending on their support meant that there could be no compromise in some issues and that men (conscientious objectors) had to adjust their behaviour and ideas rather than the other way around.

With this experience, I realised that having good allies is the most valuable asset it is possible to you can have, and that they can be found, and should be sought, in what might seem unlikely places. In our case for example, the hard rock and punk scene became our most effective method of channeling information to young people about conscientious objection so we also hung out with some diehard punks. Obviously not everybody was or could be happy or satisfied with all arrangements all the time. What is useful is to establish some bottom line when making any political alliance. Machismo, for example, was simply not tolerated and some people for this or other reasons abandoned the group or activism altogether. In other cases we had to work hard to reach compromises and in some cases had to learn that a divisive issue is not worth arguing about: you can just walk out if you don't like loud music, for example.

Having described some of the conflicts we had among ourselves, however, I do not want to exaggerate them: for the most part, we were stronger for being a





collective of otherwise lone voices resisting war and militarism, struggling together with the denial and apathy dominating the rest of our society. We were marginalised by all major media and political forces capable of making a difference.

International Solidarity

Abroad, despite verbal condemnation of the Serbian side of the war, there was no enthusiasm for preventing or stopping the war. Neither the UNHRC or any other relevant international organisation ever considered Serbian war resisters rightful refugees. The situation for young military conscripts and for we activists only seemed to change from bad to worse, with the impact heaviest on our morale, even challenging something as simple yet crucial as the sense of shared humanity that had kept us going all these years. We needed to be constantly prepared for bad news and a bad reception, but we were often naive. Nowadays, there is much greater awareness of this danger, and even training for dealing with it. At the time, we were kept going by friends from abroad, ordinary people and activists from many countries who continuously supported us. I learned about mine and everybody's right to conscientious objection and a whole century of resistance. International solidarity was simply indispensable to us, and I believe it would be for anyone declaring conscientious objection, anywhere in our militarised world. International, grassroots solidarity meant deserters did not feel alone, and through the work of activists abroad, deserters and war resisters received the moral and material support they needed. Their actions served, if not to empower, then at least to reduce disillusionment among us. Yet it is important to be careful of the paternalism that can come with foreign support and, most of all, the sense it can foster of being a victim.

Another key aspect of our work was to establish links and relationships with individuals and groups from the so called enemy side. They were like minded people that we knew from before the war or were discovered to us by our foreign friends. As all communication lines were broken we could only meet abroad. Later on there were regular meetings between Serbian and Croatian anti-war activists in Mohács, a town in Hungary close to borders of both Croatia and Serbia. More importantly and again thanks to our foreign friends, peace activists in former Yugoslavia were the first to discover the advantages (at that time there were only advantages) of email communication to overcome borders and information walls. Once we established lines of communication it was much easier, although many other problems between us were more difficult to overcome. We could at least spell out and share our grievances or exchange often different understandings as humans do in most situations. Refusing to accept division, hate speech and propaganda, or the isolation that comes from ignorance, we strove to have our eyes and ears opened to the stories and opinions of 'the other'. Eventually it became possible to undertake joint actions and projects or issue joint statements despite some differences that would always persist.





The House for Deserters: a Case Study

I happened to be in Budapest doing my graduate studies in 1999 when war broke out in Kosovo and NATO intervened against Serbia. There was massive desertion from Serb armed forces and many others avoided conscription at the time. Despite closed borders some managed to get to neighbouring Hungary and I literally met some on the street or through friends. We came across others using a 'snowballing' method. They were in desperate need as no international organisation would help them in Hungary and they could not go anywhere else because other countries refused them entry.

So I reactivated my contacts with Amnesty International and DFG-VK (a German Peace Society, focusing on Conscientious Objection internationally) and with their advice and financial aid set up a Safe House for Deserters in Budapest where some of them stayed. Others could come for advice and help. Together with some of them we reached out to other deserters staying in refugee centres throughout Hungary and brought help occasionally. The project lasted for about ten months before I was arrested on my visit to Belgrade. With the project's help a few deserters managed to reach third countries. Others hung about until Milosevic was overthrown in October 2000.

Many setbacks, challenges and disappointments arose along the course of our activism, the worst being our inability to heal the broken or save the endangered. Despite our efforts, many objectors and deserters remained in jail or in hiding. No matter how much we tried, we felt our hands were tied. When hundreds and thousands of young men fled from Serbia to Hungary to avoid participating in all out war against NATO, we thought that they would receive the support they needed. Major human rights organisations claimed they were entitled to refugee status according to the Geneva Convention as they fled an internationally condemned war and escaped from political leaders who had been accused of war crimes. Around the world, major newspapers and television media reported on the issue. NATO planes dropped leaflets inciting people to rebellion and desertion, something we could not do and something that is strongly prohibited in all countries. And yet many deserters in Serbia risked their lives to escape and cross the closed borders. Those who stayed behind were arrested and condemned to long term imprisonment. Despite all the attention they received and all the suffering they endured, when the deserters reached Hungary, a NATO member, these men were offered none of the protection they needed. Again, the only relief came from a few small antimilitarist groups in the NATO countries, reminding us not to place too much faith in governments and international organisations, but rather in grassroots organisations and activists.





Conclusion

Because of the constant pressure we faced from our political and social environment, and the pressure we put on ourselves in terms of our own goals and expectations, we, as conscientious objection activists, often left problems of interpersonal relations, teamwork, and mutual confidence unresolved. We recognised the need for dialogue and discussion among ourselves and the need to combine and strengthen our individual powers in the group. Yet we tended to prioritise other tasks that could be more easily measured and achieved. Consequently, some of us could not endure the strain. Today, in retrospect, I can see that these problems did not develop so much because of our weakness, but because we set our own expectations, and perhaps even our principles, too high. Thus my first piece of advice to other conscientious objection movements is to be realistic and not too unforgiving with yourselves and with your own communities. Secondly, reaching out for support, including international solidarity, is important, but it is equally important to be prepared for disappointment when this support does not come from the official sources who might make a difference. Finally, it is equally important to be open to support and solidarity from unexpected quarters. This may be an opportunity for internal or personal development, as well as being movement saving in its own right – or even life saving.





Supporting Conscientious Objectors and Deserters in Times of War: a supporter's perspective

Rudi Friedrich, General Secretary of Connection e.V. in Germany, is engaged in achieving recognition of the human rights of conscientious objectors, and acknowledgement of the persecution which conscientious objectors and deserters face as a reason for asylum. The organisation collaborates with groups opposing war, conscription and the military. Beyond Europe, the network extends to Turkey, the U.S., Israel, South Korea, Latin America and Africa. It offers counselling and information to refugees and support for their self organisation. He takes on the topic of supporting conscientious objectors and deserters abroad.

Some thousand men, liable for military service, are leaving the Ukraine as I write, at the beginning of 2015. Obviously, they don't want to fight in a war against their neighbours. One of them, who fled to Germany, told us: 'I was born in Donetsk and grew up there. We were living in the war zone close to Donetsk. I didn't want to fight either for the Republican Army of Donetsk nor for the Ukrainian army. War is wrong. I don't want to fight against my neighbours and my own family'. For more than 20 years the German based association Connection e.V. has supported conscientious objectors and deserters, of all genders.

A Personal Decision with Political Consequences

In countries which enjoy legal recognition for conscientious objection, very often the implicit understanding is that a conscientious objector has decided not to go to war under any circumstances. The Human Rights Council of the United Nations is often understood to assume this position as the default, in its statement that 'conscientious objection to military service derives from principles and reasons of conscience, including profound convictions, arising from religious, ethical, humanitarian or similar motives'.¹ A selective conscientious objection usually won't be accepted, although there are some counterexamples to this: during the Yugoslav wars, for example, men who had completed military service but did not want to fight fellow Yugoslavs were recognised as conscientious objectors with a right to asylum by the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly.²

This question is fundamental to working with objectors, resisters, draft evaders and deserters in times of war. In fact most of them wouldn't define themselves as conscientious objectors. They decided to leave because of a concrete situation: being involved in war. They don't care about international conventions, they follow their own convictions. Their motives may be not to fight against their neighbours, not to fight for the aims of the government, not to fight an imperialistic war, or not to take part in an illegal war or in illegal actions. Leaving their home countries for most of them is the only chance of avoiding recruitment and deployment to the war zone, although it is important to note that the option to leave their homes and flee the





country is not equally open to everyone who faces recruitment: much is dependent on personal and social factors like money, status, family background, luck, and so on.

These are personal decisions, but ones that have a very important impact on the wider societies of those making them. Conscientious objectors and deserters are giving a real life example that there are different possibilities for action when confronted with a logic of war set down by ruling parties and the military, who only know allies or enemies, the battle, the fight. Though there may be an obligation to go into the military, conscientious objectors are living proof that everybody has a choice. They challenge the principle of order and obedience that defines militarism. It is a step towards emancipation.

How can we support conscientious objectors?

There are many questions to be answered before we can decide how to support conscientious objectors and deserters in times of war. Is there a right to conscientious objection to which they could refer? Are there other ways to avoid being recruited? What kind of prosecution may they have to face? How might they leave the country? How might they enter other countries? Is there a possibility of staying or of getting refugee status? Do they see themselves as 'traitors'? Are they happy to speak out in public? Do they want to be active against war and militarism? In this article I will give some ideas for practical work focusing on the questions of how to support conscientious objectors as refugees abroad.

Background Information on Countries of Origin

One of the basic steps of our work is to collect information on the laws, the court rulings and the practice of conscientious objection and desertion in different countries. Fortunately, there are some compilations provided by organisations such as the European Bureau for Conscientious Objection, the Quaker UN Office, the United Nations Human Rights Council, and War Resisters' International (WRI). After a request from a Georgian draftee coming from Abkhazia our intern researched the question of what laws are in effect in Abkhazia and in Georgia. It took him three days. The biggest surprise was finding out that wikipedia was totally wrong – a warning to us all! But in the end he got a clear picture of it.

Another really important source for our work is information provided by groups and organisations working in the country of origin. If they exist, they might be in contact with conscientious objectors and deserters on a local level. They might be able to provide contact with local lawyers. They might understand the laws and rules in the given language. And they might be able get information on how these laws are actually applied. In some cases, like Eritrea, such groups were not able to exist under a dictatorship. Here we were successful in getting into contact with groups in exile.





Another very important source are the refugees themselves. Very often the authorities responsible for an asylum request question their testimonies and maintain that refugees are giving false statements. But in some cases we have been able to restore their credibility. One way, which we used in the case of Eritrea, was to interview about ten deserters and draft evaders. We gave them time and space to tell their whole stories – a totally new experience for them. We translated the statements and published them together with the statements of other organisations. In that way we got a reliable documentation of the situation of conscientious objectors in Eritrea, which we published in a booklet and sent to different lawyers and courts. In this way we had a significant increase in positive decisions on asylum requests.

Background Information on Conscientious Objection and Asylum

The principle continues to exist at the level of national asylum practices that the persecution of conscientious objectors is not a reason to grant them refugee status even if there is no right to conscientious objection in their country of origin, and even in times of war. In the past, positive decisions were only granted in cases where a conscientious objector expected severe prosecution or was seen as an opponent to the government. Furthermore, a resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations said that 'persons compelled to leave their country of nationality solely because of a conscientious objection to assisting in the enforcement of apartheid through service in military or police forces' should be granted asylum.³ Following this idea in a broader sense a directive of the European Union concedes since 2004 that the prosecution of objectors who refuse to be part of illegal action or an illegal war could be seen as a reason to grant them refugee status. And, and, with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of *Bayatyan v. Armenia* in 2011, conscientious objection was seen for the first time as a human right under freedom of thought, conscience and religion referring to article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights.⁴ Both changed the legal context for the European Union and the Council of Europe where all EU member states and other European countries are included.

For other regions it would also be possible to refer to different recommendations given by the UN Human Rights Council or the UNHCR in its Guidelines on International Protection no. 10: 'In countries where neither exemption nor alternative service is possible, a careful examination of the consequences for the applicant will be needed. For example, where the individual would be forced to undertake military service or participate in hostilities against their conscience, or risk being subjected to prosecution and disproportionate or arbitrary punishment for refusing to do so, persecution would arise. Moreover, the threat of such prosecution and punishment, which puts pressure on conscientious objectors to change their conviction, in violation of their right to freedom of thought, conscience or belief, would also meet the threshold of persecution'.⁵ All these could be used to give





arguments for asylum seekers in cases where this human right is not guaranteed in their country of origin.

These developments are positive. On the other hand, such possibilities are still seen as an exception to the main principle, or as recommendations which are not necessarily followed. Furthermore, authorities will check during the asylum proceedings if a conscientious objection is credible or not, referring to the need to have a profound conviction. In practice this is a clear restriction which excludes a large proportion of the people concerned from getting refugee status.

Counselling

The basic information described could be very effective as a support of conscientious objectors and deserters in times of war. In the past, with the help of Connection e.V., hundreds of them were able to achieve refugee status. Here are some practical steps for such work:

- Listen and take notes. The first step is to get in contact with the refugee and to listen to his or her story, to their experiences and facts about recruitment, the draft, desertion, and personal motivations. Obviously, this means providing a means of interpreting/translating.
- Research, as described above. Of course this could and should be done in collaboration with the refugees.
- Publish basic information in different languages: counsellors in different countries as well as the refugees themselves need reliable information. They also need a basic understanding of possible ways to be accepted as a conscientious objector in an asylum seeking process in different countries and how the proceedings are carried out
- Find lawyers: because the legal situation is confusing and international and European law are involved there is a need to find lawyers who are experienced or able to familiarise themselves with these questions and who are willing to collaborate.
- Find supporters: furthermore, when direct contact is not possible because of great distances, there is a need to find local supporters and groups which could be in direct contact with the refugee.

Self Organisation

As already mentioned, the main step in supporting conscientious objectors and deserters in a refugee application is to listen to their stories. One of them described this as follows: 'At home we can't even speak about it. There is no possibility to offer resistance. You just can leave. Now I experienced that resistance is possible. There are people who work against the government in an organized manner. It's good to see it'.

When listening to their stories and giving the feedback that we would like to





support them they could see maybe for the first time that their decision to refuse war and military could be seen as a positive step. In their domestic society (and in the diaspora) this step is very often seen as a betrayal. Frequently, they are desperate to get in conflict with their convictions and with the response of their societies. It is also a first step for them to have the chance to realize: I stick to my decision.

But they are not alone. As there are thousands of objectors and deserters just from one country like the Ukraine there must be some more asking for asylum. Is it possible to bring some of them together? Is it possible to organize an interchange between them? In a group, they can realize that they are not alone. In a group, they can realize that they have common goals or a common understanding of the situation in their country of origin. In the former Yugoslavia, Russia, Greece, USA, Angola, Eritrea or Turkey such groups have existed in the past.

Such self organised groups could be a major resource for counselling. The activists know about the situation in their country of origin, they speak the same language, they have met with the same dismissive responses during their asylum proceedings. They can exchange experiences and get informal contacts and support which may help in precarious situations.

In Germany, such groups came together as the activists wished to go public with their own demands about the asylum seeking process and the situation in their country of origin. They demanded an end to the war, support for conscientious objectors and deserters and that they be granted asylum. In this they are becoming the mouthpiece of many others who do not have the courage to speak out and could have a very important political impact.

All this means working in exile, with the difficulties typical of that experience: asylum seekers don't necessarily know the political background of their new country and they are faced with a different language in their asylum proceedings. The war in the country of origin creates mistrust and polarisation in the diaspora. In some cases the secret service of the country of origin is active abroad. And a lot of the activists do not have experience of political work, nor of ways of discussing and preparing political activities and how to collaborate in a group and so on. It is therefore very important to offer help and support to them on these issues. It could be helpful to offer input on questions about the political situation in their country of exile, decision making processes in groups, gender – but always on the basis of not predetermining their decisions.

Conclusions

The aim of Connection e.V. is to work against war and to enable or strengthen persons and groups to work against it. We decided to focus on the question of conscientious objection and on questions raised about asylum because we saw





that every person deciding neither to go to the army nor to war is throwing a spanner in the works of the military machinery. With our work we realised that we could not only help some hundreds of them, but that we could also strengthen antimilitarist work in other countries in an important way.

1. UN Human Rights Council. A/HRC/RES/24/17, Twenty-fourth session, September 27, 2013. Adopted without a vote.
2. Takemura Hitomi 2009, International Human Right to Conscientious Objection to Military Service and Individual Duties to Disobey Manifestly Illegal Orders, (Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer Verlag), pp91-92.
3. UN General Assembly, Resolution 33/165, December 20, 1978.
4. European Court of Human Rights, Grand Chamber, Case of Bayatyan v. Armenia, Application no. 23459/03. Judgment, July 7, 2011.
5. UNHCR: Guidelines on International Protection no. 10 (HCR/GIP/13/10), December 3, 2013.





The Role of Veterans in Peace and Antimilitarist Movements

Wendy Barranco was born in south central Mexico in 1985. At the age of four, she migrated to the United States 'illegally'. She was then raised in Los Angeles, California, and at the age of 17, joined the United States Army. She was later deployed on so called 'Operation Iraqi Freedom' and honourably discharged upon her return home. While at college, she encountered Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) and has since served as a chapter president with them, organising events to raise awareness about the true cost of war, troops' right to heal, and GI resistance, as well as demanding an immediate end to the occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan. Elected to the organisation's board of directors, she has served as national chair. Today, she is an activist on womyn's rights, military sexual trauma, migrant rights, workers' rights, antimilitarism, and anti-imperialism. She writes about these here.

As a woman veteran, my three years of service in the United States Army as a combat medic and my deployment to Iraq is constantly questioned and met with faces of disbelief. It is no novelty that we, women, exist in patriarchal, misogynistic, and sexist societies, constantly 'surprising' individuals as to our capabilities for thousands of years. While we may not be properly valued, respected, and understood, we continue to play key roles in a variety of settings, including the peace and antimilitarist movements. While rich men wage war, we traditionally supply its lifeline of blood and bodies from our wombs. As the producers of the casualties of war in this way, women have often been a crucial and revolutionary factor in attaining peace for we often have the most to lose; many of us have skin in the game. Even if we do not have skin in the game however, we do have game changing insights about the sexist workings of the war machine. Without us, and without listening to us, the peace and antimilitarist movements will remain ignorant of these and be the weaker for it.

While those in activist communities are working for progressive change, there is no denying that there is still much room for growth, especially when it comes to women's equality. The reality is that many environments working for justice, progress, and change, lack a place for women as leaders and active participants. While there may be a handful of powerful women veterans speaking out against imperialism and its repercussions, we, as a global community, still lack awareness from our brothers in the movement. The lack of awareness and stems not only from our current society but also from the dynamics applied to and existing in the military service that carry over into the civilian sector: because the military is a male dominated institution, it follows that its counter movement will also be male dominated or at least male centric. It has been my experience that only the bravest and most fearless women enter these environments, and the majority of these do not escape unscathed.





For one, actively participating in anything political or controversial while in uniform or while otherwise in service is strictly forbidden by the Uniform Code of Military Justice and is subject to subsequent punishment by the military. Secondly, given the macho attitudes present in the military that are carried over to activist communities, women feel as if we are not valued and by extension, our opinions and experiences are not brought to light for fear that they are not up to par with those of our brothers. We are constantly made to feel out of place, as outliers, and overshadowed. There is also a lack of community because there are so few of us speaking out.

Thirdly, and most importantly, because of the systemic rape culture and violence which exist in the military, women fear for their safety. When veteran men enter the peace and antimilitarist movements, they carry with them the patriarchal and sexist notions taught to them and accepted by them in the military. In order to have a just, safe, and welcoming forum for women, our brothers must be taught the importance of women in the movement. They must leave their sexist and judgemental baggage at the door. For the peace and antimilitarist movements to succeed, men must educate themselves and others on the progressive ideas of equality, justice, and respect for their sisters. We cannot and will not be successful if our brothers do not leave their sexist ways behind them.

While we as women may be moved to tackle this problem, it is most often ineffective, frankly infuriating, and exhausting at times. A person who has survived harassment and/ or violence should not be made to recount her ordeals for the sake of educating a man. Not only is this not productive, but it is damaging and hurtful to the survivor. What is most effective is for an enlightened and educated brother in the community to teach, have trainings with new members and engage in conversations. It should be outlined and understood that this global community is a safe space and a code of conduct will be adhered to. Those not adhering to the concepts of mutual respect not only towards (cis) women but also trans, queer, lesbian and gay members should not be allowed to remain in the community for this endangers the lives of everyone participating. Sexual harassment, misogyny, violence and sexism will not be tolerated.

While our brothers may be beside us in the fight against imperialism, many have yet to connect the idea of war to patriarchy. The war of men is a war on women and humanity. All of the social justice movements in which we participate are inextricably connected and our brothers must realize this. While they walk around with male and white privilege and are blind to it, they must learn that their sisters encounter unjust struggles because of the views of their brothers. The war on women is not external but resides within every person who believes it is non-existent.

To gain an understanding as to why a woman veteran, or any veteran, would not actively participate in the peace and antimilitarist communities we must look at





the dynamics within a veteran. I have found that most veterans, deployed or not, will have some kind of mental health issue because of their service: the culture of violence, dehumanizing the enemy, and lack of concern for human life is indelibly marked in the soul of a soldier. Even when we no longer wear the uniform it is near impossible to break free from the brainwashing that took place early on in our military experience. As we move into the civilian sector, we must once again relearn what it is to be a 'normal' person. The first few years after exiting the military are the most tumultuous for a veteran as they struggle to find their feet. Personally, I grappled with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and its manifestation, depression. There were very dark moments. However, these did not come immediately after my deployment but rather appeared late within the first year and progressively worsened over time. I was lucky that I encountered members of Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW) at my college early on. Activism with my brothers and sisters became a sort of therapy. But this was not sustainable; I dedicated my free time and even that which wasn't to activism. My education and professional career were put on the back burner.

None of the veterans I know will ever ask for help. It has been ingrained in us



*A group of Iraq Veterans Against the War at the Oakland general strike in 2011
(credit: Drew Dellinger)*

that we are unbreakable; we have endured cold, hunger, pain. Additionally, most of us tend to immerse ourselves in what we do completely, there is no halfway. As such, we focus on our work and do not care for ourselves properly. In our community, we have lost many to suicide. Though we preach and practice a community of love, we can and will never understand the personal demons a





veteran faces when they lay their heads to sleep.

PTSD may manifest in other ways, and as a peace community we need to be aware of and educated about this. While I consider myself an activist, you will probably never find me on a march with thousands of people. Not only do crowds cause me anxiety but loud noises still cause alarm signals. As a community we must be sensitive to the fact that all our members have different experiences, needs, and capacities. We must not push veterans, or indeed anyone, into activities or situations they may not be ready for, as this may cause severe repercussions. There must be honest and open communication. Finally, there must be an understanding that self care is paramount and making resources available a top priority.

Secondly, it is obvious that war causes death and injuries. Veterans are no strangers to this. While mental wounds are not visible, physical ones are and those more often than not require extensive attention. While many injured veterans would like to get out on the streets and work for peace, the reality is that they are consumed with the task of staying alive and caring for themselves.

Thirdly, as a result of their mental and physical injuries and military experiences, veterans find themselves struggling to fit into civilian society after their service. The most menial of tasks can prove to be the most difficult. Veterans that are working to establish themselves and stay afloat will not likely have time to dedicate to activism. The tasks of obtaining a roof over our heads, food and water, and other life necessities, will most likely occupy the whole of a veteran's life. The city I reside in, Los Angeles, has the highest rate of homeless veterans and I can assure you that none of them will list activism as their top priority. For a veteran to sustainably be involved in the peace and antimilitarism communities, they must already be self sufficient and stable. This is a lot to ask when we are facing an epidemic of veterans living on the streets and taking their own lives in the US. The estimates that the Veterans Affairs department gives us, of 22 suicides a day, is conservative at best and frankly unreliable from an institution that keeps veterans waiting for access to health services and denies our benefits.

Finally, we must look at the composition of the military. In the civilian world, there are more or less equal numbers of men and women, but in the military, women make up a small minority. Of the US' active duty force only 14.5% are women and even fewer are in leadership positions. It is no wonder, then, that so few women veterans are found in the peace and antimilitarism movements.

Given the dynamics and barriers we face in getting veterans involved, we can now look at what they, specifically women veterans, bring to the peace community. First and most importantly, we bring our experiences. Because we fell prey to the imperialist beast and have lived within it, we are familiar with its ways of operating and what it takes to dismantle it. Further, we offer irrefutable evidence in our





experiences of the savagery that is war. When I speak with people and share my experiences, there is a palpable awakening among people. It is one thing to see war in the movies and on the news and it is quite another uncomfortable thing to see it personified and live.

Most of my experiences in activism have been preaching to the choir. However, some rebuttals to my presentations have been that my speech was 'too feminist', or too demonising of men. Unfortunately, too many men fail to connect the dots and find the bigger picture for themselves. The reality is that women have an understanding of structural oppression that is vital to understanding the systemic nature of imperialism that male veterans could never fully grasp on the deep level that women do, especially women of color like myself. Women can attest to the realities of dehumanization and the nature of the atrocities of structural imperialism through sexual violence against both US GIs and women victims in the Middle East and anywhere else there is a military presence. There is a continuum of global patriarchal violence that women are fighting.

Secondly, while we may find ourselves in a patriarchal society, let us not ignore the power that women have. Mothers, sisters and daughters are key to the functioning of societies globally. As women veterans, we can build threads of solidarity and work together with women in the Middle East, Africa, and elsewhere to build an equal and just life for women everywhere. In my travels, I have found that the struggles I face here in the United States are remarkably similar to those of women in Spain, France, or Mexico. The systems of oppression, violence, sexism, and racism abound globally. There are a vast number of examples of women organizing themselves and achieving their demands. Women should be taking the lead in the peace movement and their voices should be highlighted and magnified.

Because we have so few veterans speaking out against militarism and even fewer women veterans, we must cultivate a community of sustainability. It is not enough to work together in the struggle for peace, we must also care for each other genuinely. Our work will continue only as long as our members can. We must care for ourselves and each other. As such, we must not be afraid to take a step back and gather ourselves. The typical activist personality is one that takes on too much and then burns out. Once burned out, there will be no work done and an indeterminate amount of time passes before a veteran returns to the activist community, if they do so. While we are all participants in this movement, we must take care to cultivate replacements should we need to take a sabbatical. One of my regrets as president for the local chapter of IVAW was not training another leader. When I burned out and disappeared there was no one ready or willing to take my place. There is much work to be done, and it is likely it will not end in the near future. As such, we must care for ourselves and each other so that we may sustain our work for peace. With veterans this is most difficult, because of the personalities into which we have been conditioned and because most of us know only one speed and that is 100% all the time. The crux in our lives is exceeding our





capabilities and not asking for help. But we have to think about the peace movement as a whole and its sustainability in the long term.

Veterans face particular struggles in adjusting to civilian life. There is rampant homelessness that is not new to this generation of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans; the same is true of Vietnam veterans. Companies in the United States are less likely to hire veterans than non-veterans due to stigma, and in a struggling economy where employment opportunities are few this is a devastating blow. Further, the skills and experience that veterans obtain while serving in the military do not often translate to the civilian sector. I have yet to find a company looking to hire nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons specialists and infantrymen that does not involve returning to combat zones. The norm in most activist circles is to work without compensation, also known as volunteering. Not all organizations have the means to compensate those who work for them of course, but established institutions like universities and many churches do, and could afford to pay for a speech or lecture. This would make it possible for veterans to continue contributing to the peace and antimilitarist movements while providing a source of income for what is most likely an unemployed veteran at risk of homelessness, especially if she is a woman.

Our tendency as a society to victimize survivors of sexual trauma is one that must stop. This is detrimental to the survivor when they must constantly relive their trauma and be made to feel inferior to those around them. While a survivor may be willing to share their story, the pity that is shown and expressed by those present is not productive and has negative psychosocial effects on the survivor. We must remember and understand that the identity of the survivor is not solely and wholly one of victim. They are a composition of many parts, one of which is a survivor of sexual trauma. It has been my experience, when I tell of my military sexual traumas, that I am seen only in the light of the acts that happened. We do not need pity, or to be looked down upon, but rather seen as equals, and with empathy. My identity does not consist solely of victim, but of many parts of which survivor is one of many. We must cease as a community to parade and expose survivors to relieve the traumas and then subject them to being looked down upon. This practice plays into the patriarchal, sexist, and unequal notions of our society.

Finally, one of the major obstacles the peace and antimilitarism movements run into, unknowingly, is the perceived notion that we are anti-veteran or anti-soldier. While War Resisters' International (WRI) and associated organizations like Iraq Veterans Against the War are supportive of veterans and active duty servicemen and women personally, albeit not of what they are required to do and represent, the popular view of many in uniform is the complete opposite. The notion that the peace movement hates soldiers is prevalent on many American bases around the world. This notion is highly detrimental to the peace movement, because we cannot attract and welcome active duty soldiers or veterans who believe we are against them. One way to combat this is to make our message crystal clear; we





protest war and violence, the policies of the leaders who have sent you here, not 'Yankee go home!'. The popular action of marching to bases with banners and signs may seem efficient and productive in calling attention to a foreign military presence in a sovereign land, but this action is highly detrimental to the forces on the base. They naturally conclude that the peace movement is against them personally. An alternative might be to organise a march, protest, or sit in at the office or home of the politician who allowed for the base to exist.

The role of the veteran in the peace and antimilitarism movements is of vital importance for it contributes validity that cannot be disputed, knowledge of military institutions, and most importantly: experience from the belly of the beast. As important as these things are, however, what veteran activists we have must be treated with sensitivity, respect, and understanding because we face dynamics that our fellow activists do not. If we are to attract and retain productive and long lasting relationships with veterans we must take care to cultivate our environments so that they may be welcome and feel a part of the community. In the end, this may not only achieve out purpose of world peace, but it may also save the life of a veteran that would otherwise take their life.





Alternative Civilian Service

Total Objection and Alternative Service: a Finnish perspective

Kaj Raninen has been involved in the antimilitarist movement since the beginning of the 1990s. He is currently general secretary of the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors. Ruka Toivonen, meanwhile, is a Helsinki based transgender activist and student. They study queer theory, prison systems and social history, but value their experience in radical grassroots organising as their highest and most precious education. They have been involved in the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors for many years. Here, they discuss the relative strengths and weaknesses of conscientious objection campaigns that focus on total objection and alternative service.

Finland still has comprehensive conscription for men. Even though the number of people doing military service has declined and will most likely continue to do so, about two thirds of all men coming of age still go through military service (about 20,000 per year). Women have had the option of volunteering for the army since 1994, and a few hundred enrol each year. Approximately 7-8% of men choose an alternative, non-military service which is twice the length of the shortest period of military service (165 compared to 347 days) and the same length as the longest.

Until the 1980s, Finland's conscientious objection movement worked mostly on issues concerning alternative civilian service. Total objectors were either Jehovah's Witnesses or non-organised individual cases. The situation changed in the late 1980s, however. In 1987, Jehovah's Witnesses were exempted from conscription during peacetime, and the conviction hearing procedure for people applying for alternative civilian service was abolished, after which anyone who applied was automatically accepted. At the same time, however, the duration of alternative civilian service was extended from 12 to 16 months, and there was an attempt to 'militarise' the content of the service, tying it together with the idea of 'holistic national defence', which was at the time more prevalent than ever. Men doing non-military service were positioned at airports and fire departments, for example, which could be seen as linked to military defence.

The changing attitude of the state towards conscientious objectors lead to the radicalisation of the movement. The number of total objectors saw a rapid increase, from a handful to dozens per year, and became an essential part of the movement's work in the latter half of the 1980's – and has remained such ever since.

In many European countries, movements had previously been divided into groups and organisations working either on total objection or on alternative service.





As time passed, many organisations ceased to work on matters concerning alternative service, because they thought it was not meaningful from an antimilitarist perspective. There was little internal debate within the Finnish movement about whether alternative civilian service should be abandoned entirely as a form of conscientious objection, and even less talk of going back to focusing entirely on alternative civilian service. These discussions did not happen even when, as a consequence of the movement's radicalisation and new forms of action, the state passed a new and improved law on alternative service in 1992.

One of the reasons was a practical one: the number of total objectors stayed relatively low (it has never exceeded 100 annually), and it was thought that focusing only on this subject would be detrimental to the size of the movement. Another, more important factor was connected to the nature of the Finnish conscription system: military service has been seen as its only acceptable form. A large – albeit shrinking – majority of young men act in line with this expectation. In the late 1980s, almost 90% of conscripts went through military service, and a little over 65% still do so to this day. As the state's attitude towards any form of conscientious objection is negative, punitive, and aims at marginalising the phenomenon, alternative civilian service – at least according to experiences in Finland – has not completely lost its antimilitarist meaning. While not everyone going through civilian service has opposed state militarism, state militarism has opposed them.

Although alternative civilian service has been an important part of the movement, a dominant view in the Finnish conscientious objection movement, at least since the 1990s, that alternative civilian service represents an ineffective tool in the struggle against militarism, since it is fulfilling the function of conscription. Learning from the experiences of other countries' conscientious objection movements, Finnish antimilitarists have been aware of the state's ability to capitalise on alternative service, even before these kinds of state efforts became topical in Finland. In addition, a substantial number of people going through alternative civilian service do not consider their actions to be antimilitarist or even anti-war. Many are interested neither in the conscientious objection movement nor in participating in any other kinds of antimilitarist activities. Some emphasise that they chose civilian service for various 'practical reasons', not because they are opposed to conscription or militarism per se.

A few states in Europe (at least Germany and Austria) have succeeded in utilising alternative civilian service as a source of cheap labour and a tool for maintaining conscription, with the result that most people chose to do alternative service: in Germany, more people were opting for alternative rather than military, service by the time conscription was abolished. This appears to have been one of the foremost reasons why it took Germany years longer than most other western European countries to abolish conscription (2010) and why it is still in place in Austria. Indeed, Austria held a referendum on conscription in 2013: the Austrians





voted to keep conscription, possibly because they feared losing the work of conscripts completing alternative service.

The state's efforts to capitalise on alternative civilian service in Finland, instead of punishing people choosing it, has become topical very late in the day – basically during the current decade – and it is still not the prevailing approach. The Finnish government still refuses to implement an alternative service that would fulfil even the most basic human rights requirements in terms of length of service and supposed 'gender equality'. It would seem that the Finnish state is afraid that this would lead to an increase in the number of people doing alternative civilian service, even though, for state militarism, it would be a more desirable situation at the moment. It says a lot about the state's attitude that even with low numbers, there is a persistent shortage of places where people who want to complete civilian service can be stationed.

The opportunities to depoliticise and make use of alternative service have, however, not gone unnoticed within Finnish militarism, while there remains little debate inside the conscientious objection movement regarding giving up working around alternative civilian service. It is only the function of activities that has changed: the movement does not use alternative civilian service as a strategy for combating militarism, as much as it wants to prevent civilian service from being used as a means of militarising society and supporting conscription, in the event that lest it becomes a state strategy some day.

Technological 'advances' in warfare and the rising prices of weaponry have led the number of people serving in the military to decrease, as is shown in the numbers stated above – even from the militarist perspective, it is no longer feasible to provide military training to all men in every age group. And even if the amount of people doing alternative civilian service has not increased – it has been remarkably static since the mid 1990s at around 2,500 a year – the number of people exempted from conscription has increased rapidly. At the moment, about a quarter of men coming to conscription age do not complete any kind of service. Many conscripts seek suspensions until the age of 29, when they will no longer be called for service. Others get exemptions based on a wide and sometimes vague range of medical and psychiatric impediments. The fact that many conscripts choose to use these exit strategies because of their antimilitarist or state critical views, or just plain indifference, arguably undermines the legitimacy of the conscription system much more than if the same number of people chose alternative civilian service.

Another factor which shows the extent to which alternative service and total objection are interwoven in the Finnish conscientious objection movement is the inclusion in most major conscientious objection campaigns of both alternative service and total objection. Campaigning in the late 1980s and early 1990s included activities based on both total objection and alternative service, and its single most important event combined both: in the spring of 1990, people doing





alternative service went on strike while, at the same time, four total objectors went on a hunger strike. Both campaigns, based on alternative service and total objection, had the same objective: to improve the law governing alternative service. Indeed, for some, total objection was already a protest against the poor alternative service legislation.

The situation repeated itself at the end of the late 1990s and early 2000s, when the conscientious objection movement campaigned for a change in the outdated law on alternative service, put in place in 1992. Again, there were campaigns on alternative service, including work stoppages. Total objection campaigns also took place, the biggest of them revolving around a 'refugee case' where a total objector fled to Belgium and, living in exile for five years, managed to avoid being forcibly returned and serving his sentence. The joint objective of these campaigns was to improve the law on alternative service. This campaign again led to a partial victory when new and improved legislation was finally passed in 2008.

Of course, Finland has also seen campaigns based solely on total objection. In 1992-93, there was an attempt to create an anti-conscription total objector campaign inspired mostly by the Spanish *Insumisión* movement and perhaps partly by the 'Campaign to abolish conscription', a project that was ongoing in the Scandinavian countries. Total objection campaigns in the 2010s – and total objectors' rationale for their actions – have also steered away from demanding improvements to alternative service. But interwoven as they may be, campaigns on alternative service and total objection do differ from one another. Total objection campaigns typically concentrate on one individual or a handful of people going through the process of objecting. Indeed, this individual centred approach has been the only way of addressing this issue, since there have never been large groups of total objectors in Finland. Another common trait has been the active participation of total objectors in planning and implementing campaigns built around their objection.

The most important and visible campaigns focusing on alternative service have been work stoppages and strikes by people doing alternative service, which are activities that by definition are carried out by large numbers of people. The biggest work stoppage, in November 1998, saw seven hundred alternative servicemen going on strike for a day at their alternative service placements. It is also typical for participation levels among people in service to be lower than the total number of objectors in campaigns focusing on them. Events are usually organised by activists involved in the Finnish Union of Conscientious Objectors, and only a small proportion of participants have themselves been involved in planning the events. There might be practical reasons for this: it would be difficult for the movement to create and sustain a framework in which a couple of thousand people living across a vast country could participate in decision making and planning – even for those who would be interested. Because of this, it is thought that the only way of reaching people doing alternative service is through campaigns that concern them.





Also, the rationale behind acts of total objection and choosing alternative service differ. Most total objectors see their actions as a form of resistance, or at least protest, be it against faults in the alternative service system, conscription, the manner in which they are put in practice, militarism in general, or the power of the state as a whole. In the narrative of people doing alternative service, a term that often comes up is usefulness: they explain their actions in terms of how their free labour and service benefits other people, or society, or the state – and often themselves – more than military service would. Many of them do not even see themselves as objectors; they are merely choosing alternative service because, for them, it is simply a more reasonable thing to do.

In practice, this way of thinking has sometimes lead to calls for alternative service to be accepted as a legitimate national form of service on an equal footing with military service. This has in turn produced criticism of the conscientious objection movement. Some people doing alternative service think the movement's supposedly radical activities and work with total objectors 'stigmatise' alternative service and everyone who chooses it. They feel that radical claims are the reason why their honourable work for society does not receive the appreciation it deserves. It has certainly not always received appreciation, but as we see it, the real reason is not the conscientious objection movement's methods, but rather the normalisation of men's conscription in Finland, not least through the militarisation of youth and masculinity.

Of course, there are differences within conscientious objection groups as well: personal reasons for total objection vary, and some people doing alternative service criticise the state's power or militarism in general by opting for conscientious objection. There are also differences between conscientious objectors' motives and the societal impact of different methods of objection. Based on these differences, it can be concluded that in the context of the Finnish system, alternative service represents a substitute for military service, whereas total objection represents protest.

One interpretation is that like many others, the Finnish conscientious objection movement has adopted a strategy based on individual objectors. Does this, then, mean creating alternative masculine hero myths that mirror the concept of militaristic heroism? It is at least a potential threat. In the narratives built around some total objectors on hunger strike, there is a sense of creating a certain kind of heroism: martyrdom. On the other hand, neither martyrdom nor 'anti-war heroism' have become dominant narratives in the campaigns or stories of Finnish total objectors. Instead, in the last decades, total objection campaigns have revolved around the absurdity of the justice system, the day-to-day coping of conscientious objectors and, in one case, around the exile of one objector.

Nowadays in the Finnish conscientious objection movement, the significance of





gender analysis is recognised, especially in studying militarism and analysing the movements' activities and structures, and it has perhaps been used to some degree in analysing the methods of the Union's activities. However, there has never been an effort to analyse total objection or alternative service campaigns from that perspective. From this, we can at least conclude that the subject of gender analysis has so far not been considered a priority.

What is there to say about the differences between alternative service and total objection? The kind of 'resistance machismo' that fortifies men's agency at the expense of other genders' surely does not advance antimilitarist goals, and yet the fear of giving in to masculine hero myths should not drive us to the conclusion that alternative service represents a more antimilitarist, gender sensitive or feminist option than total objection.

Militarist structures are ultimately based on the dichotomy between the protector and the protected, where white (heterosexual) men are perceived as the protectors of women, especially women of colour: this is particularly evident in the current Islamophobic narratives of Western militaries as the protectors of Muslim women and sometimes also sexual minorities. The same dichotomy is projected

onto values and attitudes in alternative surroundings and works as a cornerstone of the nation state. In this way, militarism and gender hierarchies support and reproduce one another. It is important to remember, however, that Finnish militarised masculinity comes back not only to gender, but to nationalism and whiteness. Thus, active conscientious objection and campaigning against shutting the borders on 'outsiders' are a vital part of the struggle against both militarism and gender hierarchies.



A conscientious objector leads an antimilitarist protest carrying a flag with WRI's broken rifle emblem

Here lies the weakness of the Finnish non-military service from an antimilitarist perspective: its role as an 'alternative service' legitimises the current system rather than shattering its foundations. It is true that the stereotypes sometimes attached to men going through alternative service, from 'sissy boys' to workfearing, peaceloving hippies, do





not represent the hegemonic model of masculinity of which militarism and patriotism are an inseparable part. Nonetheless, it would be hasty to think that alternative service would be effective at breaking gender roles and inequality in contemporary Finnish society. Those going through alternative service are a mixed bunch and some of them demand a higher degree of appreciation for their service, sometimes unfortunately reproducing gender hierarchies in doing so. Since nowadays they do not represent a legitimate threat to the conscription system so much as prolong its lifespan, their peaceful work for the common good does not exactly dismantle militaristic structures.

Alternative service is, by law, work done for nonprofit organisations and the public sector, for example in schools, hospitals and nursing homes. In practice, the state furthers the racial and gender segregation of labour much more efficiently outside of alternative service. This service is done in a relatively broad range of assignments within organisations, institutions and government agencies, whereas immigrants, for example, are automatically directed to low wage caring jobs for the rest of their lives: generally speaking, the 'common good' professions of the public sector are highly segregated in Finland. Whether doing this kind of low wage work with almost no compensation is more feminist than going to jail, just because the person is a man, remains questionable.

Sometimes, though fortunately only on occasion, women participating in campaigns have had to face being undermined, mostly by men doing alternative service whose rights the campaign has been working to improve. Sometimes this has been in the form of a well meaning inquiry ('what got you, as a woman, into this kind of activism?'), but at its worst in the form of aggressive questions ('this doesn't concern you, how is this any of your business?'). As a highly gendered institution, conscription seems to lead easily into tendencies that exclude people who are not subject to it, also from activities concerning conscientious objection and at worst all antimilitarist activities. Thus, becoming active in conscientious objection campaigns may be easier for men who are affected in a more direct way by conscription.

The gender context of the Finnish military institution creates particular challenges for antimilitarism in terms of gender issues. Conscription applies only to cis men, that is, men who were called boys from when they were born (the Finnish Defence Forces disregard trans people's gender identities by exempting trans men from conscription regardless of their own will). People exempted from conscription due to their gender can, however, participate as planners and organisers in the conscientious objection movement, though in the face of the kind of put downs mentioned above. Their role in putting a campaign into action is basically the same in campaigns both for alternative service and total objection.

Conscientious objection is fundamentally a reactive form of action: the state sets the rules of the game, and it reserves the right to change them at any time, for





example by determining whether the prevailing attitude is to punish conscientious objectors and marginalise them, or to utilise them as a valuable source of alternative service personnel. As an antimilitarist strategy, conscientious objection can affect the way in which the state is able to manipulate the rules and, at best, force it to burn the whole stadium down and come up with an entirely new militaristic game in the post-conscription society (as in Spain – see chapter 20). But outside of this game, conscientious objection has very limited capabilities as a tool: campaigns on non-military service face this problem perhaps more acutely, but it is also one which total objection campaigns have to confront, at the latest when militarism no longer needs comprehensive conscription.

An interesting point to note is that the predominant line of thought in the Finnish conscientious objection movement has long been that conscientious objection in isolation is not a sufficient basis for antimilitarist activities, and nowadays the movement concentrates on many other issues that are relevant to antimilitarism. A broader societal analysis of militarism and its destructive impacts forces one to look beyond one gender also on the issue of conscientious objection.

Translated from Finnish by Tuukka Toro





Campaigning for Alternative Service in Russia

Alena Karaliova is a human rights lawyer. In 2012, she started working on the protection of the rights of conscripts, both those doing military service and those doing alternative civilian service. Her main spheres of activity are in providing legal and assistance; carrying out legal and comparative analysis of regulatory legal acts relating to conscription, military service and alternative service; and interacting with international human rights organisations. Writing here, she gives us an overview of the campaign for alternative service in Russia.

In Russia: men from the age of 18 to 27 are subject to conscription if they are considered to be in 'good health'. This lasts for one year, with only one day off per week and no vacation. Usually, only a third of all men of conscription age are actually conscripted (a third cannot serve due to bad health and a third are not conscripted at all because there is no need).



Young people at a youth activists' meeting co-organised by Citizen.Army.Law on 21st September (International Day of Peace) 2012 (credit: European Bureau for Conscientious Objection)

The human rights group 'Citizen. Army. Law' is an organisation that aims to protect the human rights of military servicemen, conscripts, and alternative civilian servicemen in Russia. It was established in May 2010 by the leaders of 'Citizens and the Army', a network community of Russian human rights organisations which, since 2001, has been working to support the development of a democratic, civil alternative to military service, and which, since 2003, has been implementing all-Russian monitoring of human rights violations during the process of

military conscription and military service.

It is our view that it would be much harder to campaign for total objection than alternative civilian service in Russia. Currently, even alternative civilian service is often considered by military officials and the public to be a threat to national security. Total objection would be interpreted as an even greater threat, and there would be very high level of resistance from military command and the public alike.

In our campaigning for alternative civilian service, we place a big emphasis on the public benefit and utility of that service. This is also consistent with our





organisation's broader aim to assist in the creation of a developed civil society in Russia, which, alongside a democratic state and the proper rule of law, we hope would make a return to totalitarianism impossible. However, for this aim to be truly realised, people of all genders, and not just men, would of course need to participate. Focusing only on those who are conscripted may therefore be a limitation of our model, although it is a model which women are active participants in promoting.

The biggest obstacle facing our organisation and partners in the way of we campaigns for conscientious objection is the negative public image of alternative civilian service in Russia. There are a lot of myths concerning it, for example that it is not for 'real men', or that it exists only for representatives of 'marginal' religious groups. In conducting our project we hold educational and awareness raising campaigns to overcome such attitudes. However, our efforts are dwarfed by the militarism of Russian society, which has become increasingly evident over recent years. This is a new challenge to us, but one that is connected with the old challenge of changing ideas about what makes a real man: militarism, after all, is an expression of that model of masculinity in which dominance and the capacity to wreak violence are prized.

Another obstacle is the reluctance of military draft officers to provide citizens with alternative civilian service placements. Every year, state run entities request more than 5,000 alternative servicemen to fill various jobs, but the total number of alternative civil servicemen available does not exceed 1,000 per year. Notwithstanding this fact, we seek to address arbitrary and abusive acts by conscription or 'draft' committee officers and draft boards, such as unfounded rejections of applications, unlawful denials of requests for alternative civilian service placements, and attacks on conscientious objectors' dignity. It is, however, possible to legally overcome this obstacle via the representation of conscientious objectors at military draft committees and by filing claims of unlawful decisions by officers.

The final obstacle is the complete lack of government policy to promote alternative civilian service and corresponding lack of state funding for such promotion. Information about alternative civilian service is not to be found at the majority of military registration and enlistment offices, and nor is it accessible for young men at schools either, because the government does not provide dedicated lessons or visual manuals.

Given our situation, then, education and awareness raising, both about the possibility of alternative civilian service and the positive reasons for undertaking it, remain our priorities in the Russian conscientious objection movement.





Alternative Service and the Danger of Depoliticisation

Andreas Speck¹

Conscientious objection to military service is a political act against militarism. It is a tool available to the antimilitarist movement – and to the individual – in the political struggle against war and militarism and for disarmament and the creation of a more peaceful and just society. Or at least that is how many politically active conscientious objectors and War Resisters' International (WRI) see it. In this light, the act of conscientious objection is inherently political – an expression of opposition or even resistance to militarism. However, experience shows that it does not have to be that way. This article looks at the example of Germany to highlight the dangers of turning conscientious objection to military service from a political act into a question of personal service preference, void of political content and relevance.

Conscientious objection in (West) Germany: a synopsis

While between 1949 and 1990 there were two German states – one belonging to the Soviet bloc (the German Democratic Republic), and one belonging to 'The West' and NATO (the Federal Republic of Germany) – it was western Germany that basically took over the eastern German state in what is called the 'reunification' of Germany, and it was the western German legal, political and economic system that prevailed. Therefore, it seems warranted to disregard the specifics of the east German conscientious objection experience pre-reunification in this brief synopsis – an experience very different from the western one, but as unified Germany was built on the western model, the eastern experience is of less political relevance.

West Germany got the right to conscientious objection as a consequence of the second world war – even before it got its armed forces (*Bundeswehr*). That right was enshrined in Article 4, paragraph 3 of the West German constitution of 1949. However, it only became relevant with West German rearmament in 1955 and the reintroduction of conscription in 1956. Before then – given the absence of German armed forces – it was merely a symbolic statement within the constitution.

A working paper by the Social Science Institute of the German *Bundeswehr* of 1994 distinguishes between distinct phases of conscientious objection,² which make sense to me:

1956-1965: social deviance: numbers of conscientious objectors are low, and conscientious objectors are seen as exceptions, and 'socially deviant'. The majority of conscientious objectors at that time come from religious groups, with some political pacifists thrown in. None of them were taken very seriously politically, and initially they were simply exempted from military service. Only in 1960 was a law





introducing a substitute service passed.

1966-1968: protagonists of a conscientious objection movement: the numbers of conscientious objectors double in just a few years. More importantly, conscientious objection becomes politicised alongside the student movement and the movement against the 'emergency laws' passed in 1968, which allow the use of the German armed forces in internal political conflicts.

1969-1976: diffusion of CO: the number of conscientious objectors doubles again. The state attempts to make 'constructive use' of conscientious objectors in substitute service, while at the same time increasing repression: the recognition rate drops dramatically from about 70% to between 40 and 50% (higher on appeal). From the mid 1970s on, the huge numbers of unrecognised objectors bring out new actors in support of conscientious objection – especially churches and human rights organisations.

1977-1983: stabilisation of conscientious objection as a social phenomenon: the numbers continue to increase slightly, but the main aspect is stabilisation. The first attempt to get rid of the inquisitive hearing for conscientious objectors was made in 1977, when the then social democrat led government introduces recognition by postcard. However, this was scrapped by the constitutional court. Six years later, the then conservative led government passed a law replacing the inquisitive hearing with an administrative procedure for most objectors, while at the same time extending the length of substitute service compared to military service. The legislation comes into force in 1984.

After 1984: conscientious objection as mass phenomenon of social normality: after 1984, the numbers of objectors continue to rise and stabilise at a level of more than 100,000 objectors annually. 'During this time, the image the population had of conscientious objectors shifted: objectors were increasingly seen as persons performing a civilian service, something which the older generations also accepted. This in turn had an impact on those subject to conscription: by now, a majority of those who reach conscription age consider objection – or performing civilian service. For this group, civilian service is no longer a substitute service, but an equally valid alternative to military service'.³

This did not change until conscription was finally suspended in 2011.

This could have been a success story – but it wasn't. With the increase in numbers, conscientious objection in Germany lost any political relevance. Not only did Germany not abolish conscription until 2011 (one of the very last states in the European Union to do so – a few are still holding onto it), but the phase of conscientious objection as a mass phenomenon was also accompanied – at least from 1990 – by an increased militarisation of German society and the increased use of the German armed forces in military operations – something which had been





unimaginable, and prohibited by the then prevailing interpretation of the German constitution, until the mid-1980s. The German military's involvement in the war against Yugoslavia in 1999 – the country's first participation in a war since 1945 – was a first and important milestone in this development.

So what went wrong here?

Promoting substitute service as a positive alternative: who cares about antimilitarism?

Räder gives an important hint in his paper: there was a shift of perception in society from the mid-1980s on. People began to see and value conscientious objectors first and foremost as 'Zivildienstleistende' (persons performing a civilian service), thus as providing important social services. The reason why they performed this service – their objection to military service – was not part of public consciousness and played an ever diminishing role in the consciousness of the conscientious objectors themselves, who merely saw their decision as a choice between two options. This did not happen of its own accord, but was the consequence of interactions between tactical decisions by the mainstream conscientious objection movement organisations and government policy, which both contributed to this depoliticisation of conscientious objection as a political act and of many conscientious objectors as individuals.

The organised conscientious objection movement responded to the increased repression seen in the mid-1970s with different strategies:

- A small minority took radical antimilitarist positions, and it was at the same time that total objection appeared as a political response – albeit on a very small scale.
- Larger organisations such as the DFG-VK (Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft – Vereinigte Kriegsdienstgegner/innen: German Peace Society – United War Resisters) began to organise counselling on a large scale to help objectors master the application process.
- Similarly, the churches, which got more involved from the mid 1970s on, organised counselling for objectors, while at the same time highlighting the positive contributions of objectors in public. This was taken on board by many social democratic peace organisations.

The last two strategies – the ones with much stronger organisational backing – individualised and depoliticised conscientious objection, not necessarily consciously. Far from seeing conscientious objection as a collective antimilitarist action, these strategies were based on an understanding of conscientious objection as a symbolic appeal of the individual conscience against military action. The radical minority of antimilitarists and total objectors received little support from the mainstream, who not only saw substitute service as a legitimate imposition by the





state, but highlighted its positive contributions to social services in their lobbying efforts.

When in 1983 the then conservative led government got rid of the inquisitive hearing for conscientious objectors and replaced it with a purely administrative application procedure combined with a substitute service of punitive length, the mainstream movement feared a renewed increase of repression (this author included). However, in retrospect, it can be said that the government might have been clever than we thought: doing away with the inquisitive hearing did away at the same time away with one of the last visible repressive element of the application procedure, thus furthering the process of depoliticisation.

By the time conscription, and with it substitute service, were suspended in Germany, conscientious objection had completely disappeared as a political issue, in spite of more than 100,000 objectors annually, and the debate was about the problem of replacing 100,000 persons providing cheap labour to maintain social services. If anything, the high numbers of objectors in Germany delayed the suspension of conscription, if it had any relevance at all in the decision.

Other shortcomings of the conscientious objection movement: the omission of gender

There are other aspects where I think the conscientious objection movement – in this case all of its tendencies – failed to get the balance right. Even though 'Rambo style' extreme masculinity was almost entirely ridiculed not just in the conscientious objection movement, but in the broader peace movement and the 'alternative scene', which were culturally hegemonic in many areas, this did not extend to a gender analysis of militarism or military service. However, this lack of political analysis does not mean that gender did not play a role when it came to the issue of conscientious objection.

As German researcher Hanne-Margret Birkenbach pointed out: 'Under the guise of "no to killing vs yes to killing for the purpose of defence", conscientious objectors and those willing to perform military service argue not only about military violence, but also – without being aware of this – about ideals of masculinity'.⁴ This is a clear hint that issues of gender, masculinity and patriarchy are very relevant, and it can be asked whether a more gender aware political approach could have increased the political influence of the movement.

Those then performing substitute service did this mostly in areas usually considered 'feminine': caring for the ill, people with disabilities, and the elderly. In this sense, while conscientious objection did not prevent Germany from becoming a global military actor again after reunification, it might have contributed to a slight shift in gender relations – possibly temporary and far from reaching the foundations of patriarchy. A challenge for movements in other countries could be: how do you





get both – demilitarisation and a shift in gender relations?

Could it have been different?

It is always difficult to provide answers to this question decades later. But could the German movement have made different strategic choices, which would have prevented or minimised the depoliticising tendencies?

To some extent, depoliticisation is a consequence of almost any movement that gains mass support. Initially, it will always be mostly a core of very committed and politicised activists who form the movement. But when the movement gains mass appeal – and even cultural and/or political hegemony – people will join and take action just because it is what you do. This is part of what happened in Germany.

However, on the other hand, the movement – or the main tendencies of it – did little to educate its grassroots or to promote antimilitarist perspectives and the need for a collective response. The focus of counselling was mostly on helping individuals – as individuals – with the application process. It did not attempt to create collective responses, nor did it seek to empower individuals seeking counselling. The response to discrimination against conscientious objectors through an inquisitorial application procedure was individualising, rather than a political and collective one.

Other responses focusing on a collective response and the collective empowerment of conscientious objectors are conceivable. However, it is doubtful that the main conscientious objection organisations at the time would have been able – or even willing – to implement them, given their political or philosophical background. It would have required new organisations, or at least different organisations to take the lead. The German example is certainly extreme, and there are certainly differing interpretations. Nevertheless, it had an impact in other countries. In Spain, the conscientious objection movement carefully studied the German example and, to avoid its mistakes, they decided to opt for collective declarations and for total objection.

In other western European countries such as the Netherlands and many Scandinavian countries, we can observe a similar depoliticisation of conscientious objection, obviously with local differences (total objection in Finland comes to mind – see the relevant chapter in this book). After the fall of the Berlin Wall, the German approach was also adopted in some eastern European countries, where the 'right to alternative service' (which does not exist in international law – a right to a duty) was introduced often in the absence of a conscientious objection movement and as part of a general human rights agenda.

Conclusions





Conscientious objection to military service has huge political potential within antimilitarist movements. However, whether this potential can come to fruition depends on the strategies adopted by the movement. The German example is one that shows how this potential – initially visible from the mid 1960s on – can be sidelined and diminished such that the act itself becomes completely depoliticised.

The strategic issues relate to a difficult balancing act between the needs and demands of the individuals who face military service and want to object – which is necessarily an individual decision at first – and the need for collective decisions as an antimilitarist movement. While no collective should (or can) make decisions which overrule the decisions of the individuals involved, the focus of the German movement on 'helping individuals' and its lack of understanding of conscientious objection as a political act and a political movement clearly failed to get this balancing act right. The political impact of the movement – in terms of antimilitarism – was therefore almost zero.

1. For background information on this author, see his previous chapter (The Impact of International Mechanisms in Local Cases: the example of Colombia).
2. Räder, Hans-Georg 1994, Kriegsdienstverweigerung im neuen Deutschland. Eine empirische Bestandsaufnahme [SOWI working paper], (Munich: SOWI).
3. Räder 1994.
4. Birckenbach, Hanne-Margret 1986, 'Das ambivalente Verhältnis zur Gewalt. Psychosoziale Grundlagen militärischer Kampfausbildung', in Antimilitarismus information, no 7/1986.





After Conscription

Alternativa Antimilitarista *Movimiento Objeción de Conciencia* (AA.MOC or Antimilitarist Alternative Conscientious Objection Movement) are a Spanish movement which arose out of the Spanish experience of conscription and resistance in the form of *Insumisión*, loosely translatable as insubordination or disobedience. Members have written about the transition to the post-conscription era in Spain, and the challenges faced by antimilitarists in this transition.

'The past can't be accessed by merely remembering: it must be constructed, and this is a collective task. Our interpretations of the events through which we live will construct their history.'

Ana M. Fernández

For Alternativa Antimilitarista.MOC (AA.MOC), writing about the terrain which opened up before us after conscription means analysing the Spanish *Insumisión* campaign – the campaign of civil disobedience and total objection to military service – and stirring up many diverse experiences, emotions, sorrows and joys.

This text, therefore, is but a sample of the many, complex facets of our analysis, an attempt to combine our many differing perspectives.

***Insumisión* and Conscientious Objection in Numbers**

Civil disobedience to compulsory military service, known colloquially as 'the mili', began in the seventies, with many groups of conscientious objectors refusing to take part in this 'service'. After many years spent in a kind of legal vacuum, during which an antimilitarist movement was developed, this movement found concrete manifestation in the declarations of 57 objectors, or 'refusers', on the 20th of February 1989. Thus, the *Insumisión* campaign was born.

Ten refusers were arrested for these declarations. It was in this year that the first two court martials for such declarations took place in Barcelona, and two refusers were sentenced to thirteen months in prison. As of 1991, refusers' cases were tried in civil courts. The military penal code fixed the minimum penalty for refusal at one year's imprisonment, the civilian penal code established the so called '2-4-1': a sentence of two years, four months, and one day of imprisonment.

Between 1989 and 1999, the number of refusers grew from 371 to around twenty thousand. It is likely that the total figures are in fact even greater, as from 1993, there was an extremely high number of refusers who ceased to organise with *Movimiento de Conciencia* (MOC), and either coordinated with other organisations, or simply became refusers via the act of refusal itself: by not presenting for duty





either in the form of military service nor the civilian alternative.

In 1992, 127 refusers were tried, in the first quarter of the following year, there were 108 such trials. During these years, the fact that the sentences passed on refusers were completely unpredictable, despite the 'crime' being always the same – a situation which we called 'the sentence lottery' – began to make it obvious that there were profound contradictions and tensions within the judiciary itself and it was not uncommon for judges to refuse to imprison youths for not turning up to military service or the civilian alternative.

Conscientious objection applications increased exponentially from 12,170 in 1985 to 113,000 in 2000. The peak was reached in 1999 with 164,000 applications. If we look at the number of young people who completed military service and those who declared themselves objectors, we can see that the number of objectors went from 1.85% of the number of young people completing the service in 1985, to 112% of that number in 2000. According to Ministry of Justice sources, by the end of 2000 there were 945,195 recognised objectors and 940,000 others with different but recognised grounds for not presenting for military service nor the civilian alternative.

The new Penal Code, approved in 1995, made repression more subtle and perhaps more effective. Sentences of 'absolute disqualification', known as 'civil death', were introduced: these made it impossible to work for civil service, make contracts with the public sector, or receive scholarships for a period of between 8 and 14 years. These sentences could be accompanied by fines of up to 35 million pesetas (more than 200,000€). This new form of repression opened new routes of disobedience once more, with government departments and public education centres refusing to execute the sentences and keeping on employees and scholars affected by them regardless.

The final stage in this cycle of *Insumisión* was called '*Insumisión* in the barracks' – desertion from barracks once enlisted. This campaign was started in 1997 and entailed returning to military jurisdiction. Refusers' cases were tried at court martial once more, in various military locations across the country, and – something which made the repression of the campaign much harder to bear – 2-4-1 sentences were brought back in, to be spent in the military detention centre at Alcalá de Henares, Madrid.

Imprisonment, which was in principle meant to be the government's main dissuasive weapon to put a stop to *Insumisión*'s development, in fact became a political weapon for the campaign. The impact of imprisonment was important for many refusers and for their loved ones. A significant portion of Spanish society at that time could not comprehend that refusal of military service could be considered a crime, and the government's position became ever more untenable, the only response to the civil disobedience of *Insumisión* which it knew being more





repression. In order to minimise the personal cost of *Insumisión* to those undertaking it, the campaign established mechanisms of protection and resistance and organised entertainments and workshops before trials and when refusers went to prison.

Hundreds of refusers were incarcerated in the prisons of the whole Spanish territory. They carried out hunger strikes and, in 1994, those sentenced to imprisonment 'in the third degree' – meaning they only had to spend the nights in prison – violated the terms of their imprisonment by sleeping in the doorways of their prisons. In 1996, the highest ever number of imprisoned refusers was reached: 348. Writing this, the eternal 'liberty, imprisoned refusers' springs to mind, a chant which was repeated at protests and actions and which used to decorate a fair number of building façades in towns and villages across Spain. In 1998, there were still 70 imprisoned refusers.

The Loving Social Fabric that Sustained the Refusers

Did the *Insumisión* campaign only involve young men? At the individual level, this is how it was, given that only men had to complete military service, but these men were surrounded by political groups and friendship groups which supported their decision. It is also worth noting the group of MOC women who, in 1984, launched the 'Don't Count On Us' campaign in response to the incorporation women into the armed forces.

In some groups, most members were women, who often had a personal connection as mothers, girlfriends, partners, or friends of the refuser, or a double connection, both personal and political. Though of course the personal is political in feminist theory, it is still possible to try and differentiate between the distinct relationships among support groups in this way. On some occasions, the feminist movement objected to the role of women within the political project of *Insumisión*, where they took on caring and support work, had a back seat in the public sphere, and scant visibility in comparison to the masculine figure of the refuser.

Other groups, however, were comprised of men who were either too young for military service, or had already completed it, or were exempt for other reasons. These men wanted to be involved in the *Insumisión* struggle against militarism, and participation in support groups was their means of being so.

What should be highlighted here is that *Insumisión* became something more than a personal stance of civil disobedience. A young man's decision not to carry out compulsory military service for political reasons would mean that a space was created in which women and men, whether or not they were personally threatened with conscription, could develop their own antimilitarist struggle while providing personal and political support to the person on whom the system made the whole weight of repression fall. Support groups would accuse themselves alongside the





refuser during trials, which also extended the civil disobedience of *Insumisión* to the entire social network around him.

Strong networks of solidarity were woven around *Insumisión*. These networks comprised members of the most diverse sectors of society: the ecological and feminist movements, occupation groups, neighbourhood associations, Christian Base communities (associated with liberation theology), internationalists, the alternative media, students, the unemployed, and many more.

The refusers' support groups, and the Association of Conscientious Objectors and Refusers' Mothers, Fathers and Friends, were especially strong. These close knit groups tried to reduce the impact of repression and imprisonment on imprisoned refusers and their environment. They organised prison visits and for prisoners to be greeted on their release, as well as activities for prisoners on weekend leave. They also reported everything related to *Insumisión* to the press. These groups carried out the work not only of emotional support for the refusers but also communicated what was entailed by disobeying the compulsory military service law to the public and what it meant for society as a whole to have these new political prisoners. They made many dream the dream of a world without militaries. Following the premise of civil disobedience, they took advantage of this moment of repression to question military spending, the patriarchy of the military institution, and the racist and xenophobic values of the army, as well as to raise the issue of the militarisation of society. The media take up of their message was very important.

The demonstrations in front of prisons, the press releases, organising the prison visits, setting up camp outside the prisons, the letters and postcards of support to prisoners we didn't even know, all these things live on in memory, as do the worry about whether the prisoners were OK, the tenderness as we pictured their faces, the sadness at not being able to give them a hug during prison visits because they were being sanctioned for non-cooperation, their political commitment, how they used to fight...

What did the *Insumisión* movement bring to other political groups and to society as a whole?

Refusers were not only committed to the struggle against compulsory military service, at least in MOC. Many were already involved in other resistance movements before becoming refusers: these included Coordinadora de Barrios – an anti-social exclusion collective – 'Base Churches' – associated with liberation theology – and occupied social centres, among others.

The *Insumisión* movement 'contaminated' these other movements with the practice of basing political action in both a personal and a collective commitment, using civil disobedience as a political tool of social transformation, and assuming





the consequences of disobedient action to the last extreme, which for many meant imprisonment. Nonviolent direct action permeated other groups' mode of political action: they chose it as a tool of struggle then and still use it in this way now.

During the *Insumisión* campaign, the enormous amount of work entailed by the problem of imprisonments meant that MOC groups always had urgent matters at hand, which limited the extent to which they could actively support other struggles. But when conscription was abolished, a large number of activists who had developed their politics within the antimilitarist movement became involved with other movements. Some returned to the struggles which had occupied them before they were confronted with compulsory military service, and others joined struggles they had encountered via antimilitarist mobilisations. These activists took with them the important legacy of horizontalism, an assembly based model of organising, and a capacity for civil disobedience – as well as antimilitarism of course – which pollinated the new struggles they launched and the manner of organising in the new collectives which they joined.

In addition, while they were imprisoned, the refusers and their support groups and lawyers helped many other prisoners against whom 'irregularities' were committed, assisting them to appeal their sentences and denouncing prison conditions in Spain.

What did the end of conscription mean for MOC?

After the 'hangover' which followed the end of the *Insumisión* campaign as a political strategy, MOC suffered a crisis and went through a low point, not only in terms of the number of people who were involved, but also in its political prominence in the media and social movements and so on.

This crisis was in part due to the fact that young people no longer had to complete compulsory military service and so the movement ceased to be as youthful: many of us had been students, without family obligations, and now we were in our thirties, with other projects to develop, other needs.

Another important reason was burnout. We had been involved in a long campaign with serious personal implications, both for the refusers who went to prison or suffered 'civil death', and for their support groups and families.

In addition to the political context, the Spanish state itself was also changing. The army ceased to interest many people now that it was a professional as opposed to conscripted institution: the army was no longer on the political agenda and it went through a makeover – it 'modernised' – so that a significant portion of the population started to see the army as a 'lesser evil', or as an inevitability against which it would be pointless to continue fighting.





MOC's other campaigns – peace education and war tax resistance – also weakened during this time.

A process of reflection and dialogue was begun during the first half of 2001 however, which culminated, at the end of 2002, in the 3rd congress of the organisation now called Alternativa Antimilitarista.MOC (MOC.Antimilitarist Alternative), out of which came the same organisation's third ideological



Members of AA.MOC hold banners reading 'cut the military' at the naval base in Las Palmas

declaration.

Without the urgency of the daily work of Insumisión, we now had an opportune moment to take stock, to see what kind of state our groups were in and what were the common visions about antimilitarism, nonviolence, civil disobedience, coordination and so on which would allow us to continue participating in the new 'post-Insumisión' era. The results of the process of reflection and dialogue were campaigns such as 'Disobey War', or the 'Cut the Military' campaign of 2014. We seem still to be looking for the issue that can be our cause célèbre and bring us back into the public eye however, though some don't believe that we will be able to find such a cause, considering the level of media attention which Insumisión attracted.

In addition to the two campaigns mentioned – 'Disobey War' and 'Cut the Military' – AA.MOC groups have dedicated much time over the past ten years to nonviolent direct action and civil disobedience workshops, and have coordinated with other groups of a 'disobedient' nature for specific campaigns such as the





weeks of action going under the banner of 'Break the Silence' in Madrid. Also worth mentioning are the protests against military bases in which AA.MOC have participated with affiliates of the European Antimilitarist Network and War Resisters' International (WRI), including actions organised with these groups against NATO bases in Spain.

We also continue to work together with some of the groups with whom we cooperated during the Insumisión campaign: there continue to be links with Ecologistas en Acción in nearly every AA.MOC group, for example, though they are not as close as they used to be.

What with the recent passage of the 'Mordaza Law' – which clamps down on the right to protest – and the reform of the penal code, we participate actively in the struggle against social criminalisation in Spain, sharing platforms with those who will let us at least try to tinge the conversation with our antimilitarist discourse, while at the same time promoting the use of civil disobedience as an invaluable weapon of protest. Some AA.MOC groups also take part in struggles against social exclusion, and we maintain firm links with Women in Black, with many women in AA.MOC sharing their antimilitarist time between both organisations.

The average age of AA.MOC members has increased – we are mainly in our thirties and forties – and the membership has also become more balanced in terms of gender. There are fewer groups: seven in total, each with very different memberships of between 3 and 15 people. There remain very few who are actively involved in AA.MOC's work: some 15 or 20 in the whole country. We are aware, however, that many of our old membership are involved in other other groups and movements which are confronting injustice and with which we are in clear sympathy, though their struggles cannot be called classically antimilitarist.

To the best of its ability, MOC worked hard on other issues during the Insumisión campaign, issues which were not given the same level of media attention as Insumisión itself, with its imprisonments and so on. Peace Education and War Tax Resistance were and continue to be two areas of work which are very important to AA.MOC and which bring together many people who were not as involved in the Insumisión campaign. This work has been collective, quiet, less visible, but nonetheless a solid means by which we have been able to continue our antimilitarism. It also, with hindsight, facilitated our passage into the 'post-Insumisión' era. In fact, war tax resistance remains an AA.MOC campaign to this day (see chapter 29), and continues to bring together other social movements as well as some trade unions.

Challenges for the Future

It is difficult to offer practical advice in this chapter, as though we were offering up our grandmother's favourite recipe. We are not offering a recipe, but we can





make some general reflections:

- The future – which is already upon us in our case – feels, to say the least, a bit disconcerting after such a powerful and personal struggle. In our small group analyses, we have often asked ourselves what happened to the many young refusers with whom we worked, why the struggle against militarism is such a minor one in Spain today, and why so many activists have cast their lot with other struggles. What has happened since conscription was abolished to give the armed forces a relatively benign image? Why doesn't explicit rejection of the militarisation of society come up in public debate? Why don't social movements whose members were once antimilitarist activists carry the torch of antimilitarism?

- Criticism of militarism and the armed forces no longer excites media interest; it is only occasionally possible to break into public consciousness with a powerful nonviolent direct action or an international mobilisation in which a Spanish contingent participates, or sometimes with a celebration of an Insumisión anniversary.

- Social media and being able to communicate online, without having to rely on big mass media corporations, may make it possible for the antimilitarist movement which comes after Insumisión to get back in touch with 'ex refusers' and have a greater presence in social movements' own media, as well as a greater presence in wider society, which could contribute to more of a critically antimilitarist social consciousness.

- Involvement in international networks lends us more strength, which pushes us towards a disobedient and antimilitarist social transformation at the European level and perhaps even at the global.

We can do no other: we continue to be disobedient on the grounds of our personal ethics – we cannot position ourselves before reality in any other way, it is part of our personal and collective identity. In the end, if we do not disobey, then what?





Extending Conscientious Objection

Conscientious Objection: a springboard for radical social change

Javier Gárate was one of the first publicly declared conscientious objectors in Chile and cofounder of the conscientious objection group, Ni Casco Ni Uniforme (Neither Helmet Nor Uniform). From 2005 to 2015 he worked at War Resisters' International (WRI) as the nonviolence programme worker. He currently lives in Belgium, where he enjoys the local beers, chips and chocolate, while plotting nonviolent training and action. His discussion here is of conscientious objection as an entry point into other forms of progressive activism, or a 'springboard for radical change'.

When we talk of the peace, anti-war or antimilitarist movements, we are often talking about different movements. Not all supporters of anti-war and peace movements consider themselves antimilitarists, and the concept of peace also covers a lot more than just being against war. However, when we look at the struggle for conscientious objection, we see it present in all forms of struggles against war and militarism. That is one of the biggest strengths of the struggle for conscientious objection – its diversity.

The struggle for conscientious objection often starts as a personal decision, when you find yourself confronted with the fact that you are forced to serve in the military and you almost have no choice but to think 'where do I stand when it comes to doing or not doing military service?', or with questions such as: 'am I OK with being trained to kill?'. We know that there are many different reasons for becoming a CO: as an assertion of my human right to say I don't believe in killing others, as an opposition to militarism and patriarchy, as a refusal to support a specific military mission, and many more. In my case was a rejection of all that militarism stands for and in particular a strong critique of the role the military continued to play in Chile after the end of Pinochet's military dictatorship: even if we no longer lived under a dictatorship, we did live in a military state.

The personal element is important as it means this is an issue that directly affects you and that you can directly take action against war – but a personal stance alone is not enough, since for the struggle to have an impact it needs to become a collective one. We know that it is important to support individuals affected by conscription and who have declared themselves conscientious objectors and this is something that War Resisters' International does, in the belief that every person who doesn't join the military represents a step towards peace. However, there is always the danger of focusing too much on individual cases,





sometimes even making some kind of 'heroes' out of these individuals for beings so brave as to refuse the military. And as those who are conscripted are mostly men, it is also often men who become conscientious objectors. But when we challenge militarism, we should also be challenging machismo and the construction of such 'heroes', as these go directly against our antimilitarist, anti-patriarchal struggle.

There are other reasons to avoid the individualist approach to conscientious objection, especially where a group centres around certain 'heroes'. Groups can sometimes spring up in support of one conscientious objector after he declares himself as such, and most of their early work focuses on supporting that one person. However should that person – the figurehead – be imprisoned, exiled, or become unavailable in another way, what can the group do? I have seen groups that cease to function when their leader is imprisoned (the same is true for other movements, not only ones focusing on conscientious objection). This can be one impact of hierarchical leadership based on key people who are seen as indispensable and irreplaceable. By focusing on an individual, or even a couple of individuals, you can lack a longer-term strategy to build a movement and act collectively. Movements that are strong collectively are the ones that have more chance of remaining sustainable into the future.



Conscientious objectors march against all war in New York on International Conscientious Objection Day (15th March) 2006

Work on conscientious objection can at times seem a bit narrow: the work of supporting individuals who refuse military service, the impact of which only reaches





the individual in question, without wider consequences. However, the experience of WRI on this could not be more different. As already noted, there are many motives for becoming a conscientious objector and this book explores the diversity of these motivations and approaches. Here, however, I will focus mostly on groups who identify themselves as antimilitarists.

As conscientious objection is often an entry point into antimilitarism and nonviolence for people, it is very often the case that once people start organising around conscientious objection, they soon start to realise that military service is just one of the pillars supporting war and militarism, which leads them to becoming interested in learning and getting involved in wider antimilitarist and nonviolent activities. We often hear from conscientious objection groups that they first got started as a reaction to the conscription that they and friends were facing, without much clarity on where to go from there, apart from demanding the right to conscientious objection. If this initial commitment to supporting the refusal to kill is channelled through an organisation or group and if this collective can connect with other organisations involved in antimilitarism and nonviolence, it is likely that the group will start to widen and deepen its analysis and actions. The group will start to explore how it can challenge other aspects of militarism and go beyond the refusal of military service and the demand for the right to conscientious objection.

Often, when conscientious objection groups state what they stand for and what they refuse, they say they refuse militarism because of all the negative values ingrained in military institutions, such as hierarchy, patriarchy, obedience, and nationalism etc. This refusal will and should include a strong gender analysis: conscripts are being trained in what it means to be a soldier and a man in military terms – the construction of a militarised masculinity. Many conscientious objection groups – such as those discussed in the chapters on the Turkish conscientious objection movement in this book (chapters 23 and 24) – incorporate a radical analysis of gender and sexuality, and there are several statements by women conscientious objectors on why they declare themselves as such, for example Ferda Ulker's: 'the conscientious objection movement is not only a struggle against "compulsory conscription". It has a wider dimension. And we, women, have a bigger voice and status, than being mere "supporters" of the movement. Conscientious objection is direct opposition to militarism and every aspect of it. Militarist thought does not remain within the borders of the military, but entails a military world that affects daily life. And in this world, women are degraded and disregarded. Our status is always behind, even though occasionally circumstances require us to further our position. The terms of this world are: authority, hierarchy, and obedience'. More such declarations are included in WRI's *Women Conscientious Objectors – An Anthology*. Many of these women are not directly conscripted but are opposed to a system that conscripts minds and bodies far beyond the young men doing military service. This understanding of militarism and patriarchy as interconnected is often present in conscientious objection groups' analysis and it is an important contribution to the wider peace movement.





In their exploration of how to deepen their work against military service, groups also look at different and non-hierarchical forms of organising that can lead to an interest in consensus decision making and how to organise in a nonviolent manner, making both antimilitarism and nonviolence core aspects of their identity; nonviolence training and resources such as the *Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns* can provide key guidance during this development phase. This widening and deepening of analysis and forms of action was very much evident, for example, in what we have seen happening in South Korea. WRI was first contacted many years ago, and asked to support the work on conscientious objection there. At the beginning, the people interested in conscientious objection came to it from a purely human rights perspective of defending young men who were being conscripted, with the main aim of 'getting them out' and campaigning for the right to conscientious objection: they lacked a wider critique of militarism. Thanks to their eagerness to explore other conscientious objection struggles in the world however, and also a strong link with WRI, the South Koreans campaigning around conscientious objection started to engage in other issues and to build a strong antimilitarist and nonviolent identity. Now, many years later, they have a strong group – World Without War — which continues to campaign and support conscientious objectors, but which also campaigns against war profiteering and other forms of militarism by, for example, carrying out nonviolent direct actions against the construction of a naval base on Jeju Island. This goes to show how they have developed their analysis and areas of action against militarism, while embracing nonviolence as its method for bringing about change. This has also meant that they have built stronger alliances with other movements as they are seen as a group engaging in many issues and not just as a conscientious objection group.

As much as wider peace and antimilitarist groups impact the work of conscientious objection groups, the same can be said for how conscientious objection can and has played an important role in the wider movement. The fact that conscientious objectors are prepared to take a personal stand against war can inspire others to look at questions such as 'what role do I play in the war machine?' and 'is there anything I can do to withdraw support from it?'. Conscientious objection should be seen as a form of nonviolent direct action and it is arguable that conscientious objection struggles have inspired many others to ask what forms of nonviolent action they can take against war, and to see that it is not enough to organise marches from point A to point B demanding the end of war: a spanner needs to be thrown right into the war machine.

The strategies of conscientious objection campaigns tend to combine the nonviolent action of refusing war with legal and solidarity work. As covered elsewhere in this book, there are several international mechanisms that support the right to conscientious objection, and many conscientious objection struggles have focused on getting their states to uphold this right. An example would be the case





of Finland – one of the few European countries still with conscription – and their campaign demanding the end of conscription, with one of their actions being an online petition asking for conscription to be abolished. As discussed in the chapter on International Solidarity, such solidarity has in many cases been key to the success of campaigns for the recognition of the right to conscientious objection, or individual cases claiming this right, as power-holders often want to pretend that there is no problem whatsoever with conscientious objection in their country. If international organisations can amplify the voices of local groups and show that people in other parts of the world care about what happens to conscientious objectors, the power-holders will have a tougher time pretending that nothing is happening. International solidarity has been pivotal to the development of conscientious objection groups and supporting individual cases, who often suffer imprisonment for their stand against militarism – WRI's CO-alert system is one of the best examples of how to apply international pressure in support of conscientious objection.

When we talk about solidarity and conscientious objection we are not just talking of support by people in the Global North to young men conscripted in the South. The conscientious objection movement has a long and rich history of mutual support. The fact that conscientious objection struggles most of the time involve the support of people who are members of a group or network means you form strong personal links. International meetings such as the International Conscientious Objectors' Meetings (ICOM), which unfortunately no longer takes place, and the events around International Conscientious Objection Day on the 15th May, as well as networks such as the now defunct Latin American Conscientious Objection Network or the current Middle East Conscientious Objection Network, have been places for meeting people in similar situations from other parts of the world. I remember my first International Conscientious Objection Day meeting in Israel in 2003, and the impact it had on me to see that people as far apart as South Korea, Turkey, Israel, Spain and Chile had so much in common when it came to refusing militarism.

As mentioned earlier, conscientious objection is often the first experience people have with political activism and a lot of people come and go from conscientious objection groups. Over the years, many people have attended conscientious objection meetings and events and it is hard to quantify the impact this has on activists. Surely, however, the importance of striving for a world without war and where we support the people who refuse to kill is something that people take from being connected to other refusers. As already mentioned, conscientious objection groups tend to have a radical gender analysis. You can often see that people and groups connected to conscientious objection from an antimilitarist perspective lead the way in making the connection between militarism and patriarchy and questioning dominant gender and sexual relations, as well as in highlighting the need to look at gender relations within our own groups. As conscientious objection is not just about refusing to kill in such groups, but also how





we build alternatives to militarism, the way conscientious objection groups organise – when they have managed to develop as a collective and not just as a support group for individuals – tends to be non-hierarchical, so the influence and impact in activism can be seen not just in the analysis of what we are against but also in how we organise to build the alternative. For example, if you look at the work against conscription in Colombia, which in the mid nineties started in support of individual cases, the most well known being that of Luis Gabriel Caldas, it is now a movement formed by a network of several collectives, campaigning for the right to conscientious objection and against conscription, but also looking at nonviolent alternatives to the military conflict in Colombia, including developing an economic project to support young people so they don't take the military route because of economic needs.

Often, conscientious objection groups or organisations working on conscientious objection will have people who have served and in some cases deserted from the military among their members. These people come with first hand experience of how military institutions function, and because of how this experience has impacted them, they can become extremely committed to the cause against militarism. Veterans have historically played key roles within the anti-war movement, such as in the movements against the Vietnam war and more recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. Veterans such as Wendy Barranco of Iraq Veterans Against the War – who also writes in this book – have been outspoken in denouncing sexual harassment, bullying and other forms of Human Rights violations in the military. This experience helps inform the movement of how the military functions from the inside, but also has the potential of reaching out to a much wider audience, including the so called 'military family'.

Groups campaigning for the right to conscientious objection from a legal framework have obtained landmark victories arguing that refusing to kill is a right recognised not only in the Human Rights Declaration but in various national and international legislation, such as in the case of the Colombian Constitutional Court recognising the right to conscientious objection. The work done by organisations such as WRI and the Quaker United Nations Office, arguing the legal case for conscientious objection and supporting individual cases, has been instrumental in making sure activists understand the opportunities but also the limitations of having a legal approach to their campaign. Documentations such co-guide.info are resources not just for conscientious objection campaigners, but for any activists who want to have an understanding of how legal mechanisms work. The strategy of supporting a campaign with strong legal work is, in general, increasingly seen as crucial for its success. We cannot claim that conscientious objection led the way on this understanding, but the sustained and extremely professional work of institutions supporting this right is likely to have influenced other campaigns and organisations.

When you look at the impact that conscientious objection has in the wider anti-





war, peace and antimilitarist movement, it is good to remember the phrase: 'suppose they held a war and no one came', as there is no war without somebody to fight it. If you don't have soldiers you are tumbling down one of the main pillars that upholds war and militarism. In addition, some of the biggest successes of the anti-war and peace movement have come about as a result of actions led by veterans and people who don't want to serve in the military. When you look at conscientious objection work, its impact might be hard to quantify, however this doesn't mean it is not there. There are a few exceptions, whereby people make conscientious objection their main campaigning issue throughout their life but for the majority it is something in which you get involved either when you are directly confronted with military service or you know people who are subject to recruitment in your community. This means it is often the case that conscientious objection is a phase, but also a springboard in the life of activists: that passing phase tends to be at a young age, an age where a lot of people's political ideas are formed, meaning that they can have a big impact on people, an impact that goes beyond what you find on the surface: it is an impact of long lasting change.





Conscientious Objection: making fissures in the deep militarism of South Korea

Yong-suk Lee refused to serve in the South Korean military based on his opposition to war and violence and was imprisoned from August 2006 to October 2007. He is a member of the steering committee and a nonviolence trainer at World Without War. He explains how conscientious objection is making small but significant fissures in the deep militarism of South Korea.

During the past 100 years Korea has endured a countless number of minor and major conflicts. During the first 36 years of the 20th century, Korea was under Japanese imperial rule and many Koreans were, either directly or indirectly, swept up in the Pacific wars that were waging at the time. With the 2nd world war at an end and the shackles of colonial rule thrown off, the country became divided in 1950 and with the Korean war escalating into an international one the whole country, north and south, became a battle zone. Subsequently, continuous waves of small scale regional skirmishes continue to this day. On the one hand during the 1960s and 70s the military dispatched troops on a large scale to participate in the US instigated Vietnam war. With 350,000 troops dispatched to Vietnam, the South Korean deployment was second only in scale to the US' and this deployment played a significant role in the militarisation of Korean society. Over the past 100 years the Korean people have on a regular, ongoing basis suffered the effects of many wars such as the Asia-Pacific war, the Korean war, and the Vietnam war, and from the effects of other small scale regional armed conflicts. Consequently, there is a residual dread of war that remains in the collective consciousness of the Korean people. Regrettably, Korean civil society has failed in its part of enabling the people to address these real fears in a positive manner and successive Korean governments have been able to exploit that situation by continuing to promote a strong military 'defence' as the answer to these fears.

Therefore, with war seemingly always lurking on the horizon, militarism has never been a stranger to Korean society, so much so that it is deeply ingrained in everyday life. Society has its roots deeply embedded in the political and cultural domains, but also, deep in people's unconscious, there remain strong vestiges of militarism which can be found in many different places throughout society. Not only is it taboo to criticise military conscription, but it carries a legal penalty also. Criticism of South Korean military service is perceived as a declaration of support for North Korea. Military service is the most inefficient, irrational and corrupt institution and the fog of silence that surrounds the issue has only increased. Those who have exempt status, such as women and men with disabilities, often suffer from blatant discrimination and in many ways are politely or not so politely marginalised. As soon as it became known that the son of a ruling party





presidential candidate used his father's influence to avoid military service – a possibility not available to those with less privilege – support for his candidacy collapsed and he was subsequently defeated in the polls. To utter a word at all about military service is to risk glamorising it. The way military service is beautifully packaged and presented through the media and on TV programs belies the reality of how the Korean military participated in the massacre of civilians during the Vietnam war and how the 1980 Gwangju student uprising was so violently suppressed with soldiers brutally pointing their guns at innocent civilians, which is never talked about.

Even social movements in Korean society have not been left untouched by the all-powerful force of militarism. The military has exerted a major influence in terms of the organisation and structure often adopted by the main spheres of influence within the democracy movement, such as the workers' and students' movements, who would elect only men from within the group to undergo military training drills in order to 'best prepare' for confrontations with police in the vanguard. It was assumed that standing face to face against a strong foe and engaging in fierce struggle was indispensable and any calls for democracy within the group itself were dismissed. Nonviolence gave the impression of weakness or surrender whereas violence was seen as necessary for genuine social change.

It therefore became unimaginable that, in such a strongly militaristic society, anybody would even consider objecting to military service. Although living conditions in the military were notoriously difficult, it would be extremely rare for anybody to conscientiously object to military service among those subject to recruitment, including those in the democracy movement. Prior to 2000 the only group who systematically and conscientiously objected to conscription were the Jehovah's Witnesses, and because they were considered strange, likewise this strange behaviour of theirs was also dismissed as bizarre. Of course, it cannot be definitively said that there were absolutely no other conscientious objections. Disclosure of military corruption by whistle blowers was not unknown and neither were desertions by policemen as a result of violent crackdowns by fellow riot police on civilians. In such cases, the demands made were political, but far from objecting to the military as an institution, what was actually requested in many cases was a better military.

It was from 2000 that conscientious objection began as a movement. As of 1945, with liberation, conscientious objection had never been pursued openly. Those who declared themselves conscientious objectors left themselves open to ridicule and verbal abuse and conscientious objection as a movement, while voicing opposition to militarism, had at the same time to defend itself against mounting criticism. It was forced to compromise in the face of an increasingly militarised society and declare either 'we respect the consciences of people who enlist into the military' or 'we are not opposed to the military per se but believe there should be an alternative "community" service for people who object to military





service' was another rallying cry. Despite this limitation, people could now openly declare their objection and criticise the military and this was becoming a gradual trend. Although the numbers were still miniscule, young people began to question and agonise more about joining the military and soon their numbers were increasing. The feminist and environmental movements together with the conscientious objection movement have played an important role in helping diminish the influence of militarism in society. These 'new' social movements have also helped expose the limitations of previous social movements (working class and democracy movements) in the way they used to disregard issues they didn't consider worthy of debate. For instance, the hierarchical structures, reminiscent of the military, which existed within social movements meant that a democratic/consensus decision making model almost always had to defer to a high-handed top-down approach. These criticisms seem to be unique to Korean society but the new generation who have had no experience of military dictatorship have relatively no problems in embracing these new movements.

As of 2000, then, there was an undeniable feeling that society was at the cusp of a new era which had at last thrown off the shackles of military dictatorship. However, it was also undeniable that although conscientious objection had barely made a dent in the impregnable fortress that is militarism in South Korean society, it was a very significant fissure and was growing.



International Conscientious Objection Day celebrated in Seoul, 2015 (credit: World Without War)

Korea is undeniably a country where militarism is strong but recent disturbing cases of violent deaths in the military have helped change social attitudes and perceptions. A number of high profile cases including one of a soldier going on a shooting spree killing fellow troops in revenge for persistent bullying and a subsequent manhunt, and another case of incessant violent abuse of a defenceless soldier who was subjected to relentless bullying by fellow troops which eventually led to his death has served to undermine the already tainted reputation of the military within Korean society. It seems that gone are the days when conscientious objection as a movement perceived its role as solely to protect the rights of the person against a negative societal backlash. It is now however a movement that is very much at the forefront of promoting a myriad different peace related issues. Although an alternative 'community' service is still not in existence there is no doubt that the small dent left by conscientious





objection in the side of the behemoth that is South Korean militarism is getting bigger. The diversity of voices that comprise the peace movement and conscientious objection in Korea continue to provide a strong challenge to militarism and this is very much a work in progress.

Translation: Pat Cunningham





Militarism & Gender in Turkey

Ferda Ulker, one of the first Turkish women to publicly declare herself a conscientious objector, writes about how gender and militarism intersect in the particular context of Turkish society, though her insights also have a broader application for any patriarchal and militarised society – which is to say, most if not all societies.

The subject of this article is the importance of gender awareness in conscientious objection movements. However, before examining the basis of the matter, it is illuminating to touch upon the meaning and importance of women's conscientious objection, in this case through the lens of the Turkish experience: the concept of gender is an area that has been given a great deal of thought here, though more by feminists and lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) activists than mixed groups.

Conscientious objection is not merely a matter for men. When we change our perspective and look at the phenomenon of conscientious objection from a broader point of view, we can understand why it is a matter for women, too. Definitions of conscientious objection usually focus on the refusal of mandatory military service however, and in Turkey there is no compulsory military service for women. Many people are therefore confused about why women become conscientious objectors. In fact, the same question, from a different perspective, might be relevant for men as well. Being a conscientious objector is not the only way of not serving in the army which is open to men. Besides, conscientious objection has some aspects which complicate their life. This – what we call 'civil death' – is a process that obstructs the social life of male conscientious objectors and prevents them from acting freely. But instead of becoming an objector, a man could choose other paths, such as working abroad, living as a deserter or delaying his military service by pursuing an academic career for a long time, within which period he could get a 'paid exemption from military service', which has occasionally been introduced. Nevertheless, objectors do not choose these means. It is the clearest example that the main point of conscientious objection is something other than the dichotomy of serving or not serving in the army. Fundamentally, conscientious objection means questioning all militarist structures within society, regardless of the gender of the objector.

Women's objection is not a phenomenon arising from their innately 'peaceful nature'. This understanding, in addition to any political arguments against it, is contrary to scientific facts. Women can base their political decisions either in peace or in war. It is sometimes asserted that women are inherently peaceful because of motherhood, but even if this were true, no one can automatically become a mother just because she is a woman, so women cannot automatically be denominated 'peaceful'. This does not only apply to women: no one is born with their political





preferences. But women and (other) LGBT people are particularly familiar with the concept of militarism, which is based on submission, body and soul, to another's will. There is also always an attempt to gain such control by patriarchy and its gender roles. Militarism's main expectation of men who are subjected to conscription is similar: the conscientious objector Vedat Zencir says that 'conscientious objectors perceive military service as suicide of the self'.

The military, and military service as an aspect of militarism, is only the tip of the iceberg. In fact, below the water line there is invisible militarisation. This invisible part is the driver behind visible militarisation i.e. military and military service, and it is integrated into the social fabric. A conscientious objection movement which disregards this dimension renders its ongoing struggle imperfect. When the invisible part of the iceberg is questioned, conscientious objection, as a political act, gains a wider recognition and practice. Within this conception and practice, women and (other) LGBT people's conscientious objection becomes more understandable. In this invisible section of the iceberg we also confront social facts, such as patriarchy and gender roles, which maintain militarism.

Patriarchy tries to create oppressive forms of belonging by disregarding individuals' will over their own bodies and sexualities. One of the priorities of both feminist and LGBT movements is often the protection of both the body and of identity. Militarism cannot tolerate any will against itself. Similarly, patriarchy cannot tolerate women and any will based on womanhood either. It is seen as a threat. This is a nightmare for both militarism and patriarchy. It must be kept under surveillance, monitored, and any awareness must be confronted. Any refusal of the mandatory and oppressive forms of belonging results in social exclusion. The 'otherness' which is created by this patriarchal system feeds hostility and fear. Consequently, LGBT people, conscientious objectors, and women who voluntarily confront being 'othered' by society, can often understand each other. The solidarity network of the conscientious objection movement against social exclusion and otherness has a vital importance.

In Turkey, MOTHERland is the motif most commonly applied to that primary concern of all militaries: the 'protection of territorial integrity'. The homeland is mother, woman, and honour, and honour must be protected! Indeed, this honour is supposedly so important that its protection cannot be left to women. We are expected to be the 'heroic mothers' of soldiers who are to be sent into the arena, and to give birth to boys in the first place. We are expected to be patriotic enough to sacrifice these sons for the homeland, and to applaud those who win in their fight with another state's homeland. Rape is viewed as legitimate if it is committed in the 'enemy's' homeland, but it is a 'loss of honour' in our own. This mostly affects women. Women might also be asked to 'satisfy' soldiers sexually. These immoral demands of militarism can be accounted for by the cooperation between militarism, patriarchy, and gender roles.





Militarist society is immoral because it is authoritarian and hierarchical. This structure can be seen within our homes. While the father is the house commander, sons, mothers and daughters are, in accordance with the age hierarchy, soldiers. Commanders/ fathers, whose demands are performed without question, are the most prominent figures. Women's bodies and sexualities are under the command of their husbands/ fathers. It does not matter what women want or do not want: this is a question of duty and they must be performed upon command and whenever the commander asks for it. Who can do that without ignoring their own identity? No one. In a family which attaches particular importance to sons, they are still only accepted as 'real men' after they have performed their military service. In fact, every house is a little barracks. In Turkey, people 'do not marry their daughters to those who have not performed their military service'. A man can only be seen as a 'real man' and get married if he performs military service. In this understanding, a man is expected to behave like a military commander and be commander of his wife and children. Therefore, the situation is no different to the military in his house and although the picture I paint is of the Turkish household, many women will identify with parts of this experience, even those in less obviously militarised societies and where women are now supposedly more emancipated.

Schools, which are the first 'official' place of socialisation for kids, work to a military order as well. The first thing we learn, before the alphabet, is to obey orders. Disobeying orders requires punishment. The punishment method, which mostly entails violence, works like the method that destroys the self of a soldier. We are expected to obey without any questioning. Moreover, the streets can tell us how militarised a society is. Streets and parks are named after 'martyrs'. Statues are built to these 'martyrs' in city squares. Significant parts of cities, mostly the centres, are surrounded with wire fence. It is not just forbidden to enter these buildings, even taking a photo is not allowed. In homes, on the streets, at work: militarism is everywhere!!!

Patriarchy collaborates with militarism. Within this system, which puts men at the centre, women are given a secondary role. In patriarchy the ones who have a right to speak are men. It is a world which keeps women in the background even though they undertake so many tasks. Militarism as a patriarchal system does not only ignore women, however. It also ignores LGBT people (including LGBT women, of course). Same sex attraction is seen as a disease and must be treated. Same sex attracted people are exposed to social exclusion as a result of the 'rotten reports' of militarism in Turkey, which are given to gay, bisexual, and disabled men to exempt them from military service (see more in following two chapters). Furthermore, LGBT people are not accepted as natural aspects of social life by the patriarchal system. While women may be seen as elements that can 'somehow' be handled, same sex attraction among men questions manhood and breaks the established order. Both militarism and patriarchy are afraid of all women, whether LGBT or not. But they are also afraid of LGBT men, and people with non-binary





gender identities, who threaten the concepts of 'manhood' and 'womanhood' as defined by the system.

Gender roles collaborate with militarism. Gender is a social phenomenon which uses the sex we are assigned at birth as the basis for roles that are taught and expected to be accepted without dispute. The approach of patriarchy, which puts men first, creates the model for being a woman or a man through gender roles. This approach is expected to be accepted blindly. Questioning these roles coercively assigned to us disrupts the social order. During the distribution of these roles men are associated with authority and the public sphere while women are associated with the 'private sphere' and lack authority. The entire social domain of life is shaped in accordance with these role models. What this means for women is shouldering all housework, taking care of children and old people and obeying the head of the family, its 'commander'.

What do gender roles tell us? They determine what we can and cannot do as a man or a woman. Our job, the places we can go, the clothes we can wear, our toys, who our intimate partners can be, where and how we can laugh, when and



A woman in Turkey speaks at a demonstration in solidarity with a detained conscientious objector in Cyprus

how we can be involved in public life, etc., etc. Society has already determined everything for us according to whether we have been designated 'men' or 'women'. The only thing that we can do is fit into these roles. The similar control mechanism established over women through gender roles can be seen in superior/ subordinate relationships between members of different ranks in the armed forces. Just like





women, subordinates do not have the right to speak. They have to obey orders without questioning them. Without the hegemony of violence, neither gender roles nor militarism can be maintained. There must be constant fear in order to maintain 'the system'.

The foundational concepts of militarism are: hierarchy, authority, power, unconditional obedience, and chain of command. We confront all of these in patriarchy and its gender roles too. Militarism, patriarchy, and gender roles constitute the corners of a triangle, which have a vital importance in maintaining each other. As a matter of course, there is no place for women and (other) LGBT people in these corners. Staying inside of this triangle and performing the roles appointed to us as women is extremely important. In fact, everything is considered to be for our 'honour'.

Militarism is afraid of women and wants to keep us under control through patriarchy and gender roles and it is natural for a system which is executed over women's bodies and sexualitie to be confronted by a movement whose most active members are women. If the conscientious objection movement wants to have integrity and consistency, there is a need for both feminism and the LGBT movement, because feminism and the LGBT movement are aimed at questioning and transforming gender roles alongside the foundational concepts of militarism, listed above. Conscientious objection movements both uncover and reject the masculine world fiction. Antimilitarist struggles and particularly conscientious objection movements have to be gender aware, as they already know. In Turkey, both women and men's conscientious objections, particularly during the 1990s, have meant a riot against not just the military but also the militarisation of society. In this regard, the 'We Are Not Men Initiative', started by men, is a good example. It is impossible for the conscientious objection movement, which says 'no' to the hierarchical, masculine and authoritarian structure of militarism, and declares that the movement will even be maintained, if necessary, with the great influence of conscience alone, not to be gender aware.

We women, the others of society, we conscientious objectors, and we LGBT people can create a world that includes us only through solidarity and encouraging ourselves. You might 'somehow' refrain from serving in the army. However, you cannot be outside of the militarist world which suppresses and regulates us all, especially women. In that case what we can do is fight and make something change. Another world is always possible.

(I would like to thank to Asli, Aynur, Ayse, Canan, Gulsen, Vedat.
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Translated from Turkish by Demet Catelkin





The Role of LGBT and Women's Conscientious Objections in the Turkish Movement

Doğu Durgun is a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at Sabancı University in Istanbul, Turkey. After finishing his B.A. in Economics at Hacettepe University, he pursued his M.A. in Political Science at Galatasaray University. He is currently working on a comparative-historical analysis of conscientious objection in Turkey and Israel and gives us a discussion here of how women and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Trans (LGBT) people's conscientious objections have impacted on the conscientious objection movement in Turkey.

Compulsory military service for all male citizens is one of the processes through which militarisation is perpetuated in Turkey. The state and military officials enforce military service by laws, regulations and disciplinary proceedings. Although it has lost its hegemonic power over politics, the military is still promoted as a sacred institution. People trust the military even more than democratic institutions. This institutional praise goes hand in hand with the sociocultural perception of the military as an indispensable rite of passage. Culturally, military service is conceptualised as a step towards attaining the hegemonic model of masculinity. Male citizens pursue their obligation in order to find a decent job, to get married and to 'begin their lives'. 'Every Turk is born as a soldier' is a motto which summarises the importance of the military in the construction of Turkish identity. However, there are many individuals who refuse to take part in the military due to personal, moral, political, and/ or religious motivations. Individuals resist enlistment by evading the draft, deserting their units or by taking exemption reports. They are labelled draft dodgers or deserters by Turkish military law and the general public. However, from the 1990s onwards, certain men have put forth their objections in public declarations and refused to be labelled draft dodgers or deserters. The term 'conscientious objector' has thus come to be associated in the Turkish political lexicon with these men, who conceptualise their resistances as a form of civil disobedience.

This article questions the evolution of the objection phenomenon and the challenges that objectors encounter due to the high level of militarisation in Turkey. The risk of imprisonment, Article 318 of the penal code, which criminalises people who speak about objection for 'alienating the people from military service', and the difficulty of accessing many citizens' rights – a state known as 'civil death', in which those subject to it have no access to social security, no passport, and so on – are some of the challenges to performing conscientious objection. While these are significant obstacles for conscientious objectors however, they are relatively well known, thus the main aim of this chapter is to question the degree to which power dynamics within the Turkish conscientious objection movement are structured by militarism, and the ways in which these dynamics are being overcome by the objectors themselves in the course of the movement's evolution. In particular, the





focus will be on sex, gender and sexuality, while recognising the importance of other power differentials such as race, ethnicity, class, etc.

An Antimilitarist Interruption: Conscientious Objectors in the 1990s

During the 1990s, conscientious objectors were mostly Turkish men in their twenties or thirties, with a certain degree of socioeconomic and cultural capital. Their refusal was an antimilitarist interruption which was mostly grounded in their anarchist ethics. They wanted to create a Turkish anti-war movement and to find a nonviolent way to solve the ongoing civil war between the Turkish security forces and the Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan (PKK). To do so, from 1992 onwards, they attempted to institutionalise their contestation within war resisters' associations. As antimilitarists, they sought to change the laws, regulations and policies of the Turkish government and the military. Thus, these men conceptualised their refusals to serve in the military, and in any alternative national service, as acts of civil disobedience. In doing so, they wanted to contribute to the broader collectivity to which they belonged – they wanted their refusals to set out their political responsibility to transform their society into a nonviolent and demilitarised one.

Although the predominant debates among the objectors were about just versus unjust wars, and pacifism/ antimilitarism with regard to the Turkish-Kurdish conflict, there were also cases in which these men redefined the contours of the country's sex and gender regime. They refused to recognise military service as a duty of all male citizens and deconstructed the link established between heterosexual masculinity, military service, and citizenship. They refused to identify with a heroic and warrior masculinity which recognises internal/ external threats, protects the nation from them, and, if necessary, conquers other territories. Yusuf Ergin, for instance, contested the perception of military service as a rite of passage to becoming a 'real man'.¹ Some suggested that such declarations were an act of treason against the privileged nationality, ethnicity, sex/gender, and class positions which these men enjoyed thanks to their socioeconomic and cultural capital, considering the military to be an agent of domination which sustained sex/gender, class, ethnic and national hierarchies within and outside the country.² Such declarations were refusals to become 'proper' middle-class Turkish male citizens who must be grateful to 'the father state'.

The emergence of these objections created a divide between conscientious objection as a purely individual act, and conscientious objection as both an individual act and an act of civil disobedience.⁴ Those men who lived as draft dodgers and deserters, as well as those who avoided the military via medical 'rotten reports', were not considered conscientious objectors since their refusals did not entail civil disobedience vis-à-vis the state, military and society.

The politics of 'coming out' as objectors entailed a series of confrontations with the state, military, and society. These confrontational politics reached a peak in the





military trials and long period of military imprisonment of Osman Murat Ülke (Ossi). The vicious circle between military courts, military units, and military prisons gave the objectors a voice. Paradoxically, the conscientious objection struggle thereby came to be widely known in Turkish society, and even perceived to be a heroic enterprise, associating conscientious objection with a masculine act of civil disobedience.

Gendering the Resistance: Women & (other) LGBT Objectors in the 2000s

The masculine and heterosexual character of conscientious objection began to be deconstructed at the beginning of the 2000s when Turkish society witnessed the public declarations of gay men and women objectors. These newly emerging objectors proclaimed their sex/gender and sexual differences vis-à-vis the state and military authorities as well as other objectors. Several women and one openly gay man publicly voiced their objections to military service and militarism in 2004 and in 2001 respectively. Gendering the resistance was a challenging process for the objectors and antimilitarists since the objection had so far been associated with heterosexual men. There were, however, doubts about where in the struggle to situate women and gay or bisexual men, given that women were not obliged to complete military service in the first place, and gay or bisexual men could be exempted via 'rotten reports', though only if they could 'prove' their sexual orientation to the military authorities, often at great personal cost to their privacy and perceived dignity – same sex attraction is still officially considered a disease or disability by the Turkish military and medical authorities. It is also worth noting here that though trans men face being called up in Turkey, like cis men (i.e. men who were called boys from when they were born), none are known to have served – very much unlike cis men, thus creating ambiguity around their situation also. Trans women are not called up.

These newly emerging objectors have similar pacifist and/or antimilitarist agendas to those who went before them. However, they also politicise their sex/gender and sexual differences by deconstructing and exposing the patriarchal, masculinist and heterosexist discourses and practices of the state, military, society, and some other objectors. Although women do not face compulsory military service in Turkey, they conceptualise their acts as a form of antimilitarist resistance to the hidden effects of militarism in their everyday lives. They reject militarism as an ideology which perpetuates patriarchy and refuse to be either its victims or perpetrators. Their public declarations are also a critique of patriarchal and masculinist discourses and practices among the objectors. Although women have been active agents of the anti-war movement from the very beginning, they were predominantly defined as supporters. Such an understanding resulted from the lack of compulsory military service for women. Accordingly, women objectors have not been imprisoned due to their refusals.





Women do, however, risk trials on the basis of Article 155 (now Article 318) of the Turkish Penal Code,⁶ though this has yet to be pursued against them by the military officials. Charges have only been made against them due to their participation in demonstrations, not due to their declarations. In contrast, male objectors face civil death and the risk of imprisonment due to their deserter or draft dodger status. For instance, Mehmet Tarhan received consecutive penalties of imprisonment and disciplinary proceedings. He remembers that his objection was received with more attention and enthusiasm when he was imprisoned as a gay man. His refusal of both military service and a 'rotten report' was followed by an imprisonment which paradoxically gave him a voice among and beyond other objectors. Women's lack of military obligation goes hand in hand with their non-recognition by the state and military authorities as agents in the conscientious objection struggle. It further relegated them to their supporter status within the objection movement. Their refusals challenged the meaning of resistance, in that 'paying the price' no longer meant imprisonment. Women claimed that they still paid the price, as women, mothers, and daughters in society. They didn't want to play the game in accordance with the rules defined by militarism, which allows women to have a voice only when they become 'sacred and sacrificing' wives and mothers, or if they are imprisoned due to their refusals.

The state and military authorities further silence objectors and their supporters. On the basis of Article 318, objectors, intellectuals, journalists and artists have also been tried due to speeches they have given, targeting the military institution. Halil Savda, an objector, was sentenced to five months' imprisonment; public figures such as Perihan Mağden, writer and columnist, and Bülent Ersoy, a well known trans singer, and many journalists have been tried. The article is criticised as a tool to impede freedom of expression by intimidating and criminalising those who declare their opinions against the military in Turkey.

Diversifying Conscientious Objector Profiles: Alternative Forms of Refusal

Gay, lesbian and heterosexual women objectors have transformed the gender dynamics of the Turkish conscientious objection movement. There is no doubt about the validity of their claims among other objectors. However, although the feminist critique of conscientious objection politics has been recognised as legitimate among objectors, the heritage of objection as an act of civil disobedience is yet to be deconstructed. There remain conscientious objectors who define themselves as such – draft dodgers in the language of objectors in the 1990s – who do not see their refusal as an act of civil disobedience, yet conscientiously refuse to serve in the military out of personal, political, moral and/ or religious reasons. Such examples point to the grey area of refusal. Some of them do not identify themselves as objectors because they associate objection with an act of civil disobedience through which someone publicly puts forth their objection and confronts all the penalties which follow. Others do not call themselves objectors simply because they do not have sufficient knowledge about objection. Moreover,





there are individuals who do not have the privilege, i.e. socioeconomic and/ or cultural capital, to take such a political stance due to the high levels of militarisation surrounding them. Finally, there have recently been some gay, bisexual and trans objectors who have put forth their declarations on the basis of their sexual and/ or gender identity, even though they have not refused to take 'rotten reports'. Many objectors refuse to serve in the military on conscientious terms but fear to uphold the consequences, i.e. civil death, so they find legal ways to avoid the service. In addition, although there are very few examples, reservists – those who have completed their military service – can declare public objections too. With these declarations, objection has begun to be associated not only with those men who refuse to serve in the military but with those who have served and become reservists according to military law. All these examples blur the heritage of confronting the state, military, and society in one particular way, and put forth alternative ways of forming an objection.

Conclusion

The historical trajectory of conscientious objection and the evolution of the profiles of objectors in Turkey indicate a transformation of the ways in which people resist the draft. Conscientious objection as a concept is becoming a site of negotiation in wider society. It is arguable that one of the reasons for the confusion about the meanings of objection is the high degree of militarisation which is intertwined with hegemonic masculinity in Turkey. Militarism is an ideology which praises sacrifice, courage, and confrontation; notions which are strongly associated with hegemonic masculinity. When 'paying the price' of objection signifies a confrontational politics of civil disobedience, imprisonment, and so on, many individuals who refuse to take part in the military for conscientious reasons do not identify themselves with objectors. On the other hand, either imprisoned, exempted, or not, each objector pays the price in different ways. The association of refusal with civil disobedience impedes it, to a certain degree, from being embraced across society. The widening of the meaning of objection may pave the way to increasing the significance of refusal for the Turkish public.

To conclude, let me briefly state one point which I believe to be important for the widening of conscientious objection. One of the most important assets of the phenomenon is its dynamism. The individual character of refusals creates space for newly emerging agents who put forth their own political projects through their objections. This poses some challenges to the activists who are working in the field since it becomes difficult to create solidarity and collaboration among agents with diverging social, cultural and political affiliations. Activists should be attentive to establishing and strengthening their links to other social movements. Thereby, objection may become a place from which to spark discussion among people who have different claims and values, but who nevertheless unite at the point of refusing to serve in the military. Furthermore, international institutions may be helpful in mitigating the burdens on individual objectors, as has recently happened





to some extent in Turkey, although this is a topic for a different chapter.

1. Ergin, Yusuf 1993, 'Niçin Reddediyoruz?', in Bakaya [magazine], 1993, (5): 4
2. Öğünç, Pinar. 2013, Asker Doğmayanlar,, (İstanbul: Hrant Dink Vakfı Yayınları), p 28.
3. Kılınç, N.T. 2009, 'The Morals and Politics of Conscientious Objection, Civil Disobedience and Anti-militarism', in Conscientious Objection: Resisting Militarized Society, eds. OH Çınar and C. Üsterci, (London and New York: Zed Books).
4. Objectors and their supporters who express opinions against the military risk trials on the basis of Article 155. The speeches and acts against the military are assumed to 'alienate people from the military service'. Amended in 2004, these acts and speeches are penalised under Article 318. Although it is slightly more difficult to penalise the acts and speeches, the content of the Article did not change significantly.





Disability and Conscription: masculinity, (dis)ableism and the militarised body in Turkey

Bülent Küçükaslan was born in 1973 and lives in Istanbul. He has been a wheelchair user since 1999 due to a spinal cord injury and founded the Engelliler.biz web based platform (www.engelliler.biz) on disability issues in 2003. He is the administrator and managing editor of this platform, with almost 80,000 members. He contributes to the disability movement in Turkey through such work, as well as through his essays and other forms of activism on disability. Here he writes about the intersections of (dis)ableism, militarism – in particular conscription – and masculinity in Turkey.

One of the career paths that most decisively idealises the human body is the military. Certain terms, produced to appease those who are keen to engage in masculinist language patterns, such as 'to be harsh', 'to be alert', 'to be a man', 'to stand up straight', 'to obey orders', 'to not waiver', 'to not feel pain', 'to not feel sick', 'to not sleep', 'to not tire', are particularly presented as the building blocks of the military – despite the fact that these words are simply part of anyone's life, and not the special result of military activities.

The imaginary construct of the ideal, militarised male body is particularly plain to see in the sixth article of the health management guidelines of the Turkish armed forces: 'those charged with entering the military via the route of mandatory conscription will be split into two groups: those who are and those who are not suitable to serve in the military. Those who are deemed suitable cannot have any illness or deficiency when it comes to their health'.

In other words, the military might as well hang a big sign over its entrance gates saying 'no disabled persons allowed here'. This issue is not worth worrying much about in and of itself, however the fact of the matter is that it is not only those who want to pass through the proverbial gate who are subject to this gatekeeping – that is, those who want to serve in the military – but every last young man in Turkey (regardless of the obvious health concerns relating to disabled people). What makes matters worse in such cases is the fact that where the disabled are concerned, they clearly won't ever be able to meet the requirements to get into military service and pass through the gate, but a whole labyrinth of conscription examinations nonetheless continues to beckon every last potential conscript regardless of their health, creating nuisances and injustices for many. In this regard, there are two groups of people with disabilities, whose experiences with the military are well worth examining: 1) those who wish to join the military and 2) those who don't.

If a disabled person actually wants to serve in the military, the majority of the





injustices they will suffer will be observed in military hospitals and the request is typically rejected as being contradictory to military guidelines. No matter how much this person may wish to serve in the military and no matter how hard they may try to hide their disability, a 'deficient' person will never be regarded as worthy of wearing the military uniform.

However, if the same person were to express a lack of interest in serving in the military on the sole account of their actual disability, everything would go the opposite way. In that case, no matter how much this person might wish to be exempted from the military, and no matter how much they might emphasise their disability, they would likely be faced with the accusation of trying to shirk the responsibilities that they are charged with by virtue of their masculinity; they will likely suffer the danger of being accused of trying to run from their duty, which comes with heavy consequences, such as suffering the pains of a bureaucratic quagmire, going into great financial expense, and losing lots of precious time while waiting for a final result.

At the first stage, this person would have to officially declare that they have a 'disease or deficiency', after which they would be sent to a military hospital. These hospitals may well be in other towns away from the person's hometown, in which case transportation and accommodation costs would have to be paid by the affected individual. Then the person would most likely be sent from one doctor to the next, just to assert their disabled status, often being subjected to rudimentary physical tests, and would finally be sent away to await the results of these examinations, hoping to successfully have convinced the health board of their condition.



Still from the COnscription ©caglark.com exhibition on disability and conscription held in London, 2013 (credit: zeynep dagli)

In Turkey, even those with heavy disabilities are likely to be subjected to such procedures. It is left to the citizen to prove that they are indeed 'deficient' by suffering all of these tortures. But even living up to this expectation isn't enough – the final report given to disabled persons who successfully manage to convince the board of their disability is not a plain dismissal of the





case – it is actually a so called 'rotten report', which will continue to provide future problems to such disabled persons, for instance when looking for employment. This is especially true if the disabled recipients of these reports don't have any outwardly noticeable disabilities, when they may also be suspected of being gay or bisexual and have to face the prejudice that comes with that suspicion.

In other words, you can't win whether you do want to serve in the military or you don't. But the biggest loser in this game is the person who carries the scarlet letter of the 'rotten report', trying to find a footing in professional and social settings. One way or another, every disabled person will unfortunately get a taste of what it's like to 'serve'.

Conscientious Objection in Israel: dismantling the master's house with the master's tools?

Sahar Vardi is an Israeli Contentious Objector who publicly refused military service and was imprisoned for this stance in 2008. Since then she has been active with Israeli antimilitarist groups such as New Profile and today works as the Israel Programme Coordinator for the American Friends Service Committee, based in Jerusalem. She asks whether conscientious objection in Israel is an attempt to dismantle the 'master's house' of militarism using the master's tools – tactics which gain their power from militarism itself.

When looking at the Israeli conscientious objection movement, we can see that it has, since 1948, been not only about the right to conscientious objection, but usually also a part of wider political struggles. Israeli conscientious objectors have declared their refusal to fight their Palestinian neighbours and friends, they have declared their refusal to protect and enable the expansion of settlements on occupied Palestinian territories and the implementation of martial law on Palestinian civilians; others refused to kill and risk their lives in the name of the political decision to invade Lebanon; in recent years conscientious objectors have declared their refusal to serve on feminist grounds, to protest the state's treatment of asylum seekers, and youth from marginalised parts of Israeli society have refused to serve in the military in protest at the way in which the state has oppressed them and their families.

All of these reasons which young people list for their decision to object to the compulsory military service forced upon them can only be heard, and receive public attention, due to conscription or 'the draft' itself, an issue I will further explore below. These youth receive a stage for their protest, because they are willing to pay a price for what they believe in by refusing to serve in the military and, in many cases, are imprisoned as a result. In this way, conscientious objection in Israel is





often a tactic of resistance, not to military service, but to a bigger political or ideological issues, with the act of refusal acting only as a platform.

When it comes to the movement for demilitarising Israeli society, conscientious objection has been seen for years as one of the main tools in this struggle, and possibly one of its foci. Since its establishment in 1998, the biggest feminist movement for the demilitarisation of Israeli society – New Profile – has focused much of its resources on the support of conscientious objectors (both public ones who are consequently imprisoned, and conscientious objectors who prefer to get exempted on mental health grounds, which is the easiest way out of military service). The other side of this coin is that conscientious objectors themselves have been concentrating more and more on countering militarism as one of their reasons to refuse military service, as can be seen in the 2014 refusers' letter against the occupation: 'the problem with the army does not begin or end with the damage it inflicts on Palestinian society. It infiltrates everyday life in Israeli society too: it shapes the educational system and our workforce opportunities, while fostering racism, violence and ethnic, national and gender based discrimination'.¹ But this link between countering militarism and conscientious objection, though it seems obvious, is one that needs to be reexamined, and introduces many dilemmas for our movements.

In 2001, dozens of young Israelis, both men and women, wrote a public letter declaring their refusal as a form of resistance to the Israeli occupation of the Palestinians. As a result, dozens of young men were imprisoned, five of them for almost two years each. Most of the women in the group were recognised by the military as conscientious objectors and received exemptions on these grounds, finding themselves in the role of supporting the imprisoned boys. On this, Shani Werner, one of the women in the group, wrote: 'it's precisely as easy for us to ignore women's draft resistance as it is for the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) to ignore women's military service. If women's service in the army is seen, in any case, as desk work and serving coffee, and given that the IDF allows girls exemptions from service relatively easily, our resistance is treated like "coffee serving resistance", which even the army accepts'.²

While the conscientious objection movement in Israel has become more aware of the gender imbalance it perpetuates, and while military regulations have changed, making it harder for women to be exempted, therefore bringing about an increase in women conscientious objectors, this is an important point not only because of the feminist critique presented here. It is significant also because it shows refusal as a game very clearly played within the military structure and under the military's rules – an attempt to dismantle the master's house behind the master's bars. We can see this not only with imprisoned refusers, but also people trying to be recognised as conscientious objectors by the military and forced to fit themselves into the criteria of a military committee for what pacifism and conscientious objection are. Can conscientious objection, a tactic that receives its





*Israeli refusers, shortly before their imprisonment
(Photo by: Keren Manor / Activestills.org)*

power and definition from the military itself imposing military service, truly be antimilitarist?

The Israeli conscientious objection movement has become more and more aware of this tension, understanding two conflicting realities: on the one hand, conscientious objection is an extremely powerful tool, which manages to bring issues to public

discussion; on the other hand, conscientious objection is a tool within the framework of the military structure, and relies on militaristic values. Israeli conscientious objector Udi Segal, imprisoned in 2014, referred to this: 'I chose to go to prison because, unfortunately, the Israeli public discourse listens almost only to those willing to sacrifice themselves. Those willing to "pay the price"'.³ In November that year, at the age of 19, he ended a short hunger strike, which he had started during the 5th prison term imposed upon him for refusing to serve in the Israeli military. In his decision to stop his hunger strike he addressed this tension again, stating: 'it turned into a power struggle, and I'm not interested in proving my strength or my "masculinity", in their language – that is the essence of my refusal'.

This is a good example of how being aware of this tension, being part of a movement that sees its own weaknesses and contradictions, allows conscientious objectors to find a middle ground and, in their statements – which receive a platform because of the military structure – to problematise not only military service itself, but the fundamental values of militarism. I believe this middle ground, which includes both the 'masters tools', but also our ability to make new use of them and challenge the tools themselves, allows us the space to combine the effectiveness of conscientious objection with deep antimilitarist work, which our society is desperately in need of.

1. Conscientious Objectors against the Occupation 2014, Refusenik Letter 2014: Refusing the IDF [Facebook], <https://www.facebook.com/refusingIDF/info?tab=page_info>, accessed 4th June 2015.
2. Elster, Ellen 2010, 'Coffee Serving Resistance? An Introduction to Women's Conscientious Objection in Israel', in Women Conscientious Objectors: an Anthology, (London: War Resisters' International), p 50.
3. Matar, Hagai 2014, 'Israeli Conscientious Objector ends Hunger Strike Citing Abuse', in +972Mag [online] 3rd November, <<http://972mag.com/israeli-conscientious-objector-ends-hunger-strike-citing-abuse/98369/>>, accessed 4th June 2015.





Conscientious Objection beyond the Military

Here, a UK based feminist discusses forms of action other than refusal to join the military which could nonetheless be considered forms of conscientious objection, despite also taking place outside of conscientious objection movements – at least as these are currently understood.

For an antimilitarist, conscientious objection is likely to mean conscientious objection to participating in war via the military. As militaries, both voluntary and conscripted, are overwhelmingly comprised of men, this means an antimilitarist conscientious objection movement will almost inevitably centre men. But if the movement's interest in conscientious objection lies in its antimilitarist potential, then to avoid centring men in approaching conscientious objection is paramount, for the relationship between militarism, masculinity and male supremacy – as reading this book should make clear – is a circular one, and to centre men would be to sustain male supremacy and with it the whole cycle of militarism to which the movement is opposed. This chapter discusses the pros and cons of thinking about forms of resistance to militarism other than refusal to participate in war via the military – forms of resistance more open to women – as forms of conscientious objection. Such forms of resistance are then discussed in greater detail in the subsequent chapters.

In 2010, War Resisters' international (WRI) published an anthology of women conscientious objectors. Some of these women were soldiers or would-be conscripts, but some were also objectors to being defined as supportive wives and mothers to soldiers, while others were objectors to supporting war and militarism in other ways, such as by performing 'war work'. Nora Page, for example, refused to be directed to do anything in war time – specifically during the second world war in Britain – that would not have been asked of her during peacetime. But her situation was exceptional: Britain had introduced a form of 'industrial conscription', mobilising the whole of society behind that war. Modern wars are not 'total wars', they do not require that society as a whole be mobilised in the same way – or at least, they do not require that all elements of society consciously contribute to the war effort. However, it is worth noting that, especially in the minority or 'first' world, it is difficult not to unconsciously contribute to the war industry, given that some of the private companies with the biggest presence in our everyday lives are also war profiteers: think of HP or Samsung, which produce military as well as civilian technology. Are there opportunities for conscientious objection beyond the military in this kind of world?

Women have in fact voiced objections in a plethora of ways that have undermined the war machine, even if they have not declared themselves conscientious objectors, or been included in WRI's 2010 anthology. Bunnatine 'Bunny' Greenhouse, for example, exposed a multibillion dollar no bid





reconstruction contract, awarded by the US government in the run up to the Iraq war to a company called KBR, which was a subsidiary of another company called Halliburton, whose CEO was none other than the then vice president Dick Cheney. Unfortunately, this story has all too often been framed as that of a brave woman trying to save the US taxpayer's dollar, but her story also makes it irrefutable that senior government members responsible for sending the country to war had as much of a personal, financial interest in doing so as they had a care for the so called national interest – let alone the interests of any other nation. She exposed war profiteering as a continuing driver for warmongering.

The Iraq war also led to revelations of the lengths to which warmongers would go to get their own way. Katharine Gun, for example, exposed a US intelligence plot to spy on diplomats on the UN Security Council in order to blackmail them into sanctioning the war. A previous whistleblower on US intelligence practices, Daniel Ellsberg, described her action of printing a confidential US memo and taking it to British newspaper The Guardian as unique: 'no one else – including myself – has ever done what Katharine Gun did: tell secret truths at personal risk, before an imminent war, in time, possibly, to avert it'. She did not, of course, avert that war. She has, however, been explicit that this was her aim, though she never aligned herself very closely with the rest of the anti-war movement. The question of interest in this handbook is whether her aim might have been achieved had she done so, and whether she would have been more likely to do so had the term conscientious objector been available to her as a way of conceptualising her own role.

We might also ask if her action could become less unique in the intelligence community if conscientious objection were considered as relevant a concern in their work as among soldiers'. This story illustrates the crucial role intelligence can play in facilitating war, after all. Bunny Greenhouse's story, meanwhile, illustrates that conscientious objection could even be a relevant concern among construction workers, given the nature of the particular contract to which she objected. We can also ask whether the consciences of those working for companies like Samsung and HP should always be easy about it. Clearly, a definition of conscientious objection which broadens its scope to fields other than the military could be useful.

Indeed, it would be useful to pause over what we mean by conscientious objection in the first place: even in the military field, there is a broad spectrum among those who identify with the term, or who might be identified with it by others. Not only are there both (would be) conscripts as well as 'voluntary' soldiers turned conscientious objectors, there are also conscripts and voluntary soldiers who object to all war and use of force alongside those who object to a particular war, or the use of force in a particular situation, or against particular people. There are those who object to killing and those who object to being made to kill. There are some whose objection is not so much to war or the use of force or killing or being made to kill, as to the military as an institution which perpetuates social forces to





which they object more generally, such as sexism, racism, capitalism, heterosexism and (dis)ableism. There are also those who simply and very understandably don't want to be in the military or a warzone, and have no particular view on war, the use of force, killing, being made to kill, or the social forces listed above. This last type of objector, whom WRI also supports, would not, however, be recognised as conscientious objectors in, for example, those laws which exist around the concept, as it is difficult to argue that their objection, however understandable, has anything to do with conscience. From this perspective, if we are committed to the term conscientious objector over any other – we are using it in this book, after all, and the legal mechanisms which exist are not a negligible reason for doing so, even if much of the reason for doing so may also be habit – those who object to war in fields other than the military may actually be easier to accommodate than some soldiers.

This may, however, amount to privileging those whose stake in the issue is 'less direct': the life of neither Bunny Greenhouse nor Katharine Gun was put at risk by the prospect of war, as a soldier's might be. Then again, such a soldier might be quite happy to take the life of another, even if not with risk to his own. And if our interest in conscientious objection is an interest in its potential for the struggle to create a world in which there is no war, and there are no militaries to wage it, then the conscientious part of conscientious objection is quite important, even if the term war resister or refuser might more honestly capture many of those who are currently involved in what we are terming 'conscientious objection movements': a world without wars or militaries to wage them must also, surely, be a world whose people are not happy to kill each other. Besides, if we object to privileging those whose stake is 'less direct' – those who are not in the military – then we object to privileging a form of conscientious objection which is more likely to be undertaken by women. Not to mention the fact that modern wars are increasingly ones in which – thanks to 'innovations' such as drone warfare – soldiers do not have a more direct stake than civilians, even if those civilians with a more direct stake are not minority world citizens such as Katharine Gun or Bunny Greenhouse.

There is, however, already a word for women such as Katharine Gunn and Bunny Greenhouse, in English at least, and probably also in other languages: they are whistleblowers. What do we lose or gain by trying to reconceptualise them as conscientious objectors? There is a connotation to the word whistleblower which is perhaps missing from conscientious objection: the whistleblower always wants to expose and put a stop to something, whereas conscientious objection can be much more private, a matter of not wanting to be personally complicit: a conscientious objector to a war does not necessarily seek to avert that war, as Katharine Gun did when she 'blew the whistle'. This may be why conscientious objection often has a strong religious connotation: the conscientious objector could conceivably be quite happy for their action to change nothing beyond their own life, at least in this world – though of course, this will not always or even usually be the case, even for religious objectors. But if our interest in conscientious objection is precisely its





capacity to change this world, then getting the whistleblower type on board is important. Yet there is also a 'lone wolf' connotation to the whistleblower, even more so than to 'conscientious objector'. Is this really how we think the world is changed?

Given that our focus is on movements, probably not. Indeed, this may be part of the reason Katharine Gun was less successful than she could have been at averting the Iraq war: because she operated alone. The question is: how can someone like Katharine Gun be drawn into a movement? Some personalities may simply prefer to operate alone of course, but it could also be a case of making our movements more generally accessible. A key group in the UK's anti-Iraq war movement, for example, have since been exposed as a deeply sexist organisation with a severe accountability problem – so severe that allegations of rape against a member of the leadership were investigated by his friends and fellow party leaders, and quickly degenerated into an investigation of the rape survivor's sexual and romantic history: it would be irresponsible to encourage women, or anyone vulnerable to sexual violence, to become involved with anything organised by such a group.

Plenty of women and members of other marginalised and therefore vulnerable groups did nevertheless become involved in the UK's anti-Iraq war movement of course, but the huge numbers who took to the streets then have not continued to campaign, for example against the UK's military intervention in Libya, or the renewal of Trident, or the creeping tide of militarisation in UK society – manifest, for example, in the creation of an Armed Forces Day, the government's explicit policy of promoting a military ethos in schools, and saccharine commemorations of the world wars. This does not suggest that the anti-Iraq war movement, as a potential 'gateway movement', managed to make its many participants feel particularly engaged with the broader issues in which that war was embedded. This should not surprise us if the movement was dominated by one sexist organisation, whose rationale for its involvement was in any case not antimilitarism per se, but anti-imperialism.

Despite the lack of a mass movement however, militarism has not gone completely unchallenged in the UK. Indeed, there are people who have made it their life's work to challenge militarism. Emma Sangster is co-founder and coordinator of Forces Watch – an organisation which scrutinises the ethics of armed forces recruitment practices in the UK and challenges efforts to embed militarist values in the UK's civilian society. We spoke about whether she considered her work a form of conscientious objection and what she thought might be lost or gained in thinking about her work in those terms.

She explained that she had come to peace work in the wake of Britain's imposition of sanctions on Iraq in 1991. A statistic that stood out for her was that half a million children died unnecessarily as a result of those sanctions. Something





about the suffering of these children and ordinary people in Iraq lit a spark, a visceral sense that this was wrong and that she, as a British citizen, might be able to do something about it – given that her own government was responsible – and that she should therefore try. She became involved with an organisation called Voices in the Wilderness, with whom she was active until the late 2000s, putting across the human face of Iraqi suffering to UK society.

One of the reasons she felt happy with this group for so long was its contrast to many of the hierarchical, ideology driven organisations of the British left – such as eventually dominated the anti-Iraq war movement and in which members were expected to 'toe the party line'. Not only were the personal relationships between members of Voices in the Wilderness stronger for the group being non-hierarchical, but working together from what might be termed the conscientious position of viscerally objecting to Iraqi suffering – as opposed to from an ideological position which saw campaigning against that suffering as part of a grand plan for revolutionary world change revolving around liberation from the faceless enemy of capital – gave them a more immediate stake in their work and allowed for a sense of fulfilment that may not have been possible had their end goal been a glorious revolution in the unseeable future.

The unpopularity of the war to which the UK eventually went in Iraq was a huge contributing factor to the government adopting various pro military measures as of 2008, when a report entitled 'National Recognition of the Armed Forces' was

published, suggesting such measures as an attempt to ensure popular support for any future wars the UK might want to wage. Even more so than had been the case when Britain imposed sanctions on Iraq in the early nineties, this was something to which Emma viscerally objected and about which she felt she was well positioned to take action, not only as a British citizen who could exert pressure on British policy, but as one who had gained a lot of experience in doing so. Forces Watch was born in 2011.



A Forces Watch information sheet about military involvement in UK schools





The existence of Forces Watch is clearly a manifestation of conscientious objection, in the sense that it was born of the conscientiously held objection of one of its founders, and in the sense that it forms part of a continuum of war resistance. However, too much talk of conscience or of war resistance could in fact be detrimental to the work of Forces Watch: in so far as Forces Watch has an agenda, this agenda can be carried by the evidence of hard facts, these being more likely to influence UK policy than either appeals to conscience or an a priori commitment against war which UK governments clearly do not share. Nevertheless, if conscientious objection speaks to a visceral sense of wrong and personal responsibility to address that wrong, then Emma's account of her experience of peace work makes a case for this being taken up as a position from which such work – and indeed much activism for progressive social change – can be fruitfully taken up. Conscientious objection provides a language to articulate the premises of this position, which should clearly not only be accessible to those in the military.

Similarly, while there clearly should be specialist support for those who are conscientious objectors in the military or within the military system, like would be conscripts, there should also be support for those whose conscientious objection takes place outside the military, like Emma: to object to militarism is to object to powerful vested interests and patriotic, patriarchal values often instilled at a very deep level in those who support the military. It is not risk free and does not come without a personal cost. Those costs and risks are also incurred without recourse to the authority which the figure of the soldier turned conscientious objection often commands in the peace movement and wider society – though of course, wider society may equally see the soldier turned conscientious objection as a debased, emasculated figure, and the peace movement may see him as a victim.

Though there have not historically been movements built in support of conscientious objectors whose objections fall beyond the military, nor of such objectors working together and calling themselves conscientious objectors, there are well known examples to follow in the field of war tax resistance (see chapter 29) and movements such as the boycott of South African goods in protest at apartheid. It should therefore be possible both to diversify the understanding of what counts as conscientious objection and of who can therefore be a conscientious objector, as well as to channel this diversified understanding into organised – though hopefully non-hierarchical and certainly non-sexist – movements.





21st Century War Profiteering: more openings to object?

Hannah Brock gives us an historical example of objection to war profiteering which conscientious objection movements today could emulate.¹

The introduction to this book puts the following question: 'and what of the future? Conscientious objection movements have often been inspired by the old expression 'imagine if there was a war and no one showed up?'. Well, soon perhaps hardly anyone will need to show up for there to be a war, as technology 'advances' and can do the killing of 1,000 armed people at the touch of a button. Increasingly, professional armies using remote control weapons, private security firms and robots have taken over from the mass armies of the mid 21st century. Yet even with these 'advances', you still need people to wage war. Those people are increasingly not members of the armed forces however, but instead the 'civilian' branches of the supply chains for weapons and the militarism that make war inevitable. This opens up whole new vistas of people who might resist war and their part in it.

One key aspect of this is the economic trade behind (and after) wars. War Resisters' International (WRI) calls this 'war profiteering', which we define as every economic activity that either profits from, or incentivises, war (often both). There are some inspiring past examples to give us some ideas of how forms of objection



Credit: Manuel Ocampo





have taken place in the supply chains of war profiteers. In 1974, Bob Foulton – a worker in the Rolls Royce factory in the Scottish town of East Kilbride – was due to repair some warplane engines. However, Bob recognised them as parts of the Hawker Hunters that had attacked Chile's presidential palace during the coup of September 11, 1973. He refused to work on them, and by the end of the day, all 4,000 factory workers had joined him and refused to service the engines or to let them leave the factory. They were left outside, exposed to the elements, and were still there four years later.²

There are almost endless places where this version of conscientious objection beyond the military could be manifest: PR companies employed by arms dealers; the teachers expected to host the military in their schools; the phone companies providing coverage to occupied territories; the film makers expected to promote militarism in their blockbusters; engineers, caterers and administrators for arms dealers; workers in ports who deal with arms shipments;³ security companies expected to run prisons; car companies who start making tanks; bankers holding the money of military dictators, etc, etc, etc.

For movements of resistance to begin, however, the workers and civilians involved in these pursuits have to first recognise their role, or the role of their employer, as part of the war machine. The compartmentalised nature of contemporary trade and production is a challenge to this. To take the example of arms manufacturers, it is increasingly difficult to point at who actually builds a weapon – and therefore to evoke any feeling of responsibility. Different companies and factories and individual workers will produce a component, which might be used in another factory or country by a weapons company, but equally by a civilian company. Rather like the military personnel who control drones, there is a growing distance – an alienation – between those doing the work of war, and war's victims. Compartmentalisation allows people to believe that they're not part of the problem. As a gunsmith commented after a school massacre in the US, 'nobody wants to think they had a hand in making the Newtown gun'.⁴ Consciousness raising is hard work, and often more possible when a situation already has a high profile in civil society or the press – but it also takes the communications and research skills to be able to discover the supply chain and inform the workers.

Excitingly however, this kind of conscientious objection also encourages solidarity between workers and individuals – as opposed to people who see themselves as soldiers – as it did between Scotland and Chile. This field of activism is an interesting avenue to explore, especially perhaps for conscientious objection movements who have previously worked with members of the armed forces. If conscientious objection is about knocking out the labour pillar of war that make war possible, then civilian conscientious objectors will now be crucial, too.⁵

1. For more on Hannah's background, see Chapter 1: Conscientious Objection in History'.

2. Gardiner, Karen 2015, 'Nae Pasaran' Shares the Story of Scottish Laborers Standing





- Against Chile's Pinochet Regime', Vice [online] 21 April, <<http://www.vice.com/read/nae-pasaran-shares-an-untold-story-of-chilean-solidarity-41>>, accessed 12th June 2015.
3. Although the union itself didn't make a supportive statement, many members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union respected the 'Block the Boat' picket in Oakland, USA, in August 2014 and refused to unload a cargo from Israel's largest shipping company, ZIM. The action was protesting the Israeli bombardment of Gaza, and a response to a direct appeal by Palestinian trade union groups.
 4. Twenty children and six adults were killed in Newtown, Connecticut. (Helmore, Edward 2012, 'Gunmakers' town in crisis after shootings', The Guardian [online] 22 December <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/dec/22/gunmakers-town-crisis-shootings>>, accessed 12th June 2015).
 5. One example we found is the group IntelExit, whose website <https://www.intelexit.org/> contains an automatic resignation letter generator for those working for intelligence agencies. An example includes: 'The intelligence agency I work for has...lost its moral compass, violates fundamental freedom or democratic principles or abuses the idea of "national security" in order to justify violations of the constitution.' They also encourage people to leave these agencies and gives reasons for doing so, online and with large bill boards and flyering outside the offices of intelligence services.





War Tax Resistance: Fiscal Objection to Spanish Military Spending

AA.MOC¹

For over thirty years, the Fiscal Objection Campaign has denounced military spending, with members 'redirecting' a portion of their taxes when making their tax returns. In this article, we explain and evaluate our experiences in Alternativa Antimilitarista (AA, or Antimilitarist Alternative), as part of a short workshop on this campaign at our summer conference (in Navacepeda de Tormes, Avila, in July 2014).

Beginnings

Fiscal objection to Spanish military spending has, from the beginning and to this day, been expressed in annual campaigns which open and close in tandem with the income tax collection campaign of the Tax Office. This form of direct action was proposed at the Nonviolent Assembly of Andalusia in 1982, the year in which Spain joined NATO after the attempted coup d'etat of 1981. In this same year the government contributed financially to the deployment of NATO missiles to Eastern Europe, giving rise to a social climate which keenly rejected Spanish association with the Atlantic bloc and the military spending entailed by such an association.

In 1983 the first campaign took place, which very quickly – indeed, as early as 1984 – gained national status, with the incorporation of the Conscientious Objector Movement (MOC), Barcelona Peace and Justice, and the Nonviolent Assembly of Cantabria. The National Congress of Fiscal Objection took place only five years later, in 1989. At this congress, the objective of ensuring recognition for the individual right to conscientious objection to military spending was put forth, and more social objectives were also proposed: the progressive reduction and eventual elimination of military spending; the denunciation of militarism and of the increasing militarisation of society; questioning current models of defence, with calls to promote a debate on the issue; contribution to the antimilitarist movement and the opening of new means of participation and struggle; collaboration with other struggles which defend that which ought to be defended: the rights of individuals and a more just society.

Confronted with the two tendencies of the international war tax resistance movement – taxes for peace and fiscal objection – our campaign has chosen the latter. The former calls on governments to provide a peaceful state alternative towards which the state itself can redirect the appropriate amount of war tax resisters' or conscientious objectors' taxes on their behalf. In contrast the latter, being an illegal practice, constitutes a form of civil disobedience; its development has been infused with the insubordinate character of the conscientious objection





and Insumisión movement.

How do we carry out our fiscal objection?



Every year, when we make our tax returns, we 'redirect' a portion of our taxes towards an alternative project, asking the Revenue to deduct this amount from military spending. The most common practice over the years has been to redirect a fixed quantity, but it is also possible to redirect a proportional amount, equivalent to the portion of the state budget for defence or military spending.

Firstly, we pay the agreed amount directly into the current account of the campaign or directly to the alternative project we want to support. Secondly, when we complete our tax return, we write in a tax deduction such that we request the return of the amount redirected towards an alternative project from the Tax Office. When we complete the rest of our tax return, this provision obviously changes the overall outcome, in that the amount we need to pay is less (or that the amount we expect to receive back is greater), in proportion to the amount we have redirected. We attach a receipt to our tax return for the payment to the alternative project, and a letter in which we declare ourselves fiscal objectors, also giving our reasons. Finally, we fill out a fiscal objection survey which permits disobedient collectives to publicise the collective dimension of the campaign.

The Tax Office usually returns the requested amount. However – and apparently at random – some objectors receive notification of an 'error' in their tax return. The objector can then choose to pay or not to pay, knowing that if they choose not to pay, their accounts will be seized. Recognition of the right to fiscal objection has yet to be obtained via judicial routes, but the state has also failed to have fiscal objection considered a criminal form of tax evasion.

The campaign would not be a campaign without its collective dimension, centred on the Fiscal Objection group and the national strategy of awareness raising direct actions that denounce military spending and promote the Fiscal Objection campaign, alongside annual reports of the campaign results (the number of objections, the projects supported and the amounts paid to each).

The Evolution of Fiscal Objection

Over the trajectory of Fiscal Objection, we can highlight a few of the steps that have been taken:





- The first alternative projects supported by fiscal objectors had to do with welfare, but between 1987 and 1989 it was decided to choose antimilitarist projects, or ones with an alternative political content.

- Among Fiscal Objection's decisive moments, those which stand out include the successful campaign against the creation of a shooting field in Anchuras, Ciudad Real, and the action taken against the Gulf war of 1991.

- Other collectives begin to take up their own promotion of the campaign around 1997: the CGT union and Ecologists in Action, for example.

- In 2000, around the time of the campaign for 0.7% of GDP to be spent on foreign aid, an array of bodies put forward the possibility of a tax campaign for the so called 'dividends of peace', though this did not catch on.

- Since the end of the last decade, the amount you have to earn before you need to complete a tax return, alongside the greater convenience of completing a tax return over the phone, has translated into a fall in the number of people making their own tax returns. This has made it difficult to expand the campaign. In 2014, in nearly all of Spain's autonomous regions, the option of making the return without using the Tax Office's own programme for doing so is disappearing.

Participation and Organisation

The campaign was originally meant to complement the antimilitarist struggles of conscientious objection and *insumisión*, as well as to provide a means of participating in antimilitarist disobedience for those who could not directly disobey obligatory military service nor the alternative civil service: for those who couldn't be conscientious objectors and '*insumisas*'. Many women took a prominent part in the campaign, making it a (more) inclusive space and one of feminist action too. The main forms of participation have been:

- Making a Fiscal Objection: mechanisms were soon developed to enable those who were exempted from making tax returns, or who didn't earn enough money to pay tax, to nonetheless make a Fiscal Objection also.

- Collaborating with groups which promote Fiscal Objection: given that Fiscal Objection is a decentralised campaign, such groups and their offices have been our means of collaboration. Most Fiscal Objection groups are local anti-militarist groups. The collective tasks of the campaign are distributed among these.

- Participating in activities and actions to denounce military spending: the campaign has always included actions denouncing military spending, some of them collective, some national. These actions have also dealt with war profiteering and





militarism as a whole.

- Raising awareness of the campaign: many social collectives have raised awareness of the campaign among their members and affiliates, as well as by other means.

The organisation of the campaign has followed an 'assembly' model, with base groups which work as a network. The campaign has always relied on national coordination, which has lent it stability and coherence with its subject matter. For most of the campaign's history, there was a National Assembly of Fiscal Objection, which facilitated collective action between many of the constituent groups. Currently, Alternativa Antimilitarista .MOC (previously the Movement for Conscientious Objection) is the base from which the campaign is coordinated nationally. There is an Information Service on Fiscal Objection specifically for Catalonia. The campaign has produced logos, slogans, stickers and a shared web portal, but groups from different communities have designed materials in their own languages.

Fiscal Objection has its particular strengths: it clearly highlights military extravagance in times of crisis, and denounces military spending and the militarisation of society; it draws attention to our personal cooperation or non-cooperation with war via taxes, offering a form of direct action that is widely accessible; it relies on coordination at the national level, following an 'assembly' model, lending the campaign stability and integrity, enabling it to collectively create and update some resources while sharing others created at the local level, and allowing it to compile and disseminate information at both levels; at the national level is also where the social projects which offer an alternative of nonviolent defence are chosen; the 'assembly' model of organisation also draws in many grassroots local groups.

The campaign's internal weaknesses include the fact that its impact and scope remain small, with no more than 1,000 registered annual objectors; it tends towards atomisation and a lack of coordination; it requires consolidation and a plan for growth; it leaves other forms of state financing, such as indirect taxes, marginalised, and it is not succeeding at its goal of decreasing military spending, betraying a weakness as an act of civil disobedience (when detected, the ministry usually succeeds in recovering the amount that has been redirected). For some, it has also become a routine and thereby lost much of its attraction.

We identify the following as external threats: the increasing invisibility of war and the sanitisation of the military's image; the convenience of the ministry's automated tax return programme, and the public fear of the ministry; the virtual format of the return, which puts some people off modifying theirs; the possibility of a progressive disappearance of the tax return as we know it; and the increasing invisibility of the campaign's repression, which takes an individualised form, with





the Tax Office demanding corrections of the 'errors' in the tax return. If these are not corrected, and the 'redirected' sum not directed back to the Tax Office, a process is initiated, which, if the objector persists in her objection, will result in the amount being seized from her current account. Unfortunately, this process is carried out between the Tax Office and the individual, leaving little room to visibilise and politicise the struggle. So far, there has been no legal recognition of the right to conscientious objection in terms of paying war tax, though no objector has been convicted of fraud, meaning that any fines accrued have been annulled. The invariable result is that the Tax Office manages to get hold of the redirected sum plus interest for the delay incurred by the whole process, although this still only happens in those few cases where 'errors' are detected in the tax returns.

In terms of opportunities, we identify: the persistent and generalised de-legitimisation of military spending and its association with arms racing and war profiteering; the social legitimisation of civil disobedience and the activist climate produced by the recent surge of (popular) social movements; a social awareness spending cuts and the resultant precariousness, and the retrenchment of civil and democratic rights; the very existence of the tax return platform; the involvement of trade unions and other collectives. A challenge we are facing at the moment is the organisation of a national Fiscal Objection conference with the aim of creating an enhanced social base to underpin the future of the campaign.

Conclusions

The Fiscal Objection to Military Spending Campaign has enjoyed a great deal of stability over the three decades of its existence: alternative projects, investment of the sum to be redirected, the inclusion of this sum as a deduction of income, a letter to the ministry with a receipt for the payment of the redirected sum into the alternative project, and public actions. The basis of its success lies in its personal touch, but precisely for this reason it allows for a certain individualism and thereby invisibilisation, both of the results and of the repression of the campaign. Based on the results of the campaign, we can say that fiscal objection is a practical tool for exposing how we are made to passively support the armed forces and for provoking a debate about militarism. However, we are aware of the need to avoid getting stuck in a rut and to strengthen our objective of questioning military spending.

Translated from Spanish by Elisa Haf

1. For background information on this author, see the introduction to chapter 20, also written by AA.MOC.





Building the Alternative

Hannah Brock details some of the 'constructive programmes' which conscientious objection movements have historically developed as alternatives to militarist 'solutions' for social problems.¹

Antimilitarist conscientious objection is only part of a journey towards a demilitarised communal life, and many conscientious objection groups endeavour to create that world in the shell of this one.

This can happen both in terms of how the groups organise internally: how they make decisions, what actions they take and their membership. This might include using consensus decision making, using nonviolent language, ensuring a diversity of gender identities are affirmed, etc. These are all outward expressions of the internal political approach of the group. These expressions can also happen in a more public and external way, by initiating activities that productively work outside the violence of the current system as far as possible: showing how it can be done. Gandhians would call such initiatives 'constructive programmes'.

Examples of these programmes include a conscientious objection group in Sincelejo, the capital of the Colombian department of Sucre, in the Caribbean region. The young people of Sincelejo faced forced recruitment by the state army, rebel groups, and the paramilitary over many years. Having offered workshops on peace culture, nonviolence, and conscientious objection, in the early 2000s the conscientious objection group recognised that many young people were actually joining armed forces for economic reasons. They recognised that their role could be in starting economic initiatives so that recruitment did not seem like the only option in order to achieve families' financial stability. They founded small enterprises, including businesses that produced cartons and boxes, organic vegetables, margarine, t-shirts, and bakery goods, bringing income to them and their families. The main aims of these efforts were:

- to prevent the recruitment of youth into armed groups
- to form a support network to prevent forced recruitment
- to educate young people in nonviolent methods for resolving conflicts
- to come up with economic strategies to support their families' needs.²

Other such economic initiatives were surely active in Sincelejo at the time – the conscientious objection group may not have been unique; but the point is that they saw it as their particular priority, with the explicit aim of allowing people to reject the military and other armed groups. Likewise, in the state of Spain in the late 1970s, instead of undertaking compulsory military service, the first wave of civil objectors (prior to this point the majority of conscientious objectors had been religious) moved to work in impoverished areas. This made their social alternative easily





understandable to a wider public.

Carlos Pérez Barranco, a member of AA-MOC, writes that 'they demanded and created a sort of alternative, self organised civilian service outside of the state conscription mechanisms'.³ Indeed, such constructive programmes are not to be confused with substitute service imposed by the state in lieu of conscription into armed forces. Some conscientious objection groups do regard this 'alternative service' as a positive contribution to society,⁴ but autonomous constructive programmes established by conscientious objection groups is a very different thing. Rather than labour imposed by the state, as an obligatory substitute to time spent in the armed forces, they are entirely self organised, bottom-up initiatives. Substitute service is often considered to be part of the militarist system, not an alternative to it. By contrast, work by conscientious objection movements serves to illustrate the realities of a demilitarised society – to show the way.

An example of this also emerges from the British conscientious objection movement in the 1939-1945 war. In Britain in 1940, Pacifist Service Units were formed by the Peace Pledge Union and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. These units would help people directly affected by the war with advice and practical support. How much such actions were perceived by local people probably depends on who the conscientious objectors were – were they people very different to them, or with much in common? In this case, groups of conscientious objectors would move into a house in deprived areas of cities including Liverpool, London and Bristol, where they would support people made homeless by bombings. These groups actually pioneered a particular branch of social work and, after the war, went on to become the Family Service Units, which were still active until 2006 when they were absorbed into the charity Family Action.



Young people making boxes in Sincelejo

Constructive programmes can have impacts on public perception, both in tangibly communicating what kind of world the antimilitarists are trying to create – in actions rather than words - and somehow softening a public that may hitherto see conscientious objectors variously as only a nuisance or threat (many people will, of course, continue to think that and if you are tied to militarism as a solution,





then antimilitarists are a 'threat', since we want to break down that structure and build another world). However, such 'public relations' would rarely be the sole point of these initiatives. As Dr King put it, 'the nonviolent approach does not immediately change the heart of the oppressor. It first does something to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self respect; it calls up resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had.'⁵ Conscientious objection movements have found the same thing. The point is not just 'success' in terms of the behavioural or policy or attitudinal change – initiating a constructive programme does not mean militarism will fade this very minute. But you've actually already changed the world a little bit by organising and living differently within it. Martin Luther King went on to say that finally nonviolence does 'win' however, since it 'reaches the opponent and so stirs his conscience that reconciliation becomes a reality'.

Finally, ability to undertake such initiatives depends on your capacity. Small movements, whose members are regularly detained or otherwise punished, and who have little external support and few allies, may find it impossible to prioritise anything beyond protecting conscientious objectors, at least at some points in the life of their movement.

1. For more on Hannah's background, see Chapter 1: Conscientious Objection in History'.
2. Anon. 2009, 'Constructive Programme' in Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns, 1st edn. (London: War Resisters' International).
3. Pérez Barranco, Carlos. 2013, 'The *Insumisión* Movement against Military Service in Spain: legitimate disobedience', in The Broken Rifle [online] 30th May, <<http://www.wri-irg.org/node/21854>>, accessed 12th June 2015.
4. Read the chapters on Alternative Service in this book for more on this debate.





Communities Resisting War

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In 1996, after a two year siege, the Taliban occupied Kabul and created the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Their troops moved through Afghanistan seeking to bring the whole territory under their control. In 1997 they approached Jaghori, a district in the central highlands of Afghanistan. The inhabitants of Jaghori, probably 200,000 people, were Shia, the Taliban Sunnis. The Jaghori therefore had every reason to fear the Taliban. But instead of either fleeing, or settling for armed resistance as they had done at the time of the Soviet invasion, they decided to surrender, but negotiate conditions which would allow them to maintain their way of life. Central to that was the education of girls. The Taliban grudgingly agreed to allow primary primary education for girls to continue, but forbade any secondary education for them. However, the Jaghori also continued providing secondary education for girls, tricking visiting Taliban officials by pretending that the older girls were teachers, for example. All teachers also continued to teach science, history and maths – again, only when delegations were expected did they switch to Taliban-approved religious materials.

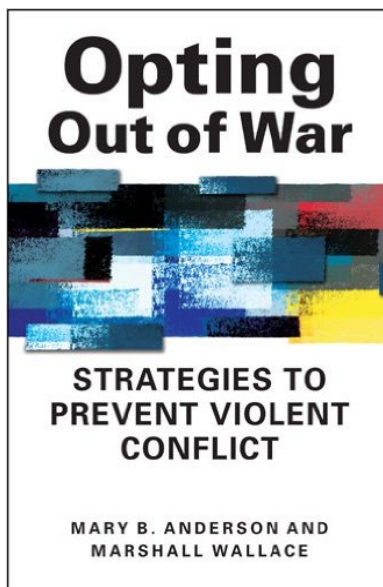
In 1994, during the genocide in Rwanda, it was the Muslim minority that protected Tutsis from being murdered. They hid them, gave them refuge in Mosques, and sometimes even pretended to marauding groups that they had already killed their neighbours. They did not always succeed, and in some instances leaders of the Muslim communities were killed, but there were almost no Muslims who were afterwards prosecuted for participating in the genocide, and the percentage of Tutsis surviving in Muslim areas was much higher than average.

These are two examples out of 13 case studies, collected between 2002 and 2006 by the Collaborative of Development Action, an organisation founded by one Mary B. Anderson and well known for developing the Do No Harm Principle. Opting Out of War,¹ written by Anderson and Marshall Wallace, summarises the lessons learned through a comparison of these cases. It analyses cases of communities that decided to stay out of conflict rather than joining one side or another. They, with a couple of exceptions, neither aimed at nor had concrete impact on the broader war surrounding them. Their goal was to protect themselves from that war by not participating, and they had rather amazing success at doing so, given the circumstances. And if the essence of conscientious objection is the refusal to participate in war, then these cases are examples of conscientious objection.





Many people probably know about the peace communities in Colombia, and some may have heard about the peace zones created in Mindanao/ the Philippines. But who knows about the two examples quoted here, the Muslims in Rwanda and the Jaghoris in Afghanistan? The thirteen cases the authors researched are: Afghanistan, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Fiji, India, Kosovo, Mozambique, Nigeria, the Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. And though each of these cases has its singular features, they also have many things in common. To start with, all the communities anticipated the conflict. They did not pretend that 'it won't come to it', but prepared themselves, and weighed the costs and options of participation versus non-participation. With one exception – that of the Rwandans – the decision to stay out of the war was made on a pragmatic basis, not on ethical or religious grounds. Some communities were proud to have participated in earlier wars, and did not exclude the possibility of fighting in future wars. It was the war in question they rejected and decided not to participate in. They all chose a 'non-war identity', as the authors call it: instead of choosing one of the identities of the conflict, meaning joining one of the parties to the conflict, they distanced themselves from those parties by choosing an identity that strengthened their cohesion and communicated their rejection of the war to the outside world. Such identities could be based on religion, or status as citizens of one town rather than a shared ethnic identity, or indeed, even ethnic identity in some cases. The important thing was that these identities were 'normal' and pre-existing. They were not arbitrarily developed but were present beforehand, and had only to be filled with new collective values of non-participation in war.



Unfortunately, the study does not provide detail on how decisions were made in the communities which adopted these identities, or on what role was played by different groups within the communities, such as people of different genders. Indeed, there is very little information in the book on the role of gender. Though it seems the formal leaders in the communities were mostly if not all men, it would have been interesting to see if, for example, women played a more active role in the resistance than in other communities choosing a 'war' identity, but given the lack of information on this in the book, this has to remain a consideration for future study. We do know, however, that the leaders of the non-war communities were not charismatic figures, no Gandhis or Abdul Ghaffar Khans, and the leadership in all cases was the one from before – it did not





change with the onset of war. What the leadership models of all the non-war communities had in common was a flat hierarchy and that they were always accessible to all community members. Another important factor they had in common was that the cohesion of the community was strengthened by the maintenance of social services (like schools and clean drinking water), often by the formulation of explicit rules on how to behave (codes of conduct), and by setting up security measures like early warning systems.

In all cases, dialogue with the armed groups was very important. This is something these communities have in common with most successful cases of civil resistance against authoritarian regimes. As comparative studies about such resistance have found, contact with the armed forces and the attempt to win their sympathy, or even support, is one of the most decisive factors.² The communities often had to make compromises, and in some cases they had to suffer occupation – either by passing troops or on a permanent basis like in Afghanistan. But they all managed to avoid being drawn fully into the fighting though they sometimes had to suffer violence from the side of the armed groups. Anderson and Wallace distinguish six strategies the groups used:

1. Use of pre-existing networks to convince combatants that they were honest and serious
2. Direct negotiations with all sides
3. Policy of the 'Open Door', meaning being inviting to all sides when they came.
4. Confrontation of the armed groups (most risky strategy, failed most often)
5. Co-option of armed groups (e.g. involving officers or civil servants into activities of the community)
6. Trickery, for example the Rwandan Muslims pretending that they had already killed the Tutsi in their neighbourhood, or the Jaghoris pretending that high school girls were teachers, not pupils.

Anderson and Wallace write in their conclusions: 'we should not romanticise the non-war communities explored in this book. Many of them compromised things they cared about to appease armed groups. People were sometimes killed. Internal dispute resolution systems were necessary because community members had real disagreements. Maintaining solidarity required constant effort in the face of uncertainty. Non-war communities were made up of real people, with real emotions, trying to live normal lives under extraordinarily difficult circumstances'.³ The story of the communities 'opting out of war' should not be misread as the story of ideal, pacifist, nonviolent communities then. They probably had a good share of internal strife, inequality, and intolerance, just like the neighbouring communities who were participating in war. This is one good reason – though not the reason given in the book – to describe them as 'non-war' rather than 'peace' communities. Peace, after all, is not only the absence of war but the positive presence of justice, although justice is likely to be more easily achieved in a community that is not at





war. Indeed, the book could be enhanced with a discussion of how attempts to achieve a just internal peace fared in these communities, if such attempts were made. The concerted efforts to maintain social services and introduce codes of conduct could be interpreted as such, but the fact that in some cases the men even emphasised that they were proud to have been fighters in other wars suggests that, at least in the communities of those men, gender justice could not have fared very well – it never can while a model of masculinity is maintained in which the capacity to wreak violence, even if only under certain circumstances, is a source of pride. We might also question how long communities in which this model of masculinity is maintained can remain 'non-war'.

To include, though not to romanticise, the story of these communities in a book on conscientious objection is nonetheless important, because it brings the issue of conscientious objection from the individual to the group level. If the essence of conscientious objection is the refusal to participate in war, then these cases are examples of CO. They are examples for real life civilian-based defence,⁴ though that is not the topic here. They do not, however, exemplify a form of conscientious objection where the 'conscientious' is writ large and which refers to a deep ethical commitment to nonviolence. Only the Rwandan Muslims explained their choice on the grounds of their faith and the demands made by the Quran not to kill, not to differentiate between people, and to protect the weak and assist people who are discriminated against.²⁶ All the others made pragmatic decisions. In this, these cases are again comparable to the many cases of civil resistance around the world where a mostly pragmatic approach to nonviolence is also predominant.

Many people hold against nonviolent approaches that nonviolence is only possible if you are a 'holy man' like Gandhi and your opponents are as 'civilised' as the Brits. The communities discussed here illustrate that it does not require one strong nonviolent leader or hero, but a community of people able to cooperate. And they have demonstrated that saying 'no' to war has been possible even in the face of genocide or when pitted against extremist groups like the Taliban. In doing so, they have made an extremely strong case for war resistance.

1. Anderson, Mary B. and Wallace, Marshall 2013, *Opting Out of War: Strategies to Prevent Violent Conflict*, (Boulder/London: Lynne Rienner Publishers).
2. e.g. Chenoweth, Erica und Stephan, Maria J. 2011, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, (New York: Colombia University Press); Nepstad, Sharon Erickson 2011 *Nonviolent Revolutions: Civil Resistance in the Late 20th Century*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press).
3. Anderson, Mary B. und Wallace, Marshall 2013, p171.
4. Civilian-based defence is a concept developed by peace researchers and militaries after World War 2 on how to defend yourself when war is no longer possible because it would lead to utter destruction. Among its main features are allowing physical occupation but defending one's own way of life, and non-cooperation with the occupier as the central leverage the occupied have in the face of an occupier depending on their eventual cooperation.
5. *ibid.* p164.





Resisting Gang Recruitment

Igor Seke is a member of War Resisters' International's Right to Refuse to Kill committee, based in Mexico. He is particularly active in countering the militarisation of youth. Here, he discusses youth resistance to recruitment by armed gangs, and makes the case for considering this a form of conscientious objection, as part of a continuum of war resistance.

The military is, unfortunately, not the only entity that recruits for war. In northern parts of Central America, there is a seemingly unending campaign to recruit minors by the violent gangs known as 'Maras'. The recruitment process consists of trying to bribe the youth, either with gifts, money, mobile phones and other commodities, or by creating illusions of the power and protection they would get as gang members. Honduras is the country with the highest homicide rate in the world, and Guatemala and El Salvador are next on the list. The homicides are committed mainly by members of either the Mara Salvatrucha (MS-13) gang, or M-18, another gang. These highly armed and extremely violent groups wage a war against the entire society, especially against its most vulnerable parts. The minors they recruit are usually, but not exclusively, from families with low incomes, and are sometimes as young as nine or ten years old. The gangs force them to execute crimes that include not only robbery and drug dealing, but also murder, sometimes even of their own friends and family members. In this way, the gangs try to make sure their 'future members' are totally submitted to the gang's power and hierarchy.

However, as the youths of Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras have learned not to believe the gangs' false promises of power and protection, the gangs have changed their tactics and their main tool of recruitment is now fear. Once a young



A mural for migrant children at the Fr Matias de Cordova Human Rights Centre in Tapachula, Mexico (credit: Manu Ureste)





boy or girl starts on the recruitment process, sometimes without even being aware of it – having simply done a gang member some favour, for example, or attended a party organized by the gang – it is almost impossible to step back. Refusing to enlist to the Maras or trying to get out of the recruitment process is very often punished with death. The Maras won't take 'no' for an answer, and they surely are not interested in anyone's reasons – moral, religious, or otherwise – for refusing to enlist into the gangs. For many, the only way to avoid this informal 'draft' is to flee through Mexico, if possible to the USA. Thousands of those who cross Mexico during their migration northwards are granted the refugee status in this country due to the violence, and threats to their lives to which they were exposed in their countries of origin.

When they are recruited by a state military, soldiers are given a uniform: in Central America, when young boys and girls are recruited by the gangs they are 'given' tatoos, a form of uniform that cannot be taken off, ever: everything they ever do inside the gang will be imprinted on their bodies forever. There are many who try, and there are some, though unfortunately not many, who manage to get out of these armies, but there are also tens of thousands who refuse the 'uniform' of the Maras every year by fleeing, and they need our support and solidarity. Anyone who believes that everyone has a right to refuse to kill, we should consider all of these refusers to be conscientious objectors.

It is estimated that over 50.000 unaccompanied minors from the northern area of Central America cross the US border every year.¹ NGOs working with child migrants are demanding that they be considered refugees, not migrants. The reason for this is very simple: these minors left in order to escape gang conflict, which in this case is really just another word for war. We know that wherever there is a war, there is also war resistance and wherever there is recruitment, strategies for evading it are being developed. Conscientious objection is not a mere legal term, it can also be an act of refusal to kill or be involved in killings, whether directly or indirectly.

This book references international solidarity with conscientious objectors throughout (though in particular at chapter 10). By providing solidarity to Central American 'draft evaders', those organisations which work with migrants, especially with child migrants who are the most obvious war resisters in this case, are, and should be considered, part of the international conscientious objection solidarity movement, although their work goes beyond the military as it is usually conceived.

1. Bratek, Rebecca 2014, 57,000 migrant children picked up at US border since Oct. 1st, Los Angeles Times [online] 9th July 2014 [online], <<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-senate-immigration-hearing-20140709-story.html>> accessed 30th July 2015.





Refusing Violence, Fighting All Injustice, and Creating Alternatives: conscientious objection in wider nonviolent struggles

Laura Pollecutt is a long term activist and writer. She has been both volunteer and staff member for a number of human rights and peace organisations during apartheid and in the new dispensation – South Africa's post-apartheid state. Together, she and Hannah Brock write about conscientious objection in wider nonviolent struggles.¹

'Conscientious objection is not "opting out". It is an effort to stimulate a new social imagination and a revolutionary mentality that does not normalise violence'.
Howard Clark, 2010²

The conscientious objector movements we have been speaking of in this volume are largely antimilitarist, nonviolent and progressive. That is to say, their conscientious objection is not an end in itself, but is part of a struggle for a different world.

When I (Hannah, a WRI staff member) talk to new people about conscientious objection (especially those people who are not activists), one of the first things I explain about WRI is that we are not conscientious objectors because we ourselves do not want to go to war for some political or moral reason – although that is of course a part of it. We are conscientious objectors because we don't want anyone else to go to war, either. That might sound obvious, but it means that conscientious objection can never, for us be an issue purely of individual rights. It is instead one strategy, and not the only strategy, towards a demilitarised society. Therefore, conscientious objectors often campaign with other antimilitarist movements who have adopted different strategies to work towards demilitarised societies, for example feminist antimilitarists, anti-arms trade campaigners, those working against particular wars or weapons, or against militarism in everyday life, amongst others. They also work with other movements for freedom and justice, because militarism will not be dismantled without also transforming the violent bases of human organisation more generally: patriarchy, racism, capitalism, and so on.

This chapter is about those links with other antimilitarist and progressive movements, especially where a conscientious objection movement springs up almost incidentally to another movement, for example against a regime that conscripts members of the other movement, for purposes to which they are opposed. We'll use the examples of South Africa during the apartheid regime and the current militarised regime in Eritrea, to look at how conscientious objection movements can be part of challenging regimes more generally, as well as part of wider campaigns that are not purely antimilitarist.





Conscientious Objectors Resisting the State, Not Just the Military

Social-political contexts draw people into conscientious objection movements, and they also shape their nature. Two obvious examples are those groups which sprang up in opposition to the South African apartheid regime, and to the ongoing occupation of Palestine. In both cases, members of the ethnic group in power – white South Africans on the one hand, Jewish Israelis on the other – were called up to take up arms in defence of their ethnic group's position of power and privilege, through conscripted armed forces.

The default position for most young men and sometimes young women (including in Israel currently) - what the state tries so hard to portray as the neutral course of action - is joining the military. Therefore, especially in an authoritarian or oppressive regime, refusing the call up is a way of undermining the morale of the security forces, and pushing back against the power of the repressive state more generally. Let's look at South Africa under apartheid to see an example of this.

The End Conscription Campaign and Apartheid

Living in an oppressive state creates endless micro instances in which the populace colludes in recreating oppressions, and indeed it may be nearly impossible not to do so. In these cases, withholding your labour from conscription can be one of the clearest ways of expressing discontent.

As member of the Apartheid-era End Conscription Campaign in South Africa Janet Cherry said, 'many young people do not want to go to the army... Where the military is highly politicised and is upholding a repressive regime, there is even more opportunity for creating divisions within the security forces and undermining their legitimacy. In South Africa, where only white men were conscripted, it was important to make it clear to these young men that they were being used by the apartheid regime to uphold an illegitimate system. The strategy in this case was to form a "single issue campaign" around the demand for an end to race-based conscription: the End Conscription Campaign (ECC). In this campaign, we drew on the example of the US Anti-Vietnam war movement, drawing parallels between Angola and Vietnam, and, as the conflict escalated inside South Africa, by questioning why one section of the youth were being used to suppress their peers within the townships'.³

This important campaign was a strategy that evolved from decades of conscientious objection in South Africa. Judith Connors, in her thesis *Empowering Alternatives*, points out that the roots of ECC are not always acknowledged post-apartheid.⁴ The pre-existing conscientious objection movement and the Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) were the incubators for the birth of the End Conscription Campaign.





Conscription became a necessity for the white minority apartheid government that had come to power in 1948. The Defence Act No 44 of 1957 introduced a ballot system of three months service for white males. In the 1950s religious groupings, including the forerunner to the South African Council of Churches, the Christian Council of South Africa, were arguing for an exemption to serving in the army if it was against their religion. This led to the inclusion in the Defence Act No 44 of 1957 of a non-combatant option for anyone whose religious commitment did not permit them to take up arms. The Defence Act of 1963 retained the provision for religious objection although this did not sit well with the state. The Defence Act of 1967, when the period of service was extended to nine months, general unhappiness with conscription began to make itself heard.

Connors says, 'although COSG was not to come into existence for at least another 12 years or so, the seeds for its formation were directly sewn by the Defence Act No 85 of 1967, which made it compulsory for all white males between the ages of 17 and 65 to serve a nine month period in the SADF [South African Defence Force].'

In 1977 the Act changed again and doubled the period of military service to 24 months. While COSG existed informally in the decade before this, it is not surprising that with motivation coming from existing conscientious objectors, the COSG was formalised in 1979. Meanwhile the government had set up the Naude Committee with the purpose of finding a new way to deal with conscientious objectors. The committee proposed a distinction between objectors who were religiously motivated and those who were politically or morally motivated. Eight year prison sentences were proposed for those in the latter category.⁵ Thanks to action by COSG, the amendment in 1983 allowed for alternative service options for those in the first category but although reduced from what had been proposed, the prison service for those in the second, was six years.

Picture taken at a press conference of Conscientious Objectors in Cape Town, 1988 (credit: South African History Archive [online])





In 1983 the new legislation introduced the Board for Religious Objection. Connors, however, says, that the establishment of the Board, with its strict division between religion and politics, created dilemmas for the Board. The amendment establishing the Board was not achieving what the government had hoped for, 'namely the appearance of an enlightened reasonableness through the creation of a forum that would accommodate religious objectors (and hence not alienate the churches), while simultaneously attempting to stifle what it saw as a political movement, which was using the issue of conscription to raise doubts about the legitimacy of the apartheid state and its practices'.

Many conscientious objectors were not motivated by pacifism, but anyone appearing before the board had to be a religious objector or pacifist. Some conscripts wanted to make the point that, whether they were religious or not, they could not take up arms and support an immoral government against their fellow South Africans. This feeling increased as the country became more militarised and there were more police and army in the townships, especially in the 1980s. The very large numbers who were not turning up for call-ups towards the end had undoubtedly been influenced by the ECC, but even larger numbers, as Janet Cherry says above, just didn't want to do military service. Although many of them rejected apartheid, many were not politicised; they just didn't want the time in which they should be studying and getting on with establishing a career, spent in the army. When they sought advice from the Conscription Advice Service their political consciousness may have been raised, but they were generally very ordinary young white people who accepted the status quo.

As stated, the pre-existing Conscientious Objector Support Group (COSG) was the incubator for the birth of the ECC. This foundation – and in turn the impetus for COSG itself – reflects how organisations with nonviolent action agendas cooperate and help the birthing process that will answer a specific need in a society.

COSG existed in different forms in each province in the country and provided support and advice to conscripts. It also saw its role as educating the public around conscription and militarisation. And although it did not have the same pull, media coverage, and popularity that the ECC would have in the future, there was in these early years considerable publicity around the young men taking a stand against conscription. The group and its Conscription Advice Service (non-directive advice)⁶ were proactive in publicising their services. The extensive experience gained by this group and the conscripts who challenged the legislation and went to detention barracks or prison, inspired many more to become conscientious objectors and later to become active in the ECC.

The exact date and circumstances of the formation of the ECC are sometimes questioned but generally the accepted view is that the growing appreciation of the fact that although it was illegal to encourage South Africans to refuse to serve, it was not illegal to call for the end of conscription. The identification of this legal





distinction is attributed to Sheena Duncan who had an uncanny eye for picking up contradictions such as this in apartheid legislation. In 1983, the Black Sash conference resolved to work towards the abolition of conscription. The latter is perceived as being the impetus for the ECC and in the same year COSG supported the call resolving to work towards a campaign against compulsory conscription.

From this point the groundwork started and branches were being formed which would culminate in the launch of the End Conscription Campaign. Its inaugural meeting is recorded as 17 November 1983 but officially it was launched in October 1984 as an anti-war movement that was actively 'engaged in the struggle against apartheid.' Its existence was based on resisting the Apartheid state's use of the military to prop up its regime by conscripting all white South African men to serve in the armed forces. The campaign was highly visible with activities appealing to the youth. Although members were harassed, intimidated, and imprisoned and meetings banned, the ECC was a broad church. Annemarie Hendricks describes its character in Sheena Duncan: 'It allowed space for many, including English and Afrikaans speakers, Christians, liberals, lefties, graphic artists and musicians. It was one of the few anti-apartheid movements to be openly gay-friendly and which prized creativity and self expression without losing sight of South African society as a whole. It was able to produce enjoyable politicised social events as well as media that attracted attention to the campaign in poignant yet often delightfully amusing ways – and which infuriated the apartheid regime'.

The many South African conscientious objectors - particularly those who took a conscious stand, in the true sense of the word – cannot all be recognised and mentioned in this chapter, but all were willing to put their lives on hold, make sacrifices and even suffer the wrath of the state, knowing that they could spend years in jail. They used conscientious objection as a non-violence tool to bring about change. Their actions too were commendable from a non-violent perspective. For instance, fasting was a way of asserting one's rights from early on and in 1985 three conscientious objectors fasted for three weeks before the 'troops out of the township' campaign took off.⁷ In 1987, a group of 23 conscientious objectors went public with their stand on refusing to serve and set off a trend of young men stating publicly that they would not serve. These numbers declaring they would not serve grew steadily despite the possible punitive repercussions they faced.

An organisation's success can be measured by the government in power's reaction to it, so it was not surprising that the ECC was banned along with a number of other anti-apartheid organisations, who were all members of the United Democratic Front.⁸ The ECC's banning was met with strong opposition from students.

In 1988 conscripts were still being jailed. One conscientious objector was jailed





a year later. Conscription was reduced in 1989 from two years to one. The government was already involved in negotiations with the liberation movements behind the scenes while the conscription machinery continued. Resources had to be mobilised to successfully oppose repressive sections of the 1992 Amendment Bill. With the banning of the ECC, COSG had to step into the breach and 'hold up the high profiled anti-militarisation work'. Fortunately the ECC 'unbanned' itself in 1989 and became critically active with COSG in ensuring that conscription would not be a feature of the new dispensation. In 1993 conscription was abolished.

Women and the Conscientious Objection Movement

During the anti-apartheid struggle, gender rights took a back seat to the mammoth task of overcoming apartheid. That is not to say that they were completely neglected – but they were not always incorporated into campaigns in a way that could have contributed to greater discussion around them. This was especially so with regard to the military and conscientious objection. Notwithstanding the recognition of women and men as equal within all the arms of the security forces, as with all military institutions, the idea that the weak need to be protected – and that this is a task for males – still prevails.

This was particularly exploited by the Nationalist Party, with all the racist undertones that accompany gender typical white male bravado and the need to protect white women from 'uncivilised' black men.

Women did play key roles in the movement. The late Howard Clark in his preface to *Women Conscientious Objectors* – an anthology⁹ identifies Sheena Duncan, president of the Black Sash, as the person who saw the opportunity to campaign against conscription and that such a campaign would have the potential to open a new front in the struggle for a non-racist South Africa.

Jacklyn Cock, a feminist, an academic as well as a member of the Black Sash, says of the ECC, 'Many of its members and supporters were white women. Women were an important source of commitment and energy'.¹⁰ However, she also attributes this role to what could be seen as a gender stereotype implying that these women were "moved by their maternal role".

When Conscription Ends

If one of the conscientious objection movement's core principles is not antimilitarism – or at least, the core principle of enough individuals within a movement is not antimilitarism – then what happens to the group after the regime has changed, but the militarism remains? In some cases, this overlaps with the general discussion on what happens to conscientious objection movements when conscription ends (see chapter 20); but it is perhaps even more acute when regimes are known as particularly heinous – beyond the realms of 'normal' or





'commonly accepted' militarism – partly because of the sheer number of people involved who might not have been engaged in an anti-conscription campaign under a less controversial regime.

In South Africa, at the closure of the ECC, an organisation came into being that would be a reminder of the rejection of conscription and militarisation of society. That organisation was the Ceasefire Campaign. It recognised that the country was still highly militarised and that our neighbours were still at war. For more than 20 years until it closed for lack of funds, the organisation, with a small band of activists, was able to keep demilitarisation and the advantages of nonviolence in the public eye.

Members of the ECC have camaraderie among themselves to this day. Many went on to be successful in different sectors unrelated to the field they were active in. However, their commitment to the principles they stood for still informs their lives. Others continued in the field of peace and justice doing research, advocacy, and campaigning. Twenty five years after the inauguration of the ECC, ex members raised funding and commemorated the event in the most extraordinary way. The details of just how much was done can be found in the South African History Archive archive. In each of the main cities, seminars and exhibitions took place. Many speakers were ex-ECC staff, leaders and members. The commemoration culminated in a three day period in Cape Town 29th October to 2nd November 2009. SAHA records this event: 'formal seminars included honest, incisive and often critical appraisals of the anti-conscription movement. The event included a range of acclaimed local speakers, as well as an international panel of conscientious objectors and anti-war activists, including a Vietnam veteran, the Chairman of War Resisters' International, an Israeli objector and an Eritrean objector'.

Music¹¹ and art were also a major part of the commemoration, a reminder of the important contribution that the arts made to an exceptional movement that helped prevent out and out civil war in South Africa. The Deputy President of South Africa at the time, Kgalema Motlanthe, also paid tribute to the movement and its contribution to the struggle for freedom.

Notwithstanding a professional voluntary army, the military today, with its promises of training and financial security, is an attractive option particularly to those from disadvantaged backgrounds. This, together with calls for the introduction of national service, makes constant vigilance a necessity.

Eritrea

There are also those repressive, heavily militarised states where labour is militarised far beyond a 'privileged' group who 'police' the majority. In 2015, the state of Eritrea falls into this category. Just over six million people live in this





country, in which campaigner and former combatant Luwam Estefanos tells us that 'for the last 14 years or more not a single Eritrean has been ordinarily demobilised'.

Conscription in Eritrea is indefinite, with state functions like health and education services populated by staff in civilian clothes who are actually still regimented, and will return to their regiments when their placements are over, or when 'disciplined'.

Conscientious objection movements do not exist in Eritrea as such at present although there are those who refuse to fight, mostly Jehovah's Witnesses, many of whom have been in prison for over 20 years for their refusal, but war resistance is rife in another form: people flee. The estimated 4,000 plus Eritreans, including unaccompanied minors, who flee the country every month – despite shoot-to-kill orders implemented by border guards and the extreme dangers along escape routes – are probably not pacifists or antimilitarist campaigners: but they do want their freedom and their lives. The militarisation of Eritrea denies this.

Indefinite conscription is only one factor that prompts migration in Eritrea. It works alongside human rights violations including extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances and incommunicado detentions, arbitrary arrests and detentions, torture, inhumane prison conditions, and lack of freedom of expression and opinion, assembly, association, religious belief and movement as incentives to flee. This exodus has a number of consequences. Firstly, of course, there are fewer people to join the military, and indeed, to fill roles more generally. Secondly, as it continues, the wider world notices. In late 2014 the UN Refugee Agency recognised the sharp increase in the number of Eritrean refugees to Europe, Ethiopia and Sudan. Between January and November 2014, nearly 37,000 Eritreans had sought refuge in Europe, compared to almost 13,000 during the same period in the previous year.

Draft evasion and immigration to avoid conscription may become one of the factors that trigger a change in the Eritrean regime. Perhaps the more militarised a country becomes, the more threatened it is by relying on the labour of a people fatigued and traumatised by its violence.

Conclusion

Conscientious objector movements do not happen in a vacuum. They are responses to circumstance: militarism as it is played out in each state, community, and home. It follows that they should never be isolated and unrelated to the struggles that occur around them, be they the most visible and obvious – like those against the Apartheid regime in South Africa – or the most everyday and accepted, like gendered violence everywhere.

As we have seen, thousands of people who would not want to make a





politicised stand as a conscientious objector nevertheless reject war and militarisation. They wish to lead peaceful and productive lives – something which military governments and agents of the military industrial complex reject while they continue to unashamedly pursue the promotion of violence and death.

Anti-conscription and conscientious objection campaigns have been inspired by, and part of, wider campaigns in the past, and they will be in the future. Where conscientious objection movements are part of 'successful' movements, for example for regime change, the challenge is to adapt as a movement to the new regime, and especially one that might feel less oppressive and militarised. Nonetheless, there will still be challenges to face, as the life of South Africa post-apartheid demonstrates.

1. For more on Hannah's background, see Chapter 1: Conscientious Objection in History'.
2. Clark, Howard 2010, 'Objecting: an act of civil disobedience', Open Democracy [online] 14 May 2010, <<https://www.opendemocracy.net/5050/howard-clark/objecting-act-of-civil-disobedience>>, accessed 12th June 2015.
3. Cherry, Janet 2014, 'Activism in Oppressive Regimes: some lessons from South Africa', in Handbook for Nonviolent Campaigns, 2nd edn. (London: War Resisters' International), p116.
4. Connors, Judith 2007, Empowering Alternatives, A History of the Conscientious Objector Support Group's challenge to military service in South Africa, (dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of M.Com. In the subject of Peace and Conflict Resolution Studies, University of KwaZulu-Natal).
5. Connors 2007, p77.
6. Connors quotes Charles Bester: 'Maybe the most impressive aspect of COSG was that they never hijacked my objection. Here I was, an eighteen year old with specific religious and political views, in the company of people, whose knowledge of South African politics in general and the military in particular was far greater than mine. And yet my view were held to be important, and in as much as it was me who was objecting, to be respected' p205.
7. During the WRI conference held in 2014 in Cape Town, South Africans said they were particularly pleased that the event was taking place at the venue, the City Hall, where conscientious objector Ivan Toms broke his fast at the launch of the campaign.
8. The United Democratic Front was a collection of anti-apartheid organisations started in 1983. Initially, it was committed to nonviolence but was influenced by the people's insurrection of the mid 1980s. To be identified with this important internal campaign gave the ECC substantial credence with the broad anti-apartheid movement and local black organisations. (South African History Online n.d., United Democratic Front (UDF), Sahistory.org <<http://www.sahistory.org.za/organisations/united-democratic-front-udf>>, accessed 12th June 2015).
9. Eds. Ellen Elster and Majken Jul Sorensen 2010, (London: War Resisters' International).
10. Cock, Jacklyn 1989, 'Women and the SADF', in War and Society: The Militarisation of South Africa, eds. Jacklyn Cock and Laurie Nathan, (New York: St Martin's Press Inc.).
11. A creative and successful action was to use the name 'Forces Favourites', a radio propaganda programme for soldiers to help increase their morale, for a compilation of mainly anti-apartheid music. Shifty Records released it in conjunction with the ECC.





