“Voices of Courage”

What makes people courageous?

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Abstract

What characterises courageous people, and what enables them to be courageous? This practice-based social sculpture research project investigates these questions by analysing the pathways of people who became activists and through an introspective assessment of my own experiences as an activist.

My findings are based on 21 semi-structured interviews with human rights and environmental activists, men, and women, between 19 to 80 years of age, from 16 countries, including Iran, Mexico, China, Russia, and Botswana. The sample is characterised as a group of people who engage publicly and for the benefit of others in sharing a humane, ecological, and just society without using violence.

I recorded the interviews on video, analysed these recordings through a transdisciplinary and autoethnographic lens and made short films based on each interview. The reflective commentary complements the practice-based social sculpture research project:

Courageous activists are not born but have been shaped by their families, role models, and mentors. The engagement with these facilitators and singular watershed moments sparks an internal process that leads them to develop and maintain courageous agency: Experience of activism perpetuates activism. This courageous agency is defined by high levels of self-confidence and a strong belief in the power of the individual. It is characterised by a strong sense of justice and a feeling of obligation and responsibility for society.

The research aims to contribute to our understanding of courageous activism. (1) The interview questions uncovered rarely attainable personal layers of motivation for becoming politically active. Thus, they have unearthed a new understanding of distinct commonalities relating to the preconditions for courageous behaviour, individual capacity, resilience, and values and beliefs in activists. (2.) The research adds to a transnational perspective on motives and preconditions of agency in activists. (3) A unique contribution is the traceable co-creative interview process and sharing of the condensed videos on the public website www.voices-of-courage.com.

The testimonies of these interviewees and their analysis provide a richer understanding of the evolution of courageous activism. By accessing the website and watching the videos, a wider audience has a chance to become aware of their agency.

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Prologue - life are stories – stories are life.

Why do we tell each other stories? Like the stories of my interviewees, you are about to read.

Joan Didion's answer was: *'We tell ourselves stories in order to live.'* (Didion, 2006)

I remember when I was a child that the story of Rapunzel somewhat left me puzzled and nearly angry. Why is a woman captured in a tower with a braid almost as long as the tower is high, waiting for a man to tell her that she could cut off her braid, pin it to the window and climb down on it to be free? Why does she not know that by herself? Alice Walker famously said: "The most common way women give up their power is by thinking they don't have any."

Quite the opposite of Rapunzel and an actual guiding image of my childhood and youth was Pippi Longstocking, who maintained an adventurous, happily independent lifestyle and simply managed everything with her unbelievable strength and wild imagination. She always used her power for good, is generous to others and true to herself – a true visionary and role model.

My interviewees are visionaries and role models as well. I am telling their stories because they can be a strong example of what each of us is capable of. I believe that what we can envision can come true - of course, we must work towards it. And if you want something to be done, do it yourself and do not wait for someone else to do it like Rapunzel.

These good stories about human courage, goodness, and excellence – have existed as long as humans have walked this planet from the ancient epos of Gilgamesh, the small David who fights off the giant Goliath to the medieval Joan of Arc. Even though she was burned, her story is very much alive. The legend of an Afghan heroine - Malalai of Maiwand - tells a similar story. She, just 18 years old, leads the Pashtun fighters in the "Battle of Maiwand". She is known as the Joan of Arc of Afghanistan.

More than 100 years later, a father and activist from Pakistan fighting for the education of girls and women named his child Malala. We all know the story of this Malala who sparks hope and gives self-esteem to girls and women worldwide, and her father knew the story of Malalai of Maiwand. In this spirit, we should pass on the encouraging stories of my interviewees. I am confident that the tales you are about to hear, such as the Tiger story from Myanmar or the tale of an origami elephant folded in Silivri prison in Turkey, are as striking and lasting.

1.0. Introduction

This reflective commentary on my practice-based PhD project about courage[1] and activism describes my process, methodology, the theoretical context relevant to this study, my claims, findings, and the contribution this research makes. My research practice consists of the analysis of semi-structured interviews and archival material. It is embedded in a transdisciplinary[2] approach working in the field of psychology, sociology, oral history, art, and social sculpture[3]. The interplay of multiple methods such as video, experimental writing, drawing and autoethnography is one of the characteristics of this project.

The core question of this study is: What enables people to become courageous activists?

After defining the core question, I searched for courageous people in various contexts and places around the globe who would be willing to share their stories while answering my questions. My interviewees are people who venture into courageous actions for moral reasons and for the benefit of others despite the consequences and risks to their own life. They are compelled to their conscience and have committed themselves to contribute to a path toward a more just, equal, and ecologically sustainable future without using violence.

I aim to lay bare the successive steps each of my interviewees took, their choices, even if unconsciously, and the internal process they engaged in to become courageous activists. Based on the stories of my interviewees, I want to question whether courage and activism are not something that one is born with while others are not but are, in fact, a competence that we learn whenever we copy from others that needs fostering and that by repeating becomes self-evident. This study examines the role of external supporting factors of courageous activism, such as different ways of upbringing or the influence of emerging necessities through social and political circumstances. Furthermore, the research displays the interdependency of courage, passion, empathy, and perseverance.

My 21 interviewees come from 16 different countries, such as Iran, Mexico, Serbia, and Myanmar and they are almost equally mixed in gender and range in age from 19 to 80. Their backgrounds are as

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[1] The term courage is used in three intersecting strands as *"a commitment to moral principles, an awareness of the danger involved in supporting those principles, and a willing endurance of that danger."* (Kidder, 2005)

[2] The term transdisciplinary is used in the sense of creating *"a space of knowledge beyond the disciplines"* (Basarab Nicolescu, 2010) where the outcome will be something more and *"besides the sum of its parts"*. (Aristotle and Ross, 1997)

[3] The term was coined by German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986) describing his radical expanded concept of art where every human being can develop the capacity to creatively shape and co-determine the society, we live in.

manifold as the causes and goals they advocate for. Among other causes they engage in are the peaceful coexistence of Israel and Palestine, equal rights of women and girls in Iran or Botswana, they advocate to protect the water resources of their native tribe in Mexico, or they fight against forced labour in China and hate speech on the internet. Even though their history and the causes they fight for are diverse, they have distinct commonalities. For example, they all encountered role models in their lives who shaped their views and understandings of the world around them to the core. They all experienced a watershed moment where the personal became political. They all reached what I would call a point of no return; they all refer to justice and firmly believe that what they do matters. After passing the point of no return, their courageous activism has grown exponentially, and this research wants to reveal why and how that happened.

The core aim of this study has been to create an 'Archive of Courage' in which I gather the testimonies of activists who have lived experiences about becoming courageous and engaging in finding solutions for pressing quests of their societies. Of particular importance to me is that this archive is online and usable for everyone to enter different experiences of agency and activism. My interviewees become a living library inspiring the audience to engage voluntarily and for the benefit of others in the challenges of our time. These interviews have been documented on the website: www.voices-of-courage.com. This project is best understood by considering the interviews alongside this commentary.

1.1. Why is this question important?

"Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet. "(Alice Walker, 2013)

There are a lot of good reasons for which to be courageous. We live in challenging times – as all times in human history have had challenges. However, one aspect seems different today: it is how and what we think about the future: that we have begun to fear we possibly have no future. Man-made climate change accelerates faster and more destructive than we had assumed to date. The summer of 2022 has again shown extreme weather where deadly floods were washing away the homes of thousands of people, and widespread fires were raging almost uncontrolled in different places around the world, as far as Siberia. The just-released IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report assesses impacts and risks as well as our options to determine the future course of climate change and the pace at which it will occur.

According to the UN Refugee Agency 82.4. million people are displaced resulting from conflict, human rights violations, and persecution but also from climate change-related droughts and floods. A map created by the NGO IRIN (Integrated Regional Information Networks) shows 40 active conflicts and

wars around the globe today. Some of them started more than half a century ago. Living in 2022 means we have access to all that information about almost every place on earth you can think of – be it Siberia or Syria.

One of the problems I see is the disparity between our knowledge and our activities. Generally, it seems that what we know does not affect what we do. It appears that we have developed strategies to justify not doing anything at all but rather coping with pressing requests and the feeling of guilt. When I listen to the news, I hear that we have developed sophisticated theoretical language describing the horrors happening around the world. The language of analysis becomes a necessary tool for us to distance ourselves. We examine whose fault it is; we point to those responsible who are not us; we tell ourselves that we do not have the power to change anything anyway; we wait and spectate and call it hope.

Civic engagement and the courage to do so, to give something positive back to the world we live in, are always needed in every society. Scientists warn us almost daily that if each of us does not contribute to the transformation of the way we eat, travel, and consume, if we do not stop enabling exploitation, war, conflict, and inequality, there will be not much of a future left for the next generations to come. To picture that: by 2050, we would need three planets like ours if we are to continue at present. Those transformations are not easily made, and they require accepting responsibility which is a prerequisite for courage. Understanding the evolution of courage and becoming conscious of one's agency will be a place to start.

1.2. Context – where is this research located?

I was challenged by the writings of the political theorist Hannah Arendt about the disaccord of knowledge and action. She witnessed the trial of Adolf Eichmann and thought to explain how the Holocaust could occur through the concept of *"banality of evil"* (Arendt, 1994). She believed this *'banality'* was, in fact, non-thinking and that true thinking would imply taking responsibility and acting. If we follow this line of thinking, we permit every injustice because we either have not thought about it carefully or act irresponsibly. She calls for the 'Gemeinsinn' (public spirit) (Arendt, 1998) to inhabit the world together as a public sphere in which we dwell, discuss, and share everything relevant to our community.

This thought also features in the 'permanent conference' idea of the German artist Joseph Beuys (Beuys and Rappmann, 2001). He proposes that a democratic society is a radical work of art and needs a permanent debate and exchange of ideas and thoughts which remains an ongoing process were every possible outcome or form is transitional and yet to be imagined and shaped further. While coming up

with this concept, he coined the term 'Social Sculpture' in the 1970s. I have always been interested in the interrelation of art and the social-political sphere. When I look back at my journey as an activist who became an artist, I feel both overlap in my own path.

Through my MA in Social Sculpture, I began to explore the concepts of social sculpture and its application to society as a whole, its ability to mobilise people to become 'Handelnde' (active participants) in society, as Joseph Beuys proposed. His thinking was at the heart of social and ecological questions; he became a founding member of the German Green Party in response to a pressing deficit in the political system of that time. After decades of working as an artist at the intersection of politics, education, oral history and art, I was finally able to locate my work in the field of social sculpture without having to restrain it to one area or another. Beuys social sculpture philosophy was embracing and permeating into other fields like politics, economics, education, and other aspects of life. Social sculpture highlights the interdependent relation between individual and societal transformation; thus, Beuys ideas about everyone as a creative and forming member of society have influenced this project and my work in general.

In addition to Beuys work, I was struck by the creative strategies of Antanus Mockus, a Mathematics professor and philosopher who – unexpectedly and with no experience as a politician - was twice voted in as mayor of Bogotá. At the time, the city was considered one of the most dangerous places in the world, ruled by a machismo society where drugs, crime and corruption seemed the everyday normal. The first days after his election, while Mockus cut a heart shape out of his bulletproof vest, his administration offered to exchange weapons for toys or electronics.[4]

Through artistic intervention[5] and a balance between self–regulation, mutual regulation and legal regulation, he managed that major traffic fatalities dropped by over fifty per cent. While Mockus's administration saved thousands of pesos, cracked the corruption, and introduced a voluntary tax system[6], the citizens of Bogotá began to self-regulate and reclaimed responsibility for their safety. Mockus moved people with art from apathy to empathy – exactly what Beuys had envisioned.

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[4] Even though less than 1 per cent of weapons were given up, the percentage of citizens who thought it normal to have firearms for self-protection dropped from 24.8 per cent in 2001 to 10.4 per cent in 2003. Homicides fell by 26 per cent. The weapons were melted into spoons for children; on each was inscribed: *I once was a gun*.

[5] Mockus discharged around 400 corrupt traffic policemen and replaced them with unarmed clowns who controlled the streets with signs that read *correcto* on one side if road users stopped at the red light and *incorrecto* when they did not.

[6] Mockus administration asked citizens to pay a 10 per cent extra tax voluntarily. 63.000 citizens followed his call. Between 1990 and 2002, Bogotás's tax revenues increased from 200 million to 750 million.

Furthermore, among others, my work was influenced by individual artists like Ai Weiwei and, for example, his social sculpture 'citizen investigation'[7] (2008) and artistic collectives like the Centre for Political Beauty and their several social sculpture projects like 'White Crosses' (2014)[8] or 'Federal Emergency Programme'[9] (2014).

Over and above, this research project was inspired and informed by the work of Ervin Staub, a professor of psychology. He is particularly known for his profound studies on pro-social behaviour and altruism (Staub, 2015). He is researching and applying his theories about goodness and helping behaviour in several training programs with governmental officials in Rwanda, Burundi and in Congo, who want to contribute to the reconciliation of antagonised parties. One of the insights I took from his studies is that passive bystanders inherently possess the capacity to become active. His work steered me to look at the capabilities and the power of courageous activists and the potential ability to act in passive bystanders.

Samuel and Pearl Oliner (Oliner and Oliner, 1988), professors of sociology and education who have designed in-depth questionnaires for rescuers of Jews and interviewed around 800 of them in several countries, gave me a fundamental understanding of why people decide to act for the benefit of others. The detailed and complex findings of their study confirmed what I had identified in all my interviewees: altruism and the willingness to perform extraordinary acts of courage and kindness in support of others do exist. Apprehending their work helped me to sharpen my questions and to recognise my findings on what enables people to do those courageous actions.

I have reflected on various social movements, uprisings, and actors in different times and places throughout my research. For example, the Arab Spring activists or the protesters in Gezi Park in Istanbul agreed that courage is not the absence but the mastering of fear and that they are not mutually exclusive. The existentialist philosopher Paul Tillich indicates in his book "The Courage to Be" that courage which he describes as '*being',* embraces fear and can overcome this fear – in Tillich's sense, the representation of '*nonbeing*': *"Being has nonbeing within itself as that which is eternally present and eternally overcome in the process of the divine life."* (Tillich and Gomes, 2000, p. 34)

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[7] 2008 when an earthquake struck Sichuan, killing 70.000 people, Ai Weiwei launched a 'citizen investigation' via his blog, engaging hundreds of volunteers to collect names of children who died because their schools collapsed because they were poorly constructed verifiable caused by corruption. The project's primary purpose was to investigate the truth and show respect for every individual life.

[8] https://politicalbeauty.com/wall.html

[9] https://politicalbeauty.com/kindertransport.html

Most researchers agree that courage in humans is probably more nurturing than nature. C. R. Woodard developed the "courage scale" (Woodard and Pury, 2007) to measure courage, considering and analysing the level of willingness to act and the experienced fear while acting. Several researchers debate whether courage and the willingness to act are intrinsically linked to knowledge or if courage, according to William Desmond, *"exceeds an act of will"* and *"is planted in a deeper ontological soil of the human being"* and is an *"elemental love of being."* (Darling-Smith, 2002, pp. 11–29) Much research has been done on finding numerous definitions of courage, its nature and the reasons for courageous actions. Apart from a few studies about how to facilitate social courage in the workplace, I could not find studies in current research about what enables and makes people act courageously as activists.

1.3. Characteristics and Significance

Three characteristics of this research stand out: First, this study draws on interviews with activists from various countries working on particular issues in unique contexts worldwide. They come from or live in democracies as well as hybrid states or dictatorships. Even though there is literature about particular uprisings or revolutions in one specific country or region and its protagonists, like the research about First Movers in the Arab Spring[10] or the protesters in Gezi Park[11] in Turkey, I have not found an overarching transnational study focusing on what enables those protagonists to become courageous activists given that their place of birth, their ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, age, physical abilities, religious or political beliefs, heritage and life experience are diverse. The concept of this study is that there are universal preconditions and factors, a set of values and beliefs that enable individuals to become courageous activists apart from their givens.

In this work, the audience can follow the development and the choices of a young student leader in the 1988 uprising against the military in Myanmar whom his fellow students elected to become the 'Min Ko Naing', a mythical figure in Myanmar's history which can be translated as "the one who conquers the king". In the traditional story, the Min Ko Naing only gets elected when there is an unjust king or

[10] E.g.: Adria Lawrence, Repression and Activism among the Arab Spring's First Movers: Morocco's (Almost) Revolutionaries, Tufts University 2013

[11] E.g.: Hatem Ete & Coskun Tastan, The Gezi Park protests: A political, Sociological and Discursive Analysis, Seta publications, Istanbul 2014.

administration to defeat. The public can retrace the politicisation of Xiye Bastida, a young climate activist and a member of the indigenous Mexican Otomi-Toltec community, or Nurcan Baysal, a Kurdish journalist from Diyarbakir in Turkey who is documenting human rights violations in her region. All interviewees let the audience partake in their progress and strategies, formative moments, and factors of their lives that made them become who they are. This work shows different ways of becoming courageous and manifold issues worth being courageous for.

Secondly, this study is done by a researcher with a lived experience as an activist. My own life experiences have had a profound influence on this research. Growing up in a dictatorship, I joined the very small opposition in East Germany, which became a movement that triggered the *Peaceful Revolution,* which finally brought down the wall. Even if not all our dreams were realised, the *Peaceful Revolution* in Eastern Europe changed the world order. Looking back, I have been asked many times and asked myself: "What made you act?"

My interviewees know that almost every struggle they have been through - putting everything in personal life on the line for one's beliefs and stance, not knowing what will come out of it, fear of persecution and imprisonment and often, in the end, the loss of freedom - we actually share this experience. The questions I am allowed to ask my interviewees are welcomed as a sharing of experience, learning together, and trying to find answers to each other's questions. With each interviewee, I feel a mutual recognition as if I would be 'meeting myself in the other and know and being known'.

Several of my interviewees said they would normally not have agreed to an in-depth interview about personal motivations but would participate in research conducted by a fellow activist. Min Ko Naing told me that he agreed to the interview because he was excited to try to find answers by sharing what life has been for us. Ali Abu Awwad, a peace activist from the West Bank, mentioned that he was determined to find out everything from inside the Peaceful Revolution in Germany as Palestine and Israel desperately needed such a peaceful revolution. This is fundamental to understanding why and how I was able to venture into this work.

Thirdly, I do this work as an artist and as practice-based research in the field of social sculpture. Unlike a scientist, my focus and the primary outcome of my work is the public visual form of this research: the online 'Archive of Courage'. As an artist, I deploy my senses to picture and interpret the world around me, bring my perceptions and visions about the present and future to life, and pour them into an 'image' that can easily be entered and understood by others.

In 1989 our small movement used the same strategy of creating images that could be instantly understood and touch the hearts of the audience directly to convince our fellow citizens to join us in the Peaceful Revolution. For example, we wrote the names of banned films on balloons and let them fly in front of a festival cinema. The people from the state security service were jumping into the air, trying to destroy the balloons with their cigarettes. We would have needed so many words to explain what this image depicted so easily to the public this evening. Images make words more memorable and lasting.

When Martin Luther King started his speech on the 28th of August in 1963 with the words: "I have a dream", he truly had drafted a vision of what the United States should become in the future. Moreover, generations up to today have internalised his vision and taken part in its realisation. If we can imagine a future where we are equal in diversity and coexist with nature, that vision is the first step towards acting in the ways required to achieve this future. Vaclav Havel, artist and the only poet to become president so far has stated in one of his public speeches addressing his fellow citizens: *"If we are to change our world view, images have to change. The artist now has a very important job to do."*

Now and for the time ahead of us, it will not be enough to be worried and to hope that someone else will take the required action that changes things for us to have a secure future on this planet. The Romanian American author, human rights activist, Nobel laureate and Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel once summarised that in the 20th century, there were only three types of people: the killer, the victim, and the bystander. I assume that he thought about the bystander in the sense of the possibility that every passive bystander can decide to become active. However, I believe there exists another type, the type of the courageous actor.

While giving voice and visibility to these courageous activists and their sense of purpose, I want to bring attention to the manifold possibilities of contribution through the courage and activism of individuals. If the audience becomes self-aware about their choices - like my interviewees - about their agency instead of thinking they have none, they might start using it. While listening to the interviewees' stories without simplifying things, I hope to enable *hope* in others - that engagement and activism to make the world a better place is doable, worth it and an urgent necessity.

2. 0. Strands of Inquiry

This chapter gives a picture of the starting points, the strands I followed and the context in which my research process unfolded.

2.1. Forms and Dimensions of Courage and Social Engagement

In Western culture, philosophers like Plato, Aristoteles, Aquinas, and Kierkegaard among others mould our notion of courage[12]. However, this project has been mainly influenced by the research on courage and altruism of Ervin Staub (Staub, 2015) and Samuel and Pearl Oliner (Oliner, 2011) and guided by the example of the courageous stance of Raoul Wallenberg (Wallenberg and United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2011) and Daniel and Philip Berrigan (Berrigan and Dear, 2009).

As I embarked on this research, I needed to understand courage's components[13] and dimensions[14]. I realised that courage is what is being shown; it is an application, but I would need to look for the substance of courage and from where it springs. When I started reading research about courage and recorded my first interviews, I realised that courageous actions and the degree of risk involved, hence the level of willingness one must apply to perform those actions, are intrinsically linked to place, ethnicity, culture, physical ability, or gender. I want to emphasise that all my interviewees have developed their courageous activism against the background of their givens.

For example, when Joshua Wong, a young activist and politician from Hong Kong is demonstrating and advocating for fair elections and free speech, he needs to control his fear of facing the consequences such as interrogation and imprisonment with much more will and determination than an activist demonstrating and advocating for climate justice in a democratic society. It requires an almost inconceivable level of courage when Malebogo Molefhe a female basketball player from Botswana, advocates for the safety and equal rights of women and girls after being shot eight times and tied to a wheelchair since then.

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[12] The term courage and the notion of it are often confused with terms like patriotism, audacity, bravery, or valour and mistakenly simplified as the opposite of cowardice and absence of fear. Osswald, Greitemeyer, Fischer and Frey empirically investigated in several studies the separation of moral courage and heroism. (Osswald *et al.*, 2010a, 2010b) Studies from Walker and Firmer suggest that moral courage and heroism are associated with different moral prototypes. Heroism corresponds to the brave prototype while moral courage corresponds to the just prototype. (Walker and Hennig, 2004; Walker and Frimer, 2007; Walker, Frimer and Dunlop, 2010)

[13] When mentioning possible components of courage, I consider a strong sense of self, the devoid of denial, the consciousness and voluntariness of choice, the willingness to act upon one's choice, the readiness to take a risk, to master one's fear and bear possible consequences of that choice.

[14] Courageous actions can have a physical, a moral or an intellectual dimension. (Pury, Kowalski and Spearman, 2007, pp. 99–114)

When reading the considerations of Robert Cummings Neville in his essay "Courage: Heroes and Antiheroes" (Darling-Smith, 2002, p.120) about his differentiation between the *"simple courage to dare*" and the *"heroic courage to dare",* I recognised the need to describe more precisely the character of the type of courage that I am tracing in my interviewees. Reflecting on my own experience and the insights from the interviews, I differentiate between three applications and practices of courage: There is this almost *commonplace courage* that we must find in ourselves in many daily circumstances to navigate life. This can be dealing with the fear of failing, of heights or in the dark. Then there is what I would describe as *consequential courage* that we apply to exceptional events: someone is drowning in the river in front of our eyes, and we jump in to help, someone is molested or attacked in the tube, and we stand up to defend that person. Different from the above *commonplace courage,* far fewer of us find in ourselves the consequential courage to rise to the occasion. And then, I see the third application of courage in my interviewees, which I would call *investing courage*. This courage requires engaging willingly with others and society, acknowledging what is necessary and just, and choosing to go on working towards achieving justice, even if it includes opposing an oppressive government or public opinion. This is the rarest form of courage. This form of courage is what my PhD is about.

2.2. "Courage is a Verb; Do It" (Darling-Smith, 2002, Daniel Berrigan, p. 94) - Raoul Wallenberg and The Berrigan Brothers

A few outstanding 'Doers' practised investing courage and guided this research apart from my interviewees by being the human embodiment of theories about courage and activism to me. One is Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat in Budapest, in 1944. He issued protective passports and saved nearly 100,000 people – more than almost any nation. He went as far as to climb up on the roof of a train crammed with Jews about to leave for Auschwitz to hand out his self-fabricated protective passports to everyone who would reach out hands toward him. One of the people who survived through Raoul Wallenberg's rescue mission remembered him:

> *"He stood out there in the street, probably feeling the loneliest man in the world, trying to pretend there was something behind him. They could have shot him there and then in the street, and nobody would have known about it. Instead, they relented. He must have had incredible charisma, some great personal authority because there was absolutely nothing behind him, nothing to back him up."* (Bierman, 2012)

As his co-worker Per Anger begged him to save himself and asked whether he feared his life, Wallenberg replied: *"It is frightening at times, but I have no choice. I have taken upon myself this*

mission, and I would never be able to return to Stockholm without knowing that I have done everything that stands in a man's power to rescue as many Jews as possible."

What struck me most while reading his biography (Carlberg and Annan, 2015) was Wallenberg's belief and self-image that it was in his power to rescue almost 100,000 people. We cannot render him a lunatic because he did achieve this rescue mission. It shows that when one believes that something is achievable and sees themselves as someone who can achieve it, this might determine the actions that one is willing to take. Wallenberg was determined to act even though there was nothing but his inner necessity – Sweden was not at war, and he was not Jewish. He was not personally affected, but he felt personally affected. Thus, with his choices, he proves two of the claims of this research: First, the perception we have about ourselves and the level of commitment we are willing to make will determine our actions. Second, after he took his first steps in this rescue mission, he did not want to stop but to save more people under increasingly dire circumstances. His courageous actions developed progressively. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said in honour of him: *"The good we do lives after us…Save a life, and you save a world. Change a life, and you begin to change the world."* I am still in awe of how many worlds Raoul Wallenberg has saved for us, among others, the world of Ervin Staub. (See 2.3.)

Daniel and Philip Berrigan were both American peace activists and Catholic priests. Daniel was also an author and poet. Both brothers took several radical actions to bring attention to the war in Vietnam in the 1960s, like refusing to pay taxes or trespassing on nuclear missile facilities and damaging the nuclear warheads. They co-founded the 'Plowshare Movement', an anti-nuclear protest movement which became transnational. Even though the protest of the brothers was entirely nonviolent, they ended up on the FBI's most wanted list, were arrested, and were sentenced to prison several times. Ahead of their time, they sparked a shift of mind in American society towards the protest movement against the war in Vietnam. Even today they still inspire activists around the globe who follow their footsteps, like Kathy Kelly – one of my interviewees.

"But we have been, by and large, unwilling to pay any significant price. Moreover, because we want peace with half a heart and half a life and will, the war, of course, continues because the waging of war, by its nature, is total – but the waging of peace, by our own cowardice, is partial." (Daniel Berrigan, p.21, Essential Writings) This sentence stayed with me as it got to the heart of the question of each individual and every movement: how much are we willing to invest in our vision - be it the vision of peace or women's rights? I remember being confronted with that choice the year ahead of the Peaceful Revolution in '89. Before every protest or action, we carried out, I asked myself, what if I get caught and end up in prison – as I did in the end – would I be able to pull through that? How can I even foreknow that? What if I cannot live through interrogation and prison and will surrender? All the "what if's" I re-recognize in my interviewees, and they all ask themselves: How can I live without doing it?

Am I able to live with myself and look into the mirror if I surrender before even trying? The lesson about the importance of the level of commitment is what I have relearned in this research from these brothers. If Raoul Wallenberg and the Berrigan Brothers were still alive, they would be on top of my dream list for an interview.

2.3. Courage in Research - Ervin Staub/Pearl and Samuel Oliner

It is relevant to me that two researchers who have devoted their professional careers to carrying out in-depth and profound studies in the field of courage, bystandership, altruism and the roots of goodness have both been rescued and owe their life to the kindness and courage of a stranger. Ervin Staub was six years old in Budapest in 1944 as his family received those protective passports from Raoul Wallenberg.

*"What happened to me as a child in Hungary has left me with a lifelong mission to get people to respond to those who need help" (*Ervin Staub in an interview with Daniel Goleman)

Ervin Staub's work coincides with his own story, and it comes as little surprise that the vision that guided him was that his work would contribute to fostering values and behaviour relevant to creating an actively caring society.

His studies on active and passive bystandership opened my eyes not only to the capacities and the power of a few courageous activists but also to the power of passivity and the complicity of the many. His research (Staub *et al.*, 1982; Staub, 2015) reminded me that inaction as much as action is a choice, and for a lasting and sustainable change in society, one needs courageous activists who uncover the problems and take the lead in organising the protest as well as one needs the majority of onlookers to change perspective and chose to get involved. Since passivity and avoidance, especially for democratic societies, are toxic powers that can make wrongdoing socially acceptable and even enable it, Staub proved in his manifold field studies (Staub *et al.*, 1982; Staub, 2003, 2011, 2014, 2015) that hate, and violence are evolving progressively in those passive environments and societies.

By choosing to remain passive in the face of injustice and harm-doing, one distances oneself and encourages the harm-doing and the passivity of others. Gradually one's passivity progresses to be carved in stone which paves the way towards numbness, uncaring and more. Fortunately, based on my recorded interviews, I know that courage and goodness also develop step by step progressively after the first time one has practised courage. Thus, every fellow human being each day takes part in the decision of what we as a community or whole society let happen and support as socially acceptable and what we do not want to maintain. That applies to climate justice as well as to hate speech on the internet.

Engaging with Ervin Staub's findings, I realised that the line between the victim, bystander and wrongdoer can be blurry now and then. The country I grew up in was a dictatorship, and looking from outside or back in history, now its citizens are mostly seen as victims of the communist regime in the GDR. I encounter many people in my country who describe their past life as having only the choice to endure the regime mentioned above. I would question that to some extent. This notion is valid for a child but not for an adult with the knowledge and ability to respond. Even though your choice comes at a price, and one can have good reasons not to dissent in a dictatorship, it does not take away the responsibility for this choice. It makes me thoughtful about Staub's findings on the power of passivity that makes wrongdoing acceptable and enables the functioning of dictatorial regimes. However, the answers to these questions are complex, not definite, and, of course, based on more factors than on the actions or inactions of individuals or groups.

Reading his book about moral courage and inclusive caring (Staub, 2015), I realised that people engage in courageous activism and care for others because they had grown up with loving parents in a caring environment. They understood their actions as a natural contribution to give something back to the community and society, which they had experienced as positive and supportive. However, there are people who take action to support and protect others from harm who have not experienced this kind of care or support in their own life. Ervin Staub calls this "altruism born of suffering", which applies particularly to one of my interviewees.

Samuel Oliner was 12 when the Germans raided the Ghetto Bobowa in Southern Poland, where he and his family had been constrained to live, to kill all residents. His stepmother had told him that whenever the Nazis would come to fetch them, he should run and hide, and as this day came, he was able to hide and made his way to friends of his family. He survived under their protection. With his later wife, Pearl M. Oliner, he founded the Altruistic Personality and Prosocial Behavior Institute, which focuses on education for a caring society. The research couple have been called 'pioneers of the heart' as they were both driven by the question of why people risk their safety and sometimes their lives for another human being and their belief in goodness.

The Oliners (Oliner and Oliner, 1988, 1990) developed in their five-year study an in-depth questionnaire for rescuers and non-rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust, which has also been used to understand genocides and massacres in the twenty-first century, for example in Rwanda or Bosnia. In this questionnaire, the researchers dissect the set of motivations, the degree of selflessness involved, and the duration of the action in the case of the rescuers. They always consulted both sides – the rescuer and the non-rescuer perspective. The research couple tried to demerge possible intentions or benefits involved in the choice of their interview partners to either stay passive or to become active. They

examined the internal state of a rescuer or a non-rescuer and the presence of empathy or the lack of it. They asked to what degree gratification and the joy about one's agency was involved in helping.

For the Oliners and Staub, testimonies and stories were invaluable as they are much more accessible for the public than any scientific paper and can serve as metaphors to pass on core insights about human conduct to a broader audience. I have used the Oliners questionnaire as background information that helped me to recognise the characteristics, I was looking for in a potential interview partner, sharpen my questions and later to recognise my findings. The excellence and perseverance with which Staub and Oliner developed their research are intrinsically linked to their background. It seems as if they felt urged to give answers about their very existence. Even though I label them researchers, they have 'lived through' their theories and were taking every opportunity to apply them to reality. In this respect, they are true 'doers' as well.

In summary, analysing the courageous choices of Raoul Wallenberg and the Berrigan brothers, their examples provided me with a blueprint that helped me to recognise and describe different forms that courage can take. Studying the research of Ervin Staub and the Oliners enabled me to name and specify the one form of courage – the investing courage – I was searching for.

3.0. Approaches and Methods

In this chapter, I will be commenting on how I located, selected, and approached the interviewees of this research project and exemplify my methods of conducting the interviews.

3. 1. Seeking and Finding Courageous People and Preparations of the Interviews

Having defined my research question, I outlined the profile of future interviewees as follows: individuals who engage presently or in recent times actively, publicly and for the benefit of others in shaping a humane, ecological, and just society without using violence. To find those courageous activists who advocate and struggle to make the world a better place, I looked at areas of conflict, destruction, and sorrow according to the principle that where there is shadow, there is also light. I started by categorising multiple core issues of our time that humans cause, engage in, and suffer under, such as wars, human rights violations, and climate change-related impacts in numerous countries. Far away from reaching a profound comprehension of the issues mentioned above, I read and learned, for example, about the war in Syria (Dam, 2017; Pearlman, 2018; Al-Saiedi *et al.*, 2020) and the arising of ISIS (Alhamza, Abdalaziz, 2017; Stanford University, 2021) as well as about the labour camps in

Xinjiang China (Zenz, 2021, 2022; Turkel, 2022) where an estimated one million Uyghurs are forced to live and work.

I undertook thorough online research about the above-mentioned conflicts and issues to find a starting point in each investigation. I relied on a substantial personal network of contacts to Human Rights Initiatives – organisations and NGOs such as the Raoul Wallenberg Institute (Raoul Wallenberg Centre For Human Rights, 2020), Human Rights Watch (Human Rights Watch Annual Report, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) or the Geneva Human Rights Summit and environmental organisations and NGOs such as Greenpeace (Greenpeace International Annual Report, 2017, 2019, 2019c, 2020a, 2021b) or Amnesty International Amnesty International Annual Report, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2021, 2022) receiving their monthly newsletters and following their work on a regular base. For example, in 2020, I was invited to attend the annual Human Rights Summit in Geneva, where activists from around the world testify and raise global awareness about human rights violations in their countries. At the summit of 2020, I met three of my interviewees.

However, in order to make sure to get the right participants for this project and to avoid misinformation, I double-checked and filtered online sources as follows: Some of the present interviewees have already attained historical significance like Joshua Wong, who is a world-known leader of the pro-democracy Hong Kong Umbrella Movement or Min Ko Naing who has become an iconic figure of the '88 uprising in Myanmar. Almost all of my interviewees have won renowned human rights prizes like the Right Livelihood Award, known as the "Alternative Nobel Award" (for ex. Svetlana Gannushkina, Ruth Manorama) or the International Women of Courage Award. Most of the interviewees had been mentioned in articles of serious international newspapers like the New York Times (f.ex. Xiye Bastida) or were the subject of award-winning documentaries (f.ex. Abdalaziz Alhamza in the *City of Ghosts*, 2017). Many interviewees were mentioned by credible human rights institutions and NGOs like Amnesty International or Human Rights Watch. Moreover, some interviewees had founded important human rights organisations, like the international #iamhere against hate speech (Mina Dennert) or the movement Otpor in Serbia (Srđa Popović). Finally, I relied on articles (Baysal, 2021) and books many of my interviewees had published (Gannushkina and Cavelius, 2015; Popovic and Miller, 2015; Popovic and McClennen, 2020; Doğan, 2022) like Nury Turkel (Turkel, 2022) and Kathy Kelly (Kelly and Rai, 2005) and most of the others.

In the example of my interviewee Abdalaziz Alhamza, a human rights defender and journalist from Raqqa, Syria, I want to illustrate the pre-interview process by retracing my steps until the recording of the actual interview: While reading on the internet about the war in Syria and all involved parties (Hashim, 2014; Stanford University, 2021), I came across the information that the city of Raqqa in North Syria had been at the centre of one of the most devastating and bloody wars of the 21st century

and had been occupied by ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) to serve as their headquarter. As I read that ISIS seized and hermetically sealed Raqqa in 2014, I searched online explicitly by using keywords such as *civil disobedienc*e or *opposition* for forms of resistance against this occupation that possibly had stirred up among the citizens of Raqqa (Remnick, 2017). I detected "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently", a diverse group of citizens who, far from their actual professions, did the work of journalists as ISIS banned the international press from reporting from Raqqa. Using their old Nokia phones, they filmed and recorded executions, sexual abuse, and beheadings. They uploaded the material to the internet. Abdalaziz Alhamza was one of those citizen journalists. He and his friends worked while they were hunted and threatened with death by members of ISIS for reporting reality (ISIS has killed several of these journalists, and others were forced to flee Raqqa to save their lives).

In 2017 when I started my PhD, Raqqa was liberated from ISIS and "Raqqa is being slaughtered silently" became a citizen organisation with a website, and Abdalaziz Alhamza became its spokesperson. I repeatedly tried to get in contact. Even though the surviving members of RBSS were now living under protection in different countries, ISIS had put a bounty on each of their heads, and they had to be very careful with whom they connected. I had left several messages on different online platforms and forums, including information about myself and my contact details. After a couple of weeks, I did it all over again at irregular intervals. At the end of 2019, I received a brief message from an unknown source: "If you are still interested in an interview, I will do it." The following day I was able to record the interview with Abdalaziz Alhamza, two years after I first contacted RBSS. Even though not all contacts have been that challenging, I want to express the lengthy and unforeseeable process behind each interview by giving this detailed account.

I proceeded similarly when researching the conditions and rights of women in India, Botswana and Iran or the founding of the nonviolent organisation Otpor in Serbia in 1998, which helped to topple Milošević. For example, in January 2021, as I heard that a Dutch court had ordered the oil giant Shell to pay compensation to villagers of the Niger Delta for the damages caused by continuous oil leaks, I knew that I wanted to figure out more about those farmers who launched the protest against Shell. I made the first contact, and these interviews will be recorded after completing the PhD. Over the last four years, I have compiled a list with more than 300 possible interview partners, which include their basic personal information, articles they possibly have written or who had been written by others about them and their work and feasible ways of contacting them.

All my present interviewees are working publicly. They have social media accounts or websites. All my interviewees want to spark public attention and call for support for the cause they advocate for. For this reason, most of them speak English to a considerable degree of proficiency. However, four interviews are recorded and transcribed with the help of translators in the respectable mother tongue of

those activists, such as Burmese, Russian, and Kurdish. This affected how I conducted the interview, as it was more challenging to build the personal relationship necessary for asking deeply personal questions. I reflect on those limitations in chapter 5.0.

From the list mentioned above of 300 possible partners, I have selected around 30 people I contacted for the first round of interviews to build the basic structure for the 'Archive of Courage'. I chose people who engage publicly and for the benefit of others in sharing a humane, ecological, and just society without using violence. One other criterion for the selection had been to offer a broader perspective of activists in terms of their age, gender, cultural background, and country, as well as their topic and style of performed activism.

3.2. The Interview Questions and Structure

When I set out to prepare this study and to draft the interview questions, I drew from the experience of "DO I KNOW YOU" (www.do-i-know-you.com), a social sculpture project I created that has been travelling Europe since 2016 and for which I interviewed 80 people from more than 20 different nations about the saying "walk a mile in someone else's shoes". Moreover, I relied on the insights I had made in serving as an interviewee myself about activism during the Peaceful Revolution in 1989. Together, these two-sided interview experiences taught me to focus on the importance of detailed pre-knowledge about each interviewee, their work, and their background and to take time for the precise wording of the questions. I remembered that when I served as an interviewee about the Peaceful Revolution in Eastern Europe, I had to spend my time as a provider of basic knowledge instead of leading a dialogue through which we mutually would be able to achieve a deeper level of knowledge and understanding. It always made me feel like we both had missed an opportunity. The oral history researcher Paul Thompson states, "the more one knows, the more likely one is to elicit significant information from an interview". (Thompson, 2017, p.309) From my own experience, I would add that detailed pre-knowledge of the topic and the background of each interviewee helps to create the necessary trust between interviewee and interviewer.

In preparation for the interviews of this project, I studied the oral history work of Studs Terkel (Terkel, 2004a, 2004b; *Voices of our time: [original live interviews*, 2005; https://studsterkel.wfmt.com) and was inspired by the self-teaching handbook "The Ethnographic Interview" of James P. Spradley (Spradley, 2016) and Jack D. Douglas' work on Creative Interviewing (Douglas, 1985). The structure of every conducted interview in this study is individually adapted to each activist's specific background and context of their work while still including the core question. Thus, I only asked Xiye Bastida, an

environmental activist from the indigenous Mexican Otomi-Toltec community who sees themselves as water protectors, about her relationship to water in order to understand her mindset and framework informing her environmental activism. Even though I map out beforehand the entire structure of each interview, I only use it as a reassuring guideline as I experienced the truth of Parker's (Parker, 2011, p.53) argument that there is no perfect structured interview: "because people always say things that spill beyond the structure, before the interview starts and when the recorder has been turned off." I seek this point in the interview where the interviewee "spills beyond" my structure and widens the frame of our dialogue and the possible reflections and findings in ways I could not have imagined before. Since all my interviewees advocate publicly for their causes, and most of them are used to giving interviews, I want them to go off-road - away from prefabricated phrases that they have used before to advocate for their cause. However, as my interview questions focus on memories that describe the process of becoming a courageous activist rather than on the outcomes of this process, I got very personal and reflective answers.

3.3. The Interview

> "The interview is a dialogue. We will never be neutral, but we can give the interviewees as much room as we can for their own narrative and constructions…" (Plato, Leh and Thonfeld, 2010, p.467)

Each interview begins with a warm-up conversation about how I found out about the interviewee, their work, and what they thought about my proposal. Then, I pass over to introductory remarks about the project and my motivation. I restate the ethics of this project to which each interviewee contributes voluntarily and can always draw back from the study even after years with no need to explain this decision to me. Often interviewees want to know who the other project participants are and sometimes they would like to reflect on the interview questions beforehand. I lay this information open. Before I start with the first question of the interview, I ask each interviewee to introduce themselves and their work and remind them that it would be sensible if they could always refer to my respective question in their answers as it makes the editing of the material easier given that I cut out my questions.

I understand each of my interviews in the literal sense of the word as an "*inter*change of *views"* between two people on a topic of mutual interest (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). Most of my interviewees were looking for what Alessandro Portelli called a "thick dialogue" and "deep exchange" (Portelli, 1981) and wanted to hear my "view" on each of my questions after they had answered them. However, I aimed for what Pierre Bourdieu described in his life story research as an "active and methodical listening" (Fowler, 1997; Bourdieu and Accardo, 1999; Bourdieu and Wacquant, 2008). That means I let the

interview run and give my undivided attention to the interviewee. If not for technical problems, I never interrupt the response of the interviewee since my own experience in serving as an interviewee has taught me that for one word the interviewer did not understand and interfered, he or she might be losing an entire chain of thoughts and stories. However, in case the interview runs off to unconnected topics, I "summarise what has been said" (Brinkmann, 2013, p. 8) and try to direct the interview back to my questions. However, apart from the core question, the interview is guided as flexible as to allow new questions to appear and to be taken in.

During my work on the above-mentioned project, "Do I know You", I recognised not only the importance of pre-knowledge and the ability of the interviewer to listen for a rich outcome of the interview but the significance of genuinely making time for the interview. Thus, I never recorded two interviews on the same day. I ensured the interviewee knew we had time for imperfection and reflection. My first experiences as an interviewer working on "Do I know You" taught me that the slightest sign of me being in a hurry in an interview could lead to incoherent or superficial answers by the interviewee. Given that most of them did not speak with me in their respected mother tongue and I did not speak in mine, we sometimes had to support each other in finding the right words for what we wanted to express.

Among my interviewees, I identified different approaches to the interview. Some of them would autonomously narrate their story alongside my questions, including occasionally taking a short silence to reflect on the conversation and then going on. Others would sometimes need a casual exchange with me about memories of their childhood or youth or present feelings and thoughts that came to their mind. Most of the time, those seemingly disconnected memories would again open the door to other memories of interest to the research. I followed Thompson's advice: "do not allow yourself to feel embarrassed by pauses" as "maintaining silence can be valuable" (Thompson, 2017, p. 323). In the few cases where silence resulted from uncertainty, I either rephrase my question or suggest that we would come back to this question later. However, in the case of my interviewee Nurcan Baysal, the time I had spent reading about her region, the situation of the Kurdish people and their history in Diyarbakir paid off when the interview briefly faltered because she stumbled in recalling what had been crucial events in her development towards becoming a human rights activist. I asked her if she could remember the murder of the Kurdish politician and human rights advocate Vedat Aydin in 1991 and how she felt about being a teenager then. I could not know that Vedat Aydin[15] had been a neighbour of her family in Diyarbakir and that his killing and the memorial service that followed were actually watershed moments in Nurcan's life and crucial for her development. She thoughtfully said she did not know how she could have almost forgotten to mention this important event of her adolescence.

[15] Vedat Aydin (1953 –1991) was a Kurdish human rights advocate and politician. He was killed by Turkish police officers. No one was charged with his murder. Thousands of people attended his funeral, where the police fired live ammunition into the crowd. 13 people were killed.

Reading Elisabeth Mosier's book "Excavating Memory – Archeology and Home" (Mosier, 2019), I recognised the role of places and buildings, objects, images or smell and sound in helping to excavate memories in oral history interviews. However, as most of the time I do not have this support at hand, I have to guide my interviewees back in time by only asking questions that might trigger the memory of a place and a time and what had happened there. I adapt my mode of working intuitively and creatively depending on each activist I am interviewing. "Creative interviewing … involves the use of many strategies and tactics of interaction, largely based on an understanding of friendly feelings and intimacy, to optimise cooperative, mutual disclosure and a creative search for mutual understanding." (Holstein and Gubrium, 1995, p.25)

However, the biggest challenge during almost every interview of this project has been finding the answer to the core research question: What *enabled* you to do what you do? Consistently my interviewees first mistake this question as: Why do you do what you do? Which would be asking for their motivations and reasons to work as activists. From my own experience, I know that the second question is straightforward to answer for a convinced active environmentalist or human rights defender. They can specify quickly why they, for example, advocate for the right of girls and women to be educated or for democracy in their country and often conclude their statement with the declaration: "I had to do it." However, I make an effort in each interview to clarify that I am asking about the compass used by the interviewee with which he or she first identifies self-evident reasons. Secondly, I ask for the driving and the enabling force that makes them act based on those self-evident reasons. Because if those solid and good reasons would alone be the only necessary basis and explanation for courageous activism, we would live in a different world since we all know why we need to care about the climate or human rights, but nevertheless, we do not act. That means that the why question and the reasons to act are not as relevant as the question about the enabling roots and the compass guiding such activism. Thus, in every interview, it takes time and a more extended conversation to approach those roots from different angles and beyond words. Jack D. Douglas states that the outcome of an interview is "partially the product of creative interactions—of mutual searches for understanding, of soul communions" (Douglas, 1985, p. 55) and that a creative interviewer is "driven by . . . friendly, caring, and adoring feelings" and "an endearing, wide-eyed sense of wonderment at the mysteries unveiled before her" (Douglas, 1985, p. 29)

3.4. Video

> "Video is changing the way we see the world, … but also the way we see ourselves." (Harris, 2016, p. 2)

Recording the interviews as videos, I followed the advice of the documentary filmmaker Sheila C. Bernard: "show, don't tell" (Bernard, 2016, p. 32) as "video is immediately compelling because it gives us the speaker's face, expressions, and gestures."(Thompson, 2017, p. 318) I agree that "…only the use of video recording grasps three fundamental aspects of oral history interviews: text (the content of the interview), texture (all the linguistic features) and context (the particular social situation in which the text is employed)." (Ercole, Treveri Gennari and O'Rawe, 2017, 63 - 77)

Furthermore, it was important to me to represent the interviews with human rights and environmental activists in a form that does not "foreclose their vitality and ongoing life" (Back 2013, p. 21) but allows the audience immediately to connect with each interviewee and to immerse into the "textures and rhythms" (Bates, 2015, p. 1) of their lives. I wanted the form and the method of my research to be as lively, direct, and active as the nature of my interviewees and their work. "With its sound and its movement, video exceeds the visual realm. It might better be thought of as a sensory method, not simply because it blends what we see with what we hear, but because it evokes a sense of feeling – a feeling *there* and a feeling *for* the spaces and people, the animals, things, relationships, and practices that we seek to understand through our research." (Bates, 2015, p. 1)

To meet someone, even if it is just on video, and to look into his or her eyes has something magical about it and allows the viewer directly to connect with the person speaking. In the book "Video for Change" by the NGO WITNESS, Gillian Caldwell, a civil rights attorney, observed that "video could elicit powerful emotional impact, connecting viewers to personal stories." (Gregory S., Caldwell G., 2005). When I asked Min Ko Naing, one of the most influential leaders of the '88 uprising for democracy in Myanmar, about his choices at the time, for which he paid with over twenty years of imprisonment, he answered with a strong, clear voice with no hesitation that he could never have imagined surrendering and the audience can understand one part of a true story. Nevertheless, when the audience can *see* Min Ko Naing while saying the words "never surrender", wandering with his gaze beyond the boundaries of the room where the interview takes place, one can begin to grasp what these choices have cost him.

Additionally, it allows me as an interviewer to visit the whole interview situation afresh over again and while analysing to review my first impressions, to reflect on them and sometimes even detect something important that had slipped my notice, a helpless gesture, a knowing smile which can help me to

understand the context of the answers. Especially given that most of my interviewees are not speaking in their mother tongue – gestures work like a lamppost in correlation with the words. Angela Fitzgerald claims that "this ability to revisit the same event for repeated observation is the main advantage of video research." (Fitzgerald, A., 2012) Exactly this revisiting of each interview and the "process of editing the footage helped me to become fully immersed in the video data" (Bates, 2015, p. 15) and thus to be able to condense the data of each interview down to the core story and its messages.

I am aware that the use of video has also been critically discussed among researchers concerning manipulation of the data through editing, the near impossibility of anonymising the interviewee and the struggle to overcome a possible inhibition of the interviewee as he or she is more self-aware and controlling about the produced lasting image. However, transforming research material into a social sculpture means that this "concept of translation implies there is no representation without manipulation." (Guggenheim, 2015, p. 353). All interviewees were fully aware of the use of video recording and even welcomed this medium as they advocate publicly for their causes. Thus, to edit and summarise the interviews for an artwork that seeks to inspire a wider audience seems adequate.

Due to Covid, I could only record the first couple of interviews in person, and then I had to record all following interviews via zoom and skype. However, after doing both in–person and on-screen interviews, I still agree with Thompson that a "face-to-face interview provides the most powerful context for expressing empathy and hearing and interpreting intimate or contentious stories …" (Thompson, 2017, p. 320). Being truly present together in the same room, country, and time zone and without everyone's personal life going on next to the screen, the interview experience felt so much more real as we were *breathing the same air* in every sense. However, given that my interviewees come from 16 different countries, I would have had to partially compromise on this aspect, even without Covid.

3.5. After the interview

How I spend the time after each interview varies between the interviews conducted in person and the online interviews: In the first case, I would be able to make some food and "show warmth and appreciation … for what has been given" (Thompson, 2017, p. 328) to me. In the case of Min Ko Naing, he invited me into his home, and I met his family. He showed me his and his father's paintings and told me about his everyday life in Yangon. In the second case, I would spend at least an hour at my desk, reentering the interview and writing my field notes about how I perceived or felt in certain moments during the interview, which parallels or disparities I discovered in previous interviews. The next step would be to secure the recording and make a backup external copy. The transcription of each interview

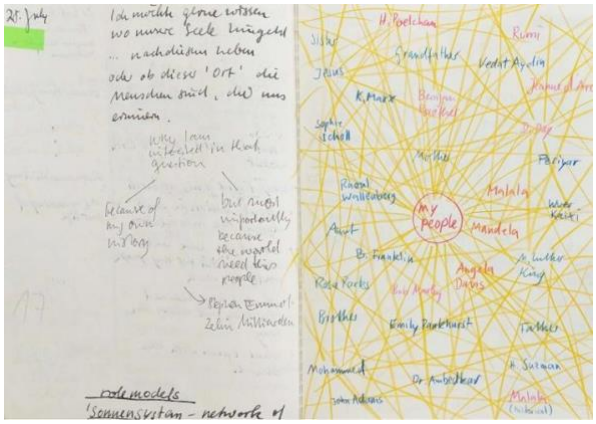
– only for my analysis – takes place the following days after the recording. The analysis and, at the same time, editing of the video material for the public website happened over the following month.

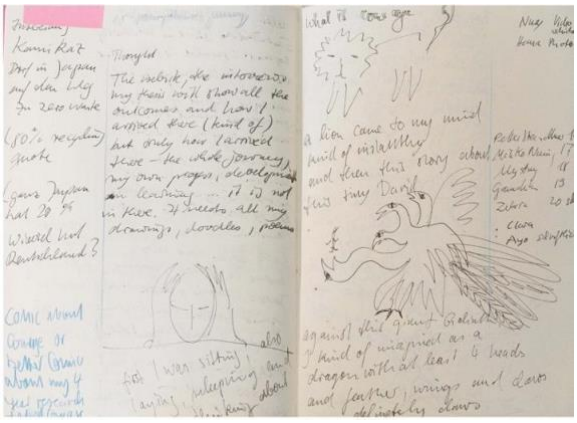
3.6. Creative methods used in this research

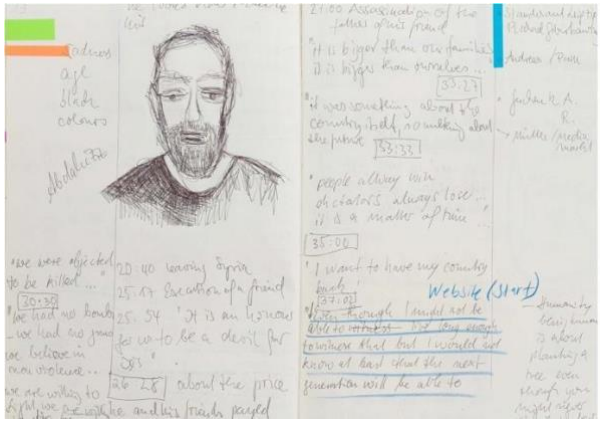
Undertaking a research study like "Voices of Courage" in the field of social sculpture serves the purpose of transforming the interviews into an artwork, a website that a wider public can experience. However, during my master's degree in social sculpture, I learned a new method to approach my questions as an artist about society and life through everyday pensive journaling and drawing without working towards an already envisioned artwork or end product. This journaling allows drawing connections between steps and findings and works as a backup for not losing valuable information. The journal serves as a place to reflect and to reenter even after months. I can connect with Kathleen M. Blee's (2003) statement: "We are more honest as scholars when we acknowledge the myriad ways in which our personal lives and emotions are intertwined with who, what, and how we study." During this PhD, I have filled 22 journals, each having more than 120 pages stuffed with every thought, information related to this study, idea, poem, drawing, snapshot observation and perception I came up with.

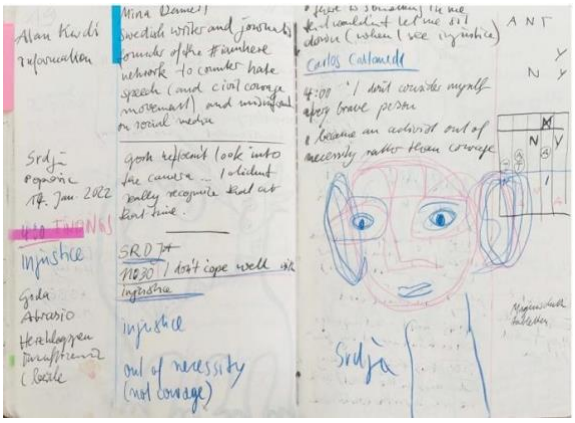
For the first time in my professional career as an artist, I relinquished my longtime practice of planning the result from the very beginning. Through engaging with the concept of social sculpture, I began to see my projects as a forming process becoming an artwork in the end. For example, before I developed the social sculpture "DO I KNOW YOU", I had no experience as an interviewer or filmmaker – I was not prepared to operate a decent film camera, not to mention that I was not able to build a website or edit a film. Hence, while developing and creating first the social sculpture "DO I KNOW YOU" and now "VOICES OF COURAGE" I had to learn and develop those skills. Crucial to letting the possible forms emerge was developing the pensive journaling into an everyday habit to maintain a constant flow to externalise one's insights.

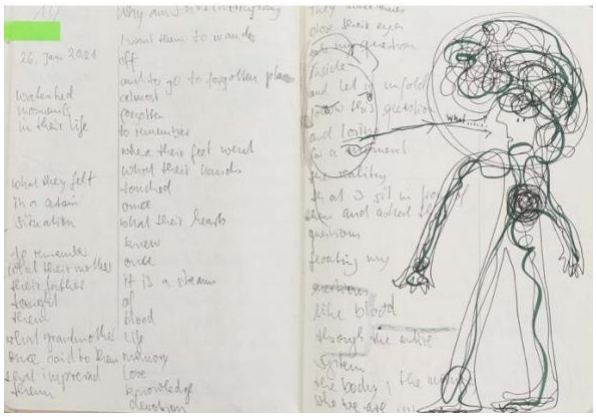
At the beginning of developing "VOICES OF COURAGE", I did not know if it would become a book, an exhibition, a film, a website or how I would name the project. The pensive journaling and drawing process unburdened me from the instant production of a presentable and perfect form and allowed me to externalise uncooked ideas and thoughts playfully. I often draw my reflections and layer them with words jumping to my mind before I can compose a text. However, those drawings are not just illustrating an idea – they also reveal various aspects of it. What can look like a random process is a conscious approach to making sometimes unconscious insights visible. When analysing my drawings or poems, I can get a sense of what I already know or guess. These are the first steps towards shaping a form presenting this knowledge and working towards transforming guesses into assurance.

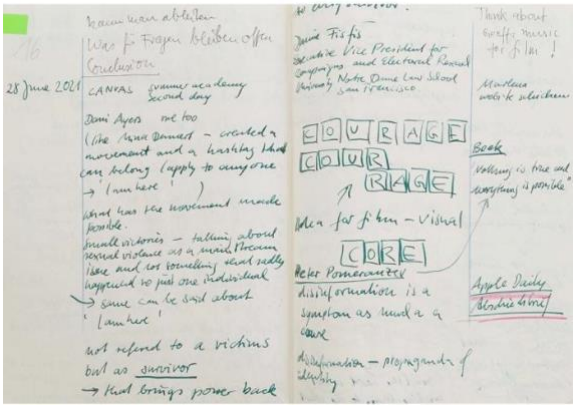


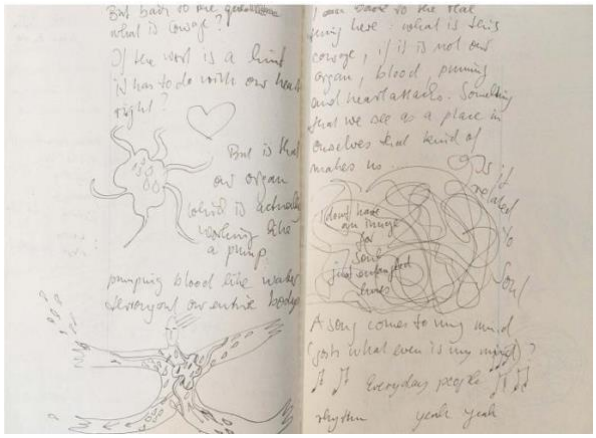


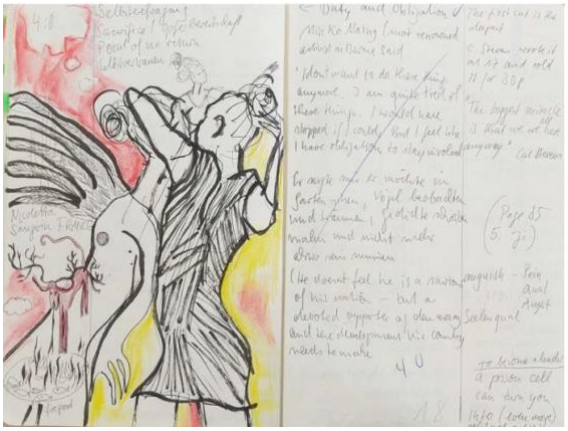












pages of my journals14, 16, 18, 19, 21

3.7. The Website “VOICES OF COURAGE”

After I had recorded the first interviews, it became clear that I wanted to give this project a more lasting form rather than preparing it for a one-time exhibition. Moreover, as I mentioned above: undertaking this research study as a socially engaged artist is directed toward creating an artwork that the public can experience. Next, I considered a film as a form that could be seen time and again, but I recognised that the film, without being linked to a website and different platforms, could quickly end up as a one-time event. Additionally, I realised that neither an exhibition nor a film would allow the project to expand and change over time. Drawing from my experiences with the still-growing online sculpture “DO I KNOW YOU”, I began to envision an online archive called the “Archive of Courage”. However, I changed the name to “VOICES OF COURAGE” as the title represents the real nature of the project being present and alive. The first impression a viewer gets from entering the website is a black background on which slowly one light dot like a tiny star appears after another and becomes stronger and brighter because that is how I visually implemented the feeling my interviewees had sparked in me. Of course, this is an artistic image which consciously overdraws a contrast, but I literally experienced my interviewees as such bright sparks.

The website's structure includes a project description and a brief background profile of each interviewee, including links to their websites, publications from or about them and their work with cooperating NGOs and foundations. Nevertheless, the centerpieces are the interviews in which each activist lays open their internal process and the steps they took to become active. Since the website is deliberately designed for a wider public, especially outside of an academic context, the recorded interviews, which occasionally have a length of four hours, are edited by me into a summarised, coherent accessible interview. All interviewees not only knew that but also explicitly wished for that to happen as the project and the website “VOICES OF COURAGE” represent their voices but at the same time give voice to the causes they advocate for. Even though I had offered each interviewee the chance to see the edited version of their interview beforehand, all of them only wanted to get the link to the website when ready.

4.0. Findings and Analysis

What are the driving forces, preconditions, convictions, values, and beliefs in a person who becomes a courageous activist like one of my interviewees? What do they have in common, and do these similarities hold answers to my question? In this chapter, I trace back and discuss the various main congruent conditions in terms of upbringing, education, values, role models, self-perceptions, and

politicisation that I recognised in the 21 interviewees of this study to answer the question about what enabled them to become courageous activists and what courage means to them. Those findings listed below are closely intersected and impact each other. I do not make universal claims about human rights defenders or climate activists. Naturally, none of the factors or attributes I found in my interview partners, neither individually nor collectively, will predictably lead to morally courageous activism in other people. Still, I think these findings can be tested and compared in future research studies. Having done this research, I can clearly say that courageous activism is contagious and becomes a habit by repeating. Those courageous activists are not born as such but educated, nurtured, and moulded.

4.1. Role models and mentors

> *"I think we catch courage from one another",* Kathy Kelly, interviewee.

> *"My mother taught me how to be a good human being."* Nury Turkel, interviewee

When specifying role models and mentors, I refer to the categorisation of Pleiss and Feldhusen (1995), who differentiate between role models as people who are admired and copied but do not necessarily have close contact with their followers and mentors as people who encourage, support, and teach their mentees and naturally maintain a close relationship to them. Mentors can serve as role models. For example, family members, neighbours, friends, or teachers can be mentors *and* role models, but public figures like actors, writers, or politicians generally do not play the role of mentors.

However, we learn crucial skills or patterns of behaviour in our lives not only by doing but similarly by observing and modelling others. Bandura (1986) states that we learn more easily by imitating others than by self-experience. Mina Dennert's answer in her interview with me underpins Bandura's statement:

> "*I think we need to have examples, someone who is showing us how things can be done. From all the tales we tell, the ideals of the Gods, Heroes and Stars, or just our parents, seeing someone doing something and realising I can do that – it doesn't seem too hard."*

Especially in search of our identity and questions of personhood and incarnation, we look out for people with behaviours and a stance we salute and start imitating them. Throughout the interviews, I understood that before my people began to develop their strength to be capable of doing courageous activism, they had been *encouraged* and strengthened to do so by others. Thus, one of the factors I looked at to find patterns and answers to why my interviewees had become courageous activists was the influence of role models and mentors on them. For most of my interviewees, parents and grandparents were

particularly formative instance, moral virtues, convictions, and beliefs. Several of my interviewees even grew up in a tradition where strong civic engagement, doing good for others, and standing up to injustice were passed on from generation to generation.

During the interview, my counterparts often reflected with great awareness about their *"political awakening"* (Sarit Michaeli, interviewee) and the role and complexity of family memories, how they grew up, what their families represent in terms of tradition, values and almost a kind of family legacy and what that has to do with whom they have become. In his interview, Joshua Wong, a key pro-democracy activist from Hong Kong, shares how he wants to live up to the name his parents gave him: Joshua, like the one from the Bible who can lead his fellow people to the promised land.

As I asked Sarit Michaeli why she, as an Israelian Jew, had become active in fighting for Palestinians' human rights, not having any necessity to do so, she answered: *"I kind of got it with my mother's milk."* On request, she explains it in detail:

> *"I grew up, not in a particular radical family but certainly in a political family where people understand the world in terms of power and control. My grandfather was an activist in the Jewish community and the communist party in London in the twenties. I also remember having incredible conversations with some relatives who managed to survive the Holocaust: the lesson from the Holocaust is always a universal lesson. It is not just about: let's make sure that we Jews don't have to go through this again. It is - let's make sure that no one ever has to go through this again."*

Later in the interview, Sarit speaks about the direct impact her grandfather's example had on her in the following words: *"…the most famous family story I remember was about the 'Battle of Cable Street* [16] *- where the fascists wanted to march through the East End of London and the Jews, the communists and the workers managed to stop them. My grandfather was involved in this – so for us as his family it is one of the proudest moments and an inspiration for me."*

Ali Abu Awwad (Palestine, interviewee), whose mother is a well-respected leader of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) in her community, sums it up in these words: *"…when I was fifteen years old and imprisoned, I had to act in a very moral way, respecting my mother's name and myself, because I am a son of a hero."* Naturally, each of my interviewees adopts and transforms these influences and puts their face to them. In the case of Ali Abu, one can see how he is building on his mother's fighting

[16] The Battle of Cable Street in London on 4th of Oct. 1936

spirit, compassion, and love for the land and its people but defining, unlike his mother and his community, his path to fighting against the occupation as solely nonviolent.

While reviewing the material, I recognised that the inclination and ability to act courageously are much more likely to develop if the immediate environment regularly sets examples and practices such as courageous and caring actions. Xiye Bastida, a climate activist from Mexico and the youngest of my interviewees, gives a robust account of this finding:

> *"I feel like a lot of kids say: I don't want to do what my parents do. But I feel like that what my parents do is the most important thing in the world. I am right now in our home's library, and there are books and books my dad has written about conserving sacred sites, about biodiversity that we have here in Mexico. My parents have been climate activists and have worked in the environmental field since before I was born. They have been fighting for years to save our lagune here in my town. So, my parents' journey, their resilience, their different perspectives and thoughts when it comes to climate solutions, not only physical, political, economical but spiritual…my parents are definitely my biggest role models. "*

Exemplary for many of my interviewees, Ali Abu Awwad and Xiye Bastida have been politicised, and their activism has become normalised not only by the modelling of their parents but by the examples of the whole community they grew up in. In the case of Xiye, one can see the impact of the community as a whole, the tribe of the Otomi Toltec[17] she grew up with, on her views and values in general and how she understands the essence and meaning of life and water in particular:

> *"For me, even at a young age, water was a sacred element that could not be wasted, and I couldn't stand other people wasting it. I would say that the root of me caring so deeply about Mother Earth is definitely that I was raised with indigenous philosophy: we take care of the earth because the earth takes care of us."*

Many interviewees referred to one or more role models from history, politics, culture or art, mentioned films and writings during the interview, and their role models from their families or communities. Zehra Doğan describes how art and poetry stored by her father have gifted the '*cement'* on which her conviction and activism have been built:

[17] The Otomi Toltec are an indigenous tribe inhabiting the Altiplano region in Mexico.

"*My father hid Cigerxwîn's cassettes*[18] *for years in the body of the car. They were recordings of poems read in his voice. Getting caught with Cigerxwin's poems was very dangerous, more dangerous even than getting caught with drugs. For years, people listened to these poems in secret… and tried to stay upright with the poetry. Inevitably, these are elements that have been added to the cement of what I am modestly trying to produce and create today."*

Several interviewees, including the young ones, referred to the terror of the Nazis before and during the second world war. In the case of Kathy Kelly, one can see that the influence of role models and the appearance of watershed moments, which I will draw on in the next section, are often tied together. Explicit statements were made like the following by Kathy:

"I was probably 15 or 16 years old – and Brother Conrad showed us the film "Night and Fog". You could start to see all the evidence of immense human cruelty, and I made this kind of vow to myself: I was never ever going to sit on the sidelines, be a spectator in the face of something that is terribly evil. I will be part of the group that tries to resist it."

What Brother Conrad had sparked in Kathy was no less than a moral shock, thus a watershed moment (see chapter 4.1.) which later led to her actions as a novice activist, for example, participating in the Missouri Peace Planting[19]. This example shows how a path once taken, a role model once chosen, leads to the next steps through which in turn the political engagement is being intensified. In the case of Kathy Kelly, it was the identical Brother Conrad who introduced the teenager to the writings of the veteran peace activists and Jesuit priests Daniel and Philip Berrigan, who became her mentors. The following quote from Daniel Berrigan becomes Kathy's lifelong internalised manual:

"We have assumed the name of peacemakers, but we have been, by and large, unwilling to pay any significant price. And because we want the peace with half a heart and half a life and will, the war, of course, continues because the waging of war, by its nature, is total, but the waging of peace, by our own cowardice, is partial." (Berrigan and Dear, 2009, p. 21)

What becomes visible here is a mutual interaction and reinforcement between the shaping and moulding of our identity through our parents and the community we live in with all the intersecting factors of

[18] Cigerxwìn is one of the most influential Kurdish poets and writers.

[19] The Missouri Peace Planting in August 1988 aimed to take a public nonviolent stand against nuclear missiles.

each one's background and the role models we will choose. It also shows that young people who become activists are drawn to other like-minded activists who already have more experience in the field.

My interviewee Ruth Manorama, who was born into the cast of the "Untouchables" in Bangalore in the 50s, is another example of the crucial role of parents and their beliefs, their confidence and how they are capable of preparing the place for their children in this world no matter how hard and almost impossible the circumstances for them are. Her parents believed in education and the equality of girls and women. It was clear to them that Ruth would go to school and, if possible, to university. The work of Bhimrao R. Ambedkar[20] , a Dalit himself, influenced both parents. What Ruth's parents were able to imagine: an India where the caste system would be abolished, determined Ruth's possibilities. In school and later at university, Ruth questioned the caste system. She understood the impact of that system, especially on poor women. It is no surprise that Ruth Manorama studied law, red Karl Marx and Ambedkar, holding several communal positions to strengthen the rights of primarily women, Dalits and slum dwellers.

Esther Htusan, a journalist from Myanmar, speaks in her interview about how she had been encouraged and goes even further about how important it is to encourage others. She is touching on the very issue of what is the meaning of our lives:

> *"I grew up watching "Schindlers List"[21] or "Life is beautiful"[22], these movies, they inspired me to do things that could be helpful for others and I think it is not only about natural conscience and the feeling of injustice, but also you look up to some people who have done amazing work, someone who had actually paved the way, so that you could see what the way looks like and whether you follow the path or not is your choice but to know what others had done for the good of the people is something very important."*

Abdalaziz Alhamza (Syria) differs from most other interviewees in terms of early politicisation at home and here from resulting role models. In the interview, he emphasises that he used to be completely "normal" and apolitical:

[20] Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar was an Indian social reformer and Minister of Law and Justice.

[21] Schindlers List is a 1993 film produced by Steven Spielberg about a German industrialist rescuing more than a thousand Jews during the Holocaust.

[22] Life is Beautiful is a 1997 film by Roberto Benigni about the humor and courage of a Jewish father and his son in a concentration camp of the Nazis.

"I had like a pretty normal life. I came from an average middle-class family. None of my family members had any ties with the opposition or any political movement. I was just hanging out with friends, playing soccer and going to university."

Abdalaziz Alhamza's political awakening erupted strong and fast when his friends were arrested and injured and became role models for him. He recalls the situation:

"I was worried more about my friends, more than I was worried about myself. I wanted to join. I did not want to leave my friends by themselves…That was the moment for me the first time being in a protest, saying things I never pictured myself saying …I thought that I am free…."

In the case of Abdalaziz, his close friends became trailblazers, and their convictions and actions created a watershed moment in his life and triggered his activism. He did not want to stand by and watch anymore, and as his political engagement was progressively evolving and even as it became more and more dangerous, he felt that he owed it to them to keep fighting for what they believed in.

4.2. Watershed moments and conscious choices

"*I have decided for my humanity not to be buried in the grave of my brother."* (Ali Abu Awwad, West Bank, interviewee)

When mentioning watershed moments, I refer partly to what James M. Jasper describes as "moral shocks", (Jasper, 1997, p. 106) which "are often the first step toward recruitment into social movements: when an unexpected event or piece of information raises such a sense of outrage in a person that she becomes inclined toward political action, …" but also I choose the word because of its visual power, as I understand it as a dividing line in one's inner geography between two times: the *before* and the profoundly changed *after* of an emotional event which in the case of my interviewees has turned them from witnesses into actors where the personal becomes political and where is no going back to what has been.

While certainly watershed moments can trigger courageous activism, I am aware that they can turn out traumatic and produce rigidity and immobility coupled with fear. Many of my interviewees described such fear but were able to overcome, canalise, and transform their fear and anger into action after struggling. Each interviewee's role models, mentors, personal background, and characteristics often prepared the foundation on which a watershed moment unfolded constructively, and courageous activism progressively evolved. Those moments are often emotionally so powerful and catalytic that they trigger a long-lasting visceral sense of moral responsibility and the felt necessity: I have to do something.

Most of my interviewees were able to answer the question of whether they could recall the watershed moments that helped trigger their activism instantly and precisely. They remembered the conscious choices they made following those pivotal moments. Once the option to invest one's energy and time in protest and activism is made, it becomes another stabilising factor for ongoing courageous engagement because of the rewarding feeling of agency and freedom. This is what Abdalaziz Alhamza, from Syria, describes after his first act of dissent against the Assad regime: *"That was the moment, the first time, me being in a protest, saying things I never pictured myself saying. I thought that I was free. My inner feelings, my thoughts, my energy just came out."*

I observed this internal process that each of my interviewees made in their way, weighing between the fear of oppression when acting and the fear of the consequences of this oppression for their future in case of not acting. Abdalaziz Alhamza described this weighing:

> "*We need to keep fighting. Whatever we have achieved, whatever we fought for, would just disappear, and we would give it at a golden plate to those dictators saying to them: you won, go ahead, and do whatever you want to do with this country. We know that we might get nothing in return, but we are helping the next generation."*

Watershed moments are a catalytic and clearing momentum necessary to become aware of who one wants to be and the meaning of one's life. Shaparak Shajarizadeh, a women's rights activist from Iran, experienced shocking treatment in a court, not even having the right to speak against her abusive husband, recapitulates how this has changed her stance:

> *"I realised it is not just that scarf. It is the philosophy behind that, the constant fear that we were having in the streets. We were forced not only to wear hijab but to pretend to be someone else. The whole society is suppressed when you suppress half of the crowd of the country. I was fed up with this fear."*

Several of my interview partners described a feeling of incongruity between their values and beliefs, what they saw and understood and how they reacted before they experienced the last push, for example, in the form of a watershed moment. Rushworth Kidder in "Moral Courage" (Kidder, 2005, p. 3) sums it up in the following sentence: "Standing up for values is the defining feature of moral courage. But having values is different from living by values …" Sarit Michaeli, a human rights defender from Israel and one of my interviewees, makes a similar statement:

> *"I think that caring about injustice is one thing and being an activist and saying: I am going to do something active to try and change society - is another. Because I know a lot of my friends who have the same sense of injustice but don't necessarily go out and protest or do activism."*

Kathy Kelly, an American peace activist and one of my oldest interviewees, describes her politicisation after experiencing key moments as a "simmering" and an "incubation time":

> *"When I started to engage in resistance to war, both through war tax refusal and small actions of civil disobedience, there was a sense of relief, a sense of now my life is getting in line with deeply held beliefs. I had these beliefs, I read these stories, I have admired these heroes, and I am starting to move in the direction I know I want to go…".*

Even though Nury Turkel, today a public official in Washington, a human rights lawyer, cannot remember the way his mother was treated by the Chinese in a labour camp in Xingjian while giving birth to Nury this was already a watershed moment for him that would determine his future:

> *"I was born in a reeducation camp – much like the one's today – that China calls "transformation centres". The circumstances in which I was brought to this world were horrific. My mother was six months pregnant with me when the Red Guards picked her up. She got injured, and as she was approaching the due date, she was cast down when she delivered me. We both were suffering health issues, malnutrition including lack of vitamin D because we were not exposed to natural sunlight."*

He resumes his choice to become an ardent human rights advocate: *"You only live in this life once. Life is literally meaningless, except for the impact that you make on other people's lives."*

Clara Thompson, 23 years old, who grew up rather well protected through her family in a democracy, had a different watershed moment. Even though she had not to endure any danger or oppression to her own life, she experienced the danger and harm to her future quite strongly. She had been to Scotland with the Erasmus exchange program, and one day, she would sit with her peers before they had to say goodbye to each other. They talked about what the future might bring, and they all agreed they couldn't imagine ever bringing children into this world. This was so shocking a realisation for Clara as it would consequently mean the end of human life on this planet. Thus, it became a turning point, and she joined the Extinction Rebellion after returning to Germany.

Min Ko Naing who is considered Myanmar's most iconic opposition figure after Aung San Suu Kyi determined his own watershed moment. He literally chose and accepted his future fate when he became the Min Ko Naing which means the "Conqueror of Kings" for the people in Burma back in 1988[23]. He said: *"I will never die. Physically I might be dead, but many more Min Ko Naings would appear to take*

[23] Paw Oo Tun revived the All Burma Federation of Student Unions, was elected the Min Ko Naing and became the most important leader of the 1988 uprising.

my place." For nearly 16 years Min Ko Naing was kept in solitary confinement and he told me that even in this impossible situation he tried to recapitulate and stay conscious about the power he still is left with, the power of his senses and thoughts. He loved to observe insects in his cell or listen to the birds outside and begin to distinguish between them and "write" poetry in his mind in order to stay sane. Min Ko Naing has inspired the next generations of youths like my interviewee Esther Htusan to follow them in their footsteps and truly "take their place" in the struggle for democracy and human rights.

Mostly, my interviewees were born and grew up in autocracies like Myanmar, China, Russia and Iran or anocracies like Turkey. Indeed, experiencing such a watershed moment, making meaningful choices, and becoming an activist in an oppressive environment is much more severe than doing the same in a democracy, as it can involve an immediate threat to the life or physical condition of the individual. Malebogo Molefhe, a national basketball player and women's rights activist from Botswana, experienced a watershed moment of an inconceivable magnitude followed by existential danger and perennial harm to her life. After being shot eight times and undergoing several lifesaving operations, she had to come to terms with using a wheelchair:

> *"Surviving the attack was the most difficult thing and a long-lasting experience in my life. To me, courage is being able to rise when you think your life is between a rock and a hard place. I have really been challenged as an individual, but it has moulded me."*

The watershed moments my interviewees experienced were caused when their beliefs, values, and sense of justice had been challenged or violated. They found themselves in situations in which they were facing injustice, lies, brutality, and oppression. All my interviewees chose not to turn away but to push back with outrage, will and engaging force after their watershed moment. They often describe this choice as either having the faith and the stance of "being true to oneself" or not. For them, there is nothing in-between. In my understanding, only their choice made a harrowing event become a watershed moment.

4.3. Sense of justice and the willingness to act on it

> *"…as long as truth and justice are lacking, it is not enough to be outraged, but to join the struggle."* (Zehra Doğan, interviewee)

> *"I just cannot imagine myself not caring about injustice… If I saw something unacceptable, I would want to change it."* (Sarit Michaeli, interviewee)

Possibly when most of us contemplate the word justice, we see in our minds the image of Justitia, the goddess of justice blindfolded with an uplifted sword and a balanced scale. We all have a sense of what we feel and believe, just or unjust, however balanced, fair, self-righteous our understanding might be. Where did we get it from, and what activates our respective sense of justice? When I speak about the sense of justice in this section, I refer to it in the sense of John Rawls's "Theory of justice as fairness" (Rawls, Mieth and Rosenthal, 2021), in which he elaborates about two principles of justice: "*basic liberties"* and "*fair equality of opportunity"* for everyone and states that every society which builds on these principles would be resilient. The Scottish philosopher and economist Adam Smith was convinced that humankind is founded on and held together by our mutual empathy and sense of justice. I very much connect with Edmond N. Cahn's assertion that human beings have a "natural capacity to fight injustice" (Cahn, 1949) because we are competent for "*empathy or imaginative interchange"* (Cahn, 1949), which means that we can put ourselves "into someone else's shoes."[24]

To acknowledge injustice, one needs to change perspective and connect to someone else's situation, their detriment or pain. This character trait consequently requires empathy for the other and is based on values and attitudes that most people, including my interview partners, adopt in their childhood and youth. The measure is not pity but rather compassion and caring for others as caring for oneself. Whether religious or not, some of my interviewees referred to a quote from the Bible (Luke, 6:31): Do onto others as you would have them do unto you."

During our conversations, all my interviewees, showed a strong sense of justice and were even identifying the inevitability of their actions from this sense. However, most interviewees consider their actions after witnessing injustice or violating human rights common and self-evident. Mina Dennert, the founder of the worldwide #iamhere network[25] against hate speech from Sweden, tells me: *"I think I am a normal human being, and when I see something unjust, I act. Does that make me an activist, or am I just a citizen of the world?"* I constantly challenge those statements and argue that if their actions were as common and coherent as they say, we would live in a much more equal and just world. Moreover, I am interested in the kind of inner compass each of my interviewees seems to have and what made them react to injustice. I want to know how this compass was built. That is always a critical moment in each interview when I feel that our dialogue breaks through a surface and establishes a more profound level where we have to work together much harder to excavate what enabled them to act.

[24] Katrin Hattenhauer, project "Do I know you ", Oxford 2016, Social Sculpture about walking in someone else's shoes: www.do-i-know-you.com

[25] #Iamhere is a civil courage movement countering hate speech and misinformation founded in Dec. 2019.

After my question, Sarit Michaeli from Israel goes into detail:

> *"These values that I had instilled in me are what make me look at the reality that I see on the ground in my own society and certainly when I look at how Israeli society is treating Palestinians. It brings up such a clear sense of injustice. Then there is the $1,000,000 question: What is my role, what can I contribute."*

Sarit says that even though we might all possess a sense of justice and describes this sense as guidance and precondition for her acting, she also clarifies that the pure ability to sense injustice does not include acting. In every situation witnessing injustice, what is needed one and above is the awareness of one's agency and the willingness to get involved. Peter Steudtner, a human rights defender from Germany, describes that very comprehensively: *"For me, courage is a mixture of this intuition and this inner impulse of not being able to bear the injustice in front of your face and then just doing something. The important point for me very often is how to get from this: I should do something to I do something."*

Ludwig Mehlhorn, a close friend and well-known dissident from the 1989 Peaceful Revolution, describes this process in his book "In der Wahrheit leben" (Living in Truth) (Mehlhorn, Delp 2012) as the realisation of an individual giving up "inner immigration" and engaging. He thought of it as the base for every well-functioning democracy. In his interview, Peter Steudtner underpins this proposition:

> *"I would say it is impossible to have a democracy without people speaking up against injustice, which even in the most just system will exist because we are so different. So, for me, a democracy only stays alive through…people who take the initiative to point out injustice."*

Notably, of the 21 interviewees of this project, only six grew up with the rights and freedoms of a working democracy. With this selection I wanted to come close to the reality of our world in which – according to ourworldindata.org only estimated 2.3. billion. (29%) of the 7.87 billion people in this world live in liberal or electoral democracies. That means in contrast 71% of the world population are considered to be living in different forms of autocracies. However, lively democracies granting human rights and equal treatment under the law to every individual require the investing courage as well in order to survive.

Most of my interviewees faced injustice, inequality, and oppression from the day they were born, ranging from being denied speaking their language and mind and practising their religion as far as being denied their freedom and even the right to exist. That is not to say that the six people born and brought up in democracies have not encountered hardship, inequality, or injustice in their personal lives. Still, they did so against a fairer background and on another magnitude. However, possibly once you have had the experience of being unjustly treated yourself, it might make you more open towards others' hardships and likely more able to put yourself in someone else's position. Reciprocally, when we are

able to relate to our happiness, we might be able to connect to other people's potential happiness and care about it.

A prerequisite for acquiring a balanced understanding of justice is the capacity for empathy, the competence to evaluate situations and information and being pliable to criticism and correction. Those mentioned capacities, in turn, we attain through education and training, the modelling of role models and mentors. However, in order to act on one's sense of justice one needs self-belief in one's agency, giving up the "inner immigration", being able to see a positive outcome. One needs inner autonomy not to comply with the majority's stance on what is beneficial, willing to take risks.

4. 4. Inner autonomy and the competence to judge (evaluate)

> *"Is what you see really what you see".* (Nurcan Baysal, interviewee)

We all want to make our own choices and live our life self-directed, aligned to our visions and values, responding in tune to our aspirations and not regulated and oppressed by external forces. According to the self-determination theory of Deci & Ryan (Ryan and Deci, 2000, 2006), autonomy is one of our three basic psychological needs, next to relatedness and competence. Nonetheless, "no man is an island" (John Donne, 1624), and we heavily rely on each other in an interdependent global world. Thus, I want to refine the type of autonomy I refer to in this section. I found that all my interviewees developed an almost radical autonomy in situations regarding their conscience and convictions despite non beneficial consequences and even threats to their life or physical condition in which they are capable of making independent conscientious decisions.

Sarit Michaeli from Israel underpins this finding when she speaks about her work for the nongovernmental Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories:

> *"I agree, there is something about being an activist that is about a life choice, choosing a particular path. I got to live my life in a way close to my values … and implement my principles to the best of my abilities."*

She continues:

> *"I think we are on the right side of history and that eventually … will be clear to other people but even if our entire society would oppose us, which is not the case, I still feel the sense of what is right and what is just in what we are doing. It is so strong to me that no societal sanction can get even close to that."*

Ali Abu Awwad, founder of Taghyeer (Change) from the West Bank clearly shows this inner autonomy and independent jugdgement when he states: *"I always say that the Palestinian freedom will not - will*

never pass-through Jewish graves. It will not be built on these graves; it has to pass through Jewish hearts." Knowing that Ali Abu had lost his brother who was accidentally shot by an Israelian soldier and had been himself imprisoned at a very young age together with his mother, it can be said that Ali Abu had enough reasons not to believe in peace and to call for revenge. But instead, he advocates passionately and in opposition to the reality on the ground for a nonviolent solution to the conflict in Israel/Palestine.

Both activists, Sarit and Ali Abu face hostility and attacks from the „other "side and their respective societies. As do all my interviewees, they count their autonomous choices as being authentic to themselves.

Nurcan Baysal, a Kurdish journalist and human rights advocate, states her work:

> "*They* (the Turkish state) *are writing the history because they have the power. But I am writing the counter-history. I am here with my books and articles, and they cannot shadow it; I am still speaking. I know we don't have their power, but 50 years later … maybe I will not live anymore, but some Kurdish children will read all these things … I am putting truth to history. We have a lot of options in our lives and to be in silence is also an option, but this is not my way."*

Nurcan described how she often feels the burden of her autonomous choices instead of having a more leisurely life while staying silent and hiding in the crowd.

Based on my research, I would differentiate between two versions of autonomy that I have observed: One is the kind of autonomy that highly focuses on one's happiness and progress, and we all strive for it and inhabit it to varying degrees. For example, we all want to choose how to live our lives, where and with whom. Though there is what I would call the expanded or advanced version of autonomy that I have found in my interviewees, which goes beyond personal needs and interests and is focusing on matters of conscience and responsibility and is committed to truth and justice even though choosing this path is likely not beneficial for one's happiness and progress. When analysing the interview data, I saw that advanced autonomy is fostered by self-awareness, reflection, and belief and is directly linked to courageous acting.

4. 5. "I had to do it" – the necessity to act

> *"I can do it. If I don't do it, who will? So, I do it."* (Zehra Doğan, interviewee)

> *"I think I became an activist out of necessity rather than courage."* (Srđa Popović, interviewee)

When I asked my people during their interview why they risked so much for their courageous activism they would stare at me puzzled and firmly reply: “But can´t you see that I had to do it?” And then they would list the dozens of good reasons for their activism. I always replied that I agree that there are many good reasons and an urgent need for your courageous activism. However, if only the perception and identification that something needs our engagement because it is simply right, just and necessary, everyone would act according to a universal understanding of justice, equality, human rights, or climate change. Yet, that is not the case. I also recall that as often as I have heard from my interviewees the statement *“It was on me, I had to do it, how could I not?”* I heard in my youth in the former GDR a similar-sounding message with an opposite result but carried forward with the same firmness. Given all the lies, the control and the oppression we had to face living in a dictatorship, when I asked relations or friends why they did not speak up or try to do anything against it, they would give me the same puzzled look and answer with similar firmness and belief: *“That was not on me, I would be standing alone, how could I have done it, it would have been foolish, can’t you see.”*

Kathrin Henneberger, a climate activist and member of the German parliament, describes this necessity:

> *“Of course, it would have been much easier for me to follow a normal career. But what would it matter if we soon feel the existential consequences of climate change? Therefore, it is necessary that one musters as much courage as one has and to take on the fight against the fossil fuel industry and challenge current policies. We have to become active ourselves so that we can create change.”*

Srđa Popović, who was a leader of Otpor, the Serbian student movement that helped to defeat Milošević goes into detail after stating that he had become an activist out of necessity rather than courage:

> *“I am not considering myself a very brave person, but when you are in your twenties, and your normal middle-class life falls apart, you get from one cosmopolitan country where you have been taught to love Croats, Bosnians and Montenegrins into a country where you are not patriotic enough if you don’t hate them. If your parents turn to smuggling petrol to survive the hyperinflation, if your brother is forced to leave the country because he doesn’t want to be drafted for Milošević ‘s war, then you only have two choices: you can fight, or you can flee, and I would rather put it into the necessity and stubbornness category than find the courage. This is how we decided we are not leaving our country to these crazy guys who were running it at the time, and we decided to fight instead of fleeing.”*

Both accounts are graphic and describe the inevitable need for action, and mainly Kathrin's statement describes our shared future if we are not engaging and changing our habits. Yet Kathrin belongs to a

minority of people actively involved in climate activism and climate justice. What has struck me in both statements and clearly shown in Srdja's phrase: "then you only have two choices: you can fight, or you can flee", was that both activists did not even consider a third and widespread solution which would be: turning away from the problem, calling others responsible and sitting it out.

While describing their felt necessity to act, my interviewees often used the sentence "I had no choice", and I realised that they understood their process of becoming an activist like sequential links of a chain that are interlocking and bearing inevitable consequences which they had already decided at an earlier stage and would be willing to accept.

Abdalaziz Alhamza, after the first of his friends got injured and killed while peacefully protesting for change in Syria, describes this consequential chain:

> "*They gave their lives for that fight … for me. I need to keep fighting. The revolution and the fight that we have – it is our fuel, it keeps me sane … it is something I am part of it, that I wouldn't give up. "*

Timothy Garton Ash describes these emotions and the necessity to keep fighting in the context of the Polish Revolution (1991, p.15): "to the shipyard workers …the poles murdered by poles became the symbol for all their accumulated grievances…the duty to honour the martyr's memory became a driving force, almost an obsession. "

4. 6. Responsibility

> *"Even if I cannot make it come true, it does not lessen my responsibility to try."* (Kathy Kelly, interviewee)

One of the most frequently used concepts during this project's interviews has been the concept of responsibility. My interviewees refer to it in the following three ways: First and foremost, they perceive themselves in the true sense of the word, as being *able to respond* to the challenges and problems of their respective societies or to global issues like war or climate change which means they accept individual responsibility. Secondly, they experience their actions and activism as a logical consequence of their perceived ability to respond. If one could assist in response to pressing issues of our time, one has equally the responsibility to do so. Thirdly, they explain that they feel accountable for their actions, as well as for their inactions. Inaction when witnessing injustice or violence, for example, would make them complicit.

In contrast to the above-described attitude of my interviewees, there exists the attitude of handing over responsibility to whatever authority and hiding behind only obeying law and order. In our societies, responsibility is often confused with obedience, for people often consider following laws and principles that govern our communities and the coexistence of individuals, like the traffic rules, inevitable. This is true, but I argue that obeying society's laws and rules voluntarily and consciously because one accepts them as necessary and meaningful is not obedience but responsibility. Obedience, in turn, is neither desirable in any society nor able to meet the challenges of our time and has been a danger in human history. In his book "Obedience to Authority" (Milgram, 2009) Stanley Milgram states: *"inhumane policies may have originated in the mind of a single person, but they could only have been carried out on a massive scale if a very large number of people obeyed orders"* This is precisely what Hannah Arendt calls *"the banality of evil"* (Arendt, 1994) *as she* was convinced that "no man has the right to obey" (radio interview given to Joachim C. Fest on the 9th of November 1964.)

Kathy Kelly, an American peace activist who disobeyed the laws of her country time and again while staying in combat zones, planting corn on nuclear missile fields and breaking sanctions to deliver lifesaving medicines to children in Iraq, describes her view on responsibility as follows:

> *"Everything we have done has been too small to really spare people around the ravages of war, but I don't think that lessens the responsibility to try. Living with people in Kabul, Basra, Baghdad, Beirut, Gaza, and Yemen certainly helped guide my activism. I needed to ask: how can we find actions commensurate to the crimes being committed? The simple truth is this: we can't. The crimes are monumental. But we must nevertheless try to educate and build a world wherein people will find it easier to be good."*

The same proposition is all the more true for Min Ko Naing, a student leader from the '88 uprising in Myanmar whose fight for democracy, freedom, and self-determination of his people against corruption and violence of the military has been fundamental but in vain. He had become a political prisoner for over 20 years; I asked him how he had convinced his fellow students and citizens of Yangon back then in 1988 to follow his call for protest on the streets, knowing that many others had already paid for it with their lives, he told me the ancient tale of the tiger attacking a village and killing its people, which every kid in Myanmar knows. The villagers hold a council on how to conquer the tiger. They agree that they must get him drunk before they can overpower him. Hence, every family should contribute as much alcohol as they can afford and pour it into a massive pot in the middle of the village. No sooner said than done, the pot is filled with it. As the tiger appears again in the village and drinks from the pot, the villagers believe that the time has come to fight the tiger. But sadly, it does not work out, and many villagers are killed or injured that day. The moral of the tale is that there was no alcohol in the pot because everyone avoided their respective task and relied on the others to fulfil them. Min Ko Naing turned to the citizens of Yangon and challenged them that if they and their children wanted to be free

of the ‘tiger’, means the military, they are responsible for doing their part to win this fight. We all know how the real story ended in the case of Myanmar, especially since the military seized power again in February 2021. When I met Min Ko Naing 2019 in his home in Yangon, he explained that he is responsible for staying involved even though he sometimes just wants to sit in his garden, listen to the birds and write poems.

Nury Turkel, an Uyghur American human rights attorney and public official born in a labour camp in the region of Xinjiang, elaborated in his interview about the interconnection between responsibility and complicity regarding forced labour:

> *“I can say this with certainty: all of us are complicit. European countries continue to be asleep at the switch, but this is part of their lives: the toys that they touch, the Adidas shoes that they wear, and the Volkswagen car that they drive may have been connected to forced labour. Volkswagen had a plant in Urumqi last year; Volkswagen's CEO told the media that he did not know about the camps. It is impossible; it is just a matter of conscience.”*

With Xiye Bastida, the youngest interviewee and climate activist from the indigenous Otomi-Toltec community in Mexico, I talked about our responsibility, which she explained as part of the collective responsibility to live in balance with nature to protect it for future generations. She told me that her parents reminded her often to leave things better than she found them, which in the case of her parents applied to the dishes, but Xiye applies it now as her responsibility towards the planet. Like Min Ko Nain and his tiger tale, she wants to persuade as many people as possible to take on their respective tasks and responsibility to leave the world better as we found it.

She tells me about the reasons and inner barriers she discovered why people do not engage with the threat of climate change. One is the concept of the ‘finite pool of worry’, which states that environmental concerns dwindle as we focus on individual worries in our everyday life, which means there are only so many things we can worry about. Another strategy and excuse to deny not only the crisis but our ability to respond to it goes hand in hand with the ‘finite pool of worry’. It describes the “diffusion of responsibility”. Bibb Latané and John Darley did several experiments in the 70s about the circumstances in which an individual feels responsible or not. They found out that a person feels less responsible for whatever is needed in a situation in the presence of others. (Latané and Darley, 1970) It is the same as in Min Ko Naing's Tiger story – when everyone is not taking on responsibility but expecting others to do so.

George Marshall gives this line of thought a further direction in his analysis of people’s behavioural instincts and mechanisms when he states:

> *"When we become aware of the issue, we scan the people around us for social cues to guide our response: looking for evidence of what they do, what they say, and, conversely, what they do not say. These cues can also be codified into rules defining the social norms expected or inappropriate behaviours. If we see that other people are alarmed or taking action, we may follow them. If they are indifferent or inactive, we will follow that cue too. This strong behavioural instinct …originated as a defence mechanism during our evolutionary development when our survival depended entirely on the protection and security of our social group."* (Marshall, 2015, p. 27)

Xiye Bastida is fully aware of the pioneering task of convincing as many other people as possible to get involved and support actions that might stop the climate crisis. She observed that her generation was named after the last letter of the alphabet, and she fiercely stated:

> *"Why do you give us the last letter of the alphabet? Do you want us to be the last generation? Actually, we are going to take that name, and we are going to be the last generation to be dependent on fossil fuels."*

I asked Nurcan Baysal how and why she feels responsible for continuing to stay in Diyarbakir and documenting the human rights violations of the Turkish government in her region, knowing that the United Kingdom had offered her asylum. Since she became active, her home has been repeatedly raided, she has been detained in front of her kids, and she continuously received death threats. Nurcan tells me that she often thinks about the day her children will ask her why she had been imprisoned and why they, as a family had to face all those difficulties and sorrows. She worries about them, but what scares her, even more is the day when she will have to explain to her children why she did not go to jail because she failed her beliefs and her responsibility to do whatever little to stop the injustice and violence against her people or at least to document it.

In summary, taking up responsibility concerning human rights, climate justice and other pressing issues, globally and locally, implies action. Concerning my interviewees, I observed that they share the *awareness* of what needs addressing and the *reflection* on what might be their contribution because they genuinely *care* about "leaving things better than they found them". Over time they developed self-efficacy and -belief to feel able to respond and positively envision their effectiveness. They discern themselves as passing on the baton of responsible and proactive agency to whoever will come after them. The statement of Xiye amplifies that: *"I want to inspire as many people, as many youths as possible to follow the path that they know is right in their hearts."* Thus, in the next section, I will go into detail about this conviction and the pivotal role of self-perception regarding courageous activism.

4. 7. Self-perception, agency, and the belief in making a difference

> *"If you don't see or envision Jerusalem, you cannot walk from Hebron. You cannot serve something that you don't believe in. "(*Ali Abu Awwad, interviewee)

Even though not all my interviewees are carried by the same strong optimism and hope of Xiye Bastida but all of them, metaphorically speaking, can envision 'their' Jerusalem and are carried by the belief that what they do matters. Albert Bandura argues that: *"Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than people's beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over events that affect their lives. Self-beliefs of efficacy influence how people feel, think and act."* (Bandura, 1990). H. Giroux (Giroux, 2017) calls the absence of a sense of agency the "crisis of civic illiteracy".

Svetlana Gannushkina, a mathematician at 80 who co-founded the human rights organisation Memorial in Russia, answers directly to Bandura: *"I have the feeling that I want to be an agent in this life, aware that things depend on me acting even if it is only something little".* She describes how she was angry as a teenager to hear people saying: we must accept how things are, and it is not on us to change things because we are ordinary people of no importance. But early on, she was driven *"to contribute"* to society and make her own mark. Having grown up in a dictatorship myself where the statement: "This is how things are." is fed by the government to its citizens like the daily bread, I experienced this message always being paired with a subtle threat of "If you do not accept how things are we will 'make' you accept it".

Yet, even democratic societies have developed subtle mechanisms of blaming unwanted engagement and activism. But again, even if the consequences of one's activism in a democracy might become nerve-stretching and arduous, they are mild compared to facing oppression and possible violence in an authoritarian regime. One example: according to numbers collected from the NGO Global Witness and reported by Claire Marshall from the BBC in September 2021, 227 activists were killed worldwide while protecting the environment, land, and water rights. About the same time, Kathrin Henneberger, a German environmental activist and spokesperson of the Climate Alliance "Ende Gelände" (until here but no further), was repeatedly threatened with lawsuits by the energy company RWE. She was banned from any RWE property, especially the opencast mines, and was forced to sign a cease-and-desist declaration, which she refused. Today she is representing the voters of the Green Party in the German parliament.

All my interviewees do not believe in the myth of powerlessness. They are aware that if one is willing to bear the consequences, one can stand up for the things one wants to see happening in the world. That being said, one-third of my interviewees have served long prison sentences. Yet, regardless of the

different levels or magnitudes of repression they had to go through, all the interviewees of this project are conscious that creating an alternative is by far the most effective way to prove the statement wrong that "there is no alternative". A statement which has been used notably by politicians also in democracies around the globe. However, my interviewees are not born with a disposition of confidence and belief in themselves and their capacities; instead, this self-efficacy has been built up over time by themselves and has been trained and modelled by others.

Yet to be able and motivated to work on such alternatives, one has to *"give up feeling like a victim",* as Ali Abu Awwad states in his interview. He explains further to me: *"Dreams are not something we see when we sleep; dreams are something that does not let us sleep until it becomes true."* When I reflected on his words, I recognised that the tale of powerlessness, if repeated and integrated into one's personality, becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy which leaves one frustrated and feeling like a victim who is doomed to endure. The other downside of feeling like a doomed victim is the danger of excusing oneself from responsibility and sustaining the status quo by idleness.

Xiye Bastida answers the question about the importance of self-efficacy as follows:

> *"Stubborn optimism keeps me going. I believe that every single thing that you do in your present will affect your future. If my mindset is that by twenty-one hundred, the world is going to be burning and underwater, then that is what is going to happen because I am not really trying hard enough. But if in my mind I say by twenty-one hundred we are going to have a better world where my grandkids can enjoy Mother Nature, then that is what is going to happen. It has to do with the power of our mindset when it comes to acting."*

Ruth Manorama, who is encouraging slum dwellers, especially women in India, to stand up for their rights, has clearly recognised first the pivotal role of self-belief and secondly that her self-belief would not be enough in terms of numbers considering the challenges in Indian society and the necessary scale on which change needs to happen when saying*: "I develop ideas with the women and make them part of it, make them contribute, capacitate them. Their capacities are inside, but I have to bring them out and tell them: You are a leader; you know the problem much better than I do. I encourage them to struggle."*

Abdalaziz Alhamzas's report from his city Raqqa in Syria shows how even under the most dangerous conditions, one can achieve something considered impossible if one believes in the cause and oneself. He describes the time when ISIS seized Raqqa in 2013 (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria) to serve as their headquarters:

> *"We had almost no equipment, only small phones, and slow internet to which we struggled to get access. For us, it was a huge achievement to be able to record a video. We were streamed*

by major TV channels and outlets. We knew we were playing with fire, something even more dangerous than fire, something that could eat us in a second. But … looking at the results - who thought that a group of teenagers would press ISIS to a point that they would put resources, millions of dollars on our heads.

He concludes:

"We knew this is bigger than us as individuals, bigger than our families, bigger than RBSS. It is about the country, about the future of the next generations, even though I know I might not be able to live long enough to witness that. We know that if we would stop, that would never come."

Every time I hear or read his words, I can touch his conviction and belief that one can make a difference.

In her answers, Malebogo Molefhe lets me take part in how her belief in being able to make a difference had evolved in her over time:

"When I look at me as a disabled person, I think: wow, I have come a long way, but how? Would I have achieved all of this when I am disabled? I prove to myself day in and day out that I am able. The way that someone appreciates life, a positive outlook on many things and about oneself … really creates a spirit inside of oneself to push even when it is hard."

Srđa Popović argues that self-belief is a skill and part of a skill set needed to create change in whatever context. He wants to pass on the knowledge he accumulated while being a leader of the Serbian movement Otpor advising many other activists and movements over the last 20 years to provide the next generation of global activists with a "Blueprint for Revolution" (2015). Thus, in 2004 he co-founded and established CANVAS (Centre for Applied Nonviolent Actions and Strategies), an education and training centre for activists. However, because of his fundamental work to support courageous activism around the globe, he was chosen by the student body of St. Andrews to become their rector in 2017. He argues:

"It is all about knowledge, it is all about education. If you have the skills to move people, if you have the skills to mobilise the 'movables', then any change is possible, and this is why in restrictive societies, you want to deprive people of the skills. You need to enable people through education, and the lovers of the status quo are terribly afraid of it."

Srđa goes one step further in terms of self-belief. He does not only want to believe for himself that what he does matters, and that necessary change can be created; he wants to *make* others believe that they can make a difference and that their engagement is crucial because he knows that the possibility to create and sustain necessary change in whatever context also has to do with the number of people willing to get involved.

I observed in all my interviewees that the more they had been self-affirmed during their engagement that they could make a difference, the more this affirmation again fueled their activism. As Malebogo states, *"once you make a decision, you plant a seed"* you start feeding it with your time and energy, and as the seed becomes a plant, it grows equally to your effort. This invested energy, time and belief becomes, as Abdalaziz Alhamza said, "part of who you are". However, when my interviewees had knowingly reached this level that their activism became part of their identity, their engagement became a habit, and they crossed the point of not returning to a life without any social or political engagement. Among other mechanisms to enable and support courageous activism is the search for fulfilment and meaning in one's life. When you exercise an ability, you weren't assumed to have, Shaparak Shajarizadeh described it to me as defying gravity and flying, others describe it as a gift and a joy.

4. 8. "Pleasure of agency."

> *"I was happy that for the first time in my life, I was doing something. I was feeling empowered; I was feeling like I was one of those suffragettes, one of those women who are going to change everything."* (Shaparak Shajarizadeh, interviewee)

> *"Joy and strength are indispensable."* (Zehra Doğan, interviewee)

What Shaparak Shajarizadeh is describing above, is summed up in the definition of Elisabeth Jean Wood, who first coined the term "pleasure of agency" as: *"the positive effect associated with self-determination, autonomy, self-esteem, efficacy, and pride that comes from the successful assertion of intention."* (Wood, 2003, p. 235) What I found striking in Shaparak's statement was that she referred to "those suffragettes", which made me realise that her joy is stronger as she believes her activism for women's rights in Iran is fundamental and is, righteous and of historical proportion like the fight of the suffragettes. When Shaparak talks about how for the first time, she tied up her white hijab to a stick and raised it like a flag visible from afar, she remembers an irrepressible joy for taking her fate into her own hands.

In fact, with her action, she became one of the iconic "Girls of Enghelab Street" (Girls of the Revolution Street), sustaining an ongoing protest inside and outside Iran inspired by Vida Movahed, who was the first "Girl of Enghelab Street" standing in the crowd at Enghelab Street on a utility box and waving her white headscarf like a flag in dissent against compulsory hijab. After this and other actions, Shaparak was named one of the hundred most inspiring and influential women worldwide in 2018 by the BBC and received the International Women's Rights Award. This recognition was particularly important for

her family, who is still in Iran suffering the consequences of Shaparak's stance on women's rights and often vacillate between condemnation and pride about Shaparak's activism.

The connection between the joy of one's agency and the significance of one's activism corresponds with Sarit Michaelis' feeling:

> *"I got so many wonderful things out of this choice* (to work as human rights advocate). *I got to live my life in a way that is close to my values that is allowing me to feel like I am doing things that are important. I benefited so much from a life in which I am involved to a certain degree, with a struggle that I think is the most important moral struggle of my generation. Any kind of harm that could beset me any kind of hassle or tax or smear campaigns or whatever I would have to deal with just pales into insignificance in comparison with my personal gain."*

Even though Wood's definition corresponds in one way or another to all my interviewees, I would argue that the driving feelings or forces for their activism go beyond the "pleasure of agency". Based on my findings, I would claim that many of my interviewees are incrementally driven by the joy of altruism, doing something meaningful and helpful for others. A good example is Malebogo Molefehe's statement:

> *"I love the idea that I am able to touch people's lives and help to change their perspectives about to make better decisions. To make one person smile is enough. To touch a life means that there is a stronger purpose."*

Nury Turkel, follows Malebogo's account seamlessly*:*

> *"Speaking out for people you don't even know and fighting for the freedom, or the safety of your own family members whom you left behind are some of the things that are empowering, some of the things that make you feel that you have a fulfilling life and makes you feel that you do something right."*

In Ali Abu Awwad's account, we can see yet another facet of the "pleasure of agency", which I would identify as the joy of taking the lead and being in charge and proving one's values and beliefs right and just to others even at a hostile place:

> "*I went on hunger strike because I wanted to see my mother and to have better conditions in prison and I succeeded. I realised that I was strong. Before, I did not think I was a strong fighter … because my strength was hidden by being blind to the best weapon I had never used, which is my humanity. This empty stomach has brought down a political system in prison. From my bed, in my room (cell), I brought down Israel to accept my rights just by starving. "*

He was 21 years old when his “empty stomach” became his teacher. Ali Abu celebrated his agency and the joy of performing something completely oppositional and unexpected inside a system like a prison where this was not meant to be happening.

I want to recapitulate this section by identifying the term “pleasure of agency” concerning my interviewees' accounts. All of the interview partners of this project expressed distinct joy while speaking about their activism. This joy or “pleasure of agency” is connected to the experience and affirmation of their agency as well as to factors like recognition and success, historical significance in terms of “being on the right side of history”, momentousness, taking the lead, redefining assumed societal and political boundaries, attacking the status quo and the specific joy of acting for others and the common welfare.

All of my interviewees had left what I call the “ordering” society where things are being delivered in some way or another by someone else, all took their faith and matters into their own hands and encountered the various “pleasures of agency”. That being said, my interviewees often had to make sacrifices for the ideals, values, and beliefs they stand and strive for.

4. 9. Resilience in the face of repression

> *“I am more afraid of the dark than of a shot that hits me somewhere around the corner.”* (Svetlana Gannushkina, interviewee)

> *"Today, we are imprisoned, we can do nothing until we get out? On the contrary, we continued to play politics within the prison itself.”* (Zehra Doğan, interviewee)

> *“My lack of freedom today is a price I knew I would have to pay for the city I love.”* (Hong Kong, Joshua Wong, interviewee)

While recording the interviews, I recognised that all my interview partners had experienced different forms and magnitudes of repression, ranging from surveillance and harassment to arrest, violence and torture. All interviewees had gone through a process of outweighing the costs against the benefits of their activism. Factually, there are two main possible reactions to repression: to comply and refrain or to accept and resist. Christian Davenport calls those varying and statistically indeterminate responses of individuals and movements to repression the “punishment puzzle”, and he argues that protest and dissent always trigger repression in some form because states and societies seek order and hold on to the status quo, politicians seek to maintain their power. He calls it the “law of coercive responsiveness” (Davenport, 2007; Davenport and Loyle, 2012). However, the extent to which any repression has the

intended results depends on each individual's response. This applies to individual activists as well as to whole movements. Thus, the question is why some individuals, including my interviewees, are resilient and able to cope with repression and persist in their activism.

While for most people, repression sparks fear and leads to intimidation and compliance, the quotes mentioned above are significant and exemplary to all my interviewees as they all show a strong rejection and resilience[26] towards repression. In some of the interviews of this project, it seemed to me as if the experienced repression turned into an extra incentive for my interviewees to intensify and accelerate their activism and to even become creative in developing tactics to prevent or minimise the effects of repression or to be able to endure it. The latter was the case for Zehra Doğan, a Kurdish artist who served almost three years in prison because of her critical art and for sharing her painting on social media about the destruction of Nusaybin, a city in southeast Turkey whose population is predominantly Kurdish after clashes between the Turkish state and Kurdish insurgents. In order to cope with life in prison, she continued to work creatively under impossible conditions: *"In prison artistic material was forbidden, so I used everything I could find; packaging, newspapers, clothes and sheets and colours I prepared with vegetable waste, tea, coffee, spices, menstrual blood …."*

Half of my interviewees have experienced lengthy prison sentences, ranging from a few months to over twenty years, in the case of the two activists of the 1988 pro-democracy uprising in Myanmar, Min Ko Naing and My Aung. For all the interview partners of this project, I can say that once they have chosen the path of courageous activism, every new action works out for them in two beneficial ways: it draws attention to the activist's cause and, at the same time, the activist becomes well-known, sometimes even internationally. Becoming a prominent activist does not only amplify the importance of the respective reason. It can also entail vital protection for the well-being and safety of this activist. To be an unknown activist in a military dictatorship like Myanmar can mean not only prison but "disappearance" or death. Therefore, if an activist working under such conditions for democracy, human rights, or environmental justice is willing to sacrifice their well-being for their cause, they consequently do everything possible to be "successful" and the sacrifice to be worthwhile. A prominent activist getting unjustly convicted like Joshua Wong from Hong Kong, who is right now serving a sentence of several months in prison, can spark international attention and protest. It does not change Joshua`s situation. Still, he told me that it makes his sacrifice more bearable for him as he succeeded in letting the world know about and taking part in the fight for freedom and democracy of the people of Hong Kong. He believes that the knowledge

[26] The term resilience refers to the individual capacity to withstand, to recover from and respond to repression and describes *"the skills, abilities, knowledge, and insights that accumulate over time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges. It is an ongoing and developing fund of energy and skill …"* (Saleebey, 1996)

of the injustice and violence taking place every day in Hong Kong comes with a responsibility for every country doing business with China, having the choice to choose people and their rights over profit.

In the case of Zehra Doğan many international human rights organisations and famous artists like Ai Weiwei or Banksy have campaigned for her release. Today Zehra is free, and even if she had to leave Turkey, she continues to draw attention to the human rights violations of Turkey against the Kurdish people.

Srđa Popović was luckier and able to avoid imprisonment. He explains in detail how in 1998 he and his friends creatively structured an opposition group that was to become the movement Otpor (Resistance) in order to be successful and prepared for the foreseeable repression of Milosevic's regime:

> *"We knew the government would be after the leaders, we knew that they would be satanised, arrested, expelled, bought, coopted, whatever… So, we wanted to prevent this vulnerability and create a hydra that is everywhere with a lot of heads and then replicate this hydra in the local neighbourhoods."*

Srđa described the spirit when Otpor had become a Serbian-wide movement with more than 70,000 supporters who helped to topple Milosevic's regime:

> *"People in Otpor were wearing the number of times that they had been arrested as a medal of honour. So, the more times you have been arrested, the more respected you are in your environment. It becomes a huge attraction because if you are the nerdy guy with thick glasses with the megaphone … you get all the best dates. I mean, there is something in human nature which makes trouble-making sexy."*

Srđa explains above the fact I observed in most interviewees of carrying arrest and prison as a hard-earned medal. Being arrested or imprisoned becomes a unifying identifier that one proudly belongs to a group of people in different times in history and various places in this world fighting for a righteous cause. Shaparak Shajarizadeh, the women's rights activist from Tehran, says: "*When you find other people like yourself in other places around the world, it is amazing."* When I asked Esther Htusan, a human rights defender and journalist from Myanmar, about what had supported her to go on with her work despite the fear of threats and repression, she mentioned four important reasons: her father as a role model, the meaning of life, the proud tradition of dissent and fight for democracy in her own country and her own choice:

> *"I have been threatened so many times when I tried to work on stories about land confiscation of farmers by the military. I was followed, threatened, they tried to get a warrant to arrest me, but I kept on going because once my dad used to say: would you rather live without opening your mouth peacefully or would you fight for your rights? I reckoned that it was something that*

I wanted to do; it was a choice. If I was threatened to be arrested, I was so anxious that I could not sleep. But I look at those people who, when I started speaking up, had already changed things for the better … people who were actually tortured, their teeth were knocked out… If they survived and they still speak out, why can I not do the same? People like Min Ko Naing and many other activists who were back then very outspoken kind of encouraged a young generation like us to keep on going. "

Esther refers to Min Ko Naing, a prominent pro-democracy activist from Myanmar who had become an iconic figure for his people in the 1988 uprising in Myanmar and is also part of this project.

Ali Abu Awwad, a human rights activist from Palestine, emphasises that he can cope with repression and prison because he knows that his fight is righteous:

"When you go to prison as a political prisoner whose desire was to achieve his freedom and his dignity then it is not about being a thief or a criminal. I spend my whole life doing this, and I am proud to be who I am. "

Nurcan Baysal, the journalist from Diyarbakir, says something similar about her fight for human rights for the Kurds: "*I know what I am struggling for, and this gives me power."*

Malebogo Molefhe from Botswana, who had to endure the ultimate form of repression: an attack on her life for being a role model for girls and women in her country, says:

"Yes, I do have fear. Someone wrote me a threatening message: "just be happy that you were saved once, but next time you are going six feet underground." This really disturbs me. But I said: well, I have been given a second chance. If I could at least save one life, I would have done well. I have found my purpose and am living to fulfil it."

Comparable to other interviewees of this project, Abdalazis Alhamza's activism became stronger after being imprisoned and experiencing the imprisonments and deaths of friends during their protests and activism against the Assad regime in Syria and later in their fight against the brutal oppression through ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria):

"Each time I lose a friend it is another huge push for me to keep going forward and not to turn back. I was in so many situations where I have been asked by so many different parties to stop … to write and tweet less and talk less, but each time something happens, it pushes me to talk more … write more. "

He described the experienced repression as a kind of compass that showed him that he was in the right place, working in the right direction:

"We knew that we are affecting them, we knew that we are hurting them. (ISIS) *All those were reasons for us to keep on doing what we have been doing. The revolution and the fight that we have is our fuel. It is an important thing for us as food, air, water ...If I would lose that – I don't know if I would survive. It keeps me sane. "*

Kathy Kelly, the 70-year-old peace activist from Chicago, still constantly questions herself about what her morals are worth if she is unprepared to make sacrifices. She said peacemakers need to be prepared to take on the same risks soldiers take when preparing for war. During our four-hour conversation, it was one of her main concerns to let me understand that the luck in the lottery of birthrights, having been born free in a democracy, comes with a responsibility to use this privilege in favour of others who had not been so fortunate. She said: *"We have to keep ourselves humble, honest about these terrible disparities in the world."*

One time Kathy witnessed the death of a baby with a respiratory infection in a hospital in Baghdad simply because of the lack of a little plastic tube fitting into the tiny nostrils to receive oxygen. Kathy did not see her several prison sentences as a hard price for her peaceful activism compared to the suffering of others:

"When a group of us decided that we would break the economic sanctions against Iraq, we were threatened with twelve years in prison and a one million dollar fine. I realised there was a chance that this could happen but at no point do I recall ever having said: I am not going to go ahead with this. I was completely convinced that this is the right thing to do, and I will do it."

Kathy explained that repression is like a test you must pass, asking you two questions: Is it worth it? Do I do the right thing? However, if your answer to both questions is a yes, you have to go on and do what is necessary. She laughed while describing her satisfaction when she had done everything in her power and could "rest" in jail:

"My head hit the pillow, and I heard, in my mind, the refrain to a song: Gonna take a ride on ..., days breaking in my soul. I felt joy. I experienced a sense of release because I had done what I could, opposing nuclear weapons, and for a time, I could do little more because I was locked up. "

Kathy kept emphasising the security and privileges of her "baby-blue" American passport, which makes her activism "relatively easy", as she said. But I also know that her passport will be of no consequence in protecting her life when she lives alongside people on different battlefields like Yemen, Syria or Iraq. Kathy knows this fact:

"Well, the idea of human shields doesn't quite work because if aerial bombardment is raining bombs down, you can't protect people. But we could be alongside people and say: we don't

believe that our lives are more or less valuable than our lives. Trying to be commensurate to the crimes being committed requires action and a measure of sacrifice."

All my interview partners experienced fear and anxiety in the face of repression but were able to transform those fears into anger and form that anger into action. The catalysts for this transformation are those I covered in previous sections, such as personal background, role models and mentors, moral values and self-belief. In the case of my interview partners, they all believed in the righteousness of their cause. Thus, repression was understood as a hard but unavoidable consequence of implementing change, questioning one's conviction and willingness to sacrifice for the possibility of impacting this change. The more repression my interviewees were facing and resisting, the more and the stronger they would hold on to their convictions and intensify their activism like a self-reinforcing spiral to make the price they had already paid worthwhile. It is also worth mentioning that some of the costs of activism also generate benefits, as all my interview partners are well respected and often admired in their communities. Some are recognised internationally for their activism.

In all interviews, I could observe that anger fueled by repression becomes an irresistible explosive composition for action unintentionally created by oppressors. The key ingredients to cope with repression are resilience, creativity and preparation. To all my interviewees, it applies that they break up the pattern of repression as they do not consent and feel like actors rather than victims. Paulo Freire describes in his book "The pedagogy of the oppressed" how oppression works if it is not faced with resilience:

> *"The oppressed, having internalised the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom. Freedom would require them to eject this image and replace it with autonomy and responsibility. Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift. It must be pursued constantly and responsibly. Freedom is not an ideal outside of man, nor is it an idea that becomes myth. It is rather the indispensable condition for the quest for human completion."* (Freire, 2000, p. 47)

Xiye Bastida, from Mexico, sums this up in her statement:

> "*Courage means not only the immediate act of standing up for something that you believe in. It is more about resilience …about continuous courage. It is about not giving up. Courage and resilience go hand in hand together because every challenge that we face builds our character, which makes us more courageous."*

5.0. Flaws and Limitations

When looking back at the development and realisation of 'Voices of Courage,' I recognise the disparity between my expectations and ideas at the beginning of this PhD project and the present results:

I did not estimate precisely enough how much time it would take to research various conflicts and issues, locate my interviewees, familiarise myself with their contexts and backgrounds, get them to agree to an interview, prepare the interview and follow up on it and then merge my experiences, observations and reflections into a social sculpture that a wider audience can experience. Even though I researched the background of more than 300 activists, the labour-intensive preparation and analysis process resulted in interviews with only 21 activists.

Since I wanted to conduct the best possible interviews, I eventually focused on quality rather than quantity. I acknowledge that my own experiences and positionality shaped the selection of the 21 activists featured in this project. Although I am aware of this, the project will inevitably reflect some of my own biases and idiosyncrasies.

Given the diverse backgrounds of my interviewees, the various contexts in which they work and the different issues they engage with, the commonalities between them and patterns in their development are difficult to pinpoint and complex to compare. Some reasons and factors leading to courageous activism resisted generalisation.

Language also played a role in the data collection process. I conducted the interviews in English, but English is neither my mother tongue nor is it the mother tongue of most of my interviewees. I must acknowledge that some nuances were likely lost in this process. I worked with translators in four instances because the interviewees did not speak English. This affected how I conducted the interview, as it was more challenging to build the personal relationship between interviewer and interviewee necessary for asking deeply personal questions.
Importantly, I must also reflect that my interviewees' statements are, by nature, imperfect. Memory can be deceptive. As Butler notes: "…we do not have full authority concerning how to understand our lives, because we do not have – and can never have – full insight into the forces that have created us." (Butler 2005, p.288)

The COVID pandemic also had a substantial impact on the way I was able to conduct my work. Initially, I had been immersed in the academic discourse at Brookes and the material through physical meetings.

In the wake of the pandemic, I had to adapt to the practice of conducting interviews through video calls. The lack of personal academic exchange with peers, slowed down my work pace.

Moreover, the quality of my films inevitably deteriorated since the quality of the stream was often severely limited by the slow internet speeds of the countries where my interviewees lived. On screen, it was challenging to foster the intimate interview setting necessary for asking painful questions.

Finally, even though the interviews will be uploaded to Brookes RADAR and "Voices of Courage" is theoretically accessible for everyone, the website needs further advertising and interlinking to become well established.

6. 0. Conclusion

> *"We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time…"* (T. S. Eliot, Little Gidding)

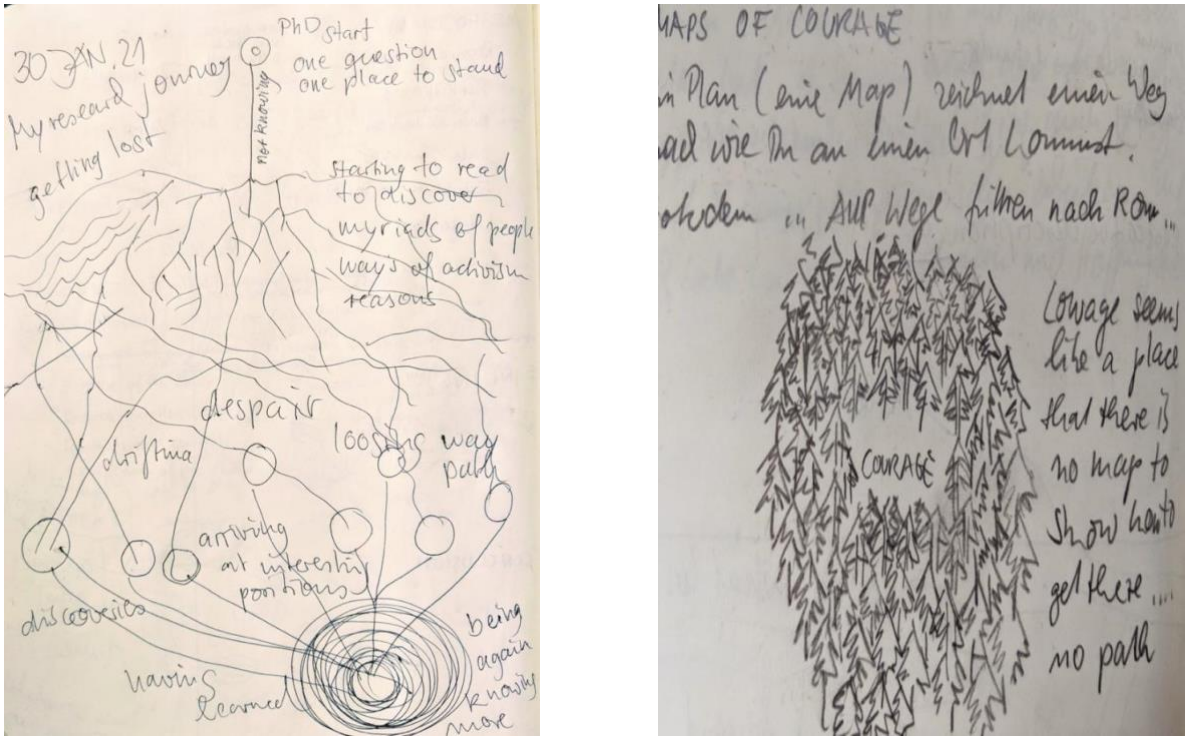
This research project has investigated the background and development of twenty-one activists from 16 countries working in the fields of human rights and environmental justice, aiming to contribute to answering the question of what enables individuals to become courageous activists. In part, this research project was motivated by the wish to feature the testimonies of these activists and the findings in in-depth interviews that would be accessible to a wider audience. The edited versions of the video interviews are available on the website www.voices-of-courage.com.

Analysing the interview data, I found that courage is not a given but a competence that grows gradually and needs to be revised and fostered. Courageous activists are shaped by their environment and circumstances and moulded by the ideals and influence of their family, friends, role models and mentors. The project was devised to highlight the importance of the rarest form of courage – the investing courage. This courage requires engaging willingly with others and society, acknowledging what is necessary and just, and choosing to go on, even if it includes opposing oppression. It was also conceived to show that civic engagement and courageous activism are essential for every society since they foster positive change. Thus, this project gives a voice to activists worldwide who are compelled by their conscience to contribute to a more just, equal, and sustainable future without using violence.

This project reveals different ways of becoming courageous and touches on different issues worth being courageous for. The transdisciplinary research practice consists of analysing in-depth semi-structured

interviews and studying secondary sources. The work is located in the field of oral history, film, art and social sculpture. Thus, one of the specifics of this research project is the interplay of multiple methods such as video, experimental writing, drawing and autoethnography. One other characteristic of this research and, at the same time, motivation to undertake it is my personal history of growing up in a dictatorship and becoming part of the very small opposition in East Germany that helped trigger the Peaceful Revolution in 1989. With the background of this personal experience, I could approach the project from various sides – as artist, researcher, and activist.

6. 1. Recap of main successive steps in this research



Drawings from my Journals

The beginning of this research project is captured in two drawings from my journals. The left image illustrates that my research question was the place I knew and from which I started to get a sense of the field related to courage and activism. The drawing on the right side illustrates metaphorically the feeling of being in a forest, having no map yet to find a specific place inside the forest but knowing it does exist.

In the first year of my PhD, I followed two different strands: first, locating the research relevant to my field and my question and secondly, locating past and present courageous activists and their writings, biographies, or any research about them to verify important successive steps in their development and to design the fundamental questions of the interview. In this summary, I only name the most crucial researchers and actors who have influenced my way of working and understanding. On the research side, I studied the work of Ervin Staub and Pearl and Samuel Oliner, and I recognised their significance to my research question. Those three researchers gave me a fundamental sense of the scope and the framework of the research field related to human goodness, pro-social behaviour and the emergence of courageous actions. Studying the interview questions of these researchers allowed me to identify characteristics I would need to look out for in my future interviewees. Additionally, their experiences helped me sharpen my interview questions and clearly recognise my findings.

While engaging with their writings and interview questionnaires, I defined three applications of courage for the purpose of this PhD: the commonplace, the consequential, and the investing courage. Those applications notably differ in the degree of agency, rarity, and excellence. This thesis focuses on investing courage that all my interviewees have exercised continuously throughout their life. The investing courage requires engaging actively and without a special occasion repeatedly for the common good of others and society, protecting human rights and the environment. In my experience, investing courage is the rarest form and level of courage.

Three outstanding 'Doers' guided this research apart from my interviewees by embodying theories about courageous activism. Reading the biographical notes, letters and writings of Daniel and Philip Berrigan – brothers, prominent American peace activists and Catholic priests - I recognised their internal processes and the sequential steps they took in becoming radical pacifists who founded the transnational 'Plowshare Movement'. The other courageous 'Doer' whose work guided my research was Raoul Wallenberg, a Swedish diplomat who rescued nearly 100.000 mainly Jewish people from certain death during WWII. When comparing their process and choices in becoming courageous activists to the processes and the choices of my interviewees, the lives of Raoul Wallenberg and the Berrigans served as a blueprint for me to decode the commonalities of sequential steps between them and my interviewees. Doing permanent research, I got a reasonably good overview and sense of the field of human rights and environmental justice and where to find reliable sources from foundations, think tanks and NGOs like Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, Green Peace, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute or Freedom House.

Moreover, because of my history, I am regularly invited as a speaker to panels or conferences regarding protecting human rights or the meaning of the Peaceful Revolution of 1989. With some of my present interviewees, I had tentative conversations at the Geneva Human Rights Summits in order to win them

as interviewees. I investigated in detail every findable information about the background of each interviewee and the context of their work. During and after the recording of each interview, I wrote down crucial observations, reflections, or questions. These field notes have become the most valuable source when tracing and formulating the main findings of this project. Whether I looked at the environmental pollution of Shell in Ogoniland, Nigeria, or genital mutilation of women in Somalia, this research confirmed that wherever injustice, oppression, and violation exist, resistance exists too.

6. 2. Recap of the main findings

Even though my interviewees differ in terms of their background and the causes they fight for, the project identified commonalities between them. The research has confirmed that certain factors, values, and beliefs enable individuals to become courageous activists. All findings of this study are intersected and impact each other. I do not make universal claims about the origins of courageous activism; none of the characteristics and factors I discovered in my interviews will necessarily lead to morally courageous activism in other individuals.

Role models:
Before engaging in courageous activism, all my interview partners were encouraged and fostered by others. One of the crucial factors in the courage of my interviewees was the influence and support of role models and mentors. The inclination and ability to act courageously are more likely to develop if the immediate environment sets such examples and practices civic engagement and steadfastness in the face of repression. They perceive themselves as standing in a line to pass on the baton of responsible and proactive agency to whoever will come after them.

Watershed moments:
All my interviewees had experienced powerful and catalytic watershed moments caused by harrowing events when their values, beliefs, and sense of justice were violated. These watershed moments triggered a conscious choice to become active. Once this choice is made and the social or political engagement has started, the invested energy, time, and conviction become consolidating factors for ongoing activism.

Sense of justice:
All interviewees showed a distinct sense of justice and referred to it as a concept of fundamental rights and equal opportunity in diversity for everyone. The research has shown that the prerequisite for perceiving and acknowledging injustice is to be able put oneself "into someone else's shoes" through compassion. Most of my interviewees have also expressed that they attribute the inevitability of their

actions to this sense of justice. Inhabiting the sense of justice is one precondition and guidance for engaging though it does not always result in action.

Autonomy:
All my interviewees have developed a radically expanded inner autonomy that allows them to work on matters beyond their personal interests and happiness and not to comply with the majority's stance. Autonomy combined with self-awareness and self-belief is linked to courageous agency.
Responsibility:
All interviewees refer to the concept of responsibility in one of the following ways: They perceive themselves as able to respond to problems in their societies and therefore accept individual responsibility. They are experiencing their actions and activism as a logical consequence of their ability to respond. They feel that they are accountable for their actions and inaction and would understand inaction in the face of human rights violations as becoming complicit in that violation.

Self-perception:
The project has shown that self-efficacy and belief determine how individuals feel, think and act from a very early age. Even in the most oppressive circumstances, all interviewees still perceive themselves as agents of their own life. They all could envision positive outcomes of their engagement and did not accept the status quo. Confidence is a skill which needs training. When confidence is affirmed through action, it perpetuates further action.

Pleasure of agency:
The research confirmed that once individuals have recognised their power and experienced their agency, they express the responsibility and a distinct joy in exercising this agency. This 'pleasure of agency' is grounded in the experience of success and affirmation through recognition and the sense of "being on the right side of history".

Resilience in the face of oppression:
Having been subject to repression while struggling for a righteous cause becomes a unifying identifier with other activists in various places in the world and at different times in history. Arrest and prison are carried proudly like a hard-earned medal. All interviewees experienced anxiety and fear of repression but were capable of transforming those fears into anger and further into action. The endurance of repression is seen as a hard but inevitable consequence of trying to impact change.

6. 3. Significance of the work and Contribution to knowledge

The significance is threefold: firstly, the research goes beyond stocktaking of reasons for civic engagement and activism by searching to trace the process and the successive steps of individuals when becoming courageous activists. Interviewees open up to rarely attainable personal layers of motivation for becoming active.
Secondly, the project is overarching and transnational. This is important because this research underlines that wherever injustice, oppression, and violation exist, resistance exists too. Thirdly, a central contribution is sharing the condensed videos on the public website www.voices-of-courage.com.
A unique contribution to knowledge is the co-creative interview process between a former activist (interviewer) and an activist (interviewee) which, according to Michael Roper, find themselves in a *"transference relationship shaped by the emotional residues of the past which both parties bring, inevitably, into the encounter."* That applies even more *"if the life-story interview situation (of the interviewee) is analogous to that of the interviewer in some important respects."* Roper is confident that "*the more intimate the relationship, the more powerful the transference".* (Roper, 2003)

Hence, the above-described analogous background, the mutual knowing and being known, go with a reciprocal appreciation for each other forming the grounding on which the interview takes place. From the beginning, the relationship between each interviewee and myself is carried by an atmosphere of trust, calmness, and serenity, which draws from mutual reflexive sensitivity. This transferential and counter-transferential interview process lays the basis for the joint excavation of rarely attainable layers of motivation for becoming and being an activist. It allows each party *"to own and engage with our* (mutual) *vulnerability"* in order *"to let ourselves be seen" (Brown, 2015)* with wholeheartedness and humour. The fundamental creative strategy I deploy in each interview is that whatever I ask or do, is guided by care and empathy in order to fully zero in on my counterpart, leave out every possible self-opinionated behaviour and stay truly open for what each interview will become.

This research enriches the field of social sculpture and the discourse about the potential of art in contributing twenty-one video interviews for a better understanding of the courage of activists and their motivation in fighting to achieve and protect human rights and climate justice. When engaging with the project 'Voices of Courage', the audience – fellow artists and activists, academics in different fields and a wider audience on the world wide web - can get a sense of courage in activists who fight under different circumstances and conditions for a righteous cause. All interviewees let the audience partake in their progress and strategies, formative moments, and factors of their lives that made them become who they are. The testimonies of these interviewees seek to provide a richer understanding of the evolution of courage and agency and add to a body of research about the characteristics of courageous activists and the supporting interlinked factors and dynamics that play a role in the emergence of their

courage. Each story bears witness not only to the dire situation in many countries regarding human rights and climate justice but about the achievements of those courageous activists: Without activists and their transnational networks, there would be no global Fridays for Future movement, less public awareness about the urgency of climate change, and less pressure on governments worldwide to change their politics.

While giving voice and visibility to these courageous activists and their sense of purpose, I hope I have brought attention to the manifold possibilities of contribution through the courage and activism of individuals. Since I wish the audience to become aware of their agency instead of thinking they have none.

6. 4. Future work

This conclusion is temporary since I envision the project “Voices of Courage”, its findings and their visualisation to expand and develop within and beyond academia. In practice, I would like to interconnect the website www.voices-of-courage.com with the public outreach of several NGOs, foundations, platforms and organisations such as Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, the Raoul Wallenberg Institute or the annual Geneva Human Rights Summit. I can perfectly see how their audience, staff, and facilitators will be interested in and profit from this project's findings and how it possibly enriches and feeds into their work and research. Furthermore, I plan to produce a documentary film from the present recorded material about the evolution of courage and activism, which can, in its own right, support the purpose mentioned above.

Given that I already collected personal contacts and background information of almost 300 other activists working in various countries and contexts, it would be an actual loss to leave this treasure of inspiration unlifted. Several activists from this list, such as Raoul Montenegro, a well-known environmentalist from Argentina, or the Cuban human rights activist Rosa Maria Payà have already agreed to an interview with me.

Daniel Berrigan is right when stating, "Courage is Verb, do it". Thus, as we all need good examples like the ones of my present interviewees, I will keep on collecting those inspiring stories.

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Appendix A

List of interviewees

Abdalaziz Alhamza is a human rights defender, award-winning journalist and IT trainer from Raqqa, Syria. In 2014 Abdalaziz and his friends founded RBSS (Raqqa Is Being Slaughtered Silently), and he became its spokesperson. This non-partisan, independent citizen journalist group exposed the atrocities committed by the Assad regime, other groups occupying Northern Syria and ISIS. Abdalaziz Alhamza received, among others, the International Press Freedom Award and the Civil Courage Prize and has become a fellow of the McCain Institute. The story of Abdalaziz and his friends was featured in the compelling documentary "City of Ghosts".

Ali Abu Awwad is a Palestinian peace activist from the West Bank. He founded Taghyeer (Change), a Palestinian national movement promoting nonviolent resistance to the occupation and achieving reconciliation between Israelis and Palestinians. Taqhyeer has also built a supportive local community network throughout the West Bank. Ali Abu's story has been featured in the striking award-winning documentaries "Encounter Point" and "Forbidden Childhood".

Xiye Bastida is a climate activist and belongs to the indigenous Otomi-Toltec community. Xiye is one of the main organizers of the Fridays for Future movement globally. She grew up in San Pedro Tultepec, a small town outside Mexico City. Xiye is a member of the "People's Climate Movement" administration committee and co-founded the not-for-profit Re-Earth Initiative. This youth-led organization focuses on the intersectionality of the climate crisis. Xiye is now a student at the University of Pennsylvania majoring in environmental studies with a focus on policy and implementation. She received the "Spirit of the UN" award and, in 2021, the Vital Voices Award.

Nurcan Baysal is a Kurdish journalist, writer and human rights defender from Diyarbakir (Turkey). Between 1997 - 2007 Nurcan supervised the United Nations Development Program in Diyarbakir as project coordinator. Her work at that time focused on fighting poverty through microfinancing of women's entrepreneurship. In 2008 Nurcan devised a rural development program in the war-torn villages of Tatvan, Kavar. She co-founded the Diyarbakir Political and Social Research Institute (DISA), concentrating on the humanitarian issues of Kurdish people in her region. Nurcan is a member of the Turkish PEN and one of the very few journalists reporting on the Turkish-Kurdish conflict from inside Turkey. In 2017 she received the "Brave Women Journalist Award" and was in 2018 named the Global Laureate for Human Rights Defenders at Risk by Front Line Defenders.

Mina Dennert is a Swedish journalist, writer and founder of the transnational #iamhere network -which has inspired more than a hundred thousand people around the globe to engage in the fight against any kind of hate speech, fake news, racism and homophobia on social media. Users of the hashtag #iamhere advocate for a democratic and inclusive society. Whenever fake news is spread, they intervene by quoting the facts and supporting people being harassed and threatened by hateful comments. In 2017 Mina was awarded the "Anna Lindh Prize" assigned to individuals or institutions who have the courage to fight "against indifference, prejudice, oppression and injustice".

Zehra Doğan is a Kurdish artist, journalist and author from Diyarbakir, Turkey. Zehra is the co-founder and former editor of the feminist Kurdish news agency Jinha which the Turkish government shot down in 2016 for its critical news coverage. In 2017 Zehra was arrested and served almost three years in prison because of her critical art and for sharing her paintings on social media about the destruction of Nusaybin, a city in southeast Turkey whose population is predominantly Kurdish. Many international human rights organisations and famous artists like Ai Weiwei and Banksy have campaigned for Zehra's release from prison. Zehra is a member of PEN International and received numerous awards for her art and human rights activism. Zehra has written and published several books, for example, the graphic novel "Prison No 5" and "Nous aurons aussi de beaux jours: écrits de prison" (We shall also know better days: prison writings)

Svetlana Gannushkina is a Russian human rights defender and professor of mathematics based in Moscow. In 1989 Svetlana was a founding member of the international working NGO Memorial, whose purpose was the documentation of crimes against humanity committed in the former Soviet Union and during Stalin's regime. She also helped establish the Memorial Human Rights Centre, which has focused on protecting human rights in contemporary Russia. In 1990 Svetlana co-founded and since heads the NGO Civic Assistance Committee, which has provided free and legal support, humanitarian aid and education to over 50,000 migrants, refugees and internally displaced persons since then. For her lifelong commitment to advocating human rights and justice for refugees and migrants, Svetlana received, among others, the Andrei Sakharov Freedom Award, the Stieg Larsson Prize, the Human Right Prize from Amnesty International and the Right Livelihood Award in 2016. The Nobel Peace Prize 2022 was awarded to the Memorial Human Rights Centre.

Kathrin Henneberger is a climate justice activist and co-founder of the Institute of Environmental Justice e.V from the Rhine region in Germany. This region causes the highest CO2 emissions in Europe. Until 2021 Kathrin was the spokesperson of the European Climate Alliance "Ende Gelände", which means: until here but no further. She is currently an MP for the Green Party in Germany. In

addition to her local commitments in Germany, Kathrin has supported negotiations at the UN climate conferences for over ten years. She is currently co-writing a book on climate justice and feminism.

Esther Htusan is a journalist, photographer, and human rights defender from Myanmar. She was born in the northernmost part of Myanmar and belongs to the ethnic minority of the Kachin. From her early childhood, Esther experienced civil war in her region. In Yangon, she started to work as a foreign correspondent for Associated Press. Esther and her colleagues investigated and wrote about the genocide of the Rohingyas by Myanmar's military. In 2016 Esther and her colleagues won the Pulitzer Prize for a documentary about human trafficking and slavery in the seafood industry in Southeast Asia. She received the Goldsmith Prize, the Anthony Lewis Prize and the Michael Kelly Award for her fearless pursuit and expression of truth. After receiving many severe threats to her life, she feared especially for her family's safety and was forced to flee to Thailand. Esther lives and works as a freelance journalist in the United States.

Myo Aung Htwe is a former student union leader of the 1988 'People To Power Uprising' and a democracy activist from Myanmar. In 1991, after the 88' uprising was bloodily crushed, and the military had ignored the outcome of the general elections, My Aung was arrested and charged with high treason. He became the youngest political prisoner in Myanmar's history. While on death row, Myo Aung served 18 years in prison and was released in 2009 as Myanmar seemed to open up. In 2011 My Aung co-founded the Yangon School of Political Science (YSPS) with other former political prisoners, which became the first independent university engaging in Myanmar's democratic transitioning process. At YSPS, he served as a board member and programme manager. Since the military regained power in the coup in February 2021, he has worked against the military dictatorship from outside Myanmar.

Kathy Kelly is an American peace activist, pacifist and author based in Chicago. In 1996 Kathy co-founded "Voices in the Wilderness", a group of pacifists who actively opposed the economic sanctions against Iraq. Since the early 90s, Kathy and her friends travelled twenty-six times to Iraq, delivering lifesaving medicine, especially for children, despite those imposed sanctions. Kathy remained in the combat zones during both US-Iraq wars, witnessing the "Shock and Awe" bombardment in Bagdad in 2003 and trying to bring the sufferings of civilians in wars to the world's attention. For her whole life, Kathy has refused to pay federal income taxes to prevent her taxes from funding weapons and wars. She donated most of her income as a teacher to non-profit charities. Throughout her life, Kathy has been arrested more than 60 times at home and abroad. Kathy has been nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize three times. In her book "Other Lands Have Dreams: From Baghdad to Pekin Prison." (2005), Kathy processes her experiences and tells about her conviction and values.

Ruth Manorama is a social and political activist and feminist from Bangalore, India. Ruth, who was born as a Dalit into the so-called cast of the 'Untouchables', has dedicated her life to battling against the interconnected issues of oppression arising from gender, class and caste hierarchies in contemporary Indian society. After completing her law degree, Ruth founded and established 1987 the first trade union for domestic workers in Bangalore and started the fight for minimum wages. Ruth holds numerous positions, for example, in the National Advisory Council for the Rights to Education and the National Standing Committee for Women Scientists and serves as president of the National Alliance of Women in India. In 2006 Ruth was awarded the Right Livelihood Award for her life's work.

Malebogo Molefhe is a former national basketball player and a disability and gender rights activist from Botswana. In 2009 Malebogo narrowly escaped death after being shot eight times by her former partner. After this brutal attack and several lifesaving operations, Malebogo was left with an irreparable spinal cord injury and had to come to terms with using a wheelchair. Since then, Malebogo has advocated against domestic abuse and supported survivors of gender-based violence. Malebogo and the Botswana Ministry of Education have created a program for children to help them learn about Gender-based violence at home. Malebogo also encourages para sports and sports for women in general. In 2017, she received the International Women of Courage Award for her activism.

Sarit Michaeli is an Israelian human rights defender and international advocacy officer for the non-profit, non-partisan Israeli Information Center B'Tselem based in Jerusalem. Since 1989 B'Tselem has been monitoring, documenting and researching human rights violations committed by Israel in the occupied territories. B'Tselem works for a future in which human rights, freedom and equality are guaranteed for all, Palestinians and Jews alike. Sarit has documented human rights violations for decades and is intensely engaged in making those internationally public. Since 2019 Sarit has advised RECLAIM, an independent organisation which supports anti-corruption activists and human rights defenders throughout Europe in their work on protecting human rights defenders at risk and on intersectional activism.

Min Ko Naing is a democracy activist and iconic leader of the 1988 uprising in Myanmar. Since he was a zoology student in Yangon in the mid-eighties, Min Ko Naing fought for democracy, freedom and self-determination of his people against the corruption, despotism and violence of the military. After the '88 uprising was bloodily crushed by the military and killed more than 3000 people, Min Ko Naing was arrested and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Amnesty International and other Human Rights organisations worldwide who recognised him as a "prisoner of conscience" fought

continuously but in vain for his release. Min Ko Naing stayed imprisoned until 2012, therefrom 16 years in solitary confinement. Since the military seized power again in February 2021, they issued arrest warrants for Min Ko Naing and other prominent activists. He went underground and has since called on his people to take a "no participation and no recognition" approach to the military. Min Ko Naing received the Gwangju Prize for Human Rights, the Civil Courage Prize, the John Humphrey Freedom Award and the National Order of Merit in 2015.

Shaparak Shajarizadeh is a women's rights activist from Iran. In 2018 she was arrested for repeatedly removing her headscarf and waving it like a flag. With these actions, she became one of the iconic "Girls of Enghelab Street "(Girls of the Revolution Street), sustaining an ongoing protest inside and outside Iran inspired by Vida Movahed. Vida was the first "Girl of Enghelab Street" standing in the crowd at Enghelab Street in Teheran on a utility box and waving her white headscarf like a flag in dissent against the compulsory hijab. After Shaparak's release from prison, she fled to Turkey and later got granted asylum in Canada. Shaparak was named one of the hundred most inspiring and influential women worldwide in 2018 by the BBC and received the International Women's Rights Award at the Geneva Human Rights Summit in 2020.

Clara Thompson is a German American author and climate activist. She co-founded the local group of the movement "Extinction Rebellion" in Leipzig and organised their work. Clara co-founded "Wald Statt Asphalt" (Forests instead of asphalt) and was a spokesperson in a recent campaign to save the Dannenröder Forest from being cut down for a new highway. She periodically writes for German newspapers and the online news channel Al Jazeera. Clara currently studies sociology in a post-graduate program at the University of Jena.

Nury Turkel is a Uyghur-American human rights lawyer, foreign policy expert and public official living and working in Washington, D.C. He was born in a so-called re-education camp in Kashgar during China's Cultural Revolution. In 2020 Nury was appointed a commissioner on the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom and currently serves as its chair. He is the co-founder and chairman of the Uyghur Human Rights Project board, a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and a Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute. Recently he testified before Congress about the mass internment of Uyghurs and advocated for a legislative response of the United States to China's crimes against humanity. Several of his proposals have been incorporated into U.S. policies and laws. 2020 Nury was named by TIME as one of the hundred most influential people. In 2022 he published his story in the book "No Escape: The True Story of China's Genocide of the Uyghurs".

Srđa Popović is a well-known civil rights activist from Belgrade, Serbia. In 1998 Srđa and his friends founded the nonviolent resistance group Otpor (Resistance) which became a nationwide movement that

helped to topple the regime of Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. After the revolution, Srđa served a term as a member of the new Serbian National Assembly and worked as an environmental advisor to the newly elected prime minister Zoran Đinđić. In 2003 Srđa and his friends founded and established the Centre for Applied Nonviolent Action and Strategies CANVAS which is dedicated to spreading the knowledge of how to start a peaceful revolution using the strategies and the knowledge of Otpor. Srđa became the Executive Director of CANVAS and trained activists from around the globe, including Iran, Venezuela, Myanmar, Egypt and Zimbabwe. In October 2017, Srđa was elected by the students as Rector of the University of St. Andrews in Scottland. In 2020 he was awarded the Brown Democracy Medal for his work.

Joshua Wong is a pro-democracy activist and politician from Hong Kong. In 2011, being just 15 years old, he co-founded the pro-democracy group Scholarism, one of the leading organisations during the peaceful "Umbrella Revolution" in 2014. In 2016 Joshua co-founded the democratic party Demosistō. He served as secretary-general of the new party until its dismissal following the implementation of the Hong Kong national security law in June 2020. Joshua was banned from running for the upcoming elections by the government of Hong Kong. In December 2020, Joshua was convicted and jailed – still until today - for the third time in his life. This time on the pretext of "unlawful assembly" outside a police station to mark the 2020 anniversary of the Tiananmen Massacre. His detention has sparked international condemnation of China's policies. Joshua Wong has received numerous awards, including the nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize. 2017 Joe Piscatella and Matthew Sultan produced the stirring documentary "Joshua: Teenager vs Superpower".

Appendix B

Examples of interview questionnaires

Example 1 Interview with Nury Turkel

Please introduce yourself and your work - as a lawyer, human rights advocate, policy advisor to the World Uyghur Congress, and chair of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.

You may briefly explain the work of the Uyghur Human Rights Project and what it can achieve outside China.

What does courage mean to you?

Do you remember when you first stood up - and at what age - for something you believed in - even if that was not the opinion of the majority around you and you had to defend your opinion against others?

What kind of "watershed moments" did you experience in your life that made you who you are today?

What exactly is a "re-education camp", and what does it mean to be born there?

What does it mean to belong to the Uyghur minority in China?

What kind of repression do we see today in the Uyghur region?

When did it start, and how did it unfold?

How many people in this region are affected?

How would you name what is happening?

Do the Uyghurs fight back?

China is naming this region Xinjiang Province; the Uyghurs are naming the land East Turkestan - how and why is that important?

How and why did you become an American citizen?

You said once: "The best day of my life was the day I became an American citizen." Is that still so?

What does the appointment to the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom on the 26th of May this year mean to you?

Why are you not turning away - like so many others - from the challenges of being at "the frontline" - defending and speaking out for dignity and human rights for the Uyghur minority in China?

What do you think makes you capable of acting for what you believe in, even if there is no safety in numbers and no certainty that others will follow?

What is your inner compass, and where is it coming from?

Do you feel that the work you do matters? How?

Did you have role models for your activism?

How do you sustain your courage?

How do you cope with fear or despair?

Do you think every society needs "first movers"? (Means: courageous individuals who move first when required and are willing to sometimes put themselves at risk for what is right and just.)

What are, in your opinion, the "building blocks" of courage and civic engagement?
What are a person's preconditions, values, and beliefs to act for others and the greater good?

How do you see your future and the future of Uyghurs?

What are you afraid of?

What are you hoping for?

What kind of international actions are needed to end the repression of Uyghurs?

What are, from your perspective, the challenges facing us as humankind today?

How vital is solidarity?

Is there anything like a story, writings, images, music, poems, or books - everything that comes to your mind - that has strengthened you to do what you do?

And, of course, if something else comes to your mind, what you would like to add?

Example 2 – Interview with Esther Htusan

Please introduce yourself and your work.

You are born in Kachin in the North of Myanmar. What does it mean to be born into an ethnic minority group in Myanmar? What did you experience growing up there?

You said once: "I grew up eager to tell the story …."
What are those stories you wanted to tell?

What kind of stories did you read as a child? Which stories are still with you today?
Was this the reason to become a journalist?

When did you choose to speak up and stand up for what you believed was right, and at what age?

You said your mother warned you – like mine did to me – so why did you choose this path?

What kind of "watershed moments" did you experience in your life that made you who you are today?

Why did you not turn away, given the oppression in your country?

How did you cope with fear and desperation?

What does courage mean to you?

What are the "building blocks" of courage, the preconditions, and values in a person for acting courageously?

Do you feel that the work you do matters? How?

What did you achieve with your work so far? (I don't mean the Pulitzer Prize.)

Did you have role models in terms of your work and general?

How many journalists are arrested in your country at present?

Have you been threatened to stop your work?

What do you think enables you to do what you do despite those threats?

Do you think every society – even a democracy – needs first movers?

What does it mean to do your job as a journalist as a woman? Does it make a difference?

You said once: "I don't want to return to being voiceless again." Can you explain?

What is the price for raising your voice?

What is your mission in the future? What do you strive for?

What are the challenges of our time for us as humans? (Locally and globally)

How vital is solidarity?

Is there anything like an ancient story, writings, images, poems, books - everything that comes to your mind - that has strengthened and supported you to do your work?

And, of course, if something else comes to your mind, what you would like to add?

Example 3 – Interview with Shaparak Shajarizadeh

Please give a brief introduction to yourself and your work.

You are born as a woman into Iranian society after the Revolution. Can you tell me about girls' and women's everyday life in Iran?

What kind of "watershed moments" did you experience in your life that made you who you are today?

What does the hijab mean to you?

What triggered your protest against the hijab?

When and why did you join the White Wednesday Movement? Why was it called White Wednesday Movement?

Were you afraid of protesting?

Under what charges did you go to prison? Did they explain your crimes to you?

What happened to you in prison?

What does courage mean to you?

What are the "building blocks" of courage, the preconditions, and values in a person for acting courageously?

What was the price you had to pay for speaking up?

What enabled you to do what you do? What gives you strength and courage?

What are your role models?

What kind of books or stories inspired you as a child?

Do you think you can make a difference in other peoples lives with what you do?

You once said, "I am not a happy person, and I always feel guilty." How and why?

"I am no hero – I wasn't representing anyone. I was my voice. I was doing it for myself." Can you say a bit more about this statement?

Do you feel heroic? How would you describe yourself?

When did you decide to leave Iran?
How have you been able to leave Iran?
What happened to your family and friends after you left?

What do you see in the future? (negative/ positive)
What is your mission? What do you strive for?
Do you dream of returning to Iran, or has Canada become home?

What does being named one of the 100 most inspiring and influential women mean to you?

Do you think every society needs first movers?

Is there anything like an ancient story, writings, images, or poems that has strengthened you?

And, of course, if something else comes to your mind, what you would like to add?

Example 4 – Interview Ruth Manorama

Please introduce yourself and your work.

What does it mean to be born in the 50s in India as a Dalit and a woman?

Has the situation changed since 1950, and how?

Do you remember when you first stood up (at what age) for something you believed in – even if that was not the opinion of the majority around you and you had to defend your opinion against others?

What does courage mean to you?

What are the "watershed moments" in your life that made you who you are today?

Do you have role models?

What made you not turn away (like many others do) from the challenges of being at the "frontline" defending dignity and human rights for the most vulnerable?

What has been the price for speaking up for what you felt was right and just? Have you been threatened because of the work you do? How do you cope with despair or fear?

Can you feel and see the "fruits" of your work in your society today? Do you think the work you do matters?

What do you think enables you to do what you do? What gives you strength? What is your inner compass?

What are, in your opinion, the "building blocks" of courage and civic engagement? (What are a person's preconditions, values, and beliefs to act for others and the greater good?)

How do you see the future of your work? (What are you afraid of? What are you hoping for? What do you strive for?)
Please tell me more about your idea of founding a political academy and developing a capacity-building training program for women.

What are, from your perspective, the challenges facing us all today as humankind?

How vital is solidarity to you?

In 2006 you got the Right Livelihood Award – what does it mean to you and your work?

Is there anything like a story, a writing, an image, music, a poem, a book – it is open for everything that comes to your mind – that has fed your soul and has strengthened you to do what you do?

And, of course, if something else comes to your mind, what you would like to add?

Example 5 – Interview Peter Steudtner

Bitte stelle Dich selbst kurz vor. Was Du machst Du? Was ist Dir wichtig?
Please introduce yourself and your work.

Möchtest Du das Interview in Deutsch oder in Englisch führen? In welcher Sprache arbeitest bzw. denkst Du?
In which language would you like me to conduct the interview? In which language are you working?

How would you describe your work?
Was genau beinhaltet Deine Arbeit?

When did you become an activist, and at what age?
Wann wurdest Du Aktivist und in welchem Alter?

Can you recall watershed moments that might have triggered your activism and made you who you are today?
Erinnerst Du Dich an Schlüsselmomente in Deinem Leben, die Dein soziales und politische Engagement ausgelöst haben bzw. die Dich zu dem gemacht haben, was Du heute bist?

Do you think what you do matters? Why and How?
Glaubst Du Deine Arbeit verändert etwas? In welcher Weise?

What means courage to you? Was bedeutet Mut für Dich?
What means civic courage to you? Was bedeutet Zivilcourage für Dich?

How did this meaning of courage affect the life you live?
Wie hat diese Bedeutung von Mut und Zivilcourage Dein Leben beeinflusst?

What kind of books did you read as a child? What kind of stories are still with you today and have shaped you? Welche Bücher hast Du gelesen …?

Are there any objects, literature, poems, music, letters, paintings, dreams, sayings other mementoes that have inspired you to do what you do?
What are or have been your role models?
Was waren/sind Deine Vorbilder?

What are the values that inform your activism?
Welche Werte stehen hinter Deinem Engagement?

What is your inner compass, and where is it coming from?
Was ist Dein innerer Kompass – was sagt Dir was richtig und gerecht ist und wie bzw. dass Du handeln musst?

Why are you not turning away?
Warum wendest Du Dich nicht ab?

What do you think enables you to do what you do?
Was befähigt Dich zu tun, was Du tust?

Do you need hope to act?
Brauchst Du Hoffnung, um zu handeln?

What are, in your opinion, the building blocks for civic engagement and courage?
Was sind Deiner Meinung nach die Voraussetzungen für ziviles Engagement und Mut?

Does a democracy needs heroes (first mover, however you call them)?
Braucht eine Demokratie Helden bzw. Vorreiter, Menschen, die beginnen?

What has been the toughest challenge while doing your work so far?
Was war bisher die größte Herausforderung in Deiner Arbeit?

How do you see the future of your work/yourself?
Wie siehst Du Deine Zukunft und die Deiner Arbeit?

How vital is solidarity to you?
Wie wichtig ist Dir Solidarität?

What are the challenges facing us all today?
Was sind die Herausforderung für uns alle in unserer Zeit?

With your work, you are preparing people for what it means to be an activist. You even prepare them for prison. What is the meaning of this work?

In Deiner Arbeit sprichst Du mit verschiedenen Aktivisten über ihr Engagement und Du bereitest sie auf verschiedene Herausforderungen in ihrer Arbeit vor – auch auf eine mögliche Inhaftierung. Was ist der Sinn Deiner Arbeit?

What price would you be willing to pay for what you believe in?
(You once said – that you will manage to the next day and then again to the next in prison – but one day could become years (in prison), did you think about that? Welchen Preis bist Du bereit zu zahlen, wenn Du für das einstehst, woran Du glaubst? Du sagtest einmal: „Ich schaffe es von einem Tag bis zum nächsten Tag und dann wieder bis zum nächsten Tag.“ Aber wir beide wissen, dass aus Tagen Jahre werden können (im Gefängnis). Hast Du oft daran gedacht?

How did your time in prison change you and the way you work? Did it change you at all?
Wie hat Dich die Zeit im Gefängnis verändert? Hat diese Zeit Deine Art zu arbeiten geändert?

Have you been able to see the sky in prison from time to time? (I remember that it was one of those things that were crucial to me – to see the sky – so vast – with clouds or without. Everything felt much lighter to me.)
I heard you were singing in the prison courtyard. What were you singing?
How much did it mean to know that people are praying for you at the Gethsemane Church?)
Konntest Du im Gefängnis ab und zu den Himmel sehen? (Ich erinnere mich, dass dies sehr wichtig war für mich damals – diesen unendlichen Himmel zu sehen – ob mit Wolken oder ohne. Alles fühlte sich einfach etwas leichter an.) Ich habe gehört, dass Du im Freihof gesungen hast. Was hast Du gesungen? Was war die Bedeutung für Dich zu wissen, dass Menschen für Dich in Deiner Heimatkirche Gethsemane beten?

How did it come that you were juggling with other inmates in prison and also preparing for a long run in a tiny cell? Wie kam es dazu, dass Du im Gefängis mit anderen Insassen jongliert hast und Dich sogar auf einen Marathon vorbereitet, hast in Deiner kleinen Zelle?

Tell me about your "Geräuschinventar "(sound collection). (You said that everything announces itself through certain sounds in prison.)
Erzähl mir mehr über Dein Geräuschinventar. (“Im Gefängnis kündigt sich alles erst per Geräusch an…“)

Tell me the story about the Origami elephant you learned to fold in prison. Erzähl mir die, Geschichte vom Origami Elephanten, den Du im Gefängnis gelernt hast zu falten.

Natürlich kannst Du auch unabhängig von meinen Fragen noch etwas erzählen bzw. dazufügen zu unserem Gespräch.
And, of course, if something else comes to your mind, what you would like to add?

Appendix C

Criteria for editing the videos

The editing process takes place in several stages. Firstly, I take out my explanations and questions and any parts of the material that are not understandable either because of technical reasons or because of the possible incoherence of the interviewee.

Secondly, I edit out any iterations and parts of the conversation unrelated to my research.

Thirdly, I trace the material for significant information about each interviewee and their respective work and bring together their most fundamental statements regarding this research.

Last, I reviewed the remaining material to remove any information that could be embarrassing to my interviewees or cause harm to them.

The purpose of editing the recorded oral history material is to produce a condensed video from 10 to 15 min, which captures each interviewee's personality and memories accurately and in a dynamic touching form.