comics as eyewitness

Myanmar

Palestine

PEOPLE front line defenders

Colombia

cypher

/'sīfər/

The dictionary definition of cypher is 'a secret or disguised way of writing'. In many ways, this is the essence of comics storytelling – the image, rather than the word, is a disguise for many words, that can convey meaning, emotion, and can re/frame an entire narrative.

Rap and hip hop culture has taken the word and ascribed a new meaning: 'an informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers and/or breakdancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together.' This, too, we find relevant to this project, in that we are bringing together artists and HRDs in freestyle collaboration of activism and art with the aim of informing, elevating and inspiring.

For us, this captures the spirit of why we are working in comics and guides how we facilitate the process of creative production.

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Cover art by Sina Wittayawiroj

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Editorial



adam shapiro

This edition of Cypher is somewhat different than usual. Rather than focus on a specific human rights defender story, we have worked with artists to present a contextual perspective on the protests movements underway in Colombia, Palestine and Myanmar, and the repression. In each case, efforts have been made to silence HRDs and to prevent the story from reaching international attention, not to mention attempting to smear and discredit HRDs.

The collection of iconic moments from each of these movements is part of the environment in which HRDs work - and try to stay safe. Understanding this helps us start to understand the choices HRDs face, the challenges they must overcome and the costs such determination and resilience can impose.

Editorial



"Death is the silence in the language of violence" Michael Franti

All you need to make a comic is pencil and paper. A tangible, non-digital medium, reminds us that comics, visual storytelling can be done anytime, anywhere under almost any circumstances. All you need is a story to tell. True that, yet sometimes circumstances allow for nothing else than pen and paper, making it somewhat challenging to get the story out into the digital world. Circumstances that restrict the access to a scanner, security reasons or computer crashes leave us with the decision to put the importance of getting the story out over the technical quality. Such is the case with our first story. We took the liberty to trace parts of the handwritten text where necessary to ensure its readability. When autocratic administrations make a serious effort to literally isolate its population from raising their voices, I believe it is self-evident to provide an outlet to make those voices heard in the global human community.

June 2021



1 February - The military detains Aung San Suu Kyi, President Win Myint and other senior figures from the ruling National League for Democracy (NLD) in an early morning raid, hours before Myanmar's new parliament was set to meet for its first session.

The military, known locally as the Tatmadaw, declares a state of emergency for a year, claiming that there had been fraud in the elections held in November 2020.

2 February - In Yangon, people bang pots and pans and sound car horns in protest. Doctors and student groups call for civil disobedience campaigns.

3 February - Civil disobedience campaign begins - in response, the military government block Facebook, Messenger and WhatsApp.

4 February - Protests spread to Mandalay.

6 February - The Tatmadaw orders blocks on Twitter and Instagram, where human rights defenders and protesters had been sharing information, and then a blackout of the entire internet. Tens of thousands of people take to the streets to protest against the coup in Yangon and other cities.

7 February - Largest protests throughout the country since 2007 take place.

8 February - Military imposes curfew and bans gatherings of more than 5 people.

In the weeks that follow, the government would order for protesters to be shot and would arrest human rights defenders and other leading anti-coup organizers. The civil disobedience campaign spread and international condemnation followed. Thousands are arrested and reports of torture emerge.

Artist first story: Anonymous

Artist second story: Sina Wittayawiroj sina.wittayawiroj

Sina Wittayawiroj is a freelance illustrator. Born in 1986, Sina grew up in Nonthaburi and Bangkok. Since 2020 most of his work has been related to political activism. He is the founder of "Democratic illustrator" and continues to paint for the movement until now.

I grew up in a third world country where we were taught not to stand aut, to speak out and to stay quiet. Made The generations before us had little idea of human rights, freedom and wealth. Our country had been enclosed from the idea of the outside word, Luckily, I grew up in a time when Myanmar was finally opening up little by little. And a shift from military regime to democracy was in sight, with Aung San Suu kyi's party paving the way. We only had what's known as "quasi-democracy", and a very short span of it. But it meant the world tous.









But with every action comes an opposite and equal reaction - the soldiers had run out of money doe to the people actively participating in the CDM (Civil Disobedience Movement). With escalating violence from the military terrorists, they state things such as hospital machines and monitors all the way to cars, motorbikes and money.



236 Deaths in 46 days. "To all fallen heroes, May your sacrifices be forever remembered " Wanted List there were more airstrikes on village where various ethnic larmed graps revided, our) jouth and middle-aged people There were also reports, and testimonies from Jenlisted in the ethnic anny to soldiers who have escaped their military bases to protest hebel against the military with weapons. Weapons vs weapons, People vs military along with the people that there were stimulants civil war. It was now their time. mixed inside their meals to keep them energetic and to pay with their lives. feel more alert. While these soldiers were asked to Justice wasn't served tore us. yet, but we were citizens, they were also being tortured by the leaders they determined to win. dearly served. Pathetic. No going backter 1988 Never



A new government was also being formed - the National Unity Government (NUG). Hope wasn't at all lost. But we were hanging by a threat. One tiny mistake could cost the youths their lives, the citizens their hopes, and the country as well.





























Palestine

6 May - Palestinian residents of Sheikh Jarrah, under threat of forced expulsion from their homes, hold public iftar meals to break the Ramadan fast and build solidarity. Israeli settlers attack the gathering and incite violence.

7 May - On the final Friday of Ramadan, Israel deploys large numbers of forces to the Temple Mount in Jerusalem and harass and intimidate those attending prayers, leading to protests and violence.

8 May - Protests focused on Sheikh Jarrah continue, as Israeli forces deploy against worshipers in Al-Aqsa mosque following prayers. Protesters are met with tear gas, rubber coated steel bullets and live ammunition. With images of the assault shared on social media, both the Israeli government and Palestinian armed groups issue threats.

10 May - With Israeli forces continuing attacks against protesters in Jerusalem, Hamas fired rockets against Israel. Israel launches an aerial campaign against Gaza, setting off

11 May - Protests erupt throughout the West Bank and in Palestinian and mixed cities and towns in Israel. Human rights defenders in Israel documenting violence committed by Israeli armed vigilante groups and settlers, as well as police, are targeted, while in the West Bank, settlers attack human rights defenders defending land and villages near illegal settlements.

Human rights defenders at the forefront of documenting violations committed by Israel have come under repeated attack, including detention, physical attack and smearing campaigns. On social media, companies have removed posts or suspended accounts at the request of the Israeli government, which ultimately led many companies to issue apologies.

Artist: Samir Harb

I am an architect, cartoonist, and geographer. In my work, I explore the forms of injustice and how it is articulated in banal materials and day-to-day spaces and human practices. The comic narrative is the medium to talk about politics, space, geography and many subjectivities.

I am a research fellow at the Freie Universitaet Berlin in the Human geography department, working on the political ecology of cement production.

<u>Instagram</u> samir_harbsss The Israeli occupation divided the Palestinian people and their Land into separated geographical entities. Each one operates under a different juridical, political, or security system.

Palestinians living in Israel are subjected to the everyday racist system of the Israeli state's regime since 1948.

Israel annexed East Jerusalem. Under the Israeli planning regulation,

A wall made from concrete separates Jerusalem from the West Bank. The Israeli planning policies in Jerusalem is systematically dispossessing Palestinians from their land, property, and culture.

Gaza since 2006 is under an extreme military blockade that prevents people and basic materials from moving in and out of that area. A condition that makes Gazans life very difficult to cope with day-to-day needs.



West Bank is under the control of the Israeli military. It is undergoing intensive Land grape and control over Palestinian natural resource, water, energy, and movement, which hinders Palestinian economic autonomy.

A Palestinian in Haifa faces a different form of oppression than the one in Ramallah. In Haifa Palestinians face Israeli state discrimination, in Ramallah they are under Israeli military control.

Palestinians in West Bank cannot usually travel to Haifa and Jerusalem.

One must look at Israeli control as an apparatus that generates multiple zones of conflict, and not a single one.

Ramallah's political and economic life does not match Palestinian's life in Gazans cannot travel to the West Bank or vice versa.

Such zones made Palestinians disparate and disconnect. In the last 73 years, Israel maintained this geographical fragmentation to prevent the Palestinians from imagining a collective cultural continuity.

Then, What difference did the current events make?

Pespite the Israeli attempts to divide Palestinians, the current events showed that Palestinians have stood up collectively to prove that such a system failed to reach its goals. Moreover, the protest showed the deep disagreement of the multiple forms of oppression Israel is practising against Palestinians Living in Palestine-Israel.

A new imaginary of continuity has emerged.



Bab al Amoud is where Palestinian families and friends gather in the night during Ramadan month to celebrate the end of a long day of fasting and worshipping. Bab al Amoud has constantly been subjected to intensive security control by Jerusalem municipality and the Israeli police.



Bab al Amoud is a 10 min walk to Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood.

The protests began transforming into a disagreement on the Israeli municipality attempts to displace more than 818 Palestinian families in the East Jerusalem area.

Uprooting Palestinian form their homes in Jerusalem is not new. Since the Israeli occupation of Jerusalem in 1967, The Israeli municipality planning unit has been systematically attempting to transform the demographics of Jerusalem by replacing Palestinian with Israeli settlers.

The planning criteria is a complex one, and has been ongoing under the protection of the Israeli juridical apparatus in order to appropriate Palestinian Land, annex East Jerusalem, and devoid the city from Palestinian culture and existences.

Palestinians in Jerusalem have been in a perpetual defence against being uprooted from their land, property, and homes.

















On June 28

The Israeli municipality of Jerusalem ordered nineteen families to demolish their own homes or else the municipality will carry the demolishing works.

When the Israeli municipality demolishes Palestinian homes, Palestinians are forced to pay the expenses of demolishing.

But due to the high expenses that Isreali municipality puts on the fees of demolishing. Many Palestininas chose to demolish their own homes within a period of 24 hours.

Standing against all forms of displacement of Palestinians is key to end the Isreali occupation.

The story has not finished, 1,500 people are threatened to be displaced in Silwan and Sheikh Jarrah, and other areas of Jerusalem.

> For more news from Sheikjarrah and Silwan follow these accounts :

- Saleh Zighari: https://www.instagram.com/salehzighari/
- Muna Al-Kurd: https://www.instagram.com/muna.kurd15/
- Muhammad AL-Kurd: https://www.instagram.com/mohammedel.kurd/
- Sheikhjarrah Units Official: https://www.instagram.com/sheikhjarrahunitsofficial/
- Silwan: https://www.instagram.com/savesilwan/
- Sheikh Jarrah Artist: https://www.instagram.com/bi7kijazz/

Colombia

28 April - Colombians take to the streets to protest a controversial fiscal reform introduced by President Ivan Duque. Activists had warned that the measure would exacerbate inequality. Cali becomes a focal point of the protests.

29 April - Protests spread as Colombia security forces use excessive force against the protesters.

30 April - More demonstrations in more cities and towns materialize as images and videos of repression are shared on social media.

1 May - By 1 May, the motivation for the protests have shifted to opposition to the corruption endemic in the country and against the use of force by the state against civilians.

2 May - President Duque withdraws the propose law, but protests continue to increase.

9 May - Indigenous woman human rights defender Daniela Soto received two gunshots to her abdomen from armed civilians in armoured vans in the La María area of Cañas Gordas, south of Cali. During the attack, at least 11 indigenous human rights defenders from the Indigenous Guard were also injured.

In 2 months of protests, local civil society organisations have documented at least 4687 cases of violence by Colombian security forces, including 44 killings where the alleged perpetrator is a member of Colombian security forces. At least 2005 protesters have been detained. (See more at: radiotemblores.org)

Women have been in the forefront of organising and protesting. At least 28 have faced sexual violence.

The government's response to the protests has been both repression and attempts to discredit the human rights defenders and organizers.

Artist: Lucas Ospina <u>Instagram</u> @luisaponcas

Francia Márquez

"Violence has never been our tool," says Francia Marquez, an important social leader, in Siloé, the biggest low-income neighborhood of Cali, in the middle of the day, in the middle of the street, on the morning of May 4. The night before, in that area, 3 young people were killed in the crossing of forces between civilians and police.

> Palabras de Francia Márquez, el 4 de mayo 2021 en Siloé, Cali, Colombia.
Moms at the Front Line

"For several nights we had watched with fear and anguish how the police attacked our young people who came out to protest for their rights," says Vanessa while covering part of her face with a black scarf. And he continues: "We came to the conclusion that if we were going to do social work, we should do it well: in the front line, putting the body to defend the protesters."

"Mamás primera línea"



Art and protest on the street walls

"If they erase it 20 times, we repaint it 40 times. Nobody or nothing makes us feel shy", says one of the graffiti artists who returned to the San Mateo Redoma today from 10 am to paint for the third time the murals on the bases of the Carlos Ramírez Paris Bridge in Cúcuta. "It is that thinking differently in this country has

always been synonymous with violence. It hurts them that we reveal the truth, and just as they cover up military killings they want to cover up our messages of rejection of the government", an art student at the University of Pamplona said indignantly.

<u>Cero y Van Tres - Los Grafiteros</u> Repintaron Su Mural

"We were very scared because everyone in Colombia is afraid of ESMAD," Piisciis said in an interview, referring to the Escuadrón Móvil Antidisturbio, or Mobile Anti-Disturbances Squadron. "They are violent and aggressive with us."

Nova said: "We resisted with art and vogue. We were scared, but the people and the love from the public was our gasoline to go up there and confront the police."

> <u>The Vogueing Protesters</u> of Bogotá

Indigenous groups tear down the statue of the Spanish founder of Bogotá

"We continue our mandate to develop historic justice against crimes against humanity," the indigenous movement maintains in a kind of statement. "With the strength of the people, we continue on permanent strike and call for a general strike in Colombia to advance, a strike

capable of teaching those who have governed us for more than 200 years that (governments must have respect for the Colombian people who build collective and popular power", they assure.

<u>Grupos indígenas derriban la estatua</u> <u>del fundador español de Bog</u>otá

Women Who Shield The Young

"In the midst of the protests, a group of women from a popular neighborhood in Cali organizes a community pot offering young people their support and a hot meal. The mothers of the Meléndez resistance point know the reality of the young and long for a better future for their daughters and sons."

Mujeres que escudan a los jóvenes de la primavera colombiana en Cali

Guardia Indígena del Cauca

"As a result of the repressive response of the authorities to the protests, at least a dozen members of the Indigenous Guardia have been injured while trying to protect and defend protestors from the disproportionate use of force deployed by state authorities in cities across Colombia."

Statement of solidarity with the work of the Guardia Indígena in Cauca



Daniela Soto

"On 9 May 2021, indigenous woman human rights defender Daniela Soto received two gunshots to her abdomen from armed civilians in armoured vans in the La María area of Cañas Gordas, south of Cali. During the attack, at least 11 indigenous human rights defenders from the Indigenous Guard were also injured."

Indigenous woman human rights defender Daniela Soto and the Indigenous Guard targetted during protests

Mauricio Villa, father of Lucas Villa

"Now we do have to meet in hearts. There, in that place where you wanted us to see each other, not with our eyes but with our hearts," said Mauricio Villa, father of Lucas Villa, the young student killed by 8 shots when he peacefully demonstrated on the viaduct that connects Pereira with Dosquebradas in Risaralda.

Video: Bailando, así le dio el último adiós el papá de Lucas Villa a su hijo

Alvaro Herrera

Álvaro Herrera, a young music student, was arrested for filming hitmen who were shooting at protesters in front of the Ciudad Jardín neighborhood, an upper-class neighborhood in Cali where some neighbors and policemen created paramilitary groups to attack the protesters. Captured by them, beaten and threatened with disappearance, he was handed over to the police and, handcuffed, forced inside a police station to confess on video that he was a "vandal". The video went viral and thanks to the action of his friends and lawyers, he was released hours later thanks to a court order.



The live shows of the protesters on Facebook and Instagram

"The *live* shows of the protesters contain their voices and their movements. They do not annihilate the other, their action is not to shoot, it is to publish, to put the repressor in the light, even when it prefers to operate at night and in the dark. They are anti-military images, they operate in search of stopping the annihilation as a way of response. These images contain a democratic demand. They appeal to the public, that the military force has its obstacle not in another military force that confronts it in its own lethal terms, but in the political, legal, democratic forces."

Los en vivo: estar vivos y ser vistos

José Alberto Tejada and his journalistic team

"This Friday, June 4, in the middle of a coverage of demonstrations, Esmad agents fired in the direction of the journalists of Channel 2 in Cali, José Alberto Tejada and Jhonatan Buitrago. In the same area, a member of the human rights brigade claimed that a police officer said that the journalist "holds on to shoot." Channel 2 is a community media that has covered the events of the national strike. During this time, their security and integrity have been compromised by the stigmatization and attacks that come from the public force and armed civilians."

Flip expresó preocupación por la seguridad del periodista del Canal 2 José Alberto Tejada

Spreaders of ambiguity

"Intolerance of ambiguity is the mark of an authoritarian personality." - Theodor Adorno

> EL POSEBLO VENCIDO JAMÁS SERÁ UNIDO

NOT

EL PR

Dressed in the costumes of Batman and the Joker, two marchers carry messages that turn common phrases into ironic slogans.

The artists confront the solemnity of power with ambiguous messages that enrich the language, give a broader understanding of reality: they evade a unique interpretation of the facts.

"There's an English idiom, 'Stop and think.' Nobody can think unless he stops." - Hannah Arendt

EMPATIA

ENUBLE

IVILE610



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