

Everyday Rebellion: Worldwide Non-Violent Resistance

By David Tischer

On the 11th Planet Doc Film Festival, the Heinrich Böll Foundation had the opportunity to debate the significance of non-violent revolutions in the contemporary world. The movie “Everyday Rebellion”, directed by the Riahi Brothers, was screened. It deals with revolutionary non-violent movements all around the globe, such as Femen, Occupy Wall Street or the beginnings of the revolutions in Syria and Egypt. The work focuses on the their struggles, the tactics that are being used by those movements and illustrates the audience in vivid and very moving pictures how democratic resistance can be lived.

To discuss this topic four guests with very different backgrounds were invited: Arash T. Riahi from Iran, who directed the movie, together with his brother. Ahmed Zaino, who took part in the beginning of the Syrian revolution with non-violent and very creative actions and was taking part as the protagonist of the movie. Furthermore, the two activists Barbara Siegieńczuk from Occupy Chevron Żurawlów, and Inna Shevchenko from FEMEN, and for a more scientific point of view, Mariya Ivancheva, a sociologist and anthropologist who is a member of the collective of Social Center Xaspel and New Left Perspectives from Bulgaria. The discussion was moderated by Agata Urbanik from the Field of Dialogue Foundation who passed the first question to the director, asking about his access to the topic. Mr. Riahi, and his brother, worked on the movie as their project to take part in the world of resistance, having their own memories of revolution from Iran. Part of this project is also an internet platform, that spreads ideas and tactics for non-violent resistance and in that way connects protests around the globe.

This connection was also sensed by the protestors at our table. For Mrs. Shevchenko, people who stand up against injustice, instead of being passive are part of a bigger movement, just as the group of local protestors against the power of a global company as Chevron chose their name as a reference to the American Occupy Wall Street protests, and the forms of protest in the beginning of the Syrian revolution did not differ much from those in other places. But challenging the harmony of a global movement, Mrs. Ivancheva asked for a more differentiated view of revolutions, as there is a crucial difference between the protest for equal women rights or better housing and the fight of a country to overthrow its dictatorship as it was the case in the Arab Spring. In those cases, violence might be inevitable.

But where does civil protest stop and violence start? This thin line is not always visible: Does the destruction of a cross already “hurt” religious feelings and is therefore violent? The guests agreed with the movie that the bottom-line of effective protests are actions without physical violence. Those tactics are especially effective, as they are not directed at people but at symbols and therefore target and reveal the unjust legitimacy of a suppressing regime. That non-violence is not always easy to maintain is understandable when the protest does emerge from the deprivation of people, who have nothing than their anger.



HEINRICH BÖLL STIFTUNG

WARSZAWA

The very interested audience introduced a more personal question. When does the protest stop, when is the goal achieved? Answering this question, the guests agreed that there is nothing as an retirement of protest, as even a perfect world would collapse with a passive society that does not stand up for its causes. Nevertheless, the world already experiences much less violence than hundred years before, and the small successes of every non-violent action have an impact on the society we will live in.