



On International Women's Day 2015:

A SPECTACLE OF WAR AND VIOLENCE



by Nadine Saliba, speaker at 25th Annual SA IWD rally

I always like to evoke the radical history of International Women's Day to reclaim it from the banal celebrations and official appropriation by governments, the United Nations and NGO's. This day is rooted in a radical history of socialism, labor rights, anti-war organizing and international solidarity.

How can we miss the recurrence of similar themes and struggles today, from war to racism, exploitation, immigration, displacement, inequality, greed and capitalism with no liberal make-up on?

God knows there is no lack of issues to talk about and angles to explore. Yet, it was a challenge to write something for today. This is not the first time I come up on this podium to say that I am at the end of my rope, at my wit's end, only to discover the worst is yet to come.

But truly, and more than ever, I feel overwhelmed by the violence swallowing us whole, pulverizing our world from Syria, Iraq and Palestine to Ferguson, Chapel Hill and Dallas like a sledgehammer in the hand of an ISIS fighter whacking at a Mesopotamian monument.

The incident in Dallas is jolting. A newly-wed Iraqi man who recently joined his bride in north Texas was killed few days ago. What kind of a cruel fate brought this man from Iraq to the United States escaping the violence, devastation and insanity unleashed on his country by non-other than the illegal US invasion and occupation only to be shot dead by a neo-American sniper as he stepped out of his home to take pictures of the snow.

Dealing emotionally and intellectually with this ravaging violence has been a challenge of the first degree. Trying to account for the political, social and economic dynamics that give rise to this violence—from poverty to racism, economic inequality, religious extremism, political extremism, a violent foreign policy and imperialism—is hard enough. Pretending that you can go through the routine motions of living as though this is a livable life is too much to bear. Even when you are not directly caught up in this traumatic violence, you feel its weight on your psyche and on your body. You feel it right here in the lump of your throat. You look in the mirror and all of a sudden you see your skin wrinkled, your belly split open and blood streaming

from your eyes, ears and mouth in a silent suffocating pain. And if you attempt to write, unintelligible protestations stammer out through choking fits.

Please do not expect a well-thought-out and organized flow of ideas, only flashes of warring thoughts and feelings. That is all I've been capable of.

American Sniper — the movie. "Shatters Records." "Biggest January Opening EVER." Perhaps the most ironic headline: "Astounds with Record 105 M on MLK Weekend." My favorite one however — "Blowing Away Iraqi Heads... I mean Box office Records." "Blowing Away Box Office Records."

Have I ever felt so alienated from this society? Violence heaped upon violence by dangerous men and shameless



Deah Shaddy Barakat, 23, his wife Yusor Abu-Salha, 21, and her sister, Razan Abu-Salha, 19, were shot to death by Craig Stephen Hicks, 46.

buffoons. I rip you to shreds, then I spit on your bits. This is the spectacle of war standing on an edifice of a militarized culture sustained at all institutional and socioeconomic levels. The proponents and agents of the War on Terror and the military industrial complex have a clear vision of how the desire-fear binary works and is worked, ensuring public passivity through escapism and induced political phobias. They continue to indulge in the "freedom against tyranny" narrative, with Muslims and Arabs serving as subjects of a post 9/11 perpetual war.

Think of a collage of Muslim and Arab pejorative depictions—as terrorists, desert-dwelling villains and backward fools—that crowd the US entertainment industry and have done so for a long time. Racist messaging embedded in pop culture and an Orientalist rendering of Iraq as a desert wasteland outside of civilization furnished by aerial reconnaissance photos create contemporary perceptions of the Middle East and a seeming remoteness of military conflicts filtered through Hollywood and the military industry into American consumerist culture.

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ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICE IN SA

by
Vanessa Quezada

Environmental Justice efforts in San Antonio are a combined effort of many different groups including the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, Southwest Workers Union, Fuerza Unida and others. 2015 was a year of horrendous contamination of our water, air and land. We must act more responsibly to be better caretakers of this land and each other.

Despite “tens of millions of dollars” in improvements, the Calumet Refinery experienced fuel spills on March 4th and April 11th of 2014. Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) cited Calumet for three different violations, since the second spill contaminated the San Antonio River. We demand that this company be held accountable for the health of our city. In late September, the refinery also experienced a fire, for which the city fire department was on site for an hour before being told to stand down while extinguished by an “internal special unit”. We ask that our city fire department be trained in specialty fires so that in the event of an emergency, more trained professionals are able to assist to protect and preserve the viability of our community.

The \$3.4 billion Vista Ridge Pipeline outsourced to Abengoa and Blue Water Systems of Austin that will be built over with Wilcox-Carrizo Aquifer will bring water from Burleson County to San Antonio. We ask that our city council explore more creative water preservation and sustainability practices. We are losing water due to contamination at an alarming rate and rather than spending more money on a project that is a temporary solution, we ask for more research and resources to further existing conservation programs and stronger policies to minimize pollution of our waters.

Concerns mount over the Governor-appointed TCEQ who denied the Alamo Area Council of Governments a \$185,000 grant because the Council showed that fracking in the Eagle Ford Shale is impacting San Antonio Air Quality. Thanks to the “Frackaso!” exhibit at the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center, citizens affected by fracking shared their stories of headaches, nausea and respiratory problems near fracking sites, the same complaints being heard inside the city limits. Particulate matter,



The Calumet Refinery located along the San Antonio River had spills in 2014 that contaminated our river along the Mission Reach area. Concerns fell on deaf ears with the River still at risk for more “accidents”.

formaldehyde, benzene and other “proprietary” chemicals are carried with the gulf coast currents into our city with little oversight. Within the last month, citizens have reported Frac sand inside our city limit. Ninety-nine percent of this sand is composed of crystalline silica, a known carcinogen that has also been associated with cardiovascular, kidney and autoimmune diseases. We must dedicate more resources to researching the dangers of fracking on our city and actively take measures to minimize the impact on our citizens to preserve a healthier city.

Just two weeks ago, during the expansion of the convention center, 150,000 cubic yards of soil was found to be contaminated with toxic heavy metals including arsenic, barium, lead, mercury and selenium “that exceeded regulatory levels”. That soil was dumped on a city-owned site at 151 and US 90 across from the San Antonio Food bank community gardens to save the city \$6 million. We demand the city ONLY allow responsible development that does NOT jeopardize the health of the land and those that depend on these lands to live. ■



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what you call the normalization of violence in mass media and culture –an architecture of decimated public spaces and anonymous dead and maimed fighters or civilians– (they’re all the same), ravaging the Arab and Muslim body as it undergoes a relentless process of othering.

This media and political narrative loves to depict Muslim and Arab women as oppressed veiled victims of their religion and culture who need saving. This framework has been used as a rationale for military intervention. Using the trope of women’s rights in the service of imperial

wars is not new. The phrase “White-men-saving-brown-women-from-brown-men,” was coined a while back to describe this phenomenon. And Western liberal feminists have jumped on the government-sponsored bandwagon of imperial missions to “liberate” Muslim women a long time ago. This time, however, we have a CIA propaganda memo exposed by Wikileaks to dispel any doubts anyone might have. Oh, the Western liberal feminist’s burden!

We know from the families of the three Muslim American victims in Chapel Hill, North Carolina that the women’s headscarves marked them in their shooter’s eyes. “We have no doubt that the way they looked... had something to do with this,” said the girls’ father. Their killer shot

them in the head execution style. Point made. The sisters Yosur and Razan Abu Salha –a dental and an architecture student respectively, volunteers and activists in their communities, thoughtful, compassionate and engaged– needed only to be saved from their neighbor-shooter and liberated from American Islamophobia and the anti-Muslim rhetoric we breathe.

Yes, we are women telling our stories! They will not have the last word in the account of what has come to pass. ❖

Bio: Nadine was born in Tripoli Lebanon on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea and immigrated to San Antonio with her family. She studied Political Theory and Int'l Relations and works as a translator. She is a board member of the Esperanza Center.