Letter from the editor

While all of us were learning to carry small bottles of sanitizer and to recognize the difference between an N-95 and a surgical mask a year ago, our partners wondered the extra steps they would need to take to keep the struggle for liberation going? Our teams asked what would their work look like during lockdown?

History has taught us that a crisis is an optimal opportunity for structural change, and clearly, the protests of 2020 pointed in that direction. Despite the greatest public health challenge in over a century—and the viral threat, lockdowns, and increasingly repressive environment it triggered—protests remained an integral part of the global political landscape. While despots and corporations globally tightened the screws of oppression, people adapted and organized.

We learned to work from home; I imagine you might have too. We organized online events, webinars, and trainings, and you joined us. You might have met some of our partners online, asked them a question, or learned how different layers of oppression and pandemic had impacted their struggle for justice. This work of collaborative learning, partnership, and organizing make the work of liberating and radical love possible. The support we have received from so many of you has been overwhelming. It inspires us to dream, hope, and work for the day to come.

This year as we celebrate our 35th birthday, we invite you to reflect with us. Some of you have supported us for a long time, and for others, this might be your first newsletter. Welcome :) Email us or write to us; we love hearing from you. Share with us why you think undoing oppressions is crucial in the work of peacemaking? Why does the work of peacemaking need to include more than just challenging the war machine? We've been having this conversation for a long time at CPT, and we've stumbled, asked for forgiveness, studied, and learned along the way. Reflection. Action. Reflection.

In this issue, we'll be looking back at some of our learnings and considering new and creative ways to carry the fundamental work of intersectional peacemaking and liberating love forward.

Before I go, I want to invite you to sign on to our campaign for sustainability and honoring the water and its defenders. You can find the campaign at cptaction.org/water. While you're at it, if you're reading this newsletter in print, let us know if you would prefer to receive it in digital form.

In kindness,

Caldwell Manners
Communications Coordinator

A tribute Jo Ann Fricke
Jo Ann passed away on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 surrounded by her family.

"Life is the sum of your choices." Albert Camus

I would like to share with you someone in my life who has influenced me greatly, my friend, colleague, and mother figure, Jo Ann Fricke.

When thinking of Jo Ann, I am reminded of the bravery she brought to every choice she made. Jo Ann taught me a lot over the years, she enabled me to see the love in everything, to fight for justice, and to be a strong woman.

She was a genuine feminist, defending women’s rights and choices, and knew the difference between being an active feminist and a hypocritical one.

On a personal level, Jo Ann gave me a home, a place to be myself, and a space to grieve and understand myself again.

On a team level, she supported us, pushed us to be better, and sang for us. But Jo Ann had her pet peeves too, one of them was inaction. She was always the first person ready to volunteer when we got a call.

It was an honour for the CPT Palestine team to have you as a member, Jo Ann. You will be truly missed.

“Heaven, or the Other Side is all around us. It is not in some far away place. Your loved ones are just a thought away.” - Karen A. Anderson

By Mona El-Zuhairi

Front cover photo: CPT accompanies a children’s march from At-Tuwani (2009)

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One of my favourite aspects of language is its malleability. As a society, we are ever-evolving and our language evolves with us. The beauty of having a means of expression that not only describes what we see, taste, touch, hear, and feel but also what we imagine and dream into being is always somewhat of a miracle to me. The realities we can create with language are endless. But this also means that what we speak out into the world shapes and forms how we perceive the world.

The structures of power and oppression in politics, religion, economics et al, are all held up by the power of language. When decolonizing our communities, the words we use play a role in our collective liberation. Recently, I’ve been reading about the term ‘terrorism’. As we have seen, particularly in United States media, white supremacist violence is explained away as isolated incidents of “a good person having a bad day”. I started to see a trend after several mass shootings in the US where critics would urge the media to start calling it what it is: domestic terrorism. But after the insurrection on the US Capitol earlier this year, I heard a different voice, asking us to avoid the use of the term ‘terrorism’. The danger in using the word terrorism to include white supremacy is that it inevitably feeds into the system that was built to oppress Black and Muslim communities through “anti-terrorism” policy and protocol. Although well intended to bring weight to the violent actions of white supremacists, the terminology provides more ammunition to continue profiling and policing bodies of colour. Sometimes a term is not about what it represents, but about what it resists. Let’s look at the term ‘womxn’. This term originated in the 1970s, but I first came across it during a resurgence in the early 2010s when women—mostly cisgender white women—were looking to distance themselves from the root word of “men”. It was also intended as an intersectional term to include those systematically left out of white feminist discourse. But in their intent to be inclusive, most people were using the word without ensuring that those spaces were indeed safe for Black, Indigenous, People of Colour, trans and non-binary communities, or without consulting the communities if this terminology resonated with them. Similarly, the term People of Colour has been simultaneously a term that has given identity to some, but left others confused and unidentified. Because this is a term that can quickly be weaponized (like womxn) where lines are drawn quickly often by assumptions based on physical appearance or presentation, it becomes imperative that we give space to those who are most affected by these structures of power to dictate the language we use to describe them.

And no, not everyone will be on the same page. Our communities are not homogenous and will not all feel represented or erased by one term or another. I have seen arguments both for and against the use of ‘domestic terrorism’ from within the Black and Muslim communities. And womxn or People of Colour can be an empowering space for those who identify and claim it. This is a call to listen boldly to perspectives different from your own. It is also an invitation to be willing to sit with your discomfort and make mistakes. Because we will continue to make mistakes. It doesn’t come naturally to those of us in positions of power to consider the expense of our privilege. That’s why it takes intentional practice. I invite you to do the first exercise today: if you are speaking from a position of power, remember to ask yourself who isn’t being represented in your language.
“When they have their foot on your neck, they can’t go anywhere either.”

By Mona El-Zuhairi and Tarek Abuata

This is the liberation quote we carry with us in the confines of our internal justice work that we often take out to frame our public justice work. We learned it from a man who participated in the lunch counter sit-ins 60 years ago. His name is Dr. Bernard LaFayette, a protégé of MLK.

As CPT continues to work alongside local communities for racial justice, we have to ask ourselves two questions: Beyond sit-ins, street demonstrations, and direct action, what is racial justice for our communities? And, what is a vision that will liberate people of colour (POCs) and white people collectively within and outside of CPT?

Before we offer you CPT Palestine’s response to these questions, let us ground ourselves in the successes that CPT has made for racial justice and build together upon these foundations. You have supported CPT to achieve POC leadership ‘on the ground’ in various countries and multiple continents, and you have supported CPT in reaching a multi-racially led Administrative Team. This leadership has authentically centred the voices of diverse community members in the global POC-led mosaic collective liberation community and has established more effective communal justice models with Black, Brown, Indigenous, and all POC communities. It is important to celebrate these successes as we move forward!

As we jointly celebrate, we invite you to hear our CPT Palestine Team members’ response by telling you about our Be The Change Project. It is a project born out of the voices of prophetic faith revolutionaries who continue to individually stand in the intersections of oppressions and commit to pushing at the limits of racial justice communally. We are Palestinians of various faith backgrounds, and we are justice and equality doers for Palestine and for a better world, working on liberating ourselves from oppressions internally and externally.

WBe The Change’s vision is: “A Palestinian community that is able and ready to provide frameworks to our own people and to the global community for multi-racial multi-faith anti-oppressions work that is centered in liberation. We want to live a microcosm of what’s possible for a global community, and to teach and learn how to best continue to transgress borders through social media, online gatherings, and collective liberation demonstrations as we jointly seek new visions of leadership.”

The spiritual beauty of this statement for us as Palestinian leaders is that it carries a vision of justice that encompasses our own Palestinian community along with POC communities worldwide for the benefit of all of God’s children. It is a vision where no one has their foot on anyone’s neck, intentionally or unintentionally, but where we all rise together and march together daily inside our institutions and organizations so that we don’t have to march in the streets.

Our mission is to liberate ourselves internally by acknowledging our Palestinian society’s oppressions and drafting actions to transform them alongside other POC communities. We will then share our experiences with the full global community to all unite authentically against oppressions.

We will carry out the first part of this mission through multiple webinars and educational workshops within and for our own Palestinian community. We have gathered 12 Palestinians of various faith and gender identities, Palestinians living in Palestine, in Israel and abroad, who will meet to evaluate issues of oppression internally that need to be addressed, hold real conversations that confront these issues, and draft actions aimed at transforming them. We will then hold workshops to educate and empower our own community to tackle internalized racism, classism, sexism, and interfaith living and working.

Simultaneously, the second part of our mission is to connect with multiple POC-led organizations creating partnerships and conversations that will compare and contrast our various experiences with other communities of colour. Through these connections, we can learn and teach each other internally— and thereafter teach all global communities— how to better combat white supremacy, sexism, gender inequality, queer rights, and joint multi-faith work for justice.

We also invite all CPTers and non-CPTers to attend our POC-led educational webinars that will give you the tools to support your local house of worship and community to grow into a vision of multi-racial, multi-faith anti-oppressions work that is centered in liberation. We will be sharing with you the timeline for these workshops once they are scheduled. Please know that each one of you is a valuable part of this work!

We know that Palestinian and POC resistance reflects the power of our communities’ steadfastness and the multi-layered lessons we can teach local and international communities in our mutual justice work for freedom. These POC-led initiatives are a way forward to achieving a global justice model guaranteed to carry long-term successes. You are already a part of this work.

Stay tuned for more information, and if you are a person of colour who is part of a POC-led group, we invite you to connect with us by emailing tarekabuata@gmail.com.
The journey that changed me

By Alix Lozano

CPT’s 35-year journey has taken the organization to different parts of the world. This anniversary occasion is a time to celebrate but also to reflect.

The metaphor of the journey implies objectives, goals, and intentions, all depending on the place you want to arrive. It needs a road map, with a starting and a finishing point. It involves learnings, periodical evaluations, changes, taking new paths, and even thinking about new visions, missions, and values.

The journey includes the invitation and inclusion of many travelling partners. You may start the voyage with some of them, and others may join along the way. Thirty-five years after CPT initiated this journey, some people are still travelling along, others have ended their journey as they continue their path in new ways, and others are now in a different dimension. Every participant on this journey has brought their hopes, dreams, energy, passions, values, spirituality, stakes, and desires. This adventure implies sacrifices for those who leave their family, country, or comfort zone and lose contact with their world. Some people have shown their frustrations, exha-
experience taught me that my ghosts—my were many of my delegation partners. This strange people. I was distressed all night, as shared some “horror stories” about situations visited the farming communities along the space to humanize one another.

encounter, an exchange of knowledge, and a ideologies, and rhetoric. Instead, we learned “cape,” as some teammates would say, and go to discover and learn first hand about the community that held me in moments lived experience in the field of peacebuilding. Anabaptists would call it “the third baptism.”

to my spiritual journey. Twenty-first century that my faith experience was missing an and spirituality has been challenging. I felt from the standpoint of peaceful non-violence communities and social organizations in their struggles for the land, life, and dignity that this journey would be long, costly, and would last my whole life. The self-sabotage that can occur during this journey is to believe that we can solve the problems and struggles of others through our committed activism—denying the existence and resolution of our own problems and clarifying that if I am well then everyone will be well, because we are interdependent as humans.

While I was taking this outward journey, life was taking me on a simultaneous internal exploration to return to myself again, identifying my own violence and oppression, the subtle ways that they were present in my life and how they manifest themselves. To “come back home” inside me was not an easy nor quick path. German theologian Jurgen Moltmann argues that “the longest journey is always an internal exploration. The odyssey inside to find your home lasts a lifetime, and perhaps more.” This journey was not one of religious matters, dogmas or mandates. This had everything to do with recovering my own being and essence, which allowed me to understand that together we do not undo oppression and violence, instead we transform them, but the process starts with me.

Finally, I learned that the key of the journey was a cultural encounter, an exchange of knowledge, and a space to humanize one another.

What did I learn on this journey?

The first delegation that I participated in visited the farming communities along the Opon River. One night, a delegation leader shared some “horror stories” about situations and experiences, nocturnal visits of animals or strange people. I was distressed all night, as were many of my delegation partners. This experience taught me that my ghosts—my internal monsters—were more frightening, dangerous, and unpredictable than my external fears.

With the help of the team, community members and women’s organizations, I was able to identify the oppressions and symbolic violence that I had internalized and normalized, along with the perpetuation of hegemonic roles imposed by patriarchy, sexism, and fundamentalisms, particularly religious ones. I needed to identify these issues within me before I could unmask, confront, and transform them to then become an agent of change. These experiences gestated within me a process of decolonization (undoing the power structures) in my mind, in my faith experience, and in what my culture and the system had taught me, bringing the focus towards my own power and internal strength. I did not know that this journey would be long, costly, and would last my whole life. The self-sabotage that can occur during this journey is to believe that we can solve the problems and struggles of others through our committed activism—denying the existence and resolution of our own problems and clarifying that if I am well then everyone will be well, because we are interdependent as humans.

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Commemorating milestones

CPT Colombia turns 20.  
By Pierre Shantz

As a society, we celebrate milestones. Birthdays, anniversaries and graduations result in a party with our family and friends, or a nice meal with the people we love. We give gifts to honour the person who is celebrating this special occasion. Overall it is usually a joyous moment.

On the other hand, some milestones don’t feel as joyous. These are moments that, as a society, we prefer to call commemorations rather than celebrations—usually tragic events such as an accident, death or worse.

This year Christian Peacemaker Teams is 35 years old. CPT was birthed in 1986 when a group of people from the historic peace churches gathered in Chicago, Illinois, USA to discuss ways to respond to deadly violence of war and colonialist economic policies that killed millions throughout the world as a result of the Cold War. At a Mennonite World Conference, Ronald Sider challenged the church to be as dedicated to peace through nonviolence as soldiers are to war, willing to die by the thousands.

Sider’s challenge resulted in a few people coming together to train corps members. These members would then establish project sites throughout the world. First in Haiti, then in Palestine, Iraq, Bosnia, Chechnya, with First Nations peoples across Turtle Island, and Mexico. Sider’s vision focused on challenging privileged global north Anabaptists to leave their spaces of comfort and dismantle the militaristic economic system from which they benefited.

This was a significant challenge, as was the response. CPT trained and sent people willing to risk entering places of lethal violence to stand with people who were nonviolently resisting. CPT would apply political pressure on government officials and raise public support to create a barrier between the violent actors and communities at risk. Sometimes the CPTers themselves would be barriers between armed men and the people they accompany.

At times CPT’s partners would attribute their successful resistance to CPT’s presence. When asked what these foreigners did there, one man in Haiti responded, “They were lazy. They didn’t build anything; they didn’t bring any projects. But if they hadn’t been here, they [the Haitian army] would have killed us all.” He credited CPT’s presence in the city of Jeremy in 1993-1994 under the military dictatorship of Raul Cedras for preventing mass murder and disappearances of people who resisted the military dictatorship and longed to see the return of President Jean Bertrand Aristid.

CPT did play a role; there is no doubt. Haitian army officials were careful around CPT’s presence, and people’s lives were likely saved as a result. We must acknowledge that what brought an end to the three-year military coup was the grassroots movement that elected Aristid in the first place. Still, for many Haitians and our support networks back home, CPT was an important catalyst. Therefore, CPT built its framework for the first decade around the idea that we needed to be foreigners to be effective.

In 2001, at the invitation of the Colombian Mennonite Church-IMCOL, CPT established a project in Barrancabermeja, Colombia. Several communities were caught in the violence between the army, paramilitary death squads, guerrilla groups and powerful economic and political forces that wanted to remove them from the land to exploit the natural resources. Human rights organizations were also under threat for daring to denounce violations publicly and taking violators to international court. Anyone daring to resist these powerful forces faced imminent death. Colombia is known to be one of the deadliest places on earth for those who resist. Over the past 20 years, CPT has placed several dozen people in Barrancabermeja for international accompaniment work.

When CPT first came, the Colombian Mennonite Church (IMCOL for its acronym in Spanish), CPT’s inviting body to Colombia, asked, “How can Colombians join CPT and participate in the work?” That’s unheard of, we thought, to have Colombians accompany Colombians? Why would the violent actors respect the presence of CPT if the CPTers were Colombian? This would never work.

Yet a year after CPT arrived in Colombia, the first delegation to visit the project was a group of 12 Colombians. Then, a change in government in 2002 led to stiff visa restrictions for foreigners joining the team. CPT appealed to the Colombian delegates so that we could fulfill our commitments of accompanying our partners. Three of them joined the team, and CPT Colombia was able to continue its presence.

Having Colombians as part of this international accompaniment team was met with skepticism on several fronts. Some of our partners felt unsafe; they were not sure that Colombian accompaniment would have the same dissuasive power with armed groups as they felt foreigners had. Other international accompaniment groups questioned if we were putting all international accompaniment theory at risk. Armed actors may no longer see us as a valid force that challenged their power.

But in the end, there is no difference when a Colombian heeds the same challenge as the foreigners who came to Colombia. Our message to violent actors was to respect life and to remind them that civilians did not want to participate in the war they fought with their enemies.

Twenty years is a significant milestone for an organization. But we don’t want to celebrate the fact that a situation remains so violent that people need allies to stand with them to increase their chance of staying alive. Over the 20 years in Colombia, CPT has faced times of danger along with our partners. Twice we were caught in gun battles between paramilitary and guerrilla groups. Armed groups assassinated several of the community members despite our presence in the communities. We retrieved dead bodies from the Opon river.

But one thing that CPT must celebrate in these 20 years in Colombia is that CPT has changed in significant ways for the better. CPT’s mission changed from ‘Getting in the Way’ to ‘Building partnerships to transform violence and oppression’. Today CPT’s Program Director is Milena Rincon, one of the first three Colombians to join the team in 2002. All of CPT’s programs have nationals as part of the programs. In fact, having local team members made it possible for CPT to be present on the ground when COVID-19 travel restrictions prohibited foreign team members from returning.

Twenty years has given us space and the time to develop long-lasting relationships with our partners, enriching how we do our work. So as CPT turns 35 and CPT Colombia turns 20, we commemorate that our partners continue to face violence and need allies to stand with them in their struggles. And we celebrate that 20 years ago, our Colombian partners decided to push the envelope and change how we do and understand our work. We are grateful for this grace on our journey of right relationship and solidarity.
N.U. from the Aegean Migrant Solidarity team interviewed F, a Kurdish man from Turkey, accused of human smuggling after arriving in Greece.

F became politically active as a student at Cerrahpasa Medical Faculty when he was faced with a nine-year prison sentence on ‘copy-paste’ accusations, a tactic used against those in the Kurdish movement. His solution was to cross the Aegean waters with dozens of refugees on a makeshift boat, but his 13-month struggle for rights began when Greek authorities put him into three different prisons on the Greek islands. This is part one of the interview.

**NU:** What happened? How did you end up becoming a political refugee?

**F:** I have been a political refugee in Greece since 2016. I had to quit my studies in medicine in Istanbul. I was born in 1988 in Tah village in the Lice district of Diyarbakır [Turkey]. Tah has a much older history than Lice. It was an Armenian village, but now Kurds live there. The previous Armenian place names are still used. Lice is a region that has never accepted the Turkish State’s authority. It was a place where war, massacres, burning villages and evacuation were common in 1990s Turkey. There are numerous unsolved murders from family members who refused to be village guards working for the State. Our family was also forced to migrate. I was five years old when we came to Diyarbakır center. I went to primary school, middle school and high school there. Then, I enrolled at Istanbul University’s Cerrahpasa medical faculty. I started to discover my identity and think about political struggles through the student clubs in which we studied culture and art. The more I learned, the more I wanted to take responsibility. I took part in the People’s Democratic Party’s (HDP) youth organization. I was participating in some political activities outside of Istanbul. Because of this, charges were filed against me, and I was detained many times. I was arrested in Izmir and spent a few months in prison.

**NU:** What was the reason for the arrest?

**F:** I was charged with false evidence for taking part in the HDP’s university youth organization. It was a “copy-paste” type of indictment imposed on everyone in the youth organization. The authorities released me due to a lack of evidence, but the investigation continued. I went back to Istanbul and continued school and political activities. In 2014, at the trial's end, even the prosecutor requested our acquittal because of the lack of evidence. But they dismissed that prosecutor from the case, and the new prosecutor demanded the most severe penalty. In May 2014, I was sentenced to 11 years for ‘membership of a terrorist organization’ and ‘resisting arrest’. An arrest warrant was issued against me. Since then, I have been on the run. I didn’t want to leave the country to become a refugee. I already felt like a refugee in my own country. I waited because I thought the Supreme Court [where the appeal would be heard] might be fair; it could revoke the unjust decision, and the file could be dropped. I had this expectation because it was during the ‘peace process’ between the Kurdish liberation movement and the Turkish State, and there was less political tension in those days. Also, there was no concrete evidence against me. At the end of 2015, the Supreme Court announced its decision; it only overturned the punishment of ‘resisting arrest’. The court maintained a nine-year sentence for the charge of ‘membership of a terrorist organization’. So I looked for a safe way to go to Europe. Maybe because of my incompetence, I couldn’t find it for a long time. But when Syrian refugees started migrating en masse to Europe, I decided to go to Athens via Çesme. The smugglers made various promises to me, just like other refugees.

**NU:** With whom and how did you set out from Çesme?

**F:** The real story starts here. What the smuggler promised me did not turn out to be true. I was expecting a big boat. But I came across a fishing boat that could accommodate a maximum of 20-25 people. The smuggler put 150 people on the boat. The boat clearly could not carry so many people to Athens. As soon as I saw the situation, I said I didn’t want to get on. We argued with the smuggler. He was a fascist; he threatened to turn me over to the police. ‘The cops are there; either I can give you to them, or you get on this boat. It’s your choice’, he said. I got on, helpless. Families, children, Syrians, Kurds, Iraqis, Afghans, Pakistanis. I was the only one from Turkey, which was why I had such much trouble afterward.

**NU:** How was the trip?

**F:** It’s a difficult feeling to describe. People are fleeing their country, escaping death, but in fact, they do this by risking death, by moving towards death. That day the sea was very rough. With every wave, people screamed, vomited, babies cried. I vomited along the way; I was miserable. I did not eat or drink anything. I fell asleep in the middle of the night. I woke up to smoke and shouting. It had been four hours since we started the journey. The boat broke down near Milos, and it could no longer discharge water, so it started taking water on board. Everyone was in a desperate panic. I was the only one who spoke English on the boat. I tried to inform the people that I could reach by phone that our lives were in danger. I called my family and friends in Turkey, and I called my friends in Greece. Finally, I found the number of the Greek Coast Guard. I explained the situation and asked for help. We didn’t even know where we were.

**NU:** What did the Coast Guard do?

**F:** They said, ‘We will try to find your location.’ Two hours passed. Then a cargo ship picked us up. The boat was close to sinking because of the waves caused by the ship. Luckily we survived. After a while, the Coast Guard came and took us to Milos Island. We stayed in the port for two days. They carried out routine procedures such as registration and health checks. Milos is a small island, and there are no refugee camps. On the second day, at midnight, the soldiers came and woke me up. ‘They said ‘we are going.’ I did not understand anything. They didn’t even let me put my shoes on before they put me in handcuffs. Two Moldovans, the captains of our boat, were also detained. Police in Greece use completely arbitrary methods to detect smugglers. For example, if everyone on the boat is from the same place, and there is only one person not from that region, they immediately label him as the smuggler. They accused me of being the person communicating between the captain and smugglers in Turkey. All this happened to me because I called the coast guard when the boat broke down, I knew the language, and I had helped the Kurdish speakers during the registration process. Nothing would have happened to me if I didn’t speak at all. Even the captains blamed me too because they thought I had informed the police on them. I was also the only one from Turkey in the boat; therefore, the charges were plausible in the eyes of the law. I asked for an interpreter when I was in prison under custody, but they did not provide one. We were sent to Syros Island. I had the chance to prepare my documents regarding my asylum case and why I had to leave Turkey. ■

**Read Part 2 of this interview at cpt.org**
The word of the year is, GRATITUDE!

This is us posing for a group screenshot after a CPT-wide call, where we spent some time reflecting on our learnings from 2020 and our plans for 2021 in our ever-changing contexts.

But mostly, we expressed our gratitude for each other and you, our community, which holds us up while we continue to do meaningful work.

Thank you for walking in solidarity with our partners and us.

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Join us for webinars and take action for peace.
cptaction.org