



REMEMBERING THE LEGACY OF RACHEL CORRIE

On the seventh anniversary of Rachel Corrie’s death–March 16th–her parents announced they are suing the Israeli military, holding them accountable for the Israeli soldier who crushed Rachel with a bulldozer in Rafah, a Egyptian border town where Rachel was protesting Israeli demolition of a Palestinian home. After years of attempts, her parents’ work has finally resulted in a trial in Haifa, Israel that began on March 10th.

As in past years, this month there have been events all over the world, honoring her courage. In Ramallah, a city in the West Bank, there was a ceremony on March 16th with school children, the mayor and Rachel’s parents to name a street in her honor.

In the US activists from around the country came out to commemorate her death by holding national days of action to stop the Israeli apartheid.

These events follow years of commemorations: a stage play based on her journal entries and emails—My Name is Rachel Corrie, first produced in London in 2005 and then again in Greenwich Village in 2006; publication of a memorial book of her writings Let Me Stand Alone in 2008 and the documentary film Rachel produced in 2009.

The twenty three year old’s last words were that she thought her back had been broken, a powerful metaphor for the Israeli attempt to break the backs of people in Gaza, most recently with the siege on Gaza that began in December, 2008.

While the Israeli military took her young life, she lives on in our memories, along with so many other nonviolent protesters like the Nigerian poet, Ken Saro-Wiwa; Civil Rights activists, Schwerner, Chaney and Goodman; and of course, Martin Luther King Jr. Added to that list are the people who died “natural deaths” after devoting their lives to nonviolent protest, the most recent, perhaps, the beloved Howard Zinn.

As is true for those she stands with, Rachel’s politic was based on keeping her own life in perspective, refusing to, because of her white skin and US citizenship privilege, overshadow the lives of the women in Gaza and the West Bank, who everyday suffer indignities while no streets, films, or plays are named after them.

With this politic we are reminded of the tricky situation that activists in the US face—knowing that the presence of US citizens in situations of conflict often elicits needed attention but also runs the risk of overshadowing those most victimized.

We think, for example, of the extraordinary film, A Long Night’s Journey into Day that chronicles several of the over 2000 cases heard by the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The two US feminist filmmakers—Deborah Hoffman and Frances Reid– deliberately included the story of the murder of Amy Beihl as the first of those chronicled, even though Amy, a 26 year old Stanford student and activist, was the only US woman whose case was heard by the TRC.

Like Rachel Corrie, we know that Amy Beihl, stabbed to death in 1993 in South Africa, would not have wanted her story to trump the thousands of Black South African citizens whose sisters, mothers, children, fathers and brothers were injured and murdered under the apartheid regime.

In that way, Amy Beihl’s story was quite exceptional and therefore not representative, but the filmmakers knew that a large part of the film’s audience would be US-based, and white; that her presence would make people pay attention to the issue.

Part of the legacy that Rachel Corrie and Amy Beihl leave with us is the knowledge that feminists need to be strategic and deliberate in their use of white bodies as representative victims. We honor these young women along side all those whose names will never make it to the stage.

Diane Harriford co-authored this blog, which is crossblogged on the Ms. Magazine blog site.

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