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# PEACE & JUSTICE NEWS

FEB - MAR - APR 2021



## In this issue:

Celebrations as TPNW Enters into Force

Signs of Hope in Biden's Oval Décor

Book Review: *Under the Odala Trees*

Take Action on ending Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

Lessons from the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the time of COVID-19





## Peace & Justice *Building a Culture of Peace in Scotland*

**Nonviolence ♦ Conflict Resolution ♦ Human Rights ♦ Advocating Disarmament  
Protecting Mother Earth ♦ Ecological Sustainability ♦ Challenging Militarism  
Challenging Systemic Injustices**

Peacebuilding for Primary Schools – Promoting Nuclear Disarmament  
Origami Peace Cranes Project - Don't Bank on the Bomb  
Opposing War Memorial  
Peace & Justice News – Online Community Events Calendar

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## Editor's Introduction

Late last year we announced that we were becoming **Peace & Justice**. Read our new Vision, Mission, and Aims statements in Centre News and find out how we plan to fulfil our Mission of *building a culture of peace in Scotland*.

In our editorial, **Peace & Justice** welcomes the US ending “offensive” arms sales to Saudi Arabia but we look askance at the continuation of the sale of so-called “defensive” arms and call on the UK government to end all arms sales to and military support for Saudi Arabia, which has devastated Yemen, causing a humanitarian crisis. You’ll find links in Centre News where you can support this call by writing to your MP.

Scotland is uniquely implicated as Scottish Enterprise has funded Fife defence contractor Raytheon, which has supplied bombs that have destroyed civilian infrastructure, and almost certainly killed thousands of civilians according to a Yemeni human rights group. We renew the call for Scottish government to end its support for the arms manufacturer.

There have been big changes across the globe as well. Brian Larkin finds some signs of hope in US President Biden’s choices of Oval Office art and what this might mean for his term.

In this issue’s feature Lane Deamant

draws parallels between the COVID19 pandemic and the HIV/AIDs crisis of the 1980s, and sees lessons that governments could learn.

In News from the Movements we report on celebrations of the entry into force of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons around the world.

And finally, Lane Deamant reviews *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta. Set in 1960s Nigeria, the novel looks at what it means to live freely and openly.

*The Editors*

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## Editorial: End Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia

We welcome President Joe Biden's decision to end offensive arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). We note however that the US will continue to provide so-called "defensive" support to Saudi Arabia and will continue operations against al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula. The US should end all arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

We also call on the UK government to stop all arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE including maintenance and crucial logistical support (especially for targeting), increase humanitarian aid to Yemen and press Saudi Arabia and UAE to implement a ceasefire and negotiate a peace agreement."

Almost six years of conflict in Yemen has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world, with more than 24 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 12 million children. The UK is now the largest enabler of the Saudis with over £6 billion worth of arms sales to Saudi forces since the war began. CAAT estimates that the real total value could be three times higher. The continuing provision of support and arms is a clear violation of the UK's own guidelines on arms sales, and of international law.

Over 230,000 people have been killed as a direct consequence of the war. 2 million people have been displaced (UNHCR, Oct 2018). The cholera outbreak, caused by the destruction of infrastructure, is the worst on record, with over one million suspected cases (Oxfam).

The UN has suggested that Saudi forces have killed twice as many civilians as combatants. Sites which have been bombed by Saudi forces include schools, hospitals, homes, a refugee camp, a wedding, a funeral, a market place and a school bus. Atrocities have been committed on all sides, but Saudi coalition air strikes are responsible for the majority of civilian deaths.

According to Yemeni Human Rights group Mwatana (2018), Paveway IV missiles with components made at Raytheon's factory in Glenrothes have been linked to attacks on civilian infrastructure in Yemen. Scottish Enterprise awarded grants to several arms companies, including Fife-based Raytheon, which sell weapons to Saudi. The Scottish Government should end all grants to arms manufacturers.

**Peace & Justice is calling on the UK government to end all arms sales to and military cooperation with Saudi Arabia.** The government should immediately refuse licence applications, revoke any extant license for exports where the end-user is the Saudi military and end cooperation between the UK military and the Saudi military at all levels.

## Peace & Justice News

After 40 years as Edinburgh Peace & Justice Centre we are becoming **Peace & Justice** with the remit of ***Building a Culture of Peace in Scotland***.

**Here are our new Vision, Mission and Aims**

### Vision

A Scotland engaged in a global community: supporting life through a regenerative world economy with peaceful and just local communities celebrating nonviolence, diversity, equality of opportunity, and cultivating respect for all.



### Mission

#### 1. Promoting nonviolence and conflict resolution, and modelling a just society.

*Aims:*

- *To provide training in nonviolence and conflict resolution*
- *To provide accessible resources & a welcoming, affordable meeting place*
- *Modelling the values of a peaceful and just society*

#### 2. Challenging pervasive militarism and advocating for disarmament.

*Aims:*

- *To promote nuclear and general disarmament, promote reduction of military spending and an end to UK involvement in foreign conflicts*
- *To build a strong collective voice to address decision makers on militaristic policies*
- *To raise awareness of conscientious objection and alternatives to war*

#### 3. Protecting mother earth in the face of the climate and ecological emergency.

*Aims:*

- *To raise awareness of the connections between militarism, nuclear weapons and nuclear power and the climate and ecological emergency*

#### 4. Upholding human rights and challenging systemic injustices.

*Aims:*

- *To stand for equality and be an ally to all experiencing violence, oppression & injustice*
- *To advocate for improved conditions for refugees and asylum seekers in Scotland*

## Peace & Justice Values

**Nonviolence** - We endeavour to model nonviolence within our organisation and in our work; cultivating the courage to act with integrity and compassion.

**Collective Creativity** - Recognising the role culture plays in changing attitudes, and the power of creativity to inspire, we collaborate in imaginative ways to transform into a peaceful future.

**Honouring life** - We welcome diversity in all with whom we work. We nurture our capacity to be present - considering each other's needs - so everyone's authentic voice is heard.

**Solidarity** - We act courageously and with openness, willing to be changed as we learn to become better allies to those experiencing violence and oppression.

**Ecological Responsibility** - We act with and promote respect for the wellbeing of all life, recognising our interconnectivity and ecological and social responsibility.

## Membership & Affiliation

Individuals who support our Vision, Mission and Values are invited to join us by becoming a member or, for organisations, by becoming an affiliate. Membership is a minimum donation of £24 / £12 (unwaged). Families £36. To join us go to [peaceandjustice.org.uk/become-a-member/](https://peaceandjustice.org.uk/become-a-member/) or complete the Membership form on the back page of this magazine.

Members receive *P&J News* 3 - 4 times per year and can sign up to our email list for regular announcements of P&J and relevant community events, notice of actions you can take to promote peace, justice and ecological sustainability. Plus support for engaging in advocacy in these areas.

## Volunteer Opportunities

There are lots of volunteer, internship and student work placement opportunities.

[See our website for details and an online application form](#) or for more information email

[coordinator@peaceandjustice.org.uk](mailto:coordinator@peaceandjustice.org.uk) .



## Will you consider becoming a Peace & Justice Trustee?

Trustees are responsible for ensuring we carry out our Mission, oversight of finances and setting strategic direction. We seek a diverse group of trustees and welcome people of all genders and people of colour.



## New PeaceBuilders Video Series for Primary Schools

Our *PeaceBuilders* team have produced a series of short videos for teachers to use in the classroom, based on our *Cooperative Games and Conflict Resolution* course. Our trained facilitators have run this course in person in 25 schools in Edinburgh since 2015, and recently expanded to include Glasgow schools. The programme helps teachers and pupils develop skills to resolve conflict, build relationships and work together to create more peaceful learning environments.

At a time when it is difficult for us to visit schools ourselves, this video series has the same aim. It is a resource teachers can use with class groups to help children develop skills in managing emotions, respect and empathy, and conflict resolution.

### About the video series

The videos consist of cooperative games, circle time conversations and other activities that we would use as part of our programme in schools. The video format allows us to reach schools even when our facilitators cannot be there in person. These interactive videos allow teachers to use the peacebuilding materials flexibly, timetabling the videos whenever suits them best. **A detailed companion manual** is included to allow teachers to facilitate along with the films.



Image: Nik Vafeiopoulou, Winter Cuckoo Films

As COVID guidelines restrict outside visitors it may be difficult for our facilitators to work with classes in schools this year. Instead, teachers across Scotland will be able to use these films to help children talk about their experience of the pandemic and lockdown, as well as providing a full PeaceBuilders

course that can be accessed at any time and into the future. The videos can be accessed

free of charge, although there is a suggested price for schools to pay for the series.

**To watch a sample video or discuss how you might use the videos in your schools,** please contact PeaceBuilders Programme Coordinator, Fiona Oliver-Larkin at: [peacebuilders@peaceandjustice.org.uk](mailto:peacebuilders@peaceandjustice.org.uk)

Find more information about the films and our PeaceBuilders programme on our website here: [peaceandjustice.org.uk](http://peaceandjustice.org.uk). **If you're a parent or work in a school can you help us spread the word by emailing your Head Teacher this link?**

## Peace & Justice Events

We held a panel discussion on **Peacebuilding and the arts** at our AGM in November featuring a talk by *Director of the Centre for Theology and Public Issues* **Prof Jolyon Mitchell** and presentations from *Opposing War Memorial artist* **Kate Ive**, *Peacebuilding in Schools project coordinator* **Fiona Oliver-Larkin** and *Peace Cranes curator* **Iliyana Nedkova** on how our projects are working through the arts to do peacebuilding locally. **Alison Johnstone MSP** sent along a video congratulating us on becoming **Peace & Justice**.



We participated in a **UK Alternative Remembrance Event** with Peace Pledge Union & Fellowship of Reconciliation that featured a short video of P&J volunteers laying a white poppy wreath at the Opposing War Memorial site.

You can watch any of the P&J events at: [peaceandjustice.org.uk/](https://peaceandjustice.org.uk/)

## Banning Nuclear Weapons

*On Friday, 22 January, we joined campaigners across the globe celebrating the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) entering into force, making nukes illegal under international law. There are currently 86 signatories and 52 states parties.*



The UK and other nuclear weapons states have not joined the treaty, and therefore are not subject to it. However, as more and more countries accede to the treaty it will become harder and harder for the countries that possess nuclear weapons or rely on them for security (such as NATO countries) to continue to justify their position. Most of the countries that have not yet ratified the treaty are planning to do so and many are very close to completing the process.

The tide is turning on nuclear weapons and the entry into force of the treaty signals the beginning of their end. It's time for the UK to get on the right side of history. Peace & Justice and other ICAN partners in Scotland are calling on the UK government to join the Treaty and disarm the Trident nuclear weapons based in Scotland.



**On 22 January Peace & Justice and the other ICAN Partners in the UK wrote to Boris Johnson calling on the UK to join the nuclear weapons ban treaty.** You can keep up with all the work being done on this important issue by all the partners in Scotland at [www.nuclearban.scot/](http://www.nuclearban.scot/).

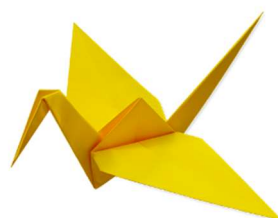
**Hundreds of people and churches rang bells across the UK to celebrate the entry into force of the TPNW. The P&J promoted and took part.**



**Peace & Justice** initiated and worked with partners to organise a Tweet Storm on 22 January. The #NukesOutUK Tweetstorm made almost 5 million impressions and reached 3 million accounts. #nuclearban & #UKNukesOut together totalled 283 million impressions across the day. P&J tweets made 15,000 impressions.

**Peace & Justice** is active in the **Don't Bank on the Bomb Scotland** network along with SCND and Medact, campaigning for banks and pension funds to divest from nuclear weapons. **Read more about the Don't Bank on the Bomb Scotland campaign and how you can get involved here.**  
<https://nukedivestmentscotland.org/>

Our Origami **Peace Cranes** project has brought together hundreds of volunteers to make 140,000 paper cranes that we hope will form the core of an **exhibition** at the Just Festival at St John's Church during the Edinburgh Fringe Festival in August of 2021 expressing hope for nuclear disarmament and will raise awareness of the Ban Treaty.



**NUCLEAR WEAPONS ARE ILLEGAL**   
The UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons enters into force on January 22, 2021

#NUCLEARBAN

**Supporting Conscientious Objectors: *Peace & Justice has written to the Prosecutor General of Ukraine in support of pacifist CO Ruslan Kostaba.*** For more details see News from the Movements and take 2 minutes to **send an email in support of Ruslan.** Go to <https://wri-irg.org/en/programmes>

**Peace & Justice is one of 385 organizations in 28 countries to call for the Global Day of Action to end the war on Yemen.** Thousands watched the event on YouTube, which featured among others, former Yemeni born British Army soldier - Conscientious Objector Ahmed al Babati, Kate Hudson (General Secretary of CND) and, US activist Cornel West and Jeremy Corbyn.

## Challenging Militarism

**Peace & Justice is an active member of the Steering Group of the Global Campaign on Military Spending (GCOMS).** In December, when the government announced a massive increase to the military budget we helped organise a Tweet Storm that made over a million “impressions” on Twitter. By working together with other organisations, we are doing more to raise awareness and press for change than we could by each group working in its own little corner. **The Annual Global Days of Action on Military Spending will be taking place in April and May when there will be lots of opportunities to get involved.**

**Take Action: Ask your MP to pressure the government to end arms sales to Saudi Arabia.** The Saudi-led war has created the worst humanitarian crisis in the world. The UK is now the largest supplier of weapons to Saudi Arabia for use in its war on Yemen and UK troops are directly involved in targeting civilians. President Joe Biden has confirmed the US will end the sale of “offensive” weapons to the Saudis. This creates an opportunity for us to call again on the UK to end our support for the Saudi war.

**Send an email to your MP at:** [caat.org.uk/homepage/stop-arming-saudi](https://caat.org.uk/homepage/stop-arming-saudi)

## Upcoming Peace & Justice Events



# UK Military Budget Webinar

Dr Sam Perlo-Freeman

Recent UK Military Spending Increase

Dr Kate Hudson

UK Nuclear Weapons Spending

Dr Stuart Parkinson

Military Spending and Climate Change

Deborah Burton

Other Public Spending Priorities

## GCOMS UK Military Budget Webinar. Monday 22 February. 4pm UTC

In November the government announced major increases in military spending, while slashing the overseas aid budget. Ahead of the March budget statement, join us at a webinar on issues relating to the military budget.

Four 10-minute presentations from and discussion. P&J is a GCOMS partner.

**Register to join Zoom call: <https://tinyurl.com/teop2ghq>**

**Or watch live on GCOMS UK Facebook page.**

**Banning Nuclear Weapons - Smashing the Patriarchy**

**22 March. 7pm. Online. Register for the event on EventBrite**



Ban the Bomb Rally.  
Photo: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse under CC 2.0 Generic license.

We are joining with Scottish ICAN partners to welcome Ray Acheson (Director, Reaching Critical Will: WILPF) to Scotland (virtually!) for conversation and readings from her upcoming book: *Banning the Bomb, Smashing the Patriarchy* (Rowman & Littlefield, June 2021).

The book offers a look inside the antinuclear movement — from scrappy organising to achieving a landmark UN Treaty banning nuclear weapons.

For all of us who campaigned so hard for the Treaty, and who know we still have so much work to do to rid our world of nuclear weapons, this evening will be a moment to reflect on how far we have already come, and to gain courage and inspiration for our next challenge.

Hosted by: WILPF, Scottish CND, Medact Scotland, UN House Scotland, Peace & Justice, and Trident Ploughshares. [Register for the event on EventBrite.](#)

## **Opposing War Memorial.**

### **Embroidery Workshop online.**

Would you like to be part of creating the Opposing War Memorial? Memorial artist Kate Ive will be running an online embroidery workshop in March. **To register interest and be notified of details email**

[admin@peaceandjustice.org.uk](mailto:admin@peaceandjustice.org.uk) Photo Credit: Kate Ive



## **SAVE the DATE 15 May. UK Conscientious Objectors Day Vigil.**

Peace & Justice will contribute to this online national event and we'll provide details of how to register in the next issue of P&J News and via email. Time tbc.

## **Upcoming Community Events**

### **Introduction to Restorative Justice. 19th April 2021 - 30th May 2021.**

**Tutors: Deborah Mitchell, Josh Rogers. £72.00.**

Six-week introductory overview of the Restorative Justice field and its potential for making a transformative contribution at multiple levels: global, national, regional, local and personal. More info at: [www.woodbrooke.org.uk](http://www.woodbrooke.org.uk)

**More Events on our website. Send your events to [contact@peaceandjustice.org.uk](mailto:contact@peaceandjustice.org.uk) and we'll post them on the Community Events Calendar.**



## Feature: Signs of Hope in Biden's Oval Office Decor

By Brian Larkin

On the day of Joe Biden's inauguration, something truly extraordinary caught my attention. It was not the tiny American flags on the mall or the beautifully poised 22-year old Black woman poet performing her spoken-word piece. It was not even the arrival of the Second Gentleman in the White House.

It was the image of Biden signing a stack of Executive Orders rescinding Trump's previous orders, ending the Muslim Ban, ending funding for the Border Wall, re-joining the Paris Accord, and more. Biden had had a bit of redecorating done in the Oval Office, the office in which Trump ranted and Nixon ordered the covert bombing of Cambodia. At that desk Truman signed



Portrait of Andrew Jackson.  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#),  
CC0 1.0 Universal Public Domain.

the order that sent the Enola Gay to bomb Hiroshima, and three days later sent another plane to drop the Hydrogen bomb on Nagasaki. In that office, surrounded by the trappings of power, 45 previous presidents have presided over one of the most militaristic nations in history.

Biden removed a portrait that had hung in the Oval during Trump's time, that of Andrew Jackson, who, as a General in the US Army, led the Creek and Seminole Wars, and as President signed the [Indian Removal Act](#), which paved the way for forced, genocidal expulsion of tens of thousands of Native American from their land into the West. A southern icon, Jackson had also stood against the emerging movement for the abolition of slavery. The removal of his portrait

from the Oval on day one resonates with the wave of removals of statues of Confederate soldiers and other white supremacists and symbolizes Biden's intention to confront racist violence in America.

His portrait was replaced with a large portrait of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, perhaps the most progressive of American presidents, who used the power of government to lift the country out of the devastating depression of the 1930's, a clear indication of Biden's intention to leverage his position as Executive to lead the country through the present crisis.

Alongside a bust of Martin Luther King Jr. already there, Biden installed busts of Rosa Parks, Eleanor Roosevelt and Cesar Chavez. The bust of Parks and Eleanor Roosevelt begin to rectify the omission of women from the public narrative of American struggles for justice. Eleanor Roosevelt, was an early

civil rights activist, and later spoke out prominently for nuclear disarmament. Most people know that Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat to a white man on a Montgomery bus. Perhaps less known is that Parks had been a Secretary of the local NAACP chapter for years, and that the black Women's Political



Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. Photo Source: [US Embassy in Guinea](#). CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Caucus, led by Jo Anne Robinson conceived the idea of the Montgomery bus boycott, drafted a call out letter and clandestinely printed thousands of copies in the offices of their workplace at the University. Because of those leaflets the whole black community stayed off the buses the next day, beginning the boycott that launched the brilliant young Rev Martin Luther King Jr on the path of leadership with the civil rights movement. History tends to

celebrate visible leaders and individual heroic actions like those of Parks. Perhaps what the Oval office needs are murals of the many, millions of people whose combined actions transform injustice.

By spotlighting Parks, King and Chavez, with of a woman of colour as Vice President, and appointing the most racially and gender diverse Cabinet in US history, Biden is signalling that the administration will champion equality and civil rights. With a swathe of Executive Orders Biden is already delivering on social justice: reinstating access to health care for millions of low income people, increasing immigration quotas and ordering that all children of immigrants who were separated be reunited with their families.

These three champions of social justice all embraced nonviolence and civil disobedience as a method of achieving justice. King and Parks are no doubt well known to readers. Co-founder of the United Farmworkers of America, Cesar Chavez may be less known this side of the Atlantic. Influenced by Gandhi, Chavez unionized farmworkers and gained contracts improving working conditions and wages for farmworkers in the California grape industry.



Rosa Parks in the foreground with Martin Luther King in the background. Credit. Ebony Magazine. Public Domain Mark 1.0.

Millions of people, in the US and in Europe, boycotted grapes - making a sacrifice in solidarity with the most exploited workers in America. In 1968 Chavez fasted for 25 days. He was joined by Robert Kennedy. Cesar said "Farm workers everywhere are angry and worried that we cannot win without violence. We have proved it before through ... hard work, faith and willingness to sacrifice. We can win and keep our own self-respect and build a great union that will secure the spirit of all people if we do it through a rededication and recommitment to the struggle for justice through nonviolence."

I had the good fortune to work with the UFW on the second grape boycott in the 1980s organising a speaking tour for Cesar Chavez. This boycott focused on the use of toxic pesticides, exposure to which was causing serious health issues for farmworkers and cancer clusters in agrarian communities. By this time Cesar's concerns were, like the later King, more holistic. He described grape vines being injected with a chemical that swelled the grapes, roots of citrus trees being injected with fungicides that were absorbed into the flesh of the fruits, and a machine that grabbed the almond trees and shook them to bring down the nuts, branches, leaves, all. "The poor trees," he said. He was already sick with cancer and one of my responsibilities was to arrange macrobiotic meals at stops on the tour.



Cesar Chavez at a UFW rally in Delano, California in 1972. [Wikimedia](#). CC by Attribution 3.0 Unported license (sic).



Cesar Chavez at Michigan State University. East Lansing. 1987.

Cesar went on a long fast in 1988 that reflected these ecological concerns. "I have been studying the plague of pesticides on our land and our food" he said. "The evil is far greater than even I had thought,... it threatens to choke out the life of our people and also the life system that supports us all. The solution to this deadly crisis will not be found in the arrogance of the powerful, but in solidarity with the weak and helpless. I pray to God that this fast will be a preparation for a multitude of simple deeds for justice. Carried out by men and women whose hearts are focused on the

suffering of the poor and who yearn, with us, for a better world. Together, all things are possible."

Like many who engage in struggles for justice, Chavez is a mixed figure. He has been criticised for association with a discredited cult and some historians



argue that his efforts to build a farmworkers' union (an exceptionally difficult task due to dispersed workplaces and migrant workforce) ended in failure. Yet he remains a Hispanic icon.

It's impossible to know exactly what Biden means by placing the images of these civil rights leaders in his office. After all, Donald Trump incongruously kept the bust of King. Co-founder of the UFW Delores Huerta said "It's really a very strong message that the strongest person in the whole world, the president of the United States of America, would have a bust of Cesar Chavez, a very simple, humble farmworker... who dedicated his life to make life better for the poorest of the poor - it indicated that the president is saying to everybody, I am your servant leader, and I am here to serve you." Perhaps.



Huerta. Bv Yreina Cervántez. Los Angeles. CC by 2.0.

If that is so, might the inclusion of these 3 proponents of nonviolence in the pantheon of American heroes suggest more than a promise to promote

civil rights and equality for women

and people of colour? King can mean different things to different people. Most Americans today remember the Montgomery bus boycott, his "I Have a Dream" speech, perhaps his letter from the Birmingham jail, and Selma. Few remember his speech at Riverside Church where he condemned the US war in Vietnam, calling America the "greatest purveyor of violence on our planet" and denounced the triple evils of racism, materialism and militarism in America as inextricably intertwined.

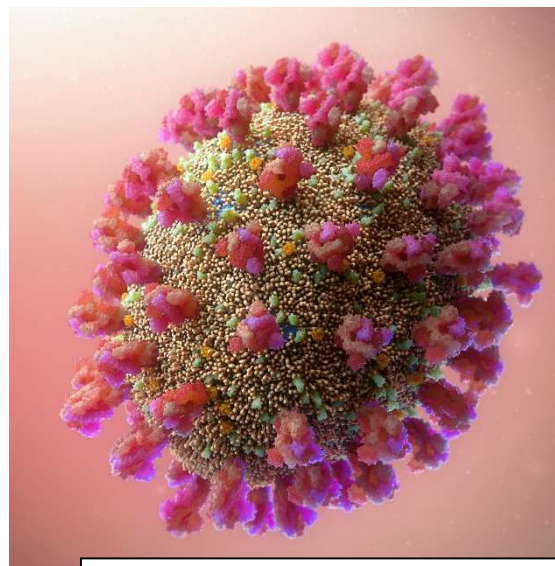
Judging from Biden's long record of support for the military, including Obama's ten year upgrade of nuclear weapons at a cost of \$1 trillion, and his support for the US wars in Afghanistan and Iraq where a million Iraqi people died, it seems likely that for Biden the bust of King will be a reminder of his narrower civil rights legacy. Let us hope that he may also go with King all the way to embrace his holistic vision laid out at Riverside Church.

If Biden ignores the legacy of King in those last years and continues to support the largest military budget on the planet and to maintain a nuclear arsenal capable of destruction of all life on earth, then the civil rights, and racial justice agenda will fail because ultimately, as King insisted, racism and materialism are interconnected with militarism. In the end, the people cannot wait for a president to lead us - we must push for peace and justice with all the nonviolent tools at our disposal.

## Feature: Lessons from the UK HIV/AIDS Epidemic in the Time of COVID-19

*By Elena (Lane) Deamant*

COVID-19 has brought about devastating losses around the world, a collective challenge that has changed our world in permanent ways. The experience of a frightening and often stigmatized outbreak of illness is not new, however, even within living memory. A look at the connections between disease and the politics that surrounded the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the UK can shed light on the coronavirus pandemic, both in understanding how we got here and what the future might hold. With COVID-19, as in the HIV epidemic, infection and mortality rates have been higher for vulnerable populations. Race, sexuality, gender, income, and immigration status all interacted to define the demographics of those who contracted HIV, and some of these intersections are shaping the impact of COVID-19 as well. As COVID-19 tests the strengths of our bonds to each other, let us draw from the resilience and generosity our communities showed and continues to show in support of those struggling with HIV.

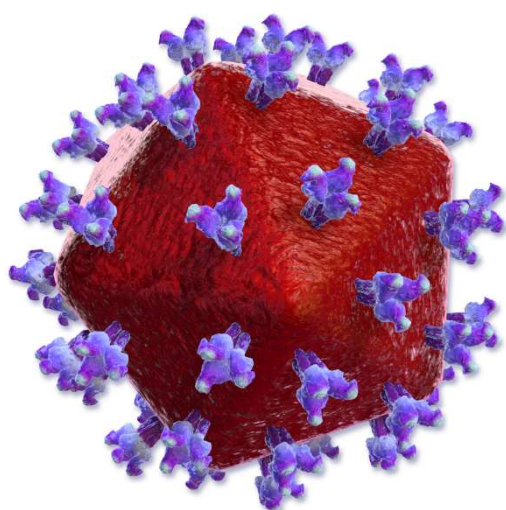


A model of SARS-CoV-2, the virus that causes COVID-19. Source: Association of Medical Illustrators, licensed for reuse under CC BY 4.0.

During its first decade, Western governments were excruciatingly slow to respond to the spread of HIV as a serious public health crisis. About 70% of those affected in the UK were gay or bisexual men, the other 30% mainly intravenous drug users (Cook, 2017), revealing the concentration of HIV infection among stigmatised and marginalised communities. We must ask: whose lives does the government value enough to be stirred to action?

The British tabloid and mainstream media demonised these populations when the epidemic was emerging. The virus was described as a “gay plague” in many headlines, displaying a willful ignorance and prejudice that reminds us of the pejorative terms like “China virus” used by Trump and others about coronavirus. Margaret Thatcher refused to take national action on the spread of HIV until 1987, eventually approving an informational television programme she previously rejected. By that point, six years after the first recorded case of HIV in the UK, more than 2000 people had already contracted the virus and several hundred had died (Cook, 2017)

The controversial ads that Thatcher's government ran featured grim images of exploding volcanoes and giant tombstones with the slogan "Don't Die of Ignorance." The campaign did raise wider awareness about the spread of HIV and how to avoid potential risks for infection (Braidwood, 2016). However, the dire messages did nothing to abate the irrational fears straight people had about interacting with the gay community. Though HIV cases decreased after the ads were released, the British Attitudes survey in 1987 showed 74% of people thought "homosexual relations were always or mostly wrong," an increase of more than 10% from 1983.



Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) molecule. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0.

Fear rarely leads to empathic responses. Messages of doom and destruction are echoed once again in today's rhetoric about COVID-19. President Macron declared France to be at war with an "invisible enemy" (BBC, 2020), President Trump called himself a "wartime president," and PM Boris Johnson declared that British people are all being "enlisted" into the "fight" (The Guardian, 2020). Both HIV and coronavirus are serious and deadly, but mobilizing the public via panic-inducing battle sirens can and does cause misguided blame and resentment.

During the AIDS epidemic, the government failed to respond swiftly and compassionately, and history seems to be repeating itself. The US and UK have both been criticised for ignoring the threat of coronavirus early on. As the UK lagged behind other European countries on testing per day and NHS workers reported shortages in personal protective equipment, Johnson delayed the release of national social distancing guidelines for days after COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the WHO (Perrigo, 2020). With coronavirus, as with HIV, an immediate and comprehensive response to a public health crisis would have been the best way to prevent infection and save lives.

In the absence of government support, British HIV/AIDS activists led grassroots movements and organizations to destigmatize the disease and to create a network of financial, emotional, physical, and medical care for each other. For example, in 1987, work began on the UK AIDS Memorial Quilt, where images and words were sewn onto quilted squares that memorialized several hundred of those who died due to AIDS complications. This act of communal creation helped people to grieve the immeasurable loss and to



remember their stories and lives.

Large-scale political protests rose up as well, including a successful movement for condom availability for people in prison (Curzon, 2018). COVID-19 has



AIDS Memorial Quilt, pictured here in Washington D.C. in 2012. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse under CC BY-SA 2.0.

similarly prompted local communities to rise up. The volunteer group COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK now has thousands of active local chapters that run programs such as grocery delivery and over-the-phone emotional support. Look up what your community might need and how you can help. As we gather up our collective energy and resources, we can work and pressure and protest together to ensure that COVID-19 changes our medical, legal, and economic systems

permanently for the better, as did thousands of dedicated HIV/AIDS activists. We can learn from the HIV/AIDS epidemic, and the coronavirus pandemic, what we need to do to make the country healthier, safer, and more equal.

## News from the Movements

**On 22 January campaigners and governments around the world celebrated the entry into force of the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons** that made nuclear weapons illegal. Here is a selection of reports on the hundreds of demonstrations and dozens of statements.



### ***Bell Ringing and Projections in UK***

Across the UK, hundreds of people and churches rang their bells across the UK while ICAN partners Trident Ploughshares organised the projection of images and slogans on prominent buildings such as the Scottish Parliament to announce the good news in Edinburgh.

Photo credit: Double Take Projections

## A-bomb survivors rejoice as UN nuclear ban treaty takes effect

Source: [japantimes.co.jp](http://japantimes.co.jp). Survivors of the US atomic bombings of Hiroshima

*This will be a day that is engraved in history.*

and Nagasaki rejoiced as the treaty banning nuclear weapons took effect. Terumi Tanaka, co-chairperson of the Japan Confederation of A- and H-Bomb Sufferers Organizations, celebrated the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty in decades. The group had handed requests to the Japanese government to sign and ratify the agreement. "This will be a day that is engraved in history," Tanaka said, adding, "We have now come halfway to abolishing [nuclear weapons]." "The next step will be to bring the Japanese government on board with the treaty," said Beatrice Fihn, executive director of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons. Atomic bomb survivor Setsuko Thurlow said Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga must "display responsible leadership" on nuclear disarmament.



Every month, Catholics at the Urakami Cathedral in Nagasaki pray in memory of the atomic bomb victims. The H-bomb detonated over the heart of the Catholic community in the Urakami neighbourhood.

Former Hiroshima Mayor Tadatoshi Akiba advocated for the creation of a Northeast Asian nuclear-free zone involving China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia and the United States. "Japan should stop giving so much consideration to the United States and encourage dialogue among countries involved," Akiba said.

## Catholic leaders celebrate the UN ban on nuclear weapons

Source: [paxchristi.net](http://paxchristi.net).

Catholic leaders released a letter welcoming the treaty and quoting Pope Francis's new encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti': "We are all saved together or no one is saved" and his statement on a trip to Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 2019. In this era of increasing global interdependence and vulnerability, peace cannot be achieved through "the threat of total annihilation".



Pope Francis. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pope_Francis_2017.jpg), licensed for reuse under CC BY-SA 2.0.

## Statement from Youngsolwara Pacific, a regional Pacific youth network

Source: [Young Solwara Pacific](#). “Doing away with Nuclear Weapons! Remembering our families in the Marshall Islands, the atolls of Bikini and Enewetak, Kiribati, and those in Moruroa and Fangataufa in Maohi Nui. We also acknowledge our Pacific leadership ... and movements such as the Nuclear Free and Independent Pacific who fought ...for nuclear justice.”

## Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs welcomes the landmark treaty

Source: [www.dfa.ie](http://www.dfa.ie). The Irish Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney T.D., welcomed the entry into force of the treaty. He said it was a “significant global achievement; it is the first time nuclear weapons have been expressly

*We will never be remotely equipped to deal with the consequences of a nuclear weapon's detonation.*

prohibited in an international instrument. The pandemic has shown us that risks, however unlikely, can materialise with devastating global impact. The growing public body of scientific and medial evidence clearly shows that

we will never be remotely equipped to deal with the consequences of a nuclear weapon's detonation. The only guarantee of safety is the complete elimination of nuclear weapons, as foreseen in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty”

## Youth activists in new initiative: Reverse the Trend: Save Our People, Save Our Planet

Reverse the Trend is a global youth advocacy network that seeks to elevate the voices of young people, primarily coming from frontline communities who have been directly affected by nuclear weapons and climate change. This initiative is supported by an international coalition of non-governmental organisations.

Selina N. Leem, a Marshallese climate change activist and spokesperson of Reverse the Trend commented at the UN General Assembly's event to commemorate the International Day Against Nuclear Tests on August 26, 2020: “We simply cannot wait for certain states to create an environment for nuclear disarmament... If they tell you to drown, are you to follow suit? It is past time for us to abolish nuclear weapons.”



Anti-nuclear protest in Japan.  
Source: [University of Sydney](#),  
licensed for reuse by CC BY-NC 2.5.

**Conference led by Colony of Development Pioneers** Source: [ICAN](#). While Burundi has not signed or ratified the TPNW, yet ICAN partners **Colony of**



**Development Pioneers** organised a conference urging other governments to do so. Young people from civil society organisations, religious denominations and the media demonstrated with posters saying “do not leave us a world with nuclear weapons.”

### **Catholic Bishops of Hiroshima and Nagasaki statement on the UN treaty**

Source: [cbcj.catholic.jp](http://cbcj.catholic.jp) (Excerpt). “Today is that special day that A-bomb survivors and countless people who hope for a peaceful world without nuclear weapons have longed for. It is the beginning of the final stage, and we share this joy. ...The Japanese government argues that ‘it is necessary to maintain the deterrence of the United States with nuclear weapons under the Japan-US alliance.’ But as the only country to ever be attacked with atomic weapons, Japan should take the lead in signing and ratifying [the treaty].”

### **King Bay Plowshares: Hope and Prison**

On 7 February nuclear disarmament activist Clare Grady held an online Festival of Hope before reporting for incarceration on a 12 month sentence (she’s already served 3-1/2 months pretrial) for her part in the Kings Bay Plowshares action April 4, 2018. The 7 entered Naval Base Kings Bay in Georgia, prayed, spray painted messages, and following the prophecy of Isaiah “to beat swords into plowshares”, hammered on a shrine to nuclear missiles, poured blood and waited to be arrested. Kings Bay is homeport to six ballistic missile Trident submarines, each of which deploys twenty Trident missiles carrying four or more warheads of at least 100 kilotons. The Hiroshima bomb was 14 kilotons. Each submarine thus has the destructive power of at least 500 Hiroshima bombs.



Clare invited activists who challenge different aspects of Rev. Dr. King’s triplets, racism, materialism and militarism to speak including Agnes Williams, a Seneca leader, Leona Morgan, a Diné leader from the Navajo Nation, working in New Mexico and Arizona to stop uranium production and dumping on their lands, Setsuko Thurlow, a Hiroshima survivor who has worked tirelessly to end nuclear weapons and Professor Russell Rickford, Cornell University historian of the Black Radical Tradition.

The seven received varying sentences. Fr. Steve Kelly was sentenced to 33 months and has now been held for over 1,000 days. Mark Colville is scheduled for sentencing on 19 Feb. Carmen Trotta and Patrick O’Neill are doing 14 months; Martha Hennessy is serving 10

months. Liz McAlister, now 80, got time served, three years supervised release and a portion of the restitution of \$30,000. She served 17 months in jail. Read more at <https://kingsbayplowshares7.org/>.

**Please Support them. Write to Them! Find their prison addresses at:** <http://www.nukeresister.org/inside-out/>

### It's still 100 seconds to midnight

Source: [thebulletin.org](http://thebulletin.org). The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists has kept the iconic clock at 100 Seconds to midnight, the closest this symbol of the threat of Armageddon has ever been to midnight in its 75-year history. The Bulletin notes that “accelerating nuclear programs in multiple countries moved the world into less stable and manageable territory last year. Development of hypersonic glide vehicles, ballistic missile defenses, and weapons-delivery systems that can flexibly use conventional or nuclear warheads may raise the probability of miscalculation in times of tension.”



Doomsday clock counting down – less than 2 minutes to midnight.  
Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Doomsday_Clock.jpg), licensed for reuse under CC 1.0 Universal license.

### US and Russia extend New START Treaty Limiting Nuclear Weapons

The US and Russia have agreed on extending New START for another five years. It is important to remember that it is not a disarmament step, but rather an extension of the current levels of nuclear arsenals. Nevertheless, it is a welcome development. Without it the rival nuclear powers would likely have escalated the already simmering New Cold War. This renewal provides the foundation for the two countries to negotiate deeper reductions in their nuclear weapons arsenals and move closer to a world free of nuclear weapons.

### Conscientious Objection: Updates from War Resisters International Israeli Teens Refuse military Service

On 5th January, sixty teenagers from Israel published an [open letter](#) declaring their refusal to serve in the army in protest of the policies of occupation and apartheid of the Israeli State. In their “Shministim Letter” (referring to the Hebrew term shministim for high school seniors), the students say: “The Israeli state is demanding our conscription into the military.... In reality, the goal of the Israeli military is ... to exercise control over a civilian population.... [O]ur conscription to the Israeli military has ... implications, first and foremost on the lives of the Palestinian people who have lived under violent occupation for 72 years. ...Our refusal to enlist ...is not an act of turning our backs on Israeli society. On the contrary, our refusal is an act of taking responsibility over our actions and their repercussions.” Read full account at [wri-irg.org/](http://wri-irg.org/)

## Turkmenistan: Five COs jailed in two days

Five conscientious objectors to compulsory military service who had already served sentences were jailed again in January. Courts gave all five two-year terms, four of them in strict-regime labour camps. All had offered to perform an alternative civilian service, but Turkmenistan does not offer this. Nine of the 14 known jailed COs – all Jehovah's Witnesses – are serving second sentences. Turkmenistan has rejected repeated calls from the United Nations to introduce alternative service. Read the full report at: <https://wri-irg.org/>.



Young women train in the Israel Defense Forces. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse through CC BY 2.0.

## Tajikistan: Three and a half years' jail for CO

Despite his offer to perform alternative civilian service, Khujand Military Court jailed Rustamjon Norov for three and a half years. While held in a military unit in October he was threatened with torture if he did not put on a military uniform. Read the full account at: <https://wri-irg.org/>.

## End prosecution of CO and journalist Ruslan Kotsaba Source: *War Resisters International*



Soldiers from the Ukrainian Armed Forces 95<sup>th</sup> Airborne Brigade. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse under CC BY 2.0.

Ukrainian journalist, conscientious objector and member of the Ukrainian Pacifist Movement Ruslan Kotsaba went on trial again in January for a video he posted in 2015 in which he called for a boycott of military mobilisation. Kotsaba had already spent 524 days under arrest and was acquitted in 2016. Kotsaba is being accused of treason and obstructing military operations.

*Peace & Justice has written to the Prosecutor General of Ukraine in support of pacifist CO Ruslan Kostaba.*

**Take Action: Send emails in support of Ruslan to the Prosecutor General of Ukraine [wri-irg.org/en/](https://wri-irg.org/en/).**



## Yemenis Protest the Saudi War

Source: [AP](#). According to Reuters, tens of thousands of Yemenis marched in Sanaa on 25 January Trump labelling the Iran-aligned Houthi movement a terrorist organisation.

## Biden Administration suspends sanctions on Houthis



The Biden administration has suspended some of the terrorism sanctions that former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo had imposed on Yemen's Houthi rebels on the day before Biden's inauguration.

### UN Relief Depends on Houthis

The UN and relief organisations depend upon the Houthis to make aid deliveries and argue the sanctions would exacerbate the world's worst humanitarian crisis. Most of Yemen's 30 million people rely on international aid to survive. The suspension of sanctions does not reverse the designation of the Houthis as a terrorist organisation, and is only temporary, lasting until 26 February.

## Confronting the Climate Crisis in Scotland

**UK must set steeper GHG Cutting Targets; Scotland must fulfil its goals.**

The Climate Change (Scotland) Act sets targets to reduce Scotland's emissions of greenhouse gases to net-zero by 2045 with interim targets for reductions of at least 75% by 2030, 90% by 2040.

Stop Climate Chaos Scotland have been calling for new policies across all sectors, in particular in relation to key sectors where there has been



With COP26 coming to Glasgow in November, there are tons of Climate Fringe events already happening. **Find out what's going on and sign up for emails at** [climatefringe.org/events-calendar/](https://climatefringe.org/events-calendar/)

little progress in reducing emissions arguing that commitments must meet our 2030 emission reductions target. Whilst the UK commitment to

reduce emissions by at least 68% by 2030 is a positive step closer to what is needed for it's share of climate action, the new target falls significantly short of Scotland's legal commitment to a 75% reduction over the same period. SCCS calls on all high-polluting countries to urgently commit to more stretching action. Learn more about the Stop Climate Chaos Scotland campaign at [www.stopclimatechaos.scot/](http://www.stopclimatechaos.scot/)



Armored truck in transit. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Armored_truck_in_transit.jpg), licensed for reuse under CC BY-SA 4.0.

## Anti-war protestors in Hamilton block Canadian arms trade trucks

Source: [CBC Canada](https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada-hamilton/anti-war-protestors-block-arms-trade-trucks-1.5888888)

A group of Hamilton anti-war demonstrators blocked trucks at a Stoney Creek transportation firm in protest of Canada's arms trade that is fuelling the war in Yemen. Members of World Beyond War and Labour Against the Arms Trade blocked trucks outside Paddock Transportation International, a transportation company that ships light armoured vehicles to Saudi

Arabia, and called on Canada to stop selling arms used in Yemen.

## UN News

### 2021 is UN International Year of Peace and Trust (excerpt)

Source: [undocs.org](https://undocs.org/en/70/1). "Recognising that peace is not only the absence of conflict, but also requires a positive, dynamic participatory process where dialogue is encouraged and conflicts are solved in a spirit of mutual understanding and cooperation, the UN has declared 2021 the Year of Peace and Trust."



### Make 2021 a year of possibility and hope, says UN

Source: [News.un.org](https://news.un.org/en/2021/01/sg-2021). "2020 brought us tragedy and peril. 2021 must be the year to change gear and put the world on track," said the UN Secretary-General António Guterres to UN member states, noting his priorities for the year ahead.

"We need to move from death to health; from disaster to reconstruction; from despair to hope; from business as usual, to transformation." The Secretary-General has called for a global reset as the world continues to reel from the COVID-19 pandemic, stating, "We can move from an *annus horribilis* to make this an '*annus possibilitatis*' – a year of possibility and hope."





The Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine. Source: [Wikimedia Commons](#), licensed for reuse under CC BY 2.0.

## Vaccine solidarity a top priority

Ensuring equal access to COVID-19 vaccines is the first step in the transformation, but the world is falling short on this goal. “Vaccines are reaching a handful of countries quickly, while the poorest countries have none. Science is succeeding, but solidarity is failing,” the UN chief said. Antonio Guterres urged countries to step up support to the COVAX Facility, the international coalition working to make these

treatments available and affordable to all.

Until COVID is eradicated everywhere, it will continue to be a threat to all of us.

## 2021 – a critical year for climate change and biodiversity.

*I call on every city, company and financial institution to adopt concrete roadmaps with clear intermediary milestones to get to carbon neutrality by 2050.”*

*- Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations.*



Photo: [Rebels in Central African Republic](#). [hdptcar](#) from Bangui, CAR. CC By SA 2.0 Generic.

## Central African Republic: 200,000 displaced in less than two months

Source: [News.un.org](#). Violence and insecurity related to the recent elections in the Central African Republic has forced more than 200,000 people to flee their homes in less than two months, according to the UN refugee agency, who warned that tens of thousands are facing dire living conditions. More than half of those displaced remain within the country,

but 92,000 people have crossed into the Democratic Republic of the Congo, while more than 13,200 are now in Cameroon, Chad and the Republic of the Congo.





## Book Review: *Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta

By Elena (Lane) Deamant

*Under the Udala Trees* by Chinelo Okparanta is a riveting and emotion-driven novel narrated by Ijeoma, an adolescent girl who is coming of age in the midst of the Nigerian-Biafran war in the late 1960s. Ijeoma's family is torn apart when the conflict between the Nigerian government and the nationalist rebels of the Biafran state leads to the untimely death of her father. Ijeoma's mother sends her away to work as a house-girl - abandoned and uncared for by the adults in her life, Ijeoma forms a deep bond with another girl who has lost everything in the war. It is this forbidden love that sets the rest of the novel into motion, as Ijeoma struggles to find her way amidst a deluge of religious and cultural pressure.

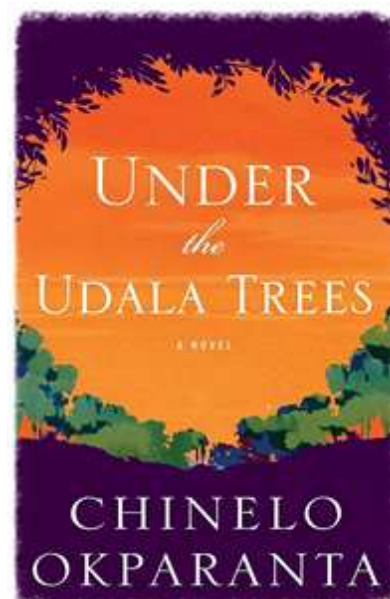


image source:  
[chinelookparanta.com](http://chinelookparanta.com)

Long after the bombings and clashes between soldiers have ended in Ijeoma's neighborhood, she is still plagued by a battle of her own: one of survival, both in body and spirit, in a world steeped in prejudice against those deemed 'abnormal.' Beyond the physical impacts of war that Ijeoma sees around her, the decimated buildings and starving children with bloated bellies, one of the most interesting aspects of the book is the way it explores violent conflict as a long-lasting, perhaps permanent influence on the psyche and character of a nation and its people. Although the novel delves into many complex themes, including Christianity and homophobia, familial and societal expectations, compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood, the heart of the book lies with war and the life-altering effects of violence.

Okparanta has created a compelling narrator in Ijeoma, developing her voice throughout the story as she ages and learns more about this world that is filled with immense joys and sorrows. Ijeoma understands herself and her own desires clearly, which makes it all the more painful when the other characters, especially her loved ones, see her only for what they wish to mold her into: a faithful Christian, a devoted daughter, a doting mother, a selfless wife. Okparanta depicts the discrimination against LGBT people in Nigeria as a distinct, location-bound ordeal, but she also tells a story with universal weight. I am Ijeoma's age as she is in the latter half of the book, just beginning my 20s, and I understand her ambitions and dreams and her eagerness for autonomy through the lens of my own experience. Yet Ijeoma lays her story bare in a way that would be moving for any reader, at any point in their life course.

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