

“My pen is my weapon”: interview with Bahraini journalist - “Journalism in Bahrain is in its worst days since February 14, 2011,”

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Ahmed Ismael, 22-years old, was a citizen journalist from Salmabad village in Bahrain. His task as a revolutionary was to document the Western-backed Bahraini authorities' attacks on peaceful protestors in his neighbourhood and across Bahrain. While he was holding his camera, trying to have his hands steady in order to avoid the usual shaky videos of protestors' footage, a gunman shot him. He lost his grip on his video camera and fell. The camera, stained with Ismael's blood, was a witness to his death and the violations that journalists and photographers face in Bahrain.

Journalism in Bahrain

Although Ismael was killed in 2012 and many have been arrested and tortured since 2011, targeting journalists and photographers along with other pro-democracy and human rights activists was common even prior to the Arab Spring. For instance, Ahmed Radhi, a prominent pro-democracy Bahraini journalist, was targeted several times before the Arab Spring. Radhi was arrested during the uprising in 1995 and since then have been facing ongoing challenges.

“Journalism in Bahrain is in its worst days since February 14, 2011,” said Radhi. That's mainly due to the escalating crackdown on pro-democracy journalists who support peaceful protestors or are critical of the Western backed Al-Khalifa regime that has been in power for centuries. In the best case, a journalist would be dismissed from his or her work. However, attacks on journalists could include arbitrary arrest, unfair trials, solitary confinements and torture.

Radhi was subjected to torture in detention in 1995. He lost hearing in one of his ears due to torture and was released as his health deteriorated. His painful experience as a political prisoner has not deterred him from supporting and being part in pro-democracy movements in Bahrain.

Anti-imperialism

Bahrain is home to US Fifth Fleet. Imperialism and Western hypocrisy play a role as an obstacle to people's demands in Bahrain. For many activists in Bahrain, the demands are not only local, confined to their rights to equality and democracy. Any resistance to Western direct or indirect intervention in the island state means resistance to intervention in the neighbouring countries. During the invasion of Iraq, countries in the Persian Gulf such as Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Qatar were home to US bases. Protesting in Bahrain against the invasion on Iraq made activists and journalists a target of the pro-Western Al-Khalifa regime.

Radhi was very critical of the presence of US army base in Bahrain prior and during the intervention in Iraq. Authorities, mainly the Ministry of Information, were uneasy with his remarks about the US's presence in Bahrain. The ministry filed a lawsuit against Radhi to force him to quit his job as a journalist and to not work in the media field. “Due to pressures, I was forced to quit journalism during the beginning of US invasion of Iraq,” said Radhi.

Western hypocrisy, including Canada, has played a major role in ignoring human rights violations in Bahrain. Whether through investments or arms sales, Western governments such as the American, Canadian and British are complicit in the ongoing violations happening in Bahrain. Currently, Bahrain is one of Canada's priority markets in the Middle East.

During the Arab Spring

Despite the challenges and the global code of silence towards the situation of Bahrain, protestors, activists and journalists like Radhi continue in their struggle for democracy and social justice. Being a victim of torture in the 1990s has not stopped Radhi from protesting and blogging during the Arab Spring protests in Bahrain.

"The prison was a painful experience for me that has left its traces on my body and deep in my heart. I use my pen as a weapon to resist oppression and tyranny," said Radhi. He has a blog site, "My Pen is My Weapon," [1] in which he writes about revolutionary and pro-democracy movements and human rights violations committed by the regime in Bahrain.

In September 2012 the Bahraini government forces raided Radhi's place and arbitrarily arrested him at dawn. Again, the authorities targeted him for his writings and for speaking with foreign media outlets about the Arab Spring protests in Bahrain. According to Radhi, the arrest followed his participation in radio programs and other platforms in which he courageously supported the demonstrations in which the majority of the population in Bahrain participated. He was later released after four months of torture, ill treatment and detention. Despite that, he continues to write, protest and defend other political prisoners in Bahrain and the region.

Solidarity with other activists

I was first introduced to Radhi at the time of the arrest of human rights activist Hussain Jawad. Although being a target of the regime, Radhi was campaigning for Hussain Jawad and other activists by asking activists from around the world to pose for photos holding posters of prisoners of conscience. Jawad was released, but his father Mohammad Jawad, 63-year-old, remains in prison. Mohamed Jawad, well-known opposition leader in Bahrain, was detained in the 1960s, 1980s and 1990s.

"The human rights defenders are not classic human rights defenders like before. They aren't now behind keyboards. They are now attending most of the protests and events," said Hussain Jawad. However, this has subjected human rights defenders, journalists and bloggers to more brutal attacks.

Western imperialism

The Bahraini government has been reluctant to make reforms and change. Any change in Bahrain means a change to Bahrain neighbours such as Saudi Arabia. The Western backed Saudi monarchy has acted as a counter-revolutionary force in several Arab countries -Bahrain, Syria, Egypt and Yemen- but in different ways.

"Bahrain is the gate to the region. That made Saudi Arabia and United States stand as an obstacle to political change," said Radhi. While activists and protestors in Bahrain resist oppression, it is essential for those around the world to show solidarity by unveiling the West's hypocrisy towards human rights issues in places like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.

"The will of Bahraini people will determine the destiny of Bahrain and the future of the revolution," said Radhi.

Yusur Al Bahrani, June 3, 2014

P.S.

* <http://www.socialist.ca/node/2289>

Footnotes

[1] <http://ahmeddi.blogspot.fr>