



The founders

Walid Slaybi and Ogarit Younan



Excerpts on how education and training on non-violence, citizenship and human rights came to exist over the past three decades in Lebanon (since the mid of eighties).

They are leading non-violent intellectuals and activists in Lebanon and the Arab world and pioneers in modern training and non-violent education.

They met in 1982 in the wake of the Lebanese war and embarked on a joint journey of life and struggle, as partners seeking to build their dream day by day under exceptional circumstances. They shared the same vision and struggle, and sought to write and create alternatives to serve the values of non-violence, non-sectarianism, freedom, justice and love.

They chose together, as Erich Fromm wrote in *"To Have or To Be"*, to give a human existential meaning to their career, away from a world of greed and fame... From the very beginning, in their prime days, each found himself choosing to think and struggle; a choice of life.

Their commitment and ideas influenced thousands of youth and activists and intellectuals and media professionals, and spread to various local and regional committees, institutions and programs. They also guided the early non-violent trainers and influenced the establishment of multiple modern civic groups, initiatives, committees, associations, networks and campaigns in Lebanon and the region.

Thus, they came to be known as pioneers in the renewal of civil society in Lebanon for the past three decades.

The first time Ogarit Younan launched the non-violent education as an alternative was in 1985. Since then, she has trained directly with profound programs, all across Lebanon, more than three thousand educators- including teachers, educational managers, ministries and coordinators.

The first time Walid Slaybi launched an innovative model of non-violent direct action was in 1983. Since then, his method and strategy expanded to civic movements and campaigns, training and writing, and through positive 'contagion'... Some of the headlines and concepts he developed became references in Lebanon and other Arab countries...

In spite of the exceptional circumstances, the belligerent situations and the climate of violence that prevailed since the beginning of their journey, and despite the restraint of mentioning non-violence, until recently, in Lebanon or the region, they developed an alternative method and modern methodology for education and social change.

They decided to begin 'against the grain' and insisted on moving around across the country facing the dangers of death on several occasions...

They understood that the starting point was to form new energies for society, during wartime for the coming peace.

They started writing, building a new kind of 'civil society library', doing translations from the world non-violent heritage, creating and publishing simplified tools, manuals and books...

They also understood the importance of establishing a new radical education for the "spirit", non-violent and non-sectarian, and that our society deserved such an education; as social revolution must be cultural and educational, first and foremost.

Their initiative rapidly snowballed, attracting citizens from all over Lebanon and soon the spontaneous rhetorical question "Haven't you been trained yet with Ogarit and Walid?!" spread. Many active personalities in society -older than Ogarit and Walid for the most part- called it: *"A new and avant-garde vision."*

Most of the youth and educators, who were trained, witnessed the evolution of their career. It was a *"turning point"* in their lives. They became the first non-violent trainers in Lebanon. Later, the same pattern was followed in a number of Arab countries.

Thus, visionary training saw the light 30 years ago in the fields of non-violence, human rights, non-sectarianism, citizenship, conflict resolution, civil strategies, non-violent theater and non-violent education. Originally, it was not called "training" but rather living, sharing, bridging, educating and daily confrontation.

Little did they know that similar work was already underway in 'developed parts' of the world. How could they know since their endeavour began in wartime when the internet and mobile phones did not exist, landlines were often not functioning, and typing machines, which were in fashion at the time, were their only means of typing their first texts, training programs and invitations... At times, they would go themselves to each and every town, including dangerous, remote or even occupied areas, in order to hand the invitation for training to those wishing to participate. Sometimes, they drove participants in their tiny car across checkpoints...

...And, they gradually dream of "a university for non-violence and human rights culture".

Despite many health problems and other obstacles, the first model of a university project was created in 2009 and a license was issued in 2014 to give legitimacy to the "Academic University for Non-violence and Human Rights – AUNOHR". The university was the first of its kind in Lebanon and in the Arab region, and a unique experience at the international level.

That is how AUNOHR defines itself: a university of academic professionalism and social change, faithful to the dream and legacy that paved the way for its creation.