



Nonviolence: A Spiritual Resistance Practice

The lived experience of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi

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Abstract: Within the interconnected conceptual framework of *spiritual resistance* and *everyday resistance*, this article analyzes the personal testimonies of Antonio Pampliega, a Spanish journalist kidnapped by Al Qaeda, and Narges Mohammadi, an Iranian human rights activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner, imprisoned by the Iranian authorities. The article describes 1) what specific nonviolent practices they developed to resist conditions of dehumanization and 2) which of those practices were specifically connected with spirituality and/or religion according to their own experience. The phenomenological research method is used to describe subjective experience. The hermeneutical method complements the phenomenological approach to understand and interpret each narrative using meaning-making theory as a framework. The article concludes that in both experiences, spirituality was a fundamental dimension of their nonviolent resistance to counteract dehumanization.

Keywords: nonviolent resistance, spirituality, dehumanization, everyday resistance, spiritual resistance

1. Introduction

In 2008 I was granted a scholarship to study at Yad Vashem, The World Holocaust Remembrance Center in Jerusalem. There, I met several Holocaust survivors and listened to their life stories of resistance during the genocide. The amazing life stories I heard, the conversations we shared, the tears, the human connection we developed and the chance to witness, in depth, the resistance practiced during the Holocaust became the most intense educational experience of my life so far.

During the last eighteen years, the questions surrounding the diverse ways of practicing

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this kind of unarmed and disarming resistance, developed by ordinary people in the most terrible contexts and situations, have accompanied me not just as an intellectual worry but as a personal, embodied and existential call.

Since my experience at Yad Vashem, I have continued to observe and listen to similar resistance stories in different contexts and situations. I have met people with no formal knowledge of nonviolent action, who nevertheless responded to kidnapping, torture, war, and other types of violence through intuitive, everyday acts of nonviolent resistance and humanization. At the same time, due to both professional and personal commitment, I have had the opportunity to learn from organized nonviolent activists who consciously use strategic tools in situations of extreme repression. In both groups, I have found religious and non-religious individuals from different traditions and cultural backgrounds whose resistance practices lead them to reflect on spirituality, transcendence, a sense of meaning, God and religion.

Working as a mediator in conflict transformation and practicing, training, learning and researching nonviolent practices have deepened both my understanding and the desire to investigate more thoroughly how spirituality and nonviolent resistance intersect. To explore this question, I began studying resistance and spirituality under dehumanization. This article analyzes the personal testimonies of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi and their nonviolent resistance in such circumstances.

Antonio Pampliega is a Spanish journalist specialized in conflict zones who has covered wars in Afghanistan, Somalia, South Sudan, Ukraine, Iraq, and Syria. He was kidnapped by Al Qaeda in Syria for 299 days when he was trying to cover the conflict. Narges Mohammadi is 2023 Nobel Peace Prize winner, an Iranian nonviolent human rights activist who was imprisoned and tortured by the Iranian government.

Each testimony is different. One has a Christian cultural background, the other a Muslim one. One is a man, the other a woman. One was kidnapped by a non-state actor because he was a western journalist, the other one was imprisoned by her own government because of her activism. Antonio Pampliega did not have any previous knowledge about nonviolent strategies and tools. Narges Mohammadi not only had the knowledge but a previous practice and experience of nonviolent action and a commitment to it. Antonio Pampliega survived his captivity and made it safely home. At the time of writing, Narges Mohammadi is back in prison resisting. These are two distinct stories which share a deep experience of human resistance practice in two of the most terrible situations designed precisely to break one's humanity.

This article is part of ongoing research on nonviolent resistance and spirituality under extreme dehumanization. It aims to offer an initial understanding of how nonviolent practices relate to spirituality and religion under those specific situations.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

The ongoing research and this article that forms part of it takes as a conceptual starting point the notion of *spiritual resistance* developed by the World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem and The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, defined as:

1. “attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity and core values in spite of Nazi

dehumanization and degradation. Such unarmed resistance came in many forms, religious and non-religious...”

2. “attempts by individuals to maintain their humanity, personal integrity, dignity, and sense of civilization in the face of Nazi attempts to dehumanize and degrade them. Most generally, ‘spiritual resistance’ may refer to the refusal to have one's spirit broken in the midst of the most horrible degradation”

Removing from these definitions the specificities of the Holocaust context (Bauman, 1987; Adler, 2006; Bartrop, 2017; Grodin, Kelly, Miller, Kirschner & Polak, 2019) and any possible presumption of spirituality or religiosity in such practices, my research focuses on individual unarmed resistance practices to maintain humanity, personal integrity, core values and dignity in situations of dehumanization (Kelman, 1973; Bandura, Underwood & Fromson, 1975; Haslam, 2006; Leyens, 2013; Simpson, 2015; Smith, 2020). Despite using as a starting point the notion of *spiritual resistance*, this research does not assume the absence or presence of spirituality or religion *a priori*. On the contrary, that absence or presence is specifically addressed as a research question.

In addition, this conceptual notion is complemented with an *everyday resistance* conceptual framework:

Everyday resistance is a theoretical concept introduced by James C. Scott in 1985 in order to cover a different kind of resistance; one that is not as dramatic or visible as rebellions, riots, demonstrations, revolutions, civil war and other such organized, collective or confrontational articulations of resistance (Scott 1985, 1989, 1990). Everyday resistance is quiet, dispersed, disguised or otherwise seemingly invisible to elites, the state or mainstream society; something Scott interchangeably calls “infrapolitics”. Scott shows how certain common behavior of subordinated groups (for example, foot-dragging, escape, sarcasm, passivity, laziness, misunderstandings, disloyalty, slander, avoidance or theft) is not always what it seems to be, but instead resistance. Scott argues these activities are tactics that exploited people use in order to both survive and undermine repressive domination, especially in contexts when rebellion is too risky (Johansson and Vintaghen, 2020, p. 19).

This means I include everyday forms of nonviolent resistance that are not necessarily deliberate strategies but spontaneous, intuitive ways of preserving humanity amid repression and dehumanization. Following the everyday-resistance framework, such acts are understood as *patterns of behaviour* (Iñiguez de Heredia, 2017, p. 52).

Within this interconnected conceptual framework -spiritual resistance and everyday resistance- I analyze the personal testimonies of individuals experiencing dehumanization and I try to show 1) what specific nonviolent practices they developed to resist and 2) which of those practices were specifically connected with spirituality and/ or religion according to their own experience. Broader ongoing research of which this article is part will also discuss 3) how the horizon of interpretation of both nonviolence and spirituality and religious studies could complement a proper understanding of the phenomenon and 4) how feasible it would be to teach to other individuals these nonviolent resistance practices (including the spiritual ones) in order to face or prevent those dehumanization processes.

In this article I present the analysis and some initial conclusions regarding the first two research questions. Through the personal testimonies of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi, I identify the nonviolent resistance practices each one developed and I examine which of these are specifically religious or spiritual according to their own narratives. Finally, I briefly reflect on how we could start to understand and interpret nonviolent resistance practice in relation with religion and spirituality in these extreme situations.

In order to do this, four main dimensions of each individual's testimony are addressed: cognitive-behavioral, relational, spatial/embodiment and material.

The cognitive-behavioral dimension here refers to the mental strategies developed to process information, as well as functions like memory, creativity, attention, etc., are used to resist and adapt to the dehumanized and oppressive situation, enabling the person to take some control of her or himself in terms of both cognition and behaviour, despite the conditions. This dimension includes using cognitive restructuring to allow a person to interpret events through his or her own lens and develop behavioral strategies. This restructuring can involve spiritual and religious beliefs, narratives and framings developed to reinforce selfhood, integrity, a sense of humanity and psychological and epistemological autonomy.

The relational dimension refers to strategies developed by the individual to establish or keep relationships in order to preserve asocial dimension in their lives despite isolation and torture. This includes how individuals relate to their oppressors, their family, their community, a divine being, such as God, transcendence, themselves and any other relational opportunity, whether the other member in the relationship is physically present or not.

The spatial/embodiment dimension refers to the use of the physical body and physical space to keep a sense of dignity and humanity and to confront subordination and oppression. It includes practices like re-defining given spaces or using one's body as a specific resistance tool. It encompasses how the individuals physically adapt, resist and respond to their confined environment. In relation with religion and spirituality it includes the integration of spiritual experience with the physical body and its location in space beyond cognitive spirituality. It includes bodily awareness, movement, sensory capacity and spatial orientation.

The material dimension here encompasses all the tangible objects used to resist and preserve humanity and core values. This includes the use of objects to help develop the other three dimensions, that is, using objects to express and enact cognitive and behavioural frameworks, foster connection or bring spiritual concepts and practices to life in the material world.

These four dimensions are also related with many scholars' work on *lived religion in everyday life* (McGuire, 2008; Rubin, Smilde & Junge, 2014; Ammerman, 2016, 2014), thus providing a theoretical framework for connecting dimensions of resistance with religious and spiritual ones if necessary. I have also separated into a different section the analysis of practices that, while they could have been included in the other four categories, have an explicitly spiritual or religious connotation according to the protagonists' narratives.

Whether a nonviolent resistance practice can be considered spiritual or not is addressed using the *integrative paradigm* (Pargament, Mahoney, Exline, Jones & Shafranske, 2013). The concept of "spiritual" is understood in the sense of something perceived, experienced, approached, accomplished, discovered or revealed in terms of relation with transcendence, divinity, ultimacy, significance or sacredness. In my analysis, "religious" refers to the spiritual

phenomenon that occurs within the context of established institutions that are designed to facilitate this spirituality. Despite the difference between the two terms, in this article I consider the spiritual and the religious as a single dimension; differentiating them would be beyond the scope of my current investigation.

I use *meaning-making theory* (Park & Folkman, 1997; Lerner & Blow, 2011; Park, 2013; Park & Georges, 2013) as a basis for my analysis of the testimonies. I focus on the *existential dimension* (Demarinis, 2008) of these possible spiritual practices and I pay attention to both the individual narrative and the cultural and social contexts (Fallot & Blanch, 2013) of each testimony. The global and situational meaning of each individual's testimony is considered, in order to understand how people living nonviolent resistance to dehumanization and living religion or spirituality engage in meaning making processes of the whole experience.

3. Research method

The main focus of this research is to study how individuals experience nonviolent resistance and spirituality in conditions of dehumanization. A phenomenological research method (Spickard, 2011; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) is used to describe subjective experience based on personal testimonies. Since these lived experiences are shared as written testimonies, in order to understand and interpret each narrative, a hermeneutical method (Gilhus, 2011) complements the phenomenological approach; however, this hermeneutical analysis is kept to a minimum.

In this article, I focus on the analysis of two personal testimonies, and I describe their nonviolent resistance practices as falling within the four aforementioned dimensions. This description and analysis offers an example of how nonviolent resistance emerges in conditions of dehumanization, and how religion or spirituality shapes that resistance.

4. Research material

For Antonio Pampliega, the primary material analyzed is his book *En la oscuridad. Diez meses secuestrado por Al Qaeda en Siria* (2017), examined in its original Spanish. Most of the book is a reproduction of the diary Antonio Pampliego wrote during his captivity. This material is supplemented by the analysis of some media interviews in which he also recounts his experience. All English quotations are my own translations from his words.

For Narges Mohammadi, the main source is her book *White Torture. Interviews with Iranian Women Prisoners* (2023), written in prison. I focus on the prologue and first chapter, in which she narrates her own story. In addition, I analyse her open letter rejecting her sentence in 2016, a letter read at the Lillehammer Literature Festival (2016), her letter from prison published by The Center for Human Rights in Iran on September 18, 2020, a letter on the execution of prisoners (2020), her Nobel lecture (2023), read by her children Kiana and Ali Rahmani, the guest opinion essay *The more they lock us up, the stronger we become*, published in the New York Times (2023), and a series of letters from Inside Iran's Evin Prison published by the website Dial (2024). In her case, the analysis relies on the available English translations of her book and letters.

5. The lived nonviolent resistance practices of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi

Antonio Pampliega was kidnapped in Syria with two other Spanish journalists in 2015. He spent 10 months in captivity. He spent the first two months with two other Spanish journalists, and the following eight months isolated without them. During that time, he suffered all kinds of abuse. He was beaten, isolated, interrogated, threatened, and deprived of medical treatment, good hygiene, and adequate food. He was subjected to degrading and humiliating treatment, thermal stress, sensory deprivation, and the constant threat of being executed. During his captivity he was able to write a diary in which he recorded his whole experience.

Narges Hommadi has been through prison, interrogations, and various forms of humiliation, degradation, and torture over the years. In the book *White Torture* she refers to experiences from 2001, 2010 and 2012. In May 2016 she was sentenced to 16 years in prison and in August 2016, she was handed a new sentence. At that moment the sentence entailed more than 32 years of imprisonment. She has been tortured, threatened, subjected to solitary confinement, sensory deprivation, stressful thermal conditions, and continuous interrogations, deprived of hygienic conditions, adequate food and medical care despite a serious illness, and even condemned to 154 lashes for having written to the Secretary-General of the United Nations. Despite being released in 2024 because of serious health problems, at the time of writing in December 2025, she has been arrested and imprisoned again.

I have analysed the resistance practices developed by Pampliega and Mohammadi under such terrible conditions, and I have categorised them into the four categories mentioned: cognitive-behavioral, relational, spatial/embodiment and material. Nevertheless, these categories should not be understood as mutually exclusive. In most cases, the same practice entails different categories at the same time.

Using examples from their testimonies, I will show how both Pampliega and Mohammadi developed different strategies of nonviolent resistance across the four dimensions. Among the cognitive-behavioral strategies, we can highlight the following ones:

- **Mentalization of the situation:**

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I try to find an explanation for so much suffering”; “I think about Jim. Also about others who went through this situation”; “Now that I am alone in my cell again, I analyze the situation carefully”; “I have resigned myself to being killed and am preparing to face that moment. I work every day for when the end comes”.

- b. Narges Mohammadi: “I remembered that Firoozeh Saber had described a similar situation before me and that she had been imprisoned there”; “I went over what I had heard about solitary confinement’s function: white torture and brainwashing. Now I was experiencing what I had heard and read about”; “I’m reminded of my leftist sisters in prison in the 1980s”

- **Cognitive techniques to maintain time control:**

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I keep counting the days in my head”; “Perhaps the time will

come when I no longer feel like counting days, weeks, or months. If that ever happens, it will mean that I have lost all hope of returning home”; “To motivate myself, I always set a time frame, a special day when I will finally be home”.

- b. Narges Mohammadi: “I did not have a watch. I guessed the time from the call to prayer, which was played three times a day”.
- **Developing self-discourses to generate, recognise and encourage one’s own resistance and capacities:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “It will be me and only me who decides my destiny” ; “I have to be strong. I can’t give up”; “Every day I think of you to draw strength from weakness”; “I am very proud of myself”; “I’m not giving up”; “I want to be strong! I want to endure and endure!”; “For you, I endure. For you, I will endure”; “They will not defeat me; they will not take away the little dignity I have left deep in my heart”.
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: “I know very well that this is not the end of the story”; “I have faith in the path I have chosen, the actions I have taken, as well as my beliefs. I am determined to make human rights a reality and have no regrets.” “I will not waiver under tyrannical punishments that will limit my freedom to the four walls of the prison cell. I will endure this incarceration, but I will never accept it”.
- **Self-discourse to keep identity:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “My name is Antonio, like my grandfather (...) I have repeated the long time I have been lying on the floor”.
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: “I am a 44-year-old woman condemned to 22 years in prison by the Islamic Republic of Iran”; “I am one of the millions of proud and resilient Iranian women who have risen up against oppression, repression, discrimination, and tyranny”
- **The use of memory to keep connection with life beyond captivity, sense of self, humanity and hope:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “I keep everything in my head”; “I try to remember good times”; “I write in my diary what has happened”; “I’m remembering your party last year. Looking at old photos in that bar where we laughed, drank, and ate surrounded by friends. We were so happy celebrating life! Celebrating so many things!”; “I think about you (his sister) every day”; I still remember when we said goodbye at the airport”; “For his memory and for you. I keep on”
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: “... how much I needed mundane things such as seeing the sun, staring at the sky, seeing a stray cat, a leaf falling from a tree, smelling good, a sound even if disruptive and unpleasant, talking to a friend, and anything that was a sign of being alive”.
Narges Mohammadi also used a different strategy in relation with memory that I did not find in Antonio Pampliega. She tried to **avoid memory, precisely so as not to suffer**: “I avoided thinking about Ali and Kiana. Their absence was unbearable”.
- **Celebration:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “It’s Monday, October 12. Hispanic Heritage Day”; “Dear brother: (...) Did you think I was going to forget your birthday?”; “I hope you spent the day with your family, which is what this time of year (Christmas) is all about”; “Yesterday, to celebrate the arrival of 2016, I peeled a couple of tangerines that I’ve

been saving and placed twelve segments on the blankets”; “Today is my birthday”.

- b. Narges Mohammadi: This is a nonviolent strategy I did not find specifically addressed in her material. However, in her letter from Inside Iran's Evin Prison she mentions that ““we have stayed true to our values, to our enthusiasm, our love, our strength and our vitality. We have recreated real life inside these walls” so we could deduce that certain celebrations might have been part of that “recreating real life” strategy.
- **The use of imagination, creativity and projection of future:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “I think about my departure. I imagine you waiting at the airport”; “I would love for you to be my son's godfather, if I ever have one”; “I closed my eyes and imagined I was thousands of miles away from here”; “Just as one looks at clouds searching for compositions and shapes, I try to find something among the stains left by water on the walls”; “I have started a crime novel”; “I pictured myself at home in Mejerada, waiting for the bus to go to school”; “I was thinking about all of you. I'm sure Mom left my presents on my bed, hoping that I'll be able to open them someday”; “I think a lot about my future”; “If I get out of this fucking place, the first thing I'll do is spend hours and hours under the shower while I listen to music”.
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: “I will continue my efforts the moment I get out of the prison” (...); “It is the promise of this future that drives us and fills us with joy. Together, we will triumph. Let us hope that day will come very soon”; “I remember one night, in my sleep, I felt Kiana's (her daughter) lips on my cheek”.
- **Sense of humor, sarcasm:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “Santa Claus came to see me! Yes, I know it's December 26 and he's a little late. But since I'm stuck in a fucking hideout, I guess it took him longer than usual to find me”.
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: This is a strategy that I did not find in her material.
- **Recognizing the value of nonviolent resistance**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “Somehow I want to stand up to them. Enough of bowing my head all the time. (...) not let anyone walk all over me”; “I am very proud that I did not beg or ask for mercy when they came in with swords or knives, or when they hit or insulted me. Resistance”; “Would you really be capable of killing? Because I wouldn't”.
 - b. Narges Mohammadi: “Despite our imprisonment, we have never stopped fighting”; “Even in the face of all these obstacles, we managed to demonstrate the power of protest and the force of dissent. Our momentum has lifted us higher than the walls that oppress us; we are stronger than them, and more solid”; “the publication of this letter is proof that our voices were powerful enough to reach you”; “We are attempting to exercise solidarity and power in a non-violent and unstoppable process to transition away from a tyrannical religious government”.
- **Recognizing humanity:**
 - a. Antonio Pampliega: “There's no point in hating anyone. I forgive them for everything they've done to me over the last seven months. Yes, I know you find it incredible and think I've lost my mind. But that's not the case, sister. I believe it is an act of courage

to forgive those who have hurt me so much. It's easy to hate. That's the easy way out. But you know I've never liked it that way. (...) Evil is circumstantial, not innate. I know that deep down in their souls they are not bad people. I want to believe that they still have some humanity left inside them. Yes, sister. I forgive them and I could never hate them”.

b. Narges Mohammadi: “I felt that morality had been forgotten and humanity had collapsed at the prison threshold. Interrogators don’t want to know about your true self. They want to build a new person moulded in their image”.

- **Appealing to rights and formal law:**

a. Antonio Pampliega: This is a strategy that I did not find in his material.

b. Narges Mohammadi: “I repeatedly wrote complaints and asked if I was sentenced to six years in prison and why they were keeping me in solitary confinement. I said that I had to be transferred to the public ward and that it was illegal for the Ministry of Intelligence to keep me in solitary confinement”; “... according to regulations of the Islamic Republic of Iran, holding prisoners in solitary confinement is illegal”; “I picked up an A4 sheet from the interrogator’s desk and started writing a complaint”; “I protested that before I had even been arraigned, they were accusing me of all sorts of things and even asking written questions accordingly”; “I repeatedly asked to be referred to my doctor”.

Both also used different **relational** strategies of nonviolent resistance like:

- **Seeking relationships and trying to humanize them:**

a. Antonio Pampliega: “I try to explain to my jailer that I am freezing” ; “I ask him about the Koran, about Islam, and about jihad. He seems pleased. He likes my interest”; “I have thanked him very much for the lessons about religion”; “He came with his own Koran and sat down with me so we could talk about religion. (...) We spent an hour or an hour and a half talking about Christians, Muslims, Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and hell”; “I thank him for his attitude with a nod of my head”; “I repeat the same gesture as last night and invite him to sit down”; “I extend my hand to greet him”; “Now I'm the one looking for him”; “The conversation about my religious beliefs soon comes up, because everyone loves it”.

b. Narges Mohammadi: “I often said during interrogations that I missed Ali and Kiana (her children)”; “I told him that my children were small and that I was a mother”; “The jailer came and I explained that I was a little sick”.

- **Establishing relationships to try to produce practical changes on the situation:**

a. Antonio Pampliega: “We ask for something to read”; “I have asked him to please try to send me some books that are not religious”; “I have responded as diplomatically as I can and asked him to bring me more”; “I try to explain to my jailer that I am freezing”.

b. Narges Mohammadi: “I thought it was better to inform the prison guard before I became worse. The jailer came and I explained that I was a little sick”; “My arguments with the guards to get them further away from the toilet and bathroom were useless”

- **Rejecting obedience and power, and non-cooperation:**

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “He takes a pack of cigarettes and a lighter out of his pocket and puts them on the floor. He offers them to us before smoking. We decline”; “*Ana Leisa Calp* (I am not a dog). Yes, in capital letters. That is what you see and read as soon as you enter the cell. I hung that message on one of the many nails in the walls, right next to the word *hurriya* (freedom). I wrote it last night, as a way of letting off steam. It is my way of protesting”; “That’s when I told him that was it. That I had no intention of serving as propaganda for them”; “He ordered me to read it again so he could record it with a video camera. (...) I refused. I told him they could cut off my head because I wasn’t going to dance to his tune with his shitty propaganda” (p. 161); “He’s nothing more than an errand boy who has been given a position of power over a Westerner and is taking advantage of it”.
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “One day during the interrogations they insisted that I had to announce the dissolution of the Center in a written statement, which I refused to do”; “They started asking irrelevant and endless questions that I refused to answer”; “The doctor said they should give me an injection and I protested and refused”; “the security agents took my medical records away from the hospital. I asked the reason for this in the interrogations I had later”.

- **Writing as a relational action:**

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I write. That way I feel like I’m talking to someone”; “I like you keeping me company, sister”; “I miss you, sister”; “I love you, sister. Please take care of me!”; “I love you my brother”; “I like having you keep me company, my girl”.
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “I’m writing you after I’ve finished serving my 6-year sentence in prison”; “My dear friends, if you were me wouldn’t you use your pen...?”; “I am addressing you”; “I sincerely thank you all for listening to me”.

- **Being part of broader community/ movement/organization:**

- a. Antonio Pampliega: Beyond family relationships I did not find this strategy in Antonio Pampliega’s material.
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “ “We call upon all freedom fighters in the world for help”; “I have no intention of raising the issue of my personal rights, but I am more determined to raise the people’s demands”; “I became a spokesperson for the Defenders of Human Rights Center, participating in the growth of a broad community of associations in Iran and working to give shape to a genuine, robust and organized civil society”; In the women’s ward (...) At night, we held meetings to exchange the news we’d heard”; “My heart is with all of you who have taken to the streets over the years, you who have been arrested and tortured, who have lost loved ones”; “I want to also extend my gratitude to the following: the global media; journalists who carry our voices out into the world; feminists of the world who consider women’s rights to be a litmus test of democracy, peace and the quality of life, and push the world to always change for the better; human rights bodies that are a sanctuary for humanity; Amnesty International; civic communities; networks and organizations of social movements; ‘the people’, who are the ultimate authority; distinguished thinkers and politicians who consider human rights and peace a necessity for politics; artists who show the world a real picture of what’s happening in Iran, Afghanistan

and the Middle East; writers; PEN International; Nobel Peace laureates including Ms Shirin Ebadi; all my colleagues in Iranian NGOs; my cellmates over the long years in prison; the unnamed and unknown women who came onto the streets to protest, and in this way became the embodiment of resistance; the mothers seeking justice;

In the case of Narges Mohammadi, being an activist has been key to her own relational strategy, which includes building community, organization, and social movement with international impact both outside and inside prison. This has a notable influence on her nonviolent resistance practice and how she was also able to frame it.

In relation to the spatial/embodiment dimension, both used their own bodies and the given space as a nonviolent resistance tool to both confront and keep a sense of humanity. Their main strategies were:

1. Self-care and control of one's own body:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: "I look at myself in the brass plate I use for eating and as a mirror"; "I have stopped biting my nails"; "I can't wait for Friday, for God's sake! It's the only day they let me take a hot shower";
- b. Narges Mohammadi: "I woke up in the morning, had a little bread and tea for breakfast"; "Every other day in Ward 209, we were allowed out in the fresh air for fifteen to twenty minutes. Every other day we had a shower"

2. Walking:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: "I prefer to walk and walk, even if I'm not going anywhere"; "I can spend hours and hours walking from one end to the other without stopping";
- b. Narges Mohammadi: "The cell was only three steps in width and walking backwards and forwards made me dizzy, but I had to put up with it. When I sat for a long time, I felt the walls close in on me"

3. Everyday activities of normalization:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: "I make the bed".
- b. Narges Mohammadi: "I made a 'bed': a blanket underneath my body, a blanket under my head and a blanket pulled over me".

4. Use of embodied gestures to confront subordination and humanize:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: "I smile ironically"; "I reply with a smile"; "I gesture with my hand to invite him to sit down"; "I have started to lift my head and look them in the eyes"; "I started to lift my head and look them in the eye. I stood in front of Tarao and held his gaze".
- b. Narges Mohammadi: "I got up, turned around, and faced him"; "I stood up and started talking".

5. Keeping the use of the different sensory senses to keep connection with one's own body:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: "I caress the wooden pieces, smell them"; "I hear the birds chirping or the sound of rain. It's an incredible feeling!"; "The feeling of hot water running down my body".
- b. Narges Mohammadi: "My cell number was 24. The silence was deathly. The absence

of light, air, smell and sound seclude the prisoner from natural living conditions. (...) There was fresh air time every other day. I was allowed to walk in the yard for two minutes”

6. Singing and using one's voice:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “For the past few days, I've been singing Christmas carols”.
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “At night I sang songs and practised the lessons that I had learned in singing class before going to sleep”; “I started shouting”; “They had closed the doors while I was shouting so that my voice would not get out”.

7. Writing and reading:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “Writing gives me peace and helps me stay focused”; I read and reread everything I write over and over again”;
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “I'm writing you”; “I'm writing this letter to you from the Evin Prison” “When I looked at the walls, I found some writing: a note from Shiva Nazar Ahari congratulating herself on her birthday, and an article by Badralsadat Mofidi who had signed her name”

8. Self control of food and hunger strike:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I reach out my arm to find a piece of stale bread that I always save from dinner and eat it little by little”; “Today I was given a chocolate croissant, one of those industrial ones. I saved it for a special occasion”; “The other day, he brought me a tomato and some slices of mortadella for dinner. (...) the next morning I gave it back to him untouched and told him I didn't like it”; “I've decided to start eating again. Not for myself, but for my friends. I don't want anything to happen to them because of me”;
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “One day they gave me an orange. I ate only a few slices of the orange each day so that it would not run out too soon”. “We got tasteless rice and vegetables for lunch, which I refused to eat”

9. Human body contact:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I hugged him. Yes, Aleja, I hugged one of the bastards who kidnapped me. It just happened! I needed it! I needed a hug! (...) After months of feeling like a dog, this has given me hope again. It was just a hug. I know! (...) No, I don't have Stockholm syndrome. I know very well what position I'm in and that the person I hugged tonight or tomorrow may order my execution”.
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “I hugged her (a 12-year-old girl, also imprisoned) (...) The little girl was with me and at night she grabbed my hands hard because she was scared, and I kissed her head and cheeks and talked to her all the time”.

10. Redefining and managing spaces for care, resistance and intimacy:

- a. Antonio Pampliega: “I like going to the bathroom. I know it's silly, but... I really enjoy it!”
- b. Narges Mohammadi: “This morning I told the prison authorities that from now on I will spread my worship mat on the toilet floor which surely is cleaner than the perfumed altars tyrants pray under”.

In relation with the material dimension, throughout Antonio Pampliega's testimony, we find some key material elements that were fundamental on his resistance practice:

- **Paper and pen:** “I have a notebook and a pen, and I have started writing this diary”; “I can ask for as many notebooks as I want, but I won't be able to take them with me”; “I've torn out all the written pages and hidden them in my pockets”.
- **A tasbeeh:** “a kind of rosary used by Muslims for prayer. I have worn it around my neck on all my travels since 2012, when a rebel soldier exchanged it for one of my mother's bracelets. It has become my amulet”. “As I do every night before going to sleep or when I wake up, I kissed the wooden tasbeeh that hangs around my neck. I held it tightly and asked Mom and God to protect me”; “I clutched the tasbeeh tightly as I spoke to God”; “I usually spend half an hour counting the beads of my tasbeeh while thinking of all of you”.
- **Blanket:** “Lying under the blanket”; “I spend all day under the blanket”; “When I came back from the bathroom, there was a second blanket on the mattress! Damn, that's nice!”.
- **Chessboard:** “It occurs to me that I can make a chessboard”. Antonio was able to build a chessboard and this allowed him to develop an effective relational strategy with his kidnappers.
- **Reading material:** It included his own writings, some parts of the Koran and brief messages. “A letter from my friends! Yes! It's just a couple of lines, but reading them has been indescribable!”; “I would be able to read anything as long as it made time pass more quickly”.
- **Television:** This element only appeared at the beginning of his captivity when he was still with other two journalists and at the end of it, after almost eight months of isolation. At both moments it was a key material resource to keep his resistance.

In the case of Narges Mohammadi we find the following key materials:

- **Worship mat:** “I opened my worship mat and sat down”; I had to fold my worship mat and go to the toilet and spread it on the wet mosaic floor to continue my prayer”; “Last night after the lights were turned off, I opened my worship mat and sat down”
- **Blanket:** “I put a blanket under my head and spread a blanket under it, but the blanket badly hurts my face and body”; “I made a ‘bed’: a blanket underneath my body, a blanket under my head and a blanket pulled over me”
- **Writing material:** Narges Mohammad does not mention it specifically but all we know from her testimony is thanks to her work of trying to share her own words through letters.

6. The impact of spirituality and religion within the nonviolent resistance practices of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi

It has been said that “...the place of faith and spirituality in work to challenge violence, are often neglected in traditional social science measurements or analysis” (Berger, Butigan, Coode

and Dennis, 2020, p. 232). However, testimonies like the ones of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi offer specific references to spiritual and religious practices within their nonviolent resistance:

- **Antonio Pampliega:** “For the first time since I was kidnapped, I spoke to God. Or call him Allah, Buddha, Jesus... I hadn't done so in years. I had been angry with Him for a long time. I didn't understand how He could allow so many people to suffer because of wars. I have seen so many people die that I wondered where He was or why He didn't stop it”; “But here I am. Talking to Him. I must have been there for about twenty minutes. Talking. Not praying”; “Every day I ask God”; “I have asked God to protect him (another prisoner)”; “I hope you're well, Goyo (his brother). I pray for that every day”; “I pray every day that we'll be able to see each other sooner rather than later”; “I don't even write anymore, or sing, or do anything at all except talk to God or my mom”; “While I was doing it (cutting my veins), I talked to God. I asked Him for forgiveness for what I was doing; for not being as brave as He was when they nailed Him to the cross. He endured torture with stoicism. I am not that strong. I was probably disappointing Him. I didn't expect Him to understand me, but I hoped He could and would forgive me”; “Like every morning, I talk to God”; “I asked Him to please help me. It is the first time since I have been talking to Him that I have needed His help. I asked for myself and not for you, as I usually do”.
- **Narges Mohammadi:** “During the years in prison, when my cellmates go to sleep, I've had a habit of opening my worship mat and doing a short prayer”; “I had to fold my worship mat and go to the toilet and spread it on the wet mosaic floor to continue my prayer”; “This morning I told the prison authorities that from now on I will spread my worship mat on the toilet floor which surely is cleaner than the perfumed altars tyrants pray under”; “Once I was praying without wearing a headscarf and coat, and the prison guard opened the door. Although he saw me praying, he paused for a while and then called me for interrogation”; “I prayed I wouldn't tremble”; “I walked around it and prayed for Kiana (her daughter)”; “I was sitting on a chair. I was very ill. I saw that I was alone in the cell and they were gone. I stood up to pray without a mat and with an unbearable headache, and God witnessed these difficult moments of mine”; “I was sure the kids were going through hard times. I prayed to God that they would forget me. I asked that the word ‘mother’ not be pronounced by them”;

Despite the cultural, gender and situational differences, in both testimonies we find that the spiritual and religious dimension had a deep impact and was key in their nonviolent resistant practice in the face of dehumanization. It offered them practices of resistance at all levels: cognitive-behavioural, relational, spatial/embodiment and material.

In both cases the spiritual dimension helped them to develop a relational practice with transcendence and the divine. Spirituality was developed as a regular, persistent, embodied and spatially rooted practice where the action of praying seemed crucial. It offered them a cognitive framework to make meaning of the situation by also offering an eschatology, that is, a horizon of transcendence beyond so much suffering. It seems this helped them to find some kind of physical and psychological strength at very difficult moments, in order to persist and keep on

resisting. This seems to confirm, results obtained from studies on resilience (eg. Ungar, 2012) and from religious methods of coping with stress, trauma and crisis (e.g. Pargament & Raiya, 2007; Shaw, Joseph & Linley, 2005); in this case such coping methods are not applied after the experience, but during the terrible experience of dehumanization itself.

That spirituality was, at the same time, sustained with concrete material objects that helped to embody the practice, exemplified by Mohammadi's worship mat and Pampliega's tashib, confirms that the material dimension is also crucial for both spirituality and resistance.

In the case of Antonio Pampliega, later interviews after his kidnapping delve into his lived experience of transcendence and show the transformative impact of spirituality. Those interviews confirm the relational dimension as a key aspect: "For seven months, I was completely alone in a room, without speaking to anyone, and one day, I started talking to God. Every morning, I spoke to him before breakfast. For seven months, I never missed my appointment. He was my companion"; "I hadn't believed in God for a long time (...) but there He took care of me. I am convinced that there was someone with me there, I am sure of it, and I clung to that"; "Now, whenever I pass by a church, I go in and talk to Him".

Narges Mohammadi in her speech at the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony, delivered by her children since she was in prison, stated: "I am a woman prisoner who, in enduring deep and soul-crushing suffering resulting from the lack of freedom, equality, and democracy, has recognized the necessity of her existence and has found faith". Her words also point to the transformative impact of spirituality. If we pay attention to her reflection in *White Torture* - "The first time I blamed myself was in Ishratnagar's cells. I thought my faith and convictions weren't strong enough"- we can see that in Narges' testimony, faith, convictions, and the strength to resist are deeply connected. In this sense, beyond the notion of the divine or God, in her experience there seems to be a clear link between nonviolent resistance and the notion of going beyond the reality of torture, suffering, and dehumanization. This literally entails transcending, overcoming limits and leaving a lasting mark even beyond death: "Thoughts and dreams don't die. Belief in freedom and justice does not perish with imprisonment, torture or even death"; "for his ideals and his objectives, the human being is capable of accepting all suffering and despite it, arousing, experimenting, and spreading hope and passion to give meaning and brilliance to his life."

7. Initial conclusions, limitations and further research

A general conclusion about the role of spirituality and religion within nonviolent resistance in conditions of dehumanization is beyond the scope of this article; after all, two testimonies cannot produce theoretical saturation. However, what we can conclude is that spirituality is fundamental to understanding the nonviolent resistance experienced and practiced by our protagonists and, in that sense, it should be a horizon for further research in other lived experiences of nonviolent resistance. If we want to better understand nonviolent resistance, the spiritual and religious dimension cannot be left out.

The testimonies of Antonio Pampliega and Narges Mohammadi show that, in both cases, their spiritual or religious practices were regular and persistent. In their testimonies we find a practice that is developed on an everyday basis in spite of extreme conditions. This fact alone

shows the importance of spirituality and religion in relation to their nonviolent resistance. It means that the topic should not only be on the focus of those interested in spirituality or religion, but also of those researchers and practitioners interested in nonviolent resistance strategies and tools. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks relevant to both everyday religion and everyday resistance could be used to guide further research in that direction.

Through the testimonies analysed we have also seen that the specific practice of prayer does not only entail a practice of resistance to dehumanization, but also a constructive practice. Dehumanization is not simply an ideological phenomenon but an embodied and material process. Nonviolent resistance practices and their strategies for facing dehumanization also operate at multiple dimensions simultaneously. Effective nonviolent resistance requires both refusing participation in systems and dynamics that dehumanize, and actively constructing relationships, spaces and dynamics based on mutual dignity and recognition of shared humanity.

Learning from the situations in which extreme dehumanization takes place, and how individuals resist under those circumstances, is fundamental. Nonviolent resistance practices and strategies at that level can show us what is essential and what are the final frontiers of humanization and resistance to its annihilation. By investigating such practices, we might be able to find the key elements for a real and effective humanizing education, that is, the fundamental nonviolent resistance strategies and practices everyone should learn to face everyday forms of dehumanization (Haslam, 2016) and prevent them.

Resistance to dehumanization is multidimensional, subtle, and deeply human. Through cognitive, relational, embodied, and material practices, individuals reshape the terms of their existence within coercive environments. These practices reveal the limits of violent power and the enduring nonviolent resistance capacities of personhood even under the most severe circumstances. Understanding these forms of resistance has profound implications. Based on the testimonies analyzed, the role spirituality and religion play in that resistance seems crucial. Further empirical data and research using a bigger sample of personal testimonies will be able to offer more insights and general conclusions.

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