cypher
/'sɪfər/
The dictionary definition of cypher is ‘a secret or disguised way of writing’. In many ways, this is the essence of comics storytelling – the image, rather than the word, is a disguise for many words, that can convey meaning, emotion, and can re/frame an entire narrative.

Rap and hip hop culture has taken the word and ascribed a new meaning: ‘an informal gathering of rappers, beatboxers and/or breakdancers in a circle, in order to jam musically together.’ This, too, we find relevant to this project, in that we are bringing together artists and HRDs in freestyle collaboration of activism and art with the aim of informing, elevating and inspiring.

For us, this captures the spirit of why we are working in comics and guides how we facilitate the process of creative production.
Usually Cypher focuses on Human Rights Defenders as a single person or a group. With the recent protests in Turkey and Colombia, the uprising against the putsch in Myanmar and the ongoing resistance to occupation in Palestine, often unaffiliated people in large masses take to the streets to collectively defend their rights, freely express themselves and defend freedom. All have in common their resistance against autocratic and corrupt administrations that continue to undermine human rights. The next two issues of Cypher will put the focus on this social unrest instead of one specific Human Rights Defender.

The protest movements and resistance we have witnessed in these and other countries is the context in which human rights defenders work. They are often the first to document and share, the first to rush to help, and the first to be targeted by ‘security’ forces and other actors who aim to disrupt or break up protest movements.

May 2021
The fight at Bogazici University, one of Turkey’s most well-known institutions, is a struggle over free speech and the upholding of academic freedom. Erdogan’s appointment of former politician Melih Bulu, a party loyalist, as the head of the University, is a direct attempt to break the remaining academic autonomy, which is under attack since 2016, to ensure nationalist and religious instructors. Erdogan, by once again labeling the opposition as “terrorists” and with a heavily armed police presence on campus, continues the overall crackdown on lesbian, gay and trans people; on women rights and intellectuals.

With daily silent protests, students and professors at Bogazici University have refused to accept President Erdogan’s government meddling by the appointment of a new rector. It’s been 148 days so far.

Artist: Betül Yılmaz
Instagram
A STORY OF BOĞAZİÇİ RESISTANCE

What if they are not plainclothes police officers?!
With an announcement in an well known official newspaper, the President appointed Professor Doctor Melih Bulu as the Rector of Boğaziçi University.

05. Jän. 21

Students took up protesting in front of the south campus demanding the respect of the elections. Police violently tried to disperse the protesters.

B.U. Students and faculty members protested the handover ceremony by turning their backs to the rectorate building.

The door was broken, so they used handcuffs to fix the door, tehee, they found such a practical solution...

I'm a rector who listens to hard rock!

Metallica is my favorite... We'll get along well with the students, he he he
Students arranged and gifted Melih Bulu Metallica's song "For Whom the Bell Tolls".

In Boğaziçi, with a banner in their hands, who is struggling? Ba dum Tss, north to south now everywhere.

Students and teachers all together.

That news came in the middle of the night, a blow to democracy! Will it stop, the whole Bosphorus cries out. Get ready, this word is for you, now look and listen:

We don't give up. RESIGN!

We will not bow down to the trustees!
20 JAN 21

Two METU* students were detained in Ankara.

* Middle East Technical University

28 JAN 21

The students' tents were destroyed.

30 JANUARY 2021

Two of the 4 people who were detained on 30 January due to the exhibition in which the Kaaba photograph was exhibited were referred to the court with a request for arrest.

We detained 4 LGBT deviants.

Twitter restricted Süleyman Soylu’s account in which he posted hateful comments towards students, on the grounds that it contained hate content.
"We request the release of our students who were detained because of the Kaaba image. I'm signing..."

Have you ever seen these types before? I think it could be plainclothes police. What if they are not plainclothes police officers?!

They are pretty much following us, brother... I'm calling the police!

Come to the police station, then sigh... Now, police officers, two people are following us inside the school.... We have to go to the police station.

Maybe WE ARE POLICE OFFICERS TOO...
I think we'll drive you home guys.

No, we will file a complaint. We have to go to the police station!!

Well then, where is the closest one...?

Besiktas region.

Oh brother, we've been waiting for two hours, no one is paying attention, I'm going outside for a smoke.

SIT DOWN !!!
While driving towards the Vatan police headquarters in the police car, the song “My Heart’s Spirit is Wounded” from Suavi was on the radio and I couldn’t keep quiet.

"my heart'sssss spirit is wounded"

Spill it!
There are two people following us at school, we came to complain about them.

Did you sign for your friends who were detained for the Kaaba photo?

I know my rights!!!
You’ll see your rights soon!

Order a cup of tea for those guys,
so they speak well of us LOL

Haaaaaaa!!!

Guys, come on, follow me, we are going to do facial recognition for criminal identification.
We were separated from each other as we rose higher and higher like capsules launched into the space. We were disappearing in this universe without knowing who was right and who was wrong.

1 FEBRUARY 2021

Rude boy! Lower your eyes!

01. FEBRUARY 21
The police intervened harshly against the students who wanted to come to the protest. The chant “We won't look down” took its place among the slogans of the resistance.

MHP leader Devlet Bahçeli made a statement full of insults and conspiracy theories.

These are the pawns of the internal and external conspirators!
Bosphorus academics this time turned their backs to the rectorate building with banners that said "159".

Are you students, are you educators, or are you the TERRORISTS who attempted to raid and occupy the rector's chamber?

Cowards!!! If you dared you will say "PRESIDENT RESIGN"!

You are not Sultan

We are not your subjects

We are not!

Resign!

Photographer Ozan Acidere, who was detained while following the Boğaziçi University protests, is under house arrest.

B.U. students were abducted by people claiming to be police officers and put in unofficial cars. They were later released.
25. MAR. 21
4 students trying to cross from the south campus to the north campus were arbitrarily detained by the police for carrying the LGBTI flag. The number of detentions increased to 12.

05. 03. 21
Murat CAN DEMİR_ECİ, one of the Boğaziçi detainees, was released. The number of arrested students dropped to 8.

08. 03. 21
Boğaziçi University female academics held a vigil on March 8th.

07. MAR. 21
Melih Bulu appointed Vice Rector Professor Doctor Naci İnci, who works in the physics department, to the Institute of Social Sciences.

01. MAR. 21
262 theater actors supported B.U. resistance.

01. 04. 21
The police intervened harshly against the students who wanted to protest in Istanbul Kadıköy demanding the release of their imprisoned friends.

12. 04. 21
For the 71st time, Boğaziçi academics turned their backs on the rectorate and protested against the “trustee rector” Bulu.

19 May 2021
On the Commemoration of Atatürk, Youth and Sports Day, B.U. students continued to protest on the 134th day of the resistance by making a press statement after the curfew due to the pandemic.
Brazil

Brazil is one of the most lethal countries in the world for environmental activists and human rights defenders. Historically, the state of Pará has registered the highest rates of violence related to agrarian issues in Brazil; located in the Amazon region, it is the most violent state for land rights defenders. The episodes vary from evictions of rural workers, riverside communities or quilombolas; illegal mining, logging and occupation of indigenous areas; destruction of property and assets; physical attacks; arbitrary detention, criminalisation and killings.

This week marked four years since the Pau d’Arco massacre in which 10 rural workers were murdered and four months since the killing of Fernando dos Santos Araújo, a survivor and key witness of the Pau d’Arco massacre case.

On 24 May 2017, in what is now widely known as the Pau D’Arco massacre, 10 rural workers and land rights defenders associated with Liga dos Camponeses Pobres – LCP were murdered on the Santa Lúcia farm by police officers. On 26 January 2021, land rights defender Fernando dos Santos Araújo was killed in his house on the Santa Lúcia farm. He was a survivor and one of the key witnesses against the 17 police officers in the Pau d’Arco criminal case. While investigations into the Pau D’Arco massacre saw some progress, no charges have been brought against those who ordered the operation, while the accused police officers were allowed to wait for the trial in freedom and return to active duty, some of them in the region of Pau D’Arco city. In addition, human rights defender José Vargas Sobrinho Junior, who is the lawyer of Pau D’Arco victims, has been facing a criminal investigation against him, considered by those who accompany the case to be an attempt to prevent justice for the Pau D’Arco Massacre.

Impunity in these notorious cases, among others, fuels the targeted violence against land and environmental rights defenders in Pará. The threats and murders of human rights defenders in Pará are endemic to the business practices of mining, logging and cattle ranching in this region, and indeed across the country, because resource extraction and agribusiness are prioritised over the lives of rural populations, indigenous communities and quilombolas.

Artist: Mandy Barros
Instagram
Santa Lúcia Farm,
Pau D'Arco Municipality,
Pará State, Amazônia, Brazil.
24.05.2017.

Let's camp around here and wait for the others at dawn.

Jane Julia, group leader, 43 years old.
Tonho, her husband, 46 years old.

For him first, why?

Where's the couscous?
Does this stuff get ready or not?
IS IT THE POLICE?

DO YOU THINK THE POLICE WILL COME IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FOREST WHEN IT IS RAINING LIKE THIS?

ARE YOU CRAZY?

WHY ARE YOU RUNNING LIKE THAT? POLICE DON'T GO INTO THE WOODS.

JANE TAKES A BLACK CANVAS AND SUGGESTS:

LET'S UNROLL THIS CANVAS!
They did not realise that they were surrounded...

There were 8 officers from the Civil Police and 21 from the Military Police.

It's the fucking police!
Whoever runs, dies!

The incident became known as the Pau D'Arco Massacre. It was the biggest massacre of rural landless workers since the massacre of Eldorado dos Carajás in 1996.

Of the 25 Landless Rural Workers who were camped out, 10 were killed by the Military and Civil Police.

Bitch, lay down on the ground to die!

Please don't!

It was you who "we" wanted!

They all died hungry...
Fernando Araújo, 39, landless rural worker, gay man and human rights defender.

He survived under the body of his beloved, Bruno Gomes.

And despite the tragedy, he had the strength to tell this story and fight for land and for justice.

The bodies were removed by the police and were piled up in pickup trucks, thereby tampering with the crime scene.


Landowners and congressmen from Boêm organized a demonstration in defence of the police officers.
And they even had a barbecue for the police officers who took part in the massacre!

The Secretary of Public Security justified the legitimacy of the operation, claiming that the victims had shot first.

The relatives and friends of the victims did not even manage to hold a proper wake, as the bodies were only returned in an advanced state of putrefaction. In addition, the relatives faced intense public harassment.


Fernando became the main eyewitness and spokesperson for the survivors of the massacre. He never gave up fighting for justice, even with constant threats.

Vargas, the threats are increasing. I don't know what to do...

(...)

José Vargas, lawyer, human rights defender, was a friend of Jane's and worked on the case for land rights on the Santa Lúcia Farm.

We can meet for a chat.

Yes, please, let's meet up in the new year...
New Year's Day, 1 January 2021.

Fernando and Vargas never met. The police suddenly appeared at Vargas' house.

**MAY I ASK WHAT THE CHARGE IS?**

**YOU ARE CONSIDERED A SUSPECT IN THE DISAPPEARANCE OF A LOCAL LEADER IN THE CITY OF REDENÇÃO.**

Several human rights organisations have denounced the illegitimacy of this arrest. Because of the weakness of the evidence, Vargas was released to home detention on 25 January 2021.

Message on Fernando's phone from Vargas: "They are the criminals, but we are the ones who have lost our freedom. I'm leaving the city, Vargas. It's getting dangerous"

But there was no time. On 26 January 2021, Fernando was found dead in his house, shot and killed.
26.01. 2021 -
Fernando dos Santos Araújo,
main eyewitness of the massacre
is killed.

Another defender
included in the list of those
"marked for death"

Santa Lucia farm sale
and purchase process is closed:
200 families living in the camp are
threatened with eviction.

July, 2017 - Leader of the
Santa Lucia camp,
Rosenildo Pereira de Almeida,
is executed

May, 2018 - Lawyer who
accompanied convictions of Pau D'Arco Massacre
perpetrators is threatened

Another murder of a landless
rural worker:
Pará is the most violent state
in Brazil for those who defend their rights to the land

Those accused of taking part in the
Pau D'Arco Massacre return to work as
police officers in the region,
without restrictions.
THE EFFORT TO SILENCE THE VOICES OF SURVIVORS AND THOSE FIGHTING FOR JUSTICE FOR PAU D’ARCO REMAINS. TO DO THIS, THE MOST CRIMINAL MEANS ARE EMPLOYED.

NEVERTHELESS, THE STRUGGLE ALSO CONTINUES.

THESE VOICES UNITE AND HOLD ON TO THE RIGHT TO EXIST, AND TO LIVE IN A WORTHY WAY, AS THE DEEPEST ROOTS OF THIS LAND.

"WE HAVE ALREADY PAID FOR THIS LAND WITH OUR BLOOD"

THE IMPULSE TO WISH FOR A HAPPY ENDING MAKES US BELIEVE THAT FERNANDO AND HIS LOVE BRUNO GOMES ARE TOGETHER WAITING FOR JUSTICE, TOGETHER WITH JANE, TONHO AND SO MANY OTHERS WHO WERE LOST IN THIS STRUGGLE FOR THE LAND, WHICH WE WILL CONTINUE TO DEFEND.

THE STRUGGLE LIVES ON!