

Is a nonkilling society possible?

Glenn D. Paige's book challenges the widely held belief that killing is inescapable in human society, writes Paschal Eze

Challenging and overturning shallow but widely-held beliefs is anathema to the insouciant but a pleasure to the progressive. It is for those who believe knowledge is not static and resist the temptation to find solace in watertight compartments of concepts and ideals, thus enlarging the coast of knowledge. Professor emeritus Glenn D. Paige's book, *Nonkilling Global Political Science*, speaks of nothing less, more so with its glaring conceptual clarity and the cascade of buttressing historical, scientific and spiritual evidence of non-violence and nonkilling.

Running through the 239-page simple-to-understand book, said to be the first book in English language with "nonkilling" in its title, are two questions: Is a nonkilling society possible? Is a nonkilling global political science possible? That Paige's answer is a bold and beautiful YES represents a reasoned rejection of the widely held belief, even among leading members of the political science discipline, that killing is inescapable in a human society.

If a society free from killing and threat of killing is unthinkable, as many political scientists and politicians hold, that in itself is a problem which political scientists should not readily repudiate but squarely address. It is nothing but a concrete challenge to the creative capabilities of political scientists, and Paige's work is a quintessential pathfinder atlas.

He painstakingly paints a picture of a human race that is not in want of non-violent ideas, strategies and icons but desperately in want of the will to embrace those ideas and strategies and apply them with relevant modifications to bring about peace and sustainable development. It is a human society that yearns to be free from killing and threat of killing, a society that is

not a mental abstraction but a complete possibility.

In Paige's mindset, if the medical profession could be set free from the 17-centuries-long dominance of Galen's laudable pus theory, that pus formed around a wound was nature's way of restoring health, and embrace the Lister-inspired invention of antiseptic, then violence and killing-accepting politics and political science is bound to give way to violence and killing rejecting politics and political science.



It was Erma Bombeck, the late American humorist, who said: "Never go to a doctor whose office plants have died", and I agree. In relation to authors, I would say never read authors whose lives do not mirror their thesis. Professor Paige's non-violence and nonkilling campaigns are fruits of heartfelt repentance worthy of strong support because he had killed in the Korea War.

At the University of Hawaii where he taught from 1967 to 1992, Paige introduced undergraduate courses and graduate seminars on political leadership and non-violent political alternatives. Before then, he had taught at Princeton University (1961 to 1967) and Seoul National University (1959 to 1961), leaving behind good legacies.

He also founded the Honolulu-based Centre for Global Nonviolence, hoping that his soft voice of experience would speak louder than the thundering voice of arrogance. He therefore reminds me of Augustine of Hippo who had strongly promoted Manichaeism and scepticism but later turned out to be one of the strongest advocates of Christianity in his

day.

Paige accuses the media, especially television, of promoting violence, a charge the media would quickly renounce as totally oblivious of its role in a human society. Many see the world through the eyes of the media and many children, especially in the North, spend long hours each week on television and video games replete with violent images that not only stick with them but also seem to make them accept spiral violence and killing as pleasant human functions.

The culture of violence and lethality, according to Paige, is also evident in colloquial expressions and trade jargons. It is not uncommon for people on Wall Street to say "You buy when there's blood in the streets" or for Americans to talk about making a killing on the stock market or for the media to talk of "bombshell" when some people are sacked in a government department.

Acknowledging the platitude that history is the root of political science and political science the fruit of history, Paige establishes historically the futility of war, illuminating it as serving the pride of men at the expense of the sanctity of lives. He goes on to present non-violence and nonkilling in an evolutionary perspective, contending that past and present global experiences already mirror some prototypical components of a nonkilling society.

"In Egypt, the Nubia-born pharaoh, Shabaka (c.760BCE-c.695BCE) abolished the death penalty." Following that precedent, 73 of the world's 193 countries and territories had abolished the death penalty by 2000 and 27 countries were without standing armies by 2001. There are many political institutions like the Friendship Party of Britain and the Green Party of Germany, and spiritual institutions like Jains and Quakers that support non-violence and nonkilling.

The same is true of educational institutions like Deemed University in Tamil Nadu, India; and economic institutions like United Farm Workers of America and Sarvodaya Shramadana Sangamaya led by A.T. Ariyaratne. There are research institutions like the Albert Einstein Institution, Cambridge, and the Gandhian Institute, Varanasi, India; problem solving institutions like Amnesty International, Greenpeace International and War Resisters International.

There are also non-violent political struggles in many parts of the world like the Gandhian independence movement in India and the Kingian movement for racial civil rights in the US; and security institutions like the prison without armed guards in Finland, and Japanese citizens who are virtually unarmed.

Only a minority of human beings dead and alive have killed and despite incidents of violence and killing in the human society, the world population has been on the increase, rising from 2.5 billion in 1950 to 6.1 billion in 2000, with the projection for 2050 put at 8.9 billion.

As many as 22,500 American conscripts reportedly refused to kill in the Korean War and some 4,000 conscripted American men refused to kill in World War I. Besides, not all war implements have yielded to their users' wish. The story of *Vasa*, King Gustavus II of Sweden's warship, comes in handy. Commissioned in 1628 to be the mightiest and most splendid warship in the world, the ship sank as soon as it fired its first shot. What a great disappointment it must have been for the king who must have sunk huge sums of taxpayers' money into it! What an unwilling ally in the desecration of human sanctity the warship was!

But have world leaders learnt anything from it? Obviously, they haven't. Huge sums of money are still being expended on massive war machine while many people live in hunger and disease and the environment suffers more and more degradation partly because of the activities of the defence industry. Instructively, the number of modern day *Vasas* is increasing.

Author of *To Nonviolent Political Science: From Seasons of Violence* (1993), Paige is therefore leading a nonviolent revolution in political science in the areas of rejecting the rigidly held belief that killing is inescapable (normative), identifying factors favourable for nonkilling social transformation (factual), and understanding causes and processes of nonkilling change (theoretical).

He provides knowledge and skills for nonkilling transformation (educational and training), engaging nonkilling knowledge in practice (applied), transforming and creating organisations to facilitate nonkilling change (institutional), and creating and adapting methods of inquiry, analysis and action most suitable for nonkilling transformational tasks (methodological).

He holds that nonkilling is clearly and completely within the realm of possibility and is rooted in human experience and creative capabilities, thus making it a potent challenge to the dynamic discipline of political science, which is about human dignity, welfare and freedom. As he puts it, "Violence-assuming political science tends to discourage non-violent creativity. By dismissing it in professional training as deviantly 'utopian', 'idealistic' and 'unrealistic', political science intellect is



Glenn D. Paige (l) and his friends at the Centre for Global Nonviolence, Honolulu

Paige holds that nonkilling is clearly and completely within the realm of possibility and is rooted in human experience and creative capabilities

condemned to confinement in perpetual lethality. Nonkilling creativity offers promise of liberation."

Interestingly, one of the few scholars that have readily accepted that promise is a top Korean philosophy professor and political leader whose country, North Korea, currently in a nuclear stand-off with the US, belongs to George W. Bush's infamous "axis of evil". To him, a nonkilling society is simply and squarely possible and by so concurring, the unnamed professor places scales under the feet of the many, notably American political scientists, who trumpet it as unthinkable.

In their thinking, nonkilling as a political principle is immoral, a nonkilling society would be totalitarian and would be attacked by foreign aggressors, killing to save victims of aggression is just, killing criminals for punishment and deterrence is beneficial to society, lethal technologies will always exist and there is no example of a nonkilling society in human history.

This is not surprising for, according to Paige, "killing contributed to the origins, territorial expansion, national integration, and global power projection of the United States of America...the reality of American

state lethality is undeniable."

No doubt, no nation gives as much aid as America, but the belligerence that runs consistently through its veins and arteries, reduces the impact of such aid, and *Nonkilling Global Political Science* believes mutual understanding and cooperation are better and more effective than gunboat diplomacy, and advises readers to always prefer persuasion to coercion in any form.

It stands to reason that the book would have gained a wider appeal if it was titled *Nonkilling Global Politics* instead of *Nonkilling Global Political Science*. This is because while many are interested in politics, few see political science as a field that is struggling to survive in the face of the litany of "unthinkables" in human socio-political and economic organisation.

But Paige was writing mainly for political scientists and other social scientists, a number of whom are in dire need of liberation from the bondage of those "unthinkables".

Nonkilling Global Political Science hopes to help them attain that liberation, for it is far from being the final word on the subject of global nonkilling. It is a stimulant to wider and deeper exploration into nonkilling alternatives that take a high sense of appreciation of the sanctity of human lives to embrace.

It will help the discerning reader to look through the hopeful lens of a pregnant future that may give birth to transmogrified despots, armed robbers, soldiers and intoxicated macho men as well as wife-beaters and child-torturing parents who will look at the past and its stench of wasted lives with stupendous regrets.

Thus, it is not one of those "fast food" books written to fill a space on the bookshop shelf or to give the author a sense of belonging in the "publish or perish" academic world. Rather, *Nonkilling Global Political Science* is a book meticulously crafted to challenge humanity, not just political scientists in ivory towers, to turn the captivity of human lethality. Every paragraph is loaded with wisdom that earns and stimulates reflection, debate and action. Little wonder it has received favourable comments from Nobel laureates, leading peace activists and notable academics. The cover is beautiful, with a "Take up and read" appeal.

Nonkilling Global Political Science

by Glenn D. Paige, Published by Xlibris Corporation, USA, www.Xlibris.com, \$39.99 hb