

Nonkilling Arts Research Committee April 2014 letter

Friends,

Colonization and Violence are inter-connected, that was the theme I saw and read last month. I noted that in two powerful films: this year's Best Picture Oscar Winner '12 Years a Slave' and Mandela biopic, 'Long Walk to Freedom'. These films though set in different context and continents show evils of colonization and how persistent perseverance and integrity helped to overcome such adversity. More importantly, power of art can raise historical consciousness of viewers. I just read that Caribbean countries are seeking from former slave trading nations compensation for damages caused over the past two centuries. Unjust power relationships at some point in history tilt towards the victims as truth looks in our face, demanding reconciliation by former oppressors in form of forgiveness and respect. The arts continue to play an important role in bringing the hidden past from shadows to light.

March 8 was the International Women's Day which brought interesting suggestions and contributions from NKARC list about role of women, gender discrimination, displaced women and children etc,

In a well researched new book, "**Bombshell: Women and Terrorism**" by Mia Bloom (2011), the author covers conflicts in Northern Ireland, Palestine, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Indonesia, and Sri Lanka. She describes each conflict in historical context from colonial times. From Northern Ireland to Sri Lanka, women have been engaged in all manner of terrorist activities, from generating propaganda to blowing up targets. What drives women to participate in terrorist activities?

I am mentioning this work here because Mia Bloom moves beyond gender stereotypes to examine the conditions that really influence female violence, arguing that while women terrorists can be just as bloodthirsty as their male counterparts, their motivations tend to be more intricate and multilayered. She demonstrates that though some of these women volunteer as martyrs, many more have been coerced by physical threats or other means of social control. She talks about the role of women versus men as it varies in different countries. One size does not fit all. Nor single motivation. Perhaps, these women in comparison with anti-terrorist women in civil society nonviolent movements or in the national armies trained to kill the enemies which she does not discuss. Ultimately, whether one is female or male, killing to stop killing never succeeds.

[Prof. Mia Bloom is a member of CGNK's Nonkilling Security and International Relations Research Committee ([www.nonkilling.org](http://www.nonkilling.org)) and for link to her website, click on: <http://www.uml.edu/Research/CTSS/meet-our-faculty/Mia-Bloom.aspx>]

**Nonkilling Plays**

The current issue of periodical alt.theatre is devoted to Gender and Theatre. As you would recall this Canadian periodical spends its time on diversity and performance theory and practice from marginalized communities. Introducing the latest issue, its editor Nikki Shaffeeulah, a NKARC colleague, informs that the current alt issue was born from a desire to investigate in depth how gender and related issues - gendered performances, misogyny, sexism, homophobia, transphobia etc.- intersect with themes of colonization, wars and killings. [www.alt.theatre.com](http://www.alt.theatre.com). See two attachments from alt.theatre's: (i) the table of contents that may point to a specific article of your interest. (ii) one-pager Dispatch article by a female improv artist Amy Shostok who gently nudges the reader to understand the meaning of empowerment as a female actor: "The art of improvisation is a vessel for our ideas. If we are stifled or scared and cannot express ourselves, then we are literally "yes men" - and no one likes "yes men". But once we own our ideas, then we own the stage." Nikki has also been busy with a big project in Montreal where she produced and directed last week a community performing arts festival about gender-based violence. For a glimpse of it, click on: <http://www.undercurrenttheatre.com/p/escape-velocity.html>

A couple of weeks ago I saw a theatrical adaptation of the American classic, 'The Grapes of Wrath' by John Steinbeck (the play adaptation by Frank Galati) at the Asolo Repertory Theatre in Sarasota. The play set in the mid-west USA during the 1930's dustbowl is a story of displacement where a farmer's family from Oklahoma having lost their land to the bank have to leave along thousands of other families for California in search of work. There is a beautiful line in the play by Ma Joad who says - "Life is an honor", one just cannot quit. It reminded me of Brecht's anti-war play, Mother Courage. In Brecht's work, it is also the stoic Mother who bears onslaught of misery caused by power and greed from unending wars. In The Grapes of Wrath, it is Ma Joad who provides similar spine bucking her family to face up to challenging times but sure that change will come eventually. Below two quotes by Ma Joad:

"Women can change better'n a man," Ma said soothingly. "Woman got all her life in her arms. Man got it all in his head."

.....

"Man, he lives in jerks-baby born an' a man dies, an' that's a jerk- gets a farm and looses his farm, an' that's a jerk. Woman, its all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on. Woman looks at it like that. We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on-changin' a little, maybe, but goin' right o."

The book was banned in the 1940s in many parts of America because it exposed tyranny of an unfair economic system. Steinbeck defended his work saying that ultimately: "in every bit of honest writing in the world... there is a base theme. Try to understand men,[for] if you understand each other you will be kind to each other...Knowing a man well never leads to hate and nearly always leads to love."

### **Nonkilling Poetry**

At the core of humanity, when it comes to socialization and standing up for social injustice, mothers have always been in forefront, a key source of strength and inspiration. Our IFLAC (International Forum for the Literature and Culture of Peace) colleague, its poet-founder Ada

Aharoni, dedicates her following two poems on the central role of women, especially to Mothers on the International Women's Day. These are posted on IFLAC blog (<http://iflac.wordpress.com/>).

## **MOTHERS YOU KNOW**

*By Ada Aharoni*

*“We can best help you to prevent war not by repeating your words and following your methods but by finding new words and creating new methods.” –Virginia Woolf, Three Guineas*

Mothers you know, a long time ago  
have been wisely decreed  
by diverse human creeds and needs –  
goddesses of peace-in-the-home,  
lavishly giving life, love and healing  
through their wombs and life-blood

And they have been quite successful  
those cosy peace-in-the-home mothers,  
closely guarding us with their wisdom  
their tender words and watchful eyes.  
Surely safer than in a Nuclear War  
or in a new World War, or just a tiny war –  
so what about making mothers  
the guardians of peace on earth?  
Surely we wouldn't be so much worse?  
And they are so available those mothers -  
you can even find them in enemy land...

Look at the terrible mess they have  
made of our blue planet, mother,  
you are the only one who can save it now,  
the only one who really knows  
how to protect your fearful children  
weeping over their drugged ailing world,  
the only one who can heal it now, mother  
cradling it in your warm, loving arms

## **COSMIC WOMAN**

*By Ada Aharoni*

They tell us  
you were first born

in warm ocean womb  
caressed by sun fingers -  
daughter perhaps  
of the stormy love  
of two unruly atoms  
maddened by the solitude  
of eternal rounds  
in the steppes of times

And your children,  
lively descendants  
of their stellar nucleus mother  
dropped from the sky  
in depths of ocean belly,  
born of green and brown seaweed  
and the laughs and cries  
of a blue bacteria

Cosmic woman,  
when you chose earth  
as home for your vast roots  
at the beginning  
of the great human family,  
it was for life -  
not for death.  
Cosmic woman,  
you, who were born of the nucleus,  
from deadly nuclear mushroom  
Save your children  
**SAVE YOUR CHILDREN.**

#### Poetry in April

April is National Poetry Month in the United States. The Nuclear Age Peace Foundation's annual poetry contest is now accepting entries. The Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Awards are an annual series of awards to encourage poets to explore and illuminate positive visions of peace and the human spirit. The Poetry Awards include three age categories: Adult, Youth 13-18, and Youth 12 & Under. For more information about the contest, including a full list of rules and instruction on how to enter, click on: [http://www.wagingpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/04\\_2014.pdf](http://www.wagingpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/04_2014.pdf)

The deadline for entries is July 1.

### **Nonkilling Art:**

I met renowned Indian activist artist Arpana Caur many years ago when she visited Ottawa for her exhibition of paintings giving catharsis to scenes of social injustice, brutality and killings surrounding her. Katherine Myers after interviewing Caur about her paintings, writes: "Her paintings are illuminated by images of spiritual masters and adepts, such as The Buddha and Guru Nanak, yogis and yoginis, embroiders of time and weavers of water. Heroines, nayikas such Sohni's tragic tale of immeasurable love, serves as an example of one for "takes the plunge" in life. Like the cycle of day and night threatened by the recurrent hovering scissors in her work, Arpana returns again and again to her most enduring themes, but does not sever her connections, trees of life and desire continue to flourish."

For more on Arpana Caur's work and her views on her art, click on:

<http://regardingindia.com/portfolio/arpana-caur/>

Let me end this letter with another of my favourite poems of Ada Aharoni,

### **TAKE US TO FREE SOWETO**

*By Ada Aharoni*

*Dedicated to the African Black Poets I met in Johannesburg, at the American Embassy  
(Johannesburg, May, 1977)*

Lady from Tel-Aviv, lady from Tel-Aviv,  
now that we've read our poems together,  
now that we've wept together  
with you and Nadine Gordimer,  
please take us back to Soweto,  
with our poems "abalonga goddam"  
full of cries of crippled children  
full of spears of anger  
wrapped in black blankets of pain –  
please take us back to Soweto –  
we've missed the fatal midnight train  
and we will go to jail!

If I only could,  
I would have taken you  
not only to Soweto –  
but to where the leaves'  
free rustle roams,  
where poems grow ripe  
before they grow hoarse,

where missing the midnight train  
does not send you to jail

But I'm not even  
from Tel-Aviv,  
I'm only from Haifa –  
and have no car  
to take you to  
the leaves' free rustle,  
or to Soweto  
my brother poets,  
and my heart burns for you  
like a black torch in me.

Thank you Ada, Nikki, and others whose works are mentioned in this letter.

Keep up the good work and please continue sending your contributions and comments.

Nonkilling Regards,

Bill

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"Nonkilling is THE measure of human progress"