

NonKilling Arts Research Committee: August 2014 Letter

I had thought that due to summer holidays July would be a slow month. Instead it turned out to be much busier because of the unprecedented killings in Gaza, Israel, and Ukraine conflicts. Although in this letter we don't directly deal with world issues as there are many other forums where they are debated and contested, however, creative work of NKARC community could not be but affected of what happens around. I share with you some thoughtful insights on the subject of war etc. below that you kindly sent. As we have always maintained, killing is just more than war as nonkilling is just more than peace. This month's letter is more of a reflection than commentary.

What's Nonkilling Art?

The following questions were posed in my July letter: "Will new forms of nonkilling art be created by its members or others? Do you think nonkilling art can or will be any different from customary peace art? If no, why not? If yes, is it possible to predict in what its characteristics might be?"

This brought interesting feedback and further elaboration on the definition of nonkilling art. NKARC colleague Kathrin Winkler, an art teacher-trainer sent an insightful response:

"The questions you forwarded are intriguing and evoke possibilities and impossibilities. As a person who is convinced of the transformative potential and inclusive space that 'art' gifts to us, I would love to be part of this discussion. Here are a few thoughts.

1. Why not explore these questions with art groups? Use the language of self expression to illuminate the complexity.

There is a wonderful group of artists in the Ottawa Valley who might be a great connection. The group is Ottawa Valley Creative Arts Open Studio.

2. It might be helpful to look at the process and the product. Were materials used that harmed life in any form? I often think of the chemicals I used in the photography dark room when I taught at high school. What impacts did they have? Then asking oneself where was this art work displayed and the associations an institute may have with 'killing' or 'non-killing.' Who was part of the process? Who was excluded?

3. What discussions can we have about art that demands reflection on unthinkable acts of killing, such as the Rwanda Genocide? Here is a site of art work created by high school students to raise awareness. Is it Nonkilling Art? Is any reference to killing and non killing one of the criteria of exclusion? What about the witness art of the residential school system? A friend of mine initiated a powerful project on this topic -- Project of Heart.

4. Collecting samples of 'customary peace art' would be a starting point of discussion. Documenting the impact of art in the peace movement - and or non-killing movement might be helpful. Photographs and the impact of media on killing and nonkilling is also a rich turf to explore. Lives have been saved through art in many ways.

I think it would be most interesting to have a 'call for non-killing' art that includes an explanation by the artists regarding their understanding of what this means.

So, Bill, you can see this has got me thinking. Thank you - let me know if I can help in any way.

All the best

Kathrin

Thank you, Kathrin. Look forward to your future work on this.

I hope Kathrin's statement would inspire us all in our respective art explorations: the "projects of heart" a commitment to nonkilling, its characteristics and how different it is from customary peace art?

Gradually, I am learning to understand about importance of commitment or at least openness to the idea of nonkilling before starting a creative project as this impacts one's work of art accordingly. I personally tried it on a short fiction piece with two different endings. In the first case, I realized killing in the story was being done to effect the protagonists' sentimental emotion to achieve dramatic effect to get the reader hooked than any genuine nonkilling concern; while in the second with an explicit nonkilling ending, the story turned out to have a more profound transformative impact on the protagonist in the story, and through that on the reader. CGNK site is full of books and other sources to provide us an enhanced understanding about this nonkilling peace paradigm.

More below on the same in a comment from Leo Tolstoy on "real art" and "real science".

Another NKARC friend, Koozma Tarasoff, on the last month's letter wrote:

"Thanks for the latest production of your newsletter on Nonkilling Arts Research Committee July 2014.

Below are several comments:

1. On the war issue, we need to add:

- a.. War is a racket.
- b.. War is slavery of our times.
- c.. War is a crime against humanity.
- d.. War is bloody murder.

2. The Vimeo rough cut by Stuart Cryer on Canada's Parliament Hill is a good beginning for a strong video of military might at the Peace Tower. A disturbing Government-sponsored event.

3. The Change Agents film is a Canadian-made film that made us think about some of environmental problems of the day. See comments by Mony Dojeiji in urging us to transform problems into personal commitments and actions. The inner spirit is important!

In search of a nonkilling solution,
Koozma J. Tarasoff"

Commemoration of two "Great Wars"

Koozma also brought to attention an excellent overview article by Peter van den Dungen, World Beyond War from the Transcend media service: "100 Years of War-100 Years of Peace and the Peace Movement, 1914-2014". The overview article analyses the goals and objectives of current commemorations of the two World Wars from the past Century, the UK plans to spend 50 million pounds (Canada has allocated \$83 million)

<https://www.transcend.org/tms/2014/07/100-years-of-war-100-years-of-peace-and-the-peace-movement-1914-2014/>

Peter's article talks about the issues the centenary should focus on and to the way in which the peace movement can contribute to the anniversary events which will be spreading out over the coming four years. The author writes that these numerous events not only in Europe but around the world offer an opportunity to the anti-war and peace movement to publicize and advance its

agenda. Have you thought about doing something in your neighbourhood to challenge these plans about commemorative celebrations of war(s)?

We have to continue with our exploration about understanding nonkilling arts. As we agreed in one of our first letters that unlike violence nonkilling creativity has infinite possibilities. I will give below through sampling of poems that made me cry out - NO MORE KILLING. This is not mere abhorrence, but authenticity of the work which makes one act on doing one's small part towards saving life of someone without further bloodshed. The power of a photograph amidst the Israel bombing of Gaza to counter violence to flow of rockets from Hamas, there was a picture in the tv news footage when an interviewer asks a Gaza man carrying his dead child in his arms what he thought about Hamas rockets etc, the bewildered father replies pointing to his dead child, "Why her? Was she Hamas?!"

Real Art and Real Science

Glenn Paige sent a reflection from renowned Russian novelist and philosopher Leo Tolstoy from his book, "A Calendar of Wisdom. Daily Thoughts to Nourish the Soul Written and Selected from the World's Sacred Texts" Translated from the Russian by Peter Sekirin. First Time in English. New York: Scribner, 1997.

Tolstoy considered the book to be his most important contribution to humanity, the work of his life's last years." Tolstoy wrote in 1908, "I hope that the readers of this book may experience the same benevolent and elevating feeling which I, experienced when working on its creation, and which I experience again and again, when I re-read it every day." [Each day in the book has a theme. There are several quotes on each page from classical and modern writers as well as various religions. He drew upon several languages. Tolstoy often adds original thoughts on the theme of the day]

On authentic science and art, Tolstoy writes:

"There are two very clear indications of real science and real art; the first inner sign is that a scholar or an artist works not for profit, but for sacrifice, for his [her] calling; the second, outer sign is that his [her] works are understandable to all people. Real science studies and makes accessible that knowledge which people at that period of history think important and real art transfers this truth from the domain of knowledge to the domain of feelings."

There is a beautiful clarity in Tolstoy's words providing a measure for our creative work as an artist.

Nonkilling Poetry

A further articulation of the same theme I found in the Introduction to a new book of poetry edited by NKARC colleague David Krieger, entitled "Summer Grasses", published by Nuclear Age Foundation. David in his thoughtful introduction to the book writes: "The task of a poet is to find the truth and, if possible, to express it with aesthetic grace. But truth comes first. This means that poets have a major responsibility to cut through surface layers of understanding and dig for deeper truths. This is particularly so when poets choose to focus on war with all its chaos and confusion. The subject of war is clouded by myth and misunderstanding. Poets are often able to break through to the realities of war more effectively than politicians or generals. They can see its viciousness and dehumanization for what they are. Their views are not encumbered by the propaganda that goes hand-in-hand with war. " One of the poems from this profound collections, see below:

Felix Pollak

(1909–1987)

Speaking: The Hero

I did not want to go.

They inducted me.

I did not want to die.

They called me yellow.

I tried to run away.

They courtmartialed me.

I did not shoot.

They said I had no guts.

I cried in pain.

They carried me to safety.

In safety I died.

They blew taps over me.

They crossed out my name

And buried me under a cross.

They made a speech in my home town.

I was unable to call them liars.

They said I gave my life.

I had struggled to keep it.

They said I set an example

I had tried to run.

They said they were proud of me.

I had been ashamed of them.

They said my mother should be proud.

My mother cried.

I wanted to live.

They called me a coward.

I died a coward.

They called me a hero.

'Summer Grasses' is an Anthology of War Poetry, mainly great anti-war poems. The collection covers World War I, World War II and the Vietnam War, and continues to 21st century wars waged by the United States in Iraq and Afghanistan. David writes: I believe that this poetry on the theme of war goes directly to the heart of peace. It has reason and truth and beauty, but it also has more than these qualities; it has the power to awaken us from our slumber of complacency. These poems are gateways to a more decent, nonkilling future. In this way, poetry has become essential for civilization and human survival.

Copies of Summer Grasses are available from NAPF Peace Store at www.wagingpeace.org.

For more information on NAPF poetry awards and resulting collections, two collections of the winning poems, The Poetry of Peace (2012) and Never Enough Flowers: The Poetry of Peace II (2012). NAPF will hold again its Barbara Mandigo Kelly Peace Poetry Awards in 2015. The first place poem in the adult category has a prize of \$1,000. For more information click on: <http://www.peacecontests.org/poetry/>

Two timely Nonkilling poems received last week are from IFLAC colleague Ada Aharoni who is much closer than anyone of us witnessing the killing fields of Gaza and Sderot, Israel:

STOP THE RIVER OF BLOOD!

Stop the river of blood in Gaza and Sderot

Before it becomes an ocean!

These two small round ripples

In the middle of the flowing

River of blood

Are the cute smiles

Of the two one year -old babies

Mona from Gaza

And Galia from Sderot -

As they smiled to their mothers

Who lovingly laid them to sleep

Last night

Before

They were shot!

Hurry, in the name of humanity

Stop the flowing river of blood

In Gaza and Sderot
With a strong dam
Of humanity
Before it becomes
An ocean of blood!
Ada Aharoni

NO TALKING
By Ada Aharoni

The politicians decided
No talking with the enemy
Beat them because they attack us
Shed their blood and that of their leaders
But most of all -
NO TALKING!

In the meantime, in Israel
And in the heart of Gaza
Blood flows and legs are blown away
And little eight-year-old Twito from Sderot
And eight-year-old Mohamed from Gaza
Will not play football anymore
But -
NO TALKING!

How can we convince violent leaders
To talk and not to shoot?
I watch from the side
At the tragic hen and egg situation
And weep together with all the
Innocent people from both sides,

But still, first and foremost –

NO TALKING!

A comment received on Ada's poem: "No Talking is exactly root! No killing by all is exactly goal! Your art contributes to understanding both!"

For more on Ada Aharoni and IFLAC website: www.iflac.wordpress.com

Thank you for sharing your powerful poems. I am glad over past few days voices from the civil society have begun to emerge in defence of innocent civilians caught in the crossfire. How sad that these are not voices of those who despite their superior culture, morality, education and faith are unable to come up with 'nonkilling' solutions.

Nonkilling Art and Sarajevo Forum:

NKARC novelist and poet Rifet Bahtijaragic Bach <rbach@shaw.ca> who is founder of the Nonkilling Balkans <http://nonkillingbalkans.org/>, he sent an interesting poster by Canadian artist Bill Hoopes. Rifet is organizing, The *Exploratory Forum Nonkilling Balkans 2014* in Sarajevo in cooperation with the Center for Global Nonkilling and the University of Sarajevo, 28th-29th August, 2014.

Rifet felt that the attached Bill Hoopes' painting captured the anguish of humanity caught between unending wars (despite the promise of the World War I to be the "last of the wars"). Sarajevo location of the forum is of importance as WWI was triggered by an act of assassination which took place in this city in 1914. Does Bill Hoopes painting reflect Nonkilling spirit that Nonkilling Balkans is seeking to project? Friend Rifet would welcome your comment and if you are an artist, submission of your Nonkilling inspiration in the form of a painting or poster for similar NonKilling event(s).

Good art elevates us to experience unity of us all and with our planet. It's a difficult one but we have seen if not politics at least once in a while art has succeeded in providing that transformative moment. As Tolstoy asks us does that piece of art bring in you "a benevolent and elevating feeling when working on its creation, and which I experience again and again..."

Nonkilling Radio

I recently came across on the website of Metta Center on Nonviolence, an interesting radio show "approved by the US Dept of Arts and Culture" (!). The Peace Paradigm Radio deals with topics such as: "Is art something only for the elites of society or does it play a more transformative role? Does art have a re-humanizing effect on society, and if so, should that matter as we think about our national priorities in spending? Who are we as human beings? This and other minor thought experiments."

To enjoy Metta Center's radio show and more on this program, click on: <http://mettacenter.org/ppr/us-department-arts-culture/>

Founder of the Metta Center of Nonviolence Education, Michael Nagler is Professor Emeritus of Classics and Comparative Literature at UC Berkeley, where he has taught since 1966.

In deep gratitude to NKARC friends who kindly contributed to this letter: Kathrin Winkler, Koozma Tarasoff, Glenn Paige, David Krieger, Ada Aharoni, Peter Van den Dungen (through Transcend Media Service), Michael Nagler, Rifet Bahtijaragic and Bill Hoopes.

Also there are many others from NKARC community who following the continuing civilian massacre in Gaza wrote some profound op-eds, commentary and petitions. Thanks for copying me on your bold and courageous nonkilling work. Thank you Bob Koehler, Mony Dojeji, Richard Preston, Rahul Varma, Jeremy Seligson, and Sumeet Grover.

Concluding Reflection

A Nonkilling Meditation

Human Beings are moral, they have both ego and conscience. We know when it's wrong and when it's right.

When we are wrong and are unable to speak our heart out, cover our acts with empty words, we then become deeply wounded humans. Our heads hung in shame as we are unable to answer to our conscience.

All this is felt when we become witness to killings of innocent:

- when a child is burnt alive by bystanders
- when a child is a victim of stabbing or gun killing
- when a child commits suicide
- when a child is killed as part of a collateral damage
- when a child's life is taken by a sniper or a soldier
- when in the last Century 200 million were killed, mostly innocent mothers and children

No amount of warfare, violence, counter violence justifies killing as means of resolving conflict or achieving victory. Violence is preventable like any disease - not eliminated but preventable.

Work towards ending killing and its prevention is a hard slog for which all world leaders were chosen by their people to find solutions. Ought they not be ashamed, apologize and repent on their inability to tackle this basic human right TO LIVE?

Do they seek forgiveness when in private for what they or their predecessors have done, and resolve: NO MORE KILLING.

Sustainability of our fragile planet earth can only be accomplished by Nonkilling.

Resurrect as nonkilling knowledge is being discovered and made freely available (www.nonkilling.org) to assist leaders and people of the world to end this era of killing.

We keep walking...

In Nonkilling Peace,
Bill

Bill (Balwant) Bhaneja
Coordinator
Nonkilling Arts Research Committee
Center for Global Nonkilling(CGNK)

www.nonkilling.org

"Nonkilling is THE measure of human progress"

"We were created to give life, not to take it. Our freedom begins when we live in accord with this purpose. The gun will never make us free. The gun makes us a slave. A slave of fear going around and around in a spiral of death, becoming a more and more like the thing that we hate." - James Loney, Author of Captivity

"What difference does it make to the dead, the orphans, and the homeless, whether the mad destruction is wrought under the name of totalitarianism or the holy name of liberty and democracy? " - Mahatma Gandhi

"Frightened civilians are not objects that can be remotely controlled to react rationally in a chaotic moment, to run exactly in the right direction, exactly at the right time - in many instances they don't know where to go. Children easily slip away, and in the heat of the battle, tragedies happen. Spokespersons shrug their shoulders and say, "it is not our fault, they use the civilians as shields" or, "they occupy us and kill our people, we have the right to defend ourselves." So the attacks and killings go on, and no one is big enough to talk to the other." - Jeremy Solevig, IFLAC

"Canada believes that Israel has every right to defend itself, by itself, from such belligerent acts of terrorism" (Foreign Minister John Baird, July 8).

True, and accepted by most of the international community, with a caveat: with rights come responsibilities.

A central responsibility, in fact a legal obligation of any belligerent in conflict, is to distinguish between civilians and legitimate military targets. Indiscriminate military action is prohibited, as is the deliberate targeting of civilians (Hamas's indiscriminate rocketing of Israel communities is prima facie a war crime). International law acknowledges that civilian casualties might occur when military targets are attacked, but it requires warring parties to minimize injury and death among civilians. Complexity gives no dispensation from this principle, nor does the unlawful behaviour of the other side. " - Paul Heinbecker, Canada's former ambassador to the United Nations. Currently with Laurier University and the Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo, Ont.