

NK Arts Research Committee Letter: March 2014

Dear friends,

Our this month's Nonkilling Arts Letter covers:

1. Theatre and Plays: Inspirations from "Meeting with the Enemy"
2. Poem of Moral Injury: Veterans Day from a Vietnam War veteran
3. Music: Argentinian Playlist of Freedom
4. Global Peace Monuments and Nonkilling Ethic
5. Arts for Peace: Cultural bridge
6. Cinema: Voices of Pain and Peace

1. Nonkilling Theatre and Plays

In view of ongoing conversation on what makes a good nonkilling play, two new plays resulting from western experience in Afghan war are worth noting. The plays "This is War" by Canadian Tanya Moscovitch and "The Two Worlds of Charlie F" by British Owen Sheers are told by Afghan war veterans returning home with PTSD.

These plays about soldiering based on trauma causing experiences as told to journalists and interviewers, are about the pressures under which a soldier works in today's combats fighting the invisible guerrilla enemy. As Moscovitch found one soldier telling her, "you make the call you think you can live with." In an interview, the lead member of the Two Worlds of Charlie F, Charlie Cassidy, a wounded war veteran turned actor, when asked if there was a political agenda behind the play - whether the soldier should be fighting this foreign war or that foreign war, his response was;

"Soldiers do what they do because of the rest of the population can't do that or don't want to. You go to get the job done. If someone doesn't support the war, they need to have a talk with their politician. But if someone doesn't support their soldier, then they really need to have a word with themselves. It's as simple as that..."

I don't think anyone would have problem with that statement. The question comes to my mind is why this play has been written and what makes it a great play? Does a soldier's story about his or her trauma needs to be told? Certainly, we need a place to learn and talk about costs of such involvement from a soldier's vantage point. But the two plays miss out in many other important aspects of what makes war happen? Well-meaning intentions behind these plays telling us about challenges of modern warfare do not question their necessity or futility. In fact it seems while seeking recognition of a soldier's courage, they assume that once repaired these trauma victims would return to armed conflict and be ready to kill or to be killed for their country. That's a limited view of trauma and its impact. One of the problems seems to be their writers avoidance of confronting the fundamental question of life and death beyond oneself. If these plays miss out on such consciousness raising transformative element, there is not much likelihood of these works to be remembered as Bertolt Brecht's Mother Courage or Arthur Miller's All My Sons and A View from the Bridge. Those great plays came from

the playwrights' passion and convictions of finding truth about sources which force nations into sending soldiers to wars and making us raise questions about righteousness and necessity of soldiers being sent to battle zones and killing of innocent civilians on both sides.

I was profoundly touched by the following report published in the recent Truth Out op ed. It is about two Vietnam war veterans from the opposite sides talking about Vietnam War. A moving truthful exchange between the two soldiers once enemies. Capt. Camilo Mac Bica of the United States Army (now an university professor) and Le Hoai Trung, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's ambassador to the United Nations. Their conversation given below has potential for a good nonkilling play. Prof. Capt. Mac Bica writes:

"Though little was said that evening that was new and not already painfully clear to many who fought in Vietnam or who read honest accounts of the war written by commentators like Howard Zinn, Stanley Karnow or Oliver Stone, meeting the enemy face-to-face and hearing the experiences of someone personally victimized by the war brought home the criminality of my "service to country," the extent of my culpability, and the insidiousness of the mythology of nobility and heroism. Such dialogue, though certainly disconcerting, is crucial for healing and to achieve the reconciliation of which the ambassador spoke. We must end our denial, rationalization and mythologizing of war. We must face our demons head-on and confront the realities of what we did and what we became. Such dialogue is crucial as well to raise the awareness and outrage of the American public regarding our continuing criminal aggression in Iraq , Afghanistan , Pakistan , Somalia , Yemen , etc. Perhaps most importantly, such dialogue between prospective enemies lessens the likelihood of war by making apparent the humanity of the other. With that realization, like Paul Baumer, Erich Maria Remarque's protagonist in his seminal novel All Quiet on the Western Front, I felt the need to seek my "enemy's" forgiveness."

See the full text below.

This ain't no Valentine Card.....

Meeting With the Enemy: Vietnam From a Vietnamese Perspective

Wednesday, 12 February 2014

By Camillo Mac Bica <<http://truth-out.org/author/itemlist/user/45097>>

Truthout <<http://truth-out.org/>> | Op-Ed

Vietnam war, 1972. (Photo: <a href= <http://www.truth-out.org/images/images_2014_02/2014.2.11.Bica.Main.jpg> by Raymond Depardon via manhhai / Flickr)" width="640" height="421">Vietnam war, 1972. (Photo by Raymond Depardon via manhhai / Flickr

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Recently, I was invited by Professor Susan Schnall to address her class at New York University studying what is referred to as the "Vietnam War" by Americans and the "American War" by the Vietnamese (I guess nomenclature is a matter of perspective). Also to speak was Le Hoai Trung, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam's ambassador to the United Nations. My credentials warranting the invitation were, I guess, twofold. First, by an accident of nature, I was born during a time of paranoia and frenzy in a nation that feared Communist ideology as an existential threat and saw Vietnam as the domino that must at all cost remain standing. Second, being a child of immigrants dutifully instilled with an appreciation and love of our new homeland, I embraced a patriotism as exemplified by John Wayne, heeded John F. Kennedy's admonition to ask not what my country can do for me, and decided that what I could do for my country was to enlist in the military and fight the Communist hordes there in Vietnam rather than here on the streets of San Francisco.

He was born in the city of Hanoi and came of age at a time when American aircraft routinely sought to free the Vietnamese people from Communist domination by bombing what was then termed " North Vietnam " back into the Stone Age. The ambassador's credentials, as I saw it, were also twofold. First, by a similar accident of nature, he was born in the city of Hanoi and came of age at a time when American aircraft routinely sought to free the Vietnamese people from Communist domination by bombing what was then termed " North Vietnam " back into the Stone Age. Secondly, despite having endured the horror of America 's unsuccessful attempts at liberation and its aftermath of economic sanctions and embargo, the ambassador completed his Ph.D. law degree and assumed a variety of political positions within the government of a unified Vietnam .

Though, as a member of Veterans For Peace and a philosophy professor with a focus on war and ethics, I have often discussed my impressions and insights about war and its aftermath in the classroom, at conferences and with civic groups, I had never had such discussions with someone who had been my "enemy." Consequently, I must admit I was a bit apprehensive. Intellectually, I realized that this apprehension was irrational, that the ambassador was no longer my enemy - if he had ever been - and that the war is some 40 years gone. But in that other aspect of my being, the psyche, the emotions, whatever, the war endures and the passage of time is irrelevant. Though the ambassador is a trained diplomat and has spent many years negotiating with representatives of the government that had destroyed his country, killed and injured his countrymen, perhaps even members of his family, I wondered whether, at some level, he has ever entertained similar concerns and apprehensions when speaking to someone who had been his enemy.

The discussion began with a PowerPoint presentation by Professor Schnall that highlighted the devastation inflicted upon the people and the countryside of Vietnam by the American military machine of which, of course, I was a part. She spoke of the use of

napalm and the defoliant Agent Orange - an issue of particular concern to Professor Schnall, a national board member of the Vietnam Agent [<http://www.vn-agentorange.org/>](http://www.vn-agentorange.org/) Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign. She concluded her presentation by showing heart-wrenching images of birth defects suffered by children born of parents exposed to dioxin.

A Feeling of Personal Responsibility

Though clearly it was not her intent to prompt such emotions, as I approached the lectern for my presentation, I felt embarrassed and personally responsible for the death, destruction, injuries and deformities suffered by the Vietnamese people, particularly the children - many of whom were born long after the war had ended. I began by introducing myself as having participated in the Vietnam War, during which I was charged with the responsibility of preserving the lives of some 30 young Marines, average age about 19, a task inevitably entailing the injury and deaths of other human beings who happened not to be Americans but Vietnamese. I felt embarrassed and personally responsible for the death, destruction, injuries and deformities suffered by the Vietnamese people, particularly the children - many of whom were born long after the war had ended.

The ambassador began by describing growing up in an environment of death and destruction, of living in constant anticipation and fear of B52 attacks. He spoke of the devastating physical, psychological and emotional injuries suffered by his countrymen and women, so many of them civilians. I spoke of experiencing such "Arc Light" bombing strikes from a safe distance, feeling the ground tremble as though from an earthquake, and being comforted by a realization that no enemy could possibly survive such carnage. More than 7 million tons of bombs were dropped on Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, more than twice the amount dropped on Europe and Asia during World War II.

The ambassador commented on how the people came to prefer overcast and rainy weather to the beautiful sun-drenched days of their tropical paradise because inclement weather grounded the bombers and provided the people a brief respite from the unrelenting attacks. I described the apprehension I felt during the rainy monsoon season when close air support and medical evacuation became difficult if not impossible.

Contrasting Images of "the Enemy"

The ambassador spoke of how during his military training he was taught not to hate the enemy but to differentiate the warrior from the government that sent him to kill and to die. He learned to understand the awfulness of war and to prefer peace. Though perhaps counterintuitive from an American military perspective, I found the ambassador's comments quite credible. I spoke of being conditioned to kill in boot camp, to regard the enemy as the embodiment of evil, as non or subhuman, of never referring to the Vietnamese as persons, but dehumanizing them as "gooks," "slants" and

"dinks." I remembered embracing the illusion, the mythology of war as honorable, noble and necessary and going to Vietnam not to kill human beings but, perhaps naively, to exorcise demons and check the spread of the Communist menace.

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As he spoke, the ambassador's admiration and respect for his country's political and military leadership and for the Vietnamese people was apparent. He noted their perseverance and willingness to suffer great personal hardships during the long struggle for national liberation and in enduring the profound economic challenges imposed by severe American sanctions following the war. I spoke of becoming profoundly disillusioned as the mythology I had embraced crumbled and the immorality, futility and waste of the war quickly became apparent. I remembered the disappointment and resentment I felt, and perhaps still feel, as I realized that I had been misled, lied to by my political and military leaders and abandoned by my fellow Americans, a deception and indifference that ultimately cost the lives and well-being of many of my comrades both during the war and afterwards.

The ambassador spoke of the tragic long-term disabling effects of Agent Orange spraying on both the ecology of Vietnam and on the Vietnamese people. He expressed his gratitude to the many American veterans, such as Professor Schnall, who are assisting his government to provide medical and rehabilitative assistance to the tens of thousands still suffering its debilitating effects. I spoke of having no idea, at the time, of the toxicity of dioxin and recalled bathing in bomb craters filled with Agent Orange-tainted rain water. I spoke about how we came to regard the Vietnamese landscape as hostile, of waging war against nature, preferring an Agent Orange-defoliated moonscape to the lush, tropical jungle that provided concealment for ambushes and snipers. Between 1962 and 1971, as part of its chemical warfare program Operation Ranch Hand, the United States sprayed over 20 million gallons of Agent Orange, Pink, Blue and Purple over Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos - destroying some 5 million acres of forest and 500,000 acres of crops. According to the Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4.8 million Vietnamese people were exposed to Agent [Orange](http://www.theglobeandmail.com/incoming/last-ghost-of-the-vietnam-war/article1057457/?page=all), resulting in 400,000 people being killed or maimed, and 500,000 children born with birth defects.

I spoke of my own government's years of denial regarding the connection between Agent Orange exposure - dioxin poisoning - and the many serious illnesses suffered not only by the Vietnamese but by US servicemen and women. I remembered my grief, anger and frustration at the loss of friends and former comrades who succumbed to Agent Orange-related illnesses.

Vietnamese Have Put the War Behind Them, but Have Americans?

Finally, the ambassador spoke of how, in his view, the vast majority of Vietnamese have put the war behind them and reconciled both with former American servicemen and with fellow countrymen and women who had supported and/or fought for the American-installed government in the South. In closing, he expressed concern whether Americans have also achieved such closure regarding the war, whether we have come to grips with the experience and moved on with our lives.

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I found the ambassador's final question disconcerting as it required that I look into places I was not prepared to go. In response, I spoke about how, in my own case, I have accepted personal responsibility for my actions. How, despite my efforts at atonement and retribution through activism - working for peace, speaking out and educating the public, particularly young people, about the realities of the Vietnam War in particular, and the nature of war in general - my participation in the war remains a source of profound moral pain, i.e., of remorse, guilt, and shame. I spoke of my frustration with my country's unwillingness, even today, to admit the truth about its involvement in Vietnam and its continuing effort to alter history - to portray the Vietnam War as noble and necessary and we who fought it heroic. I spoke of my disappointment with many of my fellow veterans, who should know better but choose instead to embrace the mythology - thinking, hoping that accepting the illusion of noble cause and personal heroism would somehow placate the demons that still haunt them today. It is clear, therefore, that unlike our Vietnamese counterparts, Americans have yet to achieve reconciliation. Nor have we as a people realized an inner (or outer) peace, as we cannot heal from illusion or go on with our lives until we face the reality of what we did, or what was done in our names.

Though little was said that evening that was new and not already painfully clear to many who fought in Vietnam or who read honest accounts of the war written by commentators like Howard Zinn, Stanley Karnow or Oliver Stone, meeting the enemy face-to-face and hearing the experiences of someone personally victimized by the war brought home the criminality of my "service to country," the extent of my culpability, and the insidiousness of the mythology of nobility and heroism. Such dialogue, though certainly disconcerting, is crucial for healing and to achieve the reconciliation of which the ambassador spoke. We must end our denial, rationalization and mythologizing of war. We must face our demons head-on and confront the realities of what we did and what we became. Such dialogue is crucial as well to raise the awareness and outrage of the American public regarding our continuing criminal aggression in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Somalia, Yemen, etc. Perhaps most importantly, such dialogue between prospective enemies lessens the likelihood of war by making apparent the humanity of the other. With that realization, like Paul Baumer, Erich Maria Remarque's protagonist in his seminal novel *All Quiet on the Western Front*, I felt the need to seek my "enemy's" forgiveness.

Comrade, I did not want to kill you ... But you were only an idea to me before, an abstraction that lived in my mind and called forth its appropriate response. It was that abstraction I stabbed. But now for the first time, I see you are a man like me ... Now I see your face and our fellowship. Forgive me, comrade. We always see it too late. Why do they never tell us that you are poor devils like us, that your mothers are just as anxious as ours, and that we have the same fear of death, and the same dying and the same agony. Forgive me comrade: how could you be my enemy.

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2. NONKILLING POETRY:

Doug Rawlings <rawlings@maine.edu> found the moral injury Mac speaks above in the TruthOut piece as very real. As a veteran of Vietnam war, see below his following poem:

VETERANS DAY

Why this particular memory
 that always comes for me
 from a world
 a half a world away
 With its distinctive rhythms
 its telling rhymes
 so different from the silences
 of the incandescent tamaracks
 of the oaks and maples blackened
 in this soft November rain
 If not to join me
 in a ghoulish adagio
 with gutted deer swinging in dooryards
 with pumpkin skulls glistening in village streets
 If not to remind me
 we are never that far away from
 a time
 a place
 where no one
 is entirely sane

Doug Rawlings
 Veterans For Peace

Art is not a mirror held up to reality but a hammer with which to shape it. -- Bertolt Brecht

I refuse to live in a country like this, and I'm not leaving. -- Michael Moore

In a dark time, the eye begins to see -- Theodore Roethke

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3. NONKILLING MUSIC:

BBC Worldservice on its website has an excellent radio-feature, "Argentinian playlist for Freedom" telling inspiring story of political role of music (BBC program well-told 23 min.). Click on: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p01s1qts> .

Natalio Cosoy of BBC Mundo, reports on his 30-something generation growing up in the shadow of the violence of military rule in the 1970s and 1980s. He talks to musicians, friends and the half-brothers whose activist parents were killed by the military. It's a story of survival and the music that helped them and the country forge a new Argentine identity.

Wonder what a Global Playlist for Nonkilling could be like? Our colleague Anis Hamadeh's nonkilling musical creative initiative, "The Flood" deserves a mention for taking on the challenge. See CGNK website (www.nonkilling.org) for more on Hamadeh's unique musical production.

4. GLOBAL PEACE MONUMENTS and NONKILLING ETHIC:

(<geovisual@comcast.net>):

The world has relatively few monuments devoted to pacifism and nonviolence but not specifically about nonkilling.

The book "Monumental Beauty: Peace Monuments and Museums Around the World" by Edward W. Lollis illustrates 416 peace monuments and museums (see: http://www.peacepartnersintl.net/monumental_beauty.htm and <http://peace.maripo.com>) One page (http://peace.maripo.com/p_co.htm) is devoted to "Monuments Related to Pacifists, Conscientious Objectors & War Resisters." The Nobel Peace Prize display at the Memorial pour la Paix in Caen, France. There are similar displays at the Dayton International Peace Museum in Ohio, at the Liberty Museum in Philadelphia, and at the new Nobel Peace Park in Eugene, Oregon.

The commemorations of the 4+ years of slaughter that was World War I provides a good opportunity to raise some relevant questions about how can we through these peace monuments spread the notion of a Nonkilling Ethic, for example, (i) Would /could Nonkilling Peace Monuments be different from existing ones? (ii) Is it possible that the concept of Nonkilling could be introduced respectfully into the thinking of people and cultures that honor the peace/war monuments? That is, could the world peace monuments and memorials be "coopted" to help build a strong Global Nonkilling Ethic to be shared by all people in the world who have suffered from wars?

5. NONKILLING ARTS FOR PEACE: CULTURAL BRIDGES

COVA and Center for People's Foreign Policy in South Asia in collaboration with Tehrik e Niswan, South Asia Partnership and PiLER of Pakistan with support from a large number of organisations, institutions and business groups in India organised 3 performances of Kathak, Oddisi and Bharatnatyam on poetry of Indian and Pakistani and some plays with social themes.

The objective of this exchange program was to break the typical stereotypes that Indians in general have about Pakistanis and Pakistanis have about India and Indians. The program had a big success in achieving this objective of promoting better understanding extensively captured by the media of all languages!!

COVA (Confederation of Voluntary Associations), is a national network of voluntary organisations working for communal harmony in India and peace in South Asia. One of the very few organisations that has operations from grassroots initiatives to international policy interventions, COVA is engaged in training 15,000 children, youth and women in the city of Hyderabad (India) for responsible citizenship and effective social activism; collaborations with over 1000 organisations at the national level to promote communal harmony in India and secure governance from grassroots; advocacy with the state and national governments for pro-poor and sustainable policies; networking with organisations across South Asia to facilitate better understanding and peace in the region through increased people to people contacts.

See below the report on the program presented across India which drew in Delhi reported crowds of 3500 at a function at Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Some selections:

18th February 2014

City culture wows Pak group

But Visa Process Should Be Made Simpler,They Feel

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Hyderabad: A group of artistes from Pakistan, who enthralled denizens with their dance and drama performances over the last few days, said they are in awe of Hyderabad's cosmopolitan culture.

The culture of food and shopping in Hyderabad is exciting. The people are warm and ever helpful, says 26-year-old Usman Zia, an actor, whose role in the critically acclaimed *Zinda Bhaag*, has received wide attention.

Artistes of the Pakistani group *Tehrik-e-Niswan*, who were on their first visit to the city, performed at three venues over the weekend in addition to holding discussions on cross-border cultural issues and the use of art as a form of expression.

We have never been made to feel alien. At home in Pakistan, Indian cinema and television shows are very popular, continued Zia, adding that he would love to see Pakistani cinemas on Indian television in an act of reciprocation.

The performances mainly included Hindustani classical dance forms like Bharatanatyam, Odissi and Kathak, besides Pakistani folk *Sindhi Jhoomar*.

The delegations leader Sheema Kermani, who studied dance in India in the 1980s, spoke about popularity of the classical dance forms in Pakistan. There are many people who still practise pure forms of classical dance and yet there are innovating it, she said, adding that unlike other dance forms, classical dance is seen with a stigma.

Classical form of dance is seen as irreligious and alien by the fundamentalists. When earlier the opposition was the state, today it could be anybody, she said, while speaking of instances where suicide bombers blew up venues in the past when performances considered heretic by fundamentalists were held.

However that has never deterred Kermani or her group from performing.

We have performed in areas where bomb blasts are frequent to educate the masses about the essence of non-violence. We get accustomed to fear and overcome it, says 24-year old dance and theatre artist Sehrish Batti, who has been with Kermani's group for seven years now.

Besides cultural exchange and right to expression, the artistes also have a take on foreign policy. Speaking about visa hurdles that artistes on both sides face, they call for a simplification of process.

Even now I face the same hurdles that I did earlier in getting a visa to come to India, though I have studied dance here besides performing several times. That my objectives are clear, is lost on the power that be, says Kermani.

Zia opines that emotions and politics should not be mixed.No terrorist takes a visa to enter.So terrorism should not be used as an alibi by governments to make the process difficult for the rightminded people, he said.

The group will be performing in Delhi for two days before heading to Pakistan.Their performances are being organized in collaboration with Confederation of Voluntary Associations (COVA).

File photo of founder of Tehrik-e-Niswan Sheema Kermani (second from right) with artistes from her group

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6. Nonkilling Cinema: Voices of Pain and Peace:

Nonkilling journalist Bob Koehler in his weekly column about a festival of documentary films in Chicago writes: "Peace isn't the avoidance of difficult topics but their thorough, unstinting examination, not with cynicism and despair but with the certainty that salvation is mixed into the pain. All we have to do is find it." For more, click on:

<http://commonwonders.com/peace/voices-of-pain-and-peace/>