

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

**Volume 10, Issue 3**  
**November 2017**

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

Editor:

Dr. Erik Juergensmeyer

## Table of Contents

### ARTICLES

*Creating a Collage of Many Peaces*

Maureen Flaherty, Ellen Sikorski, Nicholas Mckenzie, Jennifer Bell, Mary Anne Clarke, Eduardo Rodrigues da Costa, Alexandra Kuznetsova, Benjamin Maiangwa, Brett Mallon, Murlata Sani, Wei Zhou.....4

*Peace Studies/Literary Studies: An Experiment in Teaching and Learning*

Janet Gray, Matthew Fuhrmeister, and Robyn Gold.....15

*The Trilakṣaṇa (“Three Marks of Existence”) and Transformative Conflict Resolution*

Saul Tobias.....29

*The Evolution Of The Christian Motif Of Satan: A Cautionary Tale As To Why Evil Cannot Be Defeated By Destroying The Enemy*

Alan McGill.....46

### CREATIVE FICTION

*Voices of Vietnam, in War and Peace: An Oral History Play*

Patrick Chura.....64

### COMMENTARY

*Bathroom Lessons*

Melanie R. Nilsson.....94

**WORKSHOP SUMMARY**

*Workshop Summary: Peace Research and (De)Coloniality, Vienna, December 2016*

Philipp Lottholz.....105

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## Creating a Collage of Many Peaces

Authors: Maureen Flaherty, Ellen Sikorski, Nicholas Mckenzie, Jennifer Bell, Mary Anne Clarke, Eduardo Rodrigues da Costa, Alexandra Kuznetsova, Benjamin Maiangwa, Brett Mallon, Murlata Sani, Wei Zhou

Title: Assistant Professor and Graduate Students

Affiliation: University of Manitoba

Location: Winnipeg, MB, Canada

E-mail: Maureen.Flaherty@umanitoba.ca

**Keywords:** Peace education, Visioning, Participatory Research

---

### Abstract

This article describes a research project that explored what “peace” meant to a group of graduate students in a Peace and Conflict Studies course. The article describes the lead up to this particular discussion, the rationale for the discussion, including supporting theoretical underpinnings, and the actual process and findings within the discussion. Although course participants from three previous semesters are not included as authors, we wish to acknowledge and thank them for their influence in choosing to conduct this research and, in particular, Sandra Krahn for her early literature search.

### CREATING A COLLAGE OF MANY PEACES

In winter of 2013, nine men and women from seven different countries sat around a large brown glass-covered table in a boardroom that was too warm even for the frigid winter afternoon outside. The course title was, *Violence Prevention and Intervention* and the course outline stated, “Violence is pervasive in the worlds in which we live, and still, we know little about its true etiologies, what sustains it, and how to live in a world that is free of all types of violence” (Flaherty, 2013/2014/2015). In the process of the semester-long class, nine of us – professor included -- found ourselves weaving in and out of our relationships with, and understandings of violence. In the midst of our work we returned time and again, as if to a lifeline, to talk of peace -- positive, lasting peace. Our own experiences were diverse; with this diversity, our responses to the readings varied, often passionately, usually respectfully, challenging each other. While the first two thirds

of the course focused on defining violence and trying to understand ways of analyzing and confronting it, the texts we read closer to the end of the semester, *Alliances* (Davis, 2010), and *Positive Peace* (Fitz-Gibbon, 2010) stimulated discussion of positive and practical peacebuilding with diverse communities. In their chapter of the book *Alliances*, Smith and Skerritt (2010) spoke about a shared vision – how to share it and what to do with it: be bold, build power – nurture respect, use diversity, play smart, & be positive.

One grey, cold winter day near the end of the first semester she taught this course, Maureen [instructor] commented on the expressions of hopelessness displayed on many participants' faces. Her thoughts flashed to people with whom she had worked who experienced oppression, trauma, and abuse, many internalizing the oppression; a majority having great difficulty imagining or picturing the world in which they would like to live. Instead, there was more commonly an overwhelming focus on what they did not want, and that picture took precedence in the mind's eye with the accompanying feelings residing in the heart and soul (see for example Flaherty, 2012). In her years of counselling with people who experienced trauma, she had often called upon the visioning tools recommended by Solution Focused therapists such as Barry Duncan and Scott Miller (2000) and Yvonne Dolan (1991). These therapists commonly asked clients to suspend immediate concerns about how they might reach a goal and rather think past that and try to imagine and describe "in loving detail" the world in which they wanted to live, including intricate imaginings of what they themselves "will" be doing in that world.

On this bleak day, trying to shift the focus and mood, [instructor] asked class participants to take a leap and share their thoughts on what "peace" meant to each one. That is, what was their picture of peace? People carefully listened to each other taking turns around the large table. One group member said peace meant not being awakened at night by gunshots. This evoked a sharp intake of breath by another who had never witnessed armed conflict. We soon found that each person had a different picture, including descriptions of objects, movements, colours and sounds-- or lack of sounds, dependent upon our life experiences. We wondered out loud at the variety in our pictures; however, we went no further with the discussion because class had gone overtime, and the semester was almost over. We simply finished the class with a "check out" – an exercise where participants reflect openly on any responses to the class and how they are feeling prior to leaving.

One year later on another cold winter day a similar conversation took place – the same course with different people, different pictures. This time, the discussion was planned as part of the course, and we talked of documenting the pictures of peace, but as time went by the busy lives of graduate students took priority and other more immediate work took precedence.

Yet another year passed and, at last, in winter 2015, ten more participants and the same instructor decided to be more intentional about our discussion of pictures of peace. Anticipating a conversation to come at the end of the term, we submitted an application to our university's research ethics board, gaining approval to record, track, and more publicly share our discussion.

As a group, we originate from Africa, China, New Zealand, North America, South America, and Russia. We are from different cultures, some high-context and some low-context (Augsburger, 1992). We were raised in cities, villages, and rural areas. Coming from a variety of socio-economic and ethnic/racial backgrounds, we all have the privileges of higher education and to some extent, travel. Through our semester of discussions and explorations, we realized that we all have different experiences and pictures and we wondered if and how our pictures might fit together.

This article seeks to share our pictures – our collage of many peaces – drawn together by contributions from the thoughts of twenty-six people over a span of three years. While this article’s focus is on the people who participated in our audiotaped class, we thank all of the participants, named and not named, who took part in our joint classes -- people who have all added to our growing understanding of ‘peace’. While some of our paths have crossed over the years, we have never all sat in the same room together.

Many definitions and descriptions of different kinds/types of violence are present in the peace and conflict studies literature including interpersonal (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, & Lozano, 2002), structural (Galtung, 1996), cultural (ibid, 1990), direct and indirect (ibid, 1969). In hopeful response, this article collects the thoughts of graduate seminar participants in Peace and Conflict Studies, as we reflect upon our personal, culturally, and spiritually varied understandings of “what is peace”. We come to this discussion from a place of needing to look beyond violence to find solutions in building a common peace.

In this article, we first share some of the more commonly known understandings of ‘peace’ found in conversation and in the literature in our field. While more than one hundred sixty articles were reviewed, too many to cite, we offer a sampling below. Then we move into our own pictures, realizing that our individual life experiences greatly shape the vision or picture each of us has. We conclude our article with some thoughts about the importance and power of taking the time to think about and share visions of peace.

### **Definitions of Peace**

Peace is often referred to by what it is not, or the opposite of something: violent conflict, injustice, war. Oliver Richmond (2001) provides a rich review of the development of the field of conflict analysis to peacebuilding in his work, *Genealogy of Peacemaking: the Creation and Recreation of Order*. Others write about peace as the avoidance or absence of something: conflict, arms proliferation (United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs (2001), aggression, crisis (International Crisis Group, 2016), war, though Diana Jenkins (2014) believes that this approach is becoming less prevalent. Scholars such as Johan Galtung (1996) write openly about peace being more than the absence of war or conflict. Peace is also at times referred to in it’s relationship to conflict, and the ways that conflict is changed: resolving conflict, conflict resolution, conflict management (Kriesberg, 2007), negotiation (Ury & Fisher, 1981), mediation (Umbreit, 1995), reconciliation, (Bar-Siman-Tov, 2004) conflict transformation (Lederach, 1995), and/or social transformation (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2015). And there are individuals or groups of individuals who will claim the imperative of defining, proprietorially constructing, or acknowledging what peace should look like and which folks of “good will” should inherit or inhabit this peace (Deitrich & Sutzl, 1997). However, can an imposed peace be true peace?

In conversation, we often hear of peace in reference to a spiritual or emotional state: equilibrium, calm, good will, freedom, harmony, enlightened living, balance, safety, well-being. Some of the traits of peace are: responsibility, equality, possibility, order, plenty, pacifism, unity, rationality, welfare. Peace is also described as global security which is linked to respect for international borders, usually relying on military to maintain this security (e.g. Global Security.org), or, more locally, national security which speaks to the safety of a nation’s borders and the protection of those living in a nation (e.g. Government of Canada), usually from outside threats, but sometimes from “insecurity” or threats within (Rothkopf, 2016). More recently, peace has been related to

human security (Sjoberg, 2010; Reardon & Hans, 2010), focusing on the dignity and rights of the individual, while acknowledging that individuals exist and develop within relationships. Human relationships exemplifying peace involve “deep” cooperation, compromise, dialogue, integration, fruitful collaboration, an ethos of respect and interdependence, mutual good will, tolerance, and respect for others. There are also cultures of peace (Boulding, 2000) where people act upon a shared vision (Lederach, 1997; Portilla, 2003; Smith & Skerritt, 2010). This idea of a shared vision is where the conversation highlighted in this article begins.

### **The Power of Sharing Visions**

Although the definition of peace is ambiguous, engaging different participants in an open discussion around their personal definitions and visions has been an important step in understanding peace as multi-dimensional and cross-cultural. Prior to peace studies, the power of imagining and visualizing has been used in a variety of circumstances, including trauma therapy, as noted earlier. Often visualizing the future is an integral part of seeking solutions to trauma and hardship. In therapy, the survivor is provided a safe space in which they are asked to imagine their future and describe it in as much detail as they can picture, including where they will be, what they will be doing and with whom (Dolan, 1991, 2000; Duncan & Miller, 2000). The use of fantasy and imagination is a way for a survivor to gain comfort, control, and engage on some level with a new identity in a safe world. This is done not to dismiss or negate traumatic experiences, but rather encouragement to consider a brighter, very possible future without worry about the process of “getting there”. The process allows for them to shed feelings of helplessness, revisit old dreams, and act towards achieving these imaginings (Herman 1997, 202). Beginning with a vision, survivors are able to then consider concrete steps towards operationalizing that tomorrow.

In the realm of international peace building, Fred Polak and Elise Boulding have also noted the importance of visioning and sharing such images. After World War II, Boulding attended a conference on disarmament and asked the attending experts a simple question, "If we really had disarmament, how would the world function?" However, no one had a clear answer for her, and at that moment she came to realize that even though people are actively working to build peace, they are often doing so without knowing what peace should look like (Boulding, 2003). Dutch historian and sociologist, Fred Polak, developed a method for helping people imagine the future as an empowerment tool that could propel them forward towards a positive world (Polak, 1973). To some extent Polak's words early in his book offer a warning – “The rise and fall of images of the future precedes or accompanies the rise and fall of cultures” (Polak, 1973, 19). Is it not then critical that images of the future are inclusive of a variety of cultures?

It is crucial for visions of peace to be shared by a variety of different actors, for the world is a shared space made up of people and other beings living in different climates, cultures, and traditions. Many societies who have tried to create a different (and in their leaders' eyes, a better) future, have felt the need to begin with a “blank canvas” from which, in the words of Mao Zedong, “the most beautiful characters can be written on it, the most beautiful pictures painted” (Power, 2002, 88). However, the attempt to use a blank canvas in order to create “beautiful pictures” has led to some of the most extreme forms of violence, such as that experienced in China and Cambodia during the last century. Any peaceful vision for the future cannot begin with notions of a *tabula rasa* as its starting point. This only leads to extreme violence against those who will not fit into an ideal “picture” of the future society, as envisioned by the leadership. Moreover, one cannot remove elements of the past in order to move forward with a singular vision for a peaceful

society – this only leads to bitterness, hostility, and a longing for revenge, which can create the conditions for future, anticipatory, or pre-emptive violence of the most extreme kind (Straus, 2015).

Similar to Boulding's realization mentioned earlier, we found that different groups of Peace and Conflict students have very different ideas of what peace means, and we considered the potential for creating a mosaic conception of peace based on these different understandings. The purpose of the exercise was not to create one "true definition" of peace; rather we saw the strengths of incorporating many different voices in order to gain a deeper understanding of what peace looks like to different individuals in our shared world. Although each student entered the Peace and Conflict Studies program having stated their intention to work towards building peace, each statement or picture was different, and many initial statements were voiced as building towards an absence of something; for example, stopping civil war in a home country, ending erosion of the environment, or eliminating gender violence, rather than describing what will be existing instead. Polak (1973) argued that societies who have a positive image of the future are inspired to act in the present to achieve these desires while those societies who hold negative images or images of absence, will simply wither away. By openly discussing our different concepts and visions of peace the participants are empowered by their own thinking and inspired to take action in the present to bring about those goals.

Furthermore, by having a vision that is multidimensional, voice is given to those who may have traditionally been silenced (Sterri, 2014). In order to have a vision where all voices are incorporated, it is necessary for these voices to be heard and given equal authority in helping to guide the vision (Davis, 2010; Lederach, 1997). Again, our group of participants who shared their visions for peace ranged in age, gender, ethnicity etc., and came from a multitude of cultures, countries and continents. Along with our variety, we shared the privilege of attending graduate school and being able, to some extent, travel. It appeared that prior to our research no one had shared their visions of peace in such a public way. This very brief point highlights that, while it is important to envision a peaceful future, this vision must include space for a multicultural, and multi-textured collage.

## **Methodology**

This study took a qualitative approach, using spoken narrative shared in a focus group designed in the form of a "Talking Circle" to share personal pictures of peace. Throughout the three-month term of this graduate course, participants came to know each other through shared reading and discussion of theoretical and practical approaches to violence prevention and intervention, creating an increasingly safe venue for sharing personal stories. As a research tool, the narrative research approach allows participants to draw upon their biographical, professional, and academic experience, sharing their own unique knowledge to the extent that they feel comfortable (Creswell, 2013).

Our physical location at the time of our research also influenced our choice of methods. The conversation took place at the University of Manitoba and their website reminds us that both "campuses are located on original lands of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and on the homeland of the Metis Nation" (University of Manitoba, 2017). A tool often used in indigenous communities, the Talking Circle seemed the most inclusive and power-flattening way of conducting this discussion or exploration. Simmons, Bayha, Beaulieu, Gladu, & Manseau (2012) provide a good description of an Aboriginal Talking Circle.

A distinguishing feature of the Talking Circle is not only the seating arrangement, but also the reality that participants, including the facilitator, offer no direct response to an individual's comments other than non-verbal, quiet acceptance of what he or she has said. The individual who is the facilitator begins by outlining the guidelines for the circle as having previously been agreed upon by prospective participants. In turn, a talking stick is passed from member to member. When one holds the stick, the individual may speak without interruption. Upon finishing, the individual passes the stick along so others have their own turn to share their thoughts. The Circle conversation usually continues until people have run out of things to say, or an agreed-upon time has been reached. The talking stick, or in this case a rock from our area, represents respect for the stories and thoughts of each participant in the circle. Here, the instructor acted as facilitator, with all participants having signed consent forms prior to participating in this discussion.

### **Pictures of Peace**

In the following section we touch upon the main themes emerging from our discussion about pictures of peace. These thoughts were shared in our Talking Circle, which we audio-taped and then transcribed. We have highlighted the main themes encountered. Maybe these words and thoughts will resonate with the reader. Without comparing our thoughts to anyone else's work, we share our collective vision of peace- our collage of many peaces.

#### *Safety*

While sharing our visions of peace, few members of the group directly mentioned actual physical safety. Perhaps they felt no need to directly address safety/security since we had spent three months together getting to know each other, learning that some of our group had experienced actual war and other armed conflict, while others had encountered different kinds of direct violence. Still, Ellen, raised in a middle-class North American home, almost apologetically questioned her own understanding of peace, acknowledging that she came from "a place of privilege" where she had not directly experienced armed conflict or war. Alexandra, who came from a post-Soviet society said that for her peace meant being "protected by walls and people who are WITH you", not necessarily a place of physical safety, but in a place of ease with oneself and those around. Sani added, "it all boils down to the individual... not a place... but being in those situations with calm in one's heart." Wei added that there must be a "a state of harmony – inner peace" where one is "able to follow [the] heart so that outside forces cannot manipulate." In this state, Eduardo described seeing "'blue' like at the bottom of a pool after 20 or 30 minutes of intense exercise – the mind just flows." Jenn's picture of "radiant stillness" brought an intake of breath from the group, and brief silence of reflection.

#### *Relationships*

The underpinnings of that powerful pause seemed to rest most often in relationships, perhaps with oneself, as noted earlier, and also with others. A common theme for most was living together "in harmony" highlighting the importance of family, community, and sharing -- places "where there is mutual respect". Ben passionately described a place where

[P]eople have the ability to build solid relationships with each other...

Without people I am nothing. Without my family members I cannot forge ahead - there is very little that I can do. That speaks a lot to a philosophy we have in African tradition, which we call *Ubuntu*. *Ubuntu* basically means, like what Nick says about the humanity in other people - the ability to see the other person as yourself, if you have that ability; if you have that grace to be able to look at the humanity in the other I think, then you would also have, the respect you know for-- , towards the other person. And not just towards the other person *Ubuntu* is also about creation, is also about your environment how relational are you to your environment and to the people around you so that means a lot to me. Relationship with people gives me a sense of fulfillment and a sense of accomplishment.

Relational harmony extended to non-human beings and the environment -- looking, feeling, and sounding slightly different for each of us. Jenn spoke about the importance of teaching her children empathy by relating not only to each other and the human family members, but also to animals, learning from them. Mary Anne's sense of connection was accompanied by a visual and a feeling, "There is peace in the water – when I feel a sense of connectedness to everything in the world – swimming in the ocean with the sun shining, looking up and seeing the sun shine through the water."

### *Opportunity and Choice*

Extending the concept of relationality and connection meant considering possibilities for full development or realization for all - the importance of opportunities and choice. Ellen spoke about, "...everything having an opportunity to become its best self." For her, this meant more than having options, and perhaps in a way being more basic: opportunity might mean simply being included and considered. Brett was adamant, "Opportunity is the purest form of peace. Peace is giving all children the opportunity to be kids and that opportunity means that you know they can create themselves in the world and create the world how they want and I think that opportunity is a very powerful thing." Eduardo and Brett both argued that they will "fight for a peaceful world so people have more opportunities, you know [to] include everyone's voices." We note now that "struggle" might be a more congruent term to use for this effort.

### *Responsibility of the Individual to the Collective: Alliances and Allies*

Facilitating the inclusion mentioned above began with something as basic as seeing each other's humanity. Nick acknowledged the associated challenges, stating, "I think there is a problem whereas humans we naturally filter in the bad -- that comes naturally right? But you have to actively look for the good, and I think the more that we actively look for the good in these situations and the more we see human beings as human, living the human experience..." Ellen further stated "recognizing humanity means you don't [focus on] all those other factors which can be dividing factors whether it be gender, or sexuality, or religion; you just acknowledge someone else for who they are not what they believe in or who they love." Mary Anne argued that these differences are actually what bring people together in richness when she said "... to me that's a large part of peace -- being connected and not being divided, connected and respected, with respected differences of course but none the less building on those relationships."

It seemed that acknowledging differences, and accepting them, are important steps towards really "seeing" each other, "recognize[ing] each other's humanity", "look[ing] for the good in each other" and working so that everyone is "given the same social space to name their own world", while still looking for "shared human experiences".

### *Responsibility to Participate in the Process*

Importantly, this collage of peace pictures was much more textured than its beautiful base of sharing space or being in a state of calm and safety. There was an element of personal and shared accountability for individual behavior and thought as well as for making space for others to share in the assuring wellbeing for the whole. This responsibility extended beyond the important elements of opportunity and inclusion to ensuring justice and equality for all people in the world – at all layers and levels from local to international communities. There was a need for each individual to recognize that life must be “a shared human experience, where we look for the good in one another”, and “recognize each other’s humanity”.

So, like our circle where we sat in close proximity, with minimal hierarchy, our conversation came around again to ourselves – in relation, individuals in community. Sani said, “it boils down to the individual” – individual responsibility. Ben added, “It is my responsibility to know my purpose, and to help others to achieve their own sense of purpose, their own aim in their life.” He added “at the communal level or the collective level peace is the ability for me to maintain a solid relationship with people.” For Wei, the idea of community also went beyond her hometown in rural China; rather she viewed community membership as a global responsibility stating, “We are all villagers of the earth.”

As humans are always growing and changing, peace was also thought of as fluid and ever changing. Mary Anne said, “Peace is always evolving, even when it appears to be static on the surface. Being part of peace is being part of something creative – the opposite of destructive – internally (within self), with family, with larger groups of people, the land, all creatures.” And space must be made to continue the growth as we learn and understand more from, and with each other. Ellen reflected, “I’m still trying to figure out why my idea of peace is the way it is and I keep adding to it and subtracting from it every day.” Nick added that he continued to struggle to visualize peace – “I need to have shared conversations like this to develop the language. Then it is more possible to develop peace.”

### *Finding Balance to Continue Building Peace*

Living our varied lives, being in relationships, working, and studying about how to intervene or even prevent violence had often left graduate students in Peace and Conflict Studies feeling helpless and overwhelmed – not very peaceful, leading us back to examine our vision and reconnect with our hope. So, in addition to having a picture, and a sense of responsibility, we also need to understand what helps us to keep engaged in peacebuilding. Ben said, “At the individual level, I think what gives me peace is the balance that I am able to find and to create between my physical, my emotional, as well as my spiritual well-being...” which assists in the ability to “know one’s own purpose”. He was adamant that this balance was not something that just happens, or that one hopes for passively. He said that he believes that it is the responsibility – that word again -- of the individual to find a balance – to find harmony between the three dimensions. Adding to our collage, Eduardo shared an image of himself experiencing this rare kind moment of balance – “driving down the road with music playing, feeling that I am going somewhere and something will happen when I get there.”

Ultimately, it appears that our collage of peace is not like a quilt or a sculpture or even something written in a book. It is dynamic – and it involves choice. As Ellen said, “we could see [our] differing ideas as conflicting, but... we are listening to each other, not challenging... ‘I understand

that this is your view', adding it on, adding in all the unique ideas. It is a good thing peace is ambiguous, because it should continue to change."

Brett recalled a quote from his instructor and mentor that has stuck with him over the years: "waging peace is difficult; it takes courage". People agreed that "peace is a choice" made by people about how we live together. Wei noted that one's idea of peace cannot be forced upon others – for that is not peaceful! As we look back on this discussion we realize that we are brought back once more to the importance of visioning and sharing visions, something we seldom pause to do.

Ben reminded us of the exemplary life of Nelson Mandela, who did not give up on his vision for South Africa in spite of what he went through. His optimism meant "keeping one's feet moving forward with head toward the sun," "not to despair," maintaining and building hope in our collective journey, not giving up.

### **Concluding Observations: Making Meaning from the Collage**

After months of discussing and trying to understand violence -- ways to prevent it, and how to intervene, a group of Peace and Conflict Studies graduate students in Manitoba consciously focused our discussions on peace in our collective world. Building alliances usually begins with individuals "seeing" or recognizing each other as individuals – separate and unique (Bishop, 1994/2000/2015) and that sentiment was echoed in this group as we heard our different expressions and also saw our connections.

Werner (2010), in his chapter, "Hope and the Ethics of Belief" notes that hope is the combination of belief and expectations -- belief or understanding about the way things are and expecting or understanding that they could be different. It begins with giving voice – finding or creating a space for individuals to reflect. Sharing these reflections with a listener develops two relationships – one with the self, and one with another, who also has their own unique thoughts. The creation of this relationship helps to address the question, "As Peace and Conflict students how can we be working towards peace when we all have different concepts of what peace is?" Although our research exercise revealed that each individual has a different concept or picture of peace or at least different words/language for sharing their thoughts, these ideas are not actually contrasting; rather they fit together to form a fluid mosaic, a collage that is constantly evolving.

Living out our existences individually, in families and communities of varying sizes, we seldom take time to think about the details of a desired shared future. We just keep moving. Sharing our visions of peace influences what action we take today, as Elise Boulding noted, "knowing what you are working for affects your choices and what you do now" (Portilla, 2003). By identifying our own concepts of peace, and being open to what others visions are, we can work collectively to ensure the actions we take today promote a peaceful future, a future that is inclusive of and provides opportunity for full development of everyone and every living thing – creating a dynamic, complex, multi-layered moving collage of peace.

### **References**

- Augsburger, D. W. (1992). *Conflict mediation across cultures*. Louisville: John Know Press.  
Bar-Siman-Tov, Y. (Ed.). (2004). *From conflict resolution to reconciliation*. Oxford University Press.

- Bishop, A. (1994/2000). *Becoming and ally: Breaking through the cycle of oppression in people*. Halifax, NB: Fernwood Publishing.
- Boulding, E. (2000). *Cultures of peace: The hidden side of history*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative research and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Lincoln, NB: Sage.
- Dahlberg, L., & Krug, E. (2002). Violence: A global public health problem. In E. Krug, L. L. Dahlberg, J. A. Mercy, A. B. Zwi, & R. Lozano (Eds.), *World report on violence and health* (pp. 1-21). Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.
- Davis, L. (Ed.). (2010). *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous - non-Indigenous relationships*. University of Toronto Press.
- Deitrich, W., & Sutzl, W. (1997). *A call for many peaces*. Peace Center Burg Schlaining.
- Dolan, Y. (2000). *One small step: Moving beyond trauma and therapy to a life of joy*. Author's Choice.
- Dolan, Y. (1991). *Resolving sexual abuse: Solution-focused therapy and Ericksonian hypnosis for adult survivors*. W.W. Norton & Co.
- Duncan, L., & Miller, S. (2000). *The heroic client: Doing client-directed outcome-informed therapy*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fitz-Gibbon, A. (Ed.). (2010). *Positive peace: Reflections on nonviolence, peace education and non-violent social change*.
- Flaherty, M. (2013/2014/2015). *Course outline: PEAC 7040 Violence prevention and intervention*. Winnipeg, Manitoba.
- Flaherty, M. (2012). *Peacebuilding with women in Ukraine: Using narrative to envision a common future*. Lanham: Lexington.
- Galtung, J. (1990). Cultural violence. *Journal of Peace Research*, 27 (3), 291-305.
- Galtung, J. (1996). *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. London: Sage.
- Galtung, J. (1969). Violence, peace, and peace research. *Journal of Peace Research*, 6 (3), 167-191.
- GlobalSecurity.org. (n.d.). *Military*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from GlobalSecurity.org: [www.globalsecurity.org](http://www.globalsecurity.org)
- Government of Canada. (n.d.). *National security and defence*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from Government of Canada: <https://www.canad.ca/en/services/defence.html>
- Herman, J. L. (1992/1997). *Trauma and recovery*. New York: Basic Books.
- International Crisis Group. (2016, July 17). *Easy prey: Criminal violence and Central American migration*. Retrieved July 29, 2016, from International Crisis Group: [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org)
- Jenkins, D. (2014, June 21). *Peace is more than just the absence of war*. Retrieved July 29, 2016, from The Huffington Post: [www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-jenkins/the-absence-of-war\\_b\\_5176243.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/diana-jenkins/the-absence-of-war_b_5176243.html)
- Kriesberg, L. (2007). Contemporary conflict resolution applications. In C. Crocker, F. Hampson, & P. Aal (Eds.), *Leashing the dogs of war: Conflict management in a divided world*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.
- Krug, E., Dahlberg, L., Mercy, J. A., Zwi, A., & Lozano (Eds.). (2002). *World Report on Violence and Health* (Vol. 1). World Health Organization.

- Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*. Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace.
- Lederach, J. P. (1995). *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Polak, F. (1973). *The Image of the Future*. (E. Boulding, Trans.) New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company.
- Portilla, J. (2003). *Interview with Elise Boulding: Visioning and future studies*. Retrieved February 9, 2017, from Beyond Intractability: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/audioplay/boulding-e-3-future-studies4>
- Power, S. (2002). *"A problem from hell": America and the age of genocide*. New York: Basic Books.
- Reardon, B. A., & Hans, A. (Eds.). (2010). *The gender imperative: Human security versus state security*. Routledge.
- Reardon, B. (1996). *Sexism and the war system*. New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Richmond, O. (2001). A genealogy of peacemaking: The creation and re-creation of order . *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* , 26 (316).
- Rothkopf, D. (2016). *National security: American leadership in an age of fear, reprint edition*. USA: Public Affairs.
- Simmons, D., Bayha, W., Beaulieu, D., Gladu, D., & Manseau, M. (2012). Aboriginal talking circle: Aboriginal perspectives on caribou conservation. *Rangifer*, 32 (2), pp. 17-19.
- Sjoberg, L. (Ed.). (2010). *Gender and international development*. Lanham: Routledge.
- Smith, M., & Sterritt, A. (2010). Towards a shared vision: Lessons learned from collaboration between first nations and environmental organizations to protect the Great Bear Rainforest and coastal First Nations. In L. Davis (Ed.), *Alliances: Re/Envisioning Indigenous-non-indigenous relationships* (pp. 131- 148). University of Toronto Press.
- Staus, S. (2015). *Making and unmaking nations: War, leadership and genocide in modern Africa*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Sterri, A. B. (Ed.). (2014). *Global citizen: Challenges and responsibility in an interconnected world*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Umbreit, M. (1995). *Mediating interpersonal conflicts: A pathway to peace*. West Concord, MN: CPI.
- United Nations Department for Disarmament Affairs. (2001, March). *Conflict, peace-building, disarmament, security: e. Gender perspectives on small arms*. Retrieved July 29, 2016, from [www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/1896504.pdf](http://www.oecd.org/social/gender-development/1896504.pdf)
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. (n.d.). *Culture of peace: Youth as agents of social transformations in their communities*. Retrieved June 24, 2015, from UNESCO: [www.unesco.org](http://www.unesco.org)
- University of Manitoba. (2017, February 14). *Traditional territories acknowledgement*. Retrieved from University of Manitoba: [http://www.umanitoba.ca/administration/indigenous\\_connect/media/IND-00-030-TraditionalTerritoriesAcknowledgement\\_WebPDF\\_FNL.pdf](http://www.umanitoba.ca/administration/indigenous_connect/media/IND-00-030-TraditionalTerritoriesAcknowledgement_WebPDF_FNL.pdf)
- Ury, F., & Fisher, R. (1981). *Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.
- Werner, R. (2010). Hope and the ethics of belief. In *Positive peace: Reflections on peace education, nonviolence and social change* (pp. 1-12). New York, NY: Rodopi.

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## **Peace Studies/Literary Studies: An Experiment in Teaching and Learning**

Authors: Janet Gray, Matthew Fuhrmeister, and Robyn Gold

Title: Chair, Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Affiliation: The College of New Jersey

Location: New Jersey, USA

E-mail: gray@tcnj.edu

**Keywords:** Peacebuilding, Teaching Literature, Peace Education

---

### **Abstract**

How do you teach peace through literature? This question guided the collaborative research of participants in Peace Studies and Literary Studies, a graduate seminar at The College of New Jersey. The seminar was designed to give the participants tools and a shared space for creating and practicing peace teaching through literature, based on the assumption that English teachers need the capacity to improvise peace teaching in relation to the constraints and opportunities of their contexts. With John Paul Lederach's *The Moral Imagination* (2005) as our introduction to peace practices, we found that peacebuilding provides a framework for acting on the concerns that postmodern literary and critical theory make visible; and that creative engagement with the hybridity of discourses that is characteristic of postmodernism is key to teaching peace through literature amid the ideologically driven constraints of test-based public education.

### **PEACE STUDIES/LITERARY STUDIES: AN EXPERIMENT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING**

In a short article published in *Yes! Magazine* in 2010, David Jackson Cook described a scene that must be familiar to many peace educators: when he asked college students to define peace, they

---

had no answers. None of their teachers had ever asked them that question before. And yet, Cook argued, the practices of peace should be regarded as a fundamental set of skills.

He wrote,

Imagine if we graduated seniors who couldn't read, or do simple math, or write basic paragraphs. Outrageous, right? Yet these very same students will graduate without ever once studying conflict resolution.... they will never be required to take a course on making peace, building community, or forgiving an enemy. The principles of violence and nonviolence will not be analyzed, the philosophy of Dr. King will not be discussed, and *satyagraha*—the practice of nonviolence resistance, which Gandhi called the most powerful force in the universe—will remain ignored....

“Schools do not have to create a formal Peace Studies course,” Jackson claimed. “Just like writing or note-taking, it is an academic skill that can be infused into almost any current course.”

Our article describes an experiment with Jackson's claim that “every teacher can teach peace,” focused on teachers of literature. A basic assumption underlying the design of this project is that English teachers who want to teach peace are not all going back to school to get degrees in peace studies. At least in part, they will be flying by the seat of their pants. They will have to invent peace teaching for themselves, in relation to their particular contexts, the institutional and system-wide constraints and opportunities they face, the social worlds of their students, and the curiosities and passions that drive them as intellects and educational practitioners. Given that they have been subject to the same systemic educational limitations as their students, what resources do they need to get started as peace learners *and* teachers? Given tools for co-creating a space where they could push back against the predominance of force, antagonism, exploitation, and domination as the subtexts of their education, both in content and in structure, what would they discover? How might literary studies and peace studies as fields of knowledge and practice be an awkward fit, and what revelations might come from pairing them?

The primary author of this article has had two opportunities to experiment with creating such spaces: first, in a two-day workshop with teachers from elementary through high school in a range of disciplines--from special education to math to fitness to history and literature--and second, in a summer seminar for graduate students in English. The two-day workshop was offered through a Teachers as Scholars program at The College of New Jersey. This program presents intensive workshops for teachers on topics of scholarly interest to the faculty members who lead them. The workshop, titled Peace Education across the Curriculum, yielded important take-away lessons that informed the design of the summer seminar, which focused specifically on literary studies. One lesson was that Ian Harris's and Mary Lee Morrison's much-recommended text *Peace Education* (2012) was not especially helpful in our setting; it was too long, and its omission of Judaism in an overview of religious perspectives on peace (a common omission in peace studies texts) felt charged in our setting, where a state Holocaust and Genocide Studies Commission oversees peace education curricula. For a concise overview of concepts and practices, *Peace Education Program* (2011), a handbook from Teachers without Borders that is available online, was much more useful. Another take-away was that, while the Teachers as Scholars program is intended to offer teachers a chance to engage in intellectual exploration independent of their teaching, what the participants most wanted to learn was new interactive and experiential teaching methods. They knew that to

teach peace within and in resistance to the test-driven climates of their school systems, they needed powerful learning tools.

This article reports on discoveries that the students in the graduate seminar made with the resources available to them as they experimented with connecting the disparate threads of literary studies and peace studies. In the following sections, we first introduce the participants in this experiment—our co-investigators—as well as the theoretical grounding for our project and the interactive activities that shaped our process of building a learning community and a shared conceptual base. We go on to describe the written tasks and class discussions, based on texts selected by both the instructor and the students, the results of which served as our primary sources in the analysis that follows. Our coding of the primary material produced two major categories, Theory and Practice, each of which we discuss in subsequent sections. We discovered that peacebuilding theory and literary theory are deeply compatible, and that reading through a hybrid lens gave us access to new insights into the literature while also opening opportunities for peace learning and teaching. The section on practice describes our experiments with peace pedagogy and the restrictions teachers face when they want to teach peace through literature in a test-driven educational environment. We identify opportunities for peace teaching that are already present in educational standards and best practices. Our intention is not to prescribe a one-size-fits-all model; teachers need to improvise in relation to the institutional opportunities and restrictions at their sites of practice, as well as their awareness of their students' exposure to traumatization by direct and indirect violence. Our intention is to assure teachers and those who train them that the teaching of literature can be a form of peacebuilding, and to encourage them to explore the rich potential for teaching peace through literature.

### **The Design: Co-creating a Space of Discovery**

The co-investigators in this space were the instructor and seven students, all of whom were enrolled in Master's programs in English—six at The College of New Jersey, one at Rutgers University. Two of them became co-authors of this article. The co-investigators brought to our project a range of experience as scholars and teachers of literature: newly minted BAs, experienced classroom teachers at the middle and high school levels, students engaged in college teaching practica at a community college, and aspiring Ph.D. candidates. The group of six women and two men was racially uniform—all were white—but varied in terms of less visible social identities, including sexuality, disability, class origin, national origin, and religious background. Most of the students brought to the class a sophisticated perspective on identity and difference, honed in part through past study of critical theory, including feminism, postcolonialism, and critical race theory. The teachers in the group worked in classrooms that differed in racial composition, socioeconomic status, and ability, and held their own students in mind as they contributed to the project. Of the two most experienced teachers, for example, one worked primarily with lower-income students of color, while the other worked in a largely white, middle and upper-middle class setting.

To begin building a learning community grounded in a shared vision of our work together, we started the term with a review of excerpts from the writings of peace educators Parker Palmer, George Lakey, and Betty Reardon. In *The Courage to Teach* (1998), Palmer adopted the phrase “the grace of great things” from the poet Rainer Maria Rilke to name a factor left out of conventional representations of educational transactions that describe only the relationships among people, specifically teachers and learners. Palmer insisted that we also need to pay attention to the human community's relationship to the subjects of study “that call us together—the things that

call us to know, to teach, to learn.... It is in the act of gathering around them and trying to understand them...that we become who we are as knowers, teachers, and learners” (107). Palmer made clear that great things are not disciplines and their texts and theories; they are “the things themselves”—a vast, richly textured “truth” that challenges our ways of knowing. The outcome of a learning community’s engagement with great things therefore is not—or not solely—about mastery, but about ethical and epistemological transformation. Great things, Palmer wrote, form and transform learning communities by evoking six “virtues”: *diversity*, “because diverse viewpoints are demanded by the manifold mysteries of great things”; *ambiguity*, “because we understand the inadequacy of our concepts to embrace the vastness of great things”; *creative conflict*, “because conflict is required to correct our biases and prejudices about the nature of great things”; *honesty*, because to lie “would be to betray the truth of great things”; *humility*, “because humility is the only lens through which great things can be seen”; and *freedom*, “because tyranny in any form can be overcome only by invoking the grace of great things” (107-8).

In *Facilitating Group Learning* (2010), Lakey named the interconnectedness that develops in collaborative learning communities the “container.” He emphasized all participants’ accountability for the container and the facilitator’s responsibility for structuring opportunities for participants to contribute to its ongoing creation and care. Lakey’s description of the functions of a strong container complement the values that Palmer highlights. The container:

- breeds collaborative spirit, so participants learn from each other;
- encourages participants to be real...so authentic curiosity can emerge;
- creates safety for taking risks;
- creates an affirmative environment...
- reduces the distractability of the group...; and
- assists people to make connections in the content of the curriculum.... (39)

Opportunities for all participants to co-create the container for our seminar were built into the design of activities throughout the term, beginning with a review of an excerpt from Reardon’s *Comprehensive Peace Education* (1988). Reardon listed Seven R’s of peace education which represent capacities fundamental to peace work: reflection, responsibility, risk, reconciliation, recovery, reconstruction, and reverence (61-65). To make connections between the new material and their prior knowledge, the seminar members were invited to reflect on how the Seven R’s translated to content or method in their own classroom experiences, either as students or as teachers. Community-building continued with a familiar warm-up exercise that links personal introductions to shared processing of new content. Each student wrote on a Post-It a comment about the article by Cook that we cited at the beginning of this essay; then they walked through the center of the room, introducing themselves in pairs as they encountered each other and sharing their thoughts about what is at stake in peace teaching. For the next activity, two small groups worked briefly at each of two blackboards, one headed “How you define peace” and the other headed “How you think your students would define peace.” The follow-up discussion focused on both the sources of the participants’ understandings of peace and their sense of their students’ understandings. This activity thus not only continued the process of building the personal and intellectual connections that characterize the container; it also invited the teachers in the group to bring their students into our process from the start.

Our “great thing” took the form of a question: How do you teach peace through literature? We used a PowerPoint and the Teachers without Borders handbook for a quick introduction to key concepts in peace studies--such as negative and positive peace, cycles of violence, and cultural, structural, and direct violence--and spent the first few days filling in specific educational gaps that Cook identifies in his article. We read short texts by Henry David Thoreau (1849), Leo Tolstoy (1896), Mohandas Gandhi (1920, 1930, 1958), Martin Luther King, Jr. (1963), and Betty Reardon (1988). The students researched and wrote short creative pieces in the voices of peace workers. Given a list of figures to choose from, they chose Cesar Chavez (Hontau 2015a, Maresco 2015b), Dorothy Day (DiMeglio 2015b), Fannie Lou Hamer (Fuhrmeister 2015a), Barbara Deming (Lewis 2015b), Vandana Shiva (Gold 2015b), and Leymah Gbowee (Parmese 2015d). The assignment offered a creative space where the students could break down the magnitude of our “great thing” by humanizing individual activists and, through their words, empathically grasp what drove their work, while also situating them in networks of collective action to dispel the myth that change agents are lone, extraordinary individuals. The students researched and critiqued curricula for teaching about *satyagraha*, an opportunity for them both to enhance their own grasp of Gandhi’s principles and to apply their pedagogical skills to envisioning how they would engage their future students in learning about nonviolence.

The theoretical core of the course began to take shape as students read John-Paul Lederach’s *The Moral Imagination* (1997). The choice of Lederach’s text was irresistible in this context. First of all, it is about peacebuilding and conflict transformation. When you ask people who have not studied peace to give an example of peace action, they are more likely to mention mass movements and demonstrations than peacebuilding activities, even though peacebuilding is a broader, more accessible framework for agency. Almost anyone can do it where they are. Second, in critiquing technocratic and instrumentalist approaches to professional peacebuilding, Lederach’s approach centralizes creativity, imagination, and aesthetic practices—all very much the province of literary studies. Lederach defined the moral imagination as “*the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist*” (italics in original; ix). This capacity, he explained, depends upon four disciplines: first, “the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that includes our enemies”; second, the ability to embrace complexity without relying on dualisms; third, “belief in and pursuit of the creative act”; and fourth, acceptance of the risk of stepping into the unknown beyond the “familiar landscape of violence” (5). All of these disciplines became useful to us in analyzing literary works and considering how peace teaching can emerge in a literature classroom.

In short written assignments and class discussion, the students were charged with discovering correspondences between Lederach’s thoughts on peacebuilding and conflict transformation and the literary and critical theory they already knew, and applying those connections to readings of literary texts of their choice. They linked the moral imagination to Louis Althusser (1970) on ideological interpellation; Maurice Halbwachs (1992) on collective memory; Peter Brooks (1984), Judith Butler (1990), and Tzvetan Todorov (1977) on narratology; Slavoj Zizek (1997) on the ephemerality of ideology; and Trinh T. Minh-Ha (1988) on the interconnections of self and other. Teams of students then took responsibility for facilitating discussion of the four assigned novels, using methods from Timpson et al.’s *147 Practical Tips for Teaching Peace and Reconciliation* (2009) and the Teachers Without Borders handbook. The four novels were Erich Maria Remarque’s classic anti-war novel *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929), *The Yellow Birds* by Kevin Powers (2012)—a novel set during the war in Iraq, Alice Walker’s Civil Rights movement-

era novel *Meridian* (1976), and Ursula LeGuin's interplanetary *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969). Following discussion of the novels, the students wrote follow-up reflection essays, summarized below:

- *All Quiet on the Western Front* offered opportunities for exploring the ideological basis of war culture and the role of academia in perpetuating cycles of violence; considering satire as a force for dismantling systems of violence; and rethinking paradigms of war and violence to make space for the emergence of moral imagination (DiMeglio 2015a, Maresco 2015d, Lewis 2015a, Parmese 2015b).
- With *The Yellow Birds*, we explored challenges to engrained social narratives about war and violence, the production of violence-driven social memories, and the creation of counter-memories against repression and historic repetition, opening new spaces for self-expression and the repair of identity after war (Gold 2015a, Lewis 2015c, Parmese 2015a).
- *Meridian* gave us a chance to explore not only nonviolent direct action but also webbuilding, consciousness of place, and forgiveness, and to centralize the transaction between reader and text as we considered how reading through our specific privileges guided the ways we entered an account of divergent strategies for social change (DiMeglio 2015c, Fuhrmeister 2015c, Hontau 2015d).
- With *The Left Hand of Darkness*, we had a defamiliarized world where we could witness cycles of violence and us versus them mentalities, explore the unknown beyond the landscape of violence, and practice multiple viewpoints in conflict resolution (Fuhrmeister 2015b, Hontau 2015b, Maresco 2015a).

During the final week of the term, students individually adapted activities from *Peace Education Program* and *147 Practical Tips* to facilitate explorations of short texts of their choice. They chose poems, “The Wound Dresser” and “Reconciliation” by Walt Whitman, “America” by Curt Bennett, “Equinox” by Audre Lorde, and “From a Logical Point of View” by Nikki Giovanni; short fiction, “Toys of Peace” by Saki, “Good Form” from Tim O’Brien’s *The Things They Carried*, Jean-Paul Sartre’s “The Wall,” and “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelos” by Ursula LeGuin; and two songs, “The Ballad of the Green Beret” by Barry Sadler and “Born in the USA” by Bruce Springsteen. For their final presentations and essays, some students extended their exploration of theoretical links between literary studies and peace studies—for example, using Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) writing to identify peace consciousness in poems from the Black Arts movement (Fuhrmeister 2015d); analyzing the narrative method of *The Arabian Nights* as a conflict transformation strategy (Gold 2015d); tracing themes of solidarity and othering in *The Lord of the Rings* (Maresco 2015c); and reading *The Yellow Birds* as an account of a simulacrum war through the theory of Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Deleuze (Hontau 2015c). Other students used their final projects to stretch themselves as teachers, designing new approaches to texts they already assigned: a conflict transformation approach to classroom dialogue about slave narratives and neo-slave narratives for a mixed-race classroom (DiMeglio 2015c); methods for teaching perspective, empathy, and peace to classes of almost exclusively white students through *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lewis 2015d); and tips for disability activism extracted from a reading of *Frankenstein* (Parmese 2015c).

In reporting on the results of the seminar-as-experiment, the authors are faced with the impossibility of capturing the daily sparks of learning we shared or doing full justice to the insight and inventiveness of our classmates, Cara DiMeglio, Angela Hontau, Jessica Lewis, Alex Maresco, and Jamie Parmese. However, their voices are in this article; with their permission, we reviewed and theme-coded all of the written work for the seminar. We sorted the themes into two broad, overlapping categories, each with three subcategories: (1) Theory: ideology, narrative, postmodernism/peacebuilding; and (2) Practice: making spaces, liberatory learning, and ideological constraints. We analyze and reflect on these themes in the following pages.

### **Theory: Building Links**

A common thread in our discoveries was that peace work, as Lederach textured it through the moral imagination, is postmodern in its articulation of complex specificities. Instead of relying on an overarching theory or grand narrative over which the peacebuilder must gain authoritative control, *The Moral Imagination* promotes a theoretical basis for strategies of inquiry into the complexities of place—strategies for producing a richly textured understanding of the particularities of a conflict, starting with faith in the possibility of breaking through to “that which does not yet exist.” In other words, peacebuilding provides a framework for *doing* what critical theory points toward.

Charged with using *The Moral Imagination* to discover how to combine the fields of literary studies and peace studies, our class began to develop its critical understanding of peace action through an already complex discourse. The moral imagination represents a hybridized conceptualization of peace work as existing next to and in conversation with other systems of knowledge. As Lederach described it, the moral imagination takes understanding from varied sources—cultural and social interaction, artistic expression, shared and disparate histories—and negotiates linkages across the gaps and boundaries among differing constructions of knowledge in order to form a consciousness that acts toward change, resolution, and measures of lasting peace. Lederach was careful to explain the necessity of creativity to the success of the moral imagination’s work—a necessity that calls attention to the hybridized, interdisciplinary nature of peace work. Doing peace does not take place in a vacuum; rather, the peacebuilder accumulates applications and discourses from varied fields and critical traditions, and engages with them in order to forge newly possible avenues toward peace, bringing into being that which did not exist before.

The critical approaches we brought to the seminar from our experiences as scholars and teachers of literature were similarly complex. We read texts through many and varied critical traditions, including poststructuralism, postcolonialism, feminism, critical race theory, and narratology, using these approaches to recognize the visions of peace that the works presented. For example, Matt Fuhrmeister used Gloria Anzaldua’s writing on border-dwellers and mestiza consciousness to highlight the ways that peace workers use their own complicated identities to understand the conflicts within which they operate. Anzaldua claims that border-dwellers, those whose identities do not fit comfortably into one group or another or who may lay claim to multiple groups as parts of their selves, must constantly negotiate conflicted imaginary borders. Fuhrmeister pointed out that the border-dweller is thus a peace worker. She must write to validate her own identities, desires, demands, and needs, while balancing them with opposing forces in her surroundings. Applying Anzaldua’s thought to the works of Black Arts poets, Fuhrmeister began to see the elusive yet increasingly obvious links that border-dwellers must draw between the actual literary product and the reason they write. The texts produced “can be said to teach peace or develop a

vision of peace from the work of the individual who has enacted and engaged their moral imagination, who has negotiated their *mestiza* consciousness in order to come to an understanding of the spaces they occupy and the effect of their actions within the web of conflict” (2015d). Using literary theory to grasp the actual effects of peace work on the literature allowed us as a class to explore texts in entirely novel ways.

Of particular interest to us were narratives of conflict and peace operating in the texts we read and how these narratives correlated to larger, ideologically driven metanarratives. Early on we identified the repetitive “us versus them” narrative that most conflicts present: a simple yet often seemingly intractable dualistic opposition between two groups. As a postmodern consciousness, the moral imagination acts to counter these agonistic metanarratives. In small, localized efforts of the moral imagination, “us versus them” narratives can be overcome as groups learn of shared experiences and values and validate each other’s differences. Lederach provided several examples from his peacebuilding work, and we were easily able to draw parallels to his stories in the class texts as well as in sharing our own personal experiences, as we increasingly did as the container we were co-constructing flourished into a creative, risk-valuing space.

The initial takeaway of the course was that peace can indeed be taught through literary study; and it became clear that teaching peace is a postmodern task. The *bricolage* of ideologies, theoretical approaches, and ontological understandings operating within the boundaries of peace studies reflects the hybrid nature of the venture. Based on our review of the progression of our class work as we built an understanding of the theoretical and critical frameworks of peacebuilding in an interdisciplinary context, we propose that this postmodern blending of apparently disparate discourses is what allows peace teaching to emerge through other critical traditions. Applying peacebuilding theories in a literary context allowed for new bridges between theory and practice to take form. As learners and teachers, we could continually build on these bridges to come to our own understandings about the peace practices at play within the texts and strategize ways of introducing these practices to others. Theory, it became clear, was our window into understanding and teaching peace through literature.

### **Practice: Peace Teaching through Literature**

Like the teachers in the winter workshop, those in the seminar who were teachers enthusiastically embraced peace education methods and wanted more. They recognized the compatibility of the methods in *Peace Education Program* and *147 Practical Tips* with the best practices they had explored in their professional development. In applying methods such as these, however, the students in the seminar faced a tension between creating spaces for open-ended, collaborative exploration and, as English teachers, making sure that the rest of us as their students got the point. This tension may mark a point of disciplinary incompatibility between peace studies and literary studies—but, more significantly, it corresponds to the ideological constraints that those who teach in public schools face in their everyday practice.

Throughout the seminar, we grappled with sharing our evolving conceptions of peace, peacebuilding, and the moral imagination through pedagogical practice. The challenges of facilitating learning activities yielded awkward moments and new questions about peace teaching in the literature classroom, but also produced exemplary moments where facilitators were able to access a facet of critical thought that united peacebuilding with a more familiar pedagogical approach. The work of several students made obvious the connection of peace teaching with postmodern fragmentation and with the need to create new systems of understanding from existing

critical work. In a facilitation on Powers's *The Yellow Birds*, Robyn Gold hybridized a role-play activity—a method familiar in literary studies—by centralizing peacebuilding themes in its goals. To simulate the disappearance of peaceful resistance as one character's voice is silenced under another's dominance, Gold created an activity inspired by Theater of the Oppressed. Gold intended her students to gain insight into the dynamics of power that must be dealt with in a conflict between a "superior," the lieutenant, and an "inferior," Private Bartle. Gold wrote, "I wanted to revitalize the Bartle that is dying or disappearing in the text and allow him the opportunity to speak his mind" (2015c). Her aim was for students portraying the lieutenant to understand the mindset of an individual who promotes the war effort, "because this heightened sense of empathy and perspective is necessary to touch upon one's moral imagination," and for those portraying Bartle to apply Lederach's principles of peaceful problem-solving so they could build skills: "Cultivating peace is not passivity... It is beneficial for students to experience how difficult peaceful resistance is in a simulation so that they might feel more empowered by and compelled to utilize Lederach's praxis in real life, understand that they have a voice, and realize that there is an alternative to blindly obeying orders they find immoral or unjust." The vitality of Gold's facilitation as a unit of peace-teaching speaks to the value of a hybridized approach to sharing with students the themes of peacebuilding that are latent in literature. As her activity uncovered, when students and teachers engage with a mixing of the disciplinary approaches of peace and literature, they gain not only a greater understanding of a novel, but also practice in being of the world.

While *The Yellow Birds* was new to us, some of the students used familiar, frequently assigned texts to teach peace as uniquely subversive and brimming with possibility for new readings. Jessica Lewis proposed a reading of *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee 1960) through which "students who occupy a place of privilege, and who therefore have difficulty connecting to the text," can achieve an understanding of conflict in the novel that transforms their perceptions about the nature of conflict and their grasp of strategies for addressing conflict (Lewis 2015d). Using resistant reading in "a pedagogical approach grounded in racial literacy, peacebuilding, and dismantling present ideologies about courage," Lewis created a hybrid method for having her students read peace through required literature. Grounded in Paolo Freire's concept of problem-posing education, Lewis's approach underscored that "any attempt to teach the novel from a social justice standpoint" must be a transformative act: "in order for students to want to 'build the future' they must be jarred, moved, and affected by the past." The postmodern structure of her approach was designed to create webs and links that students can build on and use to process new knowledge about peace work.

The practice teaching in the seminar led us to critical questions about the institutional contexts of public school classrooms. Public education is a potential platform for peacebuilding, but teachers need an understanding of the school and the larger community if they are to work through constricting systems and curricula to produce larger outcomes for their students. How can teachers integrate into their practice awareness of the systemic injustices in the educational communities where they teach? Conceiving their work as peacebuilding, how can they form coalitions beyond the classroom?

Education is a principal ideological state apparatus, a vehicle through which the dominant values of the state are disseminated to the larger community (Althusser 1970). Content-based values are outlined in the Common Core Standards for each discipline area, specifying what skills students are expected to have mastered by subject for each grade level. However, it is not the standards that have altered the pedagogical approaches educators choose so much as the accompanying state tests that measure students' mastery of those skills. Reader-response methods, which used to be a

dominant literary pedagogy in public schools, and resistant reading, which arose from area studies, are very compatible with teaching peace through literature. In a test-driven educational climate, however, students are not tested for the meanings they discover through their interactions with texts; they are tested on basic comprehension, so that is what teachers must teach. They veer away from teaching values and skills that will not be measured by testing. With this changed orientation in educational goals and outcomes also come changes in theory and methods, compelling teachers to present content through a lecture-based method rather than an inquiry-based approach. Yet if educators are to fulfill their responsibility of teaching students how to think critically, they must challenge commonly held beliefs and model new ways of thinking and problem solving. This role begins with teachers' pedagogical choices in response to the potentially stifling educational conditions that have emerged with state standards and state tests.

The moral imagination offers a creative framework that teachers can tap into to recognize not only the constraints but also the possibilities in the established system, to work *with* the standards to carve out spaces for teaching beyond content skills. The challenge teachers face is to teach tested content while keeping sight of the larger picture, the "great thing" that extends beyond testable knowledge. As an example of how an English teacher might use the system to teach peace, the English Language Arts Common Core State Standards (CCSS) state that students must be able to "understand how language functions in different contexts" (CCSS L.11-12.3). A teacher could implement this standard in an assignment that directs students to identify patterns of violence in language, with the broader goal of equipping the students to identify and respond to patterns of violence in life. The standards also strongly emphasize citing textual evidence in developing an argument or an analysis. This tested skill, too, can be practiced in learning peace. For example, during our seminar, we closely read passages about diversity and hegemonic power for the purpose of understanding how particular social problems arise and exploring possible solutions. Our class also closely studied narratives of reconciliation through a peace studies lens to understand the language of effective nonviolent problem-solving in history and literature.

Returning again and again to Palmer's discussion of the "great thing," we came to recognize it as a lens on academic subjects that honors content while transforming it into a resource for liberatory education. Intriguingly, we found that the standards include spaces for practices that we readily identified with the virtues of the great thing as well as the disciplines of moral imagination. For example, the standards state that students should not only cite textual evidence that supports their claims but also determine "where the text leaves matters uncertain" (CCSS RL 11-12.1). In Palmer's terms, this standard invokes the virtues of ambiguity and humility; in terms of the moral imagination, this space of uncertainty is the opening in the known where new ideas are born. We touched on this standard repeatedly in our seminar, most directly during a dialogue on the theme of the unknowable, when the facilitators used "The Way of the Council" activity from *147 Practical Tips* to reproduce a cultural practice Leguin describes in *The Left Hand of Darkness*. This activity and others we used also met the Speaking and Listening standards regarding student collaboration and discussion in diverse groups. The Teachers without Borders guide stresses the value of engaging students in write-pair-share discussions and Socratic seminars for exchanging ideas, strategies that are well known as best practices in brain-based learning but that also encourage the openness that peacebuilding dialogue seeks. As these examples show, the standards can be viewed as a channel through which educators can put the concepts and methods of peace education into practice, modeling for students the actualizing potential and applicability of peace.

Although dominant ideologies shape the school and its wider context, hegemonic control is never total, and children are natural theorists whose questions call the “normal,” “natural,” and “inevitable” into account. As Terry Eagleton stated in *The Significance of Theory* (1991),

Children make the best theorists, since they have not yet been educated into accepting our routine social practices as “natural,” and so insist on posing to those practices the most embarrassingly general and fundamental questions, regarding them with a wondering estrangement which we adults have long forgotten. Since they do not yet grasp our social practices as inevitable, they do not see why we might not do things differently. (34)

Children are natural theorists because their minds are still elastic and open enough to see beyond the imaginative potential of adults who have been indoctrinated into an ideological legacy that insists on the impossibility of peace. While the elasticity of students’ minds hardens as they age, there is still space for the moral imagination in the minds of even our oldest students. But peace teaching must be sustained; learning theory emphasizes the importance of repetition in forming new routes in the minds of learners that allow them to escape a damaging cycle of thinking. Every time students participate in an activity that engages their moral imagination and gives them practice in applying peaceful problem solving skills, new webs, maps, and connections form in their minds. Students witness firsthand the applicability of peace both in the pedagogy that is delivered to them and in the ways they practice peaceful problem solving skills in the class, thus promoting the understanding that peaceful problem-solving is an applicable, interdisciplinary skill that can be taught, acquired, and practiced, as opposed to a vague, utopian ideal, or simply a question for which they have no answers.

As for teaching peace through literature, if there are awkward junctures, there are also benefits for both fields. As Cara DiMeglio pointed out during her facilitation of *All Quiet on the Western Front*, her students get a numbing abundance of realistic visual representations of violence delivered to them regularly. Texts can probe past the numbing. Textual description can engage readers in critical reflection on the truth of violence. But that means we have to get them reading—a role for English teachers as peace teachers. And peace studies as a frame for literary studies provides the opportunity for learners to rename and reframe literary tropes so that we recognize freshly their interconnection, their belonging as a part of the whole picture of peace as an ongoing history and an expansive set of practices that anyone can do.

One further note—or rather a set of queries—on the implications of critical theory for peace teaching: in opposing ideological metanarratives that set up the inevitability of violence and war, peace teachers need to resist resorting to counter-metanarratives. For example, take a classroom activity in which students are to debate the question of whether or not there will ever be world peace. Can anybody really be expected to know the answer to such a sweeping question, and are the only possible answers a dualistic yes or no? Critical theory points out the abstract, agentless, ideological nature of such questions, and directs us in how to treat them as discourse and pose alternate questions, beginning with: Who wins and who loses, and in what ways, depending on the answer? What are the implications of the answer you choose for how you live your life—the values you hold, the everyday choices you make, the actions you take?

## References

Althusser, L. (1970). Ideology and ideological state apparatuses. In *The reproduction of capitalism: Ideology and ideological state apparatuses* (2014). Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

- Anzaldúa, G. E. (1987). *Borderlands/la frontera: The new mestiza*. San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute.
- Baudrillard, J. (1988). The precession of simulacra. In *Simulacra and simulation*. Trans. S. F. Glaser. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Brooks, P. (1984). *Reading for the plot: Design and intention in narrative*. New York: Knopf.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity*. New York: Routledge.
- Cook, D. J. (2010, June 29). Every teacher a peace teacher. *Yes! Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.yesmagazine.org/peace-justice/every-teacher-a-peace-teacher>.
- Delueze, G. (1999). *The logic of sense*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- DiMeggio, C. (2015a). "All quiet on every front": The role of war literature in peace studies. Unpublished.
- DiMeggio, C. (2015b). Dorothy Day: A sestina on peace. Unpublished.
- DiMeggio, C. (2015c). "Peace meets pedagogy": Utilizing slave and neo-slave narratives in the English classroom to promote peaceful dialogue and positive race relations. Unpublished.
- DiMeggio, C. (2015d). "The price of privilege": Analyzing the role of "white guilt" in *Meridian* through a peace studies lens. Unpublished.
- Eagleton, T. (1991). *The significance of theory*. New York: Wiley.
- Fuhrmeister, M. (2015a). Credentials: My name is Mrs. Fannie Lou Hamer. Unpublished.
- Fuhrmeister, M. (2015b). *The left hand of darkness* facilitation reflection. Unpublished.
- Fuhrmeister, M. (2015c). *Meridian* facilitation reflection. Unpublished.
- Fuhrmeister, M. (2015d). The moral mestiza: Consciousness of peace engaged in black arts.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1920). Satyagraha: Congress report on the Punjab disorders. In R. L. Holmes and B. L. Gan, eds. (2012). *Nonviolence in theory and practice*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (pp. 83-87). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.
- Gandhi, M. K. (1930). My faith in nonviolence. Retrieved from [http://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/faithin\\_nonvio.htm](http://www.mkgandhi.org/nonviolence/faithin_nonvio.htm).
- Gandhi, M. K. (1958). Ahimsa, or the way of nonviolence. In J. J. Fahey & R. Armstrong, eds. (1992). *A peace reader* (pp. 171-174). New York: Paulist Press.
- Gold, R. (2015a). Allowing for student voice. Unpublished.
- Gold, R. (2015b). Free seeds: A free verse poem for Vandana Shiva. Unpublished.
- Gold, R. (2015c). Recognizing violence and developing perspective for reconciliation. Unpublished.
- Gold, R. (2015d). Replacing violence with narrative in *The Arabian nights*. Unpublished.
- Halbwachs, M. (1992). *On collective memory*. Ed. And trans. L. A. Coser. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Harris, I. M. & Morrison, M. L. (2015). *Peace education*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co.
- Hontau, A. (2015a). The dream of Cesar Chavez: Day 20 of the fast. Unpublished.
- Hontau, A. (2015b). Love as a form of deconstruction in *The left hand of darkness*. Unpublished.
- Hontau, A. (2015c). Peace and the simulacrum war in *The yellow birds*. Unpublished.
- Hontau, A. (2015d). The struggle for peace and purpose in Alice Walker's *Meridian*. Unpublished.
- King, M. L., Jr. (1963). Letter from a Birmingham jail. Retrieved from [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html).

- Lakey, G. *Facilitating group learning: Strategies for success with diverse adult learners*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lederach, J. P. (2005). *The moral imagination: The art and soul of building peace*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Lee, H. (1960, 2014). *To kill a mockingbird*. New York, Harper Collins.
- Le Guin, U. K. (1969, 1987). *The left hand of darkness*. New York: Ace Books.
- Lewis, J. (2015a). Authority and power in *All quiet on the western front*. Unpublished.
- Lewis, J. (2015b). Barbara Deming—A villanelle on justice. Unpublished.
- Lewis, J. (2015c). Personal and social memory in peacebuilding. Unpublished.
- Lewis, J. (2015d). Teaching perspective, empathy, and peace with *To kill a mockingbird*. Unpublished.
- Maresco, A. (2015a). The dark side of pride. Unpublished.
- Maresco, A. (2015b). The only deal we'll take: in response to Cesar Chavez's "The union and the strike." Unpublished.
- Maresco, A. (2015c). Small but mighty: The hobbits as soldiers of change. Unpublished.
- Maresco, A. (2015d). The trench's untold stories. Unpublished.
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Parmese, J. (2015a). Changed men on the path to peace: Struggles with identity in soldiers' personal narratives in Powers's *Yellow birds*. Unpublished.
- Parmese, J. (2015b). Romanticism of war: Comments on education in Remarque's *All quiet on the western front* with Woolf's *A room of one's own*. Unpublished.
- Parmese, J. (2015c). Saving the monster: Reading the second Norton critical edition of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* through a peace-building lens and turning classroom tips into social action. Unpublished.
- Parmese, J. (2015d). There are some days when I feel so empty inside: Based on Nonviolence and peacemaking by Leymah Gbowee with Archbishop Thabo Makgoba. Unpublished.
- Powers, K. (2012). *The yellow birds*. New York: Little, Brown and Company.
- Reardon, B. (1988). The fundamental purposes of a pedagogy of peace. In *Comprehensive peace education: Educating for global responsibility*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Remarque, E. M. (1928, 1982). *All quiet on the western front*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Teachers Without Borders. (2011). *Peace education program: A professional development course for educators*. Retrieved from <http://www.achva.ac.il/sites/default/files/achvafiles/r%26d/institute/rd/PEP%20Curriculum%20FINAL%20-%20Sep2011%20Revision.pdf>.
- Thoreau, H. D. (1849). On the duty of civil disobedience. Retrieved from <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/walden/Essays/civil.html>.
- Timpson, W. M., Brantmeier, E. J., Kees, N., Cavanagh, T. McGlynn, C., & Ndura-Ouedraogo, E., eds. (2009). *147 practical tips for teaching peace and reconciliation*. Madison, WI: Atwood Publishing.
- Todorov, Tzvetan. (1977). Narrative-men. In *The poetics of prose*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca, NY.
- Tolstoy, L. (1896). Letter to Ernest Howard Crosby. Retrieved from [http://www.nonresistance.org/docs\\_pdf/Tolstoy/Letter\\_to\\_Crosby.pdf](http://www.nonresistance.org/docs_pdf/Tolstoy/Letter_to_Crosby.pdf).

Trinh T. M.-H. (1988). Not you/like you: Post-colonial women and the interlocking questions of identity and difference. *Inscriptions* 3-4. Retrieved from <http://ccs.ihr.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-34/trinh-t-minh-ha/>.

Walker, A. (1976). *Meridian*. New York: Harcourt.

Žižek, S. (1997). *The plague of fantasies*. Brooklyn, NY: Verso.

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## The *Trilakṣaṇa* (“Three Marks of Existence”) and Transformative Conflict Resolution

Author: Saul Tobias

Title: Associate Professor

Affiliation: California State University Fullerton

Location: California, USA

E-mail: stobias@fullerton.edu

**Keywords:** Buddhism, Intractable Conflict, Transformative Conflict Resolution

---

### Abstract

A number of scholars in peace and conflict studies emphasize psychological transformation as important to successful conflict resolution. The adjustment of personal attitudes and emotional commitments is seen as particularly important in the context of intractable conflicts in which religious, ethnic, or national identities are at stake. This paper proposes a well-known triad of Buddhist concepts as a framework for such transformative conflict resolution (TCR). The *Trilakṣaṇa* or “Three Marks of Existence,” of *anatta* (non-self), *anicca* (impermanence), and *dukkha* (suffering) are said to characterize all aspects of reality. In Buddhist religious practice, meditation on the three marks frees the practitioner from attachment to fixed conceptions of self and phenomena that are principle causes of hatred and conflict. In the context of conflict mediation, the *Trilakṣaṇa* can be “secularized” and adapted for the purpose of promoting the psychological and emotional adjustments necessary to the successful resolution of conflict.

## THE *TRILAKṢAṆA* (“THREE MARKS OF EXISTENCE”) AND TRANSFORMATIVE CONFLICT RESOLUTION

### Introduction

The *Trilakṣaṇa*, usually translated from Sanskrit into English as the ‘three marks of existence,’ is a triad of concepts well-known across all traditions of Buddhist thought. The three marks of existence are *anicca*: ‘impermanence’; *dukkha*: ‘dissatisfaction’; and *anatta*: ‘non-self’. Together, they are said to describe reality as perceived by those with true wisdom or understanding. The American Buddhist scholar and teacher Alan Wallace (2011) asserts the importance of the three

marks of existence as antidotes to conflict and its psychological causes. “Learning to treat each other compassionately would be a big step toward mitigating our suffering,” he writes. “But the ultimate liberation, according to Buddhism’s foundational teachings, is the direct realization of three particular aspects of reality – impermanence, dissatisfaction, and non-self – which eradicates the very root of afflictive mental tendencies and suffering” (p. 68).

Wallace’s assertion provides a starting point for examining the relevance of Buddhism’s understanding of the *trilakṣaṇa* for conflict resolution, and particularly for what is known in the field as transformative conflict resolution (TCR). There are a number of reasons for drawing connections between the Buddhist idea of the *trilakṣaṇa* and TCR. First, all models of conflict resolution are to some extent culturally specific. This cultural specificity extends from conceptions of human psychology to the norms governing social interactions. Many such existing models have been developed in a Western context and draw on Western scientific and social-scientific research. It is therefore important to find ways to translate the insights and strategies of these models into intellectual frameworks that may resonate more closely with other cultures. The *trilakṣaṇa* provides Buddhists and Buddhist mediators a framework for thinking through the grounds and process of conflict resolution in terms that may be more familiar to Buddhist societies, but which are nonetheless compatible with Western models of conflict resolution.

Conversely, perspectives and models drawn from non-Western cultural and intellectual contexts can contribute to existing, Western frameworks by contributing new insights, as well as reframing problems and solutions in novel ways. The *trilakṣaṇa* provides a particularly coherent and integrated model of the psychological obstacles to conflict resolution, and of practical interventions for psychological transformation. It is also a model that can be reframed in non-sectarian terms to guide mediators and facilitators, and community members who are not Buddhists, but have their own traditions of transformative conflict resolution that are compatible with the one laid out here. In short, not only do these particular Buddhist ideas provide a useful rubric for conceptualizing the psychological issues at stake in transformational conflict resolution; they also suggests strategies that, with due consideration for context and circumstances, might be adapted to a number of conflict situations, particularly those involving communities divided on ethnic, religious or similar grounds.

Before examining the *trilakṣaṇa*, an overview of transformative conflict resolution may be helpful.

### **Transformative Conflict Resolution**

Over the last few decades, transformative conflict resolution (TCR) has emerged as an important perspective within the broader conflict resolution literature. In describing TCR, early exponents Robert Bush and Joseph Folger (1994) wrote that “we have come to believe that mediation’s greatest value lies in its potential not only to find solutions to people’s problems, but to change people themselves in the very midst of conflict” (p. iv). For these authors, the ultimate goal of conflict mediation should not be mere settlement or solution to disagreement, but the moral transformation of the participants themselves as a step towards realizing the fuller potential of human beings and society, “a world in which people are not just better off but better: more human and more humane” (p. 29).

Many subsequent accounts of TCR present variations on Bush and Folger’s view, arguing, for example, that transformation is not so much a higher goal than settlement but rather, in many conflict situations, an absolute *prerequisite* for enduring peace. This is particularly evident in the

case of intractable conflicts, those protracted and often violent struggles between groups that prove unusually difficult to resolve. There are many external political, historical, and economic reasons why conflicts remain unresolvable, but one reason concerns the psychology of the participants in the conflict. As Gayer et. al. (2009) note, intractable conflicts are frequently perceived to be “existential ..., unsolvable, of a zero-sum nature, and to preoccupy society members that invest much in [their] continuation.” (pg. 972, n.1). In other words, conflicts become entrenched and are sustained by participants on both sides, who come to think, feel, believe, and perceive in ways that sustain the conflict and prevent change.

### **Freezing**

The process whereby the beliefs, ideas, and emotional responses of participants in intractable conflicts become rigid and resistant to change is referred to by a number of scholars as “freezing” (see Lewin 1947; Gayer et.al, 2009; Bar-Tal, 2013). Three distinct types of freezing can be identified: cognitive freezing; emotional freezing; and existential freezing. Though closely related and mutually reinforcing, these three psychological processes draw on different parts of our psychological functioning and require different solutions.

*Cognitive freezing* refers to the ways in which conflict-supporting beliefs become pervasive and entrenched among a society’s members. Daniel Bar-Tal (2013) notes that in entrenched conflicts the two sides may each become reliant on these conflict-supporting beliefs, making them resistant to other viewpoints and reluctant to search for alternatives. Such beliefs are to be found in the group’s founding myths, its narratives of collective sacrifice and victimization, in tales of the enemy’s infamy, and in “common knowledge” concerning the enemy’s nature, motives, and behavior. Together, these narratives form a fixed construction of social and historical reality.

One reason why these structures of belief become rigid is that they in fact appear to serve important human needs, providing a stable framework in which to conduct life – and survive - in a conflict zone. They offer a sense of certainty and clarity about the situation, a means for differentiating friend from enemy, and a shared ground on which to build group solidarity. They endow the apparent randomness and futility of the conflict with purpose and meaning, and provide a moral framework and justification for action, including for acts of violence (see Burton, 1990; Kelman & Fisher, 2003; Staub & Bar-Tal, 2003). Nor do these ideas and beliefs exist only at a conceptual level. Parties to the conflict establish routines and patterns of life, and even institutions that depend on the maintenance of these rigid beliefs and ideas, which leads to their further solidification.

The second type of psychological freezing is *emotional freezing*, which refers to the ways in which emotional responses to conflicts contribute to these conflicts’ intractability. In particular, emotions of fear, anxiety, hatred, and humiliation tend to reinforce habits of thought and action that freeze the conflict in self-perpetuating patterns of aggression and reaction that are not easily broken. One reason for this is that fear and chronic stress reinforce patterns of impulsive and over-simplified mental processing, i.e. flight or fight reactions, that short-circuit rational reflection and long-term planning. Psychologist Evelin Lindner (2006) points out that

there is an ongoing tension between older, more primitive emotional responses and our more recently achieved capabilities. ... We manage to resolve this tension through a series of hierarchically structured feedback loops .... Unfortunately, these loops are too often overridden in conflict situations, when the older parts of the brain leap into action ... This can lead to disaster. (p. 273)

In addition to stress and fear, humiliation and hatred similarly distort our capacity for reflection and problem-solving. When our mental functioning has become primed for these emotions, they are quickly triggered by any perceived threat or insult, which in turn reinforces the hold these emotions have over our mental life. We become, in a sense, addicted to our fear, our humiliation, and our hatred, and to the beliefs and ideas associated with those feelings (Lindner, 2006).

Finally, *existential freezing* refers to the belief and feeling that the continued existence of the group is in peril. A conventional response to this sense of existential peril is to deepen our attachment to the established ideas, beliefs, and habits that have protected the group and constitute its identity, and on which its survival seems to depend. The effects of existential anxiety have been the focus of a psychological approach called Terror Management Theory, in which there has been recently a resurgence of interest (see Solomon, Greenberg & Pyszczynski, 2015). Terror Management Theory holds that anxiety about death is an omnipresent feature of human existence, and that human societies have developed specific cultural worldviews partly in response to this anxiety. As sociologist Ernst Becker expressed it, a cultural worldview is “more than an outlook on life, it is an immortality formula” in the sense that it serves as a means by which human beings make sense of, and attempt to manage, the fear of death (cited in Burke, Martens & Faucher, 2010, p.156). As fear of death increases, people tend to hold more firmly to their cultural beliefs as a source of reassurance. This tendency has been verified in numerous experimental studies that have shown that priming people to think about their own mortality leads to their increased adherence to their own cultural worldview. In situations of protracted conflict, the proximity of death – what psychologists in the field call “mortality salience” – is dramatically increased. The associated tendency to hold more firmly to an established worldview is therefore heightened. What is more, Jeff Greenberg points out that proximity of death does more than deepen one’s attachment to one’s own beliefs. It also increases one’s intolerance of others who hold different beliefs (Greenberg et.al., 1992).

### **The *Trilakṣaṇa* as Framework for Transformative Conflict Resolution**

Cognitive, emotional, and existential freezing reinforce one another, constituting a powerful barrier to resolving intractable conflicts. When we turn to the Buddhist literature, we find that Buddhist teachings on the three marks of existence provide insight into the nature of cognitive, emotional, and existential freezing and their mutual reinforcement.

#### **Anicca**

The first of the three marks of existence is *anicca*, or impermanence. Buddhism holds that all things, including physical, cognitive, and emotional phenomena, are by nature impermanent. This emphasis on impermanence is foundational for all Buddhist schools and traditions, but is expressed nowhere more beautifully than in the Diamond Sutra, a much-loved text of Mahayana Buddhism:

So I say to you - This is how to contemplate our conditioned existence in this fleeting world:

"Like a tiny drop of dew, or a bubble floating in a stream;

Like a flash of lightning in a summer cloud,

Or a flickering lamp, an illusion, a phantom, or a dream."

So is all conditioned existence to be seen. (*Diamond Sutra*, verse 31)

According to the Buddhist teachings, while impermanence is the true nature of all things, human beings, as a consequence of ignorance and self-cherishing, view what is impermanent as permanent, grasping at the impermanent as if it were durable and unchanging. This is a fundamental human tendency, but as we have seen in relation to cognitive freezing, it is exacerbated in situations of intractable conflict. While the reality of any conflict situation is that it is dynamic and constantly changing, the parties involved frequently perceive and live the conflict as if it were fixed and immutable. This erroneous view is reinforced in the histories, myths, and narratives of opposing communities. In this way, an inherent psychological tendency is reified by what communities in conflict teach their children, reaffirm as conventional wisdom, and use as a conceptual map for navigating their reality and ordering their daily routine.

Within a situation of conflict, such fixed ideas and ways of viewing the world discourage trust and negotiation. For peace to be possible, contending parties must move beyond the security and familiarity of viewing the conflict in fixed and unchanging terms. Bar-Tal (2013) writes that for progress to be made in resolving intractable conflicts, “the society must move from what is known and well established in the minds of society members and well-practiced for many years to new ideas that portray an unknown, uncertain, and unpredictable future...” (p. 325). Moving from a situation of certain conflict to uncertain peace requires the capacity to tolerate and even embrace uncertainty. This movement can be understood as a growing familiarization with, and acceptance of, the first mark of existence: that all phenomena arise in relation to specific causes and conditions and are inherently impermanent, including the fixed ideas, beliefs, habits and institutions that keep contending sides locked in an unresolvable conflict.

### **Dukkha**

The second mark of existence is *dukkha*, translated as suffering or unsatisfactoriness. The Buddha’s first teaching, the so-called Four Noble Truths, was a teaching on *dukkha*. As expressed in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*, the first noble truth reminds us of the ubiquity of suffering:

Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering. (*Samyutta Nikaya*, 56.11)

Buddhism reminds us of the pervasiveness of suffering, and the necessity of cultivating awareness and understanding if suffering is to be diminished. It also emphasizes how suffering is frequently self-imposed as a result of unhealthy habits and distorted perceptions. The eighth-century sage Shantideva, in his *Guide to the Bodhisattva Way of life* (1997), wrote that “I do not desire suffering; yet, fool that I am, I desire the cause of suffering. When suffering emerges due to my own fault, why should I be angry with anyone else?” (p. 66). According to Buddhism, all beings long for happiness and to be free from suffering. But because we maintain a distorted understanding of the world, clinging to fixed ideas about self and other, we cause suffering rather than avert it. This distorted understanding generates the *kleshas* or afflictions, including attachment, fear, paranoia, hatred, and prejudice. Such emotions are universal, but as we have seen, they are frequently exaggerated in situations of intractable conflict.

This second mark of existence draws our attention to the affective dimension of intractable conflict, which may often be the most difficult to overcome. The fuel of conflict and the difficulty of overcoming conflict lie frequently in the suffering of the parties, and more importantly, in the

designation by the parties of responsibility for that suffering. If intractable conflicts are to be resolved, fixed and unhealthy emotional responses to this suffering need to be transformed. Understanding the second mark of existence is consistent with this transformation. First, a Buddhist understanding of suffering encourages us to recognize that suffering is ubiquitous and pertains to both sides in a conflict. Second, we can come to see how adaptation and habituation to the conflict situation results in a distorted idea of happiness. The reaction to the suffering caused by conflict is often to strengthen such feelings and their associated ideas and beliefs, however much they may in fact themselves perpetuate the conflict. Pride in our sense of victimization, and the petty humiliations and victories exacted from the enemy, come to feel like pleasure and happiness. In the end, participants in intractable conflicts become habituated to these emotional states, so that a life dominated by mistrust, paranoia, and hatred may come to seem normal, and even happy. Thus the widely-observed yet perplexing characteristic of enduring conflicts that the continuous suffering endured by both sides often fuels the conflicts more than it motivates its end. Shantideva's admonition reminds us that in pursuing happiness and in avoiding suffering, we often foster emotional habits that only perpetuate that suffering.

### **Anatta**

The final mark of existence is *anatta*, or non-self. According to Buddhism, all things lack an inherent self that is fixed and separate from others. Though an identity may be imposed on an individual or on a group, beneath that designating label is only a substrate of factors that are constantly changing and are fundamentally relational. The Vietnamese Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh uses the terms "interbeing" to capture this interdependent nature of selfhood. As Joan Halifax and Marty Peal (1996) explain, the concept of interbeing "points to the absence of a separate self identity and thus to the interconnectedness, interdependence, and interpenetration of all beings" (p. 6). Ignorance consists in viewing the shifting and interdependent self as something permanent and separate. In the *Alaguduppama Sutta*, the Buddha instructs his disciples to carefully examine the various physical and mental components that are thought to anchor the self's existence. Such careful analysis will ultimately reveal that no inherent self can be found either in or outside these components:

Therefore, monks, any kind of material form ..., any kind of feeling ..., any kind of perception ..., any kind of mental formation ..., any kind of consciousness ..., should be seen as it actually is with proper wisdom thus: "This is not mine, this I am not, this is not my self." (*Majjhima Nikaya: 22*)

The erroneous belief in an inherently existing self is a normal human belief. However, under most conditions, human beings permit this sense of self to shift and change over time, even while insisting that it remains intact. But as we have seen, intractable conflicts are often perceived by participants to be existential in character, in which the very survival of the self and the group is felt to be at stake. This leads to existential freezing, in which the individual and group self are reified and fixed. In contradiction to the reality of *anatta*, we insist on the inherent truth and value, and the immutable, singular character, of our cultural worldview and our group identity. We exaggerate the differences between self and other, repudiate the beliefs of others as a threat to our existence, and affirm the superiority of our group and our worldview. Under such conditions, even to contemplate the end of the conflict is to risk the revision and abandonment of these ideas and

beliefs that define our sense of self and community. The truth of *anatta* offers a preliminary glimpse into a more flexible and relativistic view of self and other.

Perhaps what is most useful about the *trilakṣaṇa* presentation is its account of the mutually reinforcing character of the three marks. The *Alaguppāna Sutta* states that each of the three marks of existence implies or necessitates the others:

Form, feeling, perception, mental formations and consciousness are *anicca*, impermanent; whatever is impermanent, that is *dukkha*, unsatisfactory; whatever is *dukkha*, that is without *atta*, self.... Thus should it be seen by perfect wisdom as it really is. (SN 22.45)

In the context of political conflict, this mutually reinforcing character can be understood as a cycle of factors that deepen the conflict's intractability. Resistance to the inherent selflessness (*anatta*) and impermanence (*anicca*) of things contributes to our suffering (*dukkha*), and when we suffer, we tend, in turn, to grasp more fervently at the belief in the solidity and permanence of things for the security these seem to provide. In this cycle of perpetual suffering, identified in Buddhist thought as *samsara*, the relentless cycle of rebirth, our rigid beliefs about permanence and fixed identity strengthen the routinized emotional responses that we have to the conflict. And these afflictive emotions, such as fear, hatred, and humiliation, strengthen a fixed sense of self, and provide support for the validity and justice of our fixed ideas and beliefs. The *trilakṣaṇa* thus describe a vicious circle, in which thought, emotion, and identity all become frozen, inhibiting the open heart and open mind that are necessary conditions for a break in the cycle of conflict.

### Unfreezing

As we can see, the Buddhist teaching on the three marks of existence provides a useful framework for capturing the ways in which our tendencies to misapprehend the nature of reality are further exacerbated in conflict situations, deepening and freezing those afflictive tendencies in damaging ways. However, Buddhism is not merely interested in described the nature of reality and our misunderstanding of that nature. Its principle concern is with providing techniques to correct that misunderstanding. Buddhist practice aims to transform the person in order to attain freedom from the self-created cycle of suffering (*samsara*), much as exponents of Transformative Conflict Resolution understand that the psychological transformation of people who are parties to a conflict is a condition, alongside political and institutional changes, of any enduring resolution. Dilgo Khyentse (2006, p.102), one of the great twentieth century masters of Tibetan Buddhism, describes the perpetuation of cycles of suffering in terms of fixation and freezing:

Blind to the mind's true nature, we fixate on our thoughts, which in truth are simply the manifestations of that nature. But through fixation, pure awareness is frozen into solid concepts such as “self” and “other,” “desirable” and repulsive,” and many more. That is how we create *samsara*.

In the Buddhist view, contemplative practices that unfreeze our attachment to the rigid beliefs and views are the principle antidote to the suffering caused by these fixations. Dilgo Khyentse offers the following analogy:

Lakes and rivers can freeze in winter and the water can become so solid that people, animals, and carts travel back and forth on its surface. At the approach of spring, the earth warms up and the waters thaw. What remains then of all that solid ice?

... It is the same with our perceptions of the external world. To be attached to the reality of phenomena, tormented by attraction and repulsion ... is what causes the mind to freeze. Melt the ice of your concepts so that fluid water of free perception can flow. (p. 131)

The 'unfreezing' that Dilgo Khyentse advocates here refers to a repertoire of contemplative and meditative practices that Buddhism has developed over the centuries. Traditionally, these practices have been grouped into three approaches by which one attains understanding of the three marks of existence: *listening* to the teachings; *contemplating* the teachings; and *meditating* on the teachings. While some of these contemplative practices may seem unusual in conflict resolution settings, they are not that different from the practices such as mediated discussion, compassionate listening, role-play, or reflection, that are standard in mediation practice. These approaches, through creative modifications, can be applied to grassroots conflict resolution settings, and to the challenges of melting the entrenched beliefs, emotions, and identities that sustain intractable conflict.

### **Listening**

We can understand listening to the teachings as communicating ideas of impermanence, non-self, and suffering to participants in ways that potentially open up the rigid structure of concepts and beliefs that define intractable conflicts. The change in understanding or belief that new information may provoke is referred to in the conflict resolution literature as an instigating belief, that is, an idea or belief that opens the possibility for a shift in perspectives and attitudes. Daniel Bar-Tel (2013) defines an instigating belief as "a new idea that is inconsistent with the held beliefs and attitudes and causes some tension... which may stimulate people to move from their old position" (pp. 327-8).

There is evidence that hearing new ideas or receiving new information that relates to the three marks of existence can have a positive impact on conflict situations. For example, in relation to the first mark of existence, impermanence (*anicca*), psychological studies have affirmed the beneficial impact of a perspectival shift from a view of the conflict as fixed, to a view of reality as dynamic and changeable. A study by Smadar Cohen-Chen, et.al. (2014) found that participants in situations of intractable conflict, when provided with information about the dynamism and malleability of social and political reality, exhibited more hope about the possibility of an end to conflict. The study presented two groups of Israelis with two different pieces of research - one which showed that historically conflicts are dynamic and change over time; the other that conflicts are static and unchanging. The result of the study showed that "an increased belief about the malleability of conflict situations induces higher levels of hope regarding the end of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the future, and this in turn increases support of major concessions needed in order to promote peace" (Cohen-Chen et. al. 2014, p.72). Writing about the possible practical implications of their study, the authors suggest that exposing participants to information about conflict malleability could form the basis for educational programs aimed at promoting peace between conflicting groups. Studies such as this affirm the importance of developing practices of conflict resolution that include the dissemination of information promoting a fundamental perspectival shift from permanence to impermanence, a change in perspective consistent with the first mark of existence.

Efforts to transform historical understanding in conflict situations can be seen in the work of organizations such as the Association for Historical Research and Dialogue (AHRD), a collaboration between Greek and Turkish Cypriot educators to transform, through critical and

collaborative research and teaching, fixed historical narratives that reinforce the Cypriot conflict. AHRD includes among its aims to “nurture a critical understanding of the linkages between perceptions of history, attitudes and behaviors towards the ‘other’, and history education” and to “increase public awareness on the importance of dialogue and multiperspectivity on the issues of history, historiography, history teaching, and history learning” (AHRD).

The positive impact of hearing on peace-making and reconciliation is also evident in relation to the second mark of existence, suffering (*dukkha*). Bar-Tel (2013) notes that a willingness to recognize the suffering of the other party can itself constitute an instigating belief that can provide an opening for an unfreezing of social attitudes (p. 328). In post-Apartheid South Africa, the information disseminated by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was widely considered an instigating factor in the personal transformation of sections of the white population. Many white South Africans were confronted for the first time with the full horror and extent of the state’s persecution of black citizens. This information contributed to revising their understanding of the history of the country and their role in that history.

A widely reported example of this recontextualization came during the TRC hearings, when Susan van der Merwe, the wife of a white Afrikaner farmer killed by black militants, gave testimony. Rather than treating the hearings as an occasion to counter black suffering with white suffering, van der Merwe contextualized the suffering of her family within the framework of the broader suffering of black South Africans that the TRC hearings had exposed. Speaking in Afrikaans, van der Merwe’s testimony included the following statement which she addressed to the presiding commissioners:

Mr. Chairperson and honorable members of the Truth Commission, you have heard so many stories of horrible deeds. Stories of people who have hurt others without batting an eyelid. You have gone into the hearts and minds of people whose wounds have shattered their lives. My story and that of my children is but a minor story in comparison with these others for whom we feel sympathy. Our pain is but a mere drop in the ocean of South Africa's suffering. (van der Merwe, 1996)

Van der Merwe’s testimony represents a blueprint for hearing about the marks of existence as a potentially transformative practice. The mark of existence that is “heard” in this case is the truth of suffering (*dukkha*), of its ubiquity and pervasiveness across the boundaries of conflict. It also conveys the capacity of suffering to dissolve fixed and doctrinaire distinctions between self and other and between contesting groups that stand in the way of empathy and transformation. Naturally, not all parties to a conflict are ready or able to listen in this way, but under the right circumstances, the practice of hearing can prepare the ground for a softening of attitudes and a transformation of fixed identities that can contribute to the resolution of conflicts.

The fact that this instance of “listening” took the form of an officially sanctioned Hearing is also instructive about the relation between psychological transformation and institutional change. In the case of South Africa, the TRC combined a judicial process of truth-finding and amnesty hearings with a process designed to promote reconciliation through the humanization of opponents, and the “sharing” of testimony. In other words, it represented an attempt to institutionalize and “scale up” interpersonal processes of unfreezing to a national level. Such scaling up carries its own risks, but it is evidence that the principle of listening need not be restricted purely to the level of individual interactions.

## Contemplating

In addition to merely communicating ideas about impermanence, suffering, and non-self to participants in conflicts, we can also facilitate the contemplation of these ideas. To contemplate in Buddhism means to test the truth of an idea. It goes deeper than hearing, for the sustained contemplation of an idea not only provides new insights but may destabilize and lead to the revision of broader structures of thought. So in the context of grassroots conflict mediation, contemplating the three marks of existence means providing an opportunity to discuss and reflect on the truth and significance of these ideas as applied to the conflict experience. Such contemplative practices could take place both within and between conflicting groups, in structured “safe-spaces” where individuals can begin to acclimatize to the uncertainty and shift in perspective necessary for intercommunal peace-making.

Some of this contemplation might consist, for example, in reflection on any myths, legends, or religious narratives that pose a particular challenge to conflict resolution. Such narratives must be approached with great sensitivity, but one possibility consists in exploring whether seemingly fixed religious or cultural traditions in fact contain resources for reimagining communal histories in more inclusive ways. Similarly, contemplating seemingly permanent political and social institutions and structures may reveal ways in which they can be opened or transformed. In addition, “non-self” may be contemplated in relation to entrenched ideas about “us and them”, “theirs and ours”, which can be invaluable in de-essentializing fixed identities and boundaries.

To contemplate a community’s sense of self and its history in these ways serves not only to facilitate the creation and integration of a transformed and more inclusive image of self and of history; it may also loosen bonds that exacerbate both communities’ suffering. One may come to appreciate that not only does the enemy suffer as well, but the inability of one’s community to unlock its fixed conception of itself and of its history is a cause of its own suffering. The importance of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which initiated a period of sustained and often painful national reflection, lay in the way in which it facilitated this double recognition. Not only did opposing communities come to see how the other side had suffered, but they also saw how their intransigence had contributed to their own suffering.

Here are some examples of the kinds of questions that can be posed for discussion and reflection in contemplative forums:

- Is it true that what seems unchanging about this conflict is, in fact, changeable?
- Are the cultural practices and beliefs that sustain this conflict fixed, or are they more flexible than they seem?
- Have we come to see our own suffering as normal? Is this healthy? How did this happen?
- Is it only my group that suffers or suffers more, or have all parties suffered? Is our suffering connected?
- What does it mean to be a member of my own national or ethnic group? Is this identity connected to the identity of my enemy? Has the definition of this identity changed over time? Can my definition of this identity change now? Does that thought instill anxiety or hope?

Referenda on peace agreements provide an example of national discussions on such questions of history, belonging, victimhood, and identity. Even when such contemplation does not immediately produce the hoped-for result, as was the case with the 2016 referendum on the Colombia peace accords, it may nonetheless play a critical part in the ongoing process of transforming fixed beliefs and emotions (Posada-Carbó, 2017). Such opportunities institutionalize contemplation as a mechanism of broader social and political transformation, effectively “scaling-up” contemplation to the group or national level.

## **Meditating**

The third method traditionally associated with attaining realization of the three marks of existence is meditation. From the Buddhist perspective, true transformation comes through recognizing these marks of existence at the experiential level, in terms of our own felt experience, and not merely at the level of conceptual thought. Through meditation, insights attained in hearing and contemplation are processed and gradually integrated; in this way, the self is transformed.

For those unfamiliar with Buddhist meditative traditions, it should be recalled that meditation is not magic. Indeed, in the Buddhist tradition, it is understood literally as “practice,” that is, the development of habits of thought and response that are then carried into our life situations. Rather than directly transforming the conflict, meditative practices allow participants to explore, develop and “practice” imaginatively, and in a “safe space,” a different repertoire of concepts and feelings concerning both the self and the enemy.

Here I want to mention briefly just two meditation practices that can be adapted for conflict resolution settings. The first is a practice known as the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, which is based in the *sutras*, the original discourses of the Buddha. The second is a practice with variants found throughout Mahayana Buddhism, but particularly widely practiced in Tibetan Buddhism. It is known as Tong-Len, the practice of exchanging self for other.

### *The Four Foundations of Mindfulness*

Mindfulness practices have received a great deal of attention in the media recently, though they in fact first appear in the Buddhist sutras in connection with the three marks of existence. The premise of mindfulness meditation is that insight is itself a kind of antidote. Not only do we see our frozen patterns of belief and feeling more clearly, but in doing so, we begin to see through them, and in that sense, begin to melt them.

The four foundations of mindfulness are: mindfulness of body, mindfulness of feeling, mindfulness of mind, and mindfulness of phenomena. Though all four practices are relevant to conflict resolution, we will here briefly consider two.

### Mindfulness of Feeling

Through mindfulness of feeling we develop the capacity to be present with our feelings, but without identifying with them, rejecting them, or feeding them with a narrative. We gain some distance from our emotions, enabling us to disentangle our feelings from the the storylines and beliefs that sustain them and which they, in turn, sustain. In this way we are able to suspend, if only temporarily, the repetitive cycle of thoughts and emotions that sustain each other.

Developing the capacity to be present with the feelings associated with enduring conflicts in this kind of thoughtful and non-reactive way is an effective method for weakening the power of those

feelings to inflame and sustain conflict. We learn to look more deeply into conflict-sustaining feelings such as hatred, fear, and humiliation, and into the ideas, beliefs, and habits that generate and sustain them.

For example, the feeling of humiliation has been noted as a powerful obstacle to reconciliation, so long as the narrative of humiliation remains influential, and so long as one's sense of self is deeply invested in that humiliation. Mindfulness of emotion trains us to be present with that feeling of humiliation, without immediately identifying with it, or associating it with a narrative. This distance from our feelings opens a space for unfreezing, for constructing a different story-line and a different sense of our relation to our humiliation. We see that we may be hanging onto a feeling that has already run its course and endures only out of habit; that this feeling causes more pain than comfort; that our humiliation becomes a pathway to recognizing the humiliation of our enemy; or that our humiliation can serve as a seed for a more altruistic desire to end the humiliation of others. Whatever the outcome of this mindfulness of the feeling of humiliation, this re-narrating of our feelings, and loosening of our identification with our emotions, is potentially transformative of our self, our relations to others, and the broader conflict.

### *Mindfulness of Phenomena*

In the fourth foundation of mindfulness, mindfulness of phenomena, we focus our awareness on the myriad phenomena that sustain our sense of identity and self, including physical forms, feelings, perceptions, social roles, ideas, and beliefs. In practicing mindfulness of these phenomena, we come to see that what we hold as essential parts of ourselves may themselves be impermanent and contingent. They do not, as we suppose, provide a solid and stable basis for our sense of identity. In the context of conflict resolution, we can direct our attention to the physical and mental phenomena on which our sense of individual or group identity seems to depend, either because we identify with these things, or because we define ourselves against them. Mindfulness of phenomena is thus a practice for unfreezing our sense of self, in that it creates the space and flexibility for renegotiating one's sense of who one is, and for developing a more expansive, inclusive, and flexible identity.

### *Exchanging Self for Other (Tong-Len)*

Once considered a closely-guarded secret, Tong-Len is now a widely-taught meditation practice, and seems particularly appropriate in the context of conflict resolution. A classic account of the practice is found in Shantideva's famous work, *The Way of the Bodhisattva (Bodhicharyavatara)*, written in the eighth century. In chapter eight of the work, dedicated to the topic of meditation, Shantideva begins his discussion of the practice with verses that assert the falsity of fixed and polarized conceptions of self and other:

Strive at first to meditate  
Upon the sameness of yourself and others  
In joy and sorrow all are equal:  
Thus be the guardian of all, as of yourself.

The hand and other limbs are many and distinct,  
But all are one - the body to be kept and guarded.  
Likewise, different beings, in their joys and sorrows,  
Are, like me, all one in wanting happiness. (8:90-91)

Shantideva then challenges us to consider the view that holds our own suffering and victimhood to be more worthy of concern than that of others. Pointing out the conventional and contingent character of our sense of self, he argues in verses 96 and 102 that when fixated attachment to a particular sense of self is loosened, then so is the sense of a firm distinction or boundary between my suffering and that of others.

Since I and other beings both,  
In feeling suffering, are equal and alike,  
What difference is there to distinguish us,  
That I should save myself and not the others?

Suffering has no ‘possessor,’  
Therefore no distinctions can be made in it.  
Since pain is pain, it is to be dispelled.  
What use is there in drawing boundaries?

Such contemplations form the basis of the Tong-Len practice, but the meditation itself consists in an imaginative exchange of self and other which challenges our sense of identity in a much profounder way. The practice is summed up in two lines by Shantideva:

Happiness, fulfillment: these I give away.  
The pain of others: this I will embrace. (8:161)

Over centuries this core instruction has developed into an organized meditation practice. While there are a number of variations on the practice, its basic form involves the imaginative taking in of another’s suffering, often synchronized with the in-breath, and the imaginative giving out of help, compassion, and happiness, synchronized with the out-breath. In a number of variations on the practice, this imaginative act of exchange proceeds through three phases: first in relation to loved ones, then to strangers, and then to enemies. In other words, the meditator “practices” this exchange of self and other on friends, family, and compatriots, before extending the practice to enemies and opponents. This is not an easy practice, for it requires emotional vulnerability and a willingness to expand one’s emotional responses, rather than retreat to the habitual reactions of defensiveness, hatred and fear. But precisely because Tong-Len is a sustained meditative practice requiring imaginative effort and concentration in a situation free of distraction, it is more likely to generate genuine feelings of empathy than the more detached practices of study and contemplation. Through extended practice, Shantideva suggests, one’s emotional responses to one’s supposed opponents can be thoroughly transformed:

And so we should be undeterred by hardships,  
For through the influence of use and habit,  
People even come to grieve  
For those whose very names struck terror in their hearts! (8:119)

In situations of intractable conflict, Tong-Len may be particularly challenging. The conscious effort to take on the suffering of one’s enemy, and to send them security, happiness, and the fulfillment of all their wishes, runs up against deep-seated habits of feeling and thought that sustain the conflict. Nonetheless, in conjunction with other forms of negotiation and mediation, and in the context of peace-building efforts, it is a powerful means of unfreezing the hardened emotional patterns that have been built up over the course of the conflict. This is because while Tong-Len is

traditionally included among a set of so-called “compassion” practices, the generation of compassion is only one of its aims. Instead, the practice aims directly at the cognitive, emotional, and existential freezing that we have identified as barriers to conflict resolution. So in addition to generating compassion, the practice also involves:

- the disruption of fixed belief and emotion by actively willing the well-being of the enemy.
- the disruption of fixed belief and emotion by actively taking upon oneself the enemy’s suffering.
- the disruption of fixed views of the self that may result from the practice.

Western scholars of conflict resolution have noted a similar relation between empathy and its impact on fixed conceptions of self and other. Much like Shantideva, who disputes the polarizing distinction between self and other, Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (2014), in calling for the necessity of a “productive engagement between the two memories, histories, and identities” of Israeli and Palestinian communities, begin by insisting on the “unavoidable inseparability and interdependence of Arab and Jew” (p. 78). Bashir and Goldberg draw on Dominick La Capra’s notion of “empathic unsettlement,” understood as a way to “transform otherness from a problem to be disposed of into a moral and emotional challenge” (p. 78). The notion of empathic unsettlement suggests that in seeking to relate to the perspective and suffering of an opponent in an empathic way, the self is necessarily unsettled. It is extremely difficult to *genuinely* empathize with an opponent, and yet entirely maintain the fixed conception of self and other that perpetuates the conflict.

While Bashir and Goldberg explore this engagement primarily in the context of public debate and conversation over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the logic of empathic unsettlement is the same logic we find in the meditative practice of Tong-Len. Like Tong-Len, its purpose is not merely to generate positive feelings towards the opponent, but perhaps, more importantly, to disrupt fixed conceptions of the self so that growth and transformation become possible. In particular, the authors argue that empathic unsettled disrupts fixed ideas about the uniqueness of one’s suffering and the special claim to victimhood that are common features of national and communal mythologies and that constitute significant barriers to reconciliation. “Empathic unsettlement,” they write, “... constantly undermines every ‘redeeming narrative’ of suffering that offers a melancholic pleasure and this is the source of its considerable political value” (85). This capacity to disrupt fixed conceptions is what we have seen Western conflict resolution scholars call an “instigating belief,” and what Buddhist scholars like Dilgo Khyentse refer to as “melt[ing] the ice of your concepts.”

It is important to note, however, some significant differences between Western and Buddhist approaches. For example, Bashir and Goldberg insist that disruptive empathy does not involve the equivalence of self and other (p. 84). It is not necessary to get into their reasons for insisting on this point, other than to note that the authors explicitly draw on the psychoanalytic tradition and on an ethical-philosophical perspective they describe as Levinasian. In other words, their views on selfhood and ethics are shaped by a Western heritage that includes psychoanalysis, Enlightenment philosophy, and Judaic ethics. Their insistence that empathy does not involve the equivalence of self and other would ring strange in cultures steeped in Buddhist metaphysics and ethics. The point here is that we recognize how Western ethical paradigms may face obstacles when applied in non-Western peace-making contexts, but also the value of exposing one’s own peace-making traditions to viewpoints that involve very different ethical and psychological assumptions.

Various grassroots initiatives present opportunities for introducing practices based on the principles of Tong-Len. Peace Camps that brought together teenagers from both sides of the Sri Lankan conflict for four days of peace-building activities resulted in measurable increases in empathy across the communities (Malhotra & Liyanage 2005). Such initiatives, under the supervision of trained educators and mediators, offer a promising venue for implementing age and context-appropriate meditative practices based on the idea of exchanging self for other.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

One should not exaggerate the speed or scale at which individual psychological transformation, facilitated by approaches such as the *trilakṣaṇa*, can effect long-lasting political change. Such a process is rarely direct, but instead takes place through a staggered process of institutionalization at multiple levels. Small-scale efforts at psychological transformation result in new institutional frameworks, such as inter-community schools and centers, joint religious services, museums, memorials, and other institutional expressions of a commitment to peace, and finally permanent political and economic institutions for reconstruction and dispute settlement. Simultaneously, negotiated institutional arrangements for power-sharing and dispute resolution can provide shared spaces and opportunities for psychological transformation. Because such transformation is a gradual and staggered process, it cannot initially prevent violence or an escalation in conflict that is already underway. Under such circumstances, diplomacy and the actions of leaders are the only means to prevent escalation. However, over the long term, diplomacy and leadership cannot alone secure lasting peace.

Models of conflict resolution are also to some extent culturally specific, and any efforts at peace-making must consider the specific historical and cultural context of the conflict. Nonetheless, Western scholars and peace-makers can learn much from non-Western approaches, such as the conceptual framework and strategies grounded in the Buddhist “three marks of existence.” Whatever strategies and methods are adopted towards conflict resolution and peace-making, the peace-building process is impossible without faith that human beings, despite the determination with which they hold to fixed beliefs and feelings inimical to change, can be open to a more inclusive and trusting worldview, despite the uncertainties involved in this shift. For empirical researchers in the field of conflict resolution, this faith is grounded in history and empirical evidence that human beings are capable of such transformation. Underpinning the social-psychology of transformational conflict resolution is the premise “that humans are capable of compassion and of being reasonable and fair. When conditions permit, these traits flourish” (Pilisuk, 2008, p. 343). For religious thinkers, such empirical evidence is further bolstered by views of human goodness. For Buddhism, this view is expressed in confidence in the “Buddha nature,” the view that beneath the mental confusion that is created through fixation on limited, prejudiced, and fearful views, all beings have an innate mind characterized by the qualities of strength, open wisdom, and compassion. Though participants in the process of peace-making may not at first fully exhibit these traits, they become more evident as sustained efforts yield a new sense of identity, and a sense of reality that is more expansive, more inclusive, and more empowering than the narrow, fear-based conception they are leaving behind. It is important to recognize and celebrate these small steps in the abandonment of older conceptions as it is only through such gradual change that a transformation necessary for enduring peace becomes possible. Practices of unfreezing based on the three principles of non-self, impermanence, and suffering, appropriately adapted to the conflict environment, can play a valuable role in these efforts.

## References

- AHRD. Association for Historical Research and Dialogue. <http://www.ahdr.info/home.php>.
- Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable conflicts*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Bashir, B., & Goldberg, A. (2014) Deliberating the Holocaust and the Nakba: Disruptive empathy and binationalism in Israel/ Palestine. *Journal of Genocide Research*, 16(1), 77-99.
- Burke, B.L., Martens, A., & Faucher, E. H. (2010) Two decades of terror management theory: A meta-analysis of mortality. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(2), 155-195.
- Burton, J.W. (Ed.). 1990. *Conflict: Human needs theory*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press.
- Bush, R.A.B. & Folger, J.P. (1994). *The promise of mediation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen-Chen, S., Halperin, E., Crisp, R.J., & Gross, J. J. (2014). Hope in the Middle East: Malleability beliefs, hope, and the willingness to compromise for peace, *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 5(1), 67-75.
- Diamond Sutra*. (trans. Alex Johnson). <http://www.diamond-sutra.com>.
- Gayer, C., Landman, S., Halperin, E., & Bar-Tal, D. (2009). Overcoming psychological barriers to peaceful conflict resolution. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 53(6), 951-975.
- Greenberg, J., Simon, L., Pyszczynski, T., Solomon, S., & Chatel, D. (1992). Terror management and tolerance: Does mortality salience always intensify negative reactions to others who threaten one's worldview?, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 63(2), 212-220.
- Halifax, J., & Peale. M. Interbeing: Precepts and practices of an applied ecology. *Upaya*. [www.upaya.org](http://www.upaya.org).
- Kelman, H.C. & Fisher, R.J. (2003). Conflict analysis and resolution. In D.O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.). *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 315-353). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Khyentse, Dilgo. (2009). *The hundred verses of advice*. Boston and London: Shambala.
- Lewin, K. (1947). Frontiers in group dynamics: Concept, method and reality in Social Science; Social Equilibria and Social Change. *Human Relations*, 1, 5-41.
- Lindner, E.G. (2006). Emotion and conflict: Why it is important to understand how emotions affect conflict and how conflict affects emotion. In M. Deutsch, P.T. Coleman, E. C. Marcus (Eds.). *The handbook of conflict resolution: Theory and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. 268-293.
- Majjhima Nikaya: The middle length discourses of the Buddha*. (2005). B. Nanamoli & B. Bodhi (Trans.). Wisdom Publications.
- Malhotra, D. & Liyanage, S. (2005). Long-term effects of peace workshops in protracted conflicts. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 49(6), 908-924.
- Pilisuk, M. (2008). Advancing the social psychology of conflict resolution. *Peace and Conflict*, 14: 433-436.
- Posada-Carbó, E. (2017). The difficult road to peace in Colombia. *Current History*, 116(787), 74-6.
- Samyutta Nikaya: The connected discourses of the Buddha*. (2003). B. Bodhi (trans.). Wisdom Publications.
- Shantideva (1997). *A guide to the bodhisattva way of life*. V. A. Wallace & B. A. Wallace (Trans). Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.

- Solomon, S., Greenberg, J., & Pyszczynski, T. (2015). *The worm at the core: On the role of death in life*. New York, NY: Random House.
- Staub, E., & Bar-Tal, D. (2003). Genocide, mass killing, and intractable conflict: Roots, evolution, prevention and reconciliation. In D.O. Sears, L. Huddy, & R. Jervis (Eds.). *Oxford handbook of political psychology* (pp. 710-751). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Van der Merwe, Susan (testimony). Date: 23.09.1996. Case Number. 01539 Klerksdorp. *South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission*.  
<http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/hrvtrans\klerks/merwe.htm>
- Wallace, A. (2011). *Minding closely. The four applications of mindfulness*. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion.

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

*The Evolution of the Christian Motif of Satan: A Cautionary Tale as to Why Evil Cannot be Defeated by Destroying the Enemy*

Author: Alan McGill

Title: Director of Faith Formation and Liturgy

Affiliation: The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Atlanta

Location: Atlanta, GA, USA

E-mail: amcgill@sacredheartatlanta.org

**Keywords:** Satan, Enemies, Apocalyptic Thinking

---

***THE EVOLUTION OF THE CHRISTIAN MOTIF OF SATAN: A CAUTIONARY TALE AS TO WHY EVIL CANNOT BE DEFEATED BY DESTROYING THE ENEMY***

**Abstract**

The term “Satan” is derived from the Hebrew for enemy, and the motif of Satan has developed in the biblical and Christian philosophical traditions so as to hold implications for the treatment of enemies. It has variously signified an adversarial role enacted by human beings, a heavenly being that tested and tempted on behalf of God, and a mythical explanation for the existence of evil in a world created by a wholly benign deity. The motif has also served to distinguish corrupted beings from the privation of evil in and of itself, and to offer an implicit assurance that God the sustainer of being would not annihilate a being even if it irrevocably rejected God. Such an account of Satan is compatible with Jesus’ teachings on enemy love and limitless forgiveness, and undercuts any attempt to depict enemies as satanic so as to evoke a religious justification for their annihilation.

**Introduction**

The purpose of this paper is not to assert first order, religious truth claims. Rather, it interprets the claims of the Christian tradition regarding Satan, a term derived from *sheytan* (שֵׂטָן), the Hebrew for “enemy” or “adversary,” so as to uncover underlying significance for attitudes towards perceived enemies, and the prospect of violence.

A crucial factor that influences the propensity of a religious belief system to foment violence is the extent to which it directly identifies evil with persons as opposed to an ultimately impersonal reality of some kind. Pejorative uses of the motif of Satan on the lips of figures ranging from Christian evangelist Pat Robertson to the *Ayatollah Khomeini* may be intended to signify the worst imaginable evil and utter contempt for it (CNS News 3.1.17, NBCNews.com 3.14.2006, *The New York Times* 9.1. 2015)—The present paper, however, argues a thesis that Christianity stops short of equating even Satan, the most corrupted of all possible creatures, with pure evil in and of itself so that, within the Christian worldview, no person can be directly identified with pure evil, and the destruction of persons cannot be regarded as the destruction of evil.

Regarding all of creation, including Satan (whether understood as a mythical motif or an ontological reality of some kind) as fundamentally good and infused with the divine presence, the sacramental worldview of Christianity regards evil as a privation, that is, a void or lack of being. This point is of crucial importance in relation to attitudes towards enemies. Evil in itself, when understood as a privation, is clearly delineated from persons, and its conquest must be distinguished from the destruction of persons. To destroy inimical persons, according to this understanding of evil, is not to destroy evil itself but to reduce being to nonbeing and hence exacerbate the privation of evil.

### **Myth as a Probe into the Possible**

Richard Bell (2007, p. 173) argues that the Christian imagination discovered Satan through myth. As we shall see, the interpretation or, one might say, the misinterpretation of a constellation of mythical narratives and motifs, has spawned the motif of the devil that lurks in the popular imagination of the West. Recognition of the mythic roots of this motif is crucial for an appreciation of its implications for a disposition towards human enemies.

Paul Ricoeur suggests that the genre of myth can express not only actualities but also potentialities that characterize the experience of being human in the world, interpreting this world in terms of a narrative world (Kearney & Ricoeur, 1978; Kearney, 2010, p. 50). Walter Wink, for his part, captures this sense in which the imagination of the possible is crucial to the religious sensibility. Wink regards the “imaginal” realm as situated between the realm of ideas and the realm of action, as an arena in which the possibilities may be rehearsed. In myth, possibilities are played out within an imaginal world so that, as Wink suggests, “We perceive the action as if it were staged on the physical plane but it is not” (Wink, 2002, pp. 40-41; Seiple & Weidmann, 2008, p. 106). The events depicted by myth are actualized within a narrative world while they may remain possibilities in the world beyond the text.

### **Mythical Language Engages the Mystery of Evil**

Ricoeur recognized the role of myth in probing into the experience of evil that can seem impenetrable to analytical thought. Richard Kearney observes that “From the beginning, Ricoeur recognized evil as an experience which could not be adequately dealt with by the human cogito or intentional consciousness” (Kearney, 2006, p. 1987). Rather than suggesting that we cannot think rationally about evil, Ricoeur suggests that the symbolism of myth can allow us access to a level

of consciousness from which our critical thinking can proceed. “When confronted with evil,” Kearney proposes, “we are reminded that there are meanings and experiences that defy the transparency of consciousness and contravene our will” (Kearney, 2006, p. 198). Kearney’s reference to meanings and experiences that “defy the transparency of consciousness” suggests an epistemological opaqueness that defies conscious thought.

Ricoeur’s characterization of myth as a bearer of the possible, suggests that the genre is particularly suited to engage the mystery of evil. Karl Simms (2003, p. 16) notes that Ricoeur regards evil as a possibility rather than as an external force, much less an ontological Satan. “Evil is not an external metaphysical force that is presented to God as an object. It is not, for example, a ‘Satan’ if Satan means a kind of other person who brings evil into the world. Evil is a possibility which man is born with – whether he realizes this possibility or not is up to him” (Ricoeur, 1965, p. 203). In view of Ricoeur’s remarks, we might argue that Satan exists, not as another person, but as the mythic representation of possibilities that apply to all persons.

### **Satan as a Tempter and Tester Appointed by God**

When biblical and extracanonical myths allude to Satan, the overall thrust of these narratives does not seem to provide an affirmation of Satan’s ontological reality as a particular person, disembodied or otherwise. Rather, Satan, as invoked in a variety of biblical narratives, has functioned as a motif enabling the exploration of possibilities in relation to the Creator-creature relationship, or one might argue, humanity’s relationship with the world itself. As Almut-Barbara Renger (2013, p. 8) observes, “myth thematises the relationship between a human being and superhuman powers.”

The motif of Satan emerged in large part as a by-product of the evolution of ethical monotheism in ancient Israelite religion. Kirsten Nielson (1991, p. 55) offers a reminder that within the henotheistic worldview, the deities were partisan, tribal entities that would readily smite enemies of the tribe, or tribal members who broke covenant. As monotheism gradually emerged from henotheism, foreign gods would have been regarded as posing less of a threat in and of themselves. Israel’s military defeats and misfortunes were hence increasingly attributed to the agency of YHWH, the supreme God who, in retribution for Israel’s periodic unfaithfulness, would allow the weaker gods of Israel’s enemies to prevail.

Within the monist worldview of ancient Israel, both good and evil were attributed to a morally complex YHWH so that Paul Volz proposes that YHWH was once regarded as possessing a demonic dimension (Volz, 1924, Nielson, 1991, p. 55). Such an understanding may be reflected in 1 Samuel 16: 14 wherein YHWH is depicted as sending an evil spirit to trouble Saul. Prior to the emergence of a doctrine of the fall of the angels, it may have been conceivable to imagine evil spirits afflicting humankind in service of the deity, or serving as a hypostasis thinly veiling the direct agency of the deity itself as it executed its inscrutable and, at times, ostensibly harsh dictates.

This morally complex image of God is implied by the plight of Job whom God allows to be tempted by Satan, saying “Very well, he is in your power; only spare his life.” (Jb 1:6) Indeed, the image of Satan as a divinely authorized tempter and tester perseveres into the New Testament. As James Alison (2005) observes, the Jesus of Matthew’s Gospel is led by God’s Spirit to be tempted by Satan in the desert (Mt. 4:1-11).

The narrative of the temptation of Jesus in Matthew 4 offers a New Testament instance of the motif of Satan as tempter and tester, serving as a probe into possibilities in the Creator-creature relationship. When Satan presents Jesus with a series of contingent possibilities along the lines of “if you were to do this, then the following might happen.” Hence, Satan invites Jesus to command stones to turn to bread, to worship Satan and hence inherit the kingdoms of the earth, and to throw himself off the parapet of the temple and be saved by the angels. In Matthew 16:23, Satan is once more presented as a purveyor of tempting possibilities when Jesus chides Peter, detecting the Satanic at work in Peter’s suggestion that Jesus might compromise his mission in order to avoid a violent death.

Henry Ansgar Kelly (2006, p. 155) suggests that it is in the Book of Revelation 12:10 that a biblical author first offers an explicit indication that Satan has exceeded his divinely imparted brief and breached his service contract with God so as to be “thrown down.” Satan’s demotion may have been inevitable as ethical monotheism emerged from monism. As God was no longer regarded as the source of evil, an imaginative void ensued.

Kelly (2006, pp. 17-30) outlines the manner in which imagery of Satan was adapted to represent the evil that could no longer be attributed to the agency of the morally purified deity. To achieve this end, Satan, conceived in the Book of Job as a member of the divine court, now became a scape-goat as it were, so as to exonerate God of the charge of having created evil. If God is the one and only God, and hence is God for all people, it is less plausible that God would unleash angels of destruction upon Egyptian first-borns, Assyrian soldiers, or *goyim* in general. From a monotheistic perspective, it is difficult to imagine that evil, cruel or destructive spirits could enjoy a divine mandate. As David Cook (2009) posits, “The nature of God is that He is good. He is also the standard of goodness.”

### **Cosmic Dualism and the Fallen Satan**

Israel’s monist view of God as author of both good and evil gradually gave way to dualistic tendencies, whereby evil was attributed to forces that oppose God. When King Cyrus the Great of Persia conquered Babylon, the Jews in exile there may have been exposed to Zoroastrianism with its cosmic dualism, envisaging reality as existing in tension between a principle of goodness and a principle of evil (Kronen & Menssen, 2010, pp. 185-205; Isbell, 2006, pp. 143-154).

Zoroastrianism may have influenced the imagination of ancient Israel by delineating a dualistic arrangement, whereby God increasingly represented goodness and other supernatural beings represented evil (Bultmann, 1958). The Zoroastrian worldview envisages the existence of a benign deity, Ahura-mazda, and a malevolent deity, Ahrimam, implying clearly defined forces of good and evil.

The question as to what extent Zoroastrianism has influenced Judeo-Christian conceptions of God and the devil is a complex one. While Ahrimam could be regarded as a possible antecedent for Christian concepts of Satan, Zoroastrianism is a polytheistic faith insofar as it considers Ahrimam to be an uncreated rival of the benign deity, rather than an originally good creature that fell from grace. As we shall see, it may be in the Gnosticism with which Second Century Christianity contended that we can most closely detect the influence of the Zoroastrian account of an evil deity.

Raymond Brown (1965, p. 110) notes that the influence of Zoroastrian dualism may be evident in the writings of the Qumran community which views reality as gripped by a cosmic struggle between a spirit of light and a spirit of darkness also referred to as the spirit of perversion or Belial. The Qumran literature however differs from the Zoroastrian account by regarding both spirits as creations of the one Creator God.

### **Cosmic Dualism and Human Enemies**

T. J. Wray and Gregory Mobley (2005, pp. 52 – 57) show that most references to the Satan in the Hebrew Bible take the form of a common noun and refer to human characters who serve in an adversarial role, obstructing paths and sabotaging the plans of other humans. Thus, the Philistines mistrust David, sending him away before they march into battle against Israel lest he turn against them and become a satan to them (1 Samuel 29). David pardons Shimei, and a resentful Abishai acts as a satan and accuses him for his mercy (2 Sam 16) Hadad the Edomite (1 Kings 3) and Rezon (1 Kings 11) act as satans to Solomon and in Psalm 109, the psalmist laments that his enemies seek to appoint a satan against him.

While these satans are envisaged as acting in an adversarial manner towards other people, there is little to indicate that they were considered enemies of God, much less, God's arch-enemy. In the intertestament period, however, perhaps to some extent influenced by the cosmic dualism of Zoroastrianism, and a gradual relegation of foreign deities to a fallen, morally suspect status, the association of enemies with Satan began to take on a far more sinister significance.

Elaine Pagels (1995, p. 49) highlights the role of Israel's national conflicts in the evolution of the concept of Satan. Pagels regards intertestamental references to fallen angels as a formative phase in the evolution of a Christian model of Satan that could not have been in any sense known to the intertestamental authors.

On a similar note, Wilfred Harrington (1999) identifies an apocalyptic tendency to interpret strife on earth as a "repercussion of something already determined in a heavenly world," and Jon Levenson (1988, p. 44) observes, "the enemies cease to be merely earthly powers . . . and become, instead or in addition, cosmic forces of the utmost malignancy." The authors of *The Book of the Watchers* in First Enoch interpreted the treachery of those Israelites who sided with Greek invaders and opposed the Maccabean revolt as reflecting cosmic treachery and the fall of supernatural persons (Pagels, 1995, p. 48).

*The Book of the Watchers* does not identify Satan by name. Instead the text speaks of demonic figures such as: Semihazah, Azazel, Mastema and Belial. With reference to these mythic personas, Philip Almond (2014, p. 8) comments that "The Prince of Demons went by many different names." Almond traces the development of the idea of Satan, not suggesting that the Enochian demon motifs are all manifestations of a particular ontological reality. Still, the suggestion that Satan went by numerous names should be qualified by the caveat that only in retrospect were these once-distinct motifs blended into the composite motif of Satan.

Later, Essene separatists would specifically invoke the name of Satan to demonize Jews who embraced Hellenistic culture. "More radical than their predecessors," Pagels (2006, p. 47)

observes, “these dissidents began increasingly to invoke the *satan* to characterize their Jewish opponents; in the process they turned this rather unpleasant angel into a far grander – and far more malevolent – figure.” Pagels proposes that the invocation of satanic motifs so as to vilify earthly adversaries seems to have contributed towards the evolving perception of a Satan who was God’s enemy rather than God’s unpopular henchman.

### **Christianity Rejects Cosmic Dualism**

A variety of myths and strands of tradition have been conscripted and cross-pollinated so as to form what might be broadly considered the “Christian” model of Satan. The individual strands of tradition were not, as we have seen, primarily concerned with the assertion of the ontological reality of Satan so much as with the exploration of humanity’s relationship with the deity as ancient authors reflected upon experiences of suffering, adversity, and all the complexities entailed by free-will.

The development continued in postbiblical times. In the second century, Origen identified Satan with the “Morning Star,” “light-bearer” or, in Latin, “Lucifer” of Isaiah 14, an association popularized in St. Jerome’s Latin translation of the Bible, the Vulgate in 382 AD, and further reinforced by Milton’s *Paradise Lost* in 1608 (Almond, 2014, p. 46).

Justin Martyr in the mid-second century identified the talking snake in the Adamic narrative as Satan. Motifs as disparate as the “son of God” in the Book of Job, the fallen star of Isaiah 14, the fallen angels of the extracanonical *Book of the Watchers*, the talking snake of Genesis 3, the gods of the gentiles, in time demoted to demonic status, the dragon, serpent, and beast of Revelation, the chaos monsters of the psalms, and the antichrist moniker of the First Letter of John have contributed to the discovery of the Christian Satan popularly imagined in Western culture, its pedigree very much that of a mongrel.

The second-century apologetic Patristics including Justin Martyr, Tatian, Athenagorus, Irenaeus, and Origen sought to refute models of Satan advanced by various forms of Gnostic dualism that identified Satan as a demiurge who created the physical world, or as a creature of the demiurge (Russell, 1981, pp. 27, 47, 227). Rejecting such Gnostic dualism, Justin Martyr, in the mid-second century, associated Satan with the snake of the Adamic myth, hence situating Satan as a creature within the Garden of Eden created by YHWH-Elohim, rather than existing as a co-eternal principle or as the creature of such a principle (Russell, 1981, p. 65).

Offering a further level of significance, snake imagery had characterized the fertility cult of ancient Israel with its rival gods (Maly, 1968, p. 40). The implication was that Satan was no more a rival god than were the obsolete fertility “gods” of the ANE. The assertion that Satan existed as a creature – whether in the form of a talking snake or any other form, may be a secondary consideration in rejecting the inflated model of Satan advanced by Gnostic polytheism.

Justin’s disciple, Tatian, pioneered the classification of the fallen angels as demons, an association that had not hitherto been widely assumed. Tatian also advanced the view that Satan numbers among the fallen angels, and is as such a mere demon (Russell, 1981, p. 73). Again this counteracted Gnostic claims that Satan existed as God’s opposite equal.

Athenagorus and Tertullian built on Tatian's position so as to emphasize that Satan, as a fallen angel, was a creature of God, and as a part of God's creation possessed an inherently good nature. Consistent with this, Clement of Alexandria advanced the model of evil as a privation, and hence distinct from both the Gnostic (and Zoroastrian) notions of a self-creating principle of evil and from the Christian model of Satan as a fallen angel, that is, a wayward creature of God (Russell, 1981, p. 73).

Origen, for his part, suggested that Satan's inherently good being might be redeemed since it is separable from the privation of evil (Russell, 1981, p. 147). Origen's distinction between the privation of evil and the inherently good being of Satan, seems to have assumed and reinforced the position that Satan exists as a being.

While refuting the idea of a co-eternal evil principle, God's "opposite equal" who is the cosmic source of evil, the Patristics also sought to exonerate God of having willfully created evil (Russell, 1981, pp. 27-28). In rejecting depictions of Satan as a creator-demiurge, or as a creation of the demiurge, the Patristics emphasized that Satan was a creature of the one God, and used its free will to choose evil. On the face of it, only a free-willed sentient being, a person, that is, could make this choice. Still, the driving motivation of the Patristics seems to have been a polemical and corrective one more than it was to offer positive speculate regarding the ontological reality of Satan. They sought to correct the exaggerated notion of Satan that arose in Gnosticism.

Jeffrey Burton Russell (1981, pp. 220, 225) proposes that, while their initial motivation was by and large apophatic in nature, the Patristics proceeded too far down the *via positiva* and their positive assertions became so speculative as to succumb to incoherence. Patristic zeal to counteract a model of Satan as a demiurge may have, as a secondary effect, perpetuated misplaced certainty about Satan's ontological reality as a creature, an angel, and hence, a person. Russell's position is that we are incapable of knowing whether the devil exists "objectively" or "transcendentally." Nonetheless, the Patristics broadly managed to preserve Christian monotheism while simultaneously absolving God of responsibility for directly creating evil.

The model of evil as a privation preserves the fundamental goodness of being, and of its Creator. "Evil is nothing", proposed St. Augustine, "since God makes everything that is, and God did not make evil" (Pine-Coffin, 1961, p. 8). Adopting this view of evil as a privation in his *Confessions*, Augustine parted ways with the Manichean and Neo-Platonist influences of his earlier years that regarded the physical world as evil and only the spiritual as good (Hick, 1977, p. 4). Having rejected Plotinus's position that matter is evil and only the spiritual is good, Augustine identifies the original choice for evil as arising from the choice of an angel, that is, from the realm of spirit.

For Augustine, no created thing or being is inherently evil. Evil, for Augustine, is the void of *nothing*. In the Catholic Christian worldview, all being, that is, all of creation, is infused with the presence of God so that Aquinas would argue that created things exist by virtue of their participation in the being of God so that God is more analogous to being itself than to one great being among others (Aquinas, *Summa*, Ia q.4, a.1).

Yet, Augustine does affirm the ontological existence of demons, including Satan. Frederick Coplestone (1962, p. 76) observes, "With evil non-existent and only a privation of goodness, it

would seem that an invisible world of spirited beings such as demons and angels would also be non-existent, lacking a positive existence.” As Peter Finney notes, however, Augustine alleviates the apparent contradiction between his model of evil as a privation, and his acceptance of the ontological existence of the devil by insisting that Satan cannot be flatly reduced to the personification of pure evil (Finney, 2000). Rather, in Augustine’s view, Satan retained a nature that was created good by God and is shared in common with the angels. “Not even the devil himself is evil, so far as its nature; but perversity makes it evil” (Pine-Coffin, 1961, p. 160). For Augustine, the devil is not the embodiment of pure evil, since, no matter how perverse it has become by its exercise of free-will, its being, created by God, is inherently good. In Augustine’s thought, it is Satan’s very being, that is, its status as part of the inherently good creation that distinguishes Satan from evil itself.

The Patristic account of evil and of Satan gained currency so as to gain acceptance as Christian doctrine. The First Council of Braga (561 CE) gave explicit ecclesiastical approval to the position that evil entered the world as a result of Satan’s abuse of free will, thus exonerating God of any charge of having created it. The Fourth Lateran Council (1215 CE) rejected the Albigensian/Cathar heresy that the physical world was created by the devil, thus defending the essential holiness of creation - which would include the devil, insofar as it was regarded as a creature, albeit a perverted one.

In modernity, Pope Paul VI in a 1972 audience asserted the existence of Satan as a particular being, and a 1975 study entitled *Christian Faith and Demonology* authored anonymously and published by the Doctrine of the Faith took issue with those theologians and biblical scholars who call into question whether the Satan of scripture and tradition must necessarily be regarded as a supernatural being. The 1992 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (§ 2851-2852) closely reflected the positions defended in the 1975 statement so that a considerable disconnect exists between the Catechism and the overwhelming weight of exegetical and theological opinion, including the work of Catholic scholars.

Notable Catholic theologians have rejected Satan’s existence as a person. Joseph Ratzinger (1969, 2010, p. 44), that is, Pope Benedict XVI, asserts, “If one asks whether the devil is a person, then one must in an altogether correct way answer that he is the Un-Person, the disintegration and corruption of what it means to be a person. And so it is particular to him that he moves about without a face and that his inability to be recognized is his actual strength.” Ratzinger is by no means denying the reality of Satan. Rather, he denies the devil’s personhood while defending the doctrine of Satan against Herbert Haag’s broad assertion that it is untenable for moderns to believe in Satan (Haag, 1969). Ratzinger questions the mode rather than the fact of Satan’s existence. The comment that Satan lacks a face may imply a ubiquitous quality - a lack of particularity and personality.

Han Urs von Balthasar (1988, pp. 144-146), for his part, speaks of the “non-person-hood” of the devil, suggesting that a propensity for love and relationship is integral to the definition of a “person” in the full sense. Walter Kasper (1983, p. 173) argues that “The Devil is not a personal figure, but a self-dissolving mal-figure, an entity that perverts itself into a mal-entity; he is a person in the manner of a mal-person.” Granted, Kasper refers to Satan as an entity, implying positive

existence. On the other hand, Kasper's reference to a 'self-dissolving mal-figure' suggests an entity that fades from being.

Interestingly, when these theologians refer to the facelessness of Satan, its disintegration, its non-personhood, and self-dissolving quality, these descriptions, albeit of a largely metaphorical nature, imply an entity tottering on the brink on nonbeing. It might be argued that when these theologians deny Satan's personhood, there is little left to distinguish Satan from pure evil – and in effect a privation. After all, it is Satan's being, its participation in the being of God, in Aquinas' view, that ensures its fundamental goodness and distinguishes it from sheer evil. Granted personhood is not synonymous with being, yet the Patristic explanation of Satan's being was that Satan existed as an angel, that is, a disembodied person.

Having acknowledged the current tension between scholarship and the catechetical teachings of the Church, it might be said that the Patristic endeavor to defend the goodness of God and of creation, yielded as a byproduct, an insistence in official Church teaching on the existence of Satan as a particular, supernatural being. Because this being is imagined to be beyond all hope of reconciliation, it represents a prospect that can all too easily be invoked as a convenient caveat to the ethical mandates imparted by Christianity's founding figure.

### **Jesus' Teachings on Enemy-Love**

When the canonical gospels depict Jesus as referring to Satan, such references may well reflect his Jewish worldview, immersed in the narratives of the Hebrew Bible. As noted, when Jesus says to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan", there is little evidence to suggest that Jesus is saying that Peter is possessed by or somehow embodies the devil as conceived in Patristic or medieval Christian thought. Indeed, Jesus' references to the "evil one" often have a ubiquitous ring about them as though they are general references to enemies of flesh and blood (Jackson, 2003, p. 124; Kittle & Fredrick, 1985, p. 914).

Challenging a zealous enthusiasm for the decimation of the enemy, Jesus in Matthew 5:43-48 mandates enemy-love and unlimited forgiveness. Daniel Harrington (1988, p. 871) interprets Jesus' command to enemy-love as a mandate to emulate God's own disposition towards enemies. "This new demand is based, not on human nature, but on the example of God." David Gill (1991, pp. 246-262) agrees, positing that while Jesus was not the first to teach enemy-love, his teaching is distinctive since in his rendition of the doctrine, "the primary motive is imitation of the Heavenly Father, whose daughters and sons the disciples are." Likewise, John McKenzie observes that this passage exhorts Christians to exhibit "God-like providence as they vindicate their title of sons of God" (McKenzie, 1968, p. 73). This suggests a God who practices enemy-love, including openness to reconciliation, never utterly foreclosing on this possibility.

Simon Joseph (2013, p. 29) asserts that Jesus' teaching on enemy-love appears to critique his own Jewish tradition and its more restricted stance on forgiveness. Terrence Rynne (2014, p. 70) contrasts Jesus' command to enemy-love with the sectarian attitudes that characterized the Qumran community in particular, whose literature counseled, "Members of the community are to love all the sons of light, each according to this lot among the council of God, but to hate all the sons of darkness, each according to this guilt in the vengeance of God." This endorsement of a dualistic,

polarized worldview stands in stark contrast with Jesus' command to enemy-love. This said, it should also be acknowledged that Israelite religion included the prophetic tradition with its strong impetus for reconciliation and peace. In a case in point, Isaiah's vision of the Peaceable Kingdom (Is.11: 1-9) might be regarded as highly consistent with Jesus' teachings on these matters as creatures that were once regarded as natural enemies are depicted as existing in harmony.

### **Jesus' Command to Forgive Infinitely**

With reference to Jesus' command in Matthew 18: 21-35 to forgive 77 times, Daniel Harrington (1988, p. 889) argues that "Christians have no right to place any limit on forgiveness." John McKenzie concurs, observing that to forgive seven times, would according to a particular mindset informed by the Hebrew Bible, have suggested the perfect degree of forgiveness, beyond which forgiveness would be excessive (McKenzie, 1968, p. 95). In contrast, the author observes, Jesus teaches that there is no limit on perfect forgiveness. The duty to forgive never ceases.

Granted, it might be argued, contra Harrington and McKenzie, that the mandate for infinite forgiveness applies to humans and not necessarily to God upon whose authority it is based. That is, it might be argued, fallible humans must not withhold forgiveness, but the Deity in its omniscience might rightly choose to do so. However, this would seem to create an odd situation in which the Christian would be mandated to forgive villains whom even God does not forgive, and in that sense, be more forgiving than God.

Some commentators on Matthew 18: 21-35 suggest that while human forgiveness must be extended even if the wrong-doer does not repent, divine forgiveness depends upon repentance. (Worthington, Sharp & Lerner, 2006, p. 33). In response, it might be argued that, while humans, never fully knowing the motives disposition of another might wrongly withhold forgiveness, God knows the secrets of every human heart and is in a unique position to withhold forgiveness. However, even if one were to concede that divine forgiveness is dependent upon repentance, this could only reasonably apply to creatures that still have the opportunity to repent. If, on the other hand, the opportunity to repent ends with death, then divine forgiveness expires when God withdraws the opportunity to repent, and God's mercy is hence finite.

### **A Tension between Gospel Passages: Reconciliation versus Destruction of the Enemy?**

Admittedly, it may appear to lack even-handedness to characterize the gospels as unambiguously championing reconciliation, forgiveness, and enemy-love. Simon Joseph notes a tension between, on the one hand, conciliatory "wisdom" aphorisms in Matthew that espouse reconciliation and, on the other hand, sayings in that gospel that seem to reflect an apocalyptic perspective that relishes the prospect of the destruction of the enemy (Joseph, 2013, pp. 29-41). Both sets of teachings reflect Matthew's use of the "sayings gospel" known as Q (Joseph, 2015, p. 29).

Eschatological passages in Matthew include the parable of the thief (Mt. 24:42-44, Q12:39-46), the parable of the unprepared servant (Mt. 24: 45-51, Q12:42-46), and the unexpected coming of the Son of Man (Mt. 34: 36-51, Q17:22-37). While some degree of tension exists in Matthew, and the Bible as a whole, between passages that are eschatological versus ones that foment reconciliation, the underlying difference may be more a question of tone and genre than of

conflicting theologies (Tuckett, 1997, pp. 3- 26). These eschatological sayings do not despair of the prospect of repentance and reconciliation, or envisage the inevitable destruction of the enemy. As such, they do not reflect a fully-fledged apocalypticism.

### **The Apocalyptic Vision of Persecuted Communities**

Apocalyptic literature such as the Book of Revelation does not yearn for reconciliation so much as for the destruction of the enemy. This literature has emerged from situations of conflict and persecution, encouraging the underdog to stand firm, and anticipating the ultimate conquest of the oppressor (Johnson, 1986, p. 525; Keller, 1996, p. 1; Moss, 2013). The apocalyptic vision regards conflict on earth as symptomatic of conflict in the invisible realm (Harrington, 2012). It need not, however, be interpreted as an oracle that provides a privileged glimpse of details of the end of time or of the world hereafter. It is exhortative and consoling rather than descriptive or predictive. In this sense, the Book of Revelation heightens the agenda of the gospel writers who also sought to console persecuted Christians and to inspire hope in the midst of adversity (Perkins, 1992, p. 1286). Nonetheless, apocalyptic literature may, upon a certain reading, suggest a final standoff between clearly defined forces of good and evil with no possibility of reconciliation. Such thinking has surely contributed to the motif of the irreconcilable enemy – a motif epitomized in the exposition on the doctrine of Satan in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (1992, 1997, § 393). Still, it must be said, that the enemy motifs of Revelation are figurative in nature – the dragon, the serpent, and the beast – and may be taken to represent inimical, tyrannical forces rather than persons per say. This would be analogous with Walter Wink’s model of Satan as the spirit or inner life of oppressive systems (Wink, 1993, p. 27; 1984, p. 105).

In contrast with apocalyptic texts that envision the inevitable destruction of the enemy, Matthew’s eschatological passages exhort their audience to be reconciled with God in the face of a pending judgment. They invite their hearers to amend in their lives in a way in which truly apocalyptic literature such the Book of Revelation does not do – since, according to its apocalyptic vision, the battle-lines are already ineluctably drawn. These eschatological passages, on the other hand, stress the importance of reconciling one’s life to the gospel before it is too late. But the “too late” may refer to death itself rather than a posthumous, eternal hell as later conceived in the reception histories of these texts. Interpreted thus, these parables, and the Q-sayings that undergird them, offer little support for a doctrine of irreconcilably damned enemies. Hence, they do not contradict Jesus’ commands to enemy-love and to infinite forgiveness, so much as they resort to the hyperbolae of their epoch so as to forcefully underscore the importance of reconciliation with God and with neighbor in the present. Eschatological warnings, to draw upon a colloquialism, “light a fire” under their hearers, rather than consign them to eternal fires. As such, they are not suitable proof-texts from which to argue that some enemies, human or otherwise, are beyond all hope of reconciliation, or a license to gloat at the prospect of their destruction.

### **Satan as a Counterintuitive Symbol of Refusal to Annihilate the Enemy**

Hans Urs von Balthasar (1988, p. 74) contends that it falls short of the salvific will of God, and hence of Christian hope, to pray only for one’s own salvation or that of certain individuals. On the other hand, Balthasar (1988, p. 93) rejects the presumptuousness of universalism, that is, the position that all persons will ultimately be saved, regarding this as a form of predestination and a denial of the doctrine of free will. For Balthasar, it remains a possibility, rather than a foregone conclusion, that any human person is actually damned for all eternity. Balthasar argues that if we

love unreservedly as Christ calls us to, we should not despair of anyone, fatalistically accepting their condemnation (Balthasar, 1988, p. 78).

The Roman Catholic Church does not presume that it can know with certainty that any given human person is in the state of being known as hell. As Richard McBrien (1994, p. 1152) interprets it, “Neither Jesus, nor the Church after him, ever stated that persons actually go to hell or are there now. He - as does the Church - restricts himself to the *possibility*.” Even in the cases of those genocidal villains of history, widely reviled by humanity, the Church cannot say for certain that God’s love has not ultimately prevailed. Still, if humanity has been endowed with genuine free will, it must be conceivably possible to do so, and hell must remain a real possibility.

The only “persons” that the Church could say, with certainty are in hell, are Satan and the other demons. If, however, Satan and the demons do not exist as beings in the cosmos beyond the narrative arc of myth, then they may serve as imaginal probes into the possibility of hell. Hence, the mythical motif of Satan, and of the other demons, would serve to illustrate a prospective situation, a logical possibility in view of the reality of free will, and of the reality that love cannot be coerced, even by God. Reference to damnation, in this sense, signifies what Wink calls a “vision event” rehearsing possibilities (Wink 2002, pp. 40-41; Seiple & Weidmann, 2008, pp. 105-106).

Hell, it might be said, exists as a possibility to the extent that a genuinely free creature could refuse God’s invitation to friendship (Seymour, 1998, p. 76). This is a very different prospect to that of a punishment externally imposed by God. Balthasar (1988, p. 114) insists that Christ condemns no one – rather, a person might condemn themselves by rejecting relationship with God. Similarly, Rahner (1975) proposes that hell is not externally imposed by God but could be a natural consequence of the cumulative effects of sin. Ron Highfield (1995, p. 494) characterizes Rahner’s position, remarking, “Hell’s gate is locked from the inside.” Similarly, Joseph Ratzinger (1977, xxi) writes, “Christ inflicts pure perdition on no one. In himself he is sheer salvation. Anyone who is with him has entered the space of deliverance and salvation. Perdition is not imposed by him, but comes to be wherever a person distances himself from Christ.”

Significantly, Balthasar (1988) rejects the possibility of the *apokatastasis*, that is, the prospect of the redemption of Satan and other damned spirits, whether human or demonic. It might be argued that it is integral to the Christian motif of the fallen Satan (as opposed to its ancient Israelite and Jewish forerunners) that it represents the scenario wherein there is no possibility of a creature repenting so as to receive God’s mercy. It is precisely the hopeless intransigence of the mythic Satan that illustrates the ultimate expression of God’s unconditional love, sustaining in being that creature that will never accept God’s friendship. To hope for an *apokatastasis*, on the other hand, is to presume that at least one being is in actuality experiencing the state of hell.

The situation of Satan and the demons, as ideated with reference to mythical language, hence illustrates a possibility that the Christian tradition foresees for human persons. The tradition speaks of the personas of Satan and the other demons in a situation in which it should not presume to speak of any particular human person – that is, the situation of having irrevocably refused friendship with God. The truth of the doctrine of Satan may hence represent a potentiality rather than an actuality – a poetic truth, in the sense suggested by Aristotle (Rapp, 2010). Distinguishing between historical and poetic truth, Aristotle states that “it is not the poet's function to describe

what has actually happened, but the kinds of thing that might happen.” Hence, the plight of Satan might be regarded as a poetic truth that could potentially pertain to any creature capable of mortal sin (Rapp, 2010).

In a curious sense, the doctrine of Satan as often presented in Christian discourse, is a statement of faith in God’s unconditional love. It suggests that even if a creature were to reject God, with utterly no hope of recanting and seeking reconciliation, God would continue to sustain that creature in being. As soon as a God of unconditional love endows creatures with genuine freedom, there must then be the possibility of Satan – a creature that chooses to forever turn its back on God but whom God will not forsake to oblivion. Interpreted in this way, the motif of Satan serves as an assurance that God, the sustainer of being, will always stand between being and oblivion.

The prospect of God sustaining the existence of the enemy applies beyond the figure of Satan to all potentially damned persons. While New Testament authors may have intended their imagery of hellfire to serve an exhortative rather than a descriptive purpose, there is no denying that the prospect of the eternal fires of hell became well established in the Christian imagination and, indeed, Christian doctrine. St. Augustine’s *City of God* (Dods & Schaff, 1987) speaks of the eternal fires of hell but Augustine invokes such imagery in the context of arguing against annihilationism. Augustine emphasizes that the fires of hell may burn forever but do not annihilate the sinner. Again suggesting that the damned persist in being and are not annihilated, the Fourth Lateran Council taught that “all will receive, according to their deeds, good or evil, the former their everlasting glory with Christ, the latter their perpetual punishment with the devil.” While the punitive connotations of hell have become ubiquitous, the construct of hell as a polemic against annihilationism may have been largely forgotten, as may a model of hell as a free-willed rejection of relationship rather than an externally imposed punishment.

### **Implications for Relating to Human Enemies**

Despite the stark distinction in Christian philosophy between evil as a privation and Satan as a being (mythical or actual), the popular imagination may, in effect, equate the two. Alenka Zupancic (2005, p. 95) identifies an impulse to represent evil as a person – a tendency that may be epitomized in the doctrine of a personal Satan. Zupancic argues that the designation of others as evil “lends a face” to a “disturbing void beyond representation that captures the imagination in ways that the good cannot.” Zupancic’s reference to a “disturbing void beyond representation” suggests a privation that befuddles language yet seductively fascinates the imagination.

To flatly equate a being with evil is to dismiss the possibility of understanding that being’s motivation – to the extent that evil is its own incentive. In *Strangers, Gods and Monsters*, Richard Kearney (2003, p. 7) highlights the importance of endeavoring to understand the other. Kearney (2003, pp. 3, 111, 231) regards the motif of the “stranger” as one that a designation that can operate as a “limit experience” whereby further analysis is deemed impossible or un-worthwhile. The stranger is by definition “strange” and other.

Kearney (2003, p. 70) indicts a postmodernist tendency, arguably an over-compensation for modernity’s delusions of omniscience, to regard otherness as utterly impenetrable. The author argues that this postmodernist insistence on the drastic alterity of others, can serve as a disincentive to attempts to understand them. At worst it implies an epistemological darkness that can all too easily be interpreted as a moral darkness. “For deconstruction, aliens only come in the dark; and

we are always in the dark when they come. . . . If all reading is in the dark, how can we even begin to discern?" When aliens are viewed in such dim light, the strange may all too easily be viewed as monstrous.

Brian Gregor (2005) concurs with Kearney's challenge to the imposition of thought-limits in relation to the designations of stranger and monster, commenting, "The proper response to these enigmatic types of otherness is not wholesale exclusion, evasion, or scapegoating, but philosophical understanding." That is, the proper response to the reviled or threatening other is to seek to understand them, not to write them off as incapable of being further understood.

Kearney's point pertains even to the most despised of persons: genocidal tyrants, sadistic child-killers, rapists, and abusers – figures of hate, whether they were driven by madness or by badness. If other minds are largely unknowable, deranged minds are all the more so. Yet, Jesus' command that we love our enemies compels us to engage with such figures. To write them off as impenetrably evil precludes deeper understanding and forecloses upon lessons, however painful, that might militate for the good. Jeffrey Kosky (2003) characterizes Kearney's view, commenting that, "We stay in contact with others, according to Kearney, in and through the hermeneutic struggle to better understand them."

For two millennia of Western culture, the ultimate monster has been Satan, perceived as being beyond reason and rationale, and to associate others with Satan has sanctioned a disengagement from any serious attempt to understand them. Yet, the ancient distinction forged by the Patristics, distinguishing the fundamental goodness of being from the privation of evil holds clear implications for the tendency to demonize enemies. To destroy being is to be conscripted into the service of nonbeing. To do so with the intention of counteracting evil is to be suckered into extending its privation. The destruction of evil, on the other hand, requires the destruction of enmity, reaching out across the chasm, building a bridge where there was once a void. The point is encapsulated in the dictum apocryphally attributed to Abraham Lincoln, "I destroy my enemy when I make him my friend" (Green & Elfers, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

To trace the evolution of the motif of Satan, is to trace the development of attitudes towards enmity and enemies in the Judo-Christian tradition. A constellation of mythic motifs arising from a plethora of cultures and languages, their cross-pollination, interpretation and misinterpretation have contributed to the development of the doctrine of Satan that has become entrenched in Christian thought.

There may be, however, a temptation to impose more recent-breaking models of Satan upon ancient texts and traditions. Satan was not always and everywhere conceived as a supernatural being and the arch-enemy of God. Far from this, some of its most ancient manifestations indicate an adversarial role that might be filled by any human being, and, elsewhere, a celestial being with a divine remit to test, tempt and thus, afflict humans.

Patristic thought sought to counteract Gnostic polytheism that viewed Satan as God's evil rival or a creature of an evil demiurge. In rejecting the notion of an evil opposite of God, the Patristics cut Satan down to size, ascribing it creaturely status. As part of the fundamentally good creation of

God, Satan, in Christian thought, remains distinct from evil in and of itself. Since God does not, in the Christian mindset, create evil, then evil exists as a privation and not as a created thing.

Recovering these considerations and refusing to conflate Satan with evil in and of itself, the Christian construct of Satan serves as a mythic motif expressing the possibility that a creature might forever refuse loving relationship with God, yet God still sustains that creature in being, refusing to annihilate it so that it becomes fully consumed by the privation of nonbeing, that is, evil. Such an account of Satan is consistent with both the doctrine of free will, whereby friendship and reconciliation cannot be forced, and also with Jesus' teachings on limitless forgiveness and enemy-love.

These considerations might give pause to any inclination to justify the destruction of the enemy by deeming them to be influenced by Satan, or to embody Satan. Such thinking leads to the destruction of being and exacerbates the privation of evil with all the futility of attempting to remove a hole by digging it out of the ground.

## References

- Alison, J. (2005). "Deliver us from evil," available at <http://www.jamesalison.co.uk/texts/eng04.html>
- Anonymous author. (1975). *Christian faith and demonology*. Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, 1975, available at the website of the Holy See: [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_19750626\\_fede-cristiana-demonologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_19750626_fede-cristiana-demonologia_en.html).
- Almond, P. (2014). *The devil: A new biography*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Aquinas, T. (1947). *The summa theologica*. Trans. Friars of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger.
- Attridge, H. (1991). "Reflections on research into q." *Semeia* 55, pp. 223–34.
- Augustine of Hippo. (1887). in Philip Schaff (Ed.) *City of God*. Trans. Marcus Dods, Buffalo: Christian Literature Publishing.
- (1961). *Confessions*, Trans. RS Pine-Coffin, London: Penguin.
- Bell, R. (2007). *Deliver us from evil*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007.
- Braga, First Council of 561AD, Canon 7, <http://www.raphael.netchurch/Braga/htm>
- Bultmann, R. (1958). *Jesus and the world*, New York: Scribners, 1958.
- Chapman, M. W. (2017). "Pat Robertson: attacks on trump are 'satanic'" CNS News 3.1.17, available at News<http://www.cnsnews.com/blog/michael-w-chapman/pat-robertson-attacks-trump-are-satanic>
- Collins, J. (2011) "Cult and culture: The limits of Hellenization in Judea." in John J. Collins & Gregory E. Sterling (Eds.) *Hellenism in the land of Israel*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press.
- Cook, D. (2009). "Can God take responsibility for evil and still be good?," *Testamentum Imperium*, Vol. 2.
- Congregation of the Doctrine of the Faith. (1997). *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, English translation (U.S.A., 2nd edition) (English translation of the Catechism of the Catholic Church: Modifications from the Editio Typica. Vatican: The Holy See. Available at <http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/INDEX.HTM>

- Coplestone, F. (1962). *A history of philosophy: Volume II*, Westminster: Newman.
- Cox, Christof. (2001). "On evil: an interview with Alenka Zupancic." *Cabinet Magazine* 5  
Available at <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/5/alenkazupancic.php>)
- D'aragon, J. L. (1990). 'The Apocalypse,' in Joseph Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy, Raymond Brown (Eds.) *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, pp. 467-493.
- Finney, P. (2013). "Empty evil and the positive devil in Augustinian philosophy."  
<http://www.theologicalclowning.org/pete1.html>.
- Erdbrink, T. (2015). "U.S. remains the 'Great Satan,' hard-liners in Iran say." *The New York Times*, 9.1. 2015, available at  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/02/world/middleeast/us-remains-the-great-satan-hard-liners-in-iran-say.html>
- Gill, D. (1991). "Socrates and Jesus on non-retaliation and love of enemies." *Horizons*, 18.
- Gregor, B. (2005). "Review of 'Strangers, Gods and Monsters: Interpreting Otherness'" *Essays in Philosophy* (6) 1.
- Harrington, D. (1988). "Matthew." in Diane Bergant (Ed.) *The Collegeville Biblical Commentary*, Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1988, pp. 861 – 902.
- Harrington, W. (2012). "Understanding the Apocalypse." *Scripture from Scratch*,  
<http://www.americancatholic.org/newsletters/SFS/an1199.asp>.
- Hick, J. (1977). *Evil and the god of love*, San Francisco: Harper & Row.
- Highfield, R. (1995). "The freedom to say 'No'?" Karl Rahner's Doctrine of Sin." *Theological Studies*, 56 (1995): pp.485 – 505.
- Horsley, R. & Draper, J. (1999). *Whoever hears you: Prophets, performance, and tradition in q*, Harrisburg: Trinity Press International.
- Greene, R., & Elfers, J. (2000). *The 48 Laws of Power*, London, Profile Books, p. 12.
- Jackson, T. (2003). *The priority of love: Christian charity and social justice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003.
- Johnson, L. T. (1986). "The book of Revelation." *The Writings of the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Joseph, S. (2013). "'Love Your Enemies': The Adamic View of Q6:27-28, 35c-d," *Biblical Theological Bulletin* 43 (1): 29-41.
- Kearney, R. (2010). *A passion for the possible: Thinking with Paul Ricoeur*, New York: Fordham University Press, 2010.
- Kearney, R. (2006). "On the Hermeneutics of Evil." *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale* 2, pp. 197-215.
- Kearney, R. (2003) *Strangers, gods and monsters* Kearney, Richard, London: Routledge.
- Kearney, R. (1978). "Myth as the bearer of possible worlds: An interview with Paul Ricoeur." *The Crane Bag Journal of Irish Studies*, 2 (1): pp.112-118.
- Keller, C. (1996). "Dis/ Closing 'the End'" in *Apocalypse then and now: A feminist guide to the end of the world*, Boston: Beacon Press.
- Kelly, H A. (2006). *Satan: A biography*, New York: Cambridge University.
- Kosky, J.L.(2003). Review of Richard Kearney's *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* in *Philosophical Reviews*, University of Notre Dame, 2003.7.12.
- Levenson, J. (1988). *Creation and the persistence of evil: The Jewish drama of divine omnipotence*, San Francisco: Harper and Row.

- Kasper, W. & Lehmann, K. (Eds.) (1983), "Teufel, dämonen, besessenheit. Zur Wirklichkeit des Bösen. (Broschier: M. Grünwald, Mainz.
- Kittle, G. & Fredrick. (1985). *Theological dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids: Erdman.
- Kronen, J. & Menssen, S. (2010). "The defensibility of Zoroastrian Dualism." *Religious Studies*, 46/2: pp. 185-205.
- Maly, E. (1968). "Genesis." in Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy (Eds.) *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 1- 46.
- McBrien, R. (1994). *Catholicism*, New York: Harpercollins, 1994.
- McKenzie, J., (1968). "The Gospel according to Matthew." in Raymond Brown, Joseph Fitzmyer, Roland Murphy (Eds.) *The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, pp. 62-114.
- Moss, C. (2013). "Roman imperialism and the political context of the early Christian Apocrypha." in Andrew Gregory, Christopher Tuckett (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Apocrypha*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NBCNews.com, "Pat Robertson Calls Radical Muslims 'Satanic'" 3.14.2006, , available at [http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11814608/ns/world\\_news-europe/t/pat-robertson-calls-radical-muslims-satanic/#.WV1ez4jyu00](http://www.nbcnews.com/id/11814608/ns/world_news-europe/t/pat-robertson-calls-radical-muslims-satanic/#.WV1ez4jyu00).
- Nielson, K. (1991). *Satan, the Prodigal Son: A family problem in the Bible*, Sheffield Academic.
- Pope Paul VI. (1972). "Deliver us from Evil," audience given at the General Audience of 15 November 1972. Available at [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc\\_con\\_cfaith\\_doc\\_1972\\_50626\\_fede-cristiana-demonologia\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_1972_50626_fede-cristiana-demonologia_en.html) Accessed on 1.17. 2013.
- Perkins, P. (1992). "Revelation." *The Collegeville Biblical Commentary: New Testament* Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1992.
- Rapp, C. (2010). "Aristotle's Rhetoric" *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward Zalta, (Eds.) (Spring 2010) Available at <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/aristotle-rhetoric/>.
- Ratzinger, J. (2010) *The Ratzinger Reader: Mapping a Theological Journey*. Lieven Boeve and Gerard Mannion (Eds.). London: T&T Clarke International.
- Ratzinger, J. (1977). *Eschatology*, Washington: The Catholic University of America Press.
- Ratzinger, J. (1969). "Abschied vom Teufel?" in *Bistumsblatt Aachen* Aachen: Einhard-Verlag.
- Renger, A. B. (2013). "The ambiguity of Judas: On the Mythicity of a New Testament Figure." *Literature and Theology* 27 (1): pp. 1-17.
- Russell, J. B. (1981). *Satan: The early Christian Tradition*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Rynne, T. (2014). *Jesus Christ, peacemaker: A new theology of peace*, Maryknoll: Orbis.
- Seiple, D. & Weidmann F., (Eds.) (2008). *Enigmas and powers: Engaging the work of Walter Wink for classroom, church and world*, Eugene: Pickwick Publications.
- Simms, K. (2003). *Paul Ricoeur*, London: Routledge.
- Ricoeur, P. (1965). *Fallible Man*. Trans. Charles Kelbey, Chicago: Regnery.
- Seymour, C. (1998). "Hell, justice and freedom." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 43: pp. 69-86.
- Tuckett, C., (Ed.) (1997). "Scripture in Q." in *The Scriptures in the Gospels*, Leuven: Leuven University Press, 3- 26.
- Wink, W. (2002). *The Human being: Jesus and the enigma of the Son of Man*, Minneapolis:

- Fortress.
- Wink, W. (1993). *The Powers that be: theology for a new millennium*, New York: Galilee Press.
- Wink, W. (1984). *Naming the powers*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.
- Wolpe, D. "Angels in the Jewish Tradition." In *the big book of angels: Angelic encounters, expert answers*, Rodale Inc. & Beliefnet.
- Worthington, E., Sharp, C.; Lerner, A. & Sharp, J. (2006). "Interpersonal forgiveness as an example of loving one's enemies." *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 34 (1): pp. 32-42.
- Wray, T.J & Mobley, G (2005). *The Birth of Satan: tracing the devil's biblical roots*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Zupancic, A. (2005). *Ethics of the real*, London: Verso Books.

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## **Voices of Vietnam, In War and Peace: An Oral History Play**

Author: Patrick Chura  
Title: Professor  
Affiliation: University of Akron  
Location: Akron, OH, USA  
E-mail: [jpc@uakron.edu](mailto:jpc@uakron.edu)

**Keywords:** Vietnam War, Oral History, Memory

---

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to thank the students at Ho Chi Minh City Open University and the University of Akron for their work on this project. Thanks also to Dr. Hung Huynh Cong Minh, Mr. Mai Minh Tien, and Dr. Thuynha Nguyen.

## **VOICES OF VIETNAM, IN WAR AND PEACE: AN ORAL HISTORY PLAY**

### *Author's Note*

The inspiration for this oral history play about the Vietnam War is expressed in a simple statistic: the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., a black granite wall listing the names of 58,300 American war dead, is 150 yards long; if a similar monument were built with the same density of names listing the three million Vietnamese who died in the war, that wall would be four and half miles long. The Veterans Memorial—a place of reflection and reckoning about a national atrocity—speaks profoundly to Americans, insisting that the United States search its conscience and confront the truth about itself. The fact that it doesn't acknowledge the Vietnamese is not surprising, but it reminds us that remembering only "one's own" as narrowly defined by national borders leaves room for more cosmopolitan forms of memory.

During a five-week Fulbright lecturing grant at Ho Chi Minh City Open University in 2016, I taught a course on American Literature of the Vietnam War for 22 Vietnamese undergraduates. In

the first stage of our work, we read and discussed canonical Vietnam War literature by American writers. The second stage of the course shifted the focus, requiring the students to conduct oral history interviews with parents, grandparents or others who remembered the war, and to translate those interviews into English. These interviews would be preserved in an oral history archive and used immediately in the final stage of the course: the creation and performance of a “memory play” about the conflict referred to in Vietnamese history books as “The American War.”

Realizing that this plan asked a lot of students, I devised a rationale to provide clarity and motivation (for them and for me), as we began. After holding up a copy of Viet Than Nguyen’s new study, *Nothing Ever Dies: Vietnam and the Memory of the War* and explaining that Nguyen is a Vietnamese-American whose novel *The Sympathizer* had just won the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for fiction, I recited a statement I had silently rehearsed on the flight from Hong Kong to Saigon: “Nguyen says that *Ethical Memory* of war remembers one’s own, but does not fail to remember others as well,” I said. “This course asks you to remember others—Americans. It also asks you to remember your own—Vietnamese—in order to help *Americans* remember others.”

The play we made, *Voices of Vietnam, in War and Peace*, is the product of their interviews and translations, and my editing and scripting. The production promotes Ethical Memory by speaking the truths of the Vietnamese people while evoking the humanity and inhumanity of soldiers and civilians on all sides of the conflict. It was performed in June 2016 in an on-campus auditorium at Ho Chi Minh City Open University, using a minimal set and simple staging, by student-actors who had been rehearsing for only a few days.

At the opening of the play, each student carried a single white flower onstage and placed it in a vase that remained in view throughout the performance. The six scenes that followed offered perspectives perhaps unfamiliar to Americans, describing viewpoints that have not often been acknowledged by the English-speaking “memory industry” epitomized in American war films.

At the end of the play, the students retrieved their flowers, presented them to an invited guest and led that guest forward. Through a translator I gave this explanation of the play’s Epilogue: “You have been listening to the students speak your voices, the voices of Vietnamese who remember the war. Now you will speak the students’ voices. Please don’t be shy about coming up on stage.” As their own words became our text, I saw pride on the students’ faces. When they introduced themselves and said, “This is my voice,” there was strong emotion, made stronger by the fact that speaking out is still closely monitored in Vietnam. They had done something in an academic setting that went beyond what they thought was possible.

I had told the Vietnamese students that their play would “help Americans remember others,” which meant that U.S. students would perform it also. In a discussion with the audience after the November 2016 staging in Ohio, someone asked the cast how it felt to speak the voices of Vietnam. Several said that the experience was “eye-opening.” One remarked, “When you have to present someone else’s story, someone else’s feeling, there is a seriousness to it.” Another saw the performance as “a way for us to go back and trace a dark part in our nation’s history and also grow more empathy.”

A defining trait of oral history is how effectively it countermands state-sponsored narratives that glorify violent conflict. For Americans, hearing the stories of the Vietnamese people is a way to resist war and foster peace by breaking down the cultural binaries that make the war machine run. For Southeast Asians, remembering personal war stories is urgent because Hollywood has

displaced their history and replaced it with its own version. As Nguyen concludes, “telling family war stories . . . is an important way to treat the disorder of our military-industrial complex.”

Fundamentally about words, oral history plays embrace simple staging and are adaptable to groups of almost any size and composition. Young people may speak the voices of the elderly, males may speak female voices and vice versa. In our production in Saigon, Grandma Chung was played successfully by a young man of 19. By allowing students to imaginatively inhabit the Other—especially those of differing ethnicities, nationalities, gender identities and age groups—oral history plays foster awareness and cultural sensitivity.

Recognizing that “the human capacity to injure other people is very great precisely because our capacity to imagine other people is very small” (Scarry, 1999, p. 103), this oral history play responds to the need for empathy unbound by geographic borders. In other words, we hope our play tells stories that are more loyal to *imagination* than to *nation* while furthering a mission of peace through cross-cultural understanding.



## INTRODUCTION

**Narrator:**

**At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, the names of the 58,300 Americans who died in the Vietnam War are listed on a black granite wall. The wall is 150 yards long.**

**If a similar monument were built with the same density of names listing the three million Vietnamese who died in the war, that wall would be more than four and a half miles long.**



Martyrs Cemetery of the Republic of Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City

### **Scene One: Voices from the Village**

**Narrator**

**Young Man**

**Woman 1**

**Woman 2**

**Translator**

*NARRATOR (SIDESTAGE): In the Martyrs Cemetery of The Republic of Vietnam, the South Vietnamese war dead are not arranged in straight lines, as in American war cemeteries. The Vietnamese soldiers are memorialized in communities, their gravestones forming perfect circles with a small tree serving as a natural, living center. White is the color of mourning in Vietnamese society.*

*[A POLLING STATION IN A RURAL AREA OF VIETNAM, WAITING IN LINE TO VOTE ON ELECTION DAY, MAY 2016]*

WOMAN 1: Why did they move this polling place to this remote part of the district? You'd think the government would understand how hard it is for us old people to get around. And every year my leg gets worse.

YOUNG MAN: A war injury? Excuse me ma'am, I've seen you in town before, always walking with a slight limp.

WOMAN 1: Of course, it hurts more than ever, it's like this leg won't ever let me forget that damned war.

YOUNG MAN: How exactly did it happen?

WOMAN 1: You don't want to know young man.

YOUNG MAN: But, I do though. I'm old enough to vote this year so I want to know more about our history. I'd be honored if you'd tell me your name and how your leg was hurt—and if you have time, what life was like during the war.

WOMAN 1: I'm not in a hurry young man, not anymore. And it looks like this line isn't either. My neighbors call me Grandma Tu.

I was a doctor and secret courier during the war. In the daytime I was a physician for War Zone 9. At midnight most nights, I transferred letters or brought supplies into the jungle for the Viet Cong. [*Viet Cong (VC): The communist guerrilla force that, with the support of the North Vietnamese government and the National Liberation Front (NLF), fought against South Vietnam and the United States.*] My workplace was very active, I worked in makeshift hospitals from Quảng Ngãi to Củ Chi. I treated hundreds of injured soldiers and civilians.

WOMAN 2: (*She is also standing in line waiting to vote*): Excuse me I overheard what you were saying. My family also fought in the liberation army, we lived then in Tay Ninh province, near the Vietnam-Cambodia border. When I go to vote I can't help thinking of the war so I was just remembering my brothers when I heard you talking. My brothers were both in the army. One died in a battle against the Americans in spring of '68, the other simply went missing one day and disappeared. We had little hope of finding him and never heard from him again.

WOMAN 1: That's terrible, I'm sorry you've had such sadness.

YOUNG MAN: Yes, I am also. I'm sorry ma'am.

WOMAN 1: For me the worst time was the year 1972, a period of much fighting, and Quảng Ngãi was partitioned. Route 1 was horribly bombed by the enemies so the troops operated at midnight and usually fought at 4 or 5 am. Since the war zone was far from the medical station, we were sent down through the jungle to the coastal area to give medical aid. I remember when we first reached the place, there were hundreds of dead bodies heaped up in piles. It was unbelievable how many had been shot. Some had only flesh wounds, but the more serious cases had lost limbs and body parts and were blinded or crippled from the fighting. I remember that we all thought that death would be a blessing for them, a relief.

YOUNG MAN: Horrible. I can't imagine thinking that.

WOMAN 1: Well you weren't there young man, and you didn't see what I saw. In one four-day period we operated on more than 300 wounded, performing countless surgeries and overseeing countless cases. During that time doctors made physiological saline by themselves and we had to use antibiotics with long-expired dates. Anesthetics were limited so we used any desensitizer we could find. Some wounded were amazingly resilient, waiting for help for hours while suffering deep open abdomen wounds that had ripped apart the liver or lungs.

YOUNG MAN: It must have been very bad, doing that kind of work night and day, probably on no sleep.

WOMAN 1: For doctors like us conditions were sad and terrible. We only got one blouse, and before the blood of one patient had dried, we were covered and soaked in another's. When we bathed in the river by the field hospital, the water became bloody all around us. When I think of those times I realize that I'll never forget the deaths of those who worked alongside me and who fought for us. Once on a special mission, our team was bombed. Fortunately, I was standing far enough from the explosion but I was wounded by a fragment in the right leg and even now it hurts. There! That's how my injury happened.

YOUNG MAN: Please sit down if your leg hurts ma'am, these people can keep your place in line. *(They lead her to a table or bench at the side of the stage. She sits.)*

WOMAN 1: Thank you. But I have to admit that now, in time of peace, I sometimes regret fighting for the North. The government of Vietnam is corrupt. They're forcing things on the Vietnamese, taking away democracy, taking bribes, and being cowards before our enemies. There aren't any good candidates to vote for in my opinion. Now I understand why many Saigonese left the country behind for a totally different country in '75. They knew they were risking their lives but chose that path.

YOUNG MAN: I can't imagine what it must have been like for you. Thank you for sharing that story. What you've said makes me realize how good we have it now.

WOMAN 2: Yes, thank you. Your story makes me remember something that happened in my village when I was nine years old. I feel a connection with you. May I tell you about it?

WOMAN 1: Yes, certainly, please.

YOUNG MAN: Of course my friend.

WOMAN 2: One afternoon in my village, with everything completely quiet, some of my neighbors were resting after the morning's work, some were having lunch, and children were playing on the ground in front of the houses. We always knew what everyone in the village was doing and spent our days together. That's something that has changed in modern times but I miss it so much! Suddenly U.S. troops appeared, striding noisily out of the forest. They entered my neighbor's small house and a few minutes later led out five men who'd been hiding there. They led them, with hands bound behind their backs, into the clearing at the center of the village. They called and motioned for all the people in the village, including the children, to gather around. The American soldiers, six of them there were, formed into a line, taking positions with their guns up as if ready to fire. A

seventh man who was apparently their commander walked forward angrily and looked at the captured men. He yelled in a loud voice and an American soldier standing next to him translated into Vietnamese . . .

*(At this moment the TRANSLATOR walks onstage and shouts loudly):*

TRANSLATOR: *“These are members of the Viet Cong. They’ve done a stupid thing against the government. And I want you all to know: anyone who joins them or who hides them from us will have a bad end. But if you show me where other Viet Cong are I’ll make certain that you’ll all be safe—no more danger, nothing to be afraid of and no one will die.”*

WOMAN 2: A minute or so passed in total silence, then another minute. Nothing but silence. In my village we came to understand that the silence of village people always unsettled American soldiers. The commander became nervous and angry and the translator screamed out:

TRANSLATOR: *“What the hell are you looking at? Are you deaf and dumb? You wanna see them die? Do you? Do You?”*

WOMAN 2: The commander realized that he wasn’t winning our hearts and minds that day. I could see this. He knew he had failed. He gave a signal to the soldiers and they fired into the group of men. A mother turned and hugged closely her two small children, smothering them in her arms to keep them from seeing what was happening. The shots finished and one by one the wounded men fell down weakly, without a sound and without saying a word. Their blood gushed and dyed the ground red. I watched, and I saw the moment their eyes closed. Some people cried out in fear.

The last thing I remember was that the men of my village dug graves the next day and buried the killed ones out just beyond our garden. Throughout my childhood we tended those graves carefully. We believed that though they had died violently they were at peace because they were close to their ancestors. And because of what I saw that day, I don’t regret taking the side of our nation against the American invaders.

YOUNG MAN: Thank you also Ma’am, for letting me listen to that story. Hearing both of you tell about those horrible times somehow makes me more hopeful for Vietnam’s future.



**Scene Two: Death of a Draft Resister**

**Narrator**  
**Young Woman**  
**Grandmother**  
**Grandfather**

*[A YOUNG WOMAN, HER GRANDMOTHER AND GRANDFATHER ARE SITTING AT A TABLE IN THE KITCHEN OF A VILLAGE HOME.]*

**NARRATOR:** *New York Times, May 22, 2016—“The United States is rescinding a decades-old ban on sales of lethal military equipment to Vietnam, President Obama announced at a news conference in Hanoi on Monday, ending one of the last legal vestiges of the Vietnam War.”*

**YOUNG WOMAN:** Grandma, what do you remember about the war?

**GRANDMOTHER:** The War? You mean the War of American Aggression?

**YOUNG WOMAN:** Yes, though you know that’s not what some people call it in Saigon, I mean Ho Chi Minh City.

**GRANDMOTHER:** I know, yes, I know. Well, have I ever told you the story of Uncle Sau? It’s something that happened when I was, I think, 15 or 16. We had to take cover from air raids a lot

in those days. Whenever there was a warning of American soldiers approaching, we automatically rushed to the local bomb shelter. At that time of my life I heard the sound of bombs as often as the barking of dogs.

YOUNG WOMAN: You've never told *me* about Uncle Sau.

GRANDMOTHER: Well I remember there was a man, Mr. Sau, he was probably about middle-aged, who lived a few houses away from us. He was said to be a stupid man, but somehow he managed to get married to a charming girl and they had two children. After his marriage he became a good bread-winner in his house, providing for his wife, a lovely daughter, and a son.

*(The Young Woman takes a drink of coffee and starts taking notes, copying down her grandmother's words.)*

GRANDFATHER: Everyone in Vinh Long at this time was afraid of being killed and so was Mr. Sau. He was incredibly terrified at the idea that someday he'd die and leave his wife and children alone. I always knew that joining the Viet Cong was the last thing he'd do in his life!

Whenever he heard the sounds of rifles, bombs, pistols, or whenever he saw any U.S soldiers, he'd be the first to run away. Uncle Sau saw soldiers of both sides as often as any of us, but he just couldn't get used to them. He was just automatically scared of people wearing uniforms and carrying AK-47s, scared even of the clicking sound they made as they replaced their bullet cartridges.

Just as the day dawned one morning in 1969, in the middle years of the war, Sau came across a crowd of people near the Vĩnh Tràng pagoda. They were strenuously debating, with arms waving, about the service regulations of the NLF military. [*NLF: National Liberation Front. The political organization formed in 1960 to support the Viet Cong and effect the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government.*] He heard someone say that men could be exempted from the "draft list" by cutting off the knuckle of their right forefinger. It meant that you'd be unable to pull the trigger. That story preyed on his mind. All the way home he trembled with fear at what he might have to do.

*(He stops to take a drink of coffee.)*

GRANDMOTHER: A few days later the voices of Viet Cong recruiters called. Everyone, young and old, men, women and even some children, crowded the liaisons to listen to their recruiting speeches—all except Sau and his family. At this moment he was pacing in the yard of his small house, a knife in one hand, a jug of alcohol in the other. He took a drink and cried out, drawing an attentive audience for the first time in his life. Again he shouted. "I will cut myself, I will cut myself!"

YOUNG WOMAN: God! Did he do it?

GRANDFATHER: His wife and his children all cried "no!" at him. They were very worried, even panicked I'd say. There was a small crowd now, trying to calm him and get him to put the knife away. But they were stilled and silenced by the fear that he'd harm others. Minutes passed. He drank and drank from the bottle and fifteen minutes later he was quite drunk.

Then he put his hand on a table in the yard, lifted the knife over his head and swung it down. “Smack,” (*He loudly bangs the palm of his hand on the kitchen table*) he missed on the first try, hitting the table, like that. (*Bangs again.*) On the second try he didn’t miss. It was a deep cut, pouring blood and turning his clothing red from his chest to his feet. After that he got weaker and staggered, then fell slowly to his knees.

*(The Grandmother and Grandfather pause)*

YOUNG WOMAN (*anxiously*): What happened Grandma?

GRANDMOTHER: His wife rushed forward and hugged him as he lay on the ground, shaking free the knife, which fell on the soft earth. I saw this happen, standing by the gate of the yard. Sau’s wife called her son to her and quickly took off the child’s pants, then bandaged her husband’s wound, wrapping the mutilated hand in the child’s clothing.

Just as all of this was happening an attack began, with bombs falling and bullets digging into the earth. The townspeople started running for their lives and so did I.

When the raid was over we came out of the shelter and saw what happened. Remaining in Sau’s yard were four people—Sau’s wife and two children with Sau’s prone, bloody body.

YOUNG WOMAN: He died, right?

GRANDFATHER: He did.

YOUNG WOMAN: But it was only Sau who died, right grandma?

GRANDMA: (*becoming sad, speaking softly*) No, no. There were four deaths. No one survived—Sau, his wife, the two children.

GRANDFATHER (*waits, then suddenly declares, impatiently*): A fragmentation bomb you see—one of those cluster bombs! (*pause*) But Sau’s wife died holding her husband’s wounded hand tightly in her own two hands.

NARRATOR: “*The decision to lift the ban was not based on China or any other considerations,*” President Obama said, with the Vietnamese president, Tran Dai Quang, standing stiffly by his side. “*It was based on our desire to complete what has been a lengthy process of moving toward normalization with Vietnam.*”

“*In brief remarks to reporters as the meeting began inside the palace, Mr. Obama hailed the two countries’ growing closeness despite a history of conflict.*”



Figures in the Children's Room of the War Remnants Museum, Ho Chi Minh City

### Scene Three—Don't Play with Guns

**Narrator**

**Three Mothers**

**Two Fathers**

**Grandmother**

**Grandfather**

*[AT A KINDERGARTEN SCHOOLYARD, A GROUP OF PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS WATCH THE CHILDREN PLAY.]*

*(They sit in chairs in a semi-circle, relaxed and quiet, thinking. A toy, a child's playground ball is used as a prop in this scene.)*

MOTHER ONE: Lots of four-year-olds this year. Vietnam's had a baby-boom since the war. I was just thinking that they're now older than my father was when he first encountered war at age three.

MOTHER TWO: At age three? How did that happen?

MOTHER ONE (*picking up the ball and holding it on her lap*) My dad was born in Da Lat city. He was the second-oldest son in a family with six children that included four younger sisters. Something that happened just before the birth of his last sister was his first war experience I think, he was just three then.

My granddad's nephew was a Republican soldier. [*Republican: South Vietnamese soldier, fighting for the Army of the Republic of Vietnam or ARVN, the ally of the United States.*]When he came home on a one-day leave, he brought his weapons with him in a duffle bag—guns, grenades, knives, and other things. My dad was three at the time, and while no one was watching for a moment he took his cousin's helmet and pistol and pretended to be . . . a cowboy in a Western. He ran around with the gun, playing, pointing at imaginary enemies and saying "bam" and "pow". In the story as I've heard it, the helmet was too big for his cute little head; he had trouble keeping it on.

The fun stopped when he saw my granddad standing behind the trees with a furious look on his face. The little boy was punished severely for getting out the gun; he had no idea what that gun could do. At three years old my own dad had no sense of danger and thought it was fun! Through the eyes of a child, what can you expect? What can you expect from a child? (*She remains holding the ball*)

GRANDFATHER: Of course. Ok, now you've got me thinking. Here's what I'd say to the kids today: I'm a man who lived through the war, and now, it is peacetime. Young people nowadays are lucky to be alive, to be born and grow up in peace. They need to treasure what they have.

GRANDMOTHER: During wartime, living conditions suffer. A good education was something the teenagers and the young people then couldn't even dream of. Things at that time were different from now.

MOTHER THREE: The war's over but many, many people gave their lives—their blood and bones—for the peace we have. Those wounds will never heal. Because of that, these kids must build our country, working together. They must work to make our country strong and beautiful. *Let me tell you, they better choose peace and not war.* War chokes us, smothering the growth of the country. Now, in peacetime, the conditions are good for learning, succeeding, becoming highly-educated. I hope they make use of it and become productive members of society, to the honor of their families.

FATHER ONE: The essence of war, after all, is destruction. One can't simply side up with the winning party. Instead, we now have to look at the issue of war from opposite points of view and draw the necessary conclusions. Historical facts can be twisted. For the benefit of these kids, we have to be honest and objective about the causes and reasons that led us to war. They have to benefit in some way from its horrible destruction by at least learning its lessons.

FATHER TWO: I'm just in my 20s, starting my family, and I think each of those who were born in peace have to appreciate the good fortune that was given to us by our ancestors. We don't know what it's like to be evacuated while bombs are raining down without mercy, or what it's like to lose a child to war. We're lucky the magic words are now true: "the war is over."

MOTHER THREE: Here's something we should tell the kids: As long as we unite against war, nothing's impossible. Our country was small and very poor, and we defeated the most powerful country in the world. We didn't have a lot of modern weapons, but we defeated that powerful country. The Vietnamese together, regardless of age, religion or gender, fought together. It was a miracle that we were able to overcome them.

MOTHER TWO: But we have to tell them another truth too: War is cruel and terrible. It leaves nothing but pain and death.

GRANDMOTHER: But our ancestors sweated blood and tears for the independence of Vietnam, so their descendants better not forget our great history. They need to understand the sacrifice of their ancestors. If the younger generation does so they'll make a bright future. They'll persevere and develop our country in a better way.

GRANDFATHER: I don't know. I think they should *forget* the war and try to focus on building and developing what's good and necessary now.

FATHER TWO: Let's face it, the war has lost whatever meaning it might have had. While other countries like North and South Korea are now living peacefully, and East and West Germany are united, the situation in Vietnam is pretty sad—We're united but paying a tremendous price for it. There are good things and bad things in both North and South. Young people should learn and understand the views of both sides—not just the winning one.

MOTHER THREE: Well I say the young people need to learn a lot of things. They have much happier lives than us. They don't need to live on sweet potatoes, and they water morning glories every day instead of rice. They don't hide in bomb shelters and face death as I did when I was a kid. They're free to go to school—and play!

*(She takes the ball from MOTHER ONE and holds it tightly in front of her. She shouts, trembling with a sense of urgency, toward the playing kids) You better study hard!!*

*(Putting the ball back in the hands of MOTHER ONE, she smiles, sits back, talking calmly and thoughtfully now, still watching the playing children.)* In our time, we loved studying but had to give it up because we were poor. Be a good student so you can contribute to our country someday. Nothing's better than learning.

GRANDFATHER: I agree. I was drafted into the war in the North when I was 17; I was lucky because the war was close to being over at that time. They went to my high school and made a recruiting call for the NVA. [*NVA: the North Vietnamese Army or People's Army of Vietnam.*] It was compulsory. Those who evaded would have their food cards confiscated, which meant they couldn't eat. No military service, no food. I couldn't graduate from high school and I never did. After joining, we were inspired to fight the imperialists and their lackeys, the South Vietnamese government, and to unite our country. I underwent just two or three weeks of very careless training before my unit was rotated into operations in the South.

MOTHER ONE *(continuing her story)*: When the soldiers moved up to the highlands, things got worse. Right on the street, soldiers were shooting each other. Terrified people ran for hiding places.

In our house my grandma was calming her children down while granddad was turning over wooden tables with mattresses behind them as a barrier against stray bullets. My dad says he could clearly see fear in his parents' eyes, even at age three. They stayed still in the house for hours at a time, or until the sound of the firing stopped. When they came outside to view the scene, it was as horrible as any battlefield. There were dead lying on the ground and people kneeling and crying next to them. My dad didn't know what was happening; he was too young to understand the devastation of war.

When the people living in that area could no longer bear the intense fights between the NVA and the Republicans, many decided to abandon their homeland to save their families. My dad was still three when my family tried to flee for the first time. As soldiers marched alongside tanks in the narrow road and a crowd of people watched with fear and anxiety, my grandparents made ready to leave. When they looked around for the last time, they suddenly panicked.... Where was my dad? I can't imagine how distraught and worried my grandparents were. It turned out my dad was with the crowd, waving and yelling excitedly at the passing soldiers. It seemed to him they weren't soldiers but giants, going to a place of no return. He admired them; to him they were heroes.

You can guess what happened when my granddad finally found him. He took his boy back home and prepared him and his sisters separate packs of food and clothes for the journey. Finally they left their house and joined the stream of people moving to the north-east, to Nha Trang city. But the chaos wasn't over. While walking along as a refugee with strangers, one has to watch after family members very carefully, especially children. The strong push the weak out of the way. Everyone's fighting and pushing. Unprotected children have no chance and are left behind, it's that simple.

My dad remembers seeing lost children wandering in the street, calling for their parents. Some eventually sat down, playing in the sand and waiting for parents who would never come. As they got tired and hungry, fear came upon them and they started to cry. "Momma...Papa..." they yelled in weak, scared voices. Little, repeated, desperate cries for parents who would never find them. Those cries still haunt my father. People walking by sometimes felt sorry for them but no one helped them. No one helped them.

GRANDFATHER: Now you're talking about something the children today will not understand and it's probably good that they don't. I'm ashamed of many actions I took part in during the war. These children are lucky they don't know things like that.

MOTHER ONE: My father, a lucky child whose family was still together, now wonders what happened to those other children, if they survived or ever found anyone to care for them. He'll never find answers to these questions. After a walking journey of more than 135 kilometers with hundreds of other people, my family finally found shelter in a temple in Nha Trang.

*(She stands up, places the ball gently on the ground, and walks away)*

MOTHER TWO: *(She rises from her chair, yelling desperately at the children in the foreground, who barely notice her.)* You children, when you grow up, you take a stand! Work to protect

humanity from war. (*Shakes her finger at them*) Don't ever again force people to die in a meaningless war!



Footprints on the village path, *Son My Memorial*, Quảng Ngãi Province

#### **Scene Four: Unknown Soldiers**

##### **Narrator**

##### **Eight Vietnamese “Witnesses” of varied ages and backgrounds**

NARRATOR: *New York Times*, March 5, 1995. Most Americans think of the Vietnam War as a political and moral failure that left a young generation scarred, shell-shocked and stripped of its

*illusions. From Bao Ninh's novel, "The Sorrow of War," it is clear that the North Vietnamese experience was largely the same.*

WITNESS ONE: I worked in military intelligence for the Viet Cong. When I did my job, my mind was empty of everything but the thought of serving my country. I remember when the U.S. found our hidden tunnel complex and attacked. I and my company fought them. I shot one American soldier and wounded him. But right after I shot him, I decided to pretend to be dead in hopes that the Americans wouldn't kill me. Then I saw they were throwing poisonous gas bombs and right away I jumped up and ran, thinking that if I just stayed alive, I could save my family, my friends, and my country. But the toxic gas knocked me out and I lost consciousness. Of course the American troops caught me. They took me to Con Dao prison on Phu Quoc Island.

As a POW there I was tortured almost to death. But I'm still alive! Though I struggled and suffered through five years in prison. All through that time, my biggest motivation was my family. I couldn't leave my wife and my two sons. They're just little boys. So I had no choice--I had to live, live and live!

I was more determined because my family didn't even know I'd been captured. They thought for sure that I was dead. When I finally got home after five years, they were shocked and overjoyed; they couldn't believe it; they cried and cried.

NARRATOR: *The author, himself a veteran, traces the war-haunted life of Kien, a former infantryman turned writer, as he struggles to overcome his terrifying memories of combat and salvage the wreck that his life has become. It is not easy: Kien's fallen comrades return as ghosts in alcohol-fueled visions; his lover has also been irrevocably changed by the war; his ability to write, once his path to salvation, has begun to sputter. "The Sorrow of War" refreshingly avoids heavy philosophizing about combat and manhood. Instead it focuses on Kien's personal ordeal.*

WITNESS TWO: Even having a simple family meal was almost impossible. We often had to run to a dugout bomb shelter. When we heard the helicopters booming over our heads, they were usually full of Republican "puppet" soldiers or Americans. We called those Vietnamese who joined with the U.S. in exchange for material comforts puppet soldiers. We feared the Americans more, unless we were captured; then we feared the puppet soldiers more. We would hide in the shelter to save our hides. Whenever we so much as heard the sound of weapons or a helicopter, we'd take shelter.

WITNESS THREE: The first thing she thought about when the war was mentioned was the possibility of PEACE. She was only an 11 year-old girl during the worst part of the war, and she dreamed of a world filled with peace, not death and isolation from loved ones. She was constantly terrified and had shrunk to a fraction of her healthy weight because of the trauma induced by her mother's death. That girl's mother was my grandma and what I'm describing is the wartime life of my own mother.

She told me, my mother, a story about my grandmother, who made a living as a merchant. She bought commodities at Phuoc Long and shipped them to other towns, and she continued to do so as the Cong San and Nguy battles were happening. She carried large amounts of money around

and always worried about losing it somehow or being attacked and robbed. One day an air attack came and she ran for safety, hiding in a bomb shelter. A bomb destroyed the shelter in a direct hit and she was badly injured. But that night there came a terrible storm with heavy rain, and no rescuer could help her. She lost one leg and the other was broken in many places. For seven hours during that storm, she withstood the pain before finally dying of the constant bleeding. This is a painful story about pain itself, but I often ask my mother to retell it. It makes me proud by reminding me that I have a strong grandmother.

WITNESS FOUR: I was born and grew up after the war, but through studying photos and documents, I've learned that the conflict between the US and Vietnam was an unjust war full of misery and death, one in which many innocent civilians died from horribly barbaric bombs and weapons. There are remnants of the war that remain in our lives today, like the presence of landmines that once covered almost all of Vietnam and are still buried in certain areas, and which still cause significant harm to people and animals. Often we read stories of someone digging somewhere, and the tragic accidents when mines or—worse—live buried bombs explode. Not long ago I heard about a shocking case that happened in Cam My, Dong Nai: My friend's mother, a farmer, was raking the lawn and tending the ground around a tree, when her hoe came down on a grenade, which exploded and sent shrapnel tearing into her body. Luckily that blast didn't kill her, but it left permanent injuries. We also deal with the legacy of Agent Orange, which causes mental illness and birth defects. Several generations of children are physically or mentally deformed or handicapped. All of them, I think, are innocent. They've done nothing to deserve these hardships.

WITNESS FIVE: This happened to my grandfather near U Minh revolutionary base. The area around that base was at the time the scene of fierce fighting between VC and Americans. In order to crush our soldiers' fighting spirit, after killing VC, the Americans sometimes displayed their heads publicly on stakes stuck in the ground. Once, seeing the head of his dead comrade with matted red, blood-stained hair not only aroused in my grandfather strong hatred for the Americans, it also shocked and frightened him beyond reason. It somehow reminded him that it had been five months since the day of his last haircut, and, strangely, it made him worry obsessively that if he were captured, he would feel humiliated by having his cut-off head displayed with shaggy, bloody hair.

He asked Mr. Muoi who had been a barber before the war, to please give him a haircut. But everything was scarce then, and Mr. Muoi had lost many things, including even his scissors, the tool by which he had earned his living in peacetime. And in the underground place they were living, there was no electric light and the soldiers didn't dare emerge until after dark. There was only the weak light of a candle to cut hair by. But Mr. Muoi, kind and sympathetic to my grandfather's strange fear, agreed to cut his hair by candlelight using scissors captured from a U.S. soldier's medical kit. They did the job. After that, others had Mr. Muoi cut their hair the same way.

NARRATOR: --*Indeed, the novel is best read as a diary-like account of post-traumatic stress.*

WITNESS SIX: I'll always remember the story of a cook who was stationed at A1 hill during the Dien Bien Phu campaign. At that time, the cook's job was to take food to the soldiers. Along the road to the area of fighting, a company of soldiers was attacked, and their cook stayed and fought

with them. The soldiers saw and admired that, saying that they'd rather starve than see their friends hurt or killed. In some battles, the number of Vietnamese dead was unbelievably high, too large to imagine. Once, after a very bad battle, many of the soldiers were upset when the food arrived. Thinking of the loss of their friends, they couldn't eat. The cooks were also saddened but they knew the men had to eat. They shouted at the soldiers, held the food out to them and said: Eat! Eat! Why do we even cook if you don't eat? That's one of the most touching stories of the war and it made a deep impression on me.

WITNESS SEVEN: There was a skirmish between the Viet Cong and the Republicans. Families were caught between the two forces; they had to choose one side to fight for or almost certainly die in the war the two had started. They had no idea about the future they were promised—whether it would hold peace, happiness or a united nation—they only chose to fight for their own survival.

My father's family was no exception. My grandma's family fought for the VC, my grandad's fought for the other side. My dad said even family members could end up killing each other. It was common. Whenever the two sides fought, families were torn apart. They did manage to have short secret reunions with fathers, brothers and sons. These were their only chance to spend time together. But they usually lasted only for one day. Before the sun of the next morning rose, men of many families packed up and went back to their bases.

WITNESS EIGHT: I was born after the war, but I clearly remember three years ago, in 2013, listening to long talks about the war between my Grandpa and our neighbor, Mr. Nam, as they sat in our kitchen drinking.

Mr. Nam, born in 1948, was a prison guard in the 13A Ward of the Bien Hoa Prison. He served for the U.S Army and inflicted torture on prisoners nearly every day. Some of this was extremely cruel. He described a torture called "The Flying Body," which involved tying together the arms and legs of the prisoner and suspending him in the air. Another was called "Pop the Eardrum," [*A torture that ruptures the eardrum with percussive blows to the side of the head.*] Many VC committed suicide in this prison.

Mr. Nam saw a mountain of death, but he still had recurring nightmares in which he saw visions of the dead body of a very close friend.

Nam's closest friend was Dinh. The two had known each other since they were 15 and while they shared the same age, nationality, eye color and place of birth, they differed in their thinking. Nam followed the Republicans and moved to Bien Hoa; Dinh joined the Viet Cong and became commander of a platoon, seeing his first military action in 1966. As Mr. Nam said to my grandfather in our kitchen, "war had come, there was no room for joys anymore. They had to set out for their own futures."

In February of '68, the Tet Offensive brought Dinh and Nam together, on opposite sides. Dinh and 23 of his men were captured by the U.S. Army and brought to Bien Hoa prison.

On being told that a group of new prisoners was being processed, Nam looked through the list and found the name "Nguyen Van Dinh," a name that recalled the happiness of his life before the war.

He turned to his clerk and told him, "From this new group we have space only for those whose names began with letters A through D."

Nam wasn't even sure it was actually his friend. Part of him was anxious to find out if it was really Dinh; part of him prayed that it wouldn't be.

Nam saw Dinh first, in the distance, but he didn't approach his friend or make himself known. Dinh was assigned a common cell with a group of other prisoners, while Nam began to plan out his next move.

A few weeks later, in a re-allocation of prisoners, Nam was able to assign his friend to a private cell. Dinh didn't know the reason he had been "well-treated." At the end of his first day in the new cell, after hearing the words of the Republican national anthem—"Tien quan ca," he heard approaching footsteps followed by a familiar voice whispering his name.

"Dinh" he heard a second time, and when he stood up and looked out the little cell window, he saw Nam.

After two years the friends had few words for each other. "Is that you Nam? Nam? Man, why did you join the ARVN?" [*The Army of the Republic of Vietnam. The ally of the United States, also known as the South Vietnamese army.*]

What about you? Nam said. "A Viet Cong?"

"I did the right thing my friend!"- Dinh rashly replied. Then, "Who sent you, what's the mission today, Nam?" he asked sarcastically, with a brave smile.

Nam explained in halting words: "Man, in two weeks your battalion will come up for trial."

Dinh turned away from the window and spoke in a loud, mocking voice: "That's it! Oh wow, you did a 'great job,' thanks, but I just don't care!"

The order was received on March 11, 1968. On March 23, a beautiful, sunny morning, rifles were heard in the prison yard and the execution day began.

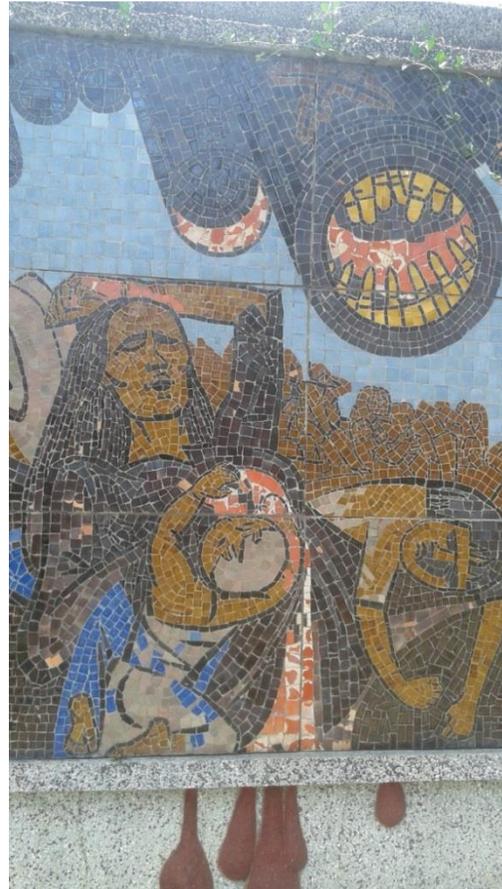
Nam looked on from the balcony of the second floor, by the door of cell 18 where Dinh had been held. He watched the guns, the commanders, the lieutenant and the U.S. forces crowded together in the center of Bien Hoa yard.

After the first man was shot, Nam stopped watching but kept listening. He listened as 22 more prisoners were shot, Dinh's entire battalion and its leader. It was the first time he felt sorry for VC troops.

Thinking back on that conversation I heard in 2013, I remember something Nam said. It was late and he was very drunk. He said to my grandpa, "what if I had fought for the VC?" Then he said "Anyway I will die soon" and passed out.

The two are now buried next to the same rice field. Nam's grave says he was 65. The smaller grave says "Nguyen Van Dinh, age 21." ***But how can the different numbers be true, I wonder, if the men were born the same year?***

**NARRATOR:** . . . *There are scenes of great emotional power. In addition, the author works hard to make certain that Kien represents a whole generation of North Vietnamese. Once again the reader learns that war is hell -- even when your side is supposedly the winner.*



**Diorama scene and mosaic depicting the My Lai Massacre**  
*Son My Memorial Museum, Quảng Ngãi Province*

### **Scene Five: Americans**

**Three men of different ages**

**Four women of different ages**

**WOMAN 1:** When I was little there was a family friend of ours in the village of Vinh Long, Mr. Than. He was afraid of being killed, terrified at the idea that someday he'd die and leave his wife and children alone. Whenever he saw any U.S army forces, he'd be the first to run away.

WOMAN 2: I can understand that. We saw the Americans as “killing machines.” They seemed not to respect or value human life. I wondered seriously if they even thought or hesitated before taking away the precious gift of life.

WOMAN 3: I know something about this. U.S. troops came to my village when I was a girl just nine years old. They shouted at us that they were looking for Viet Cong and when we wouldn't help them they killed five people in cold blood right in front of all of us. They dragged away the bodies and hung them from the banyan tree at the entrance to the village. This scene has been burned into my mind forever. I was only a schoolgirl but I still remember it all clearly.

MAN 1: Let's not forget the poison they left. The bottom line is that Agent Orange had a great number of long-term effects and consequences for our people. Even to the present day, innocent children are experiencing physical and mental pain from dioxin.

WOMAN 4: But I think there was inhumanity on all sides of the war. I think the United States just wanted to support the young Democracy in the South from the expansionism of the Northern Communists. I lived in Saigon, so seeing Americans was a daily, normal thing for me. They were nice people.

WOMAN 2: I was in the North Vietnamese Youth Volunteer Force. I and my partners caught an American soldier. It was the first time we saw a Caucasian male and it was strange for us. In the complexity of rage and damage of the war, people were so furious that they ran over and began to attack and beat the soldier. He raised his hands and surrendered. Then, someone from the government came and ordered us to hand over the soldier claiming that we didn't have the authority to handle the situation.

WOMAN 1: I'm a citizen of Vietnam, and all of us, the Vietnamese of both the North and South I think, will share the same thought...The intervention of the Americans in Vietnam was unjust. The problem in our country was our internal problem. Allow our country to take care of it. Their presence in Vietnam brought powerful forces to the war, forces that made our deaths and casualties much more severe, and the war itself more devastating. So, I don't agree with the presence of Americans in the war in Vietnam.

MAN 1: They are horrible. They directly started an unjust war. They caused endless grief and torment for Vietnamese country people.

WOMAN 3: I didn't know any Americans but I saw many of them in our country every day. I didn't like them of course. I hated them because they and the U.S government brought war to Vietnam. During the war, all my memories about the Americans are of their massacres of the common Vietnamese people.

MAN 1: The massacres. Go to the Son My Memorial and look at the 504 names on that shiny black wall. There are 20 one-year-olds on the list, 20 babies. If you walk around that little village, there's a cement path with footprints and bicycle tracks. There's a print of a U.S. military boot and the print of barefoot farmer; they are touching but going in opposite directions. One is human and one is machine-made. It made me think. My friend Le Ly—she grew up in the little village of Ky La up near Da Nang and she worked for both VC and the Americans—told me that when the VC

captured US soldiers, they'd always take their boots away first because they knew they had soft feet. Even if they managed to escape, the Americans could never get very far without their boots. They could easily be recaptured. Does that tell you anything about the VC and the Americans, my friend? About the war? Those two footprints, that *was* the war my friends, that was it.

MAN 2: The Americans were obviously wrong. I'm sure, however, that every country has good and bad people. We can't consider all of them as one person. Americans carried the war to Vietnam, but they also brought us civilization. And anywhere wars happen, there are deaths and losses.

MAN 1: About the Americans, all I want to say is that it was a disagreement that was unable to be resolved through compromise.

MAN 2: I remember when I was in sixth grade, I went camping at "Bun" Church in Binh Duong province, which was an unsafe place. American troops carried out a lot of military operations in that area. One day some of them were walking around, harvesting bunches of bananas. I spoke to them casually in French, and they gave me a bunch of bananas. That's what I remember about Americans.

WOMAN 4: I remember seeing Americans but not understanding their language. You're right, they were just regular people coming from another country more modern than Vietnam. They have a head, a body, two legs and two arms. Each of their hands has four fingers and a thumb. Some fingers are longer and some are shorter. They're really not perfect, just like all people from all countries.

WOMAN 1: But the United States committed crime after crime. American soldiers, I understand, didn't want to fight this war either, and they also were forced. The Vietnamese didn't want to kill, but our situation was different. We had to fight because we wanted to protect our country. We were different from the Americans: we love peace!

MAN 1: The United States is guilty for its actions during the war. They landed in our country and killed many people. The war turned innocent Americans into guilty killers.

MAN 3: When I was a boy my father worked with the Americans, at MACV, you know MACV? Military Assistance Command Vietnam. I remember an American general visited my father at our house and would always bring me presents. That was a good memory. But then when Saigon fell I remember the sight of the helicopters full of Americans leaving from the roof of the American embassy, practically jumping off the roof to get out of here. I saw and heard them flying over our neighborhood. I knew then that things would now be very hard for my family and my father. I felt betrayed. The noise of the choppers made me angry. I was only eleven at the time. I felt betrayal.

WOMAN 2: You talk of Saigon. That was nothing. I grew up near Hanoi, and I often saw bombing and death. As I recall, the Americans normally bombed industrial factories, streets, the airport, and waterfront area. But I will never forget that in 1972 they also dropped bombs, or what we called "a rain of bombs," right into Hanoi itself including living areas and hospitals. Everything was destroyed and I remember seeing dead bodies piled up together in heaps. In some entire large families there was no one left alive.

MAN 3: The Americans weren't the only ones who escalated the war. What about the North? They knew that engaging in this war would mean huge losses of many Vietnamese. I think both sides are to blame.

WOMAN 1: Because I was from the country and my academic level was just so-so, I didn't have the chance to know any Americans in the South. That was not for the ARVN soldiers but for the officers. But I think, not every American was bad. There were some of them doing good things, like being peace-loving people who were against the war. If they were doing bad things, I think they were usually just obeying orders. They had to become soldiers for their own ruling regime. I'm sure they had their own difficulties. They're not absolutely evil, at least not all of them.

MAN 3: A lot of Americans probably made mistakes. The most important thing is whether they know and try to correct them or make-up for them. I know that they did.

WOMAN 1: Yes, look around. On TV they seem to be joyful and funny people. I now see many Americans traveling to Vietnam and I think they are friendly, not scary. The war is over so we should consider Americans our friends, not enemies.

WOMAN 2: I said Americans were inhuman and they were, you can't deny that. But if I had enough money I'd send my grandchildren to America any way I could. Please let's stop talking about them. I'm starting to get angry.

MAN 3: No! This debate was just getting good! Listen, my Grandma Chung knows everything about the Americans. While my Dad worked with MACV, she was working at Saigon airport, Tan Son Nhat. That place was a giant US military base during the war. She still takes a walk every day in Tao Dan Park and tomorrow I'll ask her about this.



*New York Times, May 22, 2016*

### **Scene Six: Asking Grandma Chung**

**Young Man 3 from previous scene**  
**Grandma Chung**

*(The Young Man and Grandma Chung stand in place, with their backs to the audience for a minute. Then they turn around together to face the audience, strolling arm-in-arm, eventually sitting on a park bench, talking animatedly.)*

YOUNG MAN: . . . .So it was really an exciting debate we had Grandma and I have to ask: Who and what are these Americans? It seems especially important now, with the whole country talking about maybe welcoming back their warships to Cam Rahn Bay and making them our military ally against China.

GRANDMA CHUNG: Of course, child. Yes, yes I know, I read the papers. I'm glad that you asked me about this. *(She pauses, looking away, taking her time.)* Bringing that war machine back here would be a mistake. But that's not what you asked, is it?

*(She continues quickly now)*

I started working with the Americans in 1956—the very beginning of everything—at Tan Son Nhat airport, the airbase of the U.S army when the very first “advisors” came here, accompanied

by millions of dollars of equipment arriving every single day. They used the airstrip and built hangars, some of which are still there, to keep helicopters and planes, and to store supplies and spare parts. I was in charge of checking the condition of everything as it arrived and was stored, and as it went out for use. And I reported to an American logistics officer.

. . . . Oh I had a busy time of it! But I was young and it was often exciting. And by the way I saw and talked with American soldiers and workers every day; they were my co-workers and I got along fine with them.

YOUNG MAN: There was a lot said in our debate about how Americans are cruel and abusive. What's your opinion about that?

GRANDMA CHUNG: What? No they weren't bad people. *(She pauses)*

Well, there are some.

YOUNG MAN: What do you mean?

GRANDMA CHUNG *(ignoring his question)*: But the Americans I worked with were nice people, they had discipline and they treated everyone fairly. They believe in fairness and equality. I noticed that quickly.

*(She pauses, remembering)*

There was a time when the U.S soldiers had a meeting with the second lieutenant. It was a secret meeting. When they finished, I was really curious as to what it was all about. Maybe I shouldn't have but I simply asked a young soldier who had just come out of the room what the second lieutenant said.

*(She laughs, amused at the memory)*

At first, I thought he wasn't going to tell me since it was a secret meeting after all. But you know, he actually told me everything that was said. "Please, keep this a secret" he said. "Don't tell anyone, especially the Vietnamese."

For God's sake, I'm Vietnamese!

But maybe without thinking he saw me first as a friend, it's charming that he didn't realize the contradiction in what he was saying and doing.

And that's the beauty of it my boy! It turns out the meeting was about being fair to us! The lieutenant explained this at the meeting. Since both Americans and Vietnamese were working together under him, they must be treated the same. The meeting was to remind everyone to respect the Vietnamese and not look down on us, that's all.

YOUNG MAN: The soldier's honesty about it all was pretty amazing, or maybe he just wasn't very smart? But we read things in novels about the GIs. [*GI: A private soldier in the US Army.*] They show how the GIs didn't understand or respect our traditions.

GRANDMA CHUNG: (*she smiles slightly*) First, you're right that the young man wasn't very wise and neither was his commander. Think about it, having a meeting to tell people to show respect toward another culture is well-meaning but that's all. How people act about cultural differences in daily life doesn't come from the mind but the heart. It isn't taught by words at a meeting. And the written rules last only until you're tested and you show your true colors. I saw that happen many times and that's human.

YOUNG MAN: Of course, you're right.

GRANDMA CHUNG: But from what I saw during the time I worked there, they actually did know some of our traditional customs and they would let us celebrate them normally. One tradition was the Rằm tháng 7- the festival of dead souls. There was a time when two American soldiers saw two janitors preparing food for this holiday, food and drink for the departed souls of our ancestors, while at work. Well instead of stopping them, they allowed the celebration right inside the storage house. There were explosives in there! They stood next to the two janitors, watching with curious eyes. When one janitor started to burn the votive papers, the two Americans just got some fire extinguishers and held them ready in case there was an accident! That was quite a scene! So that's the Americans, my boy. We're different in many ways but they're capable of understanding and respect.

YOUNG MAN: Yes that was nice of them but I don't know if that was what you called a real test, just bending the rules at work.

GRANDMA CHUNG: (*a little surprised*) Well, that must have been quite a debate you had. You're right. It wasn't much. Another time there was a janitor who worked in the warehouse. She stole some aircraft parts and sold them on the black market. She was caught and this was a serious offense. The manager took her to me. At first he was very angry as he had a right to be, asking her why she stole the parts, though I'm not sure asking her why she stole was a very wise question. Obviously she needed money! But after listening to her story—a mother who had five little children—the manager got it, and he said very gently, "If you need money just tell me and I'll help. You can't sell the aircraft parts because they're really important. Those planes and helicopters take injured soldiers to safety." The woman knew that, I'm sure, when she took the parts, so the American telling her this was actually a little insulting to her intelligence. But this is what makes it better: the manager asked me to keep this a secret in order to preserve the woman's dignity. That was surprising.

YOUNG MAN: He didn't just fire her? Why?

GRANDMA CHUNG: Compassion my dear. Say what you will, in some way the manager cared for people, including Vietnamese people. That might not sound like much, but don't forget there was a thing called a war going on too.

YOUNG MAN: Ok, interesting.

GRANDMA CHUNG: You know I have a friend now that I see here in the park sometimes. He moved down here from the North after the war. He spent five years as a war prisoner of the Americans at Con Dao prison, a terrible place built by the French. You better believe he was

tortured there! But you know what he says? He found Americans to be kind, and honest. That's what he said about the people who tortured him. He's a wise man really, a man who is capable of seeing that all people act from self-interest, and all people show both humanity and inhumanity. He's lived quite a life and he's no longer surprised by much. You know, he says the regulations the Americans followed were very orderly and their policies on managing prisoners were sensible.

*(She pauses again, thinking)*

I think Americans are nice by nature but their view of the world can be too simple, and so can the ways they see other people. They always put themselves at the center of the story—look at their movies about the Vietnam War! To see them, you'd think the three million war deaths were on the American side. Yes, these films strongly criticize their own country but the films are always centered on American lives or American guilt, not really the Vietnamese. They see us only as scary villains or innocent, idealized victims, and we all know things aren't that simple. That's not who we are—we're not evil—and seeing us in the innocent victim role is also patronizing. But in order to make films about real Vietnamese, they would, yes it's true! They would have to understand our society, our history and our opinions a little better. Now that would be something! I haven't seen it yet.

YOUNG MAN: Yes! That seems true; I think I know what you mean.

GRANDMA CHUNG: Finally, remember what I said a minute ago? That there were some bad ones. There absolutely were, and not just a few. At war, the two enemies act with hatred and anger. The war made Americans into animals. Don't ever forget the massacre at Son My, which the Americans still mistakenly call My Lai. Animals. It did this to Vietnamese too sometimes. And I know this: not all soldiers rape, but all armies rape, including the American Army in Vietnam. Maybe Americans were surprised to find that they could be inhuman, but why should they be? The fact they didn't see this coming is really a bad thing. They thought they were different, "exceptional" is their word for it—it's what they believed and still do. This thinking will create new wars for them. War always means inhumanity. No one states that when wars start. But one has to know this. A country, a people, has to know this. I hope things have changed but the nice Americans I worked with for decades didn't always know this. It was sad to see their faces when they discovered this new truth about themselves.

YOUNG MAN: They might be coming back now Grandma. The Americans.

GRANDMA CHUNG: Yes, their politicians are all saying we should focus on the future instead of the past. But I've lived long enough to know what they mean. They mean, let's forget the past and its lessons. Mankind, I've learned, is just as interested in forgetting as in remembering. I think their politicians—and our leaders too. Our leaders too!—would rather not learn, which means either they're lazy or they are diligently unlearning so they can do what they intend.

About Vietnam now. Why do we think that any time we are angry, or wronged by another country, or unhappy, that we need to hide under the wing of a bigger stronger country? The "heroic revolutionaries" in Hanoi used to criticize Saigon for welcoming in the Americans. The South said

no, that wasn't true, that we and The Americans simply had a mutual interest. How mutual was it? Not fully mutual. We found that out at last, didn't we! Have we forgotten?

Now again the two countries have what they are calling a mutual interest: we both don't very much like the Chinese. It sounds familiar. Something's always sacrificed when we align with a great ally to show strength by proxy. It seems to me it leads to trouble.

But with or without big military allies, we've been a strong, dignified people for a thousand years.

*(They stand and begin slowly walking, arm in arm, off the stage)*

***Tell me young man, in your big debate, were you arguing about the past, the present, or the future? Because it sounds like you were doing all at once.***

### **Epilogue: Appeals for Ethical Memory**

**Phạm Ngọc Yến Nhi, 19:** I'm young, and I should know real stories, real history that is told directly. Adults who have war experience, I ask to know exactly what happened and to learn the many sides of the war. I await your war stories; I really want to hear your experience.

**Hoàng Gia Hân, 20:** Why did the U.S. fight here? They killed many, including my grandfather, and the consequences of dioxin remain. My father's house was burned three times by bombs. My grandparents had nowhere to turn, they were poor and hungry. History books are not enough. Talk to your elders. Sympathize with them. Problems aren't solved by fighting but by talking.

**Phạm Trần Bạch Thảo, 19:** The results of war, for both winners and losers, are misery, loss, and pain. To relieve this pain, sharing helps. The way of isolation, the silent attitude, is not an option. Isolation is rejection. All we are saying is, try sharing.

**Nguyễn Hải Triều, 20:** The War Remnants Museum is not the full story of the war. Both those who witnessed the war and those who have secondary memories can reveal war's hidden truths. The stories you share can give you solace, and help others who are worlds apart, not only Vietnamese but Americans too.

**Nguyễn Hải Yến, 20:** I will become a teacher someday. We who were born after the war do not know what happened. Reading history in school and surfing the Internet are not enough. We need you – both Vietnamese and Americans—to share your stories, because our generation deserves a vivid picture of the war.

**Nguyễn Huy Hoàng, 22:** Our nation needs to speak our minds democratically—revealing what we've all experienced—so we can overcome our suspicions and dislikes toward each other. Please look back on the past so we can learn from it. Don't let the younger generation misunderstand its history.

**Huyền Tôn Nữ Khánh An, 18:** We are like excited children gathering around grandparents and listening carefully to every detail. We are eager to listen to the previous generations and want to feel what they felt. Many vital things are not written in the textbooks, things we cannot imagine but which actually happened.

**Nguyễn Thị Ngọc Huyền, 20:** Memories connect the past, present and future, honoring and respecting our ancestors and ourselves. They awaken future generations to their potential and help create and maintain our individuality. Sharing our sad experiences with each other helps us to transcend them.

**Đặng Điền Trần, 20:** The war has been over for many years, what still exists are the stories of those who witnessed it. Our generation inherited peace from the blood and bones of a previous generation. I was able to write this at home because there is no war now and I don't have to carry a gun into combat.

**Nguyễn Hồng Hạnh, 22:** The war ended more than 40 years ago but is still present in every piece of land and every person in Vietnam. It is a monster that haunts the minds of those who experienced it and every person is part of it. In your stories, we can hear the sound of bombs and feel your loss, and your happiness.

**Tạ Ý Ngọc, 19:** Your stories may differ from each other, but I respect every single word of yours. Let your children know the bravery of our grandparents. I want the young people of Vietnam to respect human life, and to help the war's casualties by building houses and helping Agent Orange victims. I appeal to you to give young people knowledge of the war.

**Nguyễn Thảo Quy, 20.** I did not comprehend the war until I talked to my parents about it. Its brutality is beyond imagination. There are still misunderstandings and untold stories. War has no heroes and no right side. War is wrong. War does not bring peace. The young must understand so as not to repeat. Silence explains nothing.

**Nguyễn Thị Bích Huyen, 23:** What we know about the war comes only from textbooks, not the real and vivid stories I was told as a child. You, who are perhaps the final generation to witness the war directly, please do not hesitate to tell us your own stories. Within them are lessons we cannot learn from textbooks.

**Nguyễn Thị Hồng Loan, 22:** War is loss—friends, family, dreams, and hopes. We are still affected after 41 years. Agent Orange victims suffer and leftover bombs have killed thousands. Teach the young the value of human life. Whether you are soldiers or farmers, from North or South, Vietnamese or American, we need to hear your voices, for a better future.

**Nguyễn Thị Như Bình, 20:** The younger generation is selfish now, taking and not giving. Memories of war can let them know what their ancestors experienced and the value of peace. They'll thank the heroes who sacrificed for them. They'll appreciate the peaceful lives they live and look to the future more responsibly.

**Trần Đỗ Ngọc Quỳnh, 19:** There are two sides to every human thing and history is no exception. There are many untold stories about war, but many people want to hide them. We know a little, but ONE DETAIL CAN CHANGE A LOT. Please share your stories. It will be a gift for the future. Don't hide that gift!!

**Huyền Thiên Trung, 20:** The Vietnam War is still relevant. Now there are outside threats to our sovereignty and our environment. Hope lies in a new relationship with the U.S. To achieve this, we must break through past barriers to heal the trauma of the war. Please help us accomplish this by sharing your war memories.

**Bùi Nghiêm Bình, 22:** Asking to hear stories is a way for the young to express gratitude and empathy across generations. Stories sympathetically connect generations and cultivate understanding. One U.S. veteran said, “There has really never been *anyone* who asked me what happened or what it was like.”

**Nguyễn Tấn Minh Khôi, 20:** Knowing what happened in the war is very necessary. War is one of man's greatest mistakes. Listening to memories and sharing views helps us learn worthy lessons like how to forever respect peace and love. Sharing stories will be a wonderful thing.

**Biện Lê Thanh Tan, 20:** The husbands, wives, fathers, sons and daughters who lie beneath us can't rise again to tell untold stories. But we can find them again in your voices, your stories. Some now want to go to war again; both the young and the old can be childish and naïve. So open your hearts and tell us your stories.

**Châu Tuyết Mai, 21:** We have the right to know what happened in the war. Sharing your feelings offers release and peace of mind. Sharing your stories gives *others* a deeper understanding of *you*. Expressing your emotions educates the young. It's time you speak your mind. “The bitterest tears shed over graves are for words left unsaid and deeds left undone.”

###

## References

Scarry, E. (1999). *On beauty and being just*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## Bathroom Lessons

Author: Melanie R. Nilsson  
Title: Associate Professor  
Affiliation: McDaniel College  
Location: Maryland, USA  
E-mail: [mnilsson@mcdaniel.edu](mailto:mnilsson@mcdaniel.edu)

**Keywords:** Transgender, Social Justice, Activism,

---

## BATHROOM LESSONS

### Abstract

Admittance criteria for gendered bathrooms is a complex issue that intersects and challenges our ideas about gender, privacy, and basic human rights. In order to advance peaceful solutions, we must examine the elements of this debate on both a personal and political level. This article presents a personal vignette and reflection about bathroom access, guides the reader to explore their own responses, and ends with a discussion of the broader political landscape.

### The Bathroom

Who's missing? We were all supposed to meet at 4 PM in the lobby to head back to campus. It's 3:55 PM and everyone is here except one last-minute straggler. Let's see, the other two faculty members are by the door, their research students are clustered around the café table, which leaves only one possibility - the latecomer must be one of mine. Okay, we have James, Ollie, Christy, Susan, Rob, Barbara...Oh, that explains it, David is missing. He's probably still downloading research articles. That's no surprise since he'd been looking forward to this trip to the Johns Hopkins Welch Medical Library since the start of summer research. Well, I suppose this at least gives me a few minutes to use the bathroom before I do a final headcount. "Be right back," I call out to no one in particular.

The sound of excited banter echoes as I head down the short hallway to the women's bathroom. I'm pleased that the students have enjoyed the experience. I should try to bottle this feeling for the next time I'm taking care of the tedious logistics involved in this regular summer outing.

The trip itself is only about 40 miles, but the distance between the red brick buildings of our residential college campus and the Metro ride into downtown Baltimore is vast. The palpable nervousness of some students as they ride public transportation for the first time is, in itself, evidence that this has the potential to be a life-changing experience.

Once in the library, most of the students find themselves at ease searching the databases and devouring the knowledge they spit out. In the quiet moments of downloading articles, I see them look around the beautiful space and, in my mind, they are reflecting on the fact that this could be their future – going to medical school or pursuing a Ph.D.

I am unceremoniously yanked back into the present moment by a stern voice from behind that yells out, "You can't go in there!" Ugggh.... Just my luck...the bathroom must be in the process of being cleaned.

"That's the women's room," the voice ads. I quickly realize that the person must be confused by my short haircut and, at a quick glance, has assumed I'm a man. But, the voice sounds familiar? Of course, it's the security guard who checks my ID every time I come to the library. I turn around, assuming that once she sees my face, she will recognize me.

Seconds pass. I smile. Nope. No recognition. None.

She repeats herself, louder this time, "You can't go in there!" Maybe it just seems louder since the chatter from the lobby has now quieted? She points back toward the lobby and says, "The men's room is down there."

I feel the heat of the blood rushing to my face and the thump, thump, thump in my ears as my heart races. I am mortified that this encounter is happening in front of my students. I am not sure which is worse, the feeling of being scolded like a misbehaving child, or having the attention of everyone within earshot being directed to the anatomy south of my navel.

I try to gather my wits about me. It's not like this hasn't happened before, being stopped at the women's bathroom. But never by a security guard. And never in front of my students.

There is a long, awkward silence. I stand still, hoping she will back down. She holds her position with no indication that she is going to leave. So, in the steadiest voice I can muster, I say "I am going to use the women's bathroom."

I remain standing there, waiting for something. A response? Dignity? Tolerance? Kindness? She is more firm this time, and points an accusatory finger at me as she says, "YOU have to use the men's room!"

As I shift uncomfortably, I wonder to myself what she must be thinking. That I have brought all of these students here just so I have an excuse to sneak into a restroom for some nefarious purpose? What exactly does she think I plan to do in there anyway?

I quickly rifle through my mental list of options. I could try to wait until we get back to campus. No, that won't work because it will take at least an hour to get back. I could use the men's room. No, I don't want to use the men's room, not to mention the awkwardness of walking past the urinals. What if David is in there using a urinal? Definitely not a good idea.

I resolve that I am not going to back down. I figure that all my life I have had to check the box marked "female", whether I thought I fit into it or not, so at the very least it should give me access to the damn women's bathroom.

I stand up straighter. I again state my case, "I am going to use the women's bathroom." For some reason, it seems especially important at this moment not to give in to her. I'm not sure how much of this is for me, and how much is that I don't want to appear weak in front of my students. All I know is that I am going to stand here until she moves aside, calls the police, or the library closes.

I wait patiently for her response. By now everyone in the lobby is watching this scene unfold. You can feel the tension of their collective breath being held, waiting to see if it's time to exhale.

Slowly, the security guard's expression changes. Something clicks in her mind. "I'm sorry" she says, and steps aside. It is not clear to me what exactly she has apologized for, but she has evidently decided to let me use the women's bathroom.

I use the restroom, wash my hands, and then listen to the water flow. I splash my face with cold water, washing off the sweat and trying to pull myself together. I take a deep breath and pause in front of the sink, not wanting to face what lies beyond the door. What do my students think of the altercation? Of me?

As I head back to the lobby, I can sense that everyone wants me to alleviate their discomfort. Discomfort from observing the scene. Discomfort about not knowing what to do.

I get closer to the group, and I instinctively keep to the normal script and ask "Do we have everyone now?"

Relief appears. Relief that says, "I'm glad you're okay, and I'm glad I'm okay."

On the Metro ride back, we fill the space with mundane pleasantries interspersed with quiet reflection. Each of us, in our own way, processing the events of the afternoon.

As we wave our goodbyes and head our separate ways, I wonder to myself, what did my students learn today?

## **Reflection**

Months later, I found myself still ruminating about the library incident. Certainly, the discomfort in the moment was extreme, and I was shocked that it happened at a university, a place of so-called "higher" learning. The more difficult and lingering piece, however, was that it happened in front of my students. In *The Courage to Teach*, Palmer highlights the unusual position in which teachers practice their craft. He explains that "a good teacher must stand where personal and public meet, dealing with the thundering flow of traffic at an intersection where 'weaving a web of

connectedness' feels more like crossing a freeway on foot" (p.19). In the classroom of the library lobby, I definitely felt like I was hit by a bus on that precarious freeway of connectedness.

I began to question my role as a teacher. Was I setting the type of example I wanted my students to follow? Was I living up to my obligation of educating the next generation? I was proud that I stood up for myself and did not succumb to the pressure of authority that was based on ignorance, but I felt I could be doing more. What else could I be doing? Why wasn't I already doing it?

The issue, for me, wasn't really one of awareness. I had previously experienced comments that were thoughtless and crude, as described by the comedienne, Tig Notaro, in her very entertaining stand-up routine *Little Titties* (Notaro, 2011). I had also experienced what I call "bathroom drama" – demeaning comments that are often subtle and couched in *currently* socially-accepted language.

After a bit of soul searching, I realized that, when I was harassed in the past, I felt I simply had to tolerate the abuse. I saw it as collateral damage for being different. This, of course, is precisely how oppression works. We begin to think there is no possibility for change, so we become an accomplice in our own persecution.

In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire reminds us that "sooner or later being less human leads the oppressed to struggle against those who made them so" (p.44). The events at the library called me to that struggle. I began to think beyond my own personal insecurities and internalized oppression to consider how I could use my role as a teacher and citizen to promote understanding and advance practices that embrace our diverse humanity.

My first step was simple and began with sharing my story. In the process, I learned that very few of my friends or colleagues had ever considered the ramifications of being stopped from using a bathroom. It was not part of their lived experience, so they had never contemplated the impact it would have on their daily choices of which public venues to frequent and which to avoid.

These one-on-one conversations gave me the encouragement to continue speaking out. I casually and unceremoniously sent OSHA's proposed guidelines on bathroom use to the Director of Human Resources where I work (U.S. Department of Labor, 2015). I got no response, but it was still a self-affirming move toward reaching beyond my local sphere of friends and acquaintances.

In the following year, House Bill 2 (HB2) was passed in North Carolina, a bill that restricted individuals to only being allowed to use the bathroom that corresponds to the sex listed on their birth certificate. This bill focused a national spotlight on the issue of bathroom access (Kopan, 2016). The media attention was further heightened by the "Dear Colleague" letter disseminated to public schools that prohibited such discrimination (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016).

These two events sparked a chain reaction and brought a discussion of cisgender and transgender bathroom use into businesses, schools, and homes across the country. While it was important for these concerns to gain national attention, many individuals and communities were unprepared to engage in informed dialog on this topic.

In my local paper, for example, there were several polarizing editorials and columns, many of which were largely bereft of factual information. This motivated me to write an article to refocus

the conversation (Nilsson, 2016a). I provided a scientific definition of sex (in terms of chromosomes, gonads, genitals, etc.), and cited a study in the *American Journal of Human Biology* that determined the frequency of deviation from such definitions of male and female “may be as high as 2% of live births” (Blackless, 2000). I then invited the reader to consider this more deeply:

...before even addressing the issue of gender, it is clear that bathrooms labeled “female” and “male” are inadequate. In fact, the 2% figure eclipses the *combined* number of people in the US with Parkinson’s, Sickle Cell Disease, HIV/AIDS, Huntington’s, Multiple Sclerosis, Down’s Syndrome, and Lou Gehrig’s Disease. Take a moment to imagine what it would be like if there were no appropriate bathrooms for these people to use. Would it affect someone you know? A loved one? You? (Nilsson, 2016a)

I further extended this discussion in the article to gender identity more broadly, my own experiences personally, and tried to conclude with an understanding of our common goals as a community.

The newspaper article generated a lot of feedback from faculty, students, and town residents. Not all the feedback was positive, but many appreciated the heartfelt perspective. One colleague decided to highlight my article by having her students read and examine it as a class exercise. An acquaintance and influential local real estate agent said the story brought him to tears. A transgender student emailed me to say, “Thank you for speaking out for all of us.”

I have continued to speak and write on this topic, and am optimistic that, by examining our common humanity, we can better appreciate the strength and beauty of our differences.

## **Epilogue**

Upon asking for feedback on this manuscript, I was surprised that the most common question posed by friends, colleagues, and strangers was, “Why did you not explicitly state your gender identity?”

My first response was simply that I didn’t think it was necessary. In my mind, there were a wide variety of cues that provided, what I thought to be, sufficient detail. Legally, as indicated by the “female” checkbox reference, my sex is defined as female. I check that box begrudgingly, which, of course, could be for a variety of reasons. My first name, indicated in the author byline, is Melanie; a name predominantly associated with females. Melanie is, in fact, my legal name, the name I use both personally and professionally, and the name on my ID. I briefly described my gender presentation as including short hair and facial features that I assumed would prompt a recognition as female. Furthermore, in the earliest draft of this article, I had provided a more thorough description of my physical appearance. I included that I’m 5 foot 2 inches tall, weigh 130 pounds, and was wearing jeans and a polo-style shirt. I mentioned that I have no facial hair, do not wear makeup, but do have particularly well-manicured eyebrows. Thus, I felt my description was quite thorough.

My next reaction to why I didn’t include my gender identity was that I wanted to remain authentic to the situation. In the reality of daily living, individuals do not wear placards to indicate gender identity and, therefore, we are often working with a subset of information. I had provided the

information that would have been readily available to the security guard, or other onlookers, at the time of the incident. And, certainly, no one at the library asked me to define my gender identity.

However, I began to wonder if a declaration was needed to achieve meaning, catharsis, compassion, or resolution. Is my gender identity necessary to be relatable to other human beings? To have status in the world? Why was the ambiguity so disturbing?

My third reaction was to wonder if knowing my gender identity would impact how you, as a reader, perceive the incident. Would it change the weight you place on my story? Would it give me more or less credibility?

Consider, for example, that I identified as a cis female. Would this make the situation seem better or worse? Does it affect your ability to relate to my story? Would you perceive me as more or less of a victim? Does it detract from my authority to write about issues affecting the transgender community?

What if I identified as a transgender female? Is the sense of compassion heightened or diminished? Does it impact you differently knowing the overwhelming statistics about transgender bathroom discrimination?

Consider, finally, if I identified as gender nonconforming, nonbinary, genderfluid, or genderqueer. Would your interpretation of the events change? Does blurring of the gender binary deserve or implicitly illicit the type of response exhibited by the security guard?

I leave the reader to explore these questions and, if it is still necessary or helpful for you to know my gender identity, I refer you to a prior article (Nilsson, 2016a).

## **Discussion**

Bathroom access represents a universal activity that is relatable to everyone, and connects to broader issues of human rights since it is not possible to fully participate in the activities of a free society (social gatherings, employment, political engagement, etc.) if there is not access to a bathroom. Thus, this issue has provided a helpful focal point to stimulate critical thought and dialog.

An in-depth examination of a single incident, such as the one described herein, can illuminate our understanding of the entangled interplay of reactions and responses that contribute to injustice. However, it is equally important to consider the prevalence of the problem on a macroscale and explore the cultural, structural, and political factors that may contribute to the inequity.

The prevalence with which individuals in the US are harassed or denied access to public bathrooms is unknown. Cisgendered individuals are certainly affected (Lucal 1999), but comprehensive data is lacking. A survey of 27,715 transgendered individuals conducted in 2015 by the National Center for Transgender Equality, however, provides some insight (James, 2016). Transgender people experience “high levels of mistreatment, harassment, and violence in every aspect of life” and “59% of respondents reported that in the past year they had either sometimes (48%) or always (11%) avoided using a restroom, such as in public, at work, or at school, because they were afraid of confrontations or other problems.”

The results of the Transgender Equality survey foreshadowed the passing of HB2 in March of 2016 in North Carolina. Interestingly, there was a strong public response against HB2. Several states and the United Kingdom issued travel advisories, and many entertainers, businesses, and organizations canceled concerts, projects, and conferences that were scheduled to be held in North Carolina (Holley, 2016; Associated Press, 2017). The economic losses sparked significant pressure and, in March 2017, the bathroom restriction was lifted by the passing of House Bill 142.

Since HB2, several other states, cities, and municipalities have proposed new bathroom legislation; either to restrict bathroom access or to prevent such restrictions. Most recently, a bill similar to HB2 was passed by the Texas Senate but failed in the House due to fears of economic repercussions (Park, 2017).

The proposed bills to legislate bathroom use, however, cannot and will not resolve the current issues. For example, although my bathroom incident did not happen in North Carolina, it is relevant to note that “female” *is* the sex listed on my birth certificate, yet I was stopped from using the women’s bathroom. I do not carry my birth certificate around with me, and, even if I did, would this have been acceptable to the security guard given that my ID and entourage of well-disciplined college students was not? In such a situation, the only option to possibly “prove” one’s biological sex is to either fully disrobe or submit to a probing frisk; both of which are tantamount to sexual assault. This may not even clarify an individual’s biological sex if they do not clearly match the binary definitions.

In addition, most states, including North Carolina, allow individuals to change the sex listed on their birth certificate after gender reassignment surgery, which is inconsistent with the goal of those who want to restrict bathroom admittance based on the sex assigned at birth (Lambda Legal, 2015). Thus, policing the access to gendered bathrooms is inherently flawed on multiple levels.

The wildly oscillating pendulum of public opinion has also been reflected at the federal level. The supportive “Dear Colleague” letter issued under the Obama administration (U.S. Department of Justice, 2016) was quickly rescinded by the Trump administration (U.S. Department of Justice, 2017). Similarly, the work by the Obama administration toward inclusive practices for transgender persons in the military has been met with direct opposition from Trump (Seller, 2017).

Given the nation’s political and ideological differences, how do we continue to make progress toward peaceful and equitable goals? What types of education and/or structural changes can advance nonviolent solutions?

Gendered divisions exist in many aspects of our society. One can easily identify several sports, schools, and military practices that engage in varying degrees of gender segregation. Bathroom access, however, defines a highly focused agenda centered around a universal activity that is relatable to everyone. It also connects to broader issues of human rights since it is not possible to fully participate in the activities of a free society (social gatherings, employment, political engagement, etc.) if there is not access to a bathroom. Examining barriers to equitable bathroom practices may also benefit other social justice movements in which similar impediments persist.

A common vocabulary is an essential starting point toward meaningful dialog. Unfortunately, there is not a universal understanding of the differences between sex, sexuality, gender, and gender identity. Even the basic umbrella term of transgender can illicit different meanings and associations. However, a spate of documentary films, educational television programs, and informative websites are narrowing this communication gap.

Conversations have also been strained due to prevalent norms that define gender identity as binary and unchangeable. When such firmly held beliefs are challenged, the result is a disconnect, known as cognitive dissonance. We react to cognitive dissonance in a variety of ways. Cooke-Daniel has categorized the most common responses as “Upholding the System,” “Sidestepping the Question,” or “Overthrowing the System,” and gives detailed examples of how these reactions manifest in the gender debate (Cooke-Daniel, 2000). The article provides an excellent theoretical starting point to advance conversations beyond vocabulary into meaningful and enlightening discourse.

Cognitive dissonance, furthermore, is often coupled to the underlying power hierarchy and prejudice related to ascribed gender roles, which provides an opportunity to highlight inequalities within the cisgender population (Nilsson, 2016b). In fact, the three most common arguments against bathroom access based on gender identity involve foundations that are factually inaccurate (Grinberg, 2017), and are also couched in language that reinforces current binary gender stereotypes. The argument, for instance, that there will be an increase in opportunities for predatory attacks on women is inconsistent with the data from 200 municipalities and 18 states that have transgender nondiscrimination laws. Furthermore, the language and argument itself reinforce the stereotype that women are weak, vulnerable, and in need of protection both by and from men.

Beyond the communication and ideological differences, the current physical infrastructure of gendered public bathrooms is inadequate. The binary labeling of male and female is inconsistent with the biological diversity that exists within our species and the known spectrum of gender identities. In addition, multi-stall facilities (gendered or not) are often seen to be inadequate from the perspective of many cisgender individuals who prefer a greater degree of privacy in the bathroom. Some reasons cited for privacy include a sense of personal modesty, often related to religious practices, and medical conditions that may necessitate special assistance (Broyde, 2016).

The proposed bills to legislate bathroom use, however, cannot and will not resolve the current issues. For example, although my bathroom incident did not happen in North Carolina, it is relevant to note that “female” *is* the sex listed on my birth certificate, yet I was stopped from using the women’s bathroom. I do not carry my birth certificate around with me, and, even if I did, would this have been acceptable to the security guard given that my ID and entourage of well-disciplined college students was not? In such a situation, the only option to possibly “prove” one’s biological sex is to either fully disrobe or submit to a probing frisk; both of which are tantamount to sexual assault. This may not even clarify an individual’s biological sex if they do not clearly match the binary definitions.

In addition, most states, including North Carolina, allow individuals to change the sex listed on their birth certificate after gender reassignment surgery, which is inconsistent with the goal of

those who want to restrict bathroom admittance based on the sex assigned at birth (Lambda Legal, 2015). Thus, policing the access to gendered bathrooms is inherently flawed on multiple levels.

There have been some promising proposals to mitigate the physical structure issues. The Cooper Union has changed the labeling on their bathroom facilities to include “Restroom with Urinals and Stalls,” “Restroom with Only Stalls,” and “Restroom Single Occupancy.” This signage completely decouples the facilities from definitions of biological sex or gender identity, and allows individuals to choose the option they prefer. No one sex or gender identity is favored or disfavored in this approach, and no one group is singled out. Another proposed idea is to introduce all single-stall, unisex facilities. This solution would eliminate both the concerns of gendered signage and privacy.

In conclusion, while the issue of equity in the use of public bathrooms has received significant attention over the past few years, we still have much to learn and more opportunities for engagement. Bathroom access, I believe, has been an excellent focal point to direct meaningful conversation around basic human rights and also draws attention to issues of inadequate infrastructure, privacy, gender stereotypes, and the underlying power hierarchy. It is my hope that others will join this conversation to expand our ideas of what it means to be fully human and identify ways to encourage a social climate that embraces and values all of our fabulous diversity.

### **Acknowledgments**

I am grateful to Jeanine Stewart, Mona Becker, Miriam Witmer, and Pam Zappardino for being part of my journey and providing invaluable feedback on this manuscript.

### **Disclosure**

The names of the students in “The Bathroom” have been changed for privacy.

### **References**

- Associated Press. (2017, March 27). 'Bathroom bill' to cost North Carolina \$3.76 billion. *CNBC*. Retrieved from <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/27/bathroom-bill-to-cost-north-carolina-376-billion.html>
- Blackless, M., Charuvastra, A., Derryck, A., Fausto-Sterling, A., Lauzanne, K., & Lee, E. (2000). How sexually dimorphic are we? Review and synthesis. *American Journal of Human Biology*, 12(2), 151-166.
- Broyde, M. J. (2016, October 28). Transgender bathroom issue: a solution? *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/10/28/opinions/the-bathroom-issue-were-not-talking-about/index.html>
- Cooke-Daniel, L. (2000). Thinking about the unthinkable: Transgender in an immutable binary world [Perspectives on Teaching]. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 24(1), 63-70. Also available online at [http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/NewHorizons\\_immutable-binary-world.pdf](http://forge-forward.org/wp-content/docs/NewHorizons_immutable-binary-world.pdf)
- Freire, P. (2000). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition). New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic.

- Grinberg, E. & Stewart, D. (2017, March 7). 3 Myths that shape the transgender bathroom debate. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2017/03/07/health/transgender-bathroom-law-facts-myths/index.html>
- Holley, P. (2016, April 20). Britain issues warning for LGBT travelers visiting North Carolina and Mississippi. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/04/20/britain-issues-warning-for-lgbt-travelers-visiting-north-carolina-and-mississippi/?utm\\_term=.476c45ef6580](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/04/20/britain-issues-warning-for-lgbt-travelers-visiting-north-carolina-and-mississippi/?utm_term=.476c45ef6580)
- James, S. E., Herman, J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Ana, M. (2016). *The report of the 2015 U.S. transgender survey*. Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality.
- Kopan, T. & Scott, E. (2016, March 24). North Carolina governor signs controversial transgender bill. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/23/politics/north-carolina-gender-bathrooms-bill/>
- Lambda Legal. (2015, February 3). Changing birth certificate sex designations: state-by-state guidelines. Retrieved from <https://www.lambdalegal.org/know-your-rights/article/trans-changing-birth-certificate-sex-designations>
- Lucal, B. (1999). What it means to be gendered me: Life on the boundaries of a dichotomous gender system. *Gender & Society*, 13(6), 781-797.
- Nilsson, M. (2016a, May 25). Primer on trans people, bathrooms. *Carroll County Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/columnists/opinion/other\\_voices/ph-cc-nilsson-other-voices-052516-20160524-story.html](http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/columnists/opinion/other_voices/ph-cc-nilsson-other-voices-052516-20160524-story.html)
- Nilsson, M. (2016b, July 30). Violence against women in a trans-friendly world? *Carroll County Times*. Retrieved from [http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/columnists/opinion/other\\_voices/ph-cc-nilsson-other-voices-073016-20160730-story.html](http://www.carrollcountytimes.com/columnists/opinion/other_voices/ph-cc-nilsson-other-voices-073016-20160730-story.html)
- Notaro, T. (2011). Little Titties. On *Good One* [Audio CD]. Bloomington, IN: Secretly Canadian. Or *Tig Notaro - Little Titties* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YiWZJrQ7w4M>
- Palmer, P. J. (2007). *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.
- Park, M. (2017, August 16). 'Bathroom bill' fails to make it out of Texas special session. *CNN*. Retrieved from <http://www.cnn.com/2017/08/16/politics/texas-bathroom-bill-dead/index.html>
- Seller, M. (2017, July 31). The 4 key things you need to know about Trump's proposed ban on transgender military service. *The Washington Post*. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/31/the-4-key-things-you-need-to-know-about-trumps-proposed-ban-on-transgender-military-service/?utm\\_term=.d68cd244b3bd](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2017/07/31/the-4-key-things-you-need-to-know-about-trumps-proposed-ban-on-transgender-military-service/?utm_term=.d68cd244b3bd)
- U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. (2016, May 13). Dear Colleague Letter on Transgender Students. Retrieved from <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201605-title-ix-transgender.pdf>

U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of Education. (2017, February 22). Dear Colleague Letter. Retrieved from

<https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/letters/colleague-201702-title-ix.docx>

U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Health and Safety Administration. (2015). Best Practices: A Guide to Restroom Access for Transgender Workers. Retrieved from

<http://www.dol.gov/asp/policy-development/TransgenderBathroomAccessBestPractices.pdf>

# PEACE STUDIES JOURNAL

Volume 10, Issue 3  
November 2017

---

## **Workshop Summary: Peace Research and (De)Coloniality, Vienna, December 2016**

Author: Philipp Lottholz

Title: Ph.D. Candidate

Affiliation: International Development Department, University of Birmingham (UK)

Location: Birmingham, UK

E-mail: [Px1167@bham.ac.uk](mailto:Px1167@bham.ac.uk)

**Keywords:** Peace Research, Decolonizing, Epistemic Violence

---

## **WORKSHOP SUMMARY: PEACE RESEARCH AND (DE)COLONIALITY, VIENNA, DECEMBER 2016**

Post-, anti- and decolonial theorists have confronted the social sciences with a radical critique by denouncing the coloniality of power and of knowledge and thus unmasking the Eurocentrism and Occidentalism inherent in widely used and generally accepted scientific paradigms and practices (Mignolo, 2011; Quijano, 2000; Coronil, 1996; see Brunner, 2015). Peace and conflict studies have so far only faintly picked up the ideas of Fanon, Said, Spivak, Bhabha and their intellectual heirs. A dialogue with post- and decolonial approaches in IR and political science has emerged recently and indicated fruitful ways of decolonizing peace and conflict research (Ziai 2016, Sabaratnam 2013). The workshop “Peace Research and (De)Coloniality” held in December 2016 at the Centre for Peace Research and Peace Education (ZEF) of the Alpen-Adria-University Klagenfurt branch in Vienna was aimed at discussing the application of post- and decolonial approaches and concepts in peace and conflict research, and hence, the potential to ‘decolonize’ this field of study. Exploring how new ways of thinking and ideas about ‘epistemic violence’ (Spivak, 1988) or ‘delinking’ (Mignolo 2007) may help to rethink established definitions or broaden debates on concepts such as e.g. peace, conflict, (non-)violence or transitional justice, the participants engaged in inspiring and intensive debates. (For the detailed program and a summary in German see <http://epistemicviolence.aau.at/index.php/de/veranstaltungen/>)

The event drew together German-speaking academics of all career stages with diverse personal, theoretical and professional backgrounds. The participation of social workers, asylum seeker

---

supporters, pedagogues and social activists secured a strong emphasis on practical relevance and applicability of decolonial approaches. A guided decolonial tour through the Museum of War History Vienna and an alternatively conceptualized exhibition on experiences of the conflict in Yemen illuminated and challenged trajectories of Eurocentric knowledge production on conflicts and war and its exploitation for the purpose of consolidating and normalizing hegemonic power. The workshop format itself fostered dialogue and critical consideration as all papers were presented by purposively selected presenters in often very creative ways (e.g. theatre performance, audio-visual presentations, readout commentaries and mind maps). Comments and justifications by the authors were reserved for the conclusion of the often fruitful and generative discussions. This polylogical and decentralized approach facilitated a maximal focus on the discussed issues and a move beyond the established hierarchies structuring academic debates. Further, in keeping with a decolonial approach, the workshop neither proclaimed easy answers nor quick fixes for the dilemmas and limitations of peace research. On the contrary, a critical wariness towards the limits and pitfalls of problem-solving mentality of self-proclaimed ‘emancipatory’ scholarship was maintained throughout the conversations.

The initial discussion on the complicity of peace research with trajectories of Western/European dominance – via military interventions, aid conditionality or foreign and trade policy; often unsuccessfully challenged or even legitimized by academic research – was thus not confined to the epistemic violence that peace researchers may exert vis-à-vis their research participants or communities. Using the concept of the ‘decolonial teaching machine’ (based on Spivak 1993), questions were raised about the ability of decolonial approaches to challenge and transform the Eurocentric, Occidentalist and largely elitist academic knowledge production regimes that scholars have to operate in.

In light of recent initiatives for research excellence and impact assessment, as well as the neoliberalization of higher education, serious doubts were put forward in the discussion as to whether and how decolonial knowledge can actually exist and be disseminated through the academic apparatus whose hierarchies and exclusions it seeks to challenge and dismantle. Apart from a resistance ‘from within’, in the form of the use and diversion of administrative resources and authority for the decolonial project, a more society-focused approach for transcending the exclusive and taken-for-granted authority of academic knowledge production was discussed. Issue-based community events or teach-ins during popular festivals were proposed as ways of nurturing critical thinking and a demand for a decolonial curriculum in higher education. At the same time, participants agreed that the Critical Peace Research Working Group, the workshop’s main organizer, needs to take on a vocal role in challenging and re-shaping the position of its mother organization, the German Association for Peace and Conflict Research (AFK), vis-à-vis policy makers especially in the military(-industrial) and foreign policy realms.

Conceptually, the discussion revolved around ways of rethinking and questioning concepts within the fields of peace and transitional justice. Based on case studies from the International Court of Justice in Kenya, from Colombia and the conflict in Yemen, it was questioned whether and how ‘victim-centered’ approaches can bring about improvement or a sense of justice into the lives of those who have suffered during conflict and civil war. The key issue was identified with the incompatibility between people’s understanding of what happened to them and how they can be helped and, on the other hand, legal language and practices that are often Western-centric and too distant from the specific life—worlds to ever realize the goals of post-conflict justice. Both these and the perspectives on asylum seeker decisions in Germany pointed to the fact that legal-

administrative apparatuses and procedures, and their orientation towards managing conflict and maintaining boundaries, always present some form of coloniality that disempowers and alienates people, also those working within the respective machineries. Thinking and acting at and beyond the fringes of these bureaucratic apparatuses is a way of critiquing the artificial identities and categories they operate with, and to thus challenge the exclusion, marginalization and precarity they produce (Grosfoguel, 2005; Anzaldúa, 1987).

The implications of these and other decolonial debates for the methodology of peace and conflict studies is that only a sustained dialogue with people affected by violent and political conflict can help to understand the (re-)production of identities and knowledges through the eyes of people themselves. Such an approach can help to overcome the extractive logic of empiricist social sciences critiqued long ago in the discussion of social anthropology's 'colonial encounter' (Asad, 1973). To overcome the prevailing scientific, Western-centric and imperial mode of data gathering, analysis and subsequent application in policy, research needs to be more open to 'indigenous' and locally specific knowledges, which are often sidelined because of their incompatibility with pre-conceived categories, research frameworks and universalist conceptions. For instance, rather than transplanting or imposing conceptions of human rights, democracy and reconciliation across contexts, peace and conflict research should examine the effects of such transpositions on the societies in question, and their own ideas about how to build a peaceful and prosperous society. It was also argued that inquiry needs to tackle persisting tensions and conflicts – which are often hidden and reproduced under the surface of everyday normality – head-on and forge an honest conversation about the (im)possibility and temporal contingency of their transformation. Writing about the study of world politics at large, Sabaratnam (2011) has argued that research needs to seek a 'dialogic engagement' about power and its effects, and to let research subjects speak for themselves rather than objectifying them and their culture. Without such a critical re-positioning, the participants concluded, peace research would risk losing sight of substantial and positive forms of peace amidst the focus on ending violent conflict and institutionalizing settlements that reproduce precarious forms of peace with teleological justifications invoking the 'lack of alternatives'.

Established concepts such as Orientalism or Occidentalism were applied to expose the logic European/White/Western supremacy and its entanglement and intersection with gender, class and other categories in specific contexts like the discourse on 'academic misconduct' in international academic communities or the narrative ideology exposed in the right wing Israeli press coverage on the Gaza conflict. The concepts were controversially debated as to their ability to inspire resistance and action towards radical change. The most fundamental uncertainty was expressed over the concept of the 'subaltern' (Spivak, 1988) and corresponding ideas of inclusion and diversity: When and under what conditions do 'subalterns' represent the concerns of the respective group or category we situate them in? Do the demands of the academic curriculum and career paths not make it impossible to make academia inclusive 'proper' rather than just representative according to statistical indicators? The participants agreed that more fundamental and transformative action – not only numerical targets, flagship initiatives and popular appreciation of leading post- and decolonial intellectuals – is needed to decolonize the university and peace research in particular.

Besides an edited collection of the papers and conversations from the workshop and forthcoming publications from individual workshop participants (e.g. Exo, 2017; Brunner, 2017), the de-

colonial peace research agenda discussed at the workshop will be further set out and enacted in concrete initiatives of the working group members. For instance, the recent '[Statement](#) on the founding of the Centre for Social Cohesion' criticized the lack of transparency and debate during the allocation of 37 million Euros of German government funding to this new think tank, co-initiated by working group members, was undersigned by many peace and conflict researchers all over Germany. The [lecture series](#) 'Coloniality under De\_Construction - Decolonial Perspectives and Activisms' at the University of Vienna is another achievement of participants of the workshop and proves that decolonial thinking has a lot to offer to peace and conflict studies.

## References

- Asad, T. (ed.) (1973). *Anthropology and the colonial encounter*, London: Ithaca.
- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). Borderlands: La frontera, in Rivkin, J., Ryan, M. *Literary theory: An anthology*, Maiden: Blackwell, 1017-1030.
- Brunner, C. (2015). Das Konzept epistemische Gewalt als Element einer transdisziplinären Friedens- und Konflikttheorie [The concept of epistemic violence as an element in a transdisciplinary theory of peace and conflict], in Wintersteiner, W., Wolf, L. (eds.) *Friedensforschung in Österreich. Bilanz und Perspektiven [Peace research in Austria. Summary and perspectives]*, 38 - 53.
- Brunner, C. (2017). Friedensforschung und (De-)Kolonialität [Peace research and (de)coloniality], *ZeFKo. Zeitschrift für Friedens- und Konfliktforschung*, 1: n.p.
- Coronil, F. (1996). Beyond occidentalism. Toward nonimperial geohistorical categories, *Cultural Anthropology* 11 (1), 51-87.
- Exo, Mechthild (2017). *Das übergangene Wissen. Eine dekoloniale Kritik des liberalen Peacebuilding durch basispolitische Organisationen in Afghanistan [Overlooked knowledge: Grassroot organisations' decolonial critique of liberal peacebuilding in Afghanistan]*, Bielefeld: Transcript.
- Grosfoguel, R. (2005). The implications of subaltern epistemologies for global capitalism: Transmodernity, border thinking and global coloniality, in Applebaum, R.P., Robinson, W.I. (eds.) *Critical globalization studies*, London: Routledge, 283-293.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2011). *The darker side of western modernity: Global futures, decolonial options*, Durham: Duke University Press.
- Mignolo, W. D. (2007). DELINKING: The rhetoric of modernity, the logic of coloniality and the grammar of de-coloniality 1, *Cultural studies* 21(2-3), 449-514.
- Quijano, A. (2000). Coloniality of power and Eurocentrism in Latin America, *International Sociology* 15(2), 215-232.
- Sabaratnam, M. (2013). Avatars of Eurocentrism in the critique of the liberal peace, *Security Dialogue* 44(3), 259-278.
- Sabaratnam, M. (2011) IR in dialogue... but can we change the subjects? A typology of decolonising strategies for the study of world politics. *Millennium* 39(3), 781-803.
- Spivak, G. C. (1993). *Outside in the teaching machine*, London: Routledge.
- Spivak, G. C. (1988). *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the history of an idea*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Ziai, A. (ed.). (2016). *Postkoloniale Politikwissenschaft: Theoretische und empirische Zugänge [Postcolonial political science: Theoretical and empirical approaches]*, Bielefeld: transcript.