

“Study War No More” - Lyrics and Photographs for Peace Education

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As a medium for peace education for an international audience – offline and online, the Gandhi Information Center, Berlin, Germany, has created and presented twenty-one exhibitions on the concept of nonviolent resistance for peace education between 2008 and 2020. These exhibitions present significant quotations from activists and thinkers of nonviolence, and accompanying images against injustice, militarism and poverty: Mahatma Gandhi, Leo Tolstoy, Dr. Martin Luther King, jr., Henry David Thoreau on Civil Disobedience, Henry David Thoreau on Truth, John Ruskin, “Leo Tolstoy and the Doukhobors,” Rabindranath Tagore, Étienne de La Boétie, Dr. Albert Schweitzer, Desiderius Erasmus, Aldous Huxley, “Bread and Roses” – Pacifist Women against War. In 2017, we published an essay summarizing the first thirteen of these exhibitions.¹

“Study War No More” - Lyrics and Photographs for Peace is our only multilingual exhibition, featuring songs in twelve different languages: Czech, Dutch, English, French, German, Hebrew, Hindi, Italian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, and Turkish. Compiling this great variety of songs turned out to be a truly collaborative project: it grew from initially 40 panels at the exhibition’s vernissage over the following weeks and months to 85 panels altogether that we added step by step, oftentimes taking cues from visitors:

For instance, Professor Irit Dekel suggested the Israeli peace song Shir LaShalom (A Song For Peace), which was performed by the audience in the presence of Aviv Geffen and Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin at the closing of the November 4, 1995 peace rally in Tel Aviv. A blood-stained piece of paper with the song’s lyrics was found in Rabin’s jacket pocket after he was assassinated shortly after the rally ended. Shir LaShalom was written by Yankale Rotblit, a Six Day War veteran, born in 1945, and set to music by Yair Rosenblum.

A second example is the advice of a staff member of the Federal Foreign Office, who had worked at Lagos, Nigeria, and recommended Fela Kuti’s “Coffin for Head of State”, released in 1981. When he moved to the German embassy in London, he was proud to take a print of this very panel and put it up in his new office.²

¹ Christian Bartolf / Dominique Miething: “Exhibitions on Nonviolent Resistance: A New Medium for Peace Education.” In: *Nonviolence as a Way of Life: History, Theory, and Practice* (Two Volumes). Edited by Predrag Cicovacki / Kendy Hess. Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass Publishers, 2017, Vol. II, pp. 514-532.

² “Fela had a pretty bad day on February 18, 1977, when over a thousand soldiers from General Olusegun Obasanjo’s military government stormed his communal house, the “Kalakuta Republic,” and dragged the bandleader out by his balls. While some of the soldiers beat and mutilated Fela outside, others threw a Nigerian Army-style party for the 60 or so Kalakuta residents still in the house. According to Fela biographer Michael E. Veal’s account, “A number of the men reportedly had their testicles smashed by the soldiers, and the women were beaten, forced to strip, and carried naked through the streets on flatbed trucks to the army barracks, where they were reportedly raped and tortured.” The soldiers threw Fela’s 78-year-old mother, Funmilayo Anikulapo-Kuti, out of a second-floor window and burned Kalakuta to the ground. Then they arrested everybody and threw them in jail for a month. The following year, Funmilayo died from the injuries she suffered in the raid. On September 30, 1979, at the end of Obasanjo’s first regime, Fela Kuti and members of his Afrika 70 organization drove a van through hails of machine gun fire to the entrance of the military leader’s barracks, where

The exhibition's prime composition principle was to find photographs corresponding to the lyrics, so that people get sensitive in detecting testimonies of peace within their own cultures, particularly in the field of art: drawings, paintings, photographs, poems, sculptures, and, of course, songs.

Aside from portrait shots of several artists, we also present photographs of the gruesome reality of war³, and document peace monuments such as the "Imagine Memorial" at New York City or the "Peace On Earth" Sculpture at Liverpool, both dedicated to John Lennon.

Another example is a photograph of a monument for the child victims of the German siege of Leningrad, which lasted from 8 September 1941 until 27 January 1944 and resulted in approximately one million Russian civilian casualties who died of hunger. Placed next to this photograph are the lyrics of "May There Always Be Sunshine", a song popularized by Pete Seeger in 1975 in the Western hemisphere: the four-year-old boy Kostya Barannikov composed the chorus' four lines in 1928.

One major design element consists in the reproduction of facsimiles of the note sheets published in Broadside magazine. Agnes "Sis" Cunningham, together with her husband Gordon Friesen and their daughters, founded and edited this most important magazine of the political folk music movement in Greenwich Village from 1962 onward.

The first song we share with you is "I Didn't Raise My Boy to Be a Soldier" (1915), an American anti-war song that was influential within the pacifist movement that existed in the United States before it entered World War I. It is one of the first anti-war songs. The song gives the lament of a lonely mother whose son has been lost in the war:

*I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier,
I brought him up to be my pride and joy.
Who dares to place a musket on his shoulder,
To shoot some other mother's darling boy?
Let nations arbitrate their future troubles,
It's time to lay the sword and gun away.
There'd be no war today,
If mothers all would say,*

they deposited a coffin. The military later arrested and beat all of Afrika 70 when the group refused to remove it. The black and white photo collage on the cover of "Coffin for Head of State" reproduces Afrika 70's seemingly near-suicidal act of protest and its aftermath. It shows Fela et al. delivering the coffin to the barracks gate and the group walking away from the Black Maria (police truck) three days later. The coffin itself sits in the center of the collage, above the painted caption 'FELA'S MOTHER'S COFFIN IN FRONT OF DODAN BARRACKS.'" Moe Bishop: "Coffin for Head of State." Vice. August 4, 2011. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/znqen3/Wasted-Life-Coffin-for-head-of-state>

³ "SP4 Ruediger Richter (Columbus, Georgia), 4th Bn., 503 Inf., 173 Abn Bde (Separate), lifts his battle weary eyes to the heavens, as if to ask why? SGT. Daniel E. Spencer (Bend, Oregon) stares down at their fallen comrade. The day's battle ended, they silently await the helicopter which will evacuate their comrade from the jungle covered hills in Long Khanh Province." By Pfc. L. Paul Epley, 1966, National Archives and Records Administration, Records of the Office of the Chief Signal Officer, (111-SC-635974) [VENDOR # 135]. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Long_khanh_fallen.jpg

"I didn't raise my boy to be a soldier."...

She comments on the irony of war being between different mothers' sons, killing each other with muskets. Conflict between nations should be resolved by arbitration, not by the sword and the gun. Victory is not enough to console a mother for the loss of her son, and the blighting of her home. War would end if all mothers said they would not raise their sons as soldiers. The song thus apparently connects the suffrage and pacifist movements.

The second song is by Ed McCurdy: "Last Night I Had the Strangest Dream", released in 1950, and performed by John Denver, at the largest peace rally against the Vietnam War in Washington D.C. on April 24, 1971,⁴ popularized in the 1960s by Simon and Garfunkel. McCurdy's song ends with the lines:

*Last night I had the strangest dream
I ever dreamed before
I dreamed the world had all agreed
To put an end to war*

The third song is "I Ain't Marching Anymore" by Phil Ochs, written in 1965 when the American involvement in the Vietnam War was beginning to grow. The song criticizes American military history from the perspective of a weary soldier who has been present at many wars since the nineteenth century. In August 1968, Ochs performed "I Ain't Marching Any More" during the protests outside the Democratic National Convention, inspiring hundreds of young men to burn their draft cards.

The chorus notes that

*It's always the old to lead us to the wars
It's always the young to fall
Now look at all we've won with the saber and the gun
Tell me, is it worth it all?*

In 1966, Richie Havens came up with "Handsome Johnny", which was to open the famous "3 days of peace and music" at Woodstock in 1969. Havens continued Ochs' series of wars and weapons in chronological order.

The fourth song describes the perspective from outer space, that of the astronaut reaching the conclusion: "they shouldn't fight at all down there / upon this little sphere". Malvina Reynolds was a folk singer par excellence, for she composed her songs in her late forties, embodying an authentic, down-to-earth attitude, and it is noteworthy that it was others who popularized her songs: Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, and Pete Seeger. Irony and sarcasm are characteristic of most of Reynold's songs, but her most important songs are those which are full of wisdom such as the message contained in "From Way Up Here", written in 1962.

⁴ Photo: Folk trio Peter, Paul and Mary, alone with John Denver, second from right, belt out a song during the peace march on the steps of the Capitol building in Washington, April 24, 1971.

Her friend Pete Seeger composed the music, performing it live at a benefit concert for the Civil Rights Movement at Carnegie Hall one year later. The song's principle is simplicity: easy to understand, easy to sing, easy to learn by heart and containing cosmopolitan wisdom for humankind:

*From way up here the earth looks very small,
It's just a little ball of rock and sea and sand,
No bigger than my hand.*

*From way up here the earth looks very small,
They shouldn't fight at all
Down there, upon that little sphere.*

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