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‘The Conscientious Would Not Go’; Peace Museums and Human Rights

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I would like to explore the non-trivial relationship between peace and human rights, terms which are related but are not interchangeable. To what extent does peace include human rights? To what extent do human rights consider either the right to live in peace, free from violence, or the right to refuse to participate in violence, even if the aim of that violence is the attainment or defence of human rights? The answers to these questions have implications both for peace museums and human rights museums, giving indications of where they may be distinct and where they may share a common interest.

The 1948 UN Declaration assumes from the outset that 'recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world'.[1] It is

1. Preamble, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

such a common mantra, and is taken as self-evident, that 'there is no peace without justice', that it can sometimes feel as if peace has been usurped by human rights. There may have been consternation within the Chinese Government at the award of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to the imprisoned dissident campaigner, Liu Xiaobo, 'for his long and non-violent struggle for fundamental human rights in China',[2] but there were few suggestions outside China that the Nobel Committee had reached its decision on inappropriate grounds. That Committee, however, and not for the first time, was stretching to breaking point its interpretation of the will of Alfred Nobel, who wished to honour 'the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for the holding and promotion of peace congresses'.[3] Whatever magnificent and sacrificial stand Liu Xiaobo has made within China, he has not focussed his attention on international disarmament or 'fraternity between nations'.

This touches, of course, of one's definition of 'peace'. Johan Galtung speaks of 'a holistic continuum from negative to positive, reducing and/or eliminating direct and structural violence not only by solving conflicts, but also by building positive, harmonious relations'.[4] Such a continuum embraces attitudes of negative peace ('ban the bomb!') – not violent, not iniquitous, not exploitative – through to a positive peace of just and equitable relationships. For Galtung, if not necessarily for Nobel, human rights are part of peace.

Let's look at the relationship between human

2. Nobel Peace Prize citation, 2010.
3. The last will and testament of Alfred Nobel, 1895.
4. Galtung, Johan, 'Peace, Negative and Positive', *Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace*, volume 3, Oxford, 2010, p. 353.

rights and peace from the opposite angle. There may be a consensus that human rights are part of peace, but equally, peace is a feature of human rights. If human rights are 'a core of legal and moral concepts that regard all human beings as morally or legally entitled to some kind of protection or recognition based on the dignity and well-being of the human person',[5] then surely protection from being a victim of warfare would come high on that list. Given that states, internally and externally, have a habit of exacerbating violent conflict by providing military 'protection', one wonders whether protection from being protected should be a human right.

The right to live in peace, each 'under their own vines and under their own fig trees',[6] is a fundamental right, implicitly including the right to live free from war and violence, and including the right to live free from any violence which may be committed by those fighting for human rights. This links to *jus in bello* conditions in Just War theory of proportion and discrimination, arguably almost impossible to satisfy in modern technological warfare. Civilians have always been victims of war, but in twentieth century conflicts the majority of victims were civilian. Indeed, Cold War nuclear deterrence was based upon the deliberate intent to cause massive (genocidal?) levels of civilian casualties. And what of Western attempts to increase human rights in Iraq by the forcible removal of Saddam Hussein? Some of the bombs which fell on Iraq in 2003 may have been technologically 'smart', targeted and theoretically discriminating, but the hundreds of thousands of casualties of that war and its aftermath have nearly all been civilians who would want nothing more than

5. Molinero, Natalia Alvarez, 'Human Rights, An Overview', *Oxford International Encyclopedia of Peace*, volume 2, Oxford, 2010, p. 351.
6. Old Testament: Micah 4.4.

to sit beneath their vines or fig trees. Their rights, their lives have been lost. The right to live in peace includes the right to be spared the violence of those in governments, military alliances or campaigning groups who would 'fight' for human rights. A corollary, and a cautionary note for human rights museums, is that some affirmations and celebrations of human rights which may have been achieved through war or violence could potentially be an implicit denial of the rights of those who have been victims of the war or violence, or who have refused to take part in it.

Perhaps it would be better to think of peace not as a noun but as a verb, not a goal but the way to achieve one's goals. Whatever one's intent, the means one uses become the ends what achieves. The Middle East is but one example. 'Fighting' for peace and human rights may only achieve the fighting. There is no justice without peace.

There are other rights to be considered too, not only those associated with the protection of civilians. There is also the protection of those who have conscientious reasons for objecting to taking part in military activity. Should the government of a nation state have the power to force citizens to join the military and possibly take part in warfare whether for the defence of the nation or in pursuit of policies of that government? In starker terms, should a president or prime minister be able to compel a citizen to take up arms and kill other people, or at least be able to force a person to act in support of others who would kill? Past and present, there are many who have had or do have grounds of conscience, howsoever formed, for refusing such actions. Is such conscientious objection and abnegation of an individual's responsibility towards her or his own people, or is it a fundamental human right, to refuse to kill?

This has long been a contentious issue, with Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights being deliberately ambivalent, though a Human Rights Committee ruling of 2006 on the position of Jehovah's Witnesses in South Korea indicated that conscientious objectors should be protected. Given the number of countries which still enforce military conscription, often without so much as an alternative of civilian national service, this remains a live issue, and the 2006 ruling indicates a human right which is disregarded in many corners of the world. Even in lands without military conscription, there are campaigns to enable individuals to divert to charitable use that proportion of direct taxation designated for military purposes, a possible extrapolation of the right to conscientious objection. From a museums perspective, those peace museums which affirm and celebrate the rights of conscientious objectors are seen to be fully within the sphere of human rights museums.

Given the relationship outlined above between peace and human rights, we can see that not only peace in general is a theme worthy of consideration by museums of human rights, but conscientious objection in particular would come under their ambit, at least for the purposes of exhibition, if not necessarily for their collection policies as a number of dedicated peace collections already exist. Most fruitful would be collaboration and partnership on peace themes between human rights museums and, say, The Peace Museum (see below).

In the UK, material on conscientious objectors is held by various libraries and museums. The Imperial War Museum has a substantial audio archive of pacifism, the Liddle Collection in the Brotherton Library at the University of Leeds has an impressive set of conscientious objector diaries

from 1916-1918, and at The Peace Museum, Bradford,[7] we are building up a unique collection of conscientious objector papers, artwork and memorabilia from both world wars. We are currently drawing up proposals for commemorating the centenary of those who opposed the First World War, not least those who resisted conscription at great cost to themselves.

The most significant UK heritage site for conscientious objection history is the cell block in Richmond Castle, Swaledale, North Yorkshire, where fragile pencil graffiti can still be read from diverse socialist and religious conscientious objectors imprisoned there in 1916 en route to being dispatched to France, where they were sentenced to death – a sentence which was commuted to penal servitude. As one man wrote on his cell wall, 'We will not MURDER nor help to murder any man woman or child, no matter what nationality colour or creed', and surely that must be a human right; as another pencilled, simply, 'The Conscientious would not go'.

Our Bradford collection is broader than just material on conscientious objection. We have a substantial collection of anti-war artefacts, especially campaigning banners and posters. A 2011 temporary exhibition 'Visible Voices: the Art of Women's Protest', featured many banners, aesthetic and politically provocative, from the Museum's collection. Our small, permanent presence at the Royal Armouries, Leeds, 'Farewell to Arms', documents those who have campaigned against particular weapons systems, most obviously nuclear weapons, as well as the transformation and conversion of armaments to more positive use, such as Mozambique rifles used as raw materials for sculpture and works of art.

The most high profile peace campaigning is

7. www.peacemuseum.org.uk

negative peace, anti-war activity. However, in 1993, when our Quaker trustee founders were considering where to place the museum, one of the attractions of Bradford was the opportunity it would provide to engage with a broader definition of peace, including building up community relations across a population of diverse origins and beliefs. An early exhibition of Bradford 'peace stories' was based on a set of interviews on understandings of peace, with a number of personal 'human rights' stories emerging. Recent outreach work of the museum has included practical campaigning education with schools, based on stories of the tactics and actions of past generations of peace campaigners. This has enabled and encouraged young people to stand up and make a difference in whatever campaigning issue they themselves would choose.

Two examples illustrate this point. 'Kokeshi: Stand up, Speak out, Make a difference!'[8] was an initiative of the Diversity and Cohesion unit of Education Bradford, supported among others by the Government's controversial 'Prevent' agenda to prevent violent extremism. The starting point was the 1945 atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The Peace Museum provided a range of exhibition materials about Hiroshima, and subsequent anti-nuclear campaigning artefacts – posters, banners, images. With these raw materials, Education Bradford was able to mount a substantive exhibition which was 'owned' by the many school groups which visited it. Children's artwork was exhibited. The main film told the story of Sadako, a young girl victim of the Hiroshima bomb, who folded paper cranes in the months before her death from radiation sickness. Kokeshi was the name of the 'Little Doll'

8. www.cohesionbradford.org

movement which perpetuated the memory of Sadako. The soundtrack of the film was re-recorded, with the Hiroshima events told in a broad Yorkshire accent by local young people, so it wasn't 'their' story, but became 'our' story. Not only were the times for school visits over-subscribed, but schools provided 'ambassadors' for the exhibition, students who themselves became the guides showing other schools around. A substantive pack for teachers explored links between international violence and bullying, racism, weapons, street violence, and explicitly tackled such issues as:

- 'Sadako's rights then – whose rights now?'
- My rights - Who has rights? What right matters most to me?
- 'Group activity – bidding for rights – which right would you "pay" the most to keep?'
- 'If you rebuilt society, what human rights would you protect by law? What would your "constitution" say about war and about nuclear weapons?'

Starting with the artefacts of peace history, it became possible for young people across the Key Stages to engage with personal and political issues of peace and human rights. The final event of the programme was an outdoor celebration of some of the children's work in the city's main Centenary Square. Kokeshi 2010 was such a success that it was repeated in 2011.

The second example with which The Peace Museum has been involved, like a number of other museums, is the British Library initiative, 'Campaign! Make an Impact',[9] which encourages school students to learn active citizenship

9. www.bl.uk/campaign

and social responsibility. Although smaller in scale than Kokeshi, this has provided a good model of using the Museum's collection to facilitate and promote social change. In contemporary UK terms it could relate to community organising, or even (subversively?) to the Big Society agenda. Essentially there was a three stage process: in the first phase, our Museum Manager introduced a particular historical campaign – in our case the anti-nuclear movement - illustrated by artefacts from the Peace Museum's collection; the second phase involved the students looking more closely at the campaigning skills that had been used, not least film-making; for the third phase, the students divided into small groups and they themselves chose their own campaigns – drug abuse, knife crime, cruelty towards animals, prostitution, child abuse - and used the film-making and campaigning skills they had learned to try to bring about change according to their own agenda.

On a wider canvas, there is the International Network of Museums for Peace (INMP), founded in Bradford in 1992, and with a recently-established base in The Hague.[10] INMP represents increasing numbers of peace museums from around the world, from large museums which may be nationally funded, to small independent initiatives. Each year the numbers grow, as peace museums are recognised as a concept for which the time has time. Many peace museums, not least at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are in Japan. Often, for example at Gernika, the museums are at sites associated with past warfare. Their mission is to promote reconciliation and their message is clearly 'Never again'. The joint task is to retain the memory of the past and to use it positively to

10. www.museumsforpeace.org

promote peace for the future. Hence, a number of memorial institutions which uphold the memory of victims of oppression and civil rights abuses, whether in South America, South Africa, or South East Asia, regard themselves as museums 'for peace' and are members of INMP.

Peace and human rights are inextricable linked, with each, at least in part, contained within the other. It follows, therefore, that there should also be a close relation between peace museums and human rights museums and between networks of peace museums and networks of human rights museums. Perhaps the most important criterion is the means. 'Fighting', as a means of obtaining peace or human rights, only serves to destroy peace, further infringe human rights and gain nothing but the fighting itself. Along that route, the conscientious would not go. Peace is not only the biggest human right of all, it is the only way to obtain the others, and as Kokeshi and Campaign! have both shown, peace museums have an important part to play in that process.

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