

This is a summary of some the main points of my presentation for folks who could not join my session. I began by explaining that “writing for peace” does not only mean applying one’s writing skills to change the world in some grand way, but writing for your own peace of mind to free your creativity, which may lead to all kinds of action of your own choice, not only peace activism. I also explained that the part about being an ally is there because, while many may be

employing these writing skills online, I want to sound a note of caution about the risk of being infected by the often toxic online environment. We must guard against allowing the dopamine rush from Likes to turn us into performative optical allies.



Despite that negative note, I have been blessed recently by the wisdom of three writers who give me hope in spite of all the online toxicity.

Ruha Benjamin, who says, “Don’t just hang out a sign, become a sign embodying a more just reality.”

Maria Ressa, author of *How to Stand up to a Dictator* and subject of the documentary *A Thousand Cuts*, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2021 together with Dmitry Muratov.

Rivera Sun, author of a collection of poetry called *Skylandia*, novels such as *Billionaire Buddha*, the Ari Ara series of young adult novels, and a constant stream of peace journalism.



This is the phrase in this year’s call for papers that really spoke to me. In previous presentations (this is my fourth LotE), I have focused mostly on intersections of gender and race, but this year I will focus mainly on intergenerational unity. I am especially happy that friends from Counterpoint are here again this year to guide us in this regard.

Intergenerational Unity



Since semi-retiring from Osaka University in 2020, many junior scholars have asked me to be their mentor. I'm always happy to be a sounding board and have a fair amount of experience with active listening, having served as a harassment counselor for many years. But I'm uncomfortable with the word mentor, which implies a vertical hierarchy to me.



Mentors and Accountability Partners



I prefer accountability partner. I may be old, but I still have a lot to learn. I like this name because in a society where great weight is placed on politeness, it can be hard for junior colleagues to express disagreement with seniors. Asking you to be my accountability partner means I hold you accountable to be honest with me. Be like this cat who clearly shows her skepticism when I say something questionable. (Portrait by May Kyaw Oo.)



Continuity and Tradition

I don't want to cling to old traditions that have become fossilized and stale. But I also don't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater. I'll be demonstrating some of the ways I try to maintain a healthy balance between old and new, old and young, loud and quiet. As Zeami, the founder of my beloved Noh drama, said back in the 15th century, even the most withered bough on an ancient cherry tree can put forth fresh blossoms.

Or for an analogy from English literature, there's Sally Seton in the Virginia Woolf novel *Mrs. Dalloway*: "Sally was fifty-five, in body, she said, but her heart was like a girl's of twenty." Not to deny difference. As Yoshi said in her opening remarks, just saying we're all the same deep down inside does not pay enough respect to difference. But I think Virginia Woolf was fully cognizant of that. *Mrs. Dalloway* is all about psychological repression and what ifs. That's what I want to encourage you to do in this session today: explore some of your what ifs. But whatever you do, don't torture yourself with guilt for any past choice that looks like a bad choice to you now, for not doing it all.



If we can recognize our writing blocks, our acts of self-censorship, instead of repressing them, we're more likely to be able to let them go and move on. Of course, what works for me may not work for everyone, but I hope to give a wide enough variety of examples that something resonates. For example, I tortured myself with guilt for years when I realized that I had given in to pressure from senior faculty when I was young to stop talking about ethics and peace. They

said it sounded too moralistic. But just as a witness to harassment may sometimes be in too vulnerable position themselves to intervene and is later consumed with guilt for having been a silent bystander, you should never let such choices paralyze you. You did your best under the circumstances. Even if you could not act in the moment, you can keep the memory of what you witnessed alive and share what you learned some other time and place, when the time is right.



It's often good to have a reflective partner who can point out to you when you exhibit certain strong mannerisms in your speech. In my case, it is constant repetition of the phrase "I'm afraid." It's how I censor myself. For example, I really had to push myself to include the word "peace" in the title of this presentation because I was afraid it would turn people off. Why? Because I have been so thoroughly conditioned by negative reactions the times I have tried to talk

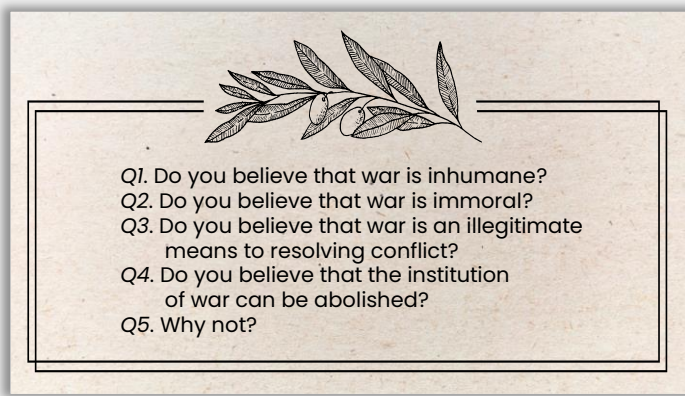
about peace and nonviolence that I subconsciously started avoiding talking about it in certain circles out of fear of alienating or offending someone. I talked about the PARSNIPs on OTJtv in my interview with Jose Domingo Cruz, but honestly sometimes I feel like one of those P should be for Peace.



Ah, those voices in our heads... I have a very powerful Inner Censor who I call The Gaslighter. Here I recounted some of the tragicomic dialogues I had with mine when I was preparing this presentation.



One reason I really pushed myself to include the word “peace” in my title this year is to establish continuity with a precious moment at last year’s LotE. In the session with the authors of the book *Passion for Japan*, they asked the audience the question, “What is your passion?” and invited us to share. “Find your passion” is one of those phrases that usually doesn’t work for me. But another participant bravely spoke of her fear that she had lost her passion.



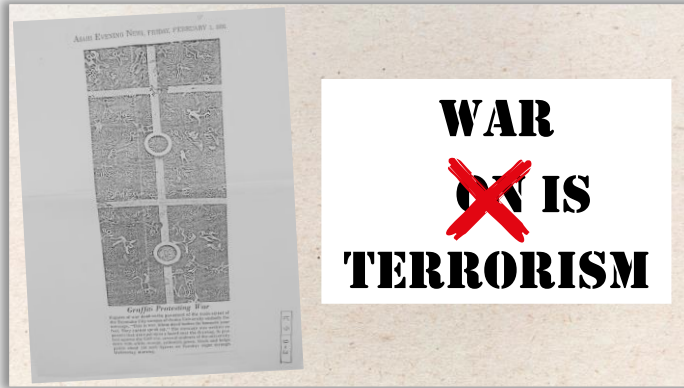
That worked for me. This is what I was compelled to share. It’s from a speech that Tony Jenkins gave when he received an award for his book *An Alternative Global Security System*.

- Q1. Do you believe that war is inhumane?
- Q2. Do you believe that war is immoral?
- Q3. Do you believe that war is an illegitimate means to resolving conflict?
- Q4. Do you believe that the institution of war can be abolished?
- Q5. Why not?



Here are three little fragmentary scenes from my life, memories I have recently retrieved, as concrete illustrations of a possible process of reconciliation with your Inner Censor, viewing it not as an enemy but as a friend. My first publication after joining the faculty of Osaka University was my self-introduction in the faculty newsletter. It was titled “The Cruellest Lies.” This was 1989, before Nelson Mandela was

released from prison, and the article is dedicated to him. I introduce a play by Athol Fugard called *The Island* that dramatizes a scene from Mandela’s time in prison where he organized performances of Shakespeare and Greek tragedy, in this case *Antigone*, and I discuss the way the play vividly illustrates how an understanding of the idea of intersectionality can help oppressed men find solidarity with oppressed women instead of falling back on toxic masculinity to bolster their identity when they are assaulted by racist society. I end the article with this bold question, if I say so myself: Who says we must not intervene? (Photo from an anniversary performance of *The Island* by the original actors, John Kani and Winston Ntshona.)



After 9/11, I put this sign on my office door. The aerial photo on the left shows a die-in protesting the Gulf War, where we took turns drawing chalk outlines around each other to leave the message after we dispersed.



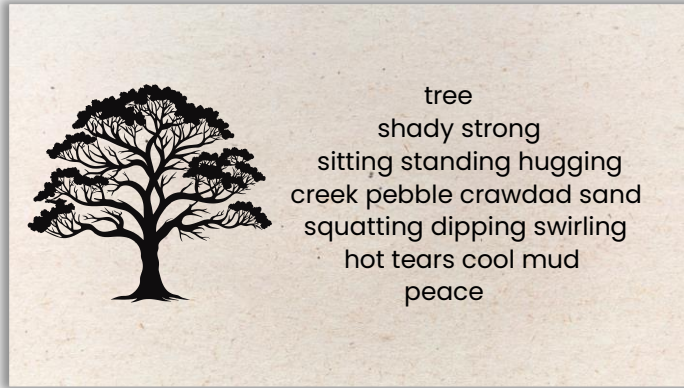
Participating in a hunger strike demanding the release of South African political prisoners on campus. Some parents saw the article in the newspaper and called the university to complain. To my dean's credit, I am happy to report that he defended me and told them that I only joined the sit-in during lunch break and after working hours, and that my fasting did not affect my ability to carry out my duties. (I realize that support is a

sign of my privilege, a courtesy that might not be equally extended to all teachers.)



Now my Gaslighter is at it again, telling me you all are silently groaning that I'm just indulging in vain nostalgia here. But I would like to believe that this story has value, not only for me personally as a step toward forgiving myself for not having done more, but also by busting a few stereotypes about old people, because remember, if you only meet someone after they're a certain age, it may be difficult to imagine what they were like when they were younger. But mostly

because I hope my story may nudge you toward similar discoveries about yourself and ways to find release from these kinds of vicious circles of self-censorship and guilt. It was not until the year I retired, when my annotated list of publications was circulated at the faculty meeting where my emerita status was approved, that I could look at the record and say, well maybe I did enough of what May called quiet activism in our joint presentation at the DEI event for Kyoto JALT in January. I'm telling you this story because I don't want you to wait that long to give yourself the credit you deserve!



After that wonderful smash poetry session with Yaya yesterday, I couldn't resist adding one more slide here. It happened again, The Gaslighter telling me I could never be a poet. But that session gave me confidence as it reminded me of one of my own favorite poems which I composed in a writing workshop with Rivera Sun. It combines the diamante form, which I learned from the Zinn Education Project, with a focus on the five senses as recommended by Rivera, and

it works for me because it helped me release even more power from a traumatic memory of being bullied as a child, an experience which I recounted in the Osaka iteration of the Vagina Monologues in 2021 and in my chapter in Gregory Glasgow's 2023 book, *Multiculturalism, Language, and Race in English Education in Japan*.



I hope these prompts help you to release your own creative energy, share your writing for peace, and celebrate the power of connecting through difference.