

Battle Against Nonviolence

Sanela Osmanovic

Course: ENGL 102

Instructor: Ms. Sarah Ross

Essay Type: Compare/Contrast

We live on a violent planet, in a world torn by wars. The history of humankind is a chronology of bloodshed, brutality and lawlessness, and we become aware of it as soon as we leave the illusory security of our childhood. Some people are lucky enough never to experience the ferocity of war but to be mere observers, always at the safe distance, in front of a television or a newspaper. Some of us are not as lucky. I come from a country where land is stained with blood and tears, where the air still reverberates with screams. The difference between me and people who were never exposed to war is an attitude towards it. They can talk against violent conflict resolutions, claiming they are pacifists. I, however, cannot afford that luxury, for the sake of all those thousands of people who are suffering at this moment. The language of war prevails every day; pacifism is an ideal in the minds of few individuals.

On May 25, four years ago, my friend Heather was sitting under the tree in a park near Baltimore, writing a letter to me. All of her family was there; her parents were strolling through the woods and her husband was playing "Risk" with their relatives and friends. Heather did not join the game because she resented it - "Risk" is about conquering the world and Heather detested everything that involves battle. That day, under a budding tree, surrounded with colors and sounds of spring, Heather wrote me about a bold dream of universal humanity.

On that same day, I was standing at the Gate, an arch at a town square in Tuzia, the second largest city in Bosnia. It was raining; the sky was gray and it felt as if clouds were sitting on my shoulders. Unable to breathe for the pain gripping my body, I read the inscription on the

white marble of the Gate: "Here, you don't live just to live/Here, you don't live just to die/Here, you even die to live," the words of famous Bosnian poet Mak Dizdar (54). Although written decades ago, these verses are very suitable, for at this place on May 25, 1995, Serbian fascist aggressors killed 71 and wounded over 100 people, kids who just went out to have a cup of coffee or a Coke with their friends. Pictures from that day passed in front of my eyes- body parts, screams, the unspeakable horror. So many young lives destroyed, the future of my country killed, massacred. I was standing at the place where three-year-old Sandro Kalesic made his last steps. I was standing at the place where this inscription would not be, if only the United Nations had reacted earlier.

After four years of war, the word "pacifist" does not exist in my dictionary. I know what my friend Heather does not; I know that for every freedom, for every breath, we have to fight. It is not a matter of choice, but a matter of survival, because a kind word does not open the Iron Gate, not on this planet. I do not wish to undermine the acts and thoughts of great people like Mahatma Gandhi or Martin Luther King; they fought for what they believed in. Undoubtedly, universal peace would be the greatest achievement of human kind. Unfortunately, we are still dreadfully far away from that ideal. Even now, we are predators, constituents of the civilization that was built atop a base of skulls. All the stories about rights and equality in our world are just an illusion.

Nevertheless, people have the right to live in an illusion and, consequently, pacifists have the right to fight for it. One problem occurs in this scheme, though. Through the years, the pacifist movement has become very strong and influential. Their word is heard and respected in politics, which means that, in many cases, their intervention can delay military action that could save lives. Some would argue that pacifists don't always oppose the intervention but even

support "just wars" and revolutions. Well, *Encyclopedia Britannica* defines the term "pacifism" as the "opposition to war and violence as a means of settling disputes. Pacifism may entail the belief that the waging of war by a state and the participation in war by an individual are absolutely wrong, under any circumstances" ("Pacifism"), Translated to everyday language, this means that we should not fight. Converted to the language of my life, this means that when Serbs attacked us, I should have just let them rape and slaughter me while trying to talk them out of it. Well, pacifists may be surprised, but that tactic would not work and if I had tried it, I would not be writing this now.

Pacifists just don't seem to live in the same world with us. For instance, Lowell Erdahl in his book, *Pro-life/Pro-Peace*, says "nearly all human conflicts are resolved peacefully through conversation, negotiation, and arbitration" (76). Which channel has he been watching for the past five decades?! Erdahl is like my friend Heather; they live in a dream world of universal kindness. Their lives are a constant denial. If Lowell Erdahl ever lost somebody close due to some violent act, it is highly unlikely that he would protest by civil disobedience. He would probably go through the same evolution as Edward Parks, who went from being a pacifist to becoming a veteran combat soldier: "My collegiate pacifism seemed very far away... As word came of casualties from the Japanese attack [on Pearl Harbor] - 24,000 Americans Americans dead, more than a thousand wounded - I felt an emotional tug to ... well, do something" (8). I can honestly say that I understand the feeling Parks confesses, the urge to change the world or at least make one event a little less unjust. That instinct is deep in the essence of every human being and I consider it noble.

Finally, I would like to emphasize that there are righteous causes worth fighting for, issues like freedom and independence. It is not accidental that, until the twentieth century, almost

every story or poem celebrated war or warriors in some way. Even Shakespeare - according to many, the greatest writer of all times - included combats and warriors in a majority of his plays. War was a way to get liberty, sovereignty and autonomy. Even the United States fought a war like that once, a just war for the future of this country and its citizens. And the same people who object to violence have the privilege to do so because others fought for them. Not talked, but battled. Now the same people proudly sing the national anthem that says, "...the rockets' red glare /the bombs bursting in air /Gave proof thro' the night/that our flag is still there" ("Star Spangled Banner"). That pride is one of the things worth fighting for.

Nonetheless, everybody has the right to choose and find his role in the world. We should not ask pacifists to support the application of force, even if it's a military aid to a country in distress. However, neither should pacifists reflexively oppose, for their opposition could lead to months of postponement of armed support, months in which hundreds of people would vanish. The truth is that force only recognizes force, therefore that is the language we should use when "discussing" violence. My wish is for this planet to be a protected place where aggression will be stopped with any means possible. One day, when I look at my child wrapped in dreaming, I want to know she lives in a safe world. And this is the battle I don't want to fight in trenches.

Works Cited

Dizdar, Mak. *Kameni Spavac*. Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1988.

Erdahl, Lowell O. *Pro-Life/Pro-Peace*. Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986.

"Pacifism." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Dec. 1999. 14 March 2001.

Parks, Edward. "I Moved Far Away From Soaring Ideals - I Became A Warrior." *Smithsonian* 23

(Dec. 1992): 8. Online. Periodical Abstracts. 6. March 2001.

"Keyword: Pacifism Star Spangled Banner." *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*. Dec. 1999. 14.

March 2001.

Sanela Osmanovic is a Mass Communications major. Mrs. Sarah Ross was her instructor.

Mrs. Ross' Comments: *Sanela Osmanovic writes a fine comparison / contrast essay on a difficult ideological subject. She speaks to her audience on a personal level and presents compelling evidence with grace and passion - a powerful message revealed through an exploration of personal political beliefs and universal fears.*