

Thinking About Human Rights with the Popoki Peace Project

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IN December 2016, the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the Declaration of the Right to Peace (UNGA A/RES/71/189; 19 Dec. 2016). The Declaration begins by “Stressing that peace is a vital requirement for the promotion and protection of all human rights for all,” stating in Article 1 that, “Everyone has the right to enjoy peace such that all human rights are promoted and protected and development is fully realized” (UNGA A/RES/71/189). Like many other developed countries, Japan voted against the Declaration, claiming it premature as peace has not yet been established as a human right under international law (Guillemet-Fernández & Puyana 2017, 42). The adoption of the Declaration and Japan’s opposition to it has in some ways made the relationship between peace and human rights and the need for human rights education more visible.¹

The right to peace also underscores the need for new and creative approaches to the teaching and learning of human rights and peace. Discussions of peace and human rights are frequently predicated on, or seek legitimacy in an understanding of the relative expendability of some lives as opposed to others, although those underlying assumptions are not always visible.² For this reason, and in order to avoid replicating many of the contradictions we are seeking to resolve, approaches to that are both critical and reflexive and are extremely important.

One way of encouraging critical and innovative thinking and expression is through storytelling. Popoki uses stories in a number of different ways: collecting and sharing narratives, and creating, drawing and/or enacting stories. Since storytelling is such an important part of our work, it seems fitting to begin with a story. This story comes from a Popoki workshop in South Africa in 2006 in the very early days of the Popoki Peace Project, but indicates a direction in which I hope we will continue to move in the future. One of the participants was a youth worker from Liberia who, after meeting and getting to know our work, asked me whether it would be possible to take Popoki home and introduce him to children in his country. His reason was both simple and radical. The children he worked with, he said, have never known peace. They have never experienced it; their parents do not

know what it is; they have no knowledge of, or experience with, the concept and/or reality of peace. How can those children, in the bare life zones of their everyday lives,³ learn to do anything other than recreate the violence into which they have been born? Popoki, he said, might provide them with a clue for taking the first step toward transforming their society.⁴

This story exemplifies one of the goals of the Popoki Peace Project: positive action based on critical imagination and expression of peace.⁵ Learning to imagine what peace might be like is an important exercise for helping to give children and adults who have grown up in situations of extreme violence a chance as individuals and as a society to do something other than reproduce that violence. Learning about human rights gives them a concrete tool to help them create peace. The need for this process of imagining peace and learning about human rights is not limited to conflict zones however. Many of us live in societies and attend educational institutions where problem solving is all too frequently conducted using violent means.⁶ Popoki's methodology can help to make power relations and violence more visible. One important aspect of this is that this process can also help people to recognize and address their own privilege.

This article introduces some of the thinking and work of the Popoki Peace Project as an example of an innovative way of approaching peace and human rights issues in the classroom and elsewhere using art and other forms of creative expression. The cat, Popoki, is the symbol and energy behind the Project, a grassroots effort for peace began in 2006 and based in Japan. The objective is to share both the theory and the experience of the Project with particular reference to human rights teaching and learning. The article focuses on Popoki's approach to human rights. It consists of two sections. The first is a somewhat autobiographical account of the experiences underlying how I came to create the Popoki Peace Project. Among these, my experiences in Hiroshima in the late seventies were particularly powerful. The second part describes two different types of programs that are directly related to human rights: workshops using drawing and human rights *kamishibai* (picture stories) and activities to deepen thinking about gender equality. It will conclude with a short discussion of the meaning of this approach. It is hoped that reading this article will encourage readers to take out their crayons and work with their friends and students to explore the world and human rights using their bodies, hearts and both hemispheres of their brain.

Part 1: The Popoki Peace Project

Hiroshima and experiences leading up to the creation of the Project

The Popoki Peace Project is the result of years of thinking about and working for peace, and is based on many different experiences. One of the most significant foundations comes from understandings and questions gained while living and working in Hiroshima in the late seventies and early eighties. There I encountered the terrifying but inspiring stories of survival from many *hibakusha* (atomic bomb survivors) and frequently felt overwhelmed by their willingness to remember and expose their own pain in order to promote peace and nuclear disarmament. But it was perhaps the contradictions and questions that I encountered during my years in Hiroshima and after that pushed me toward creating something new that would be active but also critical, creative and reflexive. The eventual result was the Popoki Peace Project.

In 1977, thirty-two years after the bombing of Hiroshima, the city was a bustling array of colors, sounds and movement, but in the shadows the ongoing impact of the atomic bomb could still be discerned. In those days, the Cold War threat of nuclear war was constantly present, and Hiroshima offered an important plea for sanity in an increasingly insane world. Many survivors of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki who had remained silent about the horror they had experienced were beginning to speak out, and as the 1978 UN Special Session on Disarmament showed, the world was demanding nuclear disarmament.

One unanticipated outcome of the mass action around that conference was the discovery of the existence of about forty-eight hours of film of the effects of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki taken by the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey in 1945-46 and immediately declared classified. The discovery of this film led to a mass movement in Japan called the “Ten Feet Campaign” to reclaim the film and use it to make anti-nuclear documentaries. My arrival and subsequent work in Hiroshima coincided with this, and I was very much involved in the collection, translation and dissemination of the stories of *hibakusha*.⁷ Not surprisingly, this had a huge impact on my understanding of nuclear weaponry and on my commitment to peace.

Hiroshima in the late seventies seemed confident in its victimhood. It was generally accepted that Japan was the “only country to have been a victim of nuclear weapons,”⁸ giving it a legitimacy that was not seen as being

shared by those whose exposure to radiation had come from other sources such as nuclear testing or uranium mining, and expressions of solidarity in mutual victimhood with Auschwitz were not uncommon. In asserting its legitimacy as a victim, the context of the war and Japanese aggression and atrocities in Asia and the Pacific were left unmentioned and, more importantly, unacknowledged. This drew criticism, even from those who asserted that racism was a factor in the decision to use the atomic bomb and that it would not have been dropped on civilians if Japan had been a Western country or the Japanese people white. Criticism was also directed at what seemed to be a contradictory stance of rejecting nuclear weapons while embracing nuclear power, and at the all-or-nothing understanding of peace as the absence of large-scale war.⁹

Personally I felt the contradictions in terms of wanting to present a strong appeal for nuclear disarmament, but at the same time understanding that what supported the nuclear arms race both politically and economically was the sacrifice of millions around the world to proxy-wars, maldevelopment and multiple injustices and rights violations. I wondered whether it was possible to focus on one part while still seeing and acknowledging the others.

The Popoki Peace Project

After five years in Hiroshima I left for graduate school in Tokyo and then took a position at Kobe University. The Cold War had ended, but the much anticipated post-Cold War peace was proving elusive. The Japanese economic bubble had burst, and Japan was once again trying to define its place in the world. Nuclear disarmament began to seem much less important and urgent as people turned their gaze inward. The once taboo subject of changing Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution and establishing a regular army began to surface and peace educators struggled with how to keep their students engaged. Peace seemed at once closer but also much farther away. I remained very active in the peace movement, giving frequent seminars and workshops, actively searching for my own approach. I had begun to use sensory questions such as “What color is peace?” at the beginning of these programs to help people relax and think more creatively and was always surprised by the interesting responses.

By the end of the 1990s I had been using these questions for some time. Friends had suggested that I publish a collection of the questions for chil-

dren, but I could not come up with an interesting way to do it. In 2005, I found the answer. The death of my much loved cat, Popoki, inspired me to combine the questions about peace with scenes from Popoki's life. The result was a manuscript for a picture book with questions about peace, *Popoki, What Color is Peace?* The Popoki Peace Project began in January of the following year (2006) with the initial objectives of getting the book published and then using it to promote creative and critical thinking about peace, leading to action. Popoki now features in a series of picture books and other materials which are used to question and politicize the meaning of peace, and to encourage people to find and implement ways to be involved in peace-making.¹⁰ Popoki has friends around the world, many of whom are linked by the monthly internet publication, *Popoki News*.

The fictional cat Popoki is the symbol and mascot of the Popoki Peace Project. His presence reminds us that life is not exclusively human and communication is more than the use of human languages, encouraging us to explore all of the modes of expression available to us as humans. Based and working primarily in Japan, Japanese is our first common language but a commitment to inclusion means that we commonly use English too, and try to make activities accessible to anyone who wants to participate. Popoki helps to make this process less threatening because he, as a cat, does not need to be fluent in human languages. His presence helps to politicize the borders of human diversity and difference, as well as human and non-human life. Moreover, as Popoki is not human, he is not subject to the complex



rules and conventions of human interaction such as age, gender, background, etc. He becomes whatever people want him to be – friend, teacher, parent, child or just someone sitting quietly and watching.¹¹

In our work with Popoki, we aim to not only look from the outside to find the ways in which bodies, human and otherwise, are understood, governed and controlled but also

from the inside, to see what kinds of expression are possible. We take a holistic approach to peace, seeking to be a celebration of life and diversity, and emphasizing the use of all of our senses, emotions and our entire bodies to imagine, express and create peace. We began with two basic ideas. The first is that our understandings of, and engagement with, the world begins with our bodies, and that body knowledge and body memory remain extremely important throughout life (Ahmed 2008, Lutz 1998, Lutz and Abu-Lughod 2008). The second is that there is a very intimate relationship between experience and imagination, such that it is very difficult to imagine something of which we have no experience. It is, therefore, also hard to create something we cannot imagine. As we have no experience of even true negative peace, e.g., the absence of all violence, it is difficult to imagine what it might look or feel like. Positive peace requires even more imagination, as it refers to a situation that is more than just a lack of violence (Galtung 1969, Alexander, forthcoming). This understanding means that conflict resolution requires more than just stopping a fight; adversaries have to be able to imagine how things could be different. In order to create peace, we have to be able to imagine the kind of peace we want to experience, and in order to do so, we need to enhance our ability to imagine and to create. The Popoki Peace Project uses movement, art and story-telling to enhance our imagination of such abstract concepts as peace or human rights, and to envision those concepts not only in terms of overcoming the negative but also as how their images can be expressed and then transformed into action for positive peace.

Popoki's work is participatory, and challenges traditional teaching methodology in a number of ways. Perhaps the most important in the context of this article is the approach itself and the implications for teaching methodology. Most social science and other education in Japan is conducted from a liberal Western position which rests on binaries such as peace/war, male/female, rational/emotional, etc. This approach aims to provide objective, scientific analyses with universal applications. In contrast, Popoki rejects binaries in favor of difference and understands objectivity in terms of the subjectivity of the viewer and the viewed. In addition, our work has taught us the importance of both being and feeling safe. Creating peace therefore entails coordinating and negotiating not only among multiple understandings of legitimacy and truth, but also among different feelings of being, or not being, safe (Alexander 2017).

In terms of teaching and learning, the Popoki Peace Project has learned much from the work of Paolo Freire (1986) and Augusto Boal (2006, 2008). The methodology is dialogic and questioning, acknowledging the importance of each participant and trying to help them feel safe and comfortable so that they can engage in both learning and teaching. Moreover, taking the position that our understanding is rooted in our body memories, participants are encouraged to not only explore the boundaries of thought and imagination but also their relationship with physical space through performance and other participatory tasks (Boal 2002, 2006, 2008). This helps them to see complexity and challenge binary understandings, as every question produces a range of answers. Participants become more active in their own learning and have many opportunities to learn from one another.

More than participatory learning strategies, however, what is unique about Popoki's programs is the use of creative expression. As mentioned above, if we want to have peace or to change violence or oppression in our societies, we must first be able to envision a peaceful world or at least one without violence. Popoki helps us to embark on a journey to the imaginary, with the expectation that the discoveries made on that journey will become a part of work for peace in our everyday lives.¹²

All Popoki Peace Project programs share the underlying core values of equality, equity and social justice. This includes respect for diversity, including gender diversity, and recognition of the importance of historical claims including colonial injustices. The feminist approach goes beyond recognizing women, seeking to transcend gender binaries and interrogate binary ways of knowing. All of the activities of the Popoki Peace Project aim to create inclusive spaces in which participants can feel safe, a prerequisite for creative and imaginative critical thinking and for sharing.

A typical program would use various techniques, but generally begin with Poga (Popoki's yoga) to help people to relax. This might be followed by simple exercises that allow participants to discover and enjoy their similarities and differences and the reading of parts of Popoki's books. Almost all workshops have a drawing component; often participants are asked to make group drawings of a peace garden in which to walk with Popoki or a peaceful town in which they live together with Popoki. These drawings have a few common requirements including, but not limited to, the following: they must include Popoki, include sensory aspects such as scent, and must be safe and peaceful for all genders. At the end of such workshops, participants

are often asked to put themselves in the drawings and to think about how it feels to be there. By the end of the workshop it is hoped that participants have a new and/or different view of peace and understanding of the personal as both political and global.



Part 2: Popoki's Human Rights Programs

My first Popoki workshop devoted specifically to human rights was held in 2005, before the Popoki Peace Project had been organized. The workshop was for university presidents and their assistants from throughout the Kinki region¹³ of Japan, and I asked them to draw a peaceful university space where human rights are respected. One group drew a classroom where all the students had their hands up, looking engaged and eager to speak. Another drew an office and all the workers were leaving on time. A third drew the cafeteria, featuring food from around the world and smiling faces. And a fourth group drew a professor's office equipped with a space to relax that featured plants and a sofa bed. These drawings were significantly different from the lists made earlier in the workshop that revealed not what had to be respected so much as what ought to be prohibited. Aside from the satisfaction I derived from having been able to encourage a room full of male (with one exception)

university presidents and their staff not only to draw but to move and be a little bit silly, this workshop demonstrated the power of drawing; it encourages people to enter new and different worlds. For this reason, drawing is an important component of almost all of Popoki's programs.

After the Popoki Peace Project began, we continued to focus on human rights, not only in terms of preventing rights violations but for creating a culture of peace based on justice. In terms of human rights education, the idea of creating inclusive, critical, democratic and safe spaces for peace learning relies on an understanding of human rights and commitment to their implementation. Here I will introduce two kinds of activities focusing specifically on human rights: the making of human rights *kamishibai*¹⁴ (picture stories) and using Popoki to think about gender equality. As the human rights *kamishibai* workshops began after I participated in the creation of a poster series on human rights, I will describe the posters first and then discuss the workshops.

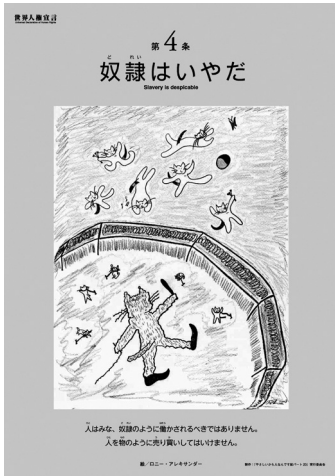
The Human Rights Posters and Human Rights *Kamishibai* Workshops

Early on in the work of the Popoki Peace Project, I was asked to join a group of local artists in the creation of a poster exhibit commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.¹⁵ The poster exhibition was to be comprised of thirty-one posters, one with the text of the Preamble and one for each of the thirty articles of the Declaration. The posters are primarily in Japanese, using simple language and/or including phonetics to make them accessible to children and learners of the Japanese language.¹⁶ The posters for each Article have a title and contain the text of the article and an illustration by one of six local artists. The title for each Article is a simplified version of the text, easily read and understood by primary school children, and includes an English translation. Below each illustration is the full text. I was asked to use Popoki to make posters of four articles: Articles 4 (Slavery is despicable), 11 (All are presumed innocent until proved guilty), 14 (Seeking refuge abroad is also a right) and 20 (Freedom both to get together and to stay home).

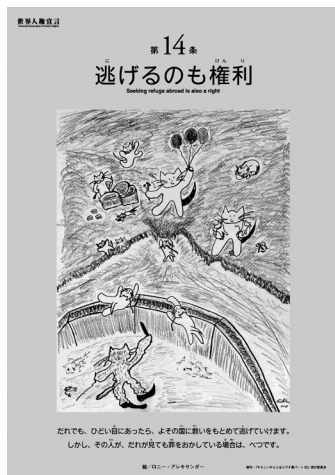
At first I found the task of making the posters very difficult and intimidating. I had a character, but had never used Popoki to directly address negative concepts such as slavery. As I struggled to design the posters, I found that my understanding was greatly enhanced when I created a story about the meaning of each Article as presented in its simplified form. I also

realized that it was only after using the four themes to create a story that I was able to find a way to make the posters meaningful for myself. The story involved taking some liberties with the material such as, for example, changing the order in which I used the four Articles. Here is my story.

Poster 1: *Slavery is despicable*. Here are the slave cats, chained and threatened by their guard cat. These are the bare life cats; existing in the space of sovereign exception, invisible and considered to be without value



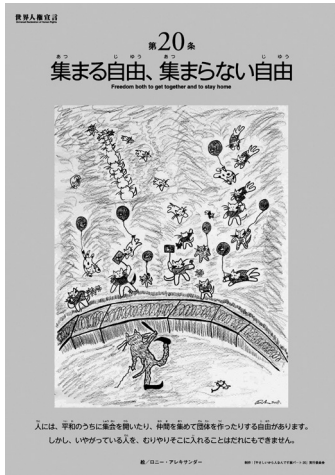
Article 4: Slavery is despicable.



Article 14: Seeking refuge abroad is also a right.

by the dancing, playing carefree cats inhabiting the world outside the wall. Is there a way to make the enslaved cats visible to the carefree cats? Is that a desirable thing to do? What would you do?

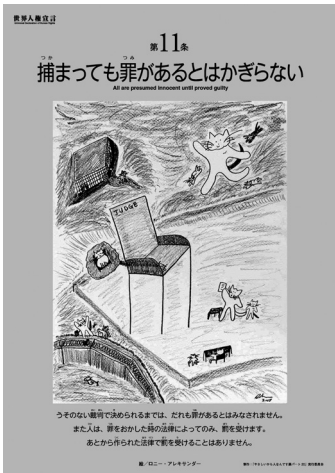
Poster 2: *The right to seek refuge abroad*. The technology of government based on liberalism and a doctrine of human rights has made slavery illegal, acknowledging the right to seek refuge abroad. Some of the stronger cats are able to break their chains and escape over the wall, leaving the world of exception behind and enabling them (if they survive) to try to exercise their right to seek refuge. Some are successful, but the smaller, weaker cats remain chained and beaten. We do not know whether some strong cats stay behind to help their weaker friends. The refugee cats are welcomed initially with open paws, and given food and shelter. Do they revel in their own good fortune and leave the others to their fate, or do they lobby for the release of their companions? In time, what happens to the refugee cats? Will they be judged to be suitable “citizens” and given their freedom, detained, or sent back to the world from which they have so recently escaped? What do you think will happen?



Article 20: Freedom to both get together and to stay at home.

the front pages of newspapers; perhaps it is never mentioned and he just disappears. We also do not know the extent to which their efforts have or have not been successful. What do you think will happen?

Poster 4: *The right to be considered innocent until proven otherwise.* This story has a happy ending. Popoki has a trial. He is released and celebrates his freedom joyfully. Why did the tiny judge in his huge chair release him? Was Popoki just lucky? What will he do with his regained freedom? How would you end this story?



Article 11: All are presumed innocent until proved guilty.

Poster 3: *The right to get together and to stay home.* Here, cats have gathered in front of the wall in protest of the slavery within. Popoki leads the march and there, in the gray zone between inclusion and exclusion, he is arrested and taken away. Many of his friends have also gathered; others choose to stay home. Perhaps they are involved in this protest in other ways, perhaps not. If they raise their voices to reveal the “truth” about the zone of exception they have left behind, does anybody listen? Do they change their stories in order to get an audience? Does anybody care? They are, after all, not human.... We do not know what happens after Popoki’s arrest. Perhaps his fate remains on

The posters and a small book of the drawings were published and displayed in various locations. I began using them in human rights teaching and learning, focusing on Popoki’s story and the questions that arose in the context of creating the posters. On reflection, I realized that in creating that story, I moved from being a spectator of human rights to an actor in my own story about human rights. Unknowingly, I was engaging in the aesthetics of the oppressed; the experience allowed me to further de-

velop my metaphoric world – to think, imagine, dream, create parables, and to distance myself sufficiently from the reality of what I know as “human rights” to allow me to be critical (Boal 2006, 41).¹⁷ This realization set the stage for the next human rights activities: making human rights *kamishibai*.

The publication of the posters created a good opportunity to create programs for human rights learning. I wanted of course to include art and story telling, prefaced with an introduction to Popoki’s work through a reading of relevant pages of Popoki’s books, and “warming up” exercises to identify the range of specific rights that are included in the term “human rights” or other terms related to the particular subject in question. When using this exercise in teaching, the students are expected to have read the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in advance, and to have some general knowledge about human rights. Although most students generally complete this reading assignment, their reflections after the workshop indicate that while they had read the Declaration, they had not really absorbed the content or thought about it in personal and/or critical terms.

The exercise itself is simple. In groups, participants are asked to make a five-page silent *kamishibai* story (not an explanation but a story) about human rights. The telling of the story should not involve the use of words, although they are allowed to have a written and/or spoken title. Popoki should appear in the story. It should also include an open-ended critical question about human rights. After the *kamishibai* are completed, the stories can be shared and discussed.

The logic behind this exercise is simple; when participants manipulate concepts and use them in a familiar way, it deepens their understanding. Moreover, when they draw they use a different part of their brain and different points of reference. Drawing both frees their imagination and brings the story closer to their physical relationship with the world, transforming them from being spectators to being creators/performers. This is particularly true in this exercise because the final product must not reply on words; the use of a silent *kamishibai* shifts emphasis from words to other modes of expression. The five-page length requirement may at first appear to be a lot of pages for a limited time, but in fact, it is an easy number to work with. The first page is for the title/introduction and the fifth for the ending/conclusion. That leaves three pages, or three steps, for the body of the story. The presence of Popoki opens the door for discussion about human/non-human implications, as well as for incorporating the gentle and sensory approach

taken by the project. The purpose of the open-ended question is to lead to further discussion of the issues raised and provide another layer of human rights learning which would continue after the end of the workshop.

In 2016, the Popoki Peace Project joined in an event to celebrate the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), offering a Popoki rights workshop for children and adults. In preparation, we re-read Popoki, *What Color is Peace?* from the perspective of the CRC, choosing pages to read based on what rights of the child they represented. When we read those pages and talked about them at the workshop, we tried something new. A new friend, “Rights Penguin” (権利ペン), joined “Peace Popoki” (平和ポキ) to read and talk about rights and peace. They began introducing themselves and discussing the right to be given a name, and then went on to read and talk about some pages from the book. This intervention not only made the presentation more fun for the participants, but it gave the Popoki Peace Project participants a chance to think about peace and rights from a new perspective. As a result, Peace Popoki and Rights Penguin continue to appear in various Popoki programs.

Next, participants were divided into groups and asked to choose a right they thought was particularly important and then use their bodies to express it. At the end of this activity, each group shared its creation and the participants

talked about what they thought it represented, asking questions and offering opinions. One group, for example, chose the right to an adequate standard of living, expressing that “we can’t live without money.” Another group chose to dance, representing the right to self-expression. This activity was enjoyable and gave the participants a chance to think about rights more deeply not only because they had to choose a particular right, but because they had to then take their intellectual curiosity and make it visible



in physical space. The physicality of the exercises changes and deepens understanding, making it more personal and, in some ways, more real.

The final activity, making *kamishibai*, had a new twist, too; participants were given a situation and questions to answer. The situation is that Popoki is not sick or hurt or hungry, but he is crying. They must include (1) the reason for Popoki's tears; (2) what they do to help him; (3) the underlying cause of those tears; and (4) everyone smiling. The resulting stories were varied and interesting. A group with both adults and small children told a story of Popoki wanting to play cards with other children, but not having any cards, while a group of adults had a story about being overwhelmed with worries and the details of their everyday lives. A group consisting of pre-teens and teenagers made a story about bullying and being ostracized. After the final presentation and discussion of the stories, we concluded with some comments on the idea of needing, asking for and offering help.

This was our first time to use the idea of Popoki crying, but it has become an important tool in our Popoki repertoire. If they see someone in distress, most people want to be comforting and also have the experience of wanting to be comforted themselves. It is easy to feel empathy with the crying Popoki, and the reasons and solutions can generally be found in everyday life. At the same time, thinking about the underlying causes can help to deepen understanding about structural violence and the ways our social relations often involve power and violence. These understandings can help lead to work for human rights and for peace.

Thinking about gender equality with Popoki

It is not possible to analyze issues of peace and violence without paying attention to the gendered relations that underlie all of our social institutions, including heteronormativity,¹⁸ patriarchal relations and misogyny. The feminist approach of the Popoki Peace Project seeks to make these relations visible and to challenge them. This includes learning to overcome binary ways of knowing, challenging gender hierarchies and acknowledging and respecting gender diversity. Accordingly, all of the programs concern gender, regardless of whether they deal directly with gender issues or women. Many workshop participants do not think about gender relations when they try to express peace. In order to encourage thinking about the relationship between gender and peace and make gender relations more visible, most drawing and story projects include a suggestion that peaceful environments for all genders be included. Sometimes performance activities address gen-

der directly by asking participants to make tableaux of such topics as men, women, gender equality, gender violence, etc. Reactions to these activities are varied. Some participants find it extremely difficult to physically express their own gender, much more so than to express other genders. Others are quite resistant to the whole idea of expressing sex and/or gender with their bodies. Most people seem surprised to find themselves struggling with a task that sounds so simple. This says something about the level at which most participants think (or do not think) critically about gender in their everyday lives.

In addition to the above, I have also used Popoki in workshops with a specific focus on gender. Here I will introduce two techniques from these workshops that can be adapted to a variety of needs. One involves storytelling and the other challenges gender biases through simple role playing.

The storytelling program is extremely simple, but can be very effective. It began as an interesting way to remind people of something that they already knew; that gender equality is important, necessary, and something that is directly related to them. I created a story about Popoki's life from birth to old age, giving interactive examples of how it might be different if he were male or female in a global context.¹⁹ This first story was well received and has been repeated in a number of situations. It is interesting to change the story and the storyteller, asking workshop participants to create their own stories with their own particularities, or giving a general set of rules and sharing the different stories that are created. The context for the first story was gender and development, but it can be used in almost any situation.

One variation that I have used very successfully in the classroom is to ask students to create a story involving Popoki and a victim of human trafficking. The victim must have a name and a story about how s/he got to where s/he is now. Of course, Popoki gets a story, too. This is an excellent way to draw out all of the stereotypes about trafficking (or other issues) in order that they can then be discussed and challenged.

Another variation is one that I often use with groups of professionals or in training programs when asked to focus on gender. I ask participants to make a drawing of gender equality. I might ask them to also make a story, but even without the direct requirement of a story, all drawings have one. These pictures are generally very different from what people focus on when talking about gender equality in the context of their work or social policy. The difference between what they draw and what they talk about is a good

way to begin to interrogate what is meant by gender, and how to address gender issues.

A slightly different variation and/or separate activity would be to make a gender map. This activity involves walking around the neighborhood or building, finding places that the participants think are related in some way to gender and marking them on a map. The follow-up discussion would depend on what they found and why they thought it was related to gender. If the Popoki story had been about Popoki in that particular place, then the map could from the beginning be made from Popoki's point of view, or contain encounters that Popoki had in that community. Participants could also first make the map and then either add their Popoki (and themselves) in at the end or even create their stories using the map.

A very different type of activity using Popoki is a very simple role play game. Participants are told they are teachers at a special school run by Popoki for a special group of ten students, five women and five men (or any variation of gender that seems appropriate). Each student studies for a different profession and is guaranteed a job at the end. In this undemocratic school, the teacher decides on the profession for each student. The groups of participants are given a list of professions and a picture of the students: ten cats of various colors and body types posing in different positions. They must match the cats with the professions, citing their reasons for their decisions. At the end, they must also rank the professions in the order of which they think will result in the highest income (or perhaps lead to the greatest happiness, etc.). There are many possibilities for follow-up, including asking the participants to create stories and drawings about what eventually happens to these students in their various jobs.

This exercise plays on gender stereotypes and understandings of gender roles. The choice of professions should of course be made on the basis of the desired learning outcome and should reflect the level of understanding and sophistication of the participants. The simplicity of this exercise makes it enjoyable and useful for a wide range of participants, even very sophisticated ones. It is extremely effective as a tool for promoting discussion of gender in international settings, as gender roles differ in different societies, and also with intergenerational groups. But it is also useful for young people from similar backgrounds, as it forces them to think about their understanding of gender in their society. The beauty of it is not just that there is no correct solution but that it works, regardless of whether or not participants are trying

to reject gender stereotypes, because the exercise forces them to confront those stereotypes, while also offering many opportunities to be critical.

In 2017, I used the above in a gender workshop with high school and college students from Hong Kong, Taiwan and Japan as part of a summer exchange program. At the end, the students were asked to respond to a questionnaire about the gender program. Most said that they had enjoyed and learned from it, and many said that they liked Popoki and the story-telling/drawing part of the workshop. Quite a few said the activity selecting occupations was their favorite. Also, many commented that they were happy to have been given a chance to learn and talk about gender diversity. Some of their final reflections include, “I realized that we often judge a person’s value by their appearance and gender without being aware of it” (Japan); “Gender is not just about physical but also mental, how people think about him/herself. There are different gender[s] and respect and understanding [are] important” (Hong Kong); “There are still many things that most people use to think in our generation, but we all know how to respect and love every personality and will not judge people if their behavior is unlike their gender” (Taiwan). Several students also said that they realized that there is a relationship between gender and peace (Hong Kong).

3. Conclusion: Popoki and human rights

The purpose of this article has been to explain the origins, worldview and objectives of the Popoki Peace Project, focusing particularly on programs and activities concerning human rights. It is hoped that it has provided some hints for practitioners involved in human rights teaching, learning and activism, as well as for those interested in new approaches to peace education and peace making.²⁰

The article began with the Declaration on the Right to Peace, an important first step in connecting and transforming understandings of rights and peace. The Declaration does not challenge the claim to legitimacy based on denial that make those who support human rights visible and important by virtue of the existence of those who do not. Crucial questions such as colonization, legitimacy of indigenous peoples and cultures, alternatives to the Westphalian model of governance and issues of privilege are not directly problematized in the Declaration. Here it has been suggested that without

addressing these issues in our own work for human rights, we are at risk of inadvertently re-creating zones of exception even as we try to change them.

In the work of the Popoki Peace Project, Popoki helps to blur the distinctions between human and non-human, and opens up space for critical thinking, imagination and expression. Reflections by workshop participants often include comments about having become aware of new or different dimensions to peace and/or human rights, gaining new understandings and linking global issues to their own lives. These understandings are not sufficient for transforming the world, but they are an essential part of the process of using critical, creative energy to make meaningful and sustainable interventions.

The Popoki Peace Project understands the power and importance of storytelling and creative expression, and works hard to share this understanding. It meets with enthusiasm from some, and great resistance from others. Some of the strongest resistance comes in the form of classifying drawing and storytelling as something for children, and therefore not necessary and/or useful for adults. This argument reflects age and gender hierarchies; not only stories and drawing but also emotion, creative expression, empathy and children's activities in general are seen as feminine and active participation in such activities is threatening as it is feminizing. The Popoki Peace Project of course sees this differently and understands this resistance as evidence of the need to transform understandings of femininity and masculinity as part of the process of promoting human rights and peace.

Our most recent work includes support for people in the areas affected by the 2011 Great East Japan Earthquake (see Alexander 2017). This work has underscored the need to understand safety and security as both physical and emotional, and we are increasingly focusing on the feeling of being safe and/or secure. We have begun to bring this understanding to work for human rights, in the belief that in order for social transformation to occur, people must be able to feel safe and to have hope.

Many years ago on a Popoki study tour to Palestine I spent many hours thinking about which comes first: social transformation or hope. I also thought about what, if anything, Popoki could contribute. My conclusion was that as social transformation must happen from within, we must try to transform our own society and at the same time support social transformation elsewhere. Perhaps the most important role for Popoki and the Popoki Peace Project lies in trying to make spaces for hope to grow through creat-

ing spaces where people can take a deep breath, relax and be able to use their imagination and creativity to think about how to proceed. Human rights will continue to be an important focus for our work as we engage in creative expression, critical imagination and inclusive action for peace.

Popoki loves stories. Won't you share yours?

* The full set of 40 Human Rights Panels can be borrowed in panel and/or CD form. Information is available in Japanese at: <http://blrhyg.and.org/publication/publication.html> or contact Hyogo Buraku Liberation Human Rights Research Institute at: ph (81-78) 252-8280; fax (81-78) 252-8281; e-mail: blrhyg@extra.ocn.ne.jp.

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Endnotes

1 For example, the Right to Peace was the subject of a session and a workshop at the June 2017 Spring Conference of the Peace Studies Association of Japan. I was involved in the planning and implementation and have subsequently used a video made for that workshop in Popoki peace workshops to think about human rights in the context of colonization and development, as well as to introduce the Declaration itself.

2 For example, Agamben (1998) discusses bare life zones in terms of homo sacer: "One of the essential characteristics of modern biopolitics ...is its constant need to redefine the threshold in life that distinguishes and separates what is inside from

what is outside...separating life from death in order to identify a new living dead man, a new sacred man (p.131). See also Dean (1999), Duffield (2008), Fassin (2009), Foucault (1976, 1994, 2009) and Repo (2016). Judith Butler's work on the relative value of life (2004, 2009) is also important to this discussion.

3 Sylvester (2006) addresses the question of life in zones of exemption, raising the possibility of "bare life as living." For children born in zones of exemption, this is an important perspective.

4 Comment from a staff member of the YMCA of Liberia after a workshop at the YMCA World Council, Durban, South Africa, 2006.

5 For more on the Popoki Peace Project, please see <http://popoki.cruisejapan.com/>. In particular, please check the Archives for the monthly "Popoki News" for details of ongoing activities. Also see Alexander 2008 and Alexander 2017 (forthcoming).

6 Violence is not uncommon in everyday life in Japan. Approximately 30,000 people commit suicide annually and one in four respondents to a recent survey said they had attempted suicide at least once. Most of those were people in their twenties (Nippon Foundation 2017). Bullying at school is frequent and sometimes so serious as to result in suicide, and domestic violence and child abuse are increasing. In addition, militarization and increasing military tensions in East Asia have made children fear war and increasingly think that military solutions are desirable (NHK Television "Asaichi" 2017.8.30).

7 *Hibakusha* is the Japanese word used to describe those who suffer from exposure to radiation. It originally was used to refer to the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but is also used to refer to people who have been exposed to radiation in other contexts. It is often used in English as in, for example, the Draft Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (2017).

8 This discourse (唯一の被爆国 in Japanese) and the accompanying hierarchy of legitimacy of victims of radiation with Hiroshima/Nagasaki at the top continues to be dominant in Japan. After the 2011.3.11 disaster and the Fukushima nuclear power plant meltdowns, Prime Minister used the phrase "only country suffering from nuclear exposure in war" (「唯一の戦争被爆国」). The media and politicians continue to use this terminology to distinguish between victims of the atomic bomb and those affected by nuclear plant and other accidents (September 2017, Takemine, personal communication).

9 This was a time when peace scholars were exploring ideas of non-peace and structural violence, looking at issues of maldevelopment, poverty, racism and/or environmental destruction as important peace issues (See for example Alexander in Gentry, Shepherd and Sjoberg (forthcoming), Lawler 1995, Galtung 1969).

10 The series includes: *Popoki, What Color is Peace? Popoki's Peace Book 1* (Kobe: Epic 2007), *Popoki, What Color is Friendship? Popoki's Peace Book 2* (Kobe: Epic 2009) and *Popoki, What Color is Genki? Popoki's Peace Book 3* (Kobe: Epic 2013). The text and illustrations are by Ronni Alexander. *Popoki's Friendship Story* (Epic, 2012) is about Popoki's work in northeastern Japan after the 2011 tsunami. A short animated version of the first book, "Popoki's Peace Message" is included in Ritsumeikan University International Museum for Peace, editor, Iwanami DVD Book Peace Archives: International Museum for Peace. (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten

Publishers, 2005). The same DVD contains “Popoki’s Peace Machine Journey,” a documentary narrated by Popoki and his kitten friend Mimi who journey to discover direct and structural violence in the 20th century. The Iwanami DVD Book Peace Archives is a series, and versions of “The Peace Machine Journey” are included in the other volumes of the series as well; the cats travel to learn about Okinawa (2006), Hiroshima/Nagasaki (2007), and air raids over Tokyo, Guernica and Chongking (2009). Narration for “Popoki’s Peace Message” is in English and Japanese, and the “Peace Machine Journey” is narrated in Japanese with English subtitles.

11 Activities include such programs as workshops, seminars and camps both in and outside of Japan and involve people of all ages and backgrounds. Sometimes Popoki takes the lead and other times he is just present as the case of a week-long international camp for young children in Japan, where his foremost function turned out to be serving as a friend and confidant for lonely children.

12 One of the strengths of this approach is its flexibility; imaginaries can change and goals can be adjusted to accommodate those changes.

13 The Kinki region is composed of the following prefectures: Kyoto, Osaka, Hyogo, Mie, Nara and Wakayama. See “Kinki Area - Industrial Tourism in Japan,” Japan External Trade Organization, www.jetro.go.jp/en/ind_tourism/kinki.html.

14 *Kamishibai* (picture boards) are a traditional Japanese storytelling art. The storyteller stands behind or next to big illustrations (traditionally in a special storytelling frame), focusing the attention of the listener on the pictures. I have been greatly influenced by the work of Musubi, a *kamishibai* group in Nishinari, Osaka and Yuji YASUNO, a *kamishibai* artist who began his work in the days when licensed *kamishibai* masters performed on street corners for the local children. This is no longer practiced. Yasuno was devoted to preserving the art of *kamishibai* and adamant that rather than finding a translation, the Japanese word for the art be used in all languages. Here I follow his advice. The five-page silent *kamishibai* technique also comes from Mr. Yasuno.

15 This poster exhibit was created by the Yasashii kara Hito desu Ten Part 20 Committee in cooperation with Hyogo Buraku Liberation and Human Rights Institute in 2008.

16 The full set of forty Human Rights Panels can be borrowed in panel and/or CD form. Information is available in Japanese at: <http://blrhyg.and.org/publication/publication.html> or contact Hyogo Buraku Liberation Human Rights Research Institute at: ph (81-78) 252-8280; fax (81-78) 252-8281; e-mail: blrhyg@extra.ocn.ne.jp.

17 Agathangelou and Ling (2009) also refer to this process.

18 “Coined in 1991 by Michael Warner, a social critic, the term heteronormativity refers to pervasive and invisible norms of heterosexuality (sexual desire exclusively for the opposite sex) embedded as a normative principle in social institutions and theory; those who fall outside this standard are devalued. The concept is useful in attempting to understand the assumptions upon which heterosexuality rests, and in showing how and why deviations from heterosexual norms are subject to social and legal sanctions.” International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008 Thomson Gale, www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/applied-and-social-sciences-magazines/heteronormativity.

19 For example, the first story began as follows: Popoki is born. Will he survive? If he is a girl in India or China, he might not make it to birth or through infancy. If he is born elsewhere, statistically girls have a higher survival rate than boys. But if his mother is under the age of 15, he three times more likely to die than if she were older, regardless of his gender.

20 Those interested in further information or details are welcome to contact the author directly at alexroni (at) kobe-u (dot) ac (dot) jp.

