

Nonviolence: more than the absence of violence

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Introduction

Research on nonviolence has never dominated the academic field of Peace Research. Compared to the focus on violent conflicts, peaceful ones have always been a minor sideline. The practice of nonviolence has on the other hand developed a lot over the last 100 years. In the following chapter, I will introduce the two main forms of nonviolence and then go deeper into the more nuanced views and advanced discussions in each of these fields. The most influential use of nonviolence in recent decades has been in political revolutions. This chapter will go through the waves of nonviolent revolutions that have washed over the world since the 1980s. At the end, I will try to look into the crystal ball and see what the future can bring.

The word

Nonviolence is a word we can find in very many contexts. It is often used as a specifier for other topics and hence followed by another word – nonviolent action, nonviolent philosophy, non-violent communication, nonviolent defence and many more. In itself it is almost impossible to define. It consists of two words most people regard as negative: no and violence. In most languages it has the same construction. Among the European languages German stands out as a little different: gewaltfrei (free from violence). None of them have a completely positive connotation. In recent years some have done their best to introduce new concepts with a more attractive meaning. The German *gütekraft* (Good power) is one example.

Why nonviolence?

Nonviolence is not always the first choice for people in conflict. Why some use nonviolence is a relevant and important question not only for theoretical reasons. It can also give guidance for those who search for help in how to act when in the midst of a conflict.

For many pacifists life itself has an inviolable or sacred value and hence it will always be

wrong to hurt other living beings. Some will restrict this to humans, for others all forms of life have an ultimate value.

For the more pragmatic minded, the situation is different. Many argue that by using violence to influence the outcome of a conflict it is often very difficult to reverse your actions in case you are wrong. It is easy to acknowledge for any honest person that we from time to time make wrong judgements. If we act violently based on wrong assumptions it is seldom possible to reverse our actions. It is obvious in extreme forms of violence: killing someone cannot be reversed, but the same goes for many forms of physical or serious psychological violence.

In the same way, many argue that violence is too wide-ranging a tool. All persons have a number of 'roles' and in most cases it is only one or a few of them we have conflicts with. Let us say you are a trade unionist, a woman, a mother, a football player, a friend, a daughter, an environmentalist, a Christian, a sociologist, a social democrat, a soldier and a Norwegian. Maybe it is only your role as a soldier I have a conflict with. If you are part of the occupation of Afghanistan by volunteering as an officer in ISAF forces in Afghanistan, I don't have problems with any role other than that you are a foreign soldier in an occupied country. If I shoot you, I will also kill all the other roles you have. Violence is not specific enough to separate the different roles. This is one of the main reasons against Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). The nuclear bombs the US dropped over Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 killed all forms of life within several square kilometres and destroyed life for many more. Violence is blind. Most nonviolent means are much more specific. They could be directed to one precise role of a person or a group of persons. It is, for instance, possible to boycott the owner of your local shop because he sells products from child labour and still cooperate with him as your trainer in football. Or you can take part in a protest against a decision by local politicians but still be friendly neighbours.

When violence is used it will often result in counter-violence and be the first twist in a violent spiral which can escalate out of control. For many of those who opt for nonviolence, the fear of the consequences of violent means is a strong argument in favour of nonviolence. A long discussion within political movements is how the means influence the ends. Many of the most prominent figures within nonviolent movements have argued strongly that violent means result in violent ends. In recent years these discussions have been given attention in more than a few armed movements as well. Former guerrilla soldiers describe how military means grow from being a tool to totally dominating the movement. Some argue that armed means became the only focus for the movement and the political goals became less important. An intensive discussion on what are the most effective means takes place in many movements these days.

Most of the discussions on the relations between means and ends have been focused on the problematic consequences of violent means. To what degree the traditional nonviolent means always end up with nonviolent ends has got the same attention. As we saw in the previous section on waves of nonviolence, there is need for more research on the long-term results of the nonviolent revolutions in recent decades. It is not obvious that all nonviolent means will always result in nonviolent ends.

Another frequent argument in favour of nonviolence is that the activists are fighting problems rather than persons. Violence can hit humans but not ideologies, decisions and policies. The roles of individuals in political conflicts have a tendency to be exaggerated. When individuals in central positions are replaced, the systems seem to survive and continue more or less as before.

Many argue that nonviolence is more effective than violence. In most social movements there is not even a discussion about violent means; the only interesting topic is which nonviolent techniques are appropriate for the campaign in front of them.

That violence creates new problems is an experience many have discovered. New conflicts, often far away from the focus they are interested in, pop up as a result of the use of violence. These remove their centre of attention and withdraw resources they could otherwise have used on their main goals.

Two overlapping traditions

The history of nonviolence has two traditions with some connecting points: the pacifistic and the pragmatic traditions. In the pacifist tradition, we include nonviolent ideas, aspects, views and visions from religions, philosophies, ethics and lifestyles. For pacifists no goal justifies killing other human beings. Many pacifists are against all forms of harming humans and other living beings. The pragmatic school regards nonviolent actions as being important and effective as political tools, a collection of techniques, and as means for communication, for revolutions, for a social movement, and as a system of defence. Many within the pacifist school actively use the methods within the pragmatic tradition, but the majority of those using the nonviolent skills do not share the pacifist views.

In the past, the pacifist traditions were larger. Pacifism has never been a majority view, but historically pacifist practitioners of nonviolence used to outnumber pragmatists. In modern times, we have the opposite situation. Those using active nonviolence for pragmatic reasons now outnumber pacifists.

In the following sections, I shall tell the story of both these traditions and distinguish the characteristics of each of them. Then I will see where there are overlaps and describe the latest developments within the research on and practice of nonviolence.

The pacifist tradition

Religious traditions tend to dominate the history of pacifist nonviolence. Inspired by holy scriptures, gurus, gods, imams, priests and other leading persons from different religions, there have probably always been groups of religious believers who were committed to nonviolence. Theistic pacifists believed that acts of violence were against the will of God and hence sinful. Some authors argue that prior to the rise of the leading religions of today, other faith systems with female goddesses rather than male gods were more peaceful than those now prevalent.

Within all religions you will find representatives who do not find any justifications for the use of violence in their respective scriptures and oral traditions. But these are usually exceptions: most religious believers justify the use of violence as a means of defence in conflict situations, be that defence of attacked individuals, groups or states. There is no one 'correct' interpretation of holy books, but nearly all of them tell stories where the god(s) goes to war for a good cause and uses extremely violent means against the enemies. Holy texts, such as The Lun Yu,¹ Wu Ching,² Bhagavad Gita,³ Koran,⁴ New Testament,⁵ Tanakh,⁶ Talmud,⁷ Tao-te-ching,⁸ Guru Granth Sahib⁹ and Veda¹⁰ are all interpreted in many different ways on the question of justification of violence. For many followers it is just as easy to find quotations in these texts which give good reason for the use of violence as it is for others to find guidance for a pacifistic conviction.

Within every religion we find sects that are more consistent pacifists than the mainstream followers. Within Christianity, so-called 'peace churches' such as the Brethren, the Mennonites and the Quakers, are examples of such sects. Two religions, Jainism and Bahá'í, are very firm in their nonviolent views and practice. For them the philosophy of nonviolence is the core of their religions.

The central part of a nonviolent philosophy is that the use of violence is morally wrong; that the aims do not justify the means. The most widespread understanding of nonviolence is the rejection of killing human beings. But most nonviolent philosophies have a much more nuanced view than this. They regard all sorts of physical and psychological harm against human beings as violations of the nonviolent norm. And many expand the scope to include not only human beings, but all sorts of living creatures. Some will include the whole global ecosystem as well as material objects.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi used the concept *ahimsa* in his philosophy. *Ahimsa* occurs in *Bhagavad-Gita* and is normally translated as ‘nonviolence’ or ‘non-harm’. In the *Bhagavad Gita*, the concept is used narrowly, with other terms describing many other forms of ‘no injury’ or ‘no harm’. Gandhi expands the use of it to include a number of different injuries. In the Gandhian philosophy it is not only a question of physical actions but he argued that *ahimsa* should be a principle guiding humans in their thoughts, words and deeds. Well aware of human nature, he was clear about the impossibility to completely fulfil such a norm, but that does not make it impossible to make every effort to reduce injury on other living creatures to an absolute minimum.

Gandhi has wrongly been criticized for promoting passivity, whereas in reality he argued that passivity itself could be violence: ‘every act of injury to a living creature and endorsement of such an act by refraining from non-violent effort, whenever possible, to prevent it, is a breach of *ahimsa*.’¹¹ This attitude so widens the concept as to make it an act of violence to abstain from efforts to prevent injurious acts, for instance suppression, manipulation, exploitation (Næss 1974: 48).

It can be useful to ask a few questions of this view. The first one is, is it universal? Shall the norm guide us in all situations and is it applicable for all human beings? Gandhi himself was not always clear on this point. There are situations in his text where he argues in favour of putting an end to life of a living being. One example is euthanasia. He describes a situation with a sick calf and the only way to end the terrible suffering is by giving the calf a deadly dose of poison. He adds: ‘It was a surgical operation, and I should do exactly the same thing with my child, if he were in the same predicament’ (Galtung and Næss 1955: Ch. 3) This is a side of the Gandhian view on nonviolence not widely known or accepted today.

What about other exceptional cases? What if someone falls in the river and cannot swim? When a brave swimmer tries to help, if the person in danger panics, the only way to rescue him is to knock him unconscious. Is that a violation of the *ahimsa* norm? Even if it includes physical violence, most people would easily justify such an act of unselfish and brave action. There are similarities in some of the common arguments for a national military defence and the situation with someone trying to save the life of others by inflicting some pain on them. The moral justification for military defence includes the idea that it can be right to sacrifice a few to save many. Few wars have been started without someone trying to justify them with arguments that they are carried out to defend higher values. The pacifist traditions do not accept such justifications of the use of violence in war situations. Neither do they justify slavery, colonialism, patriarchy or imperialism. These are all violent institutions justified by the majority just a few generations ago. Moral norms are seldom static. They change over time and differ from context to context.

For pacifists, it is more complicated to judge actions which include the harming of oneself. Many persons within the nonviolent traditions have of their own free will done harm to their own bodies. Fasts and hunger strikes are two well-known types of action. Prisoners all over the world have used hunger strikes as a means to get attention for their demands. Gandhi went on open-ended hunger strikes on several occasions. On 11 June 1963, the Buddhist monk, Thich

Quang Duc, burned himself to death in protest against the Vietnam War. Thich Quang Du was protesting against the way the administration of the Vietnamese prime minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, was oppressing the Buddhist religion during the war. Several monks and nuns followed him. Four US citizens also self-immolated in protest against the US attack on Vietnam. These extremely painful forms of suicide are controversial in many respects. Within most religions, actions like these have relatively few supporters even if there is a deep respect for those who do end their lives in this way. Many believe that such actions will be rewarded after they pass away.

It is important to understand the variations among different religious contexts when it comes to judging actions like these. For some, like most Christians, the death is much more definite than for others. For a Hindu, with thousands more lives on earth, the passing away is much less dramatic. For Gandhi, the hunger strike was an action to show how much he was willing to suffer for the cause he was struggling with. He was solely responsible for the action and possible death. When political prisoners in Christian cultures are close to dying in hunger strikes, the media and public opinion often blame others (for instance, political leaders) for the possible death of a prisoner. To die is a very different process in different religions.

Another factor of difference, when it comes to the use of violence, is whether or not ethical norms are seen as universal. Do they apply to all human beings? In the Western traditions there are widespread views that norms are valid for all or none. In, for instance, the Hindi tradition there are different norms depending on your karma and cast. For a Sadhu,¹² it is a norm to avoid the use of violence in every situation, while someone from the warrior caste, the Kshatriyas,¹³ has a duty to use violent means to defend his people. Gier characterizes Hinduism as ‘relative nonviolence’ and gives several reasons for this: ‘(1) the prohibition against killing is relative to the person, yogis and Brahmins taking the vow most strictly; (2) it is also relative to the occasion, such as killing in war, in self-defence, and in sacrifice; and (3) it is relative to individual self-interest’ (Gier 2004: 34).

Gandhi was not advocating a traditional Hindu view on these matters. He argued that the norm of ahimsa was universal and he opposed the common view among Hindus that a military defence is a necessity. Gandhi was often in doubt and experimented with different activities. He tested a number of diets, political actions and views on political and moral questions. Most of his writings are dated. In his original writings you can always see on which specific date he wrote each letter, article or comment. The reason is that he was always prepared to change his mind when he learned new things. He told his readers that, if in his writings they found several opinions on the same subject, they should trust the latest. This option for changing even your core values is important to remember when reading texts by or on Gandhi.

Gandhi grew up in a home with a very strong relationship with his deeply religious mother. She belonged to a sect that combined Hindu and Muslim beliefs and she welcomed Christians and Jains in their house. One of the great Jain saints of modern India, Shrimad Rajchandra, settled many of Gandhi’s spiritual doubts and was a significant personal inspiration for him: local people referred to Rajchandra as ‘Gandhi’s Guru’ (Hunter 2003).

For Gandhi, philosophy was not enough. His vision was to develop and build a whole lifestyle based on nonviolent principles. He used the terms ‘Nonviolence for the Weak’ about the pragmatic use of nonviolent techniques and ‘Nonviolence of the Strong’ for those who committed themselves to a nonviolent lifestyle. That lifestyle was a totality of self-discipline, undemanding lifestyle, an inner search for truth, the use of non-cooperation against unjust laws and decisions, constructive work,¹⁴ and civil courage to confront the opponent.

Among the famous advocates of nonviolence based on a religious belief we find Leo Tolstoy, Martin Luther King, Jar and Gandhi. For them, human life had an ultimate value, higher than

everything else. Nothing was important enough to sacrifice human lives. This faith led them to a pacifist position and guided their activities in life. For many, nonviolence became part of their lifestyle and influenced all parts of their life. In daily life, nonviolence could decide what to eat, how to travel, what to consume, how to relate to other human beings (and nature), how to act in order to take responsibility for your local community, and what to do for leisure. People who lived with Gandhi, like 'JP'¹⁵ (Narain 1978) and Narayan Desai¹⁶ (Desai 1980), use the term 'Total Revolution' to describe the extensive implications of a nonviolent lifestyle. Political and social revolution are not enough; in addition there must be an inner revolution in each individual. And both JP and Narayan Desai are clear that the change within every individual is by far the most difficult one.

Within this lifestyle-orientation we find the most obvious overlap between the pacifist tradition and the pragmatic tradition. Many, although not all, of those committed to a nonviolent lifestyle also tend to be engaged in nonviolent actions of different sorts. They include in their lifestyle a societal engagement and take part in civil society activities against what they regard as unjust, immoral or simply wrong policies and decisions.

The pragmatic tradition

The pragmatic tradition of nonviolence has its roots in those parts of society that have fought with peaceful means for freedom, democracy and respect for human rights. These tools are used by stakeholders to influence a conflict situation. They have adopted different nonviolent strategies and techniques and used them in their struggle against inhuman ideologies, policies, systems, decisions and laws. Their choice of means has been based more on what is effective than on ethical guidelines and moral values. Even if we can trace their history back further, it is fair to say that they have developed and been used more in the last 100 years. Today, the majority of those who deal with nonviolence, whether they use the term or not, belong to the pragmatic tradition.

Nonviolent techniques are frequently used in most modern social and political movements. Within women's networks, trade unions, environmental groups, solidarity movements, peace organizations and other parts of civil society, nonviolent actions are used regularly to promote their ideas and struggle for their causes. Nonviolent actions are used either to create wider support for their goals, to directly reach their aims, or in order to prevent their opponents from achieving theirs.

What is meant by 'nonviolence' in the pragmatic school? It is obvious that there are diverse definitions used by different authors and activists. Many practitioners have never needed or wanted to propose a full and distinct definition, but when asked have said that they 'don't use serious physical violence against other human beings'. Others have wider definitions. Some will exclude all forms of psychological violence as well. At one extreme of a spectrum we find people who merely 'try to avoid killing humans', while at the other there are those who will avoid 'all disturbance of the harmony in life'. The latter ones you will find among those who use nonviolent actions as a part of their lifestyle. The majority of nonviolent activists belong somewhere in the middle, but closer to 'not killing' than 'perfect harmony'.

Whatever definition is used, there is one more aspect of these actions we need to clarify. Is it a nonviolent action just because it avoids the use of violence? In the early phase of his writing, Gandhi used the term 'passive resistance'. That could be interpreted as nonviolence being some form passivity; not doing anything. This is a misunderstanding we still find used in present discussions and in media coverage of nonviolent actions and movements. Gandhi changed the term to 'ahimsa' and the English interpretation: nonviolence. Later he used Satyagraha, which

literally means ‘to keep to the truth’.¹⁷ The point here is that we need to make clear what we mean by nonviolence. Vinthagen (2005: 136–46) has developed and clarified the definition of the concept. He argues that in addition to ‘without violence’ it must also be ‘against violence’. It is not enough that an activity is carried out without the use of violence. To fulfil the criteria of being labelled nonviolence it must in addition be done with the aim of reducing or eliminating violence.

Nonviolent actions can be categorized in three broad groups: protests, non-cooperation and interventions.

Nonviolent protests

Nonviolent protests are actions of peaceful opposition but not going as far as refusing to cooperate or directly intervene in the situation. The use of symbols, marches, picket-lines and protest meetings are typical examples of nonviolent protest. A wide variety of actors are using such techniques on a regular basis. For more examples, see Chapter 3 in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Sharp 1973). A frequent goal for nonviolent protests is to communicate a message of opposition. It can be seen as a voice against the establishment when the formal political channels do not give them a say in decision making. The protests themselves are a visual means of communication, but often they are combined with slogans, symbols or catchphrases which explain the message. Protests are normally just one step in a chain of activities which leads to more communication between representatives from the opposition and delegates from those in positions of power. Thousands of protests take place in the local, regional and global arena every day.

Non-cooperation

Non-cooperation is well known from trade unions and their use of strikes. They put pressure on their employers by refusing to fulfil their role as producers. But these same methods are used by many other actors and in many different contexts.

To decrease or withdraw completely the normal level of cooperation changes the power relation between the actors. The main idea behind such actions is that political, social or economic power depends on some level of cooperation. These types of power can be influenced by changing the level of cooperation. The level of cooperation is based on several factors. Cooperation may exist because it benefits the involved actors or it can be based on fear of the consequences of refusing to cooperate. The fear is normally based on knowledge about possible forms of punishments. States are well known for threats of punishments like trials, fines, imprisonments, tortures and death penalties. Other actors can force people to be obedient by threats of social exclusion, withdrawal of support and – as for state actors – physical or psychological punishment. The most frequent reasons for people’s cooperation, in addition to self-benefit, are ignorance and unawareness. The norm is to obey, follow orders and regulations and not behave differently from others. For non-cooperation to take place it is necessary, but not sufficient, to remove, fear, ignorance and obedience.

Nonviolent interventions

Nonviolent intervention is the last of the three categories of nonviolent actions. These are actions in which some form of direct involvement from someone who originally was not part in the conflict takes place. By directly intervening in a situation, the persons taking part in it

often expose themselves to higher risks and the consequences can be both more immediate and more serious. The interventionists can, depending on their activity, be stakeholders in the conflict. Nonviolent interventions take place in many contexts. Someone intervening when a single person is attacked on the street is a small-scale example. Members of Shanti Sena¹⁸ interpositioning themselves between fighting Muslims and Hindus in Indian cities is an example on a group level. In the last two decades we have seen people from the peace movement act not just in their home country but by going to war zones. During the Vietnam War most activists demonstrated in their own cities or gathered outside US embassies around the world. With the wars in the Balkans we saw the first massive wave of activists moving into the battle field. It had been done earlier, but only in small numbers. In the present wars in Palestine, Colombia, Sri Lanka and Iraq the nonviolent actions inside the countries at war are substantially bigger than in any previous war. Some of these actions are there to support the local civil society; others are carried out as 'third'¹⁹ parties acting with their own agendas. Still, it is important to recognize that for most wars there are no strong movements, neither inside nor outside the combat zone. For the majority of wars, the nonviolent initiatives are still to be born.

Civil disobedience

Civil disobedience is one traditional form of nonviolent action that deserves some extra attention. It is a form of action that often triggers strong reactions and it is used in all cultures, many contexts and by all sorts of actors. The definition of civil disobedience is an action which fulfils the following four criteria:

- 1 A violation of a law or generally accepted norm.
- 2 It is done without the use of violence.
- 3 It is done in full openness.
- 4 It is done with a serious commitment.

A few words of explanation for each of these four points will make it easier to grasp this form of nonviolent intervention. The first one just says that the action is illegal or contradicts generally accepted norms in the society. This makes it controversial and provokes reactions from several actors. The second criterion is the one which specifies that civil disobedience is a nonviolent action. Exactly what is meant by nonviolence is debated. That no humans shall be physically hurt is commonly accepted, but many will accept some degree of psychological aggression and symbolic sabotage of material objects. The third criterion is the one which makes these illegal actions unique. Committing an illegal activity and being open about it puts strong demands on the actor and creates reactions among those who are observing or are parts in the conflict. Here there is a requirement that the people using this form of action shall face the consequences of their activities. The implications of that are that the activists shall not try to avoid being arrested or stay away from coming trials. A public 'confession' of what they have done is often included in these actions. The last criterion is included in order to separate these actions from 'funny' or purely spectacular activities.

That the action by definition is illegal makes it very controversial. No establishment can ever support such actions and they frequently condemn them as 'anti-democratic' and dangerous. From history we know that such actions have been used by most movements that have worked for more and better democracy. Well known are the actions of civil disobedience used by the Abolitionist Movement in the US against slavery, the suffragists in their struggle for the universal right to vote, the Civil Rights Movement for equal rights for all citizens, the workers'

movements for their right to organize themselves in unions, the anti-conscription movements for their right to conscientious objection, and the environmental movement for the right to a safe environment. Looking back, it is obvious that the uses of civil disobedience have been to the benefit of democratic development.

Nonviolence as antithesis of violence

Violence has been defined and categorized by Johan Galtung (Galtung 1969, 1990, 1996). His terminologies are direct violence, structural violence and cultural violence. In short: direct violence is harming others with intention. Structural violence is the harm done by sociopolitical structures and decisions that deprive someone of their access to basic needs necessary for fulfilling one's full potentials in life. Cultural violence is the cultural justification of direct and structural violence. Each of them has their antithesis in the context of nonviolence.

Direct nonviolence

Direct nonviolence is the use of nonviolent techniques to influence conflicts without the use of violence. The full scale of pragmatic nonviolent methods and strategies are integrated parts of direct nonviolence. Direct nonviolence is used to directly confront those decisions, laws and systems that do not treat all humans equally. The struggle for the abolition of slavery, decolonialization, removal of patriarchal structures, resistance against wars and imperialistic policies are all full of direct nonviolence. People have used direct nonviolence against illegitimate power-holders and faced armed police and military forces for hundreds of years. Many of them with successful results.

Structural nonviolence

Structural nonviolence consists of those structures in our society that promote cooperation, reconciliation, openness, equality and peaceful actions in conflict situations. Democratic institutions and systems are examples of such structures. Democracy is here meant as something much more than the parliamentary state systems we find in many Western states today. Consensus, inclusiveness, transparency and accountability are important elements in a real democracy. And these are all elements in many traditional communities. A nonviolent societal structure will to a large degree be the result if political, economical, cultural, and social human rights are fulfilled. More specifically, structural nonviolence is those parts of a society which open up for nonviolent handling of conflicts regarding human rights. When there is unequal distribution of resources, freedoms, and rights, a nonviolent structure gives people the possibility to handle such conflicts by peaceful means. In this case, 'peaceful' involves more than the tools of direct nonviolence. It includes many sorts of mediation, conflict transformation and reconciliation as well.

Cultural nonviolence

Cultural nonviolence includes those parts of our culture that transmit traditions of nonviolent behavior and which commemorate and honour nonviolent values and qualities. We can find nonviolent traditions in most cultures, religions and philosophies. While rarely the dominant tendency, they still formed important parts of norms and systems of behaviour in relation to

other human beings and/or nature. Nonviolent ways of handling conflicts can be traced far back in history. Even in times of instability and in the midst of violent conflicts we find individuals and groups who have approached the situation with the use of nonviolent techniques. We have in mind here not those who avoided conflict, but rather those who actively took part, but using peaceful means. Often they have been regarded as wise and sensible women and men. Among indigenous people many of these nonviolent values, techniques and ethics are still ruling their communities. Within movements, organizations and networks many of these qualities are integrated and important elements.

The Culture of Nonviolence has deep roots in human history. Just as in today's media, so too our written history is dominated by actions of violence. But despite violent clashes, the capabilities to cooperate have characterized human life since early days. Individual humans have sacrificed their lives for the community on many occasions in our history. Altruistic behaviour has always been regarded as a respected virtue. Human societies could not have developed without a strong force of cooperation and the capacity to solve conflicts without the use of violence.

A problem for those who search for the peaceful roots in our civilizations is that the nonviolent behaviours have not been recognized as important enough to be documented. Probably nonviolent ways of handling conflicts have been so widespread that they have never been paid any specific attention. We still see that tendency today. Almost all research on conflicts focuses on the most violent ones. Societal conflicts seem only to be interesting when the groups involved are using belligerent means, and domestic conflicts are only studied when individuals are beating and/or killing each other. This focus has been so strong that some have redefined conflict and only count those cases which include violence. Other conflicts are hardly regarded as conflicts at all. But it is among the peaceful conflicts that we can find the most interesting cases of how to handle conflicts nonviolently. One of the aims for research on conflicts should be to learn about how to handle future conflicts as peacefully as possible. In order to be skilled at peaceful conflict handling we should carefully study the most peaceful cases in our history. When military officers of today have almost every military battle since the Napoleonic wars in their curriculum, peaceworkers should have a similar history of nonviolent conflicts in theirs. The need to document nonviolent cases cannot be underestimated.

Waves of nonviolence

The concept of Nonviolent Revolution has in the past two decades gone through a renovation and transformation. From the early 1980s and up till today the number of movements that successfully have confronted governments and parliaments and demanded change in their leadership has increased enormously. The pragmatic use of nonviolent strategies in struggles for revolutionary goals is the dominant tendency. In the same period only a handful of armed movements have achieved successes in their fight against states. This change in means for victorious revolutionary movements will have an impact on the concepts, theories, research on and use of nonviolence for decades to come.

The focus in the following is those movements that have used mainly nonviolent means in their struggle and which have been successful in toppling the leadership of a state. Only cases from countries with a relatively strong and organized civil society are included. The numerous examples of movements that have not (or not yet) achieved their goals are not forgotten, but are not included in this chapter. Neither are the many social movements which effectively have used nonviolent means in their struggle for other goals than a regime change. The large

majority of social movements from all parts of civil society use nonviolence on an almost daily basis in their struggles. For those focusing on questions of gender equality, environmental problems, human rights, solidarity with the oppressed, freedom of speech and other important issues, almost all apply only nonviolent techniques in their repertoire of means.

There is also a chronological limitation in the cases taken up in this chapter, namely the period from the early 1980s to the present time. Preliminary research indicates that an important change in the use of means by those movements who worked for a change took place around that time. The trend for such movements had since 1945 been that successful movements who aimed for a change in the present regime based their strategies mainly on the use of armed struggle. Since Solidarity in Poland, an important strategy for successful movements has been holding massive demonstrations in central places of the capitals.

This is not the place to describe in detail each of these cases, but a few from the first wave will be used as illustrative cases. The key lesson here is that the nonviolent strategies and techniques *characterize* the successful nonviolent revolutions in recent decades. Most of the cases can be categorized into four more or less separate waves. The cases in each wave are linked together in different ways. Cooperation and inspiration are the main common factors.

Wave one: Poland, Bolivia, Uruguay and Philippines

Poland, 1980

The first case in this wave is Solidarity in Poland. After two centuries of armed uprising, the Polish workers in 1980 tried to fight the regime with non-armed means and they formed the independent trade movement, Solidarity. The Catholic Church and the Polish pope played a crucial role in inspiring and giving courage to individuals in the years ahead. The visit to Poland by the Pope in June 1979 mobilized some of the largest gatherings in Poland ever. No one was in doubt about the Pope's view on communism.

Solidarity is noted for its use of symbols in its struggle. Not only its flag and the Catholic cross, but a number of monuments, historic dates and well-known persons were used to express solidarity's views in times of censorship. Kubik, in his book *The Power of Symbols against the Symbols of Power* (1994), gives the reader an excellent and sophisticated cultural understanding of these nonviolent means.

On 1 July 1980, localized strikes broke out all over the country as the result of a government decree that raised meat prices by almost 100 per cent.²⁰ In August 1980, the Gdansk Strike Committee (MKS) was formed and 21 demands were presented. By early September, agreements were signed in three cities giving the workers the right to form trade unions and to strike.

On 21 September, the Sunday Mass was heard on national radio for the first time since the Second World War. During the whole autumn, strikes and court cases were intermingled with talks between Solidarity and the government. The Supreme Court officially registered Solidarity on 10 November. On 5 December, Warsaw Pact countries met for a summit in Moscow and four days later the Soviet Union initiated military exercises all around Poland; fears grew of an invasion like in Hungary 1956 or Prague 1968. By early February next year General Jaruzelski was named prime minister, asking for a three-month 'truce'. Industrial and general strikes occurred in several parts of the country. Starting in the shipyards in Gdansk, the strikes spread to many sectors and cities in the country. The scope of the protests and the lack of violence created a situation where the government was forced to start negotiations with Solidarity. By the end of autumn close to 10 million people in a total population of 35 million

joined the protests. The unions created a multitude of diverse forums for free expression of opinions. An Independent Student Union won recognition, farmers began to organize the independent Rural Solidarity. The whole of 1981 continued with strikes and recognition of more organizations. The peak was reached on 13 December, when Jaruzelski declared 'martial law' and a number of Solidarity leaders and activists were arrested.

The coming spring, Solidarity started to organize underground and formed a Temporary Co-ordinating Commission (TKK). During the following 12 months, a number of demonstrations took place but not with large numbers of participants. In October, a new law dissolved independent self-governing trade unions, and by New Year martial law is suspended. The following year the visit by the Pope in June resulted in the lifting of martial law and in October Lech Walesa was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The struggle continued and Solidarity asked people to boycott the local government elections 1984. The following year a major shift starts in the Soviet Union with the election of Gorbachev as the General Secretary of the Communist Party. In 1989, Solidarity got 35 per cent of the seats in Sejm²¹ and 99 out of 100 seats in the new upper house, the Senate. It is a without doubt a good result after almost a decade of nonviolent actions. That Lech Walesa was elected president on December 9 1989 can be seen as the end of the revolution.

Poland became some sort of model and source of inspiration for many other movements worldwide. Even if the contexts were very different and the means also differed, the Polish example encouraged other oppositional movements to organize large-scale nonviolent resistance and confront those in power.

Bolivia, 1982

Bolivia became the next scene for a nonviolent revolution. The nonviolent mobilization started in 1977 when three women from the mining districts started a hunger strike in the capital, La Paz. The well-known woman Domitila Barrios de Chungra joined them and soon many activities around the country followed. Bolivia is a country from a different political and cultural context, but with some similarities to Poland. A strong trade union is one important common factor. General Luis Garcia Meza led a bloody coup in 1980. The committee for Defence of Democracy (CONADE) was established in spring 1980 and mobilized the political opposition. The Bolivian trade union, Central Obrera Boliviana (COB), joined them and started to organize for strikes in the mines and, later, general strikes. Since the majority of the population are farmers, the opposition gathered new strength when the farmers union joined them. After five general strikes with increasing participation and a growing number of farmers in demonstrations, the generals had to step down in 1982 and give governmental power to those who won the elections in 1980. Bolivia is not well known for nonviolent resistance, but there are many interesting parallels to Poland. When Lech Walesa got the Nobel Peace Prize he invited representatives from the trade union, COB. There were obviously good links between Solidarity and COB. In both cases, the workers' organizations cooperated with the farmers' unions and generated a strong coalition which decided to use nonviolent means. The armed tradition from Che Guevara turned out to be less effective and popular than the strikes, demonstrations and boycotts.

Uruguay, 1985

After the coups d'état in June 1973, nobody challenged the military junta in Uruguay. It was regarded as one of the most totalitarian and brutal regimes in Latin America. All forms of

opposition were met with cruel reactions. People got tortured, killed or disappeared. In an effort to legitimate its power, the dictatorship organized a referendum over a new constitution in 1980. The proposed constitution would institutionalize the military rule over the country, but was rejected by 57 per cent of the population.

In the end of August 1983, a small demonstration was organized in front of the small office of Servicio Paz y Justicia (Serpaj) in Montevideo. Inside, three people had been fasting for 15 days and more and more people gathered outside in solidarity. The authorities had cut off light, water and the telephone to the office. One night a new form of protest was born: *caceroleada*. It means banging on pots, pans and other kitchen equipment to make sounds in protest. The sound was soon heard everywhere in the city. Police and military could not do much as long as people were inside their houses. With open windows the sounds got around.

Serpaj was declared illegal by the government soon after the first large *caceroleada* but grew quickly to a major national human rights movement through these actions. Labour and student organizations demonstrated separately in the capital Montevideo on several occasions that autumn. The common and main demand was new elections. In early 1984, labour and civil strikes pressed the military into negotiations with the major opposition parties. A result of these discussions was the military's agreement to hold national elections in November, in which the opposition Colorado Party's Julio Maria Sanguinetti emerged victorious. He took office in March 1985.

Philippines, 1986

Asia was the next continent to experience a successful nonviolent revolution. Corazon Cojuangco Aquino went into exile with her husband, opposition leader Benigno Aquino. On his return to the Philippines, he was shot dead on the airport runway on the orders of Marcos. When Corazon returned home for his wake and funeral, she was persuaded to become leader of the opposition. In the years following her husband's death, she led numerous demonstrations and stood against Marcos in the election of 1986. In February that year, popular uprisings took place at military camps in Quezon City, outside Manila. President Ferdinand Marcos met serious opposition after 13 years of martial law. Marcos felt confident that he would win and announced presidential elections. So blatant was Marcos' use of fraud in the elections that several electoral returning officers walked out in protest. The Catholic Bishops Conference of the Philippines issued a document that was read from pulpits throughout the nation. They declared that the people had a duty to resist, nonviolently. One million people took part in demonstrations at Luerta Park on 4 February. Two weeks later, more than two million turned up in the park. Thousands of civilians surrounded the military tanks Marcos ordered out on the streets to stop the demonstrations. Active 'fraternization' by the demonstrators turned many soldiers into supporters of the opposition. Later, parts of the armed forces declared that Mrs Aquino was the true winner of the elections. Massive demonstrations of people in yellow t-shirts took place in the capital to support Mrs Aquino. The yellow colour was used by Aquino as the symbol of her movement. Whenever she was seen in public she dressed in clear yellow clothes. That was why she got the nickname the 'Canary bird'. By the end of February, Marcos fled the country and Corazon Aquino took her place as the Philippines' legally elected president.

Wave two: Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

The year of change in Eastern Europe was 1989. With the collapse of communism in Poland, the legitimacy for one-party systems in the rest of the Soviet bloc disappeared. In country after

country people took to the streets and demanded change in the regimes. The most spectacular event was of course the fall of the Berlin Wall, but quite a few other episodes worth mentioning took place in several countries east of the 'Iron Curtain'.

By the year 1989, the communist regimes in six Eastern and Central European countries met nonviolent movements which undermined their one-party system. During the year to come, free multiparty elections were held. Many similarities can be seen in these events. Popular movements used nonviolent means to put pressure on their political leadership and the Soviet Union hesitated to come to the aid of the communist establishments. All of the old communist leaderships found themselves in difficult situations that they could not cope with. They did not know how to respond to the lack of violence from the protesters as they had trained their police and military troops to handle violent uprisings. With international television the price became much higher than they could afford.

Nonviolent actions from an organized civil society played an important role in the following countries: Hungary, East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Bulgaria, Moldavia, Mongolia, Lithuania, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Latvia and Russia.

Wave three: Sub-Saharan Africa

In Sub-Saharan Africa a similar wave of massive nonviolent actions removed the old regimes in country after country. The opposition in Benin had been growing for a long time and drew further inspiration from the dismantling of the Berlin Wall. With the break-up of The Soviet Union in 1991, several of the francophone countries saw the possibility of following the path of Benin. The student movement in China in 1989 and the bicentennial of the French revolution gave extra energy to new movements. Nonviolent and relatively well-organized oppositions forced the former marxist regimes to open up for more pluralistic political systems. In countries like Burkina Faso, Guinea, Senegal, Mali and Malawi, similar waves of democratization as in Benin followed. And the most well-known case, South Africa, got rid of the apartheid system after a long and mainly nonviolent struggle in 1994.

In 2001, President Ratsiraka of Madagascar faced a well-organized opposition that did not accept the official results of the elections. Large-scale demonstrations, strikes and peaceful protests forced him to resign in 2002.

Wave four: Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Lebanon

The next wave is still going on. With the massive bombing by NATO of Serbia in 1999, the opposition against Slobodan Milosevic was weakened. But the experiences from nonviolent opposition during 1996–97 became the base for a new and better organized opposition, aiming for the removal of Milosevic in the elections in autumn 2000. Following a number of demonstrations opposing the official results of the elections, close to a million people gathered in Belgrade on 5 October. They filled the city, occupied the government-controlled TV station and parliament and Milosevic resigned. The student movement Otpor was crucial in this revolution. Activists from Otpor later trained students in other countries and have worked as consultants for similar movements in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. These three countries went through similar revolutions during the 2003–05. A similar revolution took place in Lebanon in 2005. And for several of the former Soviet states oppositional movements are organizing for analogous revolutions.

What was the role of nonviolence in these cases?

Each of the revolutions mentioned above is unique. But they also have several common aspects. All of them include a pragmatic nonviolent strategy, with large masses of people gathered at central places. The aim is to show strength, unity and power. In most cases an election was part of the process – either the opposition successfully demanding an election, or an election taking place and the opposition accusing the old regime of fraud to stay in power. Most of these cases have an element of external support of some sort. That could be political and/or moral support for the opposition or it could be practical help in organizing, training and accomplishment of the protests. One of the most debated forms of assistance is financial transferences from foreign states or foundations to local opposition groups.

This discussion is obviously important and is one which will need more attention in the years to come. Some of the questions are: To what degree will external funding influence the agenda of the opposition? Will external funding have a different function in these conflicts depending on who the funders are?

The role and impact of financial, practical, political and moral support have not yet been sufficiently researched. Neither are there many studies of external forces intentionally creating problems for an opposition and trying to hinder them to achieve their goals. One crucial question is, if some intervention from abroad is important, necessary or sufficient for local movements to be victorious. Another important and disputed question is to what degree external support influences the agenda of the incoming power-holders once they are in power. These are all important tasks for research on nonviolent revolutions in the years to come.

Not enough to remove the old regime

The long list of successful nonviolent political revolutions all have one problematic consequence: they have been more successful in removing a regime than in replacing it with something better. Only a few of them have had a well prepared strategy for building a new and better society when the old one falls. Some changes are identifiable in the majority of cases:

- They introduce multiparty elections.
- Their foreign policies are more friendly towards the US and the EU.
- Neo-liberal market economies are introduced.

The new economic system with extensive privatization and liberalization results in a growing economy. The surplus gets bigger and bigger. In principle there is more wealth available for each citizen. But since the market economy doesn't include a system for a fair distribution of the surplus it ends up in the hands of the few. The gap between rich and poor tends to be deeper and wider than before. That results in a deadly form of structural violence, with serious consequences for the weakest ones in these societies. In summery: it is a tendency that the modern nonviolent revolutions end up with more structural violence.

This side of the nonviolent revolutions is not anything unique to them. Almost all states worldwide have been included in the new global economy and are facing similar problems. That the changes of societies only occur 'at the surface' by changing the people at the top level and that no profound social changes occur was also the result when Gandhi evaluated the liberation of India. His firm belief was that it was a consequence of too much non-cooperation and too little 'constructive work'. Gandhi's conclusion was that for a country to change into a

nonviolent society it is necessary to start building the new nonviolent society long before the 'takeover' and, in addition to changing the political structures, it is essential to change the social structures as well. In addition to that, Gandhi eagerly argued that without an 'inner revolution' there could never be a nonviolent society. To change the attitudes and spirits of each individual was, according to Gandhi, not done sufficiently during the struggle against British rule and that is why the liberated India become a quite ordinary state, ridden by internal violent conflicts, was partitioned, and never came even close to a nonviolent state.

If the 'total revolution' in the Gandhian tradition includes changing the political power, the social structure and the inner transformation of each individual, then the waves of nonviolent revolutions presented above are only a fraction of what is needed for a nonviolent society to materialize.

The future

Peace research on nonviolence has never received the same resources and attention from the leading universities and institutions as studies on weapons, wars and other forms of violence. But after some interest in the early days of modern peace research there is a renaissance in the early part of the twenty-first century. More books are published and more studies carried out today than ever before. An impressive amount of work has been done by committed individuals in academia as well as by activists. Most if it focuses on the more pragmatic understanding of nonviolent means. Evaluations and case studies of the growing number of practitioners dominate. When it comes to developing new theories, production is still relatively meagre.

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi is the most well known among those who have developed the nonviolent theories and techniques further. He is the 'greatest' in many respects and since he passed away in 1947 none have been able to move the field forward in the same way as he did. His life, practice and ideas have served as inspirations for many who have taken up these means and used them in their practical struggles. His autobiography is called *My Experiments with Truth* and points to the leading methodology in his life. He experimented with a diverse variety of political actions, diets, forms of communities, partner relations and constructive campaigns.

Probably there will never be anyone who can match Gandhi, but there are many who can follow the same path and do 'experiments with the truth'. To use creativity and empathy to develop new nonviolent tools; test them in conflict situations and build up a record of well-documented experiences is the most important job for those interested in nonviolence in the years to come. In this work there are tasks for academics and activists from all parts of human activities.

Notes

- 1 The Analects of Confucius – supposedly sayings of Confucius, but the text was not collected and edited until some 400 years after Confucius' death. Also called 'The four books'.
- 2 Five works traditionally attributed to Confucius that form the basic texts of Confucianism. The collection of writings by Confucius and his disciples is often referred to as 'Four Books and Five Classics'.
- 3 A Sanskrit poem that is part of the Indian epic known as the Mahabharata.
- 4 (Arabic, al-Qurʾān.) The primary holy book of Islam.

- 5 The second part of the Christian Bible, which contains 27 books that form the basis of Christian belief. The New Testament canon as it is now was first listed by St Athanasius, Bishop of Alexandria, in 367. That canon gained wider and wider recognition until it was accepted by all at the Third Council of Carthage in 397. Later, certain books continued to be questioned.
- 6 The Jewish name for the Hebrew Bible. It is the sacred scripture of Judaism and the first part of the Christian Bible.
- 7 A compilation of Jewish oral law and rabbinical teachings that is separate from the scriptures of the Hebrew Bible.
- 8 (The Way and Its Power.) The basic text of the Chinese philosophy and religion known as Taoism.
- 9 The holy texts for Sikhs. The texts contains the actual words from the founders of the Sikh religion and various other saints from other religions, Hinduism and Islam included.
- 10 The sacred scripture of Hinduism of which the Upanishads form the final portion.
- 11 Gandhi, M. K. (1970) *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 37, New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India.
- 12 Hindu men (and some women) who have devoted their entire lives to the quest for moksha (liberation from the chain of lives). These holy men renounce worldly concerns and live on alms.
- 13 According to the code of Manu, a Kshatriya is a member of the military or reigning order, one of the four varna within the Vedic caste system.
- 14 ‘Constructive Work’ was to start building the future liberated India while the British still ruled the country as a colony. To be independent of British textiles by spinning, weaving and sewing your own clothes was one of several campaigns Gandhi included in the struggle for an independent state.
- 15 Jayaprakash Narayan (1902–79).
- 16 The founder of Sampurnan Kranti Vidyala (Institute for Total Revolution).
- 17 A very good explanation and discussion on these terms can be found in *Satyagraha and Group Conflict* by Næss (1974).
- 18 On the ashrams of Gandhi and Vinoba Bhave, the first seeds of Shanti Sena, the Peace Army, developed. In the 1920s, Shanti Sena became a part of the Indian struggle for independence and fostered fearless and impassioned co-workers.
- 19 This term indicates that there are only two actors in a conflict. This common misunderstanding is based on very superficial views on conflicts. A better term would be ‘n+1 party’.
- 20 One major reason for this was the demand from the Soviet Union to send large quantities of meat from Warsaw Pact countries to Moscow prior to the Olympic Games. They wanted to prove false the Western rumours that there was a lack of meat in the Soviet Union.
- 21 That was the maximum agreed in the round table discussions.

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