

Abstract

*Nonviolent Action –
A Social Practice of Resistance and Construction*

Stellan Vinthagen

Department of Peace and Development Research (Padrigu), Göteborg
University, Sweden.

This research project is a conceptual exploration of a specific social phenomenon – nonviolent action. Within the discipline of peace and development studies the dissertation explores how peace with peaceful means is possible to conceptualize. Earlier theories about nonviolence (mainly Gandhi and Sharp) are discussed in the perspective of late modern sociology (Bourdieu, Foucault, Goffman, Habermas et al) in an attempt to develop a social and practical description system. The concept of *nonviolence* combines “without-violence” and “against-violence”, differing from the better known concepts of “peaceful” or “pacifism”.

Contrary to earlier research, nonviolence is described as a multidimensional rationality and contradictory action repertoire transforming conflicts through dialectical creativity. Nonviolence seeks consensus between parties – it is argued – even in conflicts plagued by power relations, enemy images, institutionalised violence, competing truth claims, dysfunctional social relations and cultural differences of groups.

The repertoire of nonviolence is a combination of resistance and construction, expressed through *dialogue facilitation*, *normative regulation*, *power breaking* and *utopian enactment*. Nonviolent action's overriding goal is to facilitate consensus and common universal truth (Satyagraha).

Contrary to earlier research this study highlights truth-regimes, power production, manipulation and other inherent contradictions of nonviolence, while maintaining the possibility of liberation struggles against organised violence and oppression.

Based on a resulting apparatus of *social concepts* (summarised in conceptual maps) a number of possible research options and development alternatives of nonviolent practices are suggested. Taken together they point towards the possibilities of a relational, constructivist and pragmatic school of nonviolence studies and an increased potential of peaceful change in difficult conflicts and oppression systems.

Key concepts: sociology, forms of action and rationality, Jürgen Habermas, Mohandas K. Gandhi, Gene Sharp, nonviolence, nonviolent action, civil disobedience, concepts of nonviolence, nonviolent movements, power, nonviolent pragmatism, nonviolent resistance, nonviolent construction, nonviolent training, dialogue facilitation, utopian enactment, normative regulation, power breaking.

ISBN: 91 87380 65 X

Göteborg 2005