

Dealing with violence from outside the campaign/group

- How do you deal with conflicts and violence from outside the group?
- How do you prepare for encounters with representatives of the state like police or courts and the violence from them?
- How does your group take into account how people will have different experiences of the state or law enforcement (depending on gender, race, class, origin etc)? How is people’s different needs for protection being received in the group?
- How do you make sure that there are ways for people in more vulnerable positions to still participate in the action?
- How are any specific consequences/repercussions as a result of the campaign/action being taken into account? For example, will anyone run a greater risk of being harassed?

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Violence

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There are many ways to describe violence. A former Chair of War Resisters’ International, Narayan Desai, once said;

“Everything that disturbs the harmony in life is violence.”

Every school of nonviolence will have their own definition of violence; you don’t need to agree with Narayan. However, there is no doubt that violence is much more than physical violence against other humans.

Johan Galtung – direct, structural and cultural violence

Peace scholar Johan Galtung made an important contribution to the understanding of violence, by making a distinction between direct and structural violence. He defined direct violence as ‘physical harming other humans with intention’ and structural violence as ‘harm to humans as a result of injustices in our societies’. Later, Galtung added the term cultural violence to his concept. Cultural violence refers to culturally

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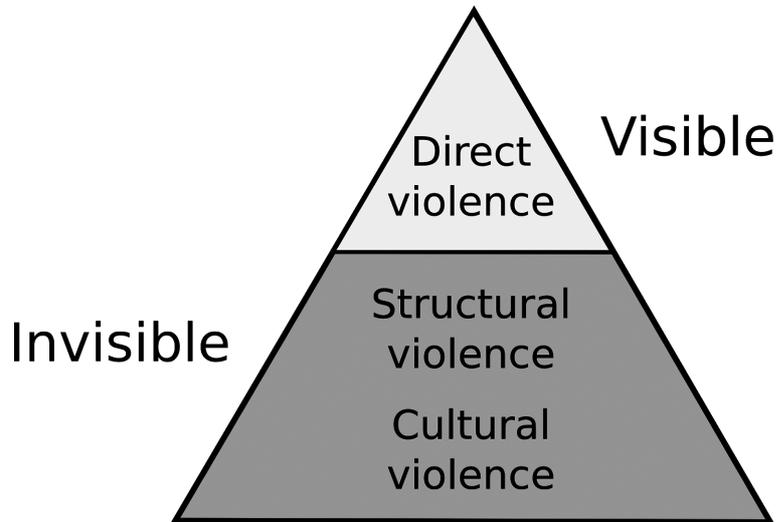
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Spectrum and cross spectrum

based justifications of direct or structural violence – cultural violence is what makes direct and structural violence appear justified, and can take the form of stories, songs, language use, aspects of religions or traditions, assumptions or stereotypes.



Peace movements have, traditionally, focused on the direct violence of the battlefields, but in recent years other forms of violence have been added to their agenda; the costs of wars reducing the budgets for health care and education, torture, school shootings, new weapon systems, and – to some degree – domestic violence. Other social movements have taken on psychological violence (bullying), violence against animals, violence against nature, and a variety of different forms of structural violence, such as poverty and economic justice issues.

Why understanding violence is important

If we try to compare the different types of violence, we can quickly encounter problems. If we focus solely on the deadly outcomes of violence against humans, we will see that they are in different 'divisions'. The number of humans killed in armed confrontations on battlefields has for some years been around 300 a day, or 100,000 a year. A huge number, but if we compare this figure with other causes of 'early deaths' in the world, traditional wars could be seen as a minor problem! According to the World Health Organisation, there are 60 million premature deaths a year, and at least half of these are due to easily curable diseases, or inadequate access to drinking water, food, and shelter. These are examples of structural violence, that are killing as many people every day as the number killed in wars each year. However, direct violence –

like war – should be understood as a manifestation of the complex structural and cultural violence that it is rooted in; this is summed up in War Resisters' International's founding declaration;

“War is a crime against humanity. I am therefore determined not to support any kind of war, and to strive for the removal of all causes of war.”

Fear of violence

Different forms of violence are feared much more than others. ‘Terrorism’ is hardly visible in statistics, while the fear of terrorism is very high. The fear of ‘terrorism’ is real, but ‘terrorism’ is not in the ‘top-10’ list of causes for early deaths in any country; the only exceptions might be countries with ongoing full scale wars. In general, the risk that you will be killed due to political or religious motivated violence is close to zero; the chance that your partner or someone else close to you will be the perpetrator is much higher. This is not meant to show disrespect for any victims of such politically-motivated violence, but it is important to consider how the fear of violence can be different to what is actually experienced, while other forms of violence are largely ignored.

How do we distinguish violence?

Sanctions are sometimes listed as a nonviolent method, as an alternative to violent conflict. However, even UN-ordered sanctions can have very violent consequences. During and after the first Gulf war in 1991, Iraq was punished with sanctions by the UN Security Council. The goal was to harm the Iraqi president Saddam Hussein, and to make him so unpopular that the people of Iraq would try to remove him. However, in a country seriously harmed by massive bombing, the effect of a near-total financial and trade embargo was devastating. By the time the sanctions were replaced with a new war (the occupation of Iraq in 2003), 1.5 million people had died as a consequence of the sanctions. This is another example of structural violence, and the total number of victims are higher than for all those killed by atomic, biological and chemical weapons in human history. One reason to oppose weapons of mass destruction is that they do not separate civilians from military, and yet these sanctions were extremely selective; Saddam Hussein and his general never lacked medicine, water, food, or shelter. The brunt of the sanctions was felt by the poor, newly born, sick, and elderly people who were unable to access the resources needed for survival.

Normative and descriptive understandings

A more theoretical discussion of violence can be useful to get a deeper understanding of the nuances of violence; to do this we can separate normative from descriptive views. A normative view takes into account the context in which the action occurs, while the descriptive tries to confine our understanding to a particular definition. Here is a short, descriptive definition of violence:

“Violence is any action that reduces the possibility for a human to live a life according to their full capacity.”

Using this definition, we could say that cutting an arm off a person is an act that reduces the capacity of a person’s life, and so should be considered violent. However, that act will in fact be judged very differently depending on who does it and why it is done. For example, paramilitaries in Colombia have used chain saws to cut off the arms of young men who refuse to join them, and this is clearly an act of brutal violence. In contrast, when a doctor removes an infected arm to prevent a patient from dying, we do not even think of that act as violence, but as life-saving medical treatment. In both cases the person loses an arm and will have a reduced quality of life, and this fits with the descriptive definition of violence above, but the normative context for these two actions places them on opposite ends of a moral spectrum.

If we enter into a discussion on violence against animals, sabotage against dead objects, destruction of nature, or all the structural or cultural forms of violence, we will soon realise that most human activities could be seen as a form of violence. The destruction of material objects is sometimes considered justified; the Ploughshare movement sabotaged deadly weapons systems, environmental activists destroy machinery used to cut down rainforest, and animal rights activists have damaged laboratories where experiments on animals are carried out. In these cases, perhaps a more important question than whether or not these actions should be labelled as ‘violent’ or ‘nonviolent’ (descriptive), is if we can justify them to ourselves (normative).

For all of us it is therefore of utmost importance to base our activities on norms we have reflected on and can defend when they are questioned. There are no easy answers to all these questions.

No More Femicides Campaign: Violence against women and intersectionality

From 2003 onwards, feminist and antimilitarist group Red Juvenil has been analysing militarism as an expression of the patriarchal domination system. This initial attempt at not hierarching different systems of oppression generates a series of questions to female activists in the network: Can we be conscientious objectors? Should we as women accompany men in their process of disobedience? How can we be rebellious, from our antimilitarist practice and from our position as women oppressed by patriarchy? Are conscientious objectors victims of patriarchy or of militarism? These questions shifted the nonviolent campaigns developed by Red Juvenil; on the one hand trying to unveil militarism from patriarchy, but at the same time understanding the activists' need for a historical and concrete understanding of the oppression they were facing as working class women.

Red Juvenil decided to reveal the structural violence towards women brought by the system of patriarchal domination and made worse by the neoliberal economic contexts we live in the city of Medellin. For this reason we have designed a campaign that aims, through direct action, training and awareness raising, to reveal the violence against women, whose ultimate expression is the murder of women: femicide. In a highly militarised city filled with armed paramilitaries, women are permanently besieged or romantically involved with armed men, and this situation becomes the perfect justification for local authorities to re-victimise women again, stating that they are part of the 'paramilitary groups'. The 'No More Femicides Campaign' aims to unravel how femicide is closely linked to the neoliberal economic model, the state and to paramilitary militarism.

Our intention – to carry out a pedagogical and action process and not thematic but of intersectional analysis of systems of domination: patriarchy, capitalism, heteronormativity, militarism, neoliberalism, imperialism, colonialism, racism – has allowed us to set the design and development of non-violent campaigns in the context of our own reality. Together we have been able to develop a radical approach towards political action, where we welcome the own thinking and emancipation of our peoples, freedom, solidarity, community and the need for constant creative change.

Nonviolence

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