

EDITORIAL

The nonviolent option today: what is it and why

Gabriella FALCICCHIO
Viorella MANOLACHE

Abstract: *Written, accepted and used in one word, nonviolence will be approached, in the thematic issue proposed by Polis, as an active creation of a different reality, considering nonviolence a necessity, positive nonviolence an “open doctrine” and “nonviolence of the brave” an option to minimize the violence and to struggle to decrease it in every context. Connected to such a conceptual “control panel”, the studies and articles – composing elements ensuring a multi- perspective of the present thematic issue (from a conquest of violence to microviolence) – accurately synthesize landmarks which define the dynamics between ratios such as violence – nonviolence or influence – influencing. The nodes/perspectives which intersect and involve the present endeavor extract their arguments from the fields of educational politics, cinematography, philosophical, pedagogical, anthropological, cultural, religious, linguistic or literary studies.*

Keywords: *positive nonviolence, nonviolence of the brave, nonviolent principle, nonviolence approaches in Political Education, cinematography, philosophy, cultural, anthropological, religious, linguistic and literary studies.*

Nonviolence, in fact, is saying a thou to each concrete being; it is to pay attention, to care, to respect, and to bestow affection towards the other; it is to feel joy that the other exists and was indeed born, and that if he were not born, we would act such that he is born; let us take it upon us

to see that he finds it to this world, we are like mothers¹.

It is no easy task to talk about nonviolence: it still scandalizes or it produces sarcasm. Its ideal appears to be utopian and who believes in its efficacy is often seen as a day-dreaming heretic or as a coward too scared to fight. Gandhi asked himself

about the “coward’s nonviolence” the nonviolence of whom renounces violence because of fear. He clearly stated that:

The path of truth is for the brave alone, never for a coward² [...].

I do believe that where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence I would advise violence. [...] But I believe that non-violence is infinitely superior to violence, forgiveness is more manly than punishment [...] Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will.³

The nonviolent option we are hereby considering is the “nonviolence of the brave” which with clarity of mind and deep reflection chooses to minimize the violence in their acts and to struggle to decrease it in every context.

Even though in the minority and made fun of, the nonviolent thought has been around for millennia and it kept on living as an underground river which nourishes and fertilizes the Earth. Nowadays, not only we have an extensive and in-depth tradition of philosophical and spiritual thought in our heritage, but we also have a remarkable amount of empirical studies linked to make branches of knowledge: social psychology, political doctrine, group dynamics, sociology, philosophy and pedagogy. The numerous branches of study and the many researchers have a hard time finding funds because they are not profitable as other research areas strongly or loosely tied to the military industry. The most

internationally acclaimed because of their studies and of their interventions are Johan Galtung and Pat Patfoort as well as Alberto L’Abate from Italy.

The Peace Studies, along with the peace practices carried out in several contexts of the world, state that nonviolence is not utopian, but as Aldo Capitini said it is “live to be lived”, growing reality and that needs to be fostered. It encompasses, as we will see, a specific choice in life. Not an easy one, but possible and fulfilling which takes roots into our inner being.

Nowadays, nonviolence has become a necessity. In this moment, more than in others in which the planet is scarred with countless wars and in which the Western world hardly ever recognizes its responsibilities, it is important to reaffirm the existence of radically alternative ways and that the solutions can be built together, if we will be able to “invent the future”, as Danilo Dolci⁴ used to say.

This is even more important for the two typical topics of another eminent researcher: Alexander Langer. The two topics are the ecological conversion and the intercultural discourse. They are two fields that are tightly linked to one another and they are both in relation with war economy. Either the excessive exploitation of natural resources in the context of a deregulated neoliberalism and the weapon trade marketing are the product of the predatory logic which is impoverishing great

part of humanity (and all the living beings on the planet) of the chance to live with dignity. It keeps Nature from regenerating itself and to offer what is necessary to everyone. It forces millions of people out of their land and hometowns which have become too dangerous.

Until we will not be able to create a way of thinking and a language capable of changing the traditional categories of the collective imagination, until we will not recognize that the most dramatic aspects of contemporary history come from a violent logic which permeates every single aspect of Western societies (politics as well as family life, social relations, education) we will not have full awareness that we can live differently. And we must act differently, as soon as possible because we are very close to a point of no return.

The levels of natural depletion, for example, reached the highest peaks in human history. The war zones do not decrease and forced migration data are as alarming as ever: more than 65 million people in 2015. These elements require immediate action but it is also urgent to ask ourselves which *Weltanschauung* allowed all this and which alternative culture we should embrace to make a change.

Nonviolence is the answer we believe in and upon which we want to build a renewed culture even with the instruments of knowledge. It is about profiting from a millennial way of thinking tradition with being

aware that nonviolence goes beyond the experiences and the studies of some important historically distinguishable people. Their philosophy and their lives are important milestones in that so nonviolence is conceived as a living and relational reality, which evolves together with people and that can find always historically adequate solutions to problems.

For this reason the word “nonviolence” is here written in one word, even in English in which the word is often hyphenated or in two words. In Italy, Aldo Capitini wanted to create the word “nonviolence” with no hyphen and no space. The meaning was clear: nonviolence is not only a complaint and an opposition to violence, to injustice, to reality as it is. It is also active creation of a different reality, that Capitini calls “reality of everyone” (*realtà di tutti*), reality liberated from limits (*realtà liberata*), celebration (*festa*) and so it is a radical transformation act.

It is so radical that Capitini does not use terms of reformism on a socio-political level, he speaks of revolution: even nonviolence is a revolution but of a totally different kind compared to past revolutions. It will be a choral and total revolution, made by everyone and capable of modifying the ontological structure of reality itself. Instead of talking about “transformation” Capitini uses “transmutation” which has a more powerful impact. Capitini’s revolution does not aim to obtain everything immediately but it is made of simple daily actions which have an

impact on reality and send it towards a different horizon⁵.

This motion is triggered by an internal dimension which is spiritual, religious in a very broad sense and not tied to historical religious confessions. Within each human being there is a chance to be “open towards the you”, the chance of *metanoia*, of a deep internal conversion which brings us to look at the other with a loving glance: every one, everyone, no one excluded.

If nonviolence has been fed by the “fathers” as well as by countless people which have not defined themselves as “friends of nonviolence”, if the forms of nonviolence are and have to be plural, Giuliano Pontara⁵ has highlighted some common and unavoidable key aspects. He separates pragmatic (or negative) violence and doctrinal (positive) violence. The first one refers to a set of conflict methods which are exempt from violence and that could be conjugated, theoretically, with whichever doctrine. The methods will change based on the definition of violence we start from and which we oppose.

Positive nonviolence, the one we are interested in, is an “open doctrine” and it is ever-changing which still keeps some cornerstones:

- the human being is capable of a nonviolent behavior and they are able to choose it;
- nonviolent competence is object of education;
- achievements in human history were reached “in spite” of

violence and wars, not “thanks to” them;

- power from the people is possible and necessary and it is based on control by the people and mass participation which Capitini calls “omnicracy”;
- in social and interpersonal dynamics, the most cooperative relations count more than the competitive ones;
- justice should be set on equality;
- the ethical disposition involves all sentient beings (not only human) and it carefully reflects on the means-goals relation;
- the fight and social change method is nonviolent and it refers to the Gandhian *satyagraha*.

These principles make it possible to trace a number of spread practices, found in all the parts of the planet in the daily life of people even when there is no explicit reference to the nonviolent tradition. It is also possible to increase the knowledge and the actions which, moved by “the hope principle”⁷, make the “nonviolent principle”⁸ within the “minimal and universal home”⁹, in other words, they build a “global human culture that unites and goes beyond all the different ways of becoming humans and the different cultures that have been made until now”¹⁰.

On this foundation, an international discourse which encompasses also these topics will foster the continuation in the Peace Studies field: from the creative and nonviolent

handling of conflicts to the peace education¹¹.

Polis journal's thematic issue confirms the sliding effect of nonviolence from a subdomain of *Peace Studies* towards that semantic area where it is possible to reassert itself as a priority term of political sciences and international relations, transported by public policies and active in the sphere of social change. Investing the term with an *essential sense resides* in the uncontested role of bibliographical files, which subsumes *texts* and *handbooks*, guides/manuals for concept use or punctually-applicative perspectives for its synchronization with the realities of the moment/the actual. One can therefore take into account the placing and timely sedimentation of nonviolence upon fertile soil already irrigated by a propensity for elasticizing and *terminological amplification*¹². A completion of semantic definitions for the concept, with significances already gathered from the registry of *constructive natures*, is implemented through an *active process*¹³ of imprinting it with *non-institutional, indeterminate*¹⁴, potential, thus obtaining a final equivocation with the term of *civil resistance*, and creating alternate structures which will prove to be essential for social change¹⁵. This offers arguments for a need of extending recent-order philosophical reflections, with an appeal to either *parity* or *privileged spaces of manifestation* for both violence and non-violence¹⁶ (altogether two different types of interpersonal relations). This

opinion entails, by reviewing the reflexes of “marginal refusal deferred towards a marginalized concept”, its recognition as a moral argument distanced from the *nature of power*, but also the impossibility of translating nonviolence by a “proactive word”¹⁷.

Connected to such a conceptual “control panel”, the studies and articles – composing elements ensuring a multi-perspective of the present thematic issue (from a *conquest of violence to microviolence*) – accurately synthesize landmarks which define the dynamics between ratios such as *violence – nonviolence*, *influence – influencing*, and *adapting Gandhism* to particular texts/contexts. One can establish that any nodes which intersect and involve the present endeavor extract their arguments from the fields of *educational politics*, *cinematography*, *philosophical*, *pedagogical*, *anthropological*, *cultural*, *religious*, *linguistic* or *literary studies*.

Gabriella Falcicchio unfolds the plan, the intention and the construction of the present thematic issue, proposing a starting study/ view, which through its pertinent instances, anticipates nonviolence's significations, which will be elaborated in and by the following articles and studies. *Human Relations in a Nonviolent Perspective between “Openness to Thou” and Creative Management of Conflicts* opens the “nonviolence dossier”, highlighting and interpreting the radically modified perspective [of the concept] and conferring to the ideational laboratory of Aldo

Capitini a privileged position. Paying attention, in an equal and correct proportion, to text(s) and context(s), Gabriella Falcicchio points out decisive emphasis: nonviolence as “an empowerment of the you”, a singularly concept apt to extract and “to add a reality to another reality”, implying an active and continuous participation, or a state of vigilance in order to “face a harrowing situation”.

In *Nonviolent Words. Introduction to a Glossary for a Capitinian Lexicon*, Daniele Taurino approaches more than a necessary *introduction* – reconstruction, reconnection and restitution of Capitini’s nonviolent perspective and influence outside the Italian Academic and scientific space (conferring and motivating Capitini’s acceptance as the most important philosopher for the nonviolence in Italy). The author probes and investigates nodal knots/coordinates found in the *nonviolence* – *persuasion* – *co-presence* relationship, endorsing and using a proficient lecture key, focused on the *specific lexicon*’s ability to convert terms/ concepts into practical realities. Following the methodology based upon necessary distinctions and fundamental clarifications, Daniele Taurino evaluates Capitini’s perspective on nonviolence “seen as something else” – as an active mechanism – particularity emerged through the moral asymmetry between *killing* and *not killing*.

Antonio Vigilante (*Tolstoy between Anarchism and Nonviolence*) brings nonviolence (non-opposition

to evil and an appeal to force/violence) to attention, as a fundamental principle of Tolstoyism and its particular derivations (with decisive ulterior influences) – as anarchic-pacifism/Christian anarchism. Even projected and based upon fundamental religious commandments, expressed as an imperative love for the other (an act which excludes any type of aggression) Tolstoy’s opinion is read and interpreted by Antonio Vigilante from the perspective of a conscience refusing any Christian ideas, closer to skeptical attitudes towards God’s existence, in a key of religiously-rational living.

The intellectual and militant gallery of “nonviolence’s personalities” is completed, using strong lines, by the profile of Alexander Langer (*The load of Alex, between Prophecy and Politics*). Interested (in parity) by the destiny and by the actioner relevance of Langer, Mao Valpiana recognizes not only his theoretical ability and predisposition, but also the active-practical involvement in rethinking politics and in re-approaching the methods, the results and the solutions given to a “good politics”. Based on the foundation of nonviolence, both the theoretical and the practical can be assigned to a “convinced and convincing no gave to violence”. Well-dozed, careful to relevant sequences (reconfirming also the author formation and vocation, of activist and writer as an optima formulae for the „man of reality”), Mao Valpiana approaches decisive elements/angular stones,

relevant not only for Alexander Langer's biography but also for actuality's configuration. Placed in the intersection of laic and religious, avoiding the ideological inflexions, nonviolence contains the right/ability to shape Europe's vision and further perspective.

(Just) from *perspective* towards *dynamics*, Alessandro Pertosa (*La responsabilità di ciò che si dice. Una proposta nonviolenta, per una nuova dinamica linguistica*) values the status of metaphors and linguistically constructs, in order to explore the value, function and vocational truths of the *violence – power – logos triad*. Insisting upon reality, theoretical effects and reformulated conceptual reference systems seen as multifaceted instances, Alessandro Pertosa builds his arguments in the immediate vicinity of a *parola violenta – dialogo salvato* report [as a culturally-maintained stance (*violent culture – nonviolent culture*)] and the relationship already established *between dialogue as a continuous state-of-war and dialogue coupled to a state of reciprocal understanding*. Freed from the bonds (e.g. *tyranny*, we note) of a rigidly used marker, the article sees, beyond the violence of economic-technological language, the possibility of a dynamical structuring of horizontal space, imbuing *eutèleia* with the attributes of a substance for new human spaces – an unaltered *fundament*, which returns, through an evangelical fraternity, to the unpervert (nonviolent, we note) *form of the Being*.

Within an interdisciplinary concept of cartography, even if – in Claudia Secci's opinion (*A Modern Political Education. Nonviolent Perspectives*) which values Bondurant's ideas – nonviolence is not the product of any specific ideology, the philosophy of Gandhian-type conflicts adds a *nov quality* to the political perspectives already dominating the domain. Speculating the theoretical method and amplifying any punctual/pinpointing attention directed towards particular bibliographies, Claudia Secci notes, on Antonio Gramsci – Aldo Capitini – Paulo Freire – Gregory Bateson's lines, leading to Martha Nussbaum – the articulation of concepts which epistemologically irrigate themselves from Gandhi's theory, with direct stakes in the *education of political emotions*, seen as an alloy of participation, experimentation and praxis. The article gives a directing sense to the placement of nonviolent educational politics. It also attributes a correcting role to nonviolence, by reactivating both the deep fundament of constructive processes and a *rehabilitation of politics*, with the purpose of launching and realizing *the educational dimension of political activities*.

Interested in the particular (proteically-chameleonic) sense of violence, the (*Micro*)*Evidences: A History of the Violent Sequence* (Viorella Manolache) article invites the reader to discover an intersection of *text-book notes* with *cinematographically images*, exclusively enticed by a *sequence of violent events*. With the

needed affirmation that any episodic frame is accepted through *sequencing particular events*, with a high degree of contamination and maximal intensity; and through *microviolence*, a way of consolidating the status of individual violent acts, seen as a germination of social contexts. *The violent sequence* (illustrated and commented, in this case, cinematographically) reloads its conceptual sequencing as an experience targeting both the dynamics and the content of reality; understanding and defining by a *history of violence* the very frame and positioning of ideas, critical events and all the consequences rising from it.

Classified, theorized, analyzed and verified in an *non-fractured manner*, as a way of composing senses already expressed in the essence of included opposites, *nonviolence* certifies, based upon the unity of arguments already launched by the present issue's thematic articles, its status as a pivotal concept, an alternative to rewriting any appeal at the very moment of fundamenting cultural traditions: Gandhi offers *nonviolence*, seen as a truly heroic act, as an alternative to Achilles' *rage*, already sung by Homer. This is the authentic, beneficently propitious instance of rebuilding a different foundation!

Note

¹ Aldo Capitini, *La nonviolenza oggi*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1962.

² *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), Publications Division Government of India, New Delhi, 1999, vol. 21, p. 1.

³ *Ibidem*, pp. 133-134

⁴ Danilo Dolci, *Inventare il futuro*, Laterza, Bari, 1968.

⁵ Aldo Capitini, *Rivoluzione aperta*, Parenti, Milano, 1956.

⁶ Giuliano Pontara, "Nonviolenza", in *Dizionario di politica*, N. Bobbio – N. Matteucci – G. Pasquino (coord.), Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 2006, pp. 601-608.

⁷ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1954.

⁸ Jean-Marie Muller, *Le principe de non-violence. Parcours philosophique*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1999.

⁹ Luce Irigaray, *L'ospitalità del femminile*, Il Nuovo Melangolo, Genova, 2014.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 30-31.

¹¹ I [G.F.] thank Vincenzo Fariello for the translation from Italian to English.

¹² Maia Carter Hallward, Julie M. Norman (eds.), *Understanding Nonviolence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.

¹³ Michael N. Nagler, *The Nonviolence Handbook: A Guide for Practical Action*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, California, 2014.

¹⁴ Kurt Schock, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2005.

¹⁵ Adam Roberts, Timothy Garton Ash (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the*

- Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.
- ¹⁶ Todd May, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.
- ¹⁷ Mark Kurlansky, *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Modern Library Chronicles, 2008..

Bibliografia

- BLOCH Ernst, *The Principle of Hope*, vol. I., MIT Press, Cambridge, 1954.
- CAPITINI Aldo, *La nonviolenza oggi*, Edizioni di Comunità, Milano, 1962.
- Idem, *Rivoluzione aperta*, Parenti, Milano, 1956.
- DOLCI Danilo, *Inventare il futuro*, Laterza, Bari, 1968.
- GANDHI MAHATMA, *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi* (Electronic Book), vol. 21, Publications Division Government of India, New Delhi, 1999.
- HALLWARD Maia Carter, NORMAN Julie M. (eds.), *Understanding Nonviolence*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.
- IRIGARAY Luce, *L'ospitalità del femminile*, Il Nuovo Melangolo, Genova, 2014.
- KURLANSKY Mark, *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea*, Modern Library Chronicles, 2008.
- MAY Todd, *Nonviolent Resistance: A Philosophical Introduction*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2015.
- MULLER Jean-Marie, *Le principe de non-violence. Parcours philosophique*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 1999.
- NAGLER, Michael N., *The Nonviolence Handbook: A Guide for Practical Action*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, California, 2014.
- PONTARA Giuliano, "Nonviolenza", in *Dizionario di politica*, N. Bobbio – N. Matteucci – G. Pasquino (coord.), Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 2006, pp. 601-608.
- ROBERTS Adam, ASH Timothy Garton (eds.), *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009.
- SCHOCK Kurt, *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 2005.