

**NONVIOLENCE AS IMPURE PRAXIS – Reconstructing the Concept with  
Aldo Capitini**

Submitted by Roberto Baldoli, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Politics, September 2015.

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ABSTRACT: This thesis aims to 'reconstruct' the concept of nonviolence, offering a new unifying and pluralistic definition, which rejects recent worrying uses of the term, and is able to deal with the crisis of democracy and the construction of a post-secular society. Currently nonviolence is split in two between principled and pragmatic nonviolence. This division has been successful, but it is now a problem: it divides means and ends, politics and morality, religion and politics. In order to find a way out we will turn to the Italian philosopher Aldo Capitini. He interpreted nonviolence as a tension, a praxis of liberation from the chains of reality and openness to the existent. This approach includes a pragmatic dimension, which is a logic reinterpreting current practices and inventing new ones to build up *via facti* a new society (omnicracy); and a principled dimension, which is a craft of integrating reality with values, reaching its peak in the connection with everybody in an action of value (compresence). This approach offers actions of protest-to-project to overcome the division between means and ends; a political approach between 'realism and serenity' to overcome the division between politics and morality; an open religion which can work at the centre of society and politics. Finally, we will extend Capitini's reflection claiming that nonviolence as praxis is a non-systematic revolutionary approach aiming at freedom and plurality. We will add that this praxis is impure, because made of less than perfect actions performed in a very imperfect environment by imperfect human beings. Reconceiving nonviolence as impure praxis will allow us to reunite principled and pragmatic nonviolence, reinterpreting the former as actualisation of a public principle and the latter as a phronesis. This interpretation will offer an interesting form of transformative realism, which enriches *via facti* any democratic order with life, and show the way to overcome the secular divisions towards a post-secular society centred on the Assisi presumption.

## Declaration

I, Roberto Baldoli, hereby declare that this PhD thesis titled:

**“Nonviolence as Impure Praxis - Reconstructing the Concept with Aldo Capitini”**

is written by me and that all material in this thesis which is not my own has been identified and properly cited.

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Date: 1<sup>st</sup> September 2015

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## Preface

This dissertation started by chance, but it revealed to be the necessary end of a coherent journey started in Milan some years ago. The choice to work on nonviolence, and in particular on Aldo Capitini, came from the precious encounter with Claudio Radaelli. He introduced me to the world of nonviolence, and he provided me with trust, guidance, understanding, encouragement and friendship. Without him, this work would not have been possible.

Before focusing on nonviolence, my interests revolved around concepts such as peace and just war. These are very well-established topics. Instead, since I started to work on nonviolence, I had to deal with a completely different situation. Nonviolence is a recent and quite mistreated concept, which achieved already a lot in practical terms, but still suffers a chronic lack of theoretical analyses (and debates). Besides, I found that the literature on nonviolence was almost completely ignored by mainstream political theory. This was definitely the sign that a much more comprehensive work was needed.

In this journey, I found in Aldo Capitini the perfect guide and help. His formation, influence and style are at the same time very Italian and very international. He represents an interesting mix of various Italian schools of thought, from the Actualism of Gentile, to existentialism of Baglietto, to the school of Milan of Martinetti, Preti and Dal Pra. At the same time, these very deep roots do not limit his thought. Capitini is part of an international dialogue on how to work for a better and more pacific world. At the centre of this international drive, we find the concept of nonviolence, which he marvellously described as something neither only for saints, nor for cowards.

This was the best starting point for a student who received his training in philosophy in Milan, with a strong phenomenological blueprint, but found himself in a political science department of the UK, with different concerns and sensibilities. The result is in my view a very interdisciplinary work, which tries to speak to everybody without closing down into one tradition.

This interdisciplinary work is also a mix of help from very different scholars coming from very diverse backgrounds, who I want to thank. I would like to thank

dr. Andrew Shaap for his precious help. He showed me what is expected from a political theorist through the many suggestions and criticisms to the (many) versions of this work. I would also like to thank prof. Mario López Martínez for the many discussions we had while I was Visiting Researcher at the University of Granada, and prof. Antonino Drago of the University of Pisa for the email exchange we had, in which he offered important suggestions on early drafts of the thesis. At the same time, I would like to thank prof. Massimo Parodi of the University of Milan. This dissertation is inevitably the result of the many discussions I had with him during my years in Milan.

All this work, training and network would have been impossible without the help of my family. No word of this dissertation would have been written without Alessandro, Rosanna and Giampietro, who I should thank for their endless faith in me and providing all the help and support I needed to realise my ambitions. Also, I thank Tania Risoleo for all the care, encouragement, patience and love. They represent the bedrock upon which all my life and work are built.

The result of this journey lies in the following pages, which I hope will represent the basis for future research and work. The usual disclaimer applies.

## INTRODUCTION

*The opposite of foot is what?*

*A mountain top's one answer, but*

*If you are thinking of a bed,*

*The opposite of foot is head.*

*To ancient generals, of course,*

*The opposite of foot is horse.*

Richard Wilbur, Opposites

The poems of Wilbur are perhaps the best way to describe the varying connotations that can be derived from the meaning of a simple term. His poems on the opposites are meant to be for children, but they reveal an important lesson for everybody. Each word he uses, even the most common and apparently unambiguous term, like 'foot', finds itself always in use, in new and unexpected plays with other words. And in the play of life, words arise, change in meaning, and play with different opposites, are frequently used, or die. This word interplay underlies a war, a real struggle for the term's existence. This struggle leads us back to the words of Heraclitus. With the famous sentence, "we must know that war [polemos] is common to all and strife is justice, and that all things come into being through strife necessarily," the Greek philosopher reminds us of the worldly features in which this struggle takes place. This world is far from immutable and stable; it is a flux, in a cosmos interpreted as fire, as energy in endless transformation. The harmony of the world does not lie in the conciliation of opposites, which would lead to dead quiet, but in a continuous struggle between them. The being is the result of this struggle, in perfect adherence to the logos, the universal law that governs our existence.

In this play, or struggle, it happens that the many different circumstances of everyday life constantly create and destroy words and meanings. Nevertheless,



some words are less in danger than others. Indeed, the struggle has witnessed the frequent presence of dominant terms, which have been defined and redefined in positive ways, overshadowing their many and changing opposites, which tend to be defined exclusively as their negation. Sometimes, the dominion of a term is persistent and crystal-clear. Most of the time this is due to the fact that the dominant term is also the one that is considered more important, and it is very difficult to change what has been solidified by habit.

In some cases, the dominion of one term is so deep that a classic opposite does not even exist. This has been the case with the term violence. Violence is an extremely vague word. Ricoeur claimed that the term violence has two extremes: murder and the 'strength of nature', which cannot be tamed by man: fire, hurricane, flood, avalanche, even death. Right in the middle of these two extremes we find human violence.

*"His violence has aspects of the hurricane and of the murder: on the side of the hurricane, it is the violence of desire, of fear, and of hate; on the side of murder, it is the will to dominate the other man, the attempt to deprive him of freedom or of expression, it is racism and imperialism" (Ricoeur, 1998:32).*

The vagueness of this term meant that finding its exact opposite is an act of desperation. A long list of opposites have been provided, including peace, order, good, democracy, meaning, love, civilisation, or even being. Many of the actual definitions of violence are so attenuated that the term began to include almost everything, however insignificant the action.

However, the dominion of a term is never absolute; new opposites and new terms may unexpectedly appear. This was the case when a new term appeared in the West in the 1920s: nonviolence. Since its birth, this term struggled for its existence and recognition, and it is now at the dawn of another struggle. The first battle that the term nonviolence went through was against the dominion of violence in the context of decolonisation. The key player in this struggle was Gandhi. He provided the West with a new method, theory, as well as with a new vocabulary that included the word, nonviolence. He did this notwithstanding two facts: Firstly, the only certainty about Gandhi is that he was not a systematic

writer<sup>1</sup>. Gandhi himself did not even use the term ‘nonviolence’ in South Africa; rather, he only adopted it “occasionally after his return to India in 1915” (Hardiman, 2013:47). Secondly, “his precise activities were long enveloped in a curtain of ignorance and misunderstanding,” as for years it remained difficult to establish what Gandhi did (Scalmer, 2011:39). In spite of these facts, nonviolence emerged as a profound and flexible notion, which survived and is still widely used.

This notion is the direct translation of the Sanskrit *ahimsa*, which means, literally, absence of desire to harm and kill. Hardiman claimed that *ahimsa* has been used mainly in the context of refusing to carry out animal sacrifices, and more generally, to harm animals in any way. However, this refusal is backed by the wider traditional idea of *himsa*, or violence, present in many of the different oriental religions. This term encompasses any form of harming or injuring to any living being. Violence is both a physical phenomenon and a reality of the mind. It follows that violence is considered an ever-present aspect of life, as total avoidance is almost impossible. Instead, it is possible and required in different degrees by Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, to follow a natural law or ethical principle to make “one’s footprint in the world as infinitesimal as possible,” practicing “a variety of forms of nonattachment to body and world” (Mantena, 2012a:459).

This struggle can take different forms and degrees. In Jainism, the ethical imperative of *ahimsa* has always been dominant, taking also extreme forms, such as wearing masks to avoid inhaling any living thing flying in the air (Jahanbegloo, 2014:19), because of the conviction that every living being should be treated with respect. In Hinduism, the concept of *ahimsa* was present, but it became very important only with Gandhi. This term was important in the path of individual liberation (*moksa*), and it was linked to the ‘greatest duty’ present in everyone, the internal law to achieve good. Instead, in Buddhism *ahimsa* was (and still is) the feeling of compassion for the whole universe, which is key to destroy the causes of suffering and to develop spiritually (Dalai Lama, 2001).

Gandhi was heavily influenced by these ideas. However, he was also aware of the fact that more direct forms of violence were merely the tip of the iceberg;

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<sup>1</sup> The vast body of Gandhi’s writing consists of opinions, mainly in the form of short sermons to those who sought his advice, or short statements in reply to critics.

beneath the surface there festered torture, starvation, and exploitation, which he witnessed firsthand in South Africa and India. There was the violence associated with the British state, with the imposition of its system of education, along with its model of civilization, and even 'other and more insidious forms of *himsa*' such as harsh words, judgments, ill-will, anger, lust for cruelty (Gandhi, [1928] 1999:59).

*Ahimsa*, as conceived by the tradition, is a partial answer to such an extended concept of *himsa*. It involves a personal journey of purification and development in two directions: the self and the other. Indeed, *ahimsa* is the way to achieve full conversion and purification of the self. At the same time, it is also the way to acquire peaceful coexistence with others. In other words, *ahimsa* is both a process of knowledge of the self, especially of the personal interconnectedness to the entire world, and a process of conduct with others, a practice of living. However, something was missing. Gandhi inherited this theory, but he also added something more in the light of his anti-colonisation struggles. His broader conceptualisation of violence could not have reduced *ahimsa* only to a process of self-purification based on the refusal to hurt and kill. *Ahimsa* began to focus more on the relation with the other; it started to involve qualities of "respect and sympathy for the opponent, freedom from anger, and a desire for peace" (Hardiman, 2003:58). In other words, Gandhi added a political dimension to the concept of *ahimsa*. He put this concept at the centre of the political struggles against racial prejudice in South Africa and colonization in India. Thus, nonviolence started to imply real mass struggles, along with techniques such as marches, strikes, hunger-strikes, acts of non-cooperation, and more. He even envisaged a peace army called *Shanti Sena* that would resolve conflicts non-violently. From the inspiration of Gandhi, the idea of *ahimsa* changed its meaning forever.

The consequence of the innovations of Gandhi is that nonviolence started to be a complex and powerful political concept, which closely related with other terms, in particular *satyagraha*, *swaraj*, *sarvodaya*, and constructive programme. The struggles of the Mahatma are sometimes also called *Satyagraha*. This concept was coined in 1908 by Gandhi to describe the South-African campaigns<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Gandhi started the search for a new term, different from the general one of passive resistance, asking for suggestions from his supporters through the South African newspaper *Indian Opinion*. After a few unsatisfactory responses, a reader proposed 'sadagraha', meaning truth (sat) and

Unfortunately, satyagraha has never been a settled idea (Jahanbegloo, 2013:24). Gandhi admitted that he had no set theory to go by: “I am myself daily growing in the knowledge of Satyagraha. I have no textbook to consult in time of need” (Gandhi, [1938] 1999:41). Even the relation with the concept of *ahimsa* is confused because sometimes they are synonyms (Gandhi, [1938] 1999:42), while other times the former refers to actual struggles, while the latter to a principle.

Turning to *swaraj* and *sarvodaya*, the former term means a complex process of self-rule or autonomy, which invests both the individual and the society<sup>3</sup>. It became central especially when Gandhi began to look at India. Self-rule was for Gandhi the logical conclusion of the Satyagraha. However, autonomy and self-rule is possible only when everybody is on board, which is the key concern of the concept of *Sarvodaya*. This principle comes from *sarvo*, meaning one and all, and *uday*, meaning welfare or uplift, and it meant the welfare of all, the awakening of all, the autonomy of communities and individuals<sup>4</sup>.

Finally, the acknowledgment of the many forms that violence takes, the ability of self-rule, along with the conviction that individual good cannot be distinguished from the good of others, were backed by the conviction that a retreat from the world is not a solution. A good deal of work and creative effort is required. In more precise terms, what is needed is a ‘constructive programme’, the ‘complete independence by truthful and non-violent means’. Nagler explains that constructive programme happens “where you create things and make corrections

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firmness (agraha) in Sanskrit. Gandhi liked the idea, and slightly changed the word into Satyagraha, meaning clinging to truth, in order to make the meaning of his campaigns clearer.

<sup>3</sup> Swaraj should not be interpreted as mere independence of India. Self-rule means a lot more. It means first “government of the self”; it is the slow process of learning to rule oneself, to become truly independent. Then, the process of *swaraj* concerns the family, because “if joint families, i.e., families enjoying self-government, become divided through family quarrels, how can we be considered fit for *swaraj*?” GANDHI, M. K. [1917] 1999. Speech at Gujarati Political Conference-I. *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi (Electronic Book)*. New Delhi: Government of India. 119. After the family, *swaraj* requires important changes within the caste, the city, and the state. For what concerned India, the process included the retreat of the British. However, it also meant a slow and difficult process of building up a different society, in which citizens are autonomous, independent, and their self-realization is not hindered.

<sup>4</sup> The word was the direct translation of *The Welfare of All* by Ruskin, which Gandhi read in 1904. He was so impressed by the ideas espoused in the book that Gandhi reported them in his *Experiments*, claiming that he was ready to change his life on the basis of these ideals. In particular, he referred to three tenets: the good of the individual is contained in the good of all; a lawyer’s work has the same value as the barber’s, as all have the same right of earning their livelihood from their work; a life of labour, such as the one of the tiller of the soil or the craftsman, is the life worth living.

in and on your own community,” and it is complementary to the obstructive programme, which takes place “where you refuse to put up with others’ attempts to weaken or exploit you” (Nagler, 2004:160). It is a work “not made to assert propositions, but to create possibilities” (Bondurant, 1988:VII).

Gandhi played an important role in the birth of the term nonviolence as we now use it. With the concepts of constructive programme, *sarvodaya*, *swaraj*, *satyagraha* and *ahimsa*, Gandhi created a vocabulary of nonviolence, even though these terms were complex, quite vague and continuously mutating<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, as soon as this term entered the Western world, nonviolence had to face another struggle: the reduction of its meaning to terms belonging to the Western tradition<sup>6</sup>. The tendency of the first works on the topic was to associate Gandhi's struggle and the term nonviolence with more common terms belonging to Western tradition. At the beginning it was associated with concepts such as passive resistance (Case, 1923:355) and civil disobedience. The problem of the former was that the term conventionally signified “a method of the ‘weak’ or ‘helpless’, merely forced into supplication by the absence of arms or the restriction of the ballot” (Scalmer, 2011:73). Likewise, the connotation of passivity shadowed the intense activity of Gandhi's campaigns, which were different from past Western passive campaigns that encompassed acts of destruction. Instead, civil disobedience, which was linked to Henry David Thoreau's essay *Resistance to Civil Government* of 1849<sup>7</sup>, was deemed to be inadequate due to the fact that a ‘deliberate opposition to the law’ was for Gandhi only a particular form of non-violent protest (Scalmer, 2011:82). Furthermore, this term made a terrible

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<sup>5</sup> As Hardiman claims, “by extending *ahimsa* into the sphere of politics, and then translating it into English in the context of such a practice, Gandhi created a new political language for the English-speaking world” (Hardiman, 2013:46).

<sup>6</sup> The first medium through which westerners knew about Gandhi's deeds was the press. Then, various biographies of Gandhi have been written. In particular: Charles Freer Andrews, *Mahatma Gandhi: His own Story*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1930; Romain Rolland, *Mahatma Gandhi: the Man who Became One with the Universal Being*, New York and London: The Century Co. 1924; Glorney Bolton, *The Tragedy of Gandhi*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1932; Haridas T. Mazumdar, *Gandhi versus the Empire*, New York: Universal Pub. Co., 1932. Besides press and biographies, the term has been used in pacifist works. On this field, it is worth looking at: Devere Allen, *The Fight for Peace*, New York: The Macmillan Co., 1930; Bennett, Scott H., *Radical Pacifism: The War Resisters League and Gandhian Nonviolence in America, 1915-1963*, Syracuse: SUNY, 2003.

<sup>7</sup> In this essay, the American author denounced the corruption of the government, and advocated the withdrawal of support from a tyrannical government, which still allows slavery.

weapon of Gandhi's struggle, which became a 'new technique of revolution'<sup>8</sup>. These common but problematic translations led Gandhi to coin another term to describe his experience in South Africa, satyagraha. Unfortunately, the new term only prompted more debates on the right translation and interpretation<sup>9</sup>, with similar attempts of assimilation to existing categories (Scalmer, 2011:79). Indeed, satyagraha has been translated as passive resistance or a 'resentful fatalism'. Finally, both non-violence and satyagraha have also been associated with a term belonging to Christian pacifism, 'non-resistance'<sup>10</sup>. Unfortunately, the translation suggested an "almost complete inertia"; it was a declaration of withdrawing from the world (Scalmer, 2011:82), as well as in extreme cases of repudiation by the individual of politics, the state, and even the entire civilization (Sibley, 1943:447).

The concept of nonviolence managed to successfully overcome this first battle for its existence. Gandhi's efforts were not lost. Nonviolence survived the reduction to passive resistance, civil disobedience and non-resistance, and this concept began to be used in the West. In particular, it started to be used by activists and pacifists. Unfortunately, nonviolence did not have a lot of time to celebrate its triumph; within a few years, it entered into a second important battle for existence. Indeed, WWII and later the Cold War revealed the limits of nonviolence. What can nonviolence offer against ruthless dictators? Many started to acknowledge that nonviolence was possible within a democratic regime, or at least in dealing with a democratic power like the UK, but what about tyrants? The two scholars who symbolize this second struggle of nonviolence are Johan Galtung and later, Gene Sharp. The two had very different views on nonviolence, but at the time, this was a strength. They showed that nonviolence was actually at work in resisting Nazism, and that it can make a key contribution to situations of conflict in order to avoid the dangerous spiral of violence and blood. They made of nonviolence an interesting answer against the dominion of dictators, exploitation, and imperialism, allowing it even to enter the world of academia.

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<sup>8</sup> Scalmer admits that "while the terms 'passive resistance' and 'non-resistance' wrongly reimagined the Mahatma's methods as harmless inactivity, the discourse of Thoreau blinded Westerners to Gandhi's insistence on love and peace" (Scalmer, 2011:85).

<sup>9</sup> In the United Kingdom, one popular translation of the new term was 'non-violent resistance'; Americans preferred 'non-violent direct action'. Instead, in his 1934 *The Tragedy of Gandhi*, Glorney Bolton equated the term to 'non-violence'. A fourth group even rejected the idea of translating, while others translated it literally as soul-force.

<sup>10</sup> Here the term traced back to Adin Ballou's work *Christian non-resistance*, to Tolstoy's writings, and other studies on the topic. In particular, see: Lanz, H. (1926), *The Doctrine of Non-Resistance and its Antithesis*, *International Journal of Ethics*, 37(1):53-66.

Thanks to them, nonviolence managed to break the silence which lasted at least 40 years, especially in the realm of political science academia. More and more books as well as articles were published using this term. They even made of nonviolence a sub-field in many different areas, such as ethics, peace studies, social movement studies, and strategic studies.

This success came with a cost. The cost was the internal split of the term. Indeed, there are nowadays two different conceptions of nonviolence. On the one hand, nonviolence is a set of techniques of action. On the other, nonviolence is a principle to be implemented in every moment of life. In the 1964 article by Galtung, the division was already there. For the Norwegian scholar nonviolence is a specific kind of way to influence other groups. He proposed thinking of nonviolence as negative or positive (Galtung, 1965:232). The former includes “all efforts – short of bodily incapacitation of any kind to influence the other party by trying to make it more difficult for him to perform actions a non-violent group is against”. This certainly contains the flow of violence in the world, but it does not face directly frustration and injustice. Instead, positive nonviolence aims to construct something new and different, as it includes “any effort, again short of bodily manipulation, to make it more easy for the other party to perform the actions the non-violence group would favour”(Galtung, 1992). Nine years later, the split became definitive with the seminal work of Gene Sharp. He divided principle from techniques of action, and on this distinction he built up the categories of pragmatic and principled nonviolence. This division, and in particular the currently dominant approach of Sharp, is at the basis of the recent success of the concept of nonviolence.

This thesis starts from here. The aim is to ‘reconstruct’ nonviolence. At first glance, it may look a paradox. Why change a concept which was at the foundation of the recent success? At this time, more and more academics are talking about nonviolence, so why should we change its definition now? This thesis is obviously not the first critical work to the present dominant approach to nonviolence. Indeed, we will see that others expressed their doubts about the ambiguity (Smith, 1969), inexistence (Yoder, 2010), and full realisation (Miller, 1966) of such a radical division. Nevertheless, nobody went beyond particular criticisms.

Here we believe that there are at least three reasons at the basis of this urgency. The first reason is that it is indeed true that more academics are talking about nonviolence, but how are they referring to it? Recently we have witnessed more and more creative and worrying uses of the term, which do not have much in common with the Gandhian complex mixture of impressive personal commitments as well as ingenious tactics and strategies of struggle. The meaning of the term is so volatile that some devised very debatable interpretations. Apart from the fact that still too many times the term non-violence or nonviolence is merely described in negative terms, as absence of violence<sup>11</sup>, there is something more. For instance, Lawrence and Karim put Gandhi and nonviolence under a section called 'The Other of Violence', along with Malcolm X and Hitler (Lawrence and Karim, 2007). But the situation can be worse. Some talk of "non-violent forms of right wing extremism" (Briggs and Goodwin, 2012), by which they mean very violent and discriminatory groups which simply do not pose immediate threat to national security (Goodwin and Ramalingam, 2012). Others even talk of 'nonviolent extremism'. This is the case of David Cameron, who at the UN General Assembly coined the term to refer to groups such as Nazis, Klu Klux Klansmen, or terrorists who incite hatred and intolerance in schools, universities and prisons (Cameron, 2014). This term has now seen use in academia (Schmid, 2014). In addition, other terms are already widely used in academia, such as 'non-violent crimes' and 'nonviolent offenders'. These terms refer to crimes such as theft, burglary, vandalism, fraud, drug use, which should be distinguished from physical assault, threatening behaviours, robberies and other offences of possessing an offensive weapon (Durose and Mumola, 2002).

To the contrary, some instead think of nonviolence as something simply being passé, like Tony Blair recently. Nonviolence is something which has perhaps been useful, but now it is better to look somewhere else (Sinha, 2013), completely ignoring the many ongoing nonviolent struggles around the world. These connotations trigger a question: how is it possible that a word with such a complex and rich meaning is used in this way?

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<sup>11</sup> UNESCO's Programme of Action on Culture of Peace and Non-violence backs a wide and important understanding of the concept of peace, but adopts non-violence as a corollary, adopting quite a general understanding of it, meaning basically absence of violence, or reason as the opposite of violence for the philosopher Muller.



We believe that a theoretical reason is deeply linked to such a confusion. The current definitions helped nonviolence to become a sub-field in many areas of study, but we missed the underlying thread that keeps united these different efforts. Now we need to *reunite* the field under a new *progressive* and *pluralistic* conception of nonviolence. With the term 'reunite' we do not simply mean helping the exchange between scholars with different interests, which use the term nonviolence. At the same time, we do not mean imposing a new single method of studying nonviolence, which should be considered better than the others. By reuniting nonviolence, we mean that a new conception of this term should be found, which is able to explain actual discrepancies without breaking the concept in smaller ones. There should be a way to include in the same concept of nonviolence the many different (and sometimes contrasting) uses of this term.

Why is fragmentation a problem? The problem is that the actual fragmentation risks being *degenerative*, in the sense of being an attempt to explain the discrepancies in the use of the term in a way that leads to lose the complexity of the Gandhian notion of nonviolence (as well as the complexity of the works of other key nonviolent actors like Martin Luther King Jr. or San Suu Kyi), opening up more opportunities for further worrying uses of the term. In the division, there is a split between the vertical tension towards self-rule, autonomy, and the horizontal one of openness to the other, to the 'welfare of all'. Thus, the complexity of Gandhi's nonviolence is reduced by this division, which conveys less than the more dynamic Gandhian approach. This paves the way to new specific definitions of nonviolence, which restrict even more the potential of the concept and further fragment the field. The problem is to find a unique and more *progressive* conception, which is able to explain actual discrepancies with a core unifying interpretation, framework, platform; to include existent uses of the term as corollaries, as contextualised instances of that concept; and to foster new uses and research. Thus, further reflections are needed if we want nonviolence to become a reunited and thus progressive field of research.

At the same time, unity has to go hand in hand with plurality. Indeed, there is the need to pursue a pluralistic approach of nonviolence, able to account for many different systems of values and beliefs. The actual dominant paradigm seems to allow everybody to talk about nonviolence. What actually happened is that it ended up being *repressive* of ideologies and beliefs. Indeed, values, principles

and beliefs are not merely equally considered (making of nonviolence something that is compatible with any sorts of beliefs), but they are equally excluded from the key political category of pragmatic nonviolence, and relegated to the one ad-hoc category of principled nonviolence. Instead, the aim of this thesis is to offer a more progressive and at the same time *pluralistic* concept of nonviolence, which is able to free discussions on values, finding the way in which a serious analysis of values may be united with more scientific and value-free approaches. In other words, we have to look for a reconciling pluralistic approach, which does not exclude or implicitly 'repress' ideologies in the name of a more scientific and value-free approach. To sum up the two points, can we imagine a new definition of nonviolence which manages to reach an equilibrium between unity and plurality?

Finally, the last reason for going back to debate the meaning of nonviolence is historical. The historical conditions which were the successful basis of Sharp's definition are changing fast. In particular, nonviolence is now required to face two challenges. The first is the crisis of democracy. The dreams of democratisation have to face the many challenges that democracy is facing, which led some scholars to talk about the crisis or 'winter' of democracy. The second challenge is to open up a new chapter in the relationship with religion. In other words, nonviolence has to reconsider the role and importance of religion for its own meaning and in the XXI century. The recent acknowledgment that it was a delusion to believe that religion disappeared in the Western and democratic world opened up a debate on the role of religion in a future post-secular society.

Thus, new and worrying uses of the term, the urgency of creating a unified and pluralistic political concept, and a changing historical environment require a sweeping answer. This thesis wants to contribute to this debate reconstructing the concept of nonviolence. In other words, this thesis endeavours to propose a different definition of nonviolence. This definition should defend what has been achieved up to now, but it should also build a bridge between the principled and pragmatic dimensions in order to face these new concerns. We believe that this strife is a way to avoid dangerous paths taken by the meaning of the term recently, and reunite the field, allowing nonviolence to fully 'come into being' as an autonomous and dominant political concept.

The 'reconstructed' nonviolence can be neither a principle nor a technique of action. Instead, we will reinterpret nonviolence as an impure praxis, an ideology, a non-systematic revolutionary approach enhancing freedom and plurality. This definition allows us to reinterpret the 'principled' dimension no more as a principle to be always implemented, but as the bottom-up actualisation of a principle in an excellent action. In the same vein, the 'pragmatic' dimension does not look at techniques, but at practices, and it generates phronesis, an art of judgment. In this way, principled and pragmatic nonviolence become complementary aspects of the same praxis, which reinterprets and shape current practices in society, as well as introduce new ones.

The result is that nonviolence returns to be an articulated but united political system of concepts, a political ideology which avoids being reduced to everything but physical violence as well as to a dogmatic rejections of violence. At the same time, unity does not endanger plurality because our conception is compatible with many (but not all indiscriminately) values and belief systems, without being well-suited for notions such as nonviolent extremisms, offenders, or crimes.

Finally, this new conception will definitely be able to face the changing historical environment. Indeed, the complexity and dynamicity of the Gandhian effort is preserved in a project of transformative realism aiming at integrating life into the decaying democratic order, human aspiration in the architecture of the state.

With this project, religion is not left aside. Indeed, the impure praxis of nonviolence includes actions of freedom and plurality of an 'open religion' as the most pure and extreme of its actions. This is an opportunity for religions, as it shows that the actual Westphalian presumption can be turned upside-down, constructing what we called the Assisi Presumption, the conviction that religious 'excellent actions' of freedom and plurality are not only compatible but necessary for the development of democracy and a real post-secular society.

### *Methodology*

The attempt to 'reconstruct nonviolence', offering a new united and pluralistic definition, required many methodological choices, which should be explained. For a start, this thesis will not focus on violence, and it will not focus on the

relationship between violence and nonviolence. This choice may be considered a hazard. If this thesis was focused on violence, there would have been no need perhaps to justify why its supposed opposite was not going to be considered in-depth; the dominion of the term violence is evident. Nevertheless, the reasons for this choice are the following. To begin, the literature on the topic of violence is immense, and a consistent analysis of the topic would require perhaps another thesis<sup>12</sup>. Even if we look only at the field of nonviolence, there are already a great amount of studies which start with important and interesting analyses of violence<sup>13</sup>, as well as many valid introductions dealing with the more classical and generic theses against the idea of a full rejection of violence because utopian, sterile, or reactionary, such as those of Marx, Sorel, and Fanon<sup>14</sup>. We will build partly on them, with the idea that a further study on the same issue of the interconnection between violence and nonviolence would hardly be innovative, and would divert the attention from the more urgent problems outlined above. In addition, the vast majority of the literature agrees that violence is more than physical violence, even though they disagree on the extent and on which typology is correct. Some authors rightly and effectively focus on the latter (Sharp, 1973a), but there is consensus on the fact that there are many forms of violence, such as psychological or symbolic. A further critique of the many typologies may be useful, but it is not the main concern here. We can even say that the problem is the opposite. The literature on nonviolence realised very well the vagueness and extent of the concept of violence. The problem is that excessive reliance on a

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<sup>12</sup> Violence is one of the topics most widely studied in every period of time. The contemporary era witnessed key works, such as 'Reflections on Violence' by Sorel; the chapter 'Critique of Violence' by Benjamin; the book 'On Violence' by Arendt. Between the many most recent studies on the topic, it may be important to mention the following works: the articles *Violence and Revolutionary Subjectivity: Marx to Žižek* and *Hannah Arendt's Critique of Violence* by Christopher Finlay, and *On Politics and Violence: Arendt contra Fanon* by Elisabeth Frazer; the books *Violence and Democracy* by John Keane, *On Violence* by Slavoj Žižek.

<sup>13</sup> Most of the literature around nonviolence starts with in-depth analysis of violence. Here is worth mentioning the ideas of vertical and horizontal violence by De Ligt; the many studies on aggression, as well as on direct, structural and symbolic violence by Galtung; the analysis by Giuliano Pontara (1978), *The Concept of Violence* Journal of Peace Research, 15:19-32; Bondurant, J.V. (1971), *Conflict: Violence and Nonviolence*, Transaction Publishers.

<sup>14</sup> Look for instance at *Introduction to Nonviolence* by Jahanbegloo, who provided us with an account of the classical critiques to the rejection of violence. It is true that today some techniques of action considered in the past as violence, such as the general strike, are part of the world of nonviolence. Nevertheless, the issue is more profound and this thesis will try to address this issue, even if only indirectly. Another introduction to the relation between violence and nonviolence, in which the difficulties of a clear distinction are listed, is provided by Hallward and Norman in chapter 2 of Hallward, M. C. and Julie M. Norman (eds.) 2014, *Understanding Nonviolence*, Cambridge:Polity, p. 22-26.

vague term may become a hindrance to the full development of the idea of nonviolence.

The defence to our choice of not focusing on violence may even be pressed further, questioning the whole idea of opposing violence to nonviolence. Are we sure that violence is the opposite of nonviolence? The first battle for existence cannot be reduced to the emergence of a simple and empty opposite, and it is not by chance that the tradition of nonviolence seems to be quite confused on the issue. On the one hand, most of the studies start with a certain idea of what is violence, whether physical and direct or indirect and systemic. Nevertheless, nonviolence has been opposed to many other concepts, which are different from violence, even if related with it. For example, the opposite of nonviolence has been identified with fear, hatred, cowardice, exploitation, or imperialism.

Besides, nonviolence seems most of the time to fail to be a real opposite of violence. For instance, even looking at the key activity of nonviolence, self-suffering, it is clear that the relation between violence and nonviolence is complex. Indeed, self-suffering is violence against the self, and many times against the other as well. While the fact that it is violence against the self does not require illustrations, the fact that many times it is violence against the other needs clarification. First of all, Gandhi acknowledged that “even a fast could be violent in intent if deployed wrongly” (Hardiman, 2013:47). However, the violence of self-suffering is not only in the intent. Self-suffering goes hand in hand in many cases with emotional and moral punishment of the other<sup>15</sup>. This is no exception. Indeed, there is a limbo in which most of the nonviolent actions are condemned. The problem is whether acts such as stopping the traffic or the normal functioning of a bank, painting walls or shops’ windows, organising boycotts or sit-ins, always belong to the world of nonviolence. The same limbo is inhabited even by harsher actions, such as throwing rocks, resisting police, blowing up electricity cables. It is doubtful that a child throwing rocks at a Jeep full of soldiers is an act intended

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<sup>15</sup> One example is given by Arun Gandhi on parenting. When he was sixteen, he lied to his father to cover-up the fact that he had arrived late to pick up his father because he went to the cinema. The father’s response was to tell his son that he must have done something wrong in bringing him up, and that he would not let his son drive him home. He would walk home alone to think about it. The walk took five hours, and Arun, feeling guilty and worried, drove behind his father at walking pace until they arrived home LÜBBE, A. 2009. The Violence within Non-Violence. *Peace Studies Journal*, 2, 39-44.. Although this was a clear example of nonviolent parenting, it included a good deal of emotional violence and punishment, which should be acknowledged.

to create real harm; at the same time, it is not considered by everyone an act of nonviolence.

Besides the fact that some actions are violent or nonviolent at the same time, it should be acknowledged that most of the time there is a mixture of clearly violent and nonviolent actions in many nonviolent campaigns. The main problem is that some scholars claim that the meaning, importance, and success of certain actions depended on the presence of violent protests too<sup>16</sup>. Some critiques even noted an implicit interdependence between violence and nonviolence, pointing to the fact that nonviolent actions are often supported by organizations backed by force. It cannot be questioned that “sometimes nonviolent activists rely on systems of violence to achieve their goals” (Martin, 2009). For instance, this was the case during the Civil Rights Movement. The success of the nonviolent campaign was decided by the federal government, which means it was decided by a more powerful armed organisation. More generally, it is possible to claim that many nonviolent struggles are based on at least some type of protection provided by police and governments; and therefore, are based on some kinds of violence.

The ambiguity of nonviolence in relation to the state was already clear with Gandhi. He actively worked for the formation of an independent India; he argued against the pacifist De Ligt on the opportunity for India to have an army. He did not despise even the colonising state, Britain. He urged his countrymen in London and India to support the British war effort against the Zulu revolt of 1906; he raised an ambulance corps in London in 1914, he recruited for the British army in India in 1918 (Bartolf, 2000). He even worked his full life with nationalistic groups in order to achieve India’s independence. This dangerous concession to nationalism was backed by the idea of being an active part of the British Empire.

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<sup>16</sup> It is true that much research on nonviolence showed that violence represents mainly a problem for nonviolent protest because it can backfire. However, here the problem is twofold. On the one hand, there is a debate on whether the actual presence of violent protests (or at least the threat of them) helps the visibility and acceptance of nonviolence or not. Indeed, the government may decide either to recognise only nonviolent protesters, marginalising the others, or to use violent protests to delegitimise nonviolent ones. On the other hand, there is the problem that people may use guns to ‘protect’ nonviolent protests. This was the case with the Civil Rights Movement. Cobb recently argued that the possession of weapons by black community indirectly helped the success of the nonviolent way offered by King. For instance, armed black people patrolled and defended houses where nonviolent activists were sleeping during the nights in the south. To know more, see: Cobb, C. E. 2014. *This Nonviolent Stuff'll Get You Killed: How Guns Made the Civil Rights Movement Possible*, Basic Books.

Going back to the Appeal for Enlistment of 1918, it is striking to notice that for Gandhi joining the army at that moment was the way of becoming partners in the Empire with the British, which he claimed was one meaning of *swaraj*.

Finally, the nonviolent fight of the Mahatma included reactionary aspects, such as the idea of the caste system. He was against untouchability, but in favour of what is called *varnashrama-dharma*, which is the idea that society should be arranged on the fact that individuals have different innate tendencies for work and different qualities which are better expressed in certain periods of life. This idea has been interpreted by Arundhati Roy as a way to be in favour of the entitlement and privileges of some social groups. To bolster this claim are the fact that he opposed more radical critics of caste system, such as Ambedkar (even though Gandhi later helped him to become Law Minister and Chairman of the Constitution Drafting Committee), and he even went on hunger strike against the 'Communal Awards' (Ambedkar, 2014)<sup>17</sup>.

The doubts on the relationship between nonviolence and violence become real confusion when the former manifests itself in real acts of violence. Interesting examples of violent action made by nonviolent actors concern euthanasia and assisted suicide. Sometimes these practices are acts of nonviolence, at least from Gandhi's approach (Gielen, 2012). For instance, once Gandhi discussed the reported case of an actress in Paris, who shot her life partner. The man implored her to do so because he was terminally ill and suffering an unbearable agony. For the Mahatma, the act could be described as nonviolence, in the case that the action was done with the right intentions. He also recommended avoiding premature judgments. Only God is capable of judging human intentions (Gielen, 2012:432). A similar example relates to killing a rabid dog if it is killed out of compassion and to prevent it from dying a slow death. This is considered

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<sup>17</sup> He even made something in favour of the caste system with the 1932 fast made to block the affirmative action of the British government in favour of the outcastes, the untouchables. Gandhi was extremely critical of untouchability and caste divisions for his whole life. However, he opposed the 1931 proposal to separate the untouchables into a separate electoral group at the Round Table Conference in London, and in 1932 he started a fast against the Communal Award until the time when a new agreement between Hindus and untouchables, called the Poona Pact, had been reached and adopted by the British government. Theoretically, the idea of a separate electorate can be considered a way to defend the identity and interests of a subjected group. Gandhi was not against separate election in general; he favoured what concerned Muslims and other religious groups. However, he recognised the fact that a generally considered favourable reform for the untouchables would have further divided an already split Hindu community, causing trouble both in the political process of liberation and in the construction of a united country. For more on this topic, look: Nanda, B. R. 1994. *Gandhi and his Critics*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, p. 26.

nonviolence, too. The same can be said for a child suffering from rabies, when there is no possibility of relief from the intense suffering. It is nonviolence to kill an ill calf, when the animal is in great pain and nursing would not be sufficient<sup>18</sup>. Nonviolence does not manifest itself only in action of euthanasia and assisted suicide, however. There are other cases where acts of violence are committed by believers in nonviolence. One of the most well-known devotees is Bonhoeffer, who conspired in the plot to kill Hitler. The German Lutheran pastor worked all of his life learning and teaching the practices of nonviolence. Even so, he arrived at a point of plotting against the life of the symbol of violence in Europe at the time. Coming back to Germany from the US, Bonhoeffer found no real education and support for a nonviolent action; at the same time, doing nothing would have been cowardice. The decision of threatening a person's life was obviously not the most evident proof of his commitment to nonviolence. At the same time, it is highly debatable whether he actually departed from his previous creed, or his choice is still to be considered part of the universe of nonviolence. Whatever the different justifications and specifications there may be, it is clear that sometimes killing is part of the world of nonviolence, or at least is not incompatible.

Thus, the many issues raised up until now led us to a choice. This thesis could have continued to focus on digging further into the distinction between violence and nonviolence, trying to find a temporary way out. However, it is natural to wonder whether this is really an urgency. Instead, we believe that there is something, which cannot be explained simply opposing nonviolence to violence or other terms, in the many struggles around the world, as well as in the words and deeds of Gandhi, San Suu Kyi and others. This does not mean that the many studies on the relationship between violence and nonviolence will be forgotten. It means simply that the concern on the opposite of nonviolence should be left to a second moment, when it will be clear what we mean by nonviolence.

Having cleared some doubts on the choice of not talking about the relationship between violence and nonviolence, it should be made clear why this thesis will focus on the term 'nonviolence', and not on the alternative spelling 'non-violence'.

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<sup>18</sup> Gielen claims that there should be no self-interest, including monetary matters, and at the same time uncontrollable suffering at the end of life, along with consent of the person when possible GIELEN, J. 2012. Mahātmā Gandhi's view on euthanasia and assisted suicide. *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 38, 431-434.. Gandhi emphasised that care is a solution for most people in these situations. Unwillingness to provide care can never be justified, as well as suicide, when is committed in order not to be a burden to others.



Throughout the first and second chapter, the reader will notice a gradual change from the term *non-violence* to *nonviolence*. This is meant to reflect a real evolution in the history of this concept, as the dash tended to disappear during recent decades. Thus, we will tend to write the term non-violence when we are dealing with authors who used this term, while using the term nonviolence when the authors chose to quit the dash. Nevertheless, we will use the term nonviolence for the rest of the thesis. The choice is partly due to the fact that nonviolence is now written almost everywhere without the dash. Nevertheless, the omission of the dash is the acknowledgment of the development of the term, which emphasises more than the term ‘non-violence’ the fact that it is much more than mere abstention from violence. Something deeper lies in that word, which is less than a rigid doctrine, but more than a simple restraint from using physical violence.

Thus, this thesis will focus on the concept of nonviolence. Yet, it is still not clear how. Indeed, it is important to describe how this thesis will actually approach the concept of nonviolence. It should already be evident that nonviolence will not be considered a “continuing concern” (Rorty, 1984:65) of the history of thought, which was out there since the beginning of human history. We already said that the concept of nonviolence emerged in the XX century. We acknowledge the fact that Gandhi declared nonviolence to be as old as the mountains. Nevertheless, the innovation of the concept of nonviolence provided by Gandhi changed radically the meaning of this term, and the actual concept of nonviolence emerged in the West only in the 1920s. Thus, it is from this perspective that we will proceed.

Besides, the aim of this thesis is not to find a correspondence with a definite truth or immutable essences. It is not even to make any strong normative claim, to determine what ought to be done in the light of certain given information, as does analytical philosophy (McDermott, 2008:11). We will not intend the meaning of the word nonviolence as the truth condition for, or the conventional meaning of, an utterance abstracted from the particular instance in which it is claimed. This thesis will not propose any sorts of ideal theory, any thought experiment, of what a nonviolent society would look like; it will not assume that any human being will agree and comply with a rational and logic description of a principle. In other words, we will not reduce this work to “find correct answers to questions of an abstract or general nature” (Frazer, 2010:5). We are aware that this may

represent a risk in the light of certain approaches to political theory, as our work will lack “the appearance of rigor which is the source of such pride among practitioners of mathematized social science, archival history and philosophical logic alike” (Frazer, 2010:11).

To the contrary, this thesis will describe the different uses of the concept of nonviolence. These different definitions of nonviolence will be considered diverse and valid descriptions from different perspectives stemming from different periods in time. The aim is not to consider them in an argumentative form in which someone should be better than the others. On the contrary, the approach is to consider the different definitions of nonviolence in a dialogue aimed at finding new essential aspects of the idea<sup>19</sup>, able to unite instead of divide. Indeed, the aim is to define the concept of nonviolence from a different angle in a way that may in our time help people (academics as well as activists) to describe what they are doing without divisions, without thinking that they are doing something different from the others. At the same time, this reconciling approach does not intend to dissolve the internal tension of the concept of nonviolence. Thus, the aim is to ‘reconstruct nonviolence’, proposing a different understanding of this concept, which tries to overcome the current division and helps in the fight for its existence and, hopefully one day, dominion over its opposites. The idea is to keep the tension provided by the two streams of nonviolence, avoiding troubling connotations and getting rid of the theoretical obstacles that divide them into two different theories. In order to emerge, nonviolence should make order at home, and this thesis is an attempt to begin that process.

In trying to reconstruct nonviolence, we decided to pay particular attention to the interpretation of nonviolence by Gene Sharp. This choice is due to the fact that Sharp is now considered the “doyen of the field” (Summy, 2005), the father of Otpor Revolution in Serbia, and many other struggles in the world. Every introduction on the topic acknowledges the key role played by Sharp in the history of nonviolence. At the same time, Gene Sharp is the one who most radically divided nonviolence in two: a principle and a method of struggle. For these

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<sup>19</sup> This approach is in line with Bevir’s attitude which the historian should keep in front of the work. He claimed that occasionalists confuse dialogue (form of discourse in which we try to recover the hermeneutic meanings, without too much attention to the linguistic meaning; we treat the utterance charitably) with Argument (form of discourse in which we accept authority of linguistic meanings; treat the utterance uncharitably, we want to show other people to be mistaken) (Bevir 1999:65).

reasons, his version of the division will inevitably be central to this thesis. This should not diminish the importance of his contribution to the field. Equally, it should not diminish the importance of other important scholars, who played a key role in the development of the concept of nonviolence. The focus on the distinction between pragmatic and principled nonviolence will inevitably lead this work to leave aside other ways of thinking about nonviolence; in particular, the one by Johan Galtung and Giuliano Pontara. The Norwegian scholar proposed in 1964 a different division of nonviolence in a negative and positive side. It is true that this division is still at the centre of many works, especially in Europe and within the Transcend network. It also inspired other studies on nonviolence, such as the ones by Pontara, who proposed to divide nonviolence in general, as an instrument to defend justice or privilege, and positive or specific, as an ethical-political choice. Nevertheless, Galtung's and Pontara's divisions are definitely less dominant than Sharp's, and are not void of problems, which is not the main concern here. In particular, Sharp is unfairly classified in the negative or generic side, even though his effort cannot be reduced to a mere limitation of violence, overlooking the enormous creative potential of pragmatic nonviolence. However, this thesis benefited immensely from the works of Galtung and Pontara. Their arguments are part of this thesis, and their definitions represent the richness of meaning of the term nonviolence. Yet, this thesis is based on the necessity of reconciling nonviolence, and not to oppose different divisions, looking at the more appropriate one.

Thus, we will focus on Sharp. We will critique his definition of nonviolence from the point of view of the three reasons outlined above. We will reflect on the use of the term, on the theoretical significance of the division, and on the consequence at the level of democracy and religion. These are the most urgent problems to face, as well as the key opportunities to exploit for reconstructing the concept of nonviolence. As it has been claimed above, the aim is to engage in a dialogue with the literature, trying to understand the key weaknesses of the division of nonviolence in principled and pragmatic, in order to propose a new synthesis.

The exposition of these critiques raise an issue on what to do next of the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence. One solution would be to simply get rid of the distinction. Some would perhaps agree, claiming that other

divisions and categorisations best describe the phenomenon. We may even coin a new and different distinction. Nevertheless, it is doubtful that a new categorisation would help the research on nonviolence. It would only make the literature more chaotic. Instead, it is much more beneficial and fascinating to try to rescue what is still actual of this distinction, abandoning what is not. The widespread acceptance of the division between principled and pragmatic nonviolence signals that it does actually contain something important. Nevertheless, too much time has passed and too many problems arisen; it is necessary to rephrase the two categories.

The work of reconstruction will start with the help of a not very well-known philosopher of nonviolence, the Italian Aldo Capitini. The philosopher was born in Perugia in 1899, son of the custodian of the old tower of the municipality and a tailor. He studied Literature and Philosophy at the Normale of Pisa, graduating under the supervision of the anti-fascist Attilio Momigliano. It is in this period that he started studying nonviolence and in particular Gandhi's example. Then, he worked as Administrative Secretary at the Normale, while also being assistant to Momigliano and an active organiser of discussions around politics and religion. In 1929 he left Catholicism, due to the Concordat with Fascism, and in 1933 he was dismissed from the Normale due to his refusal to join the Fascist Party. He went back to Perugia and survived giving private lessons. There he started a strong anti-fascist propaganda, with the creation of the Liberal-socialist Movement with Guido Calogero, and developed a non-confessional religious thought centred on nonviolence<sup>20</sup>. When the war came, he refused to take up arms in fighting fascism, and wrote an important tetralogy<sup>21</sup>, in which nonviolence plays a key role.

After the war, nonviolence remained a central concern for Capitini, both during his troubled academic career and outside. Indeed, besides his work as professor of pedagogy in Cagliari and Perugia, he founded the Centro di Coordinamento Internazionale per la Nonviolenza (Centre for International Coordination towards

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<sup>20</sup> In 1937, he published his first book, *Elementi di un'Esperienza Religiosa* (thanks to the help of Benedetto Croce), which may be considered the manifesto of his ideas on religion, nonviolence and war.

<sup>21</sup> He published *Vita religiosa* (1942), *Atti della presenza aperta* (1943), *La realtà di tutti* (written in 1944 and published in 1948) and *Saggio sul soggetto della storia* (1947).

Nonviolence), the Italian Vegetarian Society, and he organised the first Italian peace march in 1961.

The aim of his whole life has been to place nonviolence at the centre of religion and politics. For what concerns religion, Capitini considered himself a 'free religious', i.e. a scholar acknowledging the importance of the religious sphere in human life, but stressing the urgency of a radical religious reform. As other European religious thinkers, such as Bonhoeffer, Simone Weil or Lanza Del Vasto, Capitini acknowledged the deep link between nonviolence and religion. This meant a radical struggle against the continuous acts of closure and backwardness of the Catholic Church since the 1950s<sup>22</sup>, which led to harsh debates with other Italian reformers who decided to remain within Christianity and accepting the dogmas<sup>23</sup>. At the same time, it meant a complex work for the emergence of a practical and ecumenical religion, or better an 'open religion', which linked him to other important Italian religious reformers, such as Ernesto Bonaiuti and Piero Martinetti.

Turning to politics, he recognised that the advent of democracy did not reduce the need for nonviolence<sup>24</sup>. As other important scholars of nonviolence such as Albert Camus or Jean-Marie Muller, Capitini dedicated his life to develop a better 'nonviolent' democracy after the war. In particular, the Italian philosopher noticed that the institutional change was useless without a different extra-parliamentarian and extra-party work on the masses to create active and conscious citizens.

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<sup>22</sup> Capitini wrote extensively about religion. His topics ranged from the doctrine put forward by Pius XII to the role of religion in society; from death and paradise to the mystical body; from the issues concerning baptized non-believer to the problems around the Second Vatican Council. The books of particular importance are: *Il Problema Religioso Attuale*, Parma, Guanda, 1948; *Nuova Socialita' e Riforma Religiosa*, Torino, Einaudi, 1950; *Religione Aperta*, Parma, Guanda, 1955; *Discuto la Religione di Pio XII*, Milano, Parenti, 1957; *Aggiunta Religiosa all'Opposizione*, Milano, Guanda, 1958; *Battezzati Non Credenti*, Firenze, Parenti, 1961; *Severita' Religiosa per il Concilio*, Bari, De Donato, 1966.

<sup>23</sup> The rejection of Catholicism marked a difference with other religious thinkers, who were sympathetic with his cry for reform. In particular, this was quite of a strong difference between Capitini and the Florentine group of Giorgio La Pira (Capitini left Catholicism few years after Giorgio La Pira's conversion), David Maria Turollo, and Ernesto Balducci. Even though they all shared the idea that the Catholic institution was in desperate need of radical reforms, the group of Florence decided to remain within Catholicism, while Capitini never came back. This division faded away only in the 1960s, in particular with the encounter with Don Lorenzo Milani.

<sup>24</sup> It is impossible to rigidly distinguish between books on strictly political issues and books focusing on religion. Thus, we suggest to look at the above books as well as to the following: *I C.O.S. per la Comunita' Aperta*, 1948; *Italia Nonviolenta*, Bologna, Libreria Internazionale Avanguardia, 1949; *Nuova Socialita' e Riforma Religiosa*, Torino, Einaudi, 1950; *Rivoluzione Aperta*, Parma, Guanda, 1956; *L'Obiezione di Coscienza in Italia*, Manduria, Lacaita, 1959; *Antifascismo tra i Giovani*, Trapani, Celebes, 1966; *Le Tecniche della Nonviolenza*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1967; and in particular the posthumous *Il Potere di Tutti*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1969.

Thus, Capitini considered himself a 'left-wing independent' and proposed nonviolence both as a better method of struggle than guerrilla action, and as an instrument to increase participation against party politics and technocracy. His work managed to influence many Italian scholars and politicians, such as Norberto Bobbio, Tristano Codignola, Alexander Langer, and Marco Pannella. Unfortunately, he died in 1968, without having been able to directly affect the methods of protest as well as the ideas of the protesters.

At the moment, there are very few works in English on him<sup>25</sup>; however, he represents a valid way to overcome the problems related to the division. The reasons for believing this are many. Capitini worked on the concept of nonviolence since the 1930s until his death in 1968. This means that he witnessed the period in time in which nonviolence entered the Western world. In particular, he was the one who started the reflection on the topic in Italy under the fascist regime. Yet, his reflections were highly original, and never ended up with any internal division of the concept of nonviolence. To the contrary, he maintained nonviolence as something unique, even though he described and re-described this important phenomenon during his whole life. In doing so, he approached the topic in a clear and peculiar way, which mixed philosophical, poetical, and even religious discourses. This is necessary for such an interdisciplinary concept as nonviolence. Capitini never separated even theory from practice. This means that he never built up abstract but logically perfect theories of nonviolence, as well as he never made simple lists of behaviours or practices.

This approach may be considered a weakness. Indeed, it challenges the academic habit of distinguishing clearly between them, and makes the concept more difficult to understand and operationalise. Nevertheless, this approach was the logical consequence of the work of a person who was at the same time philosopher, educator and activist. He knew very well every side of nonviolence. He theorised a conception of it able to reach ethics and even religion without separating them. At the same time, he organised the first Italian peace march in

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<sup>25</sup> Nevertheless, most of his writings have been published and can be easily found in an Italian library. Moreover, this research benefited also of a visit to the State archive in Perugia in 2014, where most of the original documents are kept.

1961. And these will be useful points from which to draw an idea of what principled and pragmatic nonviolence would mean from his perspective.

A possible objection to the choice to use Capitini is related to the particular historical moment in which he lived. His first book, *Elementi di un'Esperienza Religiosa*, was published in 1937. This was an exacting period for Italy, and he was involved in the opposition to fascism. This fact can lead to suspicion that Capitini engaged “in oblique methods of conveying their thoughts” (Major, 2005:483) at least until the end of World War II, and this can lead one to believe that he is not the best choice. Against this critique we can claim that Capitini never concealed his real intentions in his writings during that period. He has been extremely coherent in his production: he did not change his style and way of writing after the rise of fascism in Italy; he did not change his particular philosophical approach; he had a clear style, which was not difficult to understand. He was jailed twice because of that. Thus, the ‘persecution thesis’ (Ward, 2009) is not applicable to this author.

Another possible objection to the choice of Capitini is that he has never been translated into English. We acknowledge that this is a problem, but we believe that this should not discourage us. For a start, we had to make choices on how to translate certain key terms: *aggiunta*, *compresenza* and *omnicrazia*. In doing so, we have been helped by the only English translation of some paragraphs of Capitini’s work by Faracovi (Capitini, 2000), as well as by an English article written by Capitini (Capitini, 1953), by Altieri’s introduction recently translated in English (Altieri, 2008), and by the short article by Antonino Drago (Drago, 2014). We followed Faracovi in translating *compresenza*, the most important religious neologism coined by Capitini, with *compresence*. We believe this choice to be better than *co-presence* because the Italian term does not have any dash, and because it is a neologism with a complex and innovative meaning. We preferred ‘integration’ to the terms ‘more’ (Capitini, 2000) or ‘adjunct’ (Drago, 2014) in order to translate the Italian term *aggiunta*. The risk in using *more* or *adjunct* is that we may give the impression of referring to something not essential which has been added or connected to something else. Instead, *integration* allows us to emphasise that nonviolence is combining, bringing together something into something else, in order to create a larger unity. Finally, we translated *omnicrazia* with ‘omnicracy’ and not ‘omni-cracy’, for the same reason of *compresence*. The

Italian term does not have any dash, and it refers to a new complex concept, which will be explained in chapter three.

Then, another issue related to the fact that Capitini wrote in Italian is that it has been necessary to translate some passages from his books. In doing so, we tried to choose the simplest passages, in order not to be forced to make too many interventions, leaving a quasi-literal translation. However, we should make clear that we treated the linguistic issue not as a threat, but as an opportunity of introducing Capitini to the English speaking world.

If Capitini may now be considered a good example, it can be claimed that the idea of drawing a pragmatic and a principled dimension of nonviolence from his thought is a hazard. Nevertheless, it is the aim of this thesis to work in-between historical and ahistorical approaches to political theory. The aim of the analysis of Capitini will not be to exactly discover the meaning of the term nonviolence within the Italian peninsula of the XX century, even though the historical aspects will not be left aside. We will adopt the concept of nonviolence of Capitini in a way that resembles what has recently been called a transhistorical approach (Frazer, 2010), which acknowledges that “the past is past, and the present is present, but that the latter has much to learn from the former” (Frazer, 2010:2). The idea of a transhistorical approach is to draw insight from history of political thought as well as contemporary political philosophy. Cherishing the autonomy of the research, the help of the example and written words of Capitini may provide us with a precious framework for overcoming the division in the concept of nonviolence. As explained above, a new framework may be of some help to both activists and academics in describing what they are doing in a way that does not create divisions.

The last thing to clarify is why we claim that this framework is an ideology. There is a long and articulated debate on what a political ideology is. This thesis relies on the approach of Michael Freeden. The British scholar interprets ideology not as ‘illusion’, “an unfortunate smokescreen that covers up reality” (Freeden, 2003:8), or a ‘dogma’. Instead, it is a flexible system of concepts, a distinctive configuration of political concepts which creates action and a new reality (Freeden, 2003). We will show that nonviolence (nonviolent praxis, or even nonviolent thought) is a very complex ‘map’ or ‘morphology’ of the political and social world; it is an “understanding of the political environment of which we are



part, and have views about the merits and failings of that environment” (Freeden, 2003:8).

In particular, our analysis offers a very precise interpretation of ideology as impure praxis. Freedon already linked Gramsci’s philosophy of praxis with ideology, but he did not dig into this link (Freedon, 2000:316). Here we will clearly describe praxis as a non-systematic revolutionary approach, an ideology, which creates theories (in the case of nonviolence ethical theories) and practices (correct or more appropriate behaviours) depending on time and space. From this perspective, we will be able to include Arendt’s concept of praxis (without focusing on her pejorative idea of ideology), showing that it helps in understanding the internal problems of nonviolence, but it is limited and it should be integrated with the adjective *impure*.

### *Chapter Outline*

In order to pursue the aim of reconstructing nonviolence, this thesis will be divided into five chapters. Chapter one will show the growing success of nonviolence and describe the dominant division in principled and pragmatic. Section one will outline the variety of ways in which the term non-violence, or nonviolence, is currently used, describing ways to overthrow dictators, to protest, defend a country, run the state, or change society. Among the many reasons for the rapid advance of this concept, which is used in more and more fields, there is the clear split in the concept of nonviolence between principle and techniques of action. Section two will describe the origins of this distinction, which can be traced back to the 1930s. Nevertheless, the division became definitive only since the 1970s, thanks to the work of the most important and well-known scholar of contemporary nonviolence: Gene Sharp. For the American scholar, nonviolence can be either a set of methods of struggle or a principle.

We will analyse the success of this division on three levels: descriptive, praxeological, and religious. At the descriptive level, it averted the use of exotic terms and help operationalization, helping the introduction of the concept in academia and the adoption by religious groups. At the praxeological level, more and more groups could adopt the term, either averting discussions about values or about effectiveness, and it was rejected the conviction that nonviolence was

effective only with democratic regimes. Finally, at the religious level, the West found a secularised concept to avoid being trapped in discussions on values and religion.

What is the result of this success? Sharp's categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence have now become the dominant categories in the literature on the topic. Section three will analyse these two very different categories. Pragmatic nonviolence focuses on 'people power', looking at new and more effective methods of overthrowing dictators, protesting and seizing power. To the contrary, principled nonviolence is a far less developed and vaguer category, which focuses on what Nagler called 'person power' and looks at pacifism and religion. Today, the categories of pragmatic and principled represent the dominant way to describe nonviolence.

The success of the division comes with a cost. In order to limit new worrying uses of the term, and offer a united and pluralistic concept, able to deal with the crisis of democracy as well as be at the centre of a post-secular society, chapter two will highlight the problems at the descriptive, praxeological and religious levels. For a start, the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence has the problem at the descriptive level of reducing nonviolence to techniques, or behaviours, and values or ideals, and thus means and ends, splitting in two the field. Pragmatic nonviolence is accused of not sufficiently taking into consideration circumstances and ends, while principled nonviolence risk interpreting too rigidly the Gandhian metaphor of seeds and the tree to describe the relation between ends and means. This division allows the proliferation of troubling uses of the term.

The consequence of these problems is apparent at the praxeological level, in which there is risk of a regressive field. Here nonviolence is well known for being a driving force for destruction, but less known for providing an alternative path for construction, especially in a period of crisis of the model of democracy in the Western world. Besides, nonviolence runs the risk of failing pluralism, falling into realpolitik and moralism, hindering in this way the participation of everybody in the change of society.

Finally, the last problem of the two streams is the implied strong division between religion and politics, which is the result of a real process of secularisation.

Nowadays, times have changed. Religion never disappeared, and there is a big debate on how to imagine a post-secular society. The same is valid for nonviolence. Religion cannot be segregated anymore in the category of principled nonviolence. Religion was and is present in the mayor struggles around the world. The issue is how to acknowledge the importance of religion in almost every nonviolent struggle, and to help religion to find a new place in a post-secular society.

These problems will represent the key points in our reconstruction of nonviolence. In order to face these issues we will turn in chapter three to the ideas on the topic of the Italian philosopher Aldo Capitini. Section one will describe the encounter with Gandhian nonviolence under the fascist regime. In such a complex situation, Capitini reinterpreted nonviolence neither as a set of techniques to seize power, nor as a principle to obey. Instead, the Italian philosopher interpreted nonviolence as a tension, a praxis. This tension, logic, or method focuses on reinterpreting and shaping reality looking at liberation from the 'chains' of reality as well as openness to the existent.

From this perspective, there is no division between pragmatic and principled nonviolence. Nevertheless, we will try to describe how the two distinct dimensions, one focused on values and the other on techniques, emerge from Capitini's writings. Section two will focus on how to conceive of a pragmatic dimension. We will show that from this perspective nonviolence is a kind of knowledge, as it promotes some techniques as well as provides the framework for an endless work of reinterpretation of existing practices, and production of new ones, to build up *via facti* a different society. The aim of this effort is in a first moment to construct a 'power without government', which will lead to the formation of a new society, called by Capitini *omnicracy*.

Instead, section three will turn to the principled dimension. The starting point is the acknowledgment of human limits, which may represent an opportunity. Indeed, human beings can decide to directly face these challenges alone, with the consequence of closing down in themselves. Alternatively, the subject can decide to deepen the link with the others, trying collectively to face the burden. This last choice implies a 'great refusal', which means the refusal to believe that the death of the body is the end of everything, as well as to consider as necessary the laws of nature, which assume that the bigger fish devours the smaller one.

Out of this refusal, nonviolence emerges as a process of liberation from the cruelty of reality, as well as openness to the existent. In other words, nonviolence is a work of integration of reality with new opportunities of liberation and openness. The integration is described as made of three main acts: ascetic, ethical, religious. The integration of these three acts in human life demonstrates that cruelty and necessity are not 'necessary', because there is the possibility to build here and now what Capitini called *compresence*.

Chapter four looks at how Capitini's conception of nonviolence answers the concerns raised in chapter two. In particular, we will focus on the way in which nonviolence as praxis overcomes the divisions between means and ends, realism and moralism, as well as religion and politics. For what concerns the division between means and ends, we will show, through the analysis of the first Italian peace march in 1961, how the praxis of nonviolence cannot be reduced to mere means. The march will emerge as a protest-to-project, which balanced destruction and construction towards the aim of transcending the actual radical contention.

Turning to the division between moralism and realism, Capitini's conception of nonviolence leads to a precise political approach, described as a balance between 'realism and serenity'. At the centre of this approach lies the construction of 'omnicracy'. During fascism it meant non-cooperation and the construction of the liberalsocialist movement, while under the democratic regime it meant the creation of new opportunities of participation, such as the COS (Centre of Social Orientation).

Finally, Capitini's conception of nonviolence included religion through the concept of compresence, the maximum liberation and openness possible. Religion is interpreted as a set of thought and action, in which faith is no longer passive obedience, and the priest is substituted by the prophet. This 'open religion' represents the opportunity for the development of values, which is necessary even in the political realm in order to balance the tension towards more inclusion and connection.

Drawing and extending from the many important suggestions provided by Capitini, the last chapter will outline a new interpretation of nonviolence, with its principled and pragmatic sides, able to answer our initial concerns at the

descriptive, praxeological, and religious levels. In doing so, we will show that this new interpretation is able to avert worrying uses of the term under a united and pluralistic concept, which provides a valid answer to the changing historical environment. Section one will reinterpret nonviolence as an impure praxis, a non-systematic revolutionary approach, an ideology, a continuous work of interpretation and shaping of reality. This praxis is impure because mired in an imperfect reality; it includes less than optimal forms, as well as social struggles; and it is always directed towards more freedom and plurality (liberation and openness in Capitini's terms).

This interpretation is of great help in reconceiving the categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence. Principled nonviolence will be reinterpreted as the actualisation of a principle realising change towards freedom and plurality. This choice implies freedom, or self-restraint, the risk of opening to plurality, the opportunity to actively construct an ideal, and the chance of enhancing the link with everybody through an excellent action. Instead, pragmatic nonviolence will be reinterpreted as practical wisdom, phronesis, an 'art of judgment' which can be drawn from the continuous reinterpretation and creation of human practices. The key features of this phronesis are: enhancement of personal responsibility, of the power of all, and of open and inclusive projects. Such a principled and pragmatic nonviolence reconsidered will not oppose each other. They are complementary and work together towards a different reality.

Section two will turn to the praxeological level. Our interpretation of nonviolence has a strong constructive and progressive drive, leading to a transformative kind of realism, a crossroad in-between realism and moralism. This transformative realism interprets and shapes any practice as an opportunity for change, leading to redrawing the boundaries of politics, fostering trust and social capital through a 'diverse citizenship'. From such a peculiar kind of realistic perspective, the crisis of democracy is a problem of 'order without life'. Instead of proposing alternative abstract models, nonviolence works by reinterpreting and shaping the current reality. This means offering a phronesis, an 'art of judgment', enhancing freedom and plurality. This means offering self-restraint and practical ways to enhance personal responsibility against the apathy of citizens; offering ethical acts and ways to enhance the power of all; offering 'excellent actions' and foster open

inclusive projects against the dominion of powerful minorities. In few words, the phronesis developed by nonviolence looks at integrating 'order with life'.

Finally, section three will look at religion. Our interpretation of nonviolence will propose to think of religion as a 'religious act', as thought and action of deepening *via facti* the link with everybody. This approach may cast religion at the centre of a post-secular society. Religion as here conceived is able to integrate the 'immanent frame' with freedom as self-restraint; society with ethical acts of openness; politics with excellent actions. This path may lead to the 'Assisi Presumption', by which I meant the conviction that an open religion is the key for an open society and allows a better democracy to flourish.

## **1. The Success of a Division: Nonviolence as Principled and Pragmatic**

The first step in order to pursue the bold aim of 'reconstructing nonviolence' is to outline the condition in which we currently find this concept. At the moment, nonviolence is living a (still modest) growing success in the literature. In order to describe this success, this chapter will outline the many current uses of the concept, as well as origin and features of the dominant divisions between techniques and principle, as well as between the categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence.

The first section will look at the meanings of nonviolence today focusing on the political world. The concept of nonviolence is increasingly studied in politics. Currently, it is mainly used in different areas, in four different connotations. Firstly, nonviolence is used in strategic and security studies, where it is associated with strategies and techniques of action able to overthrow a dictator. Secondly, nonviolence is also associated with social movement studies and contentious politics, describing certain kinds of actions of protest of social movements. Here the research on nonviolence is centred on the attempt to construct the 'perfect' campaign of civil resistance, able to put pressure on governments in order to change their policies and ideas. In addition, nonviolence is part of defence studies as referring to techniques to defend a country against invasions or coup d'état, and even of peace studies, dealing with emergencies such as international conflicts, all without the use of direct and physical violence. Recently, nonviolence is (still quite rudimentarily) associated with a certain way in which the state may act. This is the case of a nonviolent way to fight against terrorism, or even a nonviolent way to regulate society and non-state actors. Finally, the concept of nonviolence is used to describe more complex kinds of personal and social relations, going beyond the relation between citizens and governors. Nonviolence is associated with actions of everyday revolution; it enters the deepest spheres of poetry and even religion, becoming an endless work of permanent revolution in society.

Ranging from anti-terrorism to poetry and religion, the universe of nonviolence is very wide. One of the reasons for this still growing success in the use of the concept lies in a precise theoretical approach to nonviolence, which divides the concept in a principle or a set of techniques of struggle. Section two will describe the origin of this division as well as the key reasons of this success. This division

underlies nonviolence since the 1930s. Indeed, the concept has been interpreted either as a substitute for war and violent protests, or as part of radical pacifism and religion. This division survived throughout the 1940s and 1950s. Yet, it is only with Gene Sharp that nonviolence was definitely split in principle and set of techniques. Why was this division so successful? The key reasons of this success are: they produced conceptual order; spread the use of the term to groups without asking them to adhere to a creed (and thus moving beyond the idea that nonviolence was possible only in dealing with democratic regimes); satisfy the need for a secularised concept.

The success of the division in principle and techniques led to the establishment of the categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence, which will be described in the last section. It will become clear that they represent two very different approaches to nonviolence. While the principled stream focuses on principles and on the power of the person to realise pacifism and religious preaching, pragmatic nonviolence focuses on techniques of action and on people power to face the violence of governments and seize power.

### *1.1. Nonviolence: Between Anti-terrorism and Religious Preaching*

Nonviolence is slowly becoming a more and more important and studied topic, leaving its traditional marginal role. Academia never really engaged consistently with the topic until 1960s, and the few books appeared since then still represent a kind of esoteric and marginal readings. This is valid in many fields of research. It has attracted the attention of many fields, from education (Chubbuck and Zembylas, 2011) to psychology (Mayton, 2009), from religion (Jain, 2001, Rowell, 2006) to science (Bchatterjee, 1974) and communication (Marshall Rosenberg, 2003), but the topic unfortunately remains marginal. Political studies witnessed a similar path. Since the 1960s, nonviolence entered academia as a marginal concern. This is slowly changing. One of the main reasons of this change is that the term nonviolence is used to describe many revolutions around the world, from the People Power Revolution to more recent events, such as Burma's revolution, the 'coloured revolutions' in Georgia and Ukraine, the 'Arab Spring' (especially Tunisia and Egypt), and the Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong.



Thus, nonviolence is currently increasingly studied. The rising interest is apparent in the extremely fragmented and growing literature on the topic. The term nonviolence started to describe a variety of things in many different fields. For a start, the term nonviolent direct action is used to refer to a particular response to tyranny and oppressive regimes. Some scholars developed interesting analyses of the many struggles of people power and civil resistance in the XX century, such as Ackerman and Kruegler did in their *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict* (Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994) as well as Adam Roberts in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics* (Roberts, 2009). Some scholars focused on the collections of case studies covering different cultures and geographical regions<sup>26</sup>. Many institutions and centres produced handbooks to nonviolent actions in order to topple dictators. Recently, an important statistical work began, culminating in the volume of Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan on campaigns of nonviolent resistance *Why Civil Resistance Works* (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011). The study revealed that violent insurgence is rarely justified on strategic ground. Indeed, between 1900 and 2006, campaigns carried out through nonviolent resistance were more than twice as effective as violent ones, leading to more durable and peaceful democracy, and making less likely to regress into civil war.

Besides, the term nonviolence is widely used to describe a way of protesting against the government or the regime. Here nonviolence is included in the literature on social movements (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000), from the Civil Rights Movement (Calhoun-Brown, 2000) to feminism (Beckwith, 2002, Costain, 2000). Nonviolence is described as a form of contentious interaction, of protest, which does not rely on physical violence. Recently, nonviolence has even been associated to the idea of prefigurative politics, by which we mean something opposed to strategic politics in which there is no means-end equality, and it broadly refers to the “attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest” (Yates, 2014:1). Its meaning ranges from “the building of movement ‘alternatives’ or institutions” to “a way in which protest is performed” (Yates, 2014:2). Whether or not an instance of prefigurative politics, it remains the fact that, as Lipsky claimed, a protest is a political resource of the powerless

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<sup>26</sup> A good bibliography is given by McCarthy and Sharp in *Nonviolent Action: a Research Guide*; a recent excellent example is Wehr, P., Burgess, H., Burgess, G., (eds) *Justice Without Violence*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1994.

(Della Porta and Diani, 2006), and therefore it is important to advance in the strategies and mechanisms which empower social movements. Thus it is key to analyse the many examples of social movements in the world (Zunes et al., 1999), finding the best ways to conduct a perfect civil resistance campaign. This field shares the same concerns of the one looking at overthrowing dictators, even though the degree and the aims are different<sup>27</sup>. They certainly share the concern for unity, planning, and discipline, even though the aim is not a revolution. Besides, they share the attention for what Schock described as the three key elements for a clear understanding of a campaign, whether for protest or revolution. For a start, there is the process of “acquiring resources, people, and support for a campaign” (Schock, 2013), which is called mobilisation. The second key element is resilience, which is “the ability of a challenge to withstand and recover from repression” (Schock, 2013). The key factor is the tactical interaction between opponents. A diversification of tactics and the skills of devising effective strategies are key for the success of a campaign. Finally, political change is more likely when the challenge is able to “sever the opponent from the sources of power upon which it depends, either directly or through allies or third parties” (Schock, 2013). This is described as the process of leverage, opposed to that of violence, which is more similar to a hammer. The leverage approach requires the ability of the activists to attract sympathy of what is called ‘the pillars of support’, which are those who, willing or not, sustain the opponent.

Beyond revolutions and protests, the term nonviolence is also used in defence studies, referring to particular ways of defending a country. Most of these methods constitute what is called civilian-based defence<sup>28</sup>, or civilian defence, or

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<sup>27</sup> In this literature review we decided to divide research on revolutions from those on changing particular laws or habits. However, this has been done only for a better clarity. We should acknowledge that the two are not clearly separable, and that most of the time a nonviolent revolution starts from single-issue protests, with small actions aimed at building up a critical mass, which will be able to topple dictators only later in time.

<sup>28</sup> One of the first study in this direction is the 1958 book of Stephen King-Hall, *Defence in the Nuclear Age*, who brought non-violence right in the middle of the debate on security in the nuclear age. For what concern civil defence, it is important to cite *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression*, edited by Robert Adams in 1967, along with the 1974 book of Boserup and Mack *War without Weapons*. Six years later, Gene Keyes wrote *Strategic Non-violent Defence: the Construct of an Option*. In this article, the author stressed that the strategic aim of civil defence is to maintain the moral of the resistance. A key contribution to the topic is certainly the book by Gene Sharp *Making Europe Unconquerable: The Potential of Civilian-based Deterrence and Defence*, in which the author proposed civilian-based defence in order to defend Europe. Another important contribution to cite is Burrowes' *Strategy of Nonviolent Defense*, published in 1996, in which he criticized Sharp's model of civilian-based defence because it is not

social defence. These three different labels refer to a kind of approach to national security which focuses on flexible tactics of non-cooperation applied by citizens. The thrust of it is that every person should be trained in the different strategies of nonviolent struggle and non-cooperation, in order to respond to two kinds of threats: external (an invasion) or internal (for instance a coup d'état) (Lahey, 1973:176). Therefore, it is a policy centred on civilians and "intended to deter and defeat foreign military invasions, occupations, and internal usurpations" (Sharp and Jenkins, 1990). The rationale is that "instead of military weaponry, civilian-based defence applies the power of society itself to deter and defend against internal usurpations and foreign invaders" (Sharp and Jenkins, 1990:416). The power of society includes social, economic, political, and psychological 'weapons', mainly of non-cooperation and defiance. For what concerns a coup, nonviolence is considered by some scholars an effective but understudied approach (Roberts, 1975, Sharp and Jenkins, 2003). Even if the new group in power controls the most important buildings of the country, they still need physical control of government facilities. In other words, they still need cooperation and legitimacy. Thus, it is possible for the population to defend the old constitutional system nonviolently. In particular, a nonviolent answer would include internal and international repudiation of the coup; the non-cooperation of the attacked society; the block of any imposition of the new government; the encouragement of creative ways of dissent and opposition. Moreover, the society can still continue acting independently, as there was still the old government and the constitution. Finally, the institution can be made omnipresent resistance organisation, especially through a previous training of those working there and the population.

The concept of nonviolence has also been used in relation to conflict management, resolution, and search for peace. In the literature on conflict transformation and peace studies, nonviolence refers to a 'style of action', a certain pattern of behaviours observable by others, dealing with conflict in order to avoid to fall into the vortex of violence<sup>29</sup>. In this field, we can find the expression 'nonviolent conflict transformation', which looks at ways of solving the conflict which would change also the actors and the existent social structure (Galtung,

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focussed on satisfying human needs, it relies on a conception of society oriented to elites and it is a fault strategic theory.

<sup>29</sup> This is at the basis for instance of the Global Network on Conflict Transformation and Mediation Transcend founded by Johan Galtung.

1996:116). Within this interesting area of study, we also talk of 'nonviolent international intervention', referring to ways of intervention in international conflict with methods that reject physical violence and centre on civil society. One example is that of the International Peace Brigade (Checa Hidalgo, 2008), which works for the protection of human right activists and organisations, as well as other similar associations such as the Peace Corps.

Recently, the term nonviolence has also moved beyond the action of the people and citizens against or for the state. Indeed, it started to be associated to the work of the state itself. Going back to the area of defence and security studies, nonviolence has been associated for instance to the one of the key threat for security of the XXI century, terrorism. There is a growing literature which refer to nonviolent ways of fighting terrorism<sup>30</sup>. For instance, Martin recognized that the cause of nonviolence was badly damaged by 9/11 terrorist attack, which "provided a stimulus and ostensible justification for a spiral of violence in which nonviolent alternatives are marginalised" (Martin, 2002). To the contrary, the literature on nonviolence proposes different ways of fighting this phenomenon, in which the state plays an important role in leadership and coordination. For instance, a nonviolent answer would focus on reducing the vulnerability of high-technology societies to sabotage and terrorism. Indeed, a nonviolent approach proposes that technologies should be designed and chosen to be robust against the attack. "Instead of large power plant, energy efficiency and small-scale renewable energy sources could be used. Microhidro would reduce vulnerability compared to large damns. Organic farming would be far less vulnerable than monocultures" (Martin, 2002). Moreover, small-scale buildings are better than giant office blocks, office buildings in which workers are encouraged to work together should be preferred to isolation and alienation. Intelligence is another way to foster a nonviolent approach to counterterrorism. A nonviolent intelligence system has been proposed, open and made of different agencies in competition between each other (De Valk and Niezing, 1993). Assurance that third party supported by the Western security will sign a statement supporting human rights is also another way. Finally, nonviolence includes the conviction that it is urgent

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<sup>30</sup> Some of the key works on the topic are: Cortright, David, *Gandhi and Beyond. Nonviolence for an Age of Terrorism*, London:Paradigm Publisher, 2006; Martin, B. 2002. "Nonviolence versus Terrorism." *Social Alternatives* 21(2):6-9; Ram, S. and Summy R., *Nonviolence: An Alternative for Defeating Global Terror(ism)*, New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008.

to tackle the conditions fostering terrorism, such as repressive regimes, poverty, injustice, inequality, exploitation, neo-colonialism and torture (Martin, 2002).

The debate on terrorism is just one example of something that we start witnessing in the literature more and more often: nonviolence is also a way of behaving of the state itself. More recently, the term nonviolence has also been used to question the basis of the 'responsive regulatory theory', which steer the flow of events through a pyramidal approach with violent enforcement at the top. This means that nonviolence relates to the regulation of non-state actors by the state as well. This may include many different domains, from prison to extra-judicial assassination by the state, from war to UN peacekeeping. Braithwaite recently started to question the truth that that violence is the necessary peak of the pyramid (Braithwaite, 2014).

Up to now we focused on the relation between people, citizens and the state. Nevertheless, the term nonviolence is also associated to many other social behaviours, relations and habits. It relates to the widest range of activities, mainly contrasting exploitation and oppression. Non-violence has been related to a certain approach to economics aiming at self-sufficiency as well as empowering people instead of a few. This approach has been called by some Gandhian economics (Schumacher, 1993), or Gandhian political economy (Ghosh, 2012). The thrust of this approach is to empower citizens and avoid concentration of power in order to foster self-sufficiency. One example of nonviolence in economics are the many small cooperative communities of producers, such as the *agrovilas* which challenge the dominant industrial agricultural model in Brazil (Schock, 2015:176) Besides, some attempts of self-governing around the world are labelled nonviolent, such as those in Argentina (Sitrin, 2012). Looking beyond, nonviolence refers as well to the many attempts to create ashram-like communities around the world, such as those founded by Lanza Del Vasto<sup>31</sup> and called Ark Communities (Vasto, 1974). Another example of nonviolence is the work of Danilo Dolci. The Italian activist and sociologist, who moved to Sicily in order to champion the cause of the poorest. He founded an orphanage, cooperatives and later the Centro Studi e Iniziative per la Piena Occupazione (Centre of Research and Initiatives for Full Employment). He even invented a

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<sup>31</sup> The first Ark Community has been founded in 1948 in Tournier, Charente-Maritime. New communities mushroomed in France and other countries, as well as in South America.

new form of struggle, the 'strike in reverse' or 'reverse strike', consisting in initiating unauthorised public works in favour of the poor. Due to the variety of these uses, we can claim that nonviolence is used also to describe a real permanent and everyday revolution and change in society.

The permanent revolution of nonviolence mixes politics with religion and the more personal spheres of human life. Here nonviolence is associated with terms such as love, charity, compassion and many others. Today, one example of nonviolence is certainly the current Dalai Lama Tenzin Gyatso, whose commitment for nonviolence is expressed both in words (Dalai Lama, 2001) and deeds. Turning to Islam, nonviolence has been central in the work of the Pashtun leader and contemporary of Gandhi Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Nanda, 2004), or more recently to the philosophy of Jawdat Said (Abu-Nimer, 2015:53). Focusing on Christianity, nonviolence has been associated with key actors, such as the Anglican Desmond Tutu, the American Baptist Martin Luther King Jr., the German Lutheran pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others. For what concerns the Catholic world, along with Mother Teresa (Jahanbegloo, 2014) and Thomas Merton, we should consider part of the universe of nonviolence the many South Americans fighting against dictatorships. Symbols of nonviolent struggle includes Pérez Esquivel (Esquivel, 1983), Oscar Romero, bishop and martyr in San Salvador; dom Hélder Câmara, bishop of Olinda and Recife, and fighter against injustice and military regimes; Dom Paulo Evaristo Arns, Brazilian bishop and later cardinal, champion of human rights; and then Miguel D'Escoto Brockmann in Nicaragua, the Ecuadorian Leonidas Proaño, Samuel Ruiz, who worked to bring peace between Mexican government and Zapatistas, and José Maria Pires (Puleo, 1994).

From this short summary, it is quite evident that the concept of nonviolence is present in many different fields of study, from security to social movement studies, from economics to ethics. At this point, the question is: What makes possible to use the same term talking about so many different things? What allowed nonviolence to enter so many fields of study? Is there a definition of nonviolence at the basis of this success? This will be the topic of the next sections.

## 1.2. *The Distinction between Principles and Methods of Action*

Among the many reasons for the successful rise in the use of the concept, a key one is the affirmation of a particular conception of nonviolence. As we claimed in the introduction, the first battle for the existence of the concept did not lead to a widespread use of the term, which remained confined to certain pacifists and religious groups. However, something changed since the 1960s, with the emergence of key works and a clearer definition of nonviolence. With this term, the literature started referring to two different things: a principle or a set of techniques of action. This division is the current way to make sense of the fact that the same term is used to label Otpor! and the Dalai Lama, those who use nonviolent techniques because of their efficiency and Gandhi (Bharadwaj, 1998). The key theorist associated to this division is the American scholar Gene Sharp. Since the 1960s, his contribution to the field had profound impact on the way people looked at nonviolence. For Zunes, it is thanks to him if consideration of Gandhian campaigns moved beyond religious and ethics courses, and if we witness the development of the study on nonviolent conflict and civil resistance in different fields (Engler, 2013:63). By many it is even acknowledged that Sharp's ideas have been the sine qua non of the success of the Otpor! Revolution in Serbia against Slobodan Milošević.

It is worth reminding that the internal tension of nonviolence between a focus on a principle and on techniques of action is nothing new in the literature. Since the introduction of nonviolence in the west, a tension between two souls of nonviolence was evident. During the 1920s and 1930s, there was a split between those who considered non-violence a substitute for war, or a principle of a pacifist revolution. The former group includes authors such as Case, Shridharani, and Gregg. In what is considered the first important study on the topic, *Non-Violent Coercion: a Study in Methods of Social Pressure*, the American sociologist Clarence Marsh Case inquired how much room remained “for the positive effectuation of social purposes and ideals on the part of those who reject the use of physical force” (Case, 1923:413-4). Within this study, non-violent resistance is “a principle of social action” (Case, 1923:4). With these words, Case means a set of methods, techniques used in order to achieve change, with or without mass mobilisation. The aim is to “produce in the mind of the one appealed to, i.e., the subject, a change of mental attitude without the use of coercion” (Case,

1923:398). Thus, actions of non-violent coercion and passive resistance, synonyms for Case, are forms of collective pressure, a reaction “between submission and resistance” (Case, 1923:397) to actions which impinge a group’s interests.

The first clear description of this new way of waging conflicts arrived some years later with the 1934 book *The Power of Non-violence* by Richard Gregg. Here, non-violence is understood as a particular and useful way to wage conflicts. Using “the then prestigious canon of modern psychology” (Scalmer, 2011:100), even though still underdeveloped, the book is an attempt to understand “the emotional, mental and moral mechanisms” involved (Gregg, 1966:43) in this particular action at the level of both individuals and groups. From this analysis, nonviolent resistance emerged as an answer to violence. More precisely, nonviolent resistance works as a sort of moral jiu-jitsu: “the nonviolence and good will of the victim acts in the same way that the lack of physical opposition by the user of physical jiu-jitsu, does, causing the attacker to lose his moral balance” (Gregg, 1966:44).

Few years later, Krishnalal Shridharani, in his work *War without Violence*, went even further in describing nonviolence. He claimed that satyagraha, or “non-violent direct action” (Shridharani, 1939:13), is a “new social institution”, a plan for concerted action which is equivalent and can substitute the institution of war. Nonviolence was that kind of “effective action, short of the destructive practice of war” which was able to achieve “realistic and needed ends” (Shridharani, 1939:13), and it is useful “for attaining group objectives without the aid of Machiavellian physical force and fraud” (Shridharani, 1939:12-3). In other words, non-violence referred to a “technique of concerted social action” (Shridharani, 1939:14), which is independent from political and social context, tradition and conditions. Shridharani admitted that it was easier for Indians to adopt non-violence, due to their cultural traits. He also admitted that satyagraha was an expansion of the concept of Ahimsa, and it represents the culmination of Hindu heritage (Shridharani, 1939:154). However, satyagraha “can be substituted for war as simply as outmoded airplanes can be replaced by faster and more powerful ones” (Shridharani, 1939:188).

The interpretations of Case, Gregg and Shridharani may be opposed to other ways of understanding non-violence at the time. Indeed, the term has also been



adopted by the pacifist movements. It has become a key component of what can be called radical pacifism. Radical pacifism emerged from the peace movement between the world wars, along with anti-war peace advocates. The former, also called absolute pacifists, repudiate all organised violence, war, and armed conflict. On the contrary, anti-war peace advocates oppose war and militarism, while supporting defensive wars and even armed social revolution (Bennett, 2003:XII). Nonviolence became the central component of the radical pacifists' revolution, which does not stop at the political realm, but includes a change in the personal, social, and even spiritual spheres.

Two famous supporters of a more 'secular' form of nonviolent revolution are Aldous Huxley and Barthelmy de Ligt. In *Means and Ends* and *The Conquest of Violence*, the two authors acknowledged the importance of Case and Gregg, but push the topic in a different direction. Here non-violence was not only a method for war or struggle; it was a method of economic, social and cultural revolution. It was both method and spiritual force; it was abstention from any kind of violence, but also absence of fear and hatred in the fight for a different society. De Ligt was clear in saying that "non-violent resistance makes calls on man as a moral being: the more he practices it, the higher a level of human value he will reach" (De Ligt, 1989:165). For Huxley, non-violence is even a philosophy which embraces individuals and societies. The agents of this reform were described as new men, which De Ligt called 'soldiers of peace' (De Ligt, 1989:210), who fight with heroism, discipline, self-denial, as in armed battle. They take into account even self-sacrifice, even though not subordinated to collective violence, but affirming intellectual and moral individuality (De Ligt, 1989:211). Their aim is no more to substitute war or violent protests, but to place non-violence at the basis of any individual, social and political relationship in order to achieve peace. Huxley and De Ligt agree that "the things that makes for peace above all others is the systematic practice in all human relationships of non-violence" (Huxley, 1969:138). Thus, non-violence was described as the key for social liberty, justice (De Ligt, 1989:268), the construction of "a free and just society" (Huxley, 1969:15), and it was even deeply linked with religion or cosmology (Huxley, 1969:7). This means going beyond anti-militarism, because it was insufficient when not embedded in a "wider task, namely the creation of a new culture and society" (De Ligt, 1989:XVI). More generally, we can claim that non-violence was

also used as a synonym of peace, which meant much more than simple absence of war. Huxley claimed that “all men desire peace, but very few desire those things that make for peace” (Huxley, 1969:138). Non-violence was both at the same time.

The approach of Huxley and De Ligt was not the only one that radical pacifism was expressing at the time. Other authors developed much more than them the ties between non-violence and religion. They even merged non-violence and pacifism in the different religious traditions. This is the case of Sibley’s 1943 article *The Political Theories of Modern Religious Pacifism*, in which he claimed that Hinduism and Christianity have deep roots in past philosophies of non-violence, although their theologies differ (Sibley, 1943:440). However, the most well-known activist of that period, who pushed further the link between pacifism, spirituality and religion, was the radical pacifist Abraham Johannes Muste, who published in 1940, *Non-violence in an Aggressive World*. Muste claimed that WW2 represented the horrible backdrop against which a different world is imagined. The choice was simple: either a life of fear, violence and domination, or of love. Many at his time “bow the knee before Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, [and] some social arbiter or some other idol” (Muste, 1940:6). This path threatened democracy, social progress and even religion, which depended for survival and triumph “upon the adoption of a thorough-going, deeply motivated, positive, realistic pacifism” (Muste, 1940:10). The future of civilization depended on a social revolution toward pacifism. This revolution cannot be violent; violence is not a valid way for real change (Muste, 1940:78). Instead, Muste advised to follow another example, that of Jesus. Jesus chose the way of love, even though this included pain as well as the likelihood of being defeated and killed. Jesus was example of non-violence, as it was example of repentance, love of the enemy, self-suffering, refusal to inflict or desire to inflict sufferance on the others, and repudiation of using Caesar’s weapons (Muste, 1940:28). Nonviolence was thus a way that grows out of the Christian or Jewish-Christian view of life (Muste, 1940:30). Jesus “rejected the way of the sword and knew that He would therefore have to tread the way of the Cross” (Muste, 1940:25). Thus, nonviolence was the way of the Cross, which means complete sacrifice, and was the way in which a person shows the love of God (Muste, 1940:19).

The two different interpretations of non-violence as a method of struggle or a deep principle of pacifism or religious love have never been seriously challenged. To the contrary, since the 1940s we witness a constant attempt to define, redefine, and rename two main views of non-violence. One of the first authors to do so was Theodore Paullin, who tried to clarify in his 1944 *Introduction to Non-Violence* that non-violence can be defined from the idea of a continuum. On one extreme we find violence coupled with hatred, then ‘violence without hate’, ‘hate without violence’, non-violent coercion, satyagraha or nonviolent direct action and non-resistance. At the opposite extreme we find active goodwill and reconciliation. Within this continuum, Paullin claimed that non-violence can be either a principle, “accepted as an end in itself”, or a “means to some other desired end” (Paullin, 1944:3). Non-violence as a principle is the “highest value and supreme principle” of the absolute pacifist. On the contrary, he acknowledged that many of pacifists and non-pacifists consider non-violence as a technique. Being a mere technique, it can be used for different purposes; it is not attached to any value in particular, and it does not have to be followed in any circumstances.

The interpretation of Paullin was in line with the concept of non-violence held by political and social organisations of the time. One instance is given by Calhoun, who reported of a conference of 95 left-wing non-violent revolutionists in Chicago, in which it was decided for the establishment in the US of the Committee for Non-Violent Revolution. In the statement of principle of the conference we read that “we see non-violence as a principle as well as a technique. In all actions we renounce the methods of punishing, hating or killing any fellow human being” (Calhoun, 1946:118). Non-violence was considered the most suitable revolutionary technique; a violent uprising was not a valid alternative. Only the masses, organised in non-violent movements, can change the current system; their weapon is the power to refuse submission to any authority (Calhoun, 1946:119). The implementation of this power is through “agitation, seizure of existing plants, and development of new worker-consumer enterprises” (Calhoun, 1946:119).

Thus, the division was almost already established in the 1940s, and it continued to manifestly contour the debate on non-violence. Some years later, in 1958, Bondurant published one of the key works in the history of non-violence, called

*Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict*. As Sharp claimed, “this is the first book by a Western political scientist on the significance of Gandhi and Satyagraha for problems of Western political theory and practice” (Sharp, 1959b:401). The book is centred on explaining the concept of satyagraha. Even though the division seems to be less radical, the influence of the two ‘souls’ of nonviolence is apparent throughout the pages. Indeed, she is persuaded that the main problem of satyagraha is the ‘cultural matrix’ (Bondurant, 1988:5), which obscures its essential elements. A new analysis was needed, which divided the technique of action from the rest of Gandhi’s teaching. Bondurant claimed that “it is essential rigorously to differentiate satyagraha as technique of action from those specific considerations of right-living with which Gandhi also concerned himself”. The importance is due to the fact that satyagraha “is basically an ethic-principle the essence of which is a social technique of action” (Bondurant, 1988:12). In other words, the social technique of action is at the centre; at the same time, satyagraha becomes a group of precepts for action. Thus, Bondurant does not depart neatly from the previous tradition, as she tried to explain the power and novelty of satyagraha using the division between a principle and a mere technique of action. At the same time, it is evident the difficulty of describing satyagraha as a mere technique of action. Too much is at stake, such as truth, love and self-suffering.

Nevertheless, the tension between a principle and a method continued to lead the literature on the topic. The same need expressed by Bondurant for order in the dynamic meaning of nonviolence was at the basis of two other studies published in the same period. The first was the article of the philosopher Arne Naess, *A Systematization of Gandhian Ethics of Conflict Resolution* (Naess, 1958). The Norwegian philosopher tried to explain Gandhi’s thoughts and deeds as an ethics. In order to do so, he put in place a rational reconstruction in the form of a normative system. Gandhi’s actions and speech were translated into norms and sub-norms defining valid actions. The normative power of the system rested on one norm: acting in group struggle in a way conducive to long-term universal reduction of violence. Naess claimed that on this norm rests the Gandhian method of conflict behaviour, called satyagraha. Besides, Naess drew also first principles, a sort of secularised metaphysics, including assumptions such as the unity of human beings and life. This article is an example of Naess’ attempt to

conceive of non-violence as an “alternative to nuclearism and to violent behaviour in group conflict in general” (Galtung, 2011:37) through a deductive system of norms. This system will be central in the development of Naess’ idea of deep ecology.

Arne Naess will inspire both as tutor and friend Johan Galtung, who put nonviolence at the centre of a new field, peace research. Galtung started a ground-breaking research on the different kinds of violence, and described nonviolence as positive and negative. The former includes “all efforts – short of bodily incapacitation of any kind to influence the other party by trying to make it more difficult for him to perform actions a non-violent group is against”. This certainly contains the flow of violence in the world, but it does not face directly frustration and injustice. Instead, positive nonviolence aims to construct something new and different, as it includes “any effort, again short of bodily manipulation, to make it more easy for the other party to perform the actions the non-violence group would favour” (Galtung, 1992).

In 1958, Gene Sharp was invited to the University of Oslo by Naess. The following year, Sharp published *The Meanings of Non-Violence: A Typology (Revisited)*. The study tried to provide an answer to the confused meaning of nonviolence. The object was to “clarify, classify, and define” (Sharp, 1959a:64) the different types of nonviolence. In particular, he called ‘generic non-violence’ the abstention from physical violence, and divided pacifism from ‘non-violent resistance and direct action’. Then, Sharp listed in a progressive way nine types of non-violence, which can be included within the two categories above. The order is on the basis of the increasing activity involved.

The distinction between pacifism and non-violent resistance had to deal with doubts and a particular international climate. For instance, Sibley, in *The Quiet Battle*, still considered non-violence an ambiguous term, embedding both a “personal ethic of non-violence and its political significance” (Sibley, 1963:7). The tendency of linking non-violence, social justice and the total refusal of war was widespread, due mainly to the tremendous events of that period, from the development of intercontinental missiles, the Cuba crisis, the instability of South America, and the mass murder in Hungary, Algeria and Vietnam. The sentiment of impotence and fear of many citizens of the two blocs exacerbated. Out of this

fear, many authors, such as Thomas Merton<sup>32</sup>, James Douglass<sup>33</sup>, Jacques Ellul<sup>34</sup>, Dom Helder Camara<sup>35</sup>, defended the claim that non-violence was a way of life: it was a revolution against a life of terror.

Hitherto, it is clear that the division between the principle and the method of non-violence was already there. The need was only to refine and reflect on it. This will be done a few years later, with an important article by Judith Stiehm called *Nonviolence is Two*. The American scholar finds the concept of nonviolent resistance rather confusing because it “encompasses a wide variety of actions (from self-immolation to a carefully conceived consumer boycott) as well as a number of philosophic positions (from that of the Friends to that of the Congress of Racial Equality activists)” (Stiehm, 1968:23). Along with writing nonviolence without the dash, she claimed that ‘for convenience’ there are ‘two strands of thought’, which are incompatible, differing “in their motivation their assumptions and their implications” (Stiehm, 1968:24). The two strands of thought are called “conscientious nonviolence” and a “pragmatic nonviolence”. Conscientious nonviolence is associated with the individual, both in decision-making and action-initiation. It stems from a religious or ethical injunction prohibiting injury. It assumes that conscience is inviolable and should be obeyed, and that social conflict is “no more than a failure of communication between individuals and their consciences”. This category includes a variety of people, from those who “conscientiously object to war” to those “who sail (in the Pacific) or walk (in the Sahara) into atomic testing grounds” (Stiehm, 1968:24). On the contrary, pragmatic nonviolence is associated with collective behaviour, it is a “means of economically waging conflict” (Stiehm, 1968:26), “a more or less spontaneous response by an unarmed populace or by a minority group to a situation regarded as intolerable”. This second strand considers conflict as normal, and nonviolence as an effective way of challenging power. Thus, it is clear that the two kinds of nonviolence have key differences. Firstly, conscientious nonviolence is an

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<sup>32</sup> Thomas Merton (1915-1968) was a Trappist monk. He was one of the most important and well known Catholics working on nonviolence in the US, influencing a whole generation of theologians and activists. His most famous book is the autobiography *The Seven Storey Mountain* (1948).

<sup>33</sup> James W. Douglass was a theologian and a Catholic peacemaker. He wrote in 1968 *The Nonviolent Cross*.

<sup>34</sup> French sociologist, theologian and anarchist. His most famous work on the topic is *Violence: Reflections from a Christian Perspective* published in 1969.

<sup>35</sup> Roman Catholic Archbishop of Olinda and Recife. One of his famous book is *Spiral of Violence*, written in 1970.

individual job, or a group executing a unanimous decision; pragmatic nonviolence is the work of persons acting in concert. Secondly, conscientious nonviolence believes conflict to be unreal, solvable in an increase of communication, while pragmatic nonviolence expects conflict. Then, conscientious nonviolence emphasises individual obligation of avoiding doing wrong, meanwhile pragmatic nonviolence “seeks to avoid being wronged” (Stiehm, 1968:27). Finally, the aim is different. For the conscientious nonviolence the best government is no government, whereas pragmatic nonviolence revolves around democracy.

Thus, with the article of Stiehm, nonviolence lost the hyphen, but witnessed the crystallisation of a deep internal division in two. She acknowledged that the categories of conscientious and pragmatic run parallel in real life. “The two theories do live together” (Stiehm, 1968:28), and this is apparent in many events, such as sermons, pickets and theoretical discussions. Nevertheless, the division between a collective behaviour and an individual conviction was set up. Even more, on this division two quite autonomous categories have been established, conscientious and pragmatic nonviolence.

The definitive break came few years later, with the key refinement and clarification provided by the seminal work of Gene Sharp. Sharp, who is nowadays considered the most important scholar of nonviolence, started from the beginning of his career to read and talk about Gandhi and nonviolence. While at the beginning of his career he was a strong follower of Gandhi, later Sharp gradually tried to “distance himself from his source of inspiration” (Weber, 2004:232). Until 1960s, Sharp worked intensively on Gandhi, promoting satyagraha as an innovative method of combating evil combining moral power, love, integrity, and goodness with non-violent strategy and techniques (Weber, 2004:234). However, a slow change in his position took place. This change is visible in the collection of many works written between 1959 and 1970 called *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, and led to the publication of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*. They represent a ground-breaking shift towards a more strategic dimension of nonviolence, which still shape most of the current research on the topic.

Sharp faced similar problems to those of Stiehm. The term nonviolence was confused; there was the need to clarify, classify and define the different forms of nonviolence. The task had to be done in an academic, value-neutral way. The

American scholar began with an impressive study of Gandhi's works and deeds, as he believed the source of confusion laid there. The cause of the confusion on the meaning of nonviolence is traceable first of all in the eccentricities, religious symbolism and language of Gandhi. It is difficult to deal with an author who was far from systematic. Secondly, the frequent identification of Gandhi with the Indian National Congress added serious problems in the study and evaluation of the Mahatma and of nonviolence itself (Sharp, 1979:2). In addition, the distorted use and interpretation of nonviolence spread by pacifist and in particular religious pacifists, stalled its acceptance due to the fact that few accepted their programmes and doctrines (Sharp, 1979:122). Finally, the novelty and strength of nonviolence was threatened by many wrong common beliefs, such as the conviction that nonviolent campaigns were possible because the opponent was a British Government made up of gentlemen<sup>36</sup>.

Nevertheless, one of the main sources of confusion was in the distinction made by Gandhi between a 'nonviolence of the weak' and a 'nonviolence of the brave'. Here, as in other circumstances, Gandhi "often seemed to [be] torn in two or more directions at the same time, and some of his statements were in clear contradiction to others" (Sharp, 1979:89). Sharp criticised the view that in the first phase of Gandhi's life, the Mahatma preached nonviolence as a policy, while only later he disavowed that limited approach in favour of a more radical and moral concept of nonviolence. Sharp admitted that Gandhi's focus was initially limited to nonviolence directed to the achievement of "political objectives" (Sharp, 1979:96). India had to adopt nonviolence because it was more effective in producing change. However, the Mahatma always believed in the importance of conviction, will and attitudes. Later in his life, Gandhi stressed the flaws of the use of nonviolent technique as a policy, mainly in relation to the violent turn of the Indian process of independence. For this reason he bitterly admitted that the form of nonviolence used by India was 'nonviolence of the weak'. Violence came back

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<sup>36</sup> This argument, developed at page 12 of *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, will eventually re-emerge in the literature. The 1987 article of Stratford, called *Can Nonviolence Defence be Effective if the Opponent is Ruthless?: the Nazi Case*, along with Martin's *The Nazis and Nonviolence*, are good examples of the different views on the topic. A similar argument is given by Liddell Hart in his 1968 *Lessons from Resistance Movements-Guerrilla and Non-Violent*, in *Civil Resistance as a National Defense* (Harrisburg:Stackpoole, p.240). Walzer repeated the same claim in *Just and Unjust War*. He even supported this claim on the "perverse advice" given by Gandhi to the Jews in Germany. As proposed, Sharp overcomes this highly debatable mistake in *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*, stressing that this interpretation does not consider when this claim has been made, distorting the meaning.



on the scene too rapidly, showing how superficially nonviolence has been understood. As a reaction, Gandhi opposed to this expedient nonviolence a different one based on moral conviction, 'nonviolence of the brave'. The latter described nonviolence more as a 'creed', and it did not contain the many weaknesses of the former, which was only a 'policy' (Sharp, 1979:105). This creed meant that it would not give up in favour of violence in difficult times; that needs bravery and courage; that it requires the use of intellect, resourcefulness and creativity in its application; that it would be applied in all areas of life (Sharp, 1979:299).

The complexity of Gandhian nonviolence brought Sharp initially to look for a reconciliation between a nonviolence of the weak and of the brave, in other words between techniques and principle. Unfortunately, a strong disillusionment followed the "long and frustrating period" during which Sharp tried to persuade pacifist groups of the need to be leaders in the attempt to replace violent sanctions with nonviolent ones, instead of focusing on "continue efforts to gain individual converts to personal pacifism" (Sharp, 1979:252). This is one of the reasons for the increasing critique to Gandhi evident in *Gandhi as a Political Strategist*. Indeed, Sharp provided a tight response to the Gandhian critique to the violence of the weak. Nonviolence of the weak was based on the use of nonviolence as an expedient technique by people unwilling or unable to offer armed resistance (Sharp, 1979:113). However, Sharp objected, in the moment people resort to nonviolence, they change the helpless initial condition. Moreover, military weakness cannot be a factor to distinguish nonviolence of the weak (Sharp, 1979:115).

Along with the frequent critiques of Gandhi and the interest in the nonviolence of the weak, Sharp started to interpret the Indian leader in a different way. Sharp focused more and more on Gandhi as "neither a conscientious objector nor a supporter of violence in politics", but as an "experimenter in the development of 'war without weapons'" (Sharp, 1979:4). The reference to Shridharani's work was not by chance. The Indian author, along with Bondurant's interpretation of satyagraha as a technique of nonviolent action<sup>37</sup>, represent two key sources of

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<sup>37</sup> Sharp dedicated a review in 1959 to Bondurant's *Conquest of Violence* in which he considered it "the first book by a Western political scientist on the significance of Gandhi and satyagraha for problems of Western political theory and practice" p. 61.

Sharp's ideas. They all belong to a group of authors who research on nonviolent action as an "adequate functional substitute for violent conflict" (Sharp, 1979:75). From this angle, Gandhi does not look like a saint, but a person with a great understanding of political reality, intuition, organizational ability, attention to details and will to experiment. In the same vein, India's choice of nonviolence was not pacifism, but a "political act in response to a political program of action proposed to deal with a particular kind of situation and crisis" (Sharp, 1979:19). Moral superiority was not the prime factor for its acceptance; it was persuasive and convincing in that particular political moment. In other words, Sharp started to move to the position that systems of beliefs and techniques are separable (Weber, 2004:237).

Satyagraha pays the price of this move, and especially of the disagreement with pacifists; it has been in fact severed in two. Indeed, satyagraha is described as a "technique of action" (Sharp, 1979:37). This technique of action includes different techniques, "degree of dynamism, aggressiveness, attitudes to the opponent" (Sharp, 1979:37), and it aims at the conversion of the other through personal suffering, with no wish to injure anybody. At the same time, satyagraha is described as "firmness which comes from reliance on truth" (Sharp, 1979:14); a great deal of attention goes to the inward as the first step for the fight against evil in the world (Sharp, 1979:220).

Thus, nonviolence started to be considered either a set of techniques, a political weapon to fight tyranny and a substitute for war; or a principle to obey, which comes from a deep ethical or religious belief. The distinction allowed nonviolence to enter the many fields mentioned above, such as peace studies, strategic studies, social movement studies, and many others. Almost all of the most famous handbooks, introductions, and works on nonviolence take for granted (or at least acknowledge the existence of) the distinction, such as Holmes (2012), Mallik (2002), Jahanbegloo (2014), Atack (2012), Kurlansky (2009). Even in some of the Christian scholarship, the division is accepted: methods are divided from values. One example is Koontz, who considered nonviolent resistance one of the three versions of Christian nonviolence. Nonviolent resistance was the set of "pragmatically effective nonviolent means of 'fighting' that are viable alternatives to war and military conflict and that can achieve or protect crucial values" (Koontz, 2008:235).

What are the reasons behind this development? Why was the division so successful? The reasons for the success of these distinctions are many. The division between a set of methods of action and a principle allowed scholars, activists and the Western public to identify and describe the complex and broad concept of nonviolence, leaving aside exotic words as well as theories. In other words, Sharp successfully “produced conceptual order amongst the cluttered and scattered experiences and literature on non-violent actions” (Martin, 1989). This has a threefold consequence. For a start, it is much easier to describe what nonviolence is, and it is much easier to find examples of events and behaviours which can be catalogued as nonviolent. It is easier to label ‘nonviolent’ some insurrections, some techniques of protesting or defending the country, and consequently it is easier to operationalise the concept, which is key in order to enter many fields of political science and other subjects. Thus, it became natural to claim that “for analytical reasons” and because it is “easier” to understand and to describe, we shall distinguish between two components in Gandhism, “the political struggle method (non-violence) and the socio-economic program” (Hettne, 1976:228). This fact suited even religious groups, because it is easier to match the principle of nonviolence with the radical and faith-based ways of life that they are preaching, which may be epitomised by their prophet as well as justified by the tale of another life.

Besides the success at the descriptive level, the conceptual order offered by Sharp had consequences at what we can call praxeological level<sup>38</sup>. With the term praxeology we refer to the analysis aiming at identifying logical potentials of ideas immanent in society and following their logic” (Price, 2008:10), or as Linklater claimed, “reflecting on the moral resources within existing social arrangements which political actors can harness for political purposes”(Linklater, 1998:5). In other words, the dominant categories of the field may raise some concerns about their logical full implications, but also hope about their possibilities. The division allowed many political groups and association to adopt the concept of nonviolence, and in particular some of its more interesting techniques of action, without having to deal with moral issues as well as adhere to a creed. This fact

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<sup>38</sup> This term derived from Raymond Aron’s last section of *Peace and War*. There, the scholar found as the key issue of praxeology the tension between Machiavellian calculations of opportunity and the Kantian problem of acting ethically towards universal peace, or as the tension between ethics of conviction and responsibility.

has been extremely important for the current success of nonviolence around the world. Nonviolence became an effective tool to act in the real world to overthrow governments and put pressure on political power. This development meant the confutation of all those criticisms which considered nonviolence possible only in dealing with democratic regimes. Nowadays, many revolutions around the world follow the nonviolent path. At the same time, pacifist groups could easily embed the concept of nonviolence into their own ideologies, avoiding any concern with effectiveness, exchange with other groups, and providing a further argument to sustain their actions.

Finally, there are valid reasons at the religious level. Sharp's conceptual order interjected the need for a secularised concept, which suited the Western secular society. Sharp made of nonviolence something very different from a simple branch of pacifism or religion. In other words, dividing nonviolence in a technique and a principle allowed the former to enter the international sphere, averting the many prejudices concerning religion, and in particular the Westphalian Presumption, the conviction that religion should remain in the private sphere for the sake of the international order. At the same time, the division allowed nonviolence to continue to be used in religious circles, but without affecting more scientific, secular and international research.

To summarise, the division of nonviolence in a technique of action and a principle is now the dominant way in which the concept is interpreted. This conceptualisation benefitted enormously the literature on nonviolence. Gene Sharp made a ground-breaking contribution, with consequences at the descriptive (it is easier to describe nonviolence as there are many particular definitions of it), praxeological (more people use the term and the idea that nonviolence is possible only in dealing with democracies is confuted), and even religious level (satisfy the need of a secularised concept). What remains to be seen is: what is the result of this success? This will be the aim of the next section.

### *1.3. Nonviolence is Two: Pragmatic and Principled Nonviolence*

The success of the division between principle and techniques of action led to a real split in the world of nonviolence. Indeed, we witnessed the development of what are now the two most important categories in the literature, those of

principled and pragmatic nonviolence. These two categories are sometimes described as two “orientations” not always distinguishable (Martin, 2009), but it is better to say that they represent two autonomous and very different streams of nonviolence, with different key scholars, which sometimes seem to look at very different things. Beyond any doubt, the category which benefited most of the distinction was pragmatic nonviolence, which has now become an important field in politics. Indeed, pragmatic nonviolence represents by far the more dynamic field of nonviolence of the last decades. This category includes a variety of research whose thread is the understanding of nonviolence as civil disobedience or civil resistance (Schock 2013), and a more effective means for a group to achieve something considered important, such as democracy or human rights. From this angle, nonviolence refers to a series of extremely valuable techniques in seizing and keeping power. As Sharp claimed, “self-suffering is no longer only a risk, it also becomes a weapon” (Sharp and Paulson, 2005). Nonviolence, and in particular nonviolent direct action, constitutes a weapon in the hand of the population. Thanks to the many techniques gathered on the basis of this conviction, people can finally move away from collective violent behaviours. Sharp argues that people turn to violence “because they do not see any other option for resolving intractable conflicts”. The problem is not that they are wicked. The real issue is that it is not enough to exhort to love; a persuasive and effective alternative way of proceeding should be available. The scholarship on nonviolent direct action is thus keen to show that a strategy of nonviolent conflict is a more effective alternative than violence.

Pragmatic nonviolence’s key concern is power, and the approach used to achieve it is shaped by what is called consent theory. This is not a new theory. La Boetie talked extensively about it already in the XVI century, in his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*. Sharp claims that this theory is already visible in Gandhi’s works and deeds. The theory behind satyagraha itself is that all governments depend on the voluntary assistance, cooperation and obedience of their citizens. What is new in Gandhi is the focus on the means for change: non-cooperation, defiance, and disobedience. These actions, along with a change of attitude towards the government, allow the people to move from passive submission and acceptance to self-reliance and resistance to whatever is regarded unjust and

tyrannical (Sharp, 1979:53). The whole technique of nonviolent struggle is based upon the conviction that consent is power.

*“Once grasped, and when the associated corollaries of nonviolent discipline, the necessity of wise choice of methods, strategy and tactics, preparations and training, development of internal strength, and persistence in pace of repression are also understood and implemented, it becomes possible to end war and oppression in our lifetime” (Sharp, 1979:39).*

This theory of power, described at the beginning of Sharp’s key work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973a), has a pluralistic nature. Power is no more a quality of the leader; it is instead the power to influence, pressure, and coerce. Influence, pressure, and coercion can be applied both to achieve the aims of those who hold power, and to prevent them from obtaining it. This represents a clear rejection of a Weberian monolithic view of power, in which control is in the hands of those in government, resting on the ability to enforce sanctions and use of violence. In the light of the many important nonviolent victories of the XX century, this theory is inadequate. On the contrary, the American scholar claimed that there are some key sources of power, such as authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material resources and sanctions. They do not always have the same value, as their importance change depending on the specific situation; nevertheless, these are the keys to power. Power is ultimately based on obedience, cooperation and consent of the citizens, therefore. Only the cooperation of the people can fuel the authority of a government or a tyrant through the above sources of power.

Thus, nonviolence starts with a ‘no’. This refusal is the premise to change the status quo, and is far from being something passive (Sharp, 1973a). It “involves an active process of bringing political, economic, social, emotional, or moral pressure to bear in the wielding of power in contentious interactions between collective actors” (Schock 2005), and it is more effective when it undermines the sources of power above mentioned. It can happen that during this process those in power will open a dialogue after the refusal of the citizens to collaborate. Unfortunately, the most likely consequence will be repression. This kind of answer of the opponent, Sharp claims, is not a problem. It is instead an opportunity. Indeed, the key part of consent theory relates to the so-called ‘political jiu-jitsu’. The thrust of this approach is that repression becomes a

weakness for those in power, as the brutality of the regime is exposed, undermining its legitimacy and pushing to withdraw cooperation. 'Political jiu-jitsu' "occurs when authorities use violence against peaceful protesters: this is seen as unjust and can greatly increase support for the protesters" (Martin, 2009). When one group uses violence, the other "will then be able to apply something like jiu-jitsu to their opponent, throwing him off balance politically, causing his repression to rebound against his position, and weakening his power" (Sharp, 1973b:110).

Yet, how does political jiu-jitsu work? Gene Sharp carefully described the many techniques to use in order to 'throw the opponent off the balance politically', leading to an increase of internal and external dissent against the brutality of the regime. He distinguished the methods of nonviolent actions in three categories: protest and persuasion, noncooperation and intervention. Protest and persuasion include "mainly symbolic acts of peaceful opposition or of attempted persuasion, extending beyond verbal expressions, but stopping short of nonviolent intervention" (Sharp, 1973b:117). It includes picketing, mourning, parades and protest meetings. Noncooperation involves a deliberate withdrawal from usual forms and degree of cooperation with person, activity, institutions and regimes (Sharp, 1973b:183). It includes social, economic, and political noncooperation. Intervention aims to induce change, to work both negatively and positively as these actions "may disrupt, and even destroy, established patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions which are seen as objectionable; or they may establish new behavior patterns, policies, relationships, or institutions which are preferred" (Sharp, 1973b:357).

The catalogue of methods proposed had no precedent in literature, and it is still one of the most comprehensive lists of different forms of nonviolent actions. This approach is ideal for both revolutions and protests under democratic regimes. Indeed, the scholarship is walking both ways as we already claimed above. Pragmatic nonviolence is the domain mainly of both studies on how to bring about a revolution without weapons (Popovic, 2015), and of research on how to merge and enhance the fields of contentious politics (Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994, McAdam and Tarrow, 2000, Schock, 2005).

To sum up, pragmatic nonviolence is based on perfecting techniques of civil disobedience, with the conviction that the refusal to obey is the key of power. The refusal can be applied by a group of citizens fed up with the authoritarian

behaviour of their own government, being a valid answer to tyranny; by a movement crying out for change in a democratic regime; or as the way to defend a country from the threat of a foreign power, being a valid alternative to war. This is the way in which pragmatic nonviolence found its way within political science, analysing ways to dissent and defend without the use of physical violence.

This concept has great potential and is gathering more and more interest. The same cannot be said for the other category coined by Gene Sharp, principled nonviolence. Sharp did not analyse in depth this category, apart from one article, and preferred to dedicate his effort to the pragmatic stream. At the same time, there has been no real in-depth study on the category. Perhaps, the most interesting theorist referring to this stream is Michael Nagler, who has worked and is working a lot on Gandhian nonviolence. Except for this (unfortunately still undervalued) research, the result of the lack of a debate on this category is that is still now much more vague than the previous one, as it tends to contain in a quite confused way all the 'left behind' of pragmatic nonviolence. For this reason, the literature is still very divided on what exactly principled nonviolence is. There seems to be some agreement on defining it as the refusal to kill or harm on ethical and religious ground. In other words, this category is used to include ethical and religious discussions on the topic, which are considered by some to be a sort of 'second-order' reasons for a change in the behaviour of both masses and governments.

Sharp defined principled nonviolence as the sum of the many beliefs systems involving a rejection of violence (Sharp, 1979:205), excluding hermits, legislations and state decrees. There are different types of principled nonviolence, but they all share the rejection of violence because of some principle. In its more purposeful version, the many forms of principled nonviolence share the attempt to replace violence "as a feature of social and political life" (Atack 2012). As Spencer claimed, proponents of principled nonviolence are those "whose principles (whether secular or religious ethical ideals) preclude their use of violence under any circumstances" (Spencer, 2012). The supporters of this group do not focus too much on pragmatic issues. The effectiveness of an action is less important than the moral commitment. This presupposes a one-way reasoning, running from the universal principles to particular problems. The tradition of



principled nonviolence is often called satyagraha (Martin and Varney, 2003:214). As Martin claimed,

*“principled nonviolence is the Gandhian approach: nonviolence is a way of life, encompassing personal behaviour, thoughts and social arrangements as well as methods used in struggles with others. In the principled approach, the decision not to use physical force is made on ethical grounds: it is considered wrong to hurt or kill others” (Martin, 2009).*

As for pragmatic nonviolence, the core of principled nonviolence can still be considered its relation with power. However, power is not here conceived as the possibility of the people to refuse submission to the authority. Power does not lay in a different and unconventional practice of the citizens. Principled nonviolence is based on the conviction that “practice requires deep ethical resolve” (Engler, 2013:60). Thus, the starting point is here the person. In particular, the first presupposition is that “principled nonviolence is founded in a belief that behaviour flows out of the core values of a person” (Martin and Varney, 2003:214). More attention to intentions, consciousness, and the spirit of a person means awakening a different power, called by Nagler recently, ‘person power’ (Nagler, 2014:47-49). Due in particular to the close relationship between nonviolence and personalism<sup>39</sup>, many authors focused on the individual and his capacity to shape reality. For this reason, at the very heart of principled nonviolence there is a personal conversion.

This conversion may be based on three main rules to abide, which can be found in different degrees again and again in the literature. The first rule is to work on personal ‘non-attachment’. As Huxley described, non-attachment refers to a refutation of bodily sensation and lust, of craving for power and possessions, anger and hatred, and exclusive love (Huxley, 1969:3). This rule can be applied in different degrees; nevertheless, principled nonviolence requires some kind of detachment from the world.

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<sup>39</sup> The relation between nonviolence and personalism is still a topic to investigate. Nevertheless, it is doubtless that there is a close link between the two. In particular, Boston and Harvard represented two important schools of personalism in the US. Some example of authors and activists influenced by personalism are Muste (by William James and Harvard), Dorothy Day, Peter Maurin, and Luther King Jr. (he studied in Boston with Border Parker Browne).

The second rule is that the means are the ends. In other words, it is a mistake to think that the ends justify the means. To the contrary, it is only through completely nonviolent means that peace can be achieved. This rule is epitomised by the many martyrs of different religions, from Christ to those Buddhist monks who set themselves on fire as a form of protest (Atack, 2012), from Jagestetter to the first Christians.

The third 'law' of principled nonviolence relates to the interconnectedness of life. At the spiritual level, the nonviolent believes that human beings are connected to each other. This means that any human being is dependent on each other for its happiness and realisation. The interconnectedness of life is backed by the different religious traditions. Sibley claimed that a key element of Indian philosophy, whether Hindu or Buddhist, concerns the intimate connection of all forms of life. "All embodied spirits are alike condemned to suffer the bondage of the flesh, and thus all alike have at least one element in common" (Sibley, 1943:440). For what concern Christianity, the interrelatedness of life is in the commandments of Christ, as already St. Paul was teaching. Indeed, loving God is equal to abiding the law of the Spirit, which comes as an inner force within the human being. At the same time, loving God is intimately joined with loving the neighbour, even among other communities. Loving God and loving the neighbour become in this way two key and linked precepts. Without the latter, we do not have the former. In this way, the respect of these two commandments is in line with nonviolence, as avoidance of vengeance, retaliation, and the repayment of evil with evil instead of love (Jahanbegloo, 2014).

Personal conversion is the necessary preamble for the implementation of the principle or value of nonviolence in any situation of life. Nonviolence becomes here a proper 'way of life', in which human action creates a new reality here and now. Thus, the idea of nonviolence as a technique is considered poor. For instance, Yoder criticised heavily Shridharani's approach, when he wrote that

*"one early book interpreting Gandhi to England and America bore the title War without Violence, as if one could proceed, as in an ordinary war, to define one's selfish goals and designate the enemy to be destroyed, and then simply choose nonviolent rather than violent weapons for the combat"* (Yoder, 2010:41).

Principled nonviolence require more. The key actions of this new way of life are self-suffering, non-cooperation, and non-lying. Self-suffering is necessary to persuade the other of the strength of our convictions, and it should continue even if it is clear that martyrdom will not bring any change in society. Non-cooperation with the evil can reach different levels, from the total opposition to the dominant way of life by existing communities to creation of small new ones. Finally, principled nonviolence means also non-lying. This precept does not mean only not trying to deceive. It also represents the attempt to link ourselves with others, creating trust between people.

Self-suffering, non-cooperation, and non-lying can be used differently, on different degrees, and for different purposes. This generates different kinds of principled nonviolence. For instance, Sharp identified six types of principled nonviolence: nonresistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, selective nonviolence, satyagraha, and nonviolent revolution (Sharp, 1979:206). There is no strict separation between them, and it is possible that particular cases may not fit into any of these categories. This classification is neither perfect nor final; it is “a tool to facilitate understanding and study of the phenomena” (Sharp, 1979:206). Non-resistance rejects on principle all physical violence, whether on individual, state, or international level. It refuses to participate in war, in state, in court. “The nonresistants are concerned with being true to their beliefs and maintaining their own integrity”. This means refusal of resisting evil situation, along with lack of interest in social reconstruction and the creation of a good society on earth. Their influence on society is the result from their acts of goodwill, their exhortations, and their example (Sharp, 1979:207). Examples of this approach are Mennonites and Early Christians.

In a similar vein, active reconciliation uses nonviolence on principle as well. It favours active goodwill and reconciliation, focusing on one’s life improvement before trying changing the others. The approach is based on the importance of the other, and in the conviction that he or she can change; “direct action and strategy are not involved” (Sharp, 1979:209). There is the hope to build up a different society. Examples are Tolstoy and the Quakers.

Moral resistance is based on the conviction that “evil should be resisted, but only by peaceful and moral means” (Sharp, 1979:212). The emphasis of this approach lies in moral personal responsibility. The individual has an imperative to refuse to

participate in evil, as well as to do something against it. The focus is thus not on nonviolent resistance and direct action, but on education, persuasion, individual example. They lack a comprehensive programme of social change. In this category Sharp includes Ballou and Garrison.

Selective nonviolence is the refusal to participate in *particular* violent conflicts, usually international wars (Sharp, 1979:215). In other situations, such as personal life, class struggle, fight against authoritarianism or Satan, they are willing to use violence to accomplish their ends. Included in this category are a variety of groups, ranging from Jehovah Witness, non-pacifist anarchists, to International Socialists during World War I.

Satyagraha is divided by Sharp in two. It is a type of principled nonviolence, because is a normative approach of Gandhi. However, it is also a 'technique of action, suitable for use by people not sharing his belief' (Sharp, 1979:219). In this context it means 'adherence to Truth' or 'reliance to Truth'. Truth is reality; the satyagrahi aims at attaining truth through love and right actions (Sharp, 1979:220). He or she seeks to improve his own life, combat the evil, and doing a constructive programme "to build a new social and economic order through voluntary constructive work" (Sharp, 1979:220). It is unique within these kinds of principled nonviolence, as it entails method, strategy and constructive work.

Finally, nonviolent revolution is more 'a direction of developing thought and action' rather than an ideology. It is the belief that only a deep and revolutionary change in individuals and society can substitute exploitation, oppression and war. The revolutionary program includes improvement of personal life, acceptance of principles, such as nonviolence, equality, cooperation, justice, freedom, as basis for the society; building a more 'equalitarian, decentralized, and libertarian social order; combating social evils through nonviolent actions (Sharp, 1979:221).

It is clear that this typology resembles more a 'list' than a proper analysis. Sharp never really dug into the category of principled nonviolence as he did with its opposite. Perhaps, the aim of the list was not to lay the basis for further studies. However, the result was to exclude from pragmatic nonviolence pacifisms and religions. Indeed, they are the main groups represented by the different kinds of principled nonviolence. Sharp claimed that nonresistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, satyagraha and nonviolent revolution fall into the category of

pacifism (Sharp, 1979:227), which is a 'belief system' of those who "refuse participation in all international or civil wars or violent revolutions, and base this refusal on moral, ethical, religious principle" (Sharp, 1979:205). At the same time, religion is apparent in all of the above types of nonviolence. There are differences in the way nonviolence is interpreted by the many religious groups and sects. Early Christians, along with Albigenses, Moravians, Mennonites, and many other were keener on non-resistance; other groups, such as the Quakers or the Latin American model drawing from the theology of Liberation, are more proactive. The different religious groups and sects interpreted nonviolence in a different way. However, all of them approached it as the 'way of life' chosen and showed by Jesus. Nonviolence is thus a synonym of the 'way of the Cross'.

To conclude, principled and pragmatic nonviolence emerged as two different and complex approaches to the concept of nonviolence. These categories currently boost, dominate (and divide) the scientific research on nonviolence. Indeed, there are nowadays centres of studies, training programmes, and projects focused on either principled or pragmatic nonviolence. They start their analysis from different definitions of nonviolence, have a different idea of power, and champion different aims. From all this, it is clear that nowadays 'nonviolence is two'.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter showed the growing development of the concept of nonviolence, which is nowadays used in many different ways. Moreover, it retraced the history of the dominant division in the literature between principle and set of techniques, and the key features of the two key categories of contemporary nonviolence, principled and pragmatic.

Section one showed the breadth as well as the fragmentation of the studies of nonviolence today. Indeed, this term is used in many different fields to refer to techniques able to counteract terrorism, face a coup d'état, defend a country, overthrow a dictator, successfully protesting against a government, as well as to principles and ideas leading to a permanent revolution. Between the many reasons of this success, a key part has been played by the establishment of a definition of nonviolence dividing the concept in two: a principle and a set of techniques of actions.

Section two dug down into this distinction. The origin may be traced back to the 1920s and continued to be a leit motif of books and articles on the topic. Today the division is associated with the scholar Gene Sharp, who persuasively divided nonviolence in principle and techniques of action.

The consequences of the divisions are far reaching. The division produced conceptual order, making easier at the empirical level to label events and behaviours as nonviolent, as well as operationalise the term; it allowed political groups and associations to adopt the concept without having to adhere to a creed, pacifists and religious groups to avoid concerns about effectiveness, and it allowed nonviolence to become a real political tool which is effective beyond democratic contexts; it interjected the need of a secularised concept, averting ethical and religious issues.

The success of the division in principle and techniques led to the establishment of the categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence, which have been analysed in section three. The pragmatic stream is by far the most successful and the privileged one of Sharp. It is based on consent theory, which is the idea that power lies in the consent of the citizens to obey. The 'people' hold enormous power, which can be used both to dissent and to defend the community. To the contrary, principled nonviolence is a more vague and less convincing concept, including all the 'left-overs' of the pragmatic stream. This category is based on the power of ethical conviction, values and principles of an individual. Thus, nonviolence is a principle which requires a full personal conversion towards a different way of life, based on the rejection of killing on moral ground. This approach includes conversion towards non-attachment, the perfect identification between means and ends, as well as the belief in the interconnectedness of life. The result is visible in actions of self-suffering, non-cooperation, and in non-lying, in order to strictly follow the command of non-killing. Sharp listed different ways of implementing this command, including non-resistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, selective nonviolence, satyagraha, nonviolent revolution.

Since the analysis of Sharp, principled and pragmatic nonviolence are taken for granted by most of the literature. The natural issue that may be raised at this point is: what is wrong with this success? What are the main issues related to this popular distinction? This will be the concern of chapter two.

## 2. The Cost of the Division

The distinctions between principle and methods of action, principled and pragmatic nonviolence, have been extremely successful, and they are now widely accepted by the scholarship. Nevertheless, this success carried an extremely high cost, which is now time to face. Scratching the surface, we find that many scholars raised doubts, admitting that the distinction carries important problems. We already showed in the introduction that worrying uses of the term nonviolence recently emerged. At the same time, we face a divided field of research. As already Weber admitted, “principled nonviolence does generate practice, and pragmatic approaches may get things done and perhaps even may foster a nonviolent way of life” (Weber, 2003:264). In the same vein, Bond claimed that “nonviolence is manifest and distinctive in the interplay of method and purpose vis-à-vis this continuum” (Bond, 1988:86). Smith clearly talked of the ‘ambiguity of nonviolence’, which consists in “appearing *both* as an appeal to moral principle *and* as a practical device which is effective and therefore the *best means* to achieve the goal” (Smith, 1969:157). Forgetting this ambiguity, and thus this unity, is an unfair reduction of nonviolence.

The lack of unity carries the risk of creating a *regressive* as well as *repressive* field of research. As already Miller in 1964 honestly admitted, “nonviolence can be reduced neither to a moral philosophy nor to a pragmatic method” because “it owes something to each and to the equilibrium that holds the two strands together” (Miller, 1966:17). We can say more than this: the division of the concept in different and particular definitions, made in order to explain the discrepancies in the use of the term, is a danger because it leads to lose the complexity of the Gandhian notion of nonviolence, as well as the novelty of the work of Martin Luther King Jr., San Suu Kyi and many others.

Besides being regressive, the plurality of beliefs is ‘repressed’. A serious discussion on values, principles, or aims is simply avoided, because it is not central to the more important focus on tactics and techniques, and it would ‘dangerously’ limit their adoption. As Yoder claimed

*“since the pragmatic cultures of the western Europe and North America tend to translate everything into terms of procedures and effectiveness, it is indispensable to remember that for both Gandhi and King there is no such thing*

*as a 'technique' or 'tactic' of nonviolent action which could be lifted out of its original framework of spiritual and moral community discipline and 'applied' as a tactic for its own sake" (Yoder, 2010:41).*

Unfortunately, these comments have not been followed by neither in-depth analyses of the concept of nonviolence, nor by the creation of deeply reconciliatory alternatives<sup>40</sup>. This is a problem in light of the changing historical environment. Indeed, a divided field of study with increasing worrying uses of the term and focused more on techniques does not help in facing the crisis of democracy and the emergence of a post-secular society.

With all these issues, where should we start? This chapter will propose to focus on three cracks, three internal divisions to the concept of nonviolence which have to be healed. In order to offer a way out of such a complex situation, section one will focus on problems at the descriptive level, in the deep divisions in describing what nonviolent action is. We will highlight the problems concerning the reduction of nonviolent action to a behaviour or rigid practices, to a mere means or the implementation of an abstract end. Indeed, nonviolent action is sometimes dangerously reduced to nonviolent behaviour, meaning that no attention is paid to circumstances and ends. At the same time, the reduction of nonviolence to correct practices which rigidly implement an ideal is equally risky, as it would sometimes mean a too rigid interpretation of the equality of means and ends.

Instead, section two will focus on the praxeological level, where the risk is creating a regressive field. Here, we find that the concern on behaviours and practices led nonviolence to focus on disruption, leaving aside a serious debate on construction. This lack triggers important consequences. Indeed, principled

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<sup>40</sup> Many religious scholars developed alternatives to Gene Sharp's conception of nonviolence as set of techniques. For instance, Yoder wrote extensively on nonviolence as 'genuine love' directly linked with Christianity, which is different from the 'war without weapons' approach (see for instance: Yoder, J. H. (1997) *For The Nations*, Cambridge: Eedermans Publishing, p. 101; Yoder, J. H. (1994) *The Politics of Jesus*, Cambridge: Eedermans Publishing). The problem is that these interpretations left paradoxically unchallenged the distinction made by Sharp at the political level. In other words, they did not try to undermine the (fundamentally theoretical) division between two kinds of nonviolence in order to reconcile the two schools of thought. Thus, no real alternative has been developed within political science, able to include religious tradition without being led by their narratives and theological discussions. In this way, nobody really managed neither to overcome the ambiguity nor to challenge Sharp distinction, which is still unchallenged and widely used in Politics.



and pragmatic nonviolence may risk not to open up to everybody towards a shared project, becoming forms of realpolitik or dry moralism.

The lack of a serious debate on construction triggered problems also in understanding the role of religion. Section three will focus on problems at the religious level, where religion has been put in an ad-hoc category, principled nonviolence. It will show that the division between principled and pragmatic nonviolence, between values and techniques leads to a division between religion and politics. The research of nonviolence followed a process of secularisation, which limited religion to the category of principled nonviolence. Nevertheless, research has to deal with the fact that religion has always been present in nonviolent action, as well as it never left society. These problems make the search for a different approach to nonviolence necessary, in order to reconstruct the concept and provide new opportunities for the study of the topic.

### *2.1. Nonviolent Action: More than a Behaviour, Less than an Ideal*

The cost of the dominant division of the two categories of nonviolence is visible in the profound disagreement on what nonviolent action is. The only thing that both principled and pragmatic nonviolence have in common is that they refuse cowardice. Cowardice is the real opposite of nonviolence for Gandhi. As he claimed, “I do believe that, where there is only a choice between cowardice and violence, I would advise violence” (Prabhu and Rao, 1996:144). The incompatibility between cowardice and nonviolence lies in the key feature of the former, which is a fear of death. This feeling leads to inaction, passivity, and irresponsibility. Running away from a situation of danger, or refusing to help others in a situation of need, is totally incompatible with nonviolence. In other words, both principled and pragmatic nonviolence reject inaction, the passive acceptance of the status quo. Nevertheless, the two categories do not agree on what action actually means. The idea of nonviolent action underlying the concept of pragmatic nonviolence is closer to ‘nonviolent behaviour’. In other words, a nonviolent action is a patterned behaviour which is short of physical violence. Thus, it is rational to expect that the focus of this stream of nonviolence is to provide new means, new techniques of action able to overthrow a dictator and put immense pressure on governments. To the contrary, principled nonviolence

looks at nonviolent action mainly as the correct practice, which is the implementation of an abstract ideal, value, or principle. For this reason, nonviolence is confused with a belief system, a saint-like way of life, and with pacifism or religion.

For what concerns pragmatic nonviolence, the consequences of the reduction of the concept of action to that of behaviour should not be underestimated. Indeed, the focus on behaviours and patterns of behaviours leads to pay no real attention to circumstances and to the ends. Indeed, the critiques noticed that often the circumstances decide whether an action is violent or not. For instance, Galtung warned that a strike may be violent or not depending on the circumstances (Galtung, 1965). Along the same line, Niebuhr had a similar idea when he warned that, if “non-violence [...] expresses itself in the refusal to participate in the ordinary processes of society”, it follows that “it certainly places restraints upon the freedom of the objects of its discipline and prevents them from doing what they desire to do. Furthermore it destroys property values, and it may destroy life” (Niebuhr, 1963:240-1). For instance,

*“a boycott may rob a whole community of its livelihood and, if maintained long enough, it will certainly destroy life. A strike may destroy the property values inherent in the industrial process which it brings to a halt, and it may imperil the life of a whole community which the strike interferes [...] the innocent are involved with the guilty in conflict between groups, not because of any particular type of coercion used in the conflict but by the very group character of the conflict” (Niebuhr, 1963:241).*

Turning to the lack of attention to the ends, it is worth noticing that when nonviolence is reduced to a set of means, which can be used by everybody for any reason, there is the risk of indirectly encouraging the perpetration of systemic and symbolic violence. For what concerns the violence of the system, nonviolence is accused either of failing social change, or even of perpetrating and reproducing violent social structures in other countries. The former critique is made for instance by Arendt against the Civil Rights Movement, when she claimed that

*“while boycotts, sit-ins, and demonstrations were adequate in eliminating discriminatory laws and ordinances, they proved utter failures and became*

*counter-productive when confronted with social conditions—the stark needs of the black ghettos on one side, the overriding interests of the lower-income groups with respect to housing and education on the other” (Arendt, 1970).*

Instead, the accusation of promoting and reproducing violent structures is done by Chabot and Sharifi, while analysing the Green Revolution and the Egyptian upsurge. They noticed the extremely close relationship of nonviolent struggles with global neoliberal capitalism, by which they mean a paradigm “involving ideologies, discourses, and public policies that encourage the spread of free-market rationality and limit the role of states to promoting economic growth and consumerism instead of social equality and human well-being” (Chabot and Sharifi, 2013:221). Protestors were looking at political power in a pragmatic and state-centred struggle, which did not offer any constructive programme. Had nonviolent struggles won, they would have only managed to implement neoliberal freedom and democracy, allowing visible and invisible violence of neoliberalism to get in (Chabot and Sharifi, 2013). For instance, in countries such as the Philippines, South Africa and Serbia, nonviolent struggles “enriched wealthy elites at the expense of growing dispossession and desperation among the poor” (Chabot and Sharifi, 2013:221). Paradoxically, nonviolence increased the violence of inequality and poverty.

Other scholars pushed these critiques even further, claiming that such a sort of nonviolence can even become a tool for imperialism and coups d'état. Nonviolent methods can certainly be a weapon which can bring upon liberation and anti-imperialism<sup>41</sup>. However, critiques contest that nonviolent methods are the way in which US imperialism prospers in a post-cold war era, where military intervention is neither possible nor useful. In these debates, funding and other acts aimed at helping civil resistance are the new methods to foster an imperialistic project. In particular, external funding is a hotly contentious issue in nonviolent scholarship<sup>42</sup>. Apart from funding, some scholars openly considered nonviolence

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<sup>41</sup> One example of this hope is given by Johansen, Martin, and Meyer, who proposed nonviolence as the method to challenge American imperialism undermining its military, economic and ideological pillars. To bolster their argument, the three scholars refer to the examples of the Vietnam War, nuclear weapons, East Timor, Iraq, Puerto Rico, and the Arab Spring. See: JOHANSEN, J., MARTIN, B. & MEYER, M. 2012. Nonviolence versus US Imperialism. *Economic and Political Weekly*.

<sup>42</sup> There is heated debate on whether or not being helped by an imperialist power means being part of its project. Some argue that “the money is the message.” In particular, they criticise the coloured revolutions - such as the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine and the Cedar Revolution in

to be the best method for a “postmodern coup” (Mowat, 2005, Blum, 2005). Gene Sharp has been blamed of fomenting rebellions, of being “a puppet master at the center of a sinister CIA-led scheme to overthrow governments disliked by Washington” by Middle East analysts during the Arab Spring (Engler, 2013:59). Stephen Zunes rightly defended the American scholar from the accusations of being at the service of US imperialism with an open letter<sup>43</sup>, claiming that Sharp is a theorist, the Albert Einstein Institute a poorly funded organisation, and the training given are non-partisan basis. However, the answer of Ciacciello-Maher and Golinger touched a key problem: the possibility of using nonviolent direct action to overthrow a regime for an imperialistic project<sup>44</sup>.

Concerning symbolic violence, the label ‘nonviolence’ can be cunningly shaped and used instrumentally to divide and blame the enemy. This is for instance the critique of Losurdo against those who, like the US and others, call themselves nonviolent and shape the meaning of nonviolent action, while discrediting enemies with the general labels of violent (Losurdo, 2010:85). Besides the issue of actively shaping the meaning of nonviolence, there is the issue of using nonviolent techniques to foster violent symbols and cultures. Indeed, some organisations may use these techniques for their sectarian cultural war, in order to maintain or establish laws in society, which would hinder freedom of others.

This is the case of some religious groups for instance. If nonviolence is reduced to a set of techniques to seize power without a bloodshed, the risk is to empower closed religious organisations with new tools to impose their will to others. This means fostering intolerance and conflict even in democratic societies. It may even mean fostering symbolic violence. Indeed, religions around the world may find in nonviolence a new and effective ‘weapon system’ to legitimize violence; create ‘true believers’, inciters of intolerance; teach patience and passivity in the face of injustice; even promoting romanticism, ignorance, and backwardness in the face of knowledge and progress (Hatzopoulos and Petitto, 2003:56-108).

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Lebanon (see JOHANSEN, J., AND BRIAN MARTIN 2008. Sending the Protest Message. *Gandhi Marg*, 29, 503-519. Page 513). The critiques even dispute the idea that money received from an imperialist power would be helpful for the campaign. Indeed, it is often counterproductive to have external funding, in terms of audience and message; moreover, it is not true that more money (whatever the origin) is equal to success.

<sup>43</sup> The open letter can be found at: [http://stephenzunes.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Open-Letter\\_Academics\\_Zunes.pdf](http://stephenzunes.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Open-Letter_Academics_Zunes.pdf) (Last accessed on the 6<sup>th</sup> of October 2014).

<sup>44</sup> The exchange between Zunes, George Cicariello-Maher and Eva Golinger is available online at the address: <http://venezuelanalysis.com/print/3690> (Last access: 21/01/2014).

All these critiques are only partially true. These critiques are unfair if we acknowledge the fact that many of those who support pragmatic nonviolence accept nonviolence as a principle as well. Indeed, Martin claimed that “quite a few activists within largely pragmatic social movements are committed to nonviolence, but do not advertise their personal beliefs to avoid alienating fellow activists” (Martin, 2009). It is clear that individual commitment is a key factor in shaping many activists’ approach to nonviolent action. This fact can be extended even to some of the key scholars of pragmatic nonviolence, such as Lackey and Sharp. Their commitment for the rise of this stream of nonviolence has been so long and intense, in spite of the many difficulties encountered, that both look real examples of principled nonviolence. Apart from the actual supporters or scholars of pragmatic nonviolence, we should make clear that the scholarship on nonviolent direct action cannot be blamed for the fact that it did not manage to create in a day different religious attitudes and a different society.

Nevertheless, the reduction of nonviolence to a behaviour short of physical violence risks creating dangerous distortions. If nonviolence is only a technique short of physical violence, Cameron is right to use the term ‘nonviolent extremism’ to describe groups such as Nazis, Klu Klux Klansmen, or terrorists who incite hatred and intolerance in schools, universities and prisons without direct use of weapons (Cameron, 2014). It is also correct to talk of the new radical right as non-violent basically because they are not considered a problem for national security (Goodwin and Ramalingam, 2012), and even to claim that there are “non-violent forms of right-wing extremism” (Briggs and Goodwin, 2012). A speech full of hatred is anyway a speech; nobody is beaten or killed. What is worse is that if nonviolence is a technique short of physical violence it is paradoxically correct to talk about ‘nonviolent crime’ and ‘nonviolent offenders’. Indeed, why should be wrong to consider theft or fraud a part of the universe of nonviolence? Turning to the concept of pragmatic nonviolence, the problem is quite similar: the aims are not considered. We cannot deny that this concept cherishes the hope that a serious offer of efficient nonviolent behaviours will eventually lead to a more nonviolent society. In other words, the development of new tools of struggle will be sufficient to ‘fabricate’ a different society, to establish democratic regimes. The problem is that pragmatic nonviolence does not clearly face the tragedy of

winning the war against the oppressor without improving the plight of the most oppressed in society.

Turning to principled nonviolence, the consequences of a reduction of action to a correct practice, which follows a list of precepts, are different from the one concerning pragmatic nonviolence, but equally worrying. The necessity of clarifying the ends of a nonviolent campaign, and especially the values that should be placed at the centre of a different society, is crucial for principled nonviolence. For this last perspective, structural and cultural violence are paramount. Nevertheless, the risk is to focus excessively on ends, on abstract speculations for their own sake, making mistakes in the evaluation of the appropriated actions able to achieve them.

In particular, principled nonviolence is rigidly based on the complete equation of means and ends, leading to dangerous attitudes, such as withdraw from politics or radicalism. It is true that the most famous similitude is provided by Gandhi himself, who suggested that we should consider the means as seed, from which the plant of the 'end' grows up. Unfortunately, the rhetorical device has been interpreted by many in quite a strict way. Uniting means and ends was not translated as a warning to avoid unrealistic ends, and to care about the context, opponents and results. Instead, it meant radicalism, absolute proscription of war and violence of any sort in any circumstances. In some cases it also meant physical separation from the others, on the basis of the conviction that the conflict ends when one of the two participants withdraws. As Stiehm claimed, a pedantic interpretation of axioms such as 'a good tree bears good fruit' leads to a kind of activity which "often takes the form of trying to create a 'self-fulfilling prophecy'", resulting in perfectionism, chiliasm, and anarchistic individualism (Stiehm, 1968:25).

This kind of radicalism gives rise to two important concerns. First of all, Stiehm, in line with Shridharani twenty years before, made clear that one problem of what she called conscientious nonviolence was that "it seems to deny the existence of real conflict" (Stiehm, 1968). Gene Sharp went further, claiming that the absolute rejection of any sort of violence is not realistic; when nonviolent actions fail, people should not give up dreams of freedom from tyranny. Second of all, a radical unification of means and ends may backfire on the subject itself. When nonviolence is reduced to mere self-purification, the risk is to neglect to treat

properly “the irascible, the taste for obstacles, the will for expansion, for combat and domination, the death instincts and especially the capacity for destruction, the desire for catastrophe” (Ricoeur, 1965:225). The risk is to reduce nonviolence to an activity for saints, suppressing completely these aspects belonging to each human being will inevitably create new forms of violence. As Lübbe explained, “humans tend to be humans, not saints”. The main issue is that “nonviolence devotees suppress or deny feelings and impulses that are incompatible with their commitment”, which is problematic because they are more likely “to exhibit hidden and indirect forms of violence” as manipulation, passive aggression, conceit, perfectionism, pride and dogmatism. The consequence of all this is clear: “those who cannot love themselves with their flaws are bound to hate the flawed other” (Lübbe, 2009:43).

As we claimed above about pragmatic nonviolence, we should say that also these critiques are partially true. First of all, nobody of the most famous actors listed in this category interpreted the unity of means and ends in such a radical way. For instance, if principled nonviolence advocates “differ from practitioners of tactical nonviolence in that the latter may abandon either nonviolence or their objective in the face of an inadequate response or violent repression” (Powers et al. 1997), then not even Gandhi is in this category, because violence was for him better than cowardice. Moreover, Gandhi “drew back from pursuing principle in every instance to its logical conclusion” (Bartolf 2000), for example, by supporting war on at least three occasions (Bartolf 2000); by supporting cases of violence, such as euthanasia; by opposing De Ligt on the opportunity for India to have an army. However, Gandhi is not the only example of a nonviolent actor ‘living’ these contradictions. For instance, what about those Quakers who decided to serve in the military during the two World wars in the XX century (Jahanbegloo, 2014)? The same problem arises even with Martin Luther King Jr. He is considered part of principled nonviolence. Nevertheless, his principles did not prevent him from demanding federal troops or police for the demonstrations (Ryan, 2002).

In light of all these examples, what remains true is that such a ‘principled’ interpretation of nonviolence runs the serious risk of being a vague concept of passivity at the mercy of the powerful of the earth, as Gelderloos claimed (Martin, 2008:243). In addition if nonviolence is considered a principle, championing simply a dogmatic refusal to wage war or use violence at any time, why should

we be shocked by Blair's claim that nonviolence is passé (Sinha, 2013)? Indeed, it is right, from that point of view, to forget the impressive number of nonviolent struggles and revolutions around the world. They are not 'really' part of nonviolence.

Thus, the task is to rethink the concept of nonviolent action. This is the only way to bring again together values and techniques of action, without reducing nonviolence to a list of patterned behaviours or of correct practices. Through a different approach to nonviolent action, we should be able to keep together the need of a liberation from physical, symbolic and structural violence, with the necessity of proposing a credible alternative path. The alternative theory of nonviolent action should be able to include the necessity to offer new techniques, new behaviours in order to free people from violent patterns of behaviours. At the same time, it should also acknowledge that any act carries social, spiritual, and even religious meanings. Thus, an act of nonviolence should also include a sort of vertical tension toward values, toward spirituality, towards change in society. This is the way to follow for nonviolence, in order to keep together means and ends. The problem is how to re-describe nonviolence in a way that it includes higher means than merely reducing physical violence, without ending up in actions based on abstract speculations without any serious hope of changing reality.

## *2.2. Reconciling Politics and Morality: Sharing Construction with Everybody*

If on the one hand the dominant division between principle and techniques of action reveals problems in understanding what nonviolence is, on the other hand the literature expresses doubts concerning principled and pragmatic nonviolence at what we called the praxeological level. Here the risk is witnessing the fall into a regressive field of research, which forgets the complexity of the Gandhian notion.

Up to now, the key expression of both streams of nonviolence has been disruption. It can hardly be denied that up to now the main concern of the literature on nonviolence has been disorder. The two streams of nonviolence share the reaction to unjust and authoritarian societies. They both provide strong grounds for protesting and crying out the truth. The manifestations of this concern are



many, from conscientious objection to the establishment of new and separated communities, from hunger strikes to the many actions of civil resistance around the world.

The main reason for focusing on disorder lies in the fact that research on nonviolence has focused on counteracting something, either tyrannies or the institution of war in general. This is partly due to historical reasons. Before and during WWII, nonviolence was part of radical pacifism, which was an important but small group focused on overcoming the institution of war. After the conflict, the main issue was to answer how nonviolence would have been effective against Hitler and totalitarianisms in general. Moreover, Sharp introduced nonviolence in an academic world focused on nuclear weapons due to the Cold War, and not persuaded that nonviolence would have been useful in dealing with such as tense international situation.

Now time has changed. Nonviolence showed its power to ignite revolutions in any corners of the earth, and research showed examples of nonviolent actions against Hitler (Sémelin, 1993) and dictators in general (Popovic, 2015), which does not stop against the nuclear threat (Demenchonok, 2009). In other words, the research on nonviolence showed that it is an important reactive force. The result is that now we live a paradox. As Engler claimed, when Sharp started his research he had to face the common assumption that nonviolence could work only under democratic regimes, while now there is the conviction that nonviolent actions do not work where there are already established channels for discontent, such as elections or lobbying (Engler, 2013:64). In other words, nonviolence did not focus on which sorts of regime should be constructed. It is urgent to focus on democracy, paying more attention to which kind of order it fosters.

In particular, nonviolence should turn its attention to democracy, because the condition in which the most advanced political regimes are is far from stunning. As it has been claimed above, the hope of pragmatic nonviolence is the fabrication of democratic regimes through behaviours short of physical violence. Unfortunately, democracy is suffering. A new phase of the research on nonviolent action is needed, which is able to help democratic institutions. In particular, nonviolence should deal with the grim expectations that have been raised about a possible crisis of the western model. Some reassure that citizens still believe in democratic values, even though are becoming more distrustful of politicians,

parties and public sector. Others instead claim that the crisis is profound (Papadopoulos, 2013), leading to concepts such as 'winter of democracy' (Hermet, 2010), 'post-democracy' (Crouch, 2004), or 'death of democracy' (Keane, 2009).

A key point that these and other scholars highlight is the passive role of the citizens. More and more disaffection against politics and the state is raising. Some even claimed that citizens hate politics (Hay, 2007). While Crouch described them as passive, quiescent, and even apathetic, Keane recognised at least that they created many different power-monitoring and power-contesting mechanisms, creating what he called monitory democracy (Keane, 2008:3). Nevertheless, the underlying problem of Keane is that "the role of citizens is not that of public decision-making but of maintaining checks on executive rule, with the use of new communication technologies"(Chandler, 2014:47).

Besides citizens' passivity, another problem is the inefficacy of the authorities to maintain equality, due to the increasing power of elites. Indeed, democratic institutions are "threatened by oligarchic influence" (Engler, 2013:65). "By force of capital funding and membership and skilful administration, some holons are more equal than others" (Keane, 2008:22). Those elites are able to manage manipulated popular demands, making the system work for them.

Between the presence of these elites and citizens' passivity lies the crisis of role and importance of political parties. They lost loyal voters and they became more centralised and professionalised structures, as well as with short term horizon (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002). They are part of the problem, as they are close clubs of powerful minority interests. Elections have become something peculiar.

*"While elections certainly exist and can change governments, public electoral debate is a tightly controlled spectacle, managed by rival teams of professionals expert in the techniques of persuasion, and considering a small range of issues selected by those teams" (Crouch, 2000:1).*

The focus on disruption (with the subsequent lack of an answer to the crisis of democracy) led to a second important issue, which has been triggered by the focus on behaviours and correct practices. Indeed, the division between pragmatic and principled nonviolence runs the risk of regressing into two opposite but complementary extremisms. A cynical form of realism may easily emerge

from pragmatic nonviolence. The level achieved by nonviolent techniques and tactics is high. The work done on how to overthrow a dictator, conduct the perfect campaign of civil disobedience, and put pressure on governments, is enormous. Yet, the many methods created can worsen the crisis of democracy, becoming an efficacious tool for imposing the beliefs of a part of the society, when not a tool for destruction and conservation of privileges. For instance, critiques claim that the other side of effectiveness is the fact that “a dedicated 5% of the population, in conjunction with 90% of the media, economic control of 90% of a nation’s resources, and full support of a foreign superpower would be able to dispense with a government without recourse to openly violent strategies” (Ciccariello-Maher, 2008). In addition, nonviolence may quickly turn to violence when immediate success is not achieved, falling into absolute Machiavellianism (Bharadwaj, 1998). In other words, pragmatic nonviolence runs the risk of empowering certain factions against others, without necessarily meaning the construction of a different society.

For what concerns principled nonviolence, the risk is the opposite. This approach to nonviolence may easily turn into a dry form of moralism. Strict obedience to the identity of means and ends may lead to the development of a dualistic ethics, one achieved by the specific group, and another for the rest of the world. This creates a distortion in the understanding of the interrelatedness of life. Instead of considering the other equally, he or she becomes part of a different group, which is simply wrong. In some religious variants, the other is sometimes even destined to perdition. This second class of human beings is still connected by God or the desire of peace. Unfortunately, it is not enlightened. Thus, the risk is to encourage the tendency to eschew public agitation and even political participation, or to impose the view of a group to the rest of the population. The risk is to build up two ‘cities’, one holding the truth and disgusted by the fact that the others do not simply surrender. A profound fracture in the society is far from being a solution to the actual crisis of democracy.

The focus on disruption and the risk of principled and pragmatic nonviolence falling into extremisms pose two questions to nonviolence. The first problem is to focus on construction, on order. Nonviolence is now widely recognised as a drive for change, but is less known as a path for a different kind of order. More specifically, it is not enough to think of democracy as a sort of panacea. We have

seen that democracy is not in good shape. How would nonviolence contribute to democracy, and in particular to solve the problems mentioned above of lack of citizens' participation, dominion of political parties as well as of powerful minorities? And in particular, how can nonviolence make this contribution without being only a source of instability and confusion?

This leads us to a further problem to face. The risk of falling into moralism or realpolitik are two extremes which share the same key problem. The main problem is that the idea of order in their mind, their constructive programme, excludes part of the population and this does not help a democracy already in crisis. Realpolitik will look exclusively at the interest of a particular group, while moralism of that particular sect of perfect. The reason is that the people using these kinds of nonviolence have a clear idea of what they want to implement. This issue can be translated into Gandhian language as the difference between satyagraha and duragraha. These two actions start as a reaction to an injustice in the present society. The risk of any attempt to change reality, to build up a different society, is to fall into *duragraha*, which is a sort of action translated as stubborn persistence (Bondurant, 1988:42). Duragraha means that in the construction of a different society the subjects are led by prejudgments. The duragrahi is not genuinely interested in finding the truth; the real interest is to implement a prejudgment, an ideal already clear in mind. The point is that the duragrahi is certain to already know the truth and the best thing to do. In other words, even though they both start from an injustice, duragrahi already know that is true and right, and thus already know which society should be built, and when to stop in the process of change. The other people either decide to help in the process, or are simply considered as on the wrong side. To the contrary, Bondurant claimed that "the dynamics of satyagraha are end-creating. The objective is, conceptually, only a starting point. The end cannot be predicted, and must necessarily be left open"<sup>45</sup>. Thus, the problem here is: how can we think of nonviolence in a way that averts the temptation of implementing a certain kind of order, even a democratic one, which a certain group have in mind, and being inclusive, sharing the project with everybody?

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<sup>45</sup> From Bondurant, Joan V., *Satyagraha Versus Duragraha: The Limits of Symbolic Violence*, available on the internet at [http://www.mk Gandhi.org/g\\_relevance/chap05.htm](http://www.mk Gandhi.org/g_relevance/chap05.htm).

To summarise, the reconstruction of the concept of action should pave the way for balancing the focus on disorder with a deeper discussion on which order to build. This balance should be found keeping everybody on board in the construction of a new open-ended project, in order not to fall into realpolitik or moralism. In other words, nonviolence should return to be a progressive field, which reconciles realism with morality, order with personal aims and social values, in a shared project of change, to be able to contribute to serve the actual crisis of democracy.

### *2.3. Bringing Religion Back In*

The overcome of the regressive character of the distinction, which is easily reduced to disruption and duragraha, will inevitably have to deal with many issues. However, one of them is certainly paramount: the role of religion. Indeed, the West went through an important process of separation between religion and politics. The rupture between religion and the public sphere is traditionally ascribed to the dramatic event of the Wars of Religion, which devastated Europe. From this dramatic event stems the “myth of religious violence” (Cavanaugh, 2009:4). Indeed, death and hatred have been principles attributed to an “irrational and dangerous impulse,” called religion, which had to be controlled and restricted in some ways. This interpretation constituted the grounds for the “Westphalian presumption,” which is “the idea that cultural and religious pluralism cannot have a public dimension, as this would clash with the very possibility of international order,” (Mavelli and Petito, 2012), as well as for the beginning of the process of secularisation. Even if the definition of secularism is highly contested, and even if we are willing to follow Taylor’s suggestion not to take the words too seriously as “the name may be the same, but the reality will often be different” (Taylor, 2009), secularisation redefined the role of religion in society.

The slow process of secularisation of our society has been examined by many scholars in many different ways. Using Ferrara’s scheme (Ferrara, 2009), this process is visible on three different levels: political, social, and personal. On the political level, secularization meant progressive independence of the state from religion. The consequence of this process is twofold. Firstly, “the exercise of legitimate state power - what we might call the coercive dimension of law - takes

place in secular terms.” Secondly, “all citizens can freely exercise their religious freedom and worship one God, another God, or no God at all” (Ferrara, 2009). On the social level, religious communities became specialized sub-groups and religions affect fewer and fewer social actions, law, politics, and education. Besides, religious rituals are less and less important; whereas, more and more prestige is given to secular events. Finally, on the personal level, secularism is a change in the experience of believing. Indeed, secularism is “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed unproblematic to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace” (Ferrara, 2009:80). In other words, the experience of believing has been transformed by the process of secularisation, from being something unquestioned and natural, to becoming one of the many choices of a pluralist society. Moreover, the faith of the believer is now experienced from within an ‘immanent frame’, which is “a whole cultural horizon that identifies the good life with human flourishing, accepts no final goals beyond human flourishing and not allegiance or obligation to anything beyond this flourishing” (Ferrara, 2009:1).

As we claimed above, one of the reasons for the success of the divisions between principle and techniques, principled and pragmatic, was that a ‘secularised concept’ was born. The internal division to the concept of nonviolence was the answer to this need. Indeed, the creation of the category of principled nonviolence was a way to exclude religions from the political debate about nonviolence. The division is partly the result of the process of ‘secularisation’ (Weber, 2003:256), which started in the 1930s and reached its peak with Gene Sharp. Religion has been completely eradicated from the centre of nonviolence in the political debate, in order to allow westerners to consider Gandhian experiments ‘seriously’ (Weber, 2004:238). For this reason, Sharp created a different category, in which he placed religious, philosophers, and all those thinkers who used different words to talk of nonviolence. The result is that within principled nonviolence, we can find a chaotic variety of ‘this worldly’ and ‘other worldly’ oriented belief systems (Weber, 2004:253).

Sharp understood that a strong link between nonviolence and religion can lead someone to dismiss nonviolence altogether. It can be claimed that it is impossible to introduce in the west a concept so much embedded in Hinduism and Buddhism. On the other hand, the strong link can lead to the reduction of

nonviolence to religion. This is what happened with Christianity, with the reduction of nonviolence to the 'way of the Cross' and to the imitation of Christ. It is worth remembering, using Case's words, that "Jesus and the writers of the New Testament left, not a doctrine to circumscribe, but an ideal to leaven, the moral and social life of mankind" (Case, 1923:49). Therefore, the ideal can hardly encompass recent phenomena, such as "the passions of the class struggle" (Scalmer, 2011:92). Besides, the imitation of Christ can preclude new experiments, reducing nonviolence to a simple conversion to Christianity. "After all, if the Mahatma's way was but the method of the Cross, then what better means of following its precepts than to join with fellow believers in the organization of the established Church?" (Scalmer, 2011:92).

The separation made by Sharp was part of an attempt to make nonviolence independent from any 'system of belief'. Indeed, the other process of emancipation happened in relation to pacifism, as well as any doctrine. Sharp revealed in a note his frustration about pacifist groups, being only keen on gaining new converts to personal pacifism (Sharp, 1979:252). Even when pacifists adopted nonviolence, they did it only as a realistic tool for their own programme. Hence, Sharp's approach can be considered an answer to this attitude to nonviolence. Sharp uncovered the fact that pacifism became a 'belief system' of those who "refuse participation in all international or civil wars or violent revolutions, and base this refusal on moral, ethical, religious principle" (Sharp, 1979:205). The reduction of nonviolence to religion or pacifism runs parallel to the risk of reducing nonviolence to socialism, liberalism, or any specific doctrine. For instance, the 'basic understanding of life' of the 'way of life' proposed by King Jr., or the 'ontology of nonviolence' of Gandhi has been considered "at least congruent, if not identical, with the metaphysics of reformed liberalism" (Sturm, 1991:489-490). This is another attempt to reduce nonviolence to a specific doctrine, undermining its dynamicity.

The attempt to break the strong dependence from religions, ontologies and doctrines, was important. Sharp recognized that nonviolence is limited when is too much associated with a doctrine, as not everybody is willing to accept the whole creed in which nonviolence is embedded. Moreover, breaking the dependence from any doctrine paved the way for the interpretation of nonviolence through the eyes of science. Already Case tried to "apply the scientific, inductive

method in a philosophical spirit to a field of social phenomena not hitherto explored extensively in that objective, impartial way” (Case, 1923:11) because human motives and prejudices “often blur for our eyes the true outline of things as they are” (Case, 1923:11). Sharp in *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* subjected “the entire theory of nonviolent political action, together with a full history of its practice in all part of the world since the time of Christ, to the same cool, detailed scrutiny that military strategy and tactics are supposed to invite” (Sharp, 1973a:XIX). The ‘cool’ and ‘detailed scrutiny’ of Sharp made easier the use of nonviolence in the west and its introduction in academia.

Nevertheless, the concept of secularisation has been recently at the centre of a heated debate. Indeed, religions did not fade away, as some expected as logical conclusion of secularisation. Religious communities did not diminish their vibrancy and commitment, and we assist at the ‘resurgence of religion’. Unfortunately, this resurgence has the same features that the process of secularisation tried to eradicate: missionary expansion, fundamentalist radicalisation as well as the “political instrumentalisation of the potential for violence innate in many of the world religions” (Habermas, 2008:18). But this is not the end. Indeed, now there are even some religious groups using the lists of methods of the pragmatic school to impose themselves again in society. This means on the one hand that the paradigm of secularisation has been overcome in favour of a ‘post-secular society’, in which religion plays a role. Unfortunately, this means on the other hand that the causes of the process of secularisation, which is the violence of religion, did not end. Indeed, religions are still associated with a good deal of violence in the international sphere (Habermas, 2008, Juergensmeyer, 2003). Thus, the problem is: can a different approach to nonviolence help religion, as well as other beliefs systems, to find its place in a post-secular society?

Even for what concerns nonviolence itself, religion has and still is providing energy to most of the nonviolent struggles around the world. Religion played a key role in Gandhi and Abdul Ghaffar Khan. At the centre of important actions of nonviolence were and still are important religious actors, such as Mother Teresa (Jahanbegloo, 2014:147), Desmond Tutu, Martin Luther King Jr., and many others. Against the propaganda of the Burmese government that democracy is unsuited to their cultural norms, San Suu Kyi turned to Buddhism, showing that



the seeds of democracy were already well present (Aung San Suu Kyi, 2010:167-179). Recently, nonviolence and Christianity, in particular Catholicism, showed an interesting collaboration for what concerns the overthrow of dictatorial regimes. Nonviolence has been adopted by Catholicism in South America. Moreover, religion played a key role in spreading nonviolence in the Philippines, took part in the protests in Ukraine and more recently in Hong Kong. Unfortunately, the main problem is that debates on religion are still dominated in large part by violence, and most of the main religious community never had serious and vast reflections on nonviolence. This situation requires an urgent reflection on how to acknowledge the centrality of religion in nonviolence, remaining a pluralistic concept at the same time.

Thus, the reconstruction of the concept of nonviolence as a drive for change in society should be able to include religion and different 'belief systems' in the construction of a post-secular society. This requires further analyses on the best way to include again religion in the concept of nonviolence, without the necessity of becoming a disciple and buying the entire doctrine.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter showed some of the key problems related to the division between principle and techniques of action, principled and pragmatic nonviolence. The division in two has decisively contributed to the success of nonviolence, but it is time to move on. Section one focused on the descriptive level, where we find a divided concept. Indeed, we showed the problems related to understanding what a nonviolent action is. Pragmatic and principled nonviolence reduce nonviolent action either to a technique, a patterned behaviour, or to the rigid implementation of an ideal in correct practices. Thus, a new theory of action should be looked for, in order to keep together those who focus on means, on producing new and more effective techniques of action to empower citizens, or at least to make them able to disobey without using direct violence, and those who focus on ends, on liberation from the chains of a cruel symbols and systems.

Section two turned to the praxeological level, focusing on the necessity of enhancing a progressive field, which reconciles politics and morality in an open-ended project. The focus of the literature on nonviolence has been on disruption

up to now, with the assumption that democracy would come out eventually and be better in any case. Now, the focus should turn to construction, to order, with a particular eye on the way in which nonviolence may deal with a democratic model in crisis. In doing so, nonviolence should avoid falling into realpolitik or moralism, allowing everybody to participate in the process of formation of a new society. Thus, the new concept of nonviolence should be able to balance disorder and order in the construction of an open-ended project, without falling in realpolitik or moralism.

The last section focused on a key issue, which should be urgently faced in order to put forward a real shared project: religion. Religion, as well as all 'system beliefs', has been removed from the centre of nonviolence following the broader trend of secularisation. Now time has changed, and the debate is on the role of religion in a post-secular society. Thus, a different approach of nonviolence should include again at its centre religion, without necessarily becoming part of an entire creed, and losing its pluralistic nature. This would contribute to help religion to find its place in a post-secular society.

Thus, the task for the following chapters will be to reconstruct nonviolence. In other words, the focus will be on providing a different approach to nonviolence. This approach has the aim of rethinking the actual division between techniques and values in order to reconcile means and ends; overcoming the division between politics and morality; and finding a way to re-include religion at the centre of the concept of nonviolence. In other words, the process of reconstruction will aim at building up a united, progressive, and pluralistic concept, able to overcome worrying uses of the term, and face the changing historical environment.

### 3. ALDO CAPITINI'S CONCEPT OF NONVIOLENCE

The previous chapters showed that nonviolence is a dynamic and increasingly important concept. The internal divisions between techniques and values, as well as between principled and pragmatic, played an important role in the strife for the existence of the concept, but it may now lead to a real stalemate. Nonviolence risks the paralysis due to the many problems explained in chapter two. In the attempt of finding a way out, this chapter will introduce in the discussion the approach to nonviolence proposed by Aldo Capitini (1899-1968). The conviction is that the reflections of the Italian philosopher represent a strong starting point to reconstruct nonviolence.

Capitini and Sharp are two very different scholars. Capitini was born thirty years before Sharp, on the other side of the Atlantic, and lived both under a dictatorship and a democratic regime. Moreover, he is far less known than Gene Sharp, especially outside Italy. Nevertheless, both are theorists and activists. For this reason, they experienced the same problem: how to introduce nonviolence in the west? And in academia? However, Capitini's answer was very different. Instead of dividing the concept in two, the Italian philosopher developed an interesting conception of nonviolence which keeps together a vertical, spiritual tension and a horizontal, pragmatic one.

In the attempt to describe his answer, section one will start with a brief introduction of the philosopher, concentrating on his encounter with Gandhian nonviolence. Out of this encounter, as well as out of the particular historical circumstances experienced by Capitini, an original approach to nonviolence emerged. With this concept, Capitini intended neither a mere set of techniques, nor an abstract principle to implement. Nonviolence emerges from this reflection as a tension, a praxis of liberation from the chains of reality and openness to the existent. The concept of nonviolence provided by Capitini includes both a principled and a pragmatic side.

Section two will look at pragmatic nonviolence. Capitini thought of nonviolence as a method, a logic, or a style of action. Therefore, the list of techniques collected by him is wider and more complex than that of Sharp. At the same time, the list itself is less important, because nonviolence can assume the most variegated forms, as long as it creates what Capitini called the 'reality of all'. This conception of nonviolence leads to a precise approach to power, which again integrates

Sharp. Indeed, Capitini talked of two phases of power, the first one called 'power without government', which will lead to the 'power of all' or *omnicracy*.

The last section will turn to values and principles. From this perspective, we will show that nonviolence as a praxis of openness and liberation includes values without being similar to an abstract principle. Instead, Capitini's idea of nonviolence is a craft, a continuous reshaping of human actions towards more liberation and openness. Nonviolence emerged as a clear perspective in front of a realistic acknowledgment of the drama of human limits, such as pain, mistakes, and death. These limits are tackled first with a refusal, which means the refusal of both treating a human being as a mere event and obeying the law of nature saying that the big fish should eat the small one. This refusal leads to a small practical opportunity. Human limits can be faced collectively, deepening the link with others with free actions of openness and liberation. From this new perspective, the Italian philosopher described a whole process of integration of reality made up of three main acts: the ascetic, ethical, and religious. The result of these three acts is what Capitini called *compresence*.

### *3.1. Nonviolence as Praxis of Liberation and Openness*

The encounter of Capitini with the concept of nonviolence can be traced back at least to the 1920s, when the philosopher bumped for the first time into the Gandhian project. Gandhi visited Italy in 1931, but its influence on the peninsula dated well before this date. Already in 1925 the first Italian translation of *Mahatma Gandhi: the Man who Became One with the Universal Being* by Romain Rolland was published. Italian academia did not show particular interest in it, but the actions of the Mahatma did not pass unnoticed. The Vatican did not show any sympathy for Gandhi, especially because of its good relationships with the British Empire, along with its missionary role in India. Gandhi represented a problem for the stability of the area and for the missionary activity; he was "the most 'dangerous' political leader of nationalist India" (Prayer, 2009). It was perhaps also for these reasons that Pius XI did not accept to meet Gandhi in 1931. On the contrary, part of the fascist regime considered him a positive example, due to his struggle against the United Kingdom, and for the independence of India (Hayes, 2011). The encounter between Gandhi and Mussolini will always remain one of the strangest pictures in the history of the peninsula. In a private letter to Romain

Rolland, Gandhi expressed all his perplexity about Mussolini. “Mussolini is a riddle to me”, he said. The Mahatma recognized that he was attracted by many of his reforms, defining them as ‘compulsory’. He asked Rolland to make a study on him. “His care of the poor, his opposition to super-urbanization, his effort to bring about co-ordination between capital and labour, seem to me to demand special attention”. He was struck by the fact that “the majority of Italian people love the iron government of Mussolini”. Nevertheless, he asked Rolland to provide him with an “impartial” study, as he was well aware of the fact that “violence is the basis of Western society” (Gandhi, [1931] 1999:297).

The favourable look of fascism surely helped the introduction of Gandhi in academia. It is not by chance that the translation of *My Experiments with Truth* was published in 1931, and with a preface of Giovanni Gentile<sup>46</sup>, commissioner and, since 1932, director of the Scuola Normale in Pisa. The bright students of Pisa saw in Gandhi something more than simply an anti-English struggle, however. From 1922 to 1928, Lanza del Vasto was studying philosophy in Pisa. The philosopher and theologian mixed during his life a complex and original philosophy of trinity, which was the topic of his dissertation, with Gandhian nonviolence. He has been so much impressed by the Mahatma to decide to go to India in 1937 and spend time with him, coming back later with the intention of building ashram-like communities in Europe, as well as spreading Gandhian nonviolence in the world (Drago and Trianni, 2009).

In the same period of Lanza del Vasto, Aldo Capitini was studying in the faculty of Literature. Originally from Perugia, son of a municipal official and a tailor, Capitini arrived in Pisa after a period of self-study of Greek and Latin, which compensated his initial technical background. The intense study even caused him physical problems, which he interpreted as an important part of his spiritual development. In 1924, the same year of the murder of Matteotti, he won a prestigious scholarship to study Literature at the Normale in Pisa. 1928 he graduated, and in 1929 he got the Specialisation with the anti-fascist Attilio Momigliano. Then, he started to work as Administrative Secretary at the Normale, while also being an assistant to Momigliano. Capitini was impressed by Gandhi, but not by his anti-British struggle. Instead, the Italian philosopher suddenly

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<sup>46</sup> Gentile (1875-1944) was an Italian idealist philosopher and fascist. He has been described as the ‘philosopher of fascism’. He was ghost-writer of *A doctrine of Fascism* by Mussolini, and he wrote the famous *Manifesto of Fascist Intellectuals*, to which many Italian intellectuals adhered.

realised the potential of Gandhi's methods to counteract the rise of fascism, which was worrying him. Capitini understood that fascism was providing an answer to the hunger of hope and values coming from the Italian society. Unfortunately, the answer pointed towards violence, power, war and risks (Capitini, 2003:27). He witnessed the progressive idolatry of the person of Mussolini, as well as a process of idolatry of the state, with nationalism and patriotism shaping the population, leading to an increase in domestic and international violence and divisions. Against such a worrying situation, Capitini realised that nonviolence would have been a valid way to reverse the situation, and since 1931 he endlessly worked to realise his proposal: freeing Italy via nonviolent non-cooperation. Unfortunately, Italy was totally unprepared to react nonviolently against the rise of fascism. Capitini claimed that in Italy in 1924, as well as Germany 1933, a vast and well-organized action from below of nonviolent non-collaboration would have caused serious problems to governments, but there was no strategy as well as no network of people ready to deploy nonviolent actions. In spite of all this, Capitini tried to be the 'prophet' of this nonviolent revolution in the Italian peninsula. He became vegetarian at the Normale, where he was a secretary, being a scandal. Fascism was praising strength and activism, while Capitini was persuaded of the fact that saving sub-human lives could induce to refuse killing human beings. Then, he refused in 1933 to join the Fascist Party, and he was dismissed from the Normale. From 1933 he started a strong anti-fascist propaganda, organizing many meetings around Italy in order to help organizing anti-fascist groups. He worked to build up a Liberal-socialist movement, but he did not participate to the armed insurrection against fascism.

The opposition to the regime links Capitini with key figures of Italian resistance, such as Gobetti, Croce, Gramsci, and Rosselli. While he read *Socialismo Liberale* of Rosselli and Gramsci's works only later in life, he knew Croce, who helped him to publish his first book, *Elementi di Un'Esperienza Religiosa* in 1937, but he was not his follower. Nevertheless, the activity of Capitini is different from all of them as nonviolence made him more concerned about a strong relation between means and ends. Moreover, he looked at fascism from a different point of view, the religious. He realised a crisis in the production of values, and noticed the key role played by religion. The continuous closure in conservatism and power made the church the third pillar, besides monarchy and culture, of the regime. For the

philosopher, the church would have easily defeated the fascist regime with a simple but firm non-collaboration (Capitini, 2003:32). In particular, he was appalled by the Concordat between the Church and Mussolini in 1929. In that occasion, he definitely left Catholicism, and became conscious of something else. He ascertained the fact that religion and the Roman institution were two different things (Capitini, 2003:32). The Roman institution revealed its complete inadequacy, as it did not realise the profound pain that fascism would have triggered. Nevertheless, religion could not be reduced to the action of that particular institution. Capitini and many others cherished a strong religious sentiment, a tension toward some kind of transcendence and values. This religious drive could not accept to kneel down in front of the violence of fascism. Instead, the religious aspiration towards something absolute and pure became the core of Capitini's opposition to fascism (Capitini, 1950:139).

The example of Gandhi provided Capitini with a unique perspective in the struggle against the totalitarian regime and the Catholic establishment. The Mahatma provided Capitini with a strong drive to be used against fascism (Capitini, 1963:79); it provided at the same time an example of faith and a useful practical orientation (Capitini, 1966a:17). Capitini included him in the 'pure religious spirits', such as Christ, Buddha, and St. Francis (Capitini, 2010), who were also examples of a struggle against the traditional institutionalism, along with a call for religious reform (Capitini, 2003:33). Nevertheless, Capitini made clear that Gandhi has never been "a man who has made absolute revelations, such as to introduce me to discard every other moral and religious teacher". On the contrary, he was considered "a living teacher, from whom one may learn and with whom one may discuss, not as a saint whom one venerates and recognizes as a figure radically superior and of another nature, one whom one cannot fail to venerate" (Capitini, 1953). In particular, Gandhi's actions became a model for Capitini. This does not mean that Capitini found in Gandhi only a set of techniques which can be more effective to overthrow a government. Gandhi's actions were a practical attempt of changing both society and the individuals.

At the end of the war, Capitini started a long and troubled academic career as a professor of moral philosophy in Pisa, and of Pedagogy in Cagliari and Perugia<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> The intellectual production of Capitini has been very extensive and varied. One of the key interests of Capitini was pedagogy. Here it is worth mentioning: *L'Atto di Educare*, Firenze:La Nuova Italia, 1951; *Il Fanciullo nella Liberazione dell'Uomo*, Pisa, Nistri Lischi, 1953; *Aspetti*

The career did not stop his mission: deepening the understanding and spreading the knowledge of nonviolence. Thus, he founded the *Centro di Coordinamento Internazionale per la Nonviolenza* (Centre for International Coordination towards Nonviolence) in Perugia, which organized many congresses on the encounter between East and West; he founded in 1952 the *Societa' Vegetariana Italiana* (Italian Vegetarian Society); he organised the first Italian Peace March in 1961, out of which two organisations coordinated by Capitini have been established. He also worked endlessly to place nonviolence at the centre of both religion and politics, as we will see more in depth in the next chapter. For what concerns religion, Capitini led a radical struggle against the continuous acts of closure of the Catholic Church since the 1950s<sup>48</sup>. He heavily criticised Pius XII, blaming him of professing a religion “based on dividing people between each other” (Capitini, 1957:2). Later, Capitini welcomed the 1963 *Pacem in Terris* and the Second Vatican Council; he understood that they marked a watershed in the history of the Church<sup>49</sup>. Nevertheless, he also expressed his doubts on the latter in his *Severita' Religiosa per il Concilio*, in which he evaluated the significance and consequences of the Council. The result was a quite critical book. Capitini claimed that too many key issues have been left aside (Capitini, 1966b). In particular, the full importance of nonviolence has been overlooked. There is no real commitment to use and spread new methods, as well as no real effort has been made to reject war, fabrication of weapons, and violence on subhuman beings.

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*dell'Educazione alla Nonviolenza*, Pisa, Pacini Mariotti, 1959; *L'Educazione Civica nella Scuola e nella Vita Sociale*, Bari, Laterza, 1964; *Educazione Aperta*, 2 volumes, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1967.

<sup>48</sup> Capitini wrote extensively about religion, with a highly critical attitude. The topics range from the doctrine put forward by Pius XII to the role of religion in society; from the issues concerning baptized non-believer to the problems around the Second Vatican Council. The books of particular importance are: *Il Problema Religioso Attuale*, Parma, Guanda, 1948; *Nuova Socialita' e Riforma Religiosa*, Torino, Einaudi, 1950; *Religione Aperta*, Parma, Guanda, 1955; *Discuto la Religione di Pio XII*, Milano, Parenti, 1957; *Aggiunta Religiosa all'Opposizione*, Milano, Guanda, 1958; *Battezzati Non Credenti*, Firenze, Parenti, 1961; *Severita' Religiosa per il Concilio*, Bari, De Donato, 1966.

<sup>49</sup> *Pacem In Terris* was a papal encyclical issued by Pope John XXIII in 1963. The full title was On Establishing Universal Peace in Truth, Justice, Charity and Liberty, and it represents a watershed because is addressed to 'all men of good will' instead of Catholics; it insists that responsibility for peace belong to everybody and not only to superpowers; conflicts should be solved by negotiation; he emphasise the importance of human rights. For what concerns the Second Vatican Council, it was the last ecumenical council, opened in 1962 and closed in 1965. It has been extremely important because it proposed a profound renewal of Catholic doctrine and practice.



Turning to political life, Capitini recognised that the advent of democracy did not end up the need for nonviolence<sup>50</sup>. On the contrary, the limited and fragile Italian democracy revealed all the limits of western democracies. The west was still centred on violence, which remained one of the most widely used ways to deal with internal and international issues. Violence was so entrenched that even rebellions continued to hold the myth of violence, with the rising interest in the technique of guerrilla. Moreover, the philosopher understood that a democracy based on a constitution, along with democratic procedures, was not enough. The state, in particular the Italian one, continued to be closed and violent, dominated by political parties and clientelism (Capitini, 1950:130). Besides, Capitini acknowledged that western democracies suffered the fall into technocracy. He raised his voice against the tendency towards the reduction of political issues to technical problems, caring only about efficiency.

All these feature and circumstances constituted the ground in which Capitini's original theory and practice of nonviolence blossomed. Unfortunately, his work stopped too early. Due to a mocking fate, Capitini passed in 1968, right in the middle of the rebellions that were shacking Europe. However, this was far from the end. The Italian philosopher left many pages of reflections and ideas as testimony of his efforts, as well as source of inspiration for the next generations. In these pages, the idea of nonviolence represents the thread that links discussions on the most disparate topics. It is a complex concept, which is quite different from the current dominant approach of Gene Sharp. Nonviolence is not reduced to a mere set of techniques. It certainly includes techniques of actions, but something more is at stake. Indeed, nonviolence includes ethics, morality, and even religion, even though it is not a principle which should be obeyed at any time. What Capitini calls nonviolence is instead an articulated process of both liberation from the chains of reality, and 'openness to the existent' (Capitini, 1962a) (Capitini, 1962b:21). In other words, nonviolence is a process which tries

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<sup>50</sup> It is impossible to rigidly distinguish between books on strictly political issues and books focusing on religion. Thus, we suggest to look at the above books as well as to the following: *I C.O.S. per la Comunita' Aperta*, 1948; *Italia Nonviolenta*, Bologna, Libreria Internazionale Avanguardia, 1949; *Nuova Socialita' e Riforma Religiosa*, Torino, Einaudi, 1950; *Rivoluzione Aperta*, Parma, Guanda, 1956; *L'Obiezione di Coscienza in Italia*, Manduria, Lacaïta, 1959; *Antifascismo tra i Giovani*, Trapani, Celebes, 1966; *Le Tecniche della Nonviolenza*, Milano, Feltrinelli, 1967; and in particular the postomous *Il Potere di Tutti*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia, 1969.

to keep together the tension towards personal liberation and values, while maintaining a profound link with the other.

In order to understand Capitini's approach to nonviolence, we should introduce some key notions and ideas which characterise Capitini. For a start, we should look at his conception of action. With this term, Capitini refers to something which is much more than the movement of a body; it is the moment in which new meanings may take place, depending on the actual interaction with the others as well as other's understandings. In addition, an act is at the same time limited and unlimited. It is limited because it is always realized in a determined context, situation, time and place. At the same time it is unlimited, because it always transcends itself, creating something new and producing infinite and sometimes unexpected consequences. Thus, in any action there is an opportunity of "putting an ideal even in the choice of means", of realising something different, contributing to shape human relations. In few words, in any action there is a small opening for a ground-breaking choice. This choice is between actions of closure or openness, of liberation or slavery, of deepening the link with the others or not. Instead of being an event led by nature, a person can choose to recognise his or her personal responsibility to either act passively, out of necessity, or to accept the challenge, to risk.

This risk is shaped by another key word of Capitini's vocabulary, persuasion. Nonviolence is an alternative approach to reality, which is centred on the idea of persuasion. The term does not mean behaving as if things were in a certain way. Persuasion refers to a sort of 'internal participation' (Capitini, 1950:57). It is a proactive attitude. Instead of passively living life doing things without conviction, persuasion requires to 'live' the tragedy of reality with transformative, 'prophetic' attitude. Persuasion means being persuaded, not passively living in the society as it appears. It requires a serious effort to live in profundity and authenticity. Capitini drew the concept of persuasion from the philosopher Carlo Michelstaedter<sup>51</sup>. Nevertheless, the former introduced in the idea of persuasion

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<sup>51</sup> Carlo Michelstaedter (1887-1910) was an Italian philosopher and writer, who committed suicide really early in his life. The most famous book is his thesis *Persuasion and Rhetoric*, in which persuasion may also be read as possess of oneself, which always vanishes due to the limits of human life. To the contrary, rhetoric is merely the apparatus of words, actions, institutions, hiding the impossibility of reaching persuasion.

of the latter a strong ethical impulse (Foppa Pedretti, 2005:285), overcoming his nihilist approach.

Persuasion is for Capitini a persuaded action of love, of care towards the other, in the realisation of values in society. The meaning of the term value is another important part of Capitini's philosophical approach. When he talks about value, he does not have in mind abstract ideas, which can be divided from facts. Instead, it is the way in which the subject lives, intervenes, shapes facts. Thus, value is creation, is liberation from the idea that there is an external and cruel reality out there (Capitini, 1998:222). From this perspective, nobody can define a value once and for all. Nevertheless, people can participate in the day-by-day construction of the good, the beauty etc... The continuous research of persuaded action of liberation and openness for the realisation of values in society presupposes a certain conception of the person and its relation with the world. This approach to nonviolence is incompatible with an idea of person as an individual atom. Instead, Capitini talked of a person as an 'open centre'. The idea of a person as a 'centre' can be described as a condition, in which people do not hide behind the excuses of necessity or private interest; they act authentically, out of persuasion, always deepening the link with the others in the production of values (Capitini, 1950:56). Anyone can work every day for liberation from human limits and openness to others, making a profound transformation of reality.

This short introduction to the vocabulary of Capitini allows us to better understand what Capitini meant when he wrote that nonviolence is a "choice of a way of thinking and acting which is not oppression or destruction of any living being, especially human beings" (Capitini, 1962b:29). This choice cannot be understood as an act of principle, a rigid implementation here and now of a belief system, which would easily clash with other human actions, leading to nothing concrete. Capitini himself claimed that "those who want to do 'either everything or nothing' are those who do not do anything at all" (Capitini, 2011:238). Thus, the way in which nonviolence acts in the world, how it is able to liberate a closed society and to produce a different reality, is totally different. Capitini's concept of nonviolence pays great attention to social consequences, opportunities, and public reason. It is not an abstract ideal, but an endless fight to change reality at any moment. For Capitini,

*“it is a mistake to believe that nonviolence is peace, order, work, and quite sleeping, marriage and many kids, nothing broken at home, no bruise on the body. Nonviolence is not the literal and symmetric antithesis of war: in the latter everything is broken, in the former everything is intact. Nonviolence is war as well, or better, is struggle, continuous struggle against situations surrounding us, existent laws, ours’ and others’ habits, our own souls and subconscious, our own dreams, which are plenty of fear and desperate violence. Nonviolence means being prepared to see chaos around us, social disorder, arrogance of evil people; it means having the prospect of an anguished situation. Nonviolence is right in promising nothing to the world, except for the cross” (Capitini, 1948:57-58).*

With the term ‘cross’ there is no intention to adhere to a religion, even though religion is included in this interpretation of nonviolence. The Italian philosopher wanted only to stress that nonviolence has nothing to do with cowardice, and that sacrifice may be required.

This long quotation makes sense of the realism of Capitini’s conception of nonviolence. Nonviolence works right in the middle of society. Nonviolence denies neither the existence of endless forms of violence, nor the tragedy of the necessity to use certain forms of violence in extreme cases for certain purposes. This means that there is no dogmatic opposition between the nonviolent and those who use violence.

*“I do not hold in lower esteem those who rationally and out of necessity, suppress the existence of a human being. I even acknowledge that I owe aspects of my historical life to those who, for instance, fought for my country’s independence and freedom, even killing tyrants and foreigners. I respect the father who kills those who threaten the life of his child [...]. However, it hurts me those who enjoy killing for the sake of killing, adding ardour to the rational decision. My religious persuasion says that, if something should be added to rationality, it is infinite love; and thus the decision of killing will always tend to become more cautious (this is one of the aspects of human development: the acquisition of respect towards human existence)” (Capitini, 1998:102).*

Thus, nonviolence walks on the edge of violence, manifesting itself every time in different and imperfect clothes. It is a small but ground-breaking opportunity, a tension to do as much as possible here and now for openness and liberation

(Capitini, 1998:102). For this reason, nonviolence cannot be reduced to the imposition of rules, if not indirectly and with personal pain. Indeed, the increase of the link between interiority and the others cannot be achieved through the imposition of one view over another. Nonviolence is a new direction which embraces the whole personal experience (Capitini, 1962a:10-11); it is a life of persuaded actions.

Even if Capitini used this term only few times, it is possible to claim that nonviolence is for the Italian philosopher a *praxis*. The nonviolence proposed by Gandhi is a praxis (Capitini, 1999:106), as well as his one (Capitini, 1953). More precisely, he talked of a religious praxis (Capitini, 2011:93), which includes the whole process described above. It is both the need of non-cooperation and commitment towards the others. It is at the same time a constant orientation and an always different choice (Capitini, 2011). This approach is able to crudely analyse reality, in order to begin a process of change. This new process of liberation and openness, this new praxis, is called nonviolence (Capitini, 1953).

*“Nonviolence is not the carrying out of an order, but a conviction pervading our mind, our heart and our actions, and it is an open centre; this means that everyone may undertake the initiative of unity-love<sup>52</sup> without waiting until all are loving, and give expression to it in particular ways which he shall decide on with full sincerity, and with regret for all limitations and impediments which the present state of reality-society-humanity still opposes to the full development of this unity between us all” (Capitini, 1953).*

How does this praxis work? The Italian philosopher was very clear in stressing the fact that nonviolence cannot work in a traditional way. The praxis of liberation and openness cannot fall into dialectics (Capitini, 1963:88). In an article published in 1959, Capitini rejects Hegelian dialectics, due to its presumption of including everything (Capitini, 1959). For instance, he claimed that in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* dialectics tends to absorb the negative in order to overcome it, in an endless progression, up to when reason is reconciled with itself. The fact that the progression is the result of a struggle (everything is licit for human progress) triggered the many doubts of Capitini, because it may be valid in nature, where

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<sup>52</sup> With this term we refer to the unity of knowledge and value. Indeed, it is the link between the knowledge of God, of the unity with the others, and love. This leads to a religion which is not exact knowledge and description of what is God. Instead, the unity with the other and with God is to live, to find in practice, in the action of love.

human beings are events and the struggle is led by arrogance and vitality. Unfortunately, Hegel's work does not help to find an alternative way to supersede conflict other than through the annihilation of others; instead, conflict becomes the way for progress. Capitini claimed that the "method of the empire" (Capitini, 1966b), which expresses itself in burning books, or forcing others to do something, should be left aside<sup>53</sup>.

Instead, Capitini placed persuasion, the intimate participation with others in the production of values, at the core of a different method to live this different perspective. The action of liberation proposed by nonviolence works as an 'integration' to the rest of human actions (Capitini, 1998:321). These actions of integration are pure, authentic, and without condition. Indeed, they do not hinder the receiving being; they do not seek anything from others; they do not aim at the annihilation of the others. It is called 'integration' because a nonviolent action does not aim at demolishing existent institutions or groups. On the contrary, it integrates them with a force stemming from within, through open actions that aim at giving something more to the state of affairs. The approach of 'integration' makes nonviolence not a dogma or a casuistic, but a "continuous research, study, discover, celebration. Constantly amplifying and deepening the relationship with all possible beings, suffering repercussions and giving impulse to recovers, discovering that there is always a more authentic nonviolence, and that 'yesterday we were violent" (Capitini 1999:136). Nonviolence is the possibility of enriching human life with actions of love, of liberation from a cynical approach to life, of openness to others in spite of differences. In doing so, nonviolence works practically for the formation of another, and qualitatively better, reality, whose persistence depends on people's every-day choice of adhering to truth and to unity-love. (Capitini, 1998:13). This reality is called 'reality of all'.

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<sup>53</sup> The influence of Hegel in European philosophy has been extremely important. Capitini is one example of the Italian reactions to the German philosopher (along with Cesare Luporini, Nicola Abbagnano and Luigi Pareyson), as well as to Gentile's neo-Hegelian idealism and Croce's historicism. For this reason, it should be acknowledged the striking similarity with some of the key critics of Hegel, such as Kierkegaard. Capitini and the Danish philosopher criticised heavily the abstract vision of the world offered by Hegel. They put at the centre of their writings the importance of human existence against abstract reason, with the aim of finding a way to free human being from a condition of suffering. However, Capitini learnt of Kierkegaard only later in life (at least after his first book *Elementi di un'Esperienza Religiosa*) through the writings of the Christian Existentialist Nikolaj Berdjaev (and the interest for Boine and Ibsen). Thus, it may certainly be claimed that they share very similar views (Capitini even defined himself a 'Kantian-Kierkegaardian'), but we should stress that there is no direct influence of Kierkegaard on Capitini (see: Foppa Pedretti, C. (2005) *Spirito Profetico e Educatzione in Aldo Capitini*, Milano: Vita e Pensiero, p. 206).

*“When we say ‘reality of all’, we refer to something which cannot be measured. ‘All’ are not only the inhabitants of a place, of a city, of a State, of a continent, of the earth; they are all the human beings, with whom it is possible to establish a communication in action. But not only; here starts an enthusiastic openness to something else, a continuous research, a personal effort which questions whether in the ‘all’ others should be included; and thus, those who cannot run an active life and an actual exchange, because they are ill, unhappy, crazy, absent from community life, from day-to-day friendliness” (Capitini, 1999:136).*

This is enlarged to sub-human beings, as well as dead. Capitini is persuaded of the fact that when something becomes truly ‘of everybody’, belonging not to someone in particular, it changes in nature.

From this brief description, it is clear that nonviolence is never perfect and does not end anywhere (Capitini, 1962b:29), rather it traces a clear direction for people, society, and even for politics and religion. Nonviolence is like music or poetry. Indeed, nobody embraces nonviolence in an abstract way, in the same way as nobody can pretend to listen or compose ‘the Music’. It is only possible to act in particular circumstances, embarking upon particular acts of nonviolence (Capitini, 1962b:29). At the same time, “it is always possible to do new music, new poetry; and the old music and poetry can always be lived more deeply”. For what concerns nonviolence, it is always possible to act nonviolently, to create new opportunities of liberation and openness.

The analogy of music may not persuade the many who worked their whole life to make nonviolence an effective means, a set of tools which everybody can adopt. At the same time, it may represent an outrage to those who suffer the consequences of dramatic choices made to implement a pure principle of nonviolence. However, Capitini worked his whole life to introduce in Italy nonviolent methods of struggle, as well as linked nonviolence with values and religion. The fact is that the two components are the result of the praxis of nonviolence. Thus, they are both integral to nonviolence. It is the complex praxis of liberation and openness which is capable to shed new light on actions and values. Yet, how to conceive of pragmatic and principled nonviolence from this perspective? This will be the focus of the following two sections.

### *3.2. Beyond Pragmatic Nonviolence: A different Method for the Power of All*

The conception of nonviolence as a praxis of liberation and openness includes a pragmatic side. Capitini was well aware of the importance of the many techniques which did not lead to physical violence. He even wrote a book on the techniques of nonviolence in 1967, with the intent of presenting to the Italian public, in particular to students, a new but efficient path for change. He tried to be prophet of a new way, a new praxis to change the status quo, which did not fall into the too well known patterns of violence.

This new approach looks at war as a method of action. In other words, war is a series of actions of closure, such as battles, bombardments, commercial blocks, and espionage (Capitini, 1966a:134-238). This method of action divides and exacerbates the 'field of contention'. In order to deal with such a difficult situation, we certainly need a new method action, or what Zunes would call an entire new "weapon system" (Zunes, 2000:181). This method may definitely be a game changer, and it "may be valid for domestic transformation, or revolutions, as well as for the possible fight against invaders" (Capitini, 1999:127).

Nevertheless, nonviolence cannot be reduced to a list of techniques. Nonviolence is a praxis, a tension, a way of doing things. In this sense it is an alternative. The aim is not to show different behaviours, but to change human relations. For this reason, when he analysed the techniques of nonviolence, the Italian philosopher gathered a much wider and complex list of techniques than Gene Sharp, without falling into any sorts of contradictions.

He divided the 'techniques' in individual and collective. The individual techniques are characterised by the development of a strong personal responsibility, in the sense of self-discipline and responsibility towards the others. The first individual technique is the act of opening the self to the other, talking to the other in order to interiorise him or her, feeling proximity. Then, it includes vegetarianism, the overcome of the logic of revenge, the exemplarity of the individual through fast<sup>54</sup> and prayer (as tension of both ritual and spiritual love) and conscientious objections. It includes dialogue, which is not interpreted as merely speaking with each other. It is instead a kind of authentic and pure exchange based on the research of a constructive and shared truth. It presupposes the possibility of being

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<sup>54</sup> On the practice of fasting, there is a letter exchange between Capitini and Danilo Dolci.



persuaded by the other. In this sense it is continuous process of contribution and clarification, and it excludes sophisticated uses of the discourse in order to prevail. In this sense, dialogue is oriented towards non-lying, which is the contrary of consent drawn in a violent way, through manipulation of the other, or even worse the imposition a certain truth with intimidations and threat of retaliation.

The individual techniques are deeply linked with the collective, which share a strong drive towards more and better participation of people in the social and political life. Here we find non-collaboration, disarmament, negotiations, and many traditional collective actions of civil disobedience, such as strikes, reverse strikes, rallies, sit-in, and marches. However, it also includes sabotage, which means the destruction of means of communication or even weapons of an invader army. It also means sabotage of the instruments of an oppressive power without persecuting the enemies under dictatorships. Finally, a collective technique is also education, which is interpreted as a practical effort to improve the quality of the participation of everybody in the society.

The point is that this mix of techniques and personal features represent the flesh and bones of nonviolence. However, nonviolence can never be reduced to them. Nonviolence is “openness to existence, liberty and development of human beings” (Capitini, 1962a:10-11); ends cannot be sacrificed. Thus, much more is required. Nonviolence is a method used to oppose the common practices of violence in the present society, as well as the widespread violent oppression and exploitation consolidated over time.

From this analysis is clear that nonviolence, in its pragmatic side, is a method, a logic, a style of action, and not a set of techniques. More precisely, it is not merely a method to win or solve a conflict; it is an ‘open revolution’, that is a method, a style of action, a logic to change reality. It is a work of analysis of existing practices, in order to find opportunities for liberation and openness. For this reason, this sort of pragmatic nonviolence embeds a vision of power which is slightly different from Sharp’s. Indeed, this pragmatic approach to nonviolence lead to integrate the concept of ‘people power’ with that of the ‘power of all’. Capitini made clear that nonviolence is to be intended as a constant method used in social and political struggles, as well as ‘open revolution’ and stimulus to planning from below, to decentralisation and control by all. Nonviolence thus is not passive in society; it works at the centre of it. It takes initiatives of solidarity,

of non-collaboration, of assisting the overwhelmed, of distinguishing between sinners and sins, and of the creation of alternatives. It should take into account those who cannot participate and implement these techniques, and even the enemy.

The new methods offered by Capitini were based on the conviction that power lies not only in the possession of a nuclear bomb or in the affiliation with a political group, a certain religion or ideology. Looking at power not as a monopoly of institutions, it can be acknowledged that populations hold a lot of power, which they rarely exercise, and which should not be necessarily violent. The population can decide to obey or not, to give or withdraw consent, to act creatively and independently from any decree of the state. There is an infinite group of actions, of pressure, of disdain, of sentiments and relations, which are the basis of existence of power. Thus, the aim of Capitini was to work against the monopoly of power in the hands of a few small elites. Capitini's approach to power is based on self-responsibility and the empowerment of the people. Personal responsibility requires a process of internal renovation, rejecting war, destruction, spiritual self-poisoning, and folly (Capitini, 1999:253). It involves the idea that there is no 'definitive' system of power ruled by 'necessity'. In other words, we cannot exclude the possibility that a new fact could change strong institutions, such as parties, revolutions, ideas, and even dissipate the danger of war. For what concerns the empowerment of people, Capitini worked to raise awareness within the population so that they can withdraw consent from leaders, especially from those who intend to bring them into war.

However, withdrawing consent is not enough. Capitini proposed two key elements for a real revolution. First of all, an increasing bottom-up solidarity. Secondly, a long work of endless proposals for change (Capitini, 1999:115). People need to be encouraged to participate, learning to express their view (and sometimes to have one), and exercising their power fruitfully. People need new initiatives, proposals and groups, through which they can learn to cooperate, in order to put pressure on and reduce the power of those at the top. At the same time, they have to be resilient; they should acquire skills and techniques enabling them to resist for long time.

Up to now, this vision of power may appear similar to the pluralistic view of Gene Sharp. Nevertheless, this view is incompatible with the idea of a conquest of

power by any means, which Sharp does not exclude. For Capitini, nonviolence is not a list of methods of action, but a real integration with something new, the 'power without government'. This power will be represented by a centre, which in extreme cases may be a single person, contributing to the world with persuaded actions of liberation and openness, in the opposite way than sects or small groups of perfects. This fact changes the social structure, which will de facto be no more divided in a group holding power and in another without. The persuaded person, or the prophet, is the highest example of this different power, which does not have to be sustained with violence and does not depend from institutions. Consequently, this means that the main aim of the power of all is not a change in government. In the short term, it is neither necessary to overthrow a dictatorship, nor change the people in power.

In other words, the growth of the power of all may be parallel and autonomous from the traditional one. Nevertheless, this first phase will gradually end up in another phase, in which the traditional institutions will control very little. The reason is that the continuous effort in openness, the training in nonviolent techniques, the development of the environment in which people live, as well as a different education and solidarity will practically end up the dependency of the citizens from their institutions. Even the idea that egoistic and violent human beings can only be tamed by the state will fade away.

Instead, a different society will grow, which is not necessarily a representative democracy. Capitini named this new society omnocracy, which means the power of all. The term had been used for the first time in a letter in 1956 (Capitini, 1999:364). Nevertheless, Capitini only started to seriously reflect on that term during the 1960s, and it plays a key role in Capitini's theory. Indeed, it should be admitted that the concept of omnocracy is quite vague and undetermined. The main reason is that the power of all is not the process of emptying existing institutions in order to establish new powerful ones. Instead, the new order is based on new social relations, and institutions are marginal, temporary, flexible and much less powerful. Thus, it represents the political side of the practical revolution of nonviolence in society. It can be described as the political side of the 'reality of all', and for this reason cannot be fully distinguished from compresence, which will be analysed in the next session. *Omnocracy* can be described as the horizontal tension towards increasing inclusion, which balances

the vertical tension towards values of compresence (Capitini, 1950:110). *Omnicracy*, the power of all, is a sort of direct democracy. It is the maximum openness possible to the others. However, this form of direct democracy will not be a “permanent administration by an anonym square, which tramples on minority rights and actual oppositions” (Capitini, 1999:111). The reason is that the central role of the praxis of nonviolence in the process of formation of this form of direct democracy will forge the latter as a continuous work of integration. Indeed, from this perspective direct democracy the practical overcome of the omnipotent power of a group of technicians based on the myth of efficiency, as well as the omnipotent power of a political group based on the myth of revolution (Capitini, 1999:112).

### *3.3. Beyond Principled Nonviolence: The Great Refusal and the Craft of Shaping Reality*

The pragmatic dimension of Capitini’s nonviolence emerged as a method, a logic which may adopt existing techniques as well as inventing new ones. It is not the simple application of a technique; it is a process of interpreting and shaping reality, with many innovative techniques, in order to foster personal responsibility and the power of all keeping the project of omnicracy as open as possible. Thus, we are talking of something which is beyond the idea of nonviolence as a mere set of techniques, but it does not seem to be a principle or a value as well. It includes an end, but it is not something rigidly determined. Therefore, we can claim that there is certainly also a ‘principled’ dimension, but is not a classic and rigid imposition of a principle from above. This section will describe Capitini’s ‘principled’ dimension of nonviolence.

Going back to the initial definition, nonviolence is a tension that enriches and directs action. This definition may appear quite vague and confusing. It is so because nonviolence does not start with a clear and abstract definition, value, or principle to follow. Instead, Capitini’s conception of nonviolence starts by requiring a change of perspective in the subject itself. Instead of looking from above, from general theories on the meaning of nonviolence, Capitini asks the reader to begin from him or herself, along with the persons surrounding them. In order to do so, a realistic analysis of each person’s tragedy in life is needed. In

other words, nonviolence starts from an honest analysis of reality, and in particular, from the acknowledgment of the drama of human finitude. Human beings face tremendous limits, such as the possibility of pain, mistakes, and death. These limits impact deeply on each person, being at the basis of reactions, emotions, dreams and fears; at the same time, they provide a link with the others, because the drama is shared by everybody. Human limits, especially pain, mistakes, and death, are simultaneously deeply personal and common. For this reason, they can represent a valid starting point for a change of perspective.

The change of perspective, and in particular the perception of unity between people's suffering, is the beginning of the process of nonviolence. Indeed, the perception of unity allows human beings to glimpse that it is possible to refuse to follow a way of living dictated by mere power relations or passive acceptance of the necessity of pain and mistakes, along with the complete disappearance of a dead person. A reality shaped merely on these premises is not worth to last, and a possibility to react differently to human limits is grasped. Capitini called this refusal 'the great refusal'. The great refusal is first of all a rejection of the reduction of a human being to an event (Capitini 2011:7). At the same time, this rejection implies also the refutation of reducing human behaviour to the law of nature; a reality in which the bigger fish devours the smaller one. In other words, the 'great refusal' is the refusal to follow common but dangerous reactions to human limits and the cruelty of life, because these aspects of human life are insufficient, temporary, and able to create a reality which is not worth to last.

Yet, on what basis do human beings refuse to act following power relations and passively accepting human limits? The great refusal is not based on an alternative tale, telling us what a human being is, as well as suggesting the 'real' laws of nature. Instead, the focus is put back into each person's control. People have a great opportunity, as well as a great responsibility. The opportunity is not to create an alternative tale to believe, in order not to face reality. On the contrary, it is at the practical level that the opportunity lies. It is at the practical level, at the level of human actions, that nonviolence suggests a way out. When the personal reaction against human limits is closure, a person renounces the opportunity embedded in any action provided by the practical link with others, and falls into solitude and the dominion of nature. Human limits are accepted and drive the individual action towards a withdrawal from reality, inaction, or to a passive

following of the external reality. This attitude would lead to violence and resignation, and it would not represent a way out of the tragedy of human limits. Instead, when a person recognises the link with the others, he or she can decide to deepen this link. He or she can choose an act of openness. He or she can choose to love, interpreted as agape. This choice opens up de facto a different reality, which transcends the material bounds and produce values. Capitini clearly stated that the actual “way through of history” is “the sentiment that the world is foreign to us when is to be lived without love, without infinite openness towards each other, without unity upon many differences and suffering” (Capitini, 1998:21). This means that the ‘great refusal’ is not a dogmatic credo, which should be pushed straight away to the extremes. For instance, the refusal does not deny the importance of social and political institutions, even when far from being perfect. Capitini was well aware of the importance of the state, with all its institutions, including the police and the army. It is true that the army is linked directly to the empire, and to a militaristic mentality. It is also true that in the long run nonviolence works for the substitution of these institutions. Nevertheless, Capitini acknowledged the important role the police play in our imperfect society<sup>55</sup>. The same can be claimed for the army. Capitini even acknowledged the importance of religious institutions. Capitini had many problems with the Catholic church of the time. However, the Italian philosopher was fully aware that religion is also much more; it can provide the society with something important. He recognised the importance of the religious ‘optimistic sentiment’, which is persuaded of the fact that pain, sin, death, individual limits are not everything; they can and should be continuously won (Capitini, 1998:9).

As described above, the way in which nonviolence orients the practice is fundamentally different from an adversarial or dialectical one. There is no match to win; there are no opposites to contrast. Nonviolence proposes a complex process of addition, of integration. But how does the nonviolent shape reality? The key point, or the drama, is to structure reality through good will, humility,

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<sup>55</sup> It is important to highlight that Capitini has been under surveillance both during fascism and later, under democracy. Nevertheless, the Italian philosopher understands that police plays an important role, which is different from the excesses of destruction and impersonality of armies and war. It is a circumscribed action against those who bring violence in the community. Even here, the nonviolent works for reducing the violence of this kind of coercion, but is aware that the police represents the last institution which a community would abandon. For more information, look at: *Scritti filosofici e Religiosi*, p. 553; *Il Potere di Tutti*, p. 112.

goodness, artistic beauty, research of truth (Capitini, 1998:181). How values and principles are included in the work of nonviolence? Here we should turn to Capitini's description of the 'religious life', of the religious praxis, and consequently of nonviolence from a religious perspective. Capitini described the process of integration of reality by nonviolence as taking place in three different acts: ascetical, ethical, and religious. These three acts should not be interpreted as three distinct movements of the body. To the contrary, they represent three moments, three degrees in the process of deepening the link with the other, as well as orienting it towards liberation and openness.

The first step towards liberation is the ascetic act, which consists mainly of a temporary retreat into ourselves. The troubled soul should pass through an act of silence, aimed at reconstituting an identity, leaving aside small and nonessential issues, and facing directly the tragedy of human limits. With this act, Capitini is not encouraging eremitism. He is only claiming that the first liberation is that of freeing oneself from acting mechanically, without being persuaded of the meaning of our actions. This is an answer to the dominion of exacerbated activism championed by fascism, which inhibits reflection and a critical approach to actions. This first act is extremely important, because the person is making the step to no more exist as a 'bag of sensations, taste, and vices'. By not simply accepting all that happens around him, he becomes a real subject, actively present in the world. Indeed, scrutiny brings the recognition that there is something profound that differentiates human actions. In particular, the subject recognises that some actions are suddenly felt wrong, while others are held natural and desirable. This is because any action, any part of reality, carries a value. It is undeniable that actions are carried out and evaluated through the categories of truth, justice, beauty, and goodness. With values Capitini does not intend something measurable, fully describable, nor in the hand of a particular authority. Rather, value is a style which cannot be separated from action, and which works from the individuals upwards and horizontally (Capitini, 1999). Values are the structure, the style which shapes any content. In other words, values and reality are not separable in any human practice, as the formers inevitably shape the latter. The refusal to act without conviction, without being persuaded, with some kind of reflection of the values of our actions, implies a continuous and tiring process of analysis of any personal action and conviction,

avoiding both impotence and uncontrolled activism(Capitini, 1998). At the same time, the ascetic act is the first glimpse of a concrete possibility of liberation. If the person cannot shape reality by acting on natural events, the cruel reality can be transcended by acting on the 'structure' that shapes those events. A serious action on values can change human practices, and diminish the power of natural, social, and political chains.

The process of liberation is indivisible from the encounter with the other. Any discourse on truth, right, beauty, and good, opens suddenly the human horizon, the human reality, to the other. Without this openness to the other, personal convictions and values are not tested; they can be only other forms of vice or misunderstanding. Thus, the recognition of the self as more than only sensation, taste and vices, goes hand in hand with the recognition of the other as more than an object. Capitini claimed that the presence of the other is not a simple production of the mind, but a real and founded gift, thanks to which an authentic reality, which includes value, can exist. The ethical act consists of opening oneself up to this 'gift'. The formation of another reality begins with the understanding of the circumstances and scenario that the other person is living within. "The reality that I begin to construct begins with the openness to the other. In speaking with the other, I begin to participate to the pain, sentiments, ideas, beauty, trying to build up a better reality" (Capitini, 1998:347). The subject recognises that the other human being can suffer or have joy, act following values or not. He can understand a work of art, human passions, along with moral and social issues. Most importantly, any human being feel love, which means that he or she is open to something. In other words, the encounter with the other's life is an opportunity. As explained above, the subject may reject the other, or starting a shared work of the production of values, which will affect every day human practice (Capitini, 1998:347). Thus, the ethical act, Capitini argues, is mainly an act of love. The image that Capitini used to describe that kind of love is that of a mother. It is not a kind of donation; it is infinite openness to a gift, in spite of any kind of faith to an idea. This kind of love is not instrumental to the spread of any personal truth, descriptions or prescription in which the subject believes. It is exactly the reverse. It is a close link with the other. Indeed, the subject recognises the 'shared reality' with the other as worth more than the natural reality of power and arrogance. Even at the risk of his or her own death.



The ascetic and ethical acts are therefore the beginning of another reality, based on the search for something better and on the prescribed openness to others. However, it is not enough. Openness should not be confused with creating a larger group, and values with an agreement between friends. Up until now the subject has opened itself only to some single individuals. Here intervenes the religious act, which enlarges openness to everybody. In the third and last act of the nonviolent praxis, a person enlarges their preoccupation, care, and thought to everybody. The physical absence of the other is not a problem; the religious tension enlarges the 'mothers' love' to everybody. The enlargement of love to everybody comes with a recognition of a further level of liberation and openness. The subject feels that there is something more than a biological and spiritual link between people. An egoistic action does not participate in any important project; does not produce values; cannot be shared with others. At the end the subject is alone with him or herself. In the action of cooperation in the making of values, the subject experiences something different. He feels that the action of value is a cooperation between him and the other persons present at that moment, but not only that: he is included in a reality in which even those not present are cooperating, even the dead. Any action of value represents the deepening of the link with the others; it connects the subject with other human beings, and more generally other living beings. The subject becomes part of a bigger community, and starts to make real the link with everybody. This recognition of an infinite openness brings about liberation. "If I open myself to a human being with respect and care, then to another one, and in the soul I would be willing to do it for all, reaching the horizon of everybody, I cannot accept nature and facts that, without understanding, would deprive a part of the beings" (Capitini, 1999:86). In this way, an action of value is the overcoming of the chains of natural reality. In an action creating values, the subject feels the presence of everybody. The religious act is the recognition that an act of value enlarges the love of a mother to everybody, including the 'weak', the old, the ill, and even the dead. The religious act allows to perceive that "any being is active", as they do even more than what it appears; in the unity with all each being "provides with a contribution which cannot be perceived, but is actual as help in the production of values" (Capitini, 1999:36). Thanks to this enlargement, the subject feels the participation of everybody in his actions; he or she feels to take part in something bigger than a simple movement of the body. The other person may be physically absent, because far away or

dead. Nevertheless, the action of value includes him or her; the subject feels the other vitally present in the action that is doing.

The result of the integration of ascetic, ethical, and religious acts is a profound change of human relations, and consequently of reality. The integration creates what Capitini called *compresence*. Compresence is described by Faracovi as “the connection constructed between all men, both living and dead, at that moment when they present themselves as moral subjects, in contrast with the given reality, and acting as members of an ideal community” (Capitini, 2000:105). It is a new moral reality, which reveals itself practically. This new reality is a ‘circle’ of living beings producing values, which enlarges every time there is a new born. At the same time, the ‘circle’ does not restrict with the death of someone; the material presence of the other is not necessary for him or her to be here in an act of love, in the production of values. The moral example of someone, or the spiritual strength showed by someone in the past, makes this person present here and now, even if the body is dead. In doing an act of value, the subject keeps him or her ‘alive’. In this way, he or she produces a different reality. It is a reality which makes sense only in practice. In any action the person can intimately participate with everybody in the production of values, even of those who are normally excluded because of health, weakness or death, badness or goodness. The result is what Gandhi would call unity-love, and Capitini *compresence*. This is the maximum, and always growing, possible openness and liberation. Each new-born is included in this practical reality of value-making, while death cannot end the moral contribution of a person.

Compresence is also equal to God for Capitini. Indeed, God is interpreted in Capitini’s terms as ‘one-all’. It is not an object; it is the totality of subjects producing values. As Bobbio claimed, we should describe Capitini’s idea of God “not as totality of the world, of things, God as creator; but God as totality of people, of subjects, of ‘you’, and therefore God love” (Bobbio, 2011:36). Thus, God is in any act of love which fosters the participation of everybody, as well as in any moment in which a community produces values.

To conclude, the ‘principled’ dimension of nonviolence is a refusal to be led by power relations and passive acceptance of human limits. It means taking the risk of acting differently, on the basis of the unity of human beings in the ‘tragedy of life’, in order to shape differently reality with new occasions for liberation and

openness. Thus, nonviolence is not a value which directs actions as a general gives orders. In the same vein as the pragmatic nonviolence described in the last section, nonviolence is here a value or a principle in the sense of a method, a logic, a style of action. Nonviolence directs actions in a similar way like a sculptor creates a marble statue. Indeed, for the Italian philosopher reality is like a marble statue. Here the power of choice, of a decision, of a judgment is evident, as it is impossible to have a marble statue and an intact piece of marble at the same time. Decisions are constitutive of reality; they are able to shape reality (Capitini, 1998:181). In other words, looking from a more ethical and moral point of view, nonviolence is a craft, a meticulous work not to fabricate objects, but to shape and orient practices towards openness and liberation, after an analysis of what we can realistically here and now try to change.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter outlined the idea of nonviolence proposed by Aldo Capitini, in the conviction of being of great help in our attempt to reconstruct the concept. Section one introduced Aldo Capitini, focusing on the encounter with Gandhian nonviolence under the fascist totalitarian regime. The reinterpretation of Gandhi in such a complex social and political circumstances gave rise to an innovative interpretation of nonviolence. With this concept, the Italian philosopher referred neither to a set of techniques to seize power, nor to a principle to abide by notwithstanding the particular circumstance. Instead, nonviolence is a tension, or better a praxis of liberation from the chains of reality as well as openness to the existent. The aim of this approach is to build up via facti the 'reality of all'.

This interpretation wipes away the ambiguity derived from a strong division between pragmatic and principled nonviolence. To the contrary, the concept of praxis includes the two dimensions. This means that every person or event is at the same time part of principled and pragmatic nonviolence. Nevertheless, these two categories acquire very different definitions from Sharp's. Section two described how we can conceive of the category of pragmatic nonviolence from Capitini' approach. With this term we mean a method, a logic, a style of action. For this reason, Capitini included in the techniques of nonviolence individual efforts to avoid the sentiment of revenge as well as fast; collective actions such as strikes as well as education. This quite vague list is not a contradiction.

Pragmatic nonviolence will never be a list of techniques. At the same time, it is a kind of knowledge: it promotes some techniques as well as provides the framework for a continuous work of reinterpretation of existing practices in a way to produce events with a strong constructive drive. The aim of this effort is the 'power of all', which is made of a first moment of 'power without government', which will lead to make institutions always less important and to the establishment of omnicracy.

Instead, section three described how we can interpret principled nonviolence from Capitini's approach. The principled dimension of nonviolence is not a rigid implementation of a principle. It is instead a craft, a meticulous work of moulding and integrating reality with new opportunities for liberation and openness. The starting point is to focus on persons and their limits: mistakes, pain, and death. Capitini acknowledged that these limits represent both a challenge shared by everybody, as well as an opportunity shared by all. Indeed, human beings can decide to directly face these challenges alone, with the inevitable consequence of closing down in themselves, in the desperate attempt to survive as long as possible, as well as suffering the least possible alternatives. Alternatively, the subject can decide to deepen this link with the others, trying to collectively face the burdens in life with others. This last choice implies the 'great refusal', which means the refusal to believe that the death of the body is the end of everything, as well as to consider as necessary the laws of nature, which assume that the bigger fish eats the smaller one. Out of this refusal, nonviolence emerges as a process of liberation from the cruelty of reality, as well as openness to the existent. In other words, nonviolence is a work of integration of reality with new opportunities of liberation and openness. The integration is described as made of three main acts: ascetic, ethical, religious. The integration of these three acts in human life demonstrates that cruelty and necessity are not 'necessary' to build here and now, what Capitini called *compresence*.

To conclude, this long digression on Capitini's approach allowed us to portray a different scenario for nonviolence. This term is not divided in two categories, or in two approaches. Nonviolence is interpreted as a praxis of liberation and openness, which has a pragmatic and a principled side. The two dimensions are integral to nonviolence. What remains to be seen is how the reality of all produced by nonviolence would look like. In particular, it is important to understand how this

interpretation of nonviolence is able to reunite means and ends, politics and morality, and religion and politics. This will be the focus of the next chapter.

#### **4. THE 'REALITY OF ALL': PROTEST-TO-PROJECT, TRANSFORMATIVE REALISM, AND OPEN RELIGION**

In the previous chapter, we introduced a different approach to nonviolence. Capitini interpreted nonviolence as a praxis of liberation and openness. This praxis is a continuous and meticulous effort to overcome cruelty and necessity with actions which embed techniques and values. These actions create here and now a different reality, the 'reality of all', which is called omnicracy at the political level and compresence at the religious. This chapter will focus on describing, through Capitini's example, the way in which his concept of nonviolence answers the concerns raised in chapter two. In other words, we will describe how nonviolence as praxis reconstructs the division between means and ends, politics and morality, as well as how it bring back religion at the centre of society.

The first section will focus on what we called the descriptive level. We will show the way in which nonviolence as praxis resists being reduced either to a set of techniques, and thus to a mere means, or the rigid adherence to a creed, an end. In doing so, we will show that means and ends are linked analysing the most well-known nonviolent action created by Capitini: the first Italian peace march of 1961. At first glance, it looks like the perfect example of the implementation of a technique as well as an example of nonviolent 'contentious politics'. Nevertheless, the march will emerge as much more. Capitini organised an action which cannot be reduced to a simple protest, an application of a set of techniques to put pressure on governments, and it is ill suited to be described as a common example of contentious politics. Instead, we will define the march a protest-to-project which aimed at transcending the contention, enhancing personal responsibility, the power of all, and an open-ended project; a nonviolent action, which is a balance between destruction and construction, investing physical, political and symbolic level.

Section two will look at the praxeological level. Capitini's nonviolence emerges as a very progressive concept. We will look at the way in which the praxis of nonviolence becomes a truly political approach, with a strong constructive drive in-between realism and moralism. Using the title of Capitini's specialisation thesis we will claim that nonviolence leads to a political approach which is a complex balance between 'realism and serenity', at whose core there is nonviolence. At

the centre of this approach there is the project of omnocracy, which Capitini tried to realise throughout his whole life. During fascism, omnocracy meant both non-cooperation and the construction of the liberalsocialist movement. After WWII, Capitini worked to integrate the fragile Italian democracy with opportunities of participation in political life, with the promotion of the COS (Centri di Orientamento Sociale).

The last section will turn to religion. Capitini showed how religion is a central part of nonviolent action, and how nonviolence brings religion back to the centre of society. The concept of compresence is at the centre of the encounter between religion and nonviolence. Indeed, it represents the maximum openness and liberation possible, and it is even described as God, making religion a set of thought and actions, in which faith is no longer passive obedience, and the priest is substituted by the prophet. Such an 'open' religion realises itself in society, providing opportunities for openness and liberation. In particular, it provides opportunities for the development of values, without clashing with the rest of the society. This work is extremely beneficial in politics, as it provides it with the necessary vertical tension towards values, in a society in which we experience a horizontal tension toward more inclusion and connections.

#### *4.1. Keeping together Obstruction and Construction: Action as Protest-to-Project*

The interpretation of nonviolence as either a set of techniques or a principle to implement creates a division between means and ends, and a deeply divided field. We have described above that this division is translated in accusation against pragmatic nonviolence for being a means for structural and symbolic violence. At the same time, the idea of nonviolence as a principle to implement runs the risk of non-realistic evaluation of means or abstract speculation, ending up either in radicalism or in withdraw from reality. Thus, we proposed in the last chapter the conception of nonviolence as a praxis of liberation and openness, which in its pragmatic dimension means a method to shape and reinterpret actions and practices.

Yet, how would a nonviolent action look like? In particular, how can this praxis avoid being reduced to mere means? In order to answer this question we will focus on the most well-known nonviolent action organised by Capitini, the first

Italian peace march in 1961. Wittner described the march simply as one of the many antinuclear movements of the 1960s (Wittner, 1997:235). Using the framework of pragmatic nonviolence, we would say that this event is the implementation of a typical nonviolent technique. Using Sharp's definition, the march is a form of procession, with the end of protesting and persuading, which takes place "when a group of people walk in an organised manner to a particular place which is regarded as intrinsically significant to the issue involved" (Sharp, 1973b:152).

The stream of pragmatic nonviolence would also interpret this nonviolent technique as a form of 'contentious politics' (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000). Thus, nonviolent action is a relational mechanism, in a form of contention, a struggle, in which the aim is to protest and persuade those in power to change. From this perspective, any struggle emerges from a 'field of contention', described as a "socially constructive set of adversarial relationship that is embedded in a legal/institutional system that effectively constrains the strategic option available to all contenders" (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000:149). Within this framework, the protestors should be able to "restrict the social-control resources that can legitimately be used by their opponents while increasing the overall costs of these remaining options" (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000:150). The march should have been able to restraint physical, political, and symbolic resources of the opponents in order to force the government not to take part in any nuclear programme.

If we analyse the march from this perspective, it may well be described as a humble application of a nonviolent technique, or of 'contentious politics' against nuclear development. The atomic bomb was the symbol of a very complex field of contention, dominated by the division between the US and the Soviet Union. Europe was weak and deeply divided in supporters of one or the other side. In the Italian political arena, the division re-proposed itself in the great rivalry between the Christian Democrats and the Communist Party. This division overlapped with the still present tremendous crack between the fascists and the non-fascists<sup>56</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> A sign of it was the fierce protest of 1960 in Genoa against the alliance in government between Christian Democrats and the fascist party MSI under Prime Minister Tambroni. However, the antifascist front was no longer united. At the end of the war the unity of the C.L.N. lost strength and divided itself in closed groups and political parties, which increased their power over the Italian society.



Besides, the hierarchies of the most important Italian spiritual institution, the Catholic Church, passively adapted to the international and national divisions<sup>57</sup>. Divisions and passivity of the institutions were considered by Capitini the causes of the general passive acceptance of the status quo. This attitude is named by Capitini the “ideological heaviness” (Capitini, 1962a:17) of Italian society. “Italians think that there should be uniformity in absolute, serious matters (religion, politics and school), whereas variety is something pertaining to contingent individuals and folklore” (Capitini, 1962a:17). In other words, political parties, along with ideas such as revolution, state, or even God, were much more important than a positive collaboration with the outsider. This was based on the general conviction that power relations were similar to the relations in nature, where ‘the bigger fish eats the smaller ones’. The consequence was a violent and authoritarian society, in which belonging to a group guaranteed existence, and in which any person who thought differently was excluded.

However, there were signs of dissatisfaction. Although the status quo was accepted, the desire for peace was still alive (Moro, 2008). In particular, Capitini perceived that the pain of the recent war was still vivid. At the same time, he witnessed the growing international dissent against the nuclear bomb, and was aware of the importance of the petitions of the Partisans of Peace, in spite of their close relation with one of the two powers. Unfortunately, dissatisfaction was not enough. Across many countries, pacifism was a constellation of divided groups (Klimke and Scharloth, 2008:34), united only by the campaigns against nuclear armaments. The division represented an obstacle to the formation of an effective strategy able to disturb those at the top (Martellini, 2006:66).

At the national level, the situation was even worse. The Italian peace movements were many, elitist, and old, and it was the moment of changing pace or fading away<sup>58</sup>. These fragile signs of dissatisfaction had also to deal with an old and

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<sup>57</sup> The severe opposition to communism was visible in the strong conservatism and the 1949 decree of excommunication, which deeply divided Italian society. The decree was ordered by Pius XII, cutting off Catholics from participation in the sacraments and the society of faithful. Communism was considered materialist and anti-Christian. Thus, who voted or were affiliated to the communist party, as well as those who wrote filo-communist books or magazines were excluded from the sacraments. This decree was only one example of the fact that, even within the same Christian world, critiques and discussions were not welcome. Capitini experienced it personally, as his book *Religione Aperta* has been put on the index of the prohibited books in 1956.

<sup>58</sup> There was no single peace movement, but a lot of what Don Primo Mazzolari called ‘merchants of peace’. Indeed, the idea of peace was at the centre of endless disputes between and within

violent Italian contentious repertoire. In Italy mass protests were in the hands of parties (Martellini, 2006:131), and both nonviolence and peace were not in the spotlight<sup>59</sup>.

Nevertheless, there were important examples of different kinds of protests coming from the globe. First of all, the memory of Gandhi's marches was still vivid. The salt march was one of the most well-known moments of India struggle for liberty; it was an example of a complicated but fascinating direct action, including civil disobedience, the act of marching, and the production of salt without paying tax. Moving back to Europe, a global dissent against nuclear armament was rising in many countries at the end of the 1950s. The Aldermaston marches are the symbols of this rebellion, but signs of unrest were visible also in France (Wittner, 1997:195).

Besides the more 'political' repertoire, there was also a 'religious' contentious repertoire of protest and dissent. Although they were exceptions, antinuclear pilgrimages to cathedral towns have been organised in the UK (Wittner, 1997:193). To look for something similar in Italy, Capitini had to recall the religious medieval world, where the first forms of conscientious objections took place, and revolutionary figures emerged, such as Francis of Assisi. In particular, Capitini evoked the Franciscan opposition to take the oath to the podesta' in Arengo square in Rimini in 1215. The oath implied fighting for the State, and this could not be accepted (Capitini, 1962a:15).

The march from Perugia to Assisi entered right in the middle of the above 'horizon of violence'. In other words, it entered in the middle of contention. However, it did so in quite an unexpected way. We would have expected a march with a strong contentious flavour, able to use the new weapons available to bypass controls, weaken the government, create a stronger pacifist movement, and focus on the nuclear issue. Yet, the event was quite different. At the physical level, the march limited quite well the violence coming from the state. It avoided problems so well

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communists and Catholics. Besides, the most famous Italian pacifists, such as Capitini, Marcucci, Pioli were old in the 60s, while Don Mazzolari, Calosso, Fasoli and Tatiana Tolstoj had passed.

<sup>59</sup> The general strikes in 1943 and 1944 against the war were questionable examples, as the effort "coincided with workers' demands for better pay and working conditions, causing a blend of idealistic and materialistic interests" MYERS, F. E. 1973. Dilemmas in the British Peace Movement since World War II. *Journal of Peace Research*, 10, 81-90. More recently, a strong antifascist sentiment moved people to violent protests against the convocation of the MSI national assembly in Genoa in June 1960. A few days later, on 7<sup>th</sup> of July, 5 people were brutally killed by the police during a demonstration in Reggio Emilia.

that we can doubt of the willingness of the organisers to use any sorts of moral or political jiu-jitsu to put pressure on government and institutions. Indeed, the march was not a real and efficient action of civil disobedience. Following the 'logic of number', the march itself did not attract a large number of people<sup>60</sup> compared to the many protests around the world, from the Dandi March to the Civil Rights movement in the US. It did not disrupt the everyday activity of a country, as it was planned for Sunday. Participants did not show any particular strong commitment risking serious repression or violence, as they were careful to avoid any trouble. In particular, the march avoided the control of police, questura, and prefetto. Concerning the relation with the police, the organisers did their best to avoid any problem. Political parties were asked to control their members, and not to answer to any provocation. At the same time, Franco Perna<sup>61</sup> was in charge of the on-the-spot inspection with the police and the control during the march. The same Perna referred in *Peace News* that the lack of hostility and violence during the march brought some police officers to take part in it, and to a friendly and continuous interaction between demonstrators and police (Capitini, 1962a:35). For what concerns the questura, Capitini faced tedious meetings and requests for information, along with leaks to newspapers of personal information about participants and organisers. He even had to wait until the last moment for the permission to march. However, he answered without any frustration. He had nothing to hide, and thus he could counteract hostility with transparency. Capitini's work was effective also against the prefetto's use of discretionary power against the march. Beside the absence of any communication and help, the prefetto sent even a letter to all local administrations, prohibiting the display of towns' gonfalons at the march. This drew the anger of the local administrators, who were willing to break the order. However, Capitini proposed to depict big gonfalons of the towns, in order to show clearly the presence of the administrations, renouncing to fight on such an unimportant issue. His suggestion had been accepted by the organiser's committee, and a letter asking to follow this suggestion had been sent to all the local administrations, who agreed.

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<sup>60</sup> For the Times, the march reached its peak in Assisi, where there were between 8000 and 12000 participants for the police, and almost 20000 for the communist press.

<sup>61</sup> Franco Perna is an Italian activist. Capitini stressed the importance of his help at the march. Indeed, Perna brought the experience of English pacifist demonstrations, as he worked at the International Fellowship of Reconciliation in London.

Turning to the political level, the careful organisation of the demonstration avoided material and political incentives used by governments or parties to control the citizens. However, the march did not try to oppose frontally, with a strong act of dissent, the solid structure of political identities of the time. Instead, the aim was to move within the cracks of the party system without pointing toward destroying or substituting them. The march invited political parties, promoting a real decertification of radical political divisions. "Peace is too important to be left only in the hands of politicians" (Capitini, 1962a:23). Political parties were kept, but from being the only channel of any initiative, they became instruments to be used for higher motives. They were considered not sufficient to lead society, but their network was a valid channel for the development of popular projects. Thus, the organisers of the peace march appropriated themselves of the parties' network. All parties had been invited to the march, and they freely decided whether to come or not. In the case they did, they had to respect the rigid rules put in place by the organisers. They had to make their network available to the organisers, and promote the event everywhere. During the demonstration, they could not promote themselves. It was forbidden to bring any party symbols, whereas 3000 copies of a book on Gandhi were distributed to the participants. Besides, the organisers put in place a strong control of any banners and symbols present at the march.

At the symbolic level, the march challenged the symbols of the status quo, but it did not oppose openly the Catholic institutions. For a start, the organisers chose very strangely Assisi as the end of the march. If the march aimed at opposing the religious, as well as secular, establishment, and was against the nuclear armament, why ending up in Assisi? It was definitely a strange way to avoid the control of and oppose the Catholic institutions.

The lack of a strong contentious flavour was evident also in the promotion of symbols of unity. Firstly, the peace flag, a symbol of union, was used there for the first time. Along with the peace flag, many banners have been created directly by Capitini with symbolic messages of unity and condemnation of any violence. Many songs were invented and promoted during and for the march, with the aim of overcoming idealism and political Manichaeism. An entire repertoire of pacifist songs emerged, which aimed at overcoming the 'bubbling rhetoric of hymns'. In

particular, during the march Fausto Amodei and Franco Fortini invented the “Canzone della Marcia della Pace” (Martellini, 2006, Lenti, 2011).

In spite of this message of unity, the Catholic institutions tried to oppose it, implementing a tight normative control over Italian society. Fortunately, this effort was eluded by the march. Indeed, the march took place, and many Catholics took part in it, even though the institution did not accept the invitation to take part. The Catholic Church was absolutely not in favour of a march on peace, especially with the participation of parties and groups closed to the Soviet Union. Moreover, the march took place in highly religious places without being confessional. The result is that it has been accused of ‘exploiting the sacred’ (Capitini, 1962a:108), entering in well-known Catholic places with symbols which are not part of the official religion. Even during the march the level of hostility remained high, as it is clear by the fact that the friars blocked the doors of Assisi’s basilica, while the ecclesiastical hierarchies decided to force people to pray in churches during the march, in order to pay a tribute to those Catholics who were suffering in East European countries.

The march even had a political agenda presented and voted by those present: the Motion of the People of Peace (Capitini, 1962a:47). Here, we would have expected a motion focused on the nuclear issue, and with clear aims and targets. Instead, what we discover is a very broad motion, including many different problems and not directly related concrete actions. Indeed, the Motion is divided into five general principles and ten concrete applications. The leading principle of the march was the ‘fraternity of peoples’, which entailed a clear opposition to any form of exploitation, colonialism, racism, and imperialism. Those broad concepts included the need for reconciling the East, the West, and the African countries; the fraternity with people of colour; and the activation of important programs of cultural, technical, and economic collaboration. In order to prepare peace during peace, the motion recommended working for “a better training for dialogue”, which means developing all the aspects that can improve dialogue between people. This means working for a sincere openness to coexistence; a pacific competition of ideologies, political and social systems; and a better consideration of labour, which is a key constitutive element of the society. The third principle stressed the importance of the whole population in the realisation of a radical change. It would be a mistake to leave the responsibility for peace only in

governors' hands (Capitini, 1962a:23). Thus, the whole population should have the opportunity of being constantly informed and frequently consulted. Improving the quality of dialogue and increasing participation was not enough. The fourth principle called for the union of those willing to resist any war, because peace was in real danger. The last principle instead claimed that time has come for the promotion of a real nonviolent education, because humanity was finally able to appreciate an open education, which tries to renovate a structure full of prejudice and privileges.

However, the Motion did not stop here. The 'Italian people of peace' also approved ten concrete applications of those principles (Capitini, 1962a:48). The first called for the inclusion of all countries in the United Nations, because more responsibility and effective cooperation of all nations were urgently needed. The second request was for a controlled and complete disarmament, which would include the immediate disarmament of both East and West Germany, the creation of vast neutral zone, and the elimination of the many missile bases. The third point required the interruption of nuclear experiments for non-pacifist reasons, and a conference of non-nuclear nations. The fourth request was for a convergence of foreign, cultural and economic policies, in order to become closer to non-aligned countries, in particular to those of the Bandung and Belgrade conferences<sup>62</sup>. People were also marching for a different structure of countries' budgets, in favour of school, cultural elevation of the masses, and for a serious effort in the development of democratic life from below. Furthermore, they were fighting against exploitation, and thus they were calling for progress in international collective actions and reciprocal help. The march was also in favour of periodical and popular information everywhere, proposing weekly tribunes on international politics on the radio, opened also to pacifists and neutralists. Besides the spread of information, a real and continuous exchange of students and workers for long periods was urged. The last concrete application of the Motion was instead a close alliance of all pacifist movements for unitary actions. From this brief outline of the march, it emerges quite a humble example of nonviolent action, with vague aims and weak implementation. The implementation of the technique of the march to change the complex field of

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<sup>62</sup> Bandung Conference (1955) was a meeting of 21 countries of Asia and Africa aimed to promote cooperation as well as oppose colonialism and neo-colonialism. The Belgrade Conference (1961) was a meeting of 25 non-aligned countries, and the beginning of the Non-Aligned Movement.

contention of internal and domestic division looks timid and lacking an effective organisation. Indeed, it would not come as a surprise to the pragmatic school that the march has not been really effective. The demonstration of 1961 seemed to have renovated the old and violent Italian contentious repertoire. It is doubtless that the many peace marches and the 'people of peace' introduced the ideas and the techniques of nonviolence across the whole country, providing a new set of techniques to canalise for instance the anger of Genoa and Reggio Emilia. Besides the introduction of new techniques, a mass movement for peace was born, which spread across the country<sup>63</sup>. Even the Christian Democrats, after the initial diffidence, began to join the marches. Along with it, the march started to be object of debates in newspapers, with many critiques and sometimes derision (Capitini, 1962a:101-165).

However, it seems that after the initial success, the ideas and the techniques of the march have been ignored, neglected, and sometimes spoiled. History sadly confirmed the provocation written in an article of *The Times* in 1961 dedicated to the march: "it seems ill adapted to the Italian temperament, which is more at home in quick, vocal protest than in long trudge" (Times, September 29, 1961). The innovations of the contentious repertoire have been forgotten. Violence continued to remain the most widely used tool of making a claim<sup>64</sup>. At the political level, the rise of a mass peace movement connected Italy to Europe and the world in the struggle against atomic bomb and war<sup>65</sup>. Yet, we witness a real counterrevolution few years after the march. Party politics heavily entered "in the delicate and dreaming world of nonviolent spiritualism, turning upside-down the logics, rewriting the rules, and modifying its bases" (Martellini, 2006:142). Moreover, the *Consulta* (which has been established after the march along with the *Movimento Nonviolento per la Pace*) has been literally devoured by politics (Mariani Marini and Resta, 2001:99), and it dissolved some years later. Its president, Capitini,

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<sup>63</sup> A number of peace marches have been organised in many other cities, such as for instance Cortona, Cagliari, Marzabotto, Ferrara, Roma, Milano, Torino, and Napoli.

<sup>64</sup> In particular, the march had no important influence on the events of 1968. The most discouraging fact is that the category of people more incline towards violence was that of students DELLA PORTA, D. & TARROW, S. 1986. Unwanted children: Political Violence and the Cycle of Protest in Italy 1966-1973. *European Journal of Political Research*, 14, 607-632. 621. Capitini continuously called for a dialogue with them. He realised the lack of any example of nonviolent techniques given to students. The press, political parties and antagonism preferred by far other kinds of examples. This was the reason of his expressed concern for the delay in the publication of his book *Tecniche della Nonviolenza* in 1967.

<sup>65</sup> For instance, John Collins sent a letter of adhesion to the march, and a Japanese student of the movement for the nuclear disarmament made a speech in Assisi.

was forced to resign due to heavy internal and external critiques of political parties and closed groups of radical pacifists. The Movement continued with few participants, publishing from 1964 a journal called *Azione Nonviolenta*, but it passed periods of real crisis. After the death of Capitini in 1968, years after years, pacifism became 'politically correct' (Mariani Marini and Resta, 2001:105). The whole ethical and spiritual discourse proposed by Capitini and the march has been suffocated<sup>66</sup>; it only remained the political use of peace, the 'politics of peace' (Mariani Marini and Resta, 2001:102). Even party flags, symbols and banners (banned in 1961) reappeared from the following march in 1978. Both the centrality of the person and the debates on conscientious objection have been overwhelmed by a rise of collectivism that exploded in 1968. The main problems were now anti-imperialism and international capitalism, not anymore openness and personal development (Martellini, 2006:155).

Finally, at the symbolic level, the desired revolution did not happen. The new culture persuaded only a minority of Catholics (Moro, 2008:388). A new open spirituality never emerged in Italy. It is true that Assisi became an important symbolic place for ecumenism. It is also true that the church of the 1950s was different from the one of today. Nevertheless, we still do not see images of Gandhi beside those of St. Francis in a church. Moreover, we still do not see nonviolence at the centre of a less hierarchical religious institution, and the infinite respect for the other overcoming the ideological heaviness of the Italian society.

In few words, the peace march looks like a timid, heavily imperfect, and ineffective example of march and contentious politics. It was a primitive attempt of nonviolent protest in Italy, which broke only for a little while "Italy's relative silence on the nuclear issue" (Wittner, 1997:235). Nevertheless, the 'mistakes' or imperfections of the march may be looked from a different perspective when we remind the fact that nonviolence was for Capitini a praxis, a continuous attempt to find new and different ways of liberation and openness, which cannot be reduced to a mere

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<sup>66</sup> The following editions of the march focused more on the social condition of the oppressed and exploited. The reason was not ideological: the focus on these issues allowed a closer contact with the spreading sentiment of social injustice (MARIANI MARINI, A. & RESTA, E. 2001. *Marcciare per la Pace. Il Mondo Nonviolento di Aldo Capitini*, Pisa, Pisa University Press.). The results were many anti-militarist marches, organised with the Radical Party. In the 90s the situation changed, with the movement refocusing on nonviolence. Nevertheless, politics continue to heavily influence decisions and tactics, without being influenced enough by a nonviolent revolutionary project. Politics heavily changed Italian pacifism.



technique or means. What if these mistakes were something different? Can we envisage a different approach to pragmatic nonviolence from these peculiarities? For a start, the demonstration did not merely elude the most serious “combination of legal threat and physical force” (McAdam and Tarrow, 2000:150) coming from police, questura, and prefetto. It showed that the issue was not the state but the self. Indeed, the march tried to repair the division between state and citizens, rejecting violence and blaming anyone, and it opened up a channel of openness towards the others. In other words, the march was not a means to confront the state more effectively; it was the attempt to foster self-restraint and personal responsibility. It was not by chance that the organiser was not an extremist or a heavily politicised group. The demonstration showed that independent and credible organisers, as the *Centro di Perugia per la Nonviolenza*, were able to organise a nonviolent and open mass demonstration, in which people of different social classes can be brought together. Indeed, people of any background participated to the march; intellectuals and humble peasants marched together with political leaders and widows. This represented a distinctive feature of the march, in comparison for instance to the more distinctly middle class British movements (Myers, 1973:88). More importantly, this means the encounter of a mix of different worlds and thus actions of personal liberation, from fasting, praying, to dialogue and education.

All this meant the lack of a clear division between people and state, protestors and government, or groups with different ideas. Indeed, the march was open to everybody in spite of ideologies and group affiliation. The success of the march was in showing that people can act, and even protest, without being only a problem of public order, and therefore the point was not to exploit public disorder without violence. The aim was to show that policemen were not only street level bureaucrats or repressors, paving the way for a different reality, as the marches that followed had fewer problems and more influence on the state, while the population became less diffident. In few words, the march tried to foster personal responsibility in the sense of freedom from the necessity of violence and openness to the other, especially to adversaries.

Turning to the political level, the aim was quite different from political power. For a start, the march seemed the occasion for reconciliation. The decertification of political divisions allowed the auto-certification of a new identity, the people of

peace. The new identity is visible in the many marches organised in the whole country after the 24<sup>th</sup> of September. It was formed by people coming from different backgrounds, even different political parties, but sharing nonviolence and concerns about peace<sup>67</sup>. The march also linked together sects and movements under the desire for peace. In the arena of peace talks, Italy began to be a smaller place than it had been in the past<sup>68</sup>.

This attempt of reconciliation did not make the mistake of falling into *duragraha*. It would have been a mistake to shape the 'people of peace' as a new closed group or the message of the march as a closed project. The march was open to everyone and it fostered the empowerment of citizens with new opportunities to participate. The barriers against the 'others', such as a government, were removed, in favour of self-scrutiny and critique. The focus was not on the enemy, but on problems. For this reasons, the march have been seen as an 'itinerant assembly' (Degli Oddi, 2012:168).

The result of the itinerant assembly has been the establishment of two organizations: the *Consulta della Pace* and the *Movimento Nonviolento per la Pace*. The aim of the former was to be an assembly, in which all the different kinds of Italian pacifisms can constantly interact (Martellini, 2006:141). By contrast, the *Movimento Nonviolento per la Pace* gathered the different groups of integral pacifists, working for the establishment of a stronger Italian nonviolent movement. In other words, the careful political work of the march was counterbalanced by an innovative, at least for the time, project of establishing a new group. This group was not closed, and did not aim at power or dominion over other groups and parties. The aim was not the establishment of two cities. The march was an example of 'power without government'. It was a project to empower citizens with new opportunities to participate, with an itinerant assembly and open organisations.

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<sup>67</sup> The march attracted people such as La Pira and Togliatti; some Christian Democrats marched side by side with communists MORO, R. 2008. *The Catholic Church, Italian Catholics and Peace Movements: The Cold War Years, 1947-1962. Contemporary European History*, 17, 365-390.

<sup>68</sup> The peace march wanted to become a symbol of union and reconciliation. For this reason, it has been repeatedly linked to a symbol of the resistance and the democratic reconstruction of Italy, the C.L.N. The famous Italian multi-party entity fought the violence of fascism and represented the beginning of a new democratic era. Moreover, the final speech at the end was also a symbolic action of unity. Five people from five different political and social backgrounds expressed the same desire for peace during the final talks: the liberal-Catholic Arturo Carlo Jemolo, the writer Guido Piovene, the communist painter Renato Guttuso, the radical Ernesto Rossi and a Japanese student, from the Movement for Nuclear Disarmament.

For what concern the symbolic level, the march managed to re-include religion at the heart of a real pragmatic nonviolent action. Nevertheless, religion was not there to fight against some other groups, or influencing the state to implement one of its values. Instead, the march was a calculated attempt to overcome all the closures of the Catholic faith. For instance, the choice of marching on Sunday symbolised the maximum openness possible<sup>69</sup>. Sunday is the moment of closer proximity with everyone. It is the day in which human beings have time to rest and reflect. It is the day in which the moral world emerges, while almost disappear the divisions between governors and governed, workers and capitalists, Catholics and not, rich and poor, healthy and weak, and even living and dead. Unfortunately, the church completely misinterpreted the symbolic choice of Sunday.

Nevertheless, the strong message of unity was reasserted with five minutes of silence and pray to pay tribute to all war victims, showing the unity between the dead and living for the cause of peace. In addition, the march proposed new reconciling models of conduct, and it integrated the existent concept of sanctity. Indeed, two of the most important Italian nonviolent revolutionaries, Danilo Dolci and Pietro Pinna, were present at the march. The former was a model for his important social commitment in Sicily, and for the total nonviolent ways of implementing it. His hunger and reverse strikes and famine marches became famous in Italy and the whole Europe. For what concerns Pinna, he was the symbol of the fight against military service. He went to jail twice, due to his nonviolent struggle. However, his actions substantially contributed to the improvement of the laws concerning conscientious objection. For what concerns sanctity, its meaning was enlarged to include any 'pure spirit', independently from the affiliation with any church. In this way, the sanctity of Francis of Assisi and Gandhi were put on the same level, representing two polar stars for the entire world (Capitini, 1962a:16).

Finally, the symbolic revolution proposed a new 'capital', Assisi. The city has not been chosen for strategic reasons. We are not talking about Moscow,

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<sup>69</sup> As explained by Capitini, "the holy day is more open than the other days [...] In that day a high unity with everyone can be felt, a more loving and forgiving comprehension, and we come closer to the sufferers to establish a more profound unity; we also visit the cemetery with the persuasion that in that day the dead are closer to us" CAPITINI, A. 1967. *Educazione Aperta*, Firenze, La Nuova Italia.

Washington, or a simple site in which nuclear armaments are stored or produced. Assisi was chosen not only because it is central to Umbria and is extremely beautiful. Assisi has been chosen because it represented the perfect symbol of an 'open religion' (Capitini, 1962a:16). Assisi is the place where the most important Western nonviolent, St. Francis, was born. Moreover, it was an already acknowledged symbol for the celebration of what Capitini called *familiarity*, which means proximity and openness (Capitini, 1962a:16). It was the ideal place to be the symbol of a nonviolent reconstruction of Italy and Europe. In few words, the march was the occasion to present an open and really inclusive project.

Finally, the same Motion of the People of Peace was so peculiar not by chance. First of all, the fact that the motion included principles and applications was not casual; the motion emphasised the deep link between practice and theory (Mariani Marini and Resta, 2001:131), in the same way that the march is emerging as a complex mixture of theory and practice. Second of all, the motion did not focus only on the nuclear issue because it was not the main concern. Capitini understood that nuclear proliferation is the result of the overlap of many different problems; causes and consequences should not be confused. At the basis of the crisis of the west was the deterioration of human relationships, and it is there where people should look at.

This is the reason why the concern for the atomic bomb was only one of the reasons for participating. The protest against the atomic bomb was only one aspect of the protest. Indeed, it was not a rhetorical move the choice of dedicating the march to the 'fraternity among peoples'. The march was not looking merely at forcing the government to change policies. It was not focused on the 'fraternity of nations', which has been seriously threatened by the atomic bomb. The march was an attempt to intervene against the deterioration of human relations in order to foster fraternity. We may even claim that the march was the demonstration of the fact that "politics is the technique of the moral life" (Capitini, 2010:9).

It is clear from this analysis that something peculiar was going on that day. As one newspaper article rightly noticed, the march 'disturbs', creates uneasiness (Capitini, 1962a:105). Here we showed that it disturbs any attempt to label it as a simple technique and an example of contentious politics against the nuclear development. It was not a good example of contentious politics. It was not an efficacious action of putting pressure on another side. It was the betrayal of any

existing and dominant ideologies and religions. Instead of supporting one side in the fight, the march questioned all the parts, giving an opportunity to reduce the hatred. In other words, the march was an example of how to destroy, or transcend using Galtung's vocabulary, the field of contention from within and below.

This means that the peace march was done not merely to protest against the government; it was not merely to protest against the bomb. The march proposed something different, a new way of living human relations. It was the practical example of a different style of action, a different practical orientation, which proposed a different reality, the 'reality of all', made of new symbols, songs, techniques of action, models, and convictions.

This means that the march was not really a protest. The intent of the march was not really to protest against atomic weapons, or to overthrow the government, as well as the Catholic establishment. Then, the march did end up in a 'particular place which is regarded as intrinsically significant to the issue involved', but not in the way Sharp was thinking of it, making us doubting of the idea of labelling that event a march.

On the contrary, the peace march was the actualisation of an innovative project. It was aimed at integration of something (Capitini, 1962a:5), at opening up existing interactions (social, political, symbolic). Capitini integrated existing human relations with occasions of liberations from the necessity of violence and the logic that the bigger fish eats the smaller ones. This tension towards liberation went hand in hand with a strong focus on openness<sup>70</sup>. Indeed, the march represented a clear implementation of openness as

*“the attitude of establishing relations with others and other things, of not putting absolute conditions, not presenting merely the self, of facilitating the larger movement possible, the most various encounter, the dialectics between those different from us, the addition of the new, the inter-subjectivity” (Capitini, 1967:41).*

How can this project be described? It cannot be described as a mere means, as a *protest*. It may be described very broadly as an example of protest in the very broad sense of “sites of contestation in which bodies, symbols, identities,

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<sup>70</sup> A propose, Capitini referred that in 1933 he elaborated the concept of 'openness' walking from Perugia to Assisi DEGLI ODDI, I. 2012. Aldo Capitini. *Una Vita Nonviolenta*, Roma, Aracne.. The march of 1961 has been the occasion to enlarge this experience, including everybody.

practices, and discourses are used to pursue or prevent changes in institutionalised power relations” (Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004:268). It activated political parties and institutions, and it wished to have a positive influence on the society. Nevertheless, something peculiar was going on. In his study on the meaning of the term ‘protest’, Opp claimed that four criteria are shared by almost all of the 12 definitions of protest which he collected. Along with the fact that a protest is a non-regular behaviour of actors objecting to one or more decisions by a target, the scholar emphasised the fact that “the actors are unable to achieve their goals by their own effort” (Opp, 2009:34). This is the point which differentiates the first Italian peace march from a normal protest. This is the challenge that nonviolence represents to any traditional protest. The march tried to show that the participants can achieve their goal with their own efforts. A nonviolent society can be built *via facti* here and now, without relying on any authorities.

Due to this strong constructive drive, the peace march can be better defined as a *protest-to-project*. It resembles a protest, but is much more. The peace march was a reinterpretation of an existing practice, with special attention to context, people, and with a clear project in mind. The march was at the same time a means and an end, it represented here and now a different reality, which did not rely on others to change the status quo. It was a constructive action, a project of a ‘nonviolent revolution’, and the *de facto* establishment of a nonviolent society. The march was the first practical step of a constructive programme.

To summarise, the peace march as a nonviolent action is neither the implementation of an ideal in certain ‘pure’ practices, nor a behaviour for Capitini. It was not the behaviour of marching without holding weapons toward an intrinsically important place to challenge the government the thing which characterises the nonviolent character of the march. The Peace March is a simple example of a technique becoming nonviolent. The march was a nonviolent action because it proposed an open and inclusive project fostering freedom and openness. It fostered freedom as personal responsibility, in the sense of both liberation from violence and openness to the other; it enhanced openness as participation and what we called the ‘power of all’; it promoted an open and inclusive project, ‘the fraternity of peoples’.

#### 4.2. *Nonviolence Between Realism and Serenity towards Omnicracy*

The idea of nonviolence as praxis of liberation and openness reunites in protest-to-projects behaviours and ideals, techniques and principles, means and ends. It is a method, a logic, a style which shapes, interprets and use techniques and practices.

Yet, is this praxis regressive? Does it offer constructive and inclusive open projects, contributing to the development of democracy, or it simply falls into disruption and duragraha? We believe that Capitini's nonviolence is very progressive. Nonviolence as praxis of liberation and openness starts from a reaction to what Capitini called 'conventional realism', which reinterprets reality from the point of view of force and nature (Capitini, 1999:105). At the same time, it is not mere disruption or moralism; it is an effort which remains in the domain of realism, even though transformed. Capitini described this effort in the following way:

*“Living in the midst of this temporary civilization, we can do no other than take elements of the present ‘wellbeing’, even if we are absolutely happy to lose it for compresence: we have done our choice. This is the case for what concerns some elements, such as private property, the police in defence of our existence, isolation of criminals, inequality of salaries, of housing, of goods etc... We accept them as offered by the actual society, even if we try to weaken them and bring closer to compresence” (Capitini, 1999:108).*

In his specialisation thesis, titled *Realismo e Serenità*, Capitini understands realism as the representation of the inquietude, anxiety, drama, “of the evil and sin, of the torment, of the heavy weight of personal responsibility” (Capitini 1999:59). This drama does not fall into despair or cruelty. On the contrary, it is balanced by what Capitini calls *serenity*. With this term he means the “relying on something which reveals a superior existence, a tendency toward the universal” (Capitini 1999:59). It is therefore a tension, not another world. It is the tension showed by Gandhi, by St. Francis, by Christ, but also by Danilo Dolci and many other normal people.

The balance between realism and serenity is at the basis of a particular conception of order. Indeed, central to this form of realism is the awareness of the fact that a society is able to last and prosper only when two tensions, a vertical

towards values and a horizontal towards others, are kept and can flourish together. In other words, nonviolence as liberation and openness is considered to be a real force of construction of a new stability. How can nonviolence bring stability? Fostering a different kind of power which includes everybody.

Indeed, Capitini claimed that change cannot be obtained through the old version of the struggle for power, hierarchical and violent, which brought Italy and the world to the verge of complete destruction. The reason for this is that violent revolutionaries begins from the wrong assumption: that the enemy is not willing to change, and will never be open to any type of transformation (Capitini, 1999:116). This presumption closes any possibility for the inclusion of everybody in the construction of a new society, even if it cannot be considered a truth that is always valid. However, it would not have been enough even if they believed in the possibility that the enemy may be partially open. Indeed, revolutionaries should not presuppose that the enemy will easily and suddenly change.

Both these delusions create only further instability, and they should be firmly rejected in the name of what we described above as the theory of the two phases of power (Capitini, 1999:115), and in particular of a different conception of power itself. Power is not only a seat in Parliament, or the rules of a religious institution. He instead claimed that

*“power is to be looked at together with many other forces and initiatives, and more as the conclusion of a many-sided work of formation of large solidarities, wide social campaigns of pressure and non-collaboration, reverse strikes, popular assemblies, different initiatives from below, personal refusal etc...” (Capitini, 1962a:12).*

Nonviolence is the continuous work to create and develop all these sorts of initiatives from below. In this sense, this new sort of realism is in line with pragmatic nonviolence in offering an alternative to violent disruption. At the same time, it offers much more, because these initiatives are transformed in protest-to-projects to put forward liberation and openness, and thus a new kind of order. Indeed, the analysis of the peace march allowed us to acknowledge the strong constructive drive of nonviolence. From this analysis, Sharp's techniques are nonviolent only when they are protest-to-projects, when they include means and ends. For this reason, Capitini listed many other techniques as nonviolent, such as education, or the absence of the sentiment of revenge. The 'method' of



nonviolence can be found in infinite kinds of actions, as long as they attempt to increase liberation and openness, and thus a new order.

Capitini worked his entire life to build up this different order. Under the fascist regime, the philosopher of Perugia pursued this new order fighting fascism with many different nonviolent techniques. We should remember his refusal to join the fascist party, for which he lost his administrative job at the Normale in Pisa; his choice to become a vegetarian against the myth of strength and violence of fascism; the request of a strict non-collaboration to a submissive Catholic Church; the choice of not joining the armed resistance against the regime.

This more disruptive part of his work went hand in hand with what we believe to be Capitini's most important nonviolent activity of that period: the foundation, with Guido Calogero<sup>71</sup>, of the liberalsocialist movement. The liberalsocialist movement operated in Italy from 1936 to 1943. This movement was the attempt to go beyond fascism. At the same time, it was neither the construction of a new political doctrine, nor the adoption of an existing one. The aim was to re-establish democracy and to clear the ground for an open society, indicating a new possible synthesis of the most important contemporary political doctrines.

The Liberalsocialist movement began after and almost independently from the tragic experience of Gramsci and the Rosselli, who died in 1936<sup>72</sup>. Any relation with other clandestine movements was too dangerous and difficult, and the one with with *Giustizia e Libertà*<sup>73</sup> was no exception (Degli Oddi, 2012:74). The first contacts were made only in the 1940 with the participation of a group of *Giustizia e Libertà*' in a meeting of the liberalsocialist movement. The position of the two groups were not very distant. They both acknowledged that the end of fascism was close, and also the absolute lack of preparation of Italy for the aftermath. Nevertheless, the solution was different. *Giustizia e Libertà*' was more focused on the prospect of an armed revolution (Borgogni Migani, 1997:XIV), meanwhile the Liberalsocialist movement focused on the ethical degeneration carried by

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<sup>71</sup> Guido Calogero (1904-1986) was an Italian philosopher and politician. As philosopher, he is famous for his studies on ancient logics, which were at the basis of his later 'philosophy of dialogue'. As a politician, he took part in the Action Party and in 1955 founded the Radical Party.

<sup>72</sup> Gramsci died in prison on the 27<sup>th</sup> of April, due to a cerebral haemorrhage. Instead, Carlo and Nello Rosselli were assassinated in Bagnoles-de-l'Orne on the 9<sup>th</sup> of June by the pro-fascist Cagoule group, on the orders of the Italian authorities.

<sup>73</sup> *Giustizia e Libertà* was an Italian anti-fascist resistance movement, active from 1929 to 1945. After 1930 *Giustizia e Libertà* was inspired by the so-called *Socialismo Liberale*, which is also the title of a famous book written by Carlo Rosselli, one of its founders and leading figures.

fascism. Indeed, the internal repression, along with the war in Ethiopia and in Spain, was not enough to keep control over the citizens; the attachment to fascism was fading away. Renouncing fascism was equal to losing something more than a tyrant. Indeed, fascism was also a set of sentimental enjoyments; it kindled passion and imagination of many people, and now it should be compensated somehow.

Both Capitini and Calogero noticed that the young generation started to detach itself from fascism; that was an occasion of providing them with something different. A moral alternative should be proposed, able to attract those disillusioned by the regime. For this reason, this movement was not exclusive in nature. The participants were mainly academics, publishers, and intellectuals, but there were people sympathising for liberalism and socialism, without necessarily following any dominant paradigm. For instance, Norberto Bobbio, Cesare Luporini, Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti were active participants, even they did not want to be labelled liberalsocialists. The result was secret meetings with heated debates and discussions all over Italy with people such as Piero Calamandrei, Enzo Enriques Agnoletti, Alberto Apponi and others.

Soon, meetings in different cities were organised, with the participation both of Catholics and communists. The aim was to challenge fascism on the ideological, cultural and educational level, even with new publications<sup>74</sup> and magazines. The aim of this effort was a profound renovation of society and politics. In particular, there was the conviction that a serious reflection on liberalism and socialism would have been able to lead Italy towards the regeneration. Indeed, their two most important principles, liberty and equality, should be kept together in a different perspective, precisely what they called liberalsocialism. The name aimed at giving the impression of melting the two schools together, as well as attracting those fed up with extreme market liberalism, as well as left-wing totalitarianism (Degli Oddi, 2012:83).

The outcome was the attempt to go further socialism and liberalism. In particular, the result were two Manifestos, written in 1940 and 1941. The beginning of the 1940 Manifesto was clear:

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<sup>74</sup> It is at this time that Capitini published *Elementi di Un'Esperienza Religiosa*, and Calogero *La Scuola Dell'Uomo*.

*“to whom fight against misery, it cannot be offered and guaranteed, without hypocrisy, simple freedom of objecting and voting, of developing and deepening personal spirituality. To whom is under dictatorship, we cannot allow, without being malicious, an improvement of the economic condition of life, without offering at the same time freedom of critique and practice in the communal administration of richness” (Capitini, 1966a:120).*

The idea was the creation of a socialist state, with a strong defence of individual freedom. Social classes were rejected, as well as bureaucratic and authoritarian degenerations. The programme included the collectivisation of the most important businesses, as well as the formation of factory councils to educate workers (Degli Oddi, 2012:85).

For what concerns institutions, they were looking for the birth of a fourth power, to defend freedom and prevent attempts of conspiracy. In particular, the fourth power would have had the role of watchdog of political parties: programmes and attitudes, propaganda and underground paramilitary activities. Moreover, freedom of press should be protected, looking at owners and economic resources of the many newspapers. In foreign policy, liberalsocialism was looking at peaceful and harmonized life together of nations. In particular, it envisaged both the possibility of a federation of states in Europe, and the reinvigoration of international organizations (Degli Oddi, 2012:87).

Instead, the manifesto of 1941 was shorter and with one important innovation. Right at the beginning, there was the distinction between liberalsocialism as a movement working for freedom, and liberalsocialism as a political party, which will implement the programme once Italy would become free (Borgogni Migani, 1997:163). Nevertheless, liberty was kept at the basis of living together; socialism was understood as the implementation of reforms which derived from the bottom of the society. Two years later, Calogero, La Malfa, and Raghianti published together the programme of this new party, the Action Party (Capitini, 1966a:121).

Within the two manifestos it is still possible to glimpse Capitini attention to the revolution of attitudes and conscience. Nevertheless, the contribution of Capitini should not be overstated. Capitini did not shape these manifestos as he thought. He claimed to have made few contributions only; the more personal views were kept in his own writings (Capitini, 1966a:119). Moreover, the fact that Calogero

was much more interested in the juridical and institutional spheres gave him less opportunities to intervene.

This short summary of Capitini's activities before the end of the war should have made already clear at least one thing: Capitini's nonviolence is always a mix of techniques and values, destruction and construction, even when dealing with totalitarian regimes. Yet, what about under democratic regimes? Capitini found himself part of a very imperfect democracy after the fall of fascism, and he had to deal with problems which are very similar to the kind of problems we experience nowadays. The young and fragile Italian democracy was made of citizens unable to participate; of political parties who focus only on keeping power; of powerful minorities who were 'more equal than others'. What did nonviolence mean in such a complex situation?

For a start, it meant a careful analysis of the situation. Capitini realised from his own experience that democracy is not the panacea of all problems. Indeed, the heart of democracy, the parliament, is easily influenced by lobbies and particular groups; it may abuse the lack of information, swaying towards the formation of 'educated people', who know different ways of influencing the public sphere, at the expenses of the education of the multitude; it may become a top-down institution due to the dominion of private interests and closed groups, even with the bottom-up tool of elections (Capitini, 1999:117). In particular, "it concentrates power favouring efficiency to control, and ends up with non-considering means and their consequences well enough, in order to pursue an end" (Capitini, 1999:90).

How can this trend be bucked? Creating from below omnocracy, the power of all, through new opportunities for an always larger and better participation of people in the public sphere. How? The first great concern of Capitini was to raise personal responsibility. This meant first empowering people with techniques able to block armed conflicts and authoritarianism within Europe (Capitini, 1999:94), as well as to protest without using physical violence. This does not necessarily mean more participation in the everyday life of a community. However, it forges people able to both limit bestial instincts and react effectively against injustice, when democracy is in peril or an invader seizes power. These are the first steps for leaving aside necessity and passivity.

In particular, Capitini opposed the rising myth of the time: the concept of guerrilla. The idea of the guerrilla was extremely popular, as it spread from urban guerrilla put forward by black Americans, to Fidel Castro's struggle. Capitini was sympathetic with the urgency of reacting to oppression, exploitation, and persecution. Indeed, nonviolence and the guerrilla both tend to establish a different kind of power, risking life with bravery (Capitini, 1999:97). Nevertheless, the two methods are different. Once the enemy is detected, the guerrilla requires only a massive use of weapons. Instead, nonviolence is a much more meditated approach. In addition, the guerrilla does not secure victory; does not reflect on the fact that the opposition may have a high profile in terms of values and proposal; instead, it may backfire, creating urgency in the population for an external reactionary order; may not lead to more freedom of expression, information and association. Finally, the guerrilla cannot provide a real revolution for Capitini, because too often it relies on protection and armies of other countries, being in this way a pre-manifestation or surrogate of war itself. The integration of nonviolence means the display of different methods of action rather than war and its surrogates.

Nevertheless, protesting was not enough; the growing apathy of citizens may have been limited, but more is needed. Citizens need to learn to rule themselves. Yet, how? For Capitini, this urgency did not mean the construction of a new political party. Omnicracy, or the power of all, is not a simple change in the ruling class. For this reason, Capitini never seriously considered to join a political party. In 1943, during a meeting in Florence, he proposed in a speech published in *Orientamento per una Nuova Socialita'* that liberalsocialism should remain a movement, considering the diffusion of 'centres for a new sociality'. "I remained alone" he wrote, and he stopped taking part in the following meetings (Capitini, 1966a:127).

He never considered adversaries those who chose to join a political party or imagined a different institutional setting. He was simply persuaded by the fact that Italy did not need anything of that kind on the short term. What was needed was the integration of the work of political parties with new opportunities for participation. Political parties in Italy were organisations looking at the conservation of power. Capitini knew that "parties exist for 'power', to gain or sustain it. This is their only reason d'être, leading to Machiavellianism, internal

discipline, jealousy, sectarianism, party patriotism (Capitini, 1950:130). Political parties are dominated by functionaries and bureaucrats, monopolizing the power which should be left to the citizens, namely information, control and participation (Capitini, 1999:169).

Against parliaments' and parties' imperfections, Italy needed to develop first the 'power without government' of the citizens. Thus, the new democracy needed a deep and slow work of orientation of the consciences. Only a serious work at the level of beliefs and attitudes would allow democracy to prosper; there should be certainty on the fact that everybody is working toward the same direction, although with different beliefs and mentality. This would represent a real step forward in the idea of power, from being mere control, to become "capacity of realizing projects (even proposing norms), with the possibility of witnessing our projects realized and norms obeyed" (Capitini, 1999:160). Capitini's work of increasing power without government took new shapes. He implemented this idea in many initiatives of bottom-up collaboration, such as *Associazione per la Difesa e lo Sviluppo della Scuola Pubblica Italiana*, *Movimento per una Riforma Religiosa*, *Societa' Vegetariana Italiana*, and the Centre for Religious Orientation. Nevertheless, one of the key experiments was certainly the COS (Centres for Social Orientation), organised in Perugia and other cities after the war. The centres were popular assemblies open to anyone, for the examination of administrative, cultural, political, social, technical problems. The logic of those kinds of centres was very different from the political party's one. No badge or subscription was required. The aim was to create an open society, one that is able to express itself with a coral voice (Degli Oddi 2012:109-119). Those assemblies presented an opportunity for people to learn how to act in public, and exercise power of pressure and control. The motto of these assemblies was 'listen and speak'. After fascism and the authoritarianism of the Catholic Church, it was extremely important to educate Italian citizens to open discussions. The assembly should have had a real function of accountability and social control, because any totalitarianism, coup d'état, or manoeuvre would have been quicker uncovered and corrected. Capitini was persuaded that it would have been much more difficult to suppress people freedom after Matteotti's murder, had the COS proliferated all over Italy (Capitini, 1950:239).

However, the assembly was much more than a place to enhance accountability. The assembly was organized to be an exercise in control and democratic development, enhancing the participation of citizens in a more transparent public administration. The part of the name referring to a 'social orientation' should not be misunderstood. The idea was not to homologate the citizens to a unique thought. The aim was not only to empower the people with occasion to express themselves and their needs. The discussions did not end there. Even though it was not a deliberative assembly, there was the possibility to propose, chase authority, and clarify contested decisions. Results were published, and opinions on certain topics were made public; cooperatives were launched; activities were proposed, such as events in libraries or help to students.

This training in self-rule needed the help of everybody. And everybody were actually participating. Indeed, the COS were real centres, as it was a way of putting together authorities, intellectuals and citizens. The presence of public authorities was extremely important. They were able to bring their opinion and strategies on practical issues (from the welfare in the workplace to the new harvest, from the construction of a road to an energy plan) and possibilities for future projects. It was also important that intellectuals and experts were present. The COS was not a sermon, a long speech without debate. There was no need of taking care of the rhetorical effects of the words pronounced. For this reason, intellectuals were able to bring ideas, culture, daily reflections and readings to the general public. Finally, the presence of the citizens (businessmen, workers, peasants, housewives etc..) was key to bring concreteness, social needs, and simplicity of language to the assembly (Capitini, 1950:259).

The consequences of this model should not be underestimated. Using Gandhian terminology, the COS were an example of enhancing *swaraj* and *sarvodaya*. Indeed, Capitini believed that in the future those assemblies would become autonomous, able to decide without any vertical institutions forcing them to act in a certain way (Capitini 1999:117-121). Out of the debates of the COS, Movements should live and die on special issues, and political parties should orient their programmes.

The first COS started in Perugia on the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1944 in Perugia, straight after liberation. It represented an answer to political parties: it was possible to be political without belonging to a party. It quickly spread all over Umbria, and even

in other regions. Unfortunately, political parties did not tolerate it for long. They did not help in their organisation, and they became more and more hostile as it became clear that they were not able to control these meetings (Degli Oddi, 2012:115). After a short period of success, the idea of the COS lost momentum, closing down in 1948.

The COS certainly remained one of the best ways found by Capitini in order to implement nonviolence in the aftermath of the war. However, what about powerful minorities holding power behind the scene? The COS will hardly change the power relations of a country. So, how can we address this situation? Here Capitini is clear: the solution does not lie in a change of the institutional design. This means that the solution was not the deification of the state in a way similar to Hegel. Capitini acknowledged the need of finding something superior, above private interest. The state is only an institution based on bureaucracy, with a monarch at the top, and wages war (Capitini, 1999:134). Similarly, the solution cannot be the construction of a new ideal state, which can be imagined *a priori*, and implemented in society. At the same time, the way out cannot be the destruction of the state. Capitini claims first that “the free functioning of parliament representativeness is something positive” (Capitini, 1999:117). Then, if we get rid of the state, it is likely that human beings will build something similar. The excessive emphasis on the state neglects that it is an institution that changes over time, and may always be improved. In particular, Capitini considered dangerous the progressive idolization of the state, which was increasingly reduced to a form of public service. “The fact that the sink will bring water every morning has become something crucial, much more than the presence of Eucharist in the closer church” (Capitini, 1999:30).

The only way out of the dominion of powerful minorities is a long and hard work of fostering ‘power without government’ until when our democratic order is qualitatively changed in an omnocracy. This means a gradual work of opening up of rigid and closed institutions “to new turmoil, new needs, favouring freedom” (Capitini, 1998:15) and new forms of direct participation to the decision-making process. Every institution, from prison to schools, from hospital to religions, should be subject to the affirmation of different power-relations, based on non-subjection; to the growth of personal responsibility; and to the centrality of everyone.



In particular, omnocracy is a slow bottom-up work of promotion of the model of the assembly to integrate the majority rule as well as authority. The assembly is what is more similar to the reality of all, a bottom-up inclusive and open project.

We cannot fully describe what an assembly is, as it depends on the situation. It can include group work, commissions of any kinds, and it should be spread in any aspect of life, including prisons, hospitals, even in mental clinics. Yet, all these different forms of assembly should share two features. The assembly should be permanent, and not similar to either the Vatican council, which closed after a period, or the soviet in Soviet Union. At the same time, the assembly cannot be independent and working through majority principles. It would suddenly be replaced by bureaucrats.

This idea of assembly may make someone think that we are dealing with a new kind of authority. However, this is not what Capitini had in mind. The idea of assembly by Capitini cannot be compared to the 'authority'. It works differently. It is qualitatively different from the authority of a monarch (Capitini, 1999:119), or a small group of representatives. Indeed, it is something that requires much more effort and commitment, because a far larger number and typology of people takes part in it. Nevertheless, this effort is what makes the assembly qualitatively better: "the fatigue of an assembly is far nobler than that man who put a point on the top of an i"; the final decision will be shared by everybody.

Moreover, the assembly should not be confused as the end, because even the assembly can become closed and auto-referential. This is the case when it does not consider other assemblies, when is based on a majority principle, and when it becomes closed, certain of its infallibility.

The development and spread of assemblies is the way to overcome the dominion of small powerful minorities. Indeed, the gradual and progressive introduction of nonviolent practices of self-rule avoids violent clashes with the existent elites; at the same time, nonviolence empowers the masses, avoiding bloodshed. The assembly does not substitute instantly the parliament or any institutions. In the worst scenario, when the institutions are closed and arrogant, the work of the assembly is of total opposition. In the best scenario, however, the work of the assembly integrates the work of the institutions.

The hope is that in the long run is possible to overcome the actual forms of representative democracy. Capitini is aware of the fact that there will always be someone more skilled, as well as more educated than others, in shaping conscience. Nevertheless, nonviolence avoids the risk of letting them become a closed group, providing revolutionary tools, without supporting the masses to return the suffering perpetrated by the old elite. Thus it is an alternative reality from that of elites outdoing the masses, which opens up only to include some new individuals from the antagonistic class; but also different from masses violently outdoing a small group in power (Capitini, 1999:166).

At the same time, nonviolence does not lead to the complete cancellation of competence; it is the infinite practical attempt of giving value to the multitude using instruments from below, avoiding that small groups of people tyrannise and impose their will on the others. What about efficiency? For instance, Norberto Bobbio objected to Capitini's beliefs that particularism is the enemy of direct democracy (Polito, 2012:121). In other words, the risk is that there would be as many opinions as people, hindering the achievement of any agreement. It does not matter whether efficiency or utility are increased. The assembly can be sometimes inferior to any expectations; it is not infallible. But the assembly has a value on its own (Capitini:132). In particular, it represents the occasion of a slow revolution of attitude. Thus, disadvantages should be accepted.

All that we described here is what Capitini called omnicracy, a long and complex project of enhancing personal responsibility, the power of all, and open and inclusive projects. In this sense, nonviolence as praxis of liberation and openness is a very progressive conception. It is open to infinite new interpretations, it focuses on construction, avoids falling into realpolitik and moralism, and offers an inclusive project which contributes to the current crisis of democracy.

#### *4.3. Religion and Nonviolence*

The last section showed a very dynamic concept of nonviolence keeping a balance between realism and serenity, and being a force for change with a strong positive and constructive dimension. This section will turn to religion. In chapter three we described the way in which the 'principled' dimension of nonviolence

proposed by Capitini included religion. Indeed, religion was the highest act in the construction of a different reality, the reality of all.

The consequences of this interpretation are far-reaching. Nonviolence creates neither a new religion nor a new credo. At the same time, religion is not left in a corner. Nonviolence as praxis of openness and liberation is intrinsically religious, as we have seen above describing the concept of *compresence*. And this religiosity may represent a valid way for religion to become again an essential part of life. Yet, nonviolence poses a challenge to religion. The challenge is to include in any traditional or new religion a vertical liberating tension towards values as well as a horizontal opening one towards the existent. This means including the idea of a 'reality of all', of *compresence*. As explained above, in doing an act of value, the subject enters in a dialogue with everybody, even past and future generations. In this way, he or she produces a different inclusive reality, which overcomes death.

Thus, the reality of all, or *compresence*, is not to be interpreted as something which can be described in abstract terms; it is not even a call for the restoration of a golden era; it is instead a tension, the continuous orientation and integration of current practices with values. It is thus a clear choice to increase humanity in the relationship with others and with nature. Instead of opposition of strengths, of attitudes of *homo homini lupus*, which would not lead to the increase of the reality of all, Capitini looks for integration of values to a cruel natural reality. This requires the commitment of everybody, because everyone can be an opportunity for the further development of a worthy reality, independent from age and strength. In particular, commitment is required from those who are sane, adult and strong, to share life's pains and difficulties, and compensate the weakness of the others with their actions of openness. This cooperation is the kernel of the reality of all, of *compresence*, and therefore is also central to the image of God.

The impact on religion of this conception of *compresence* as creation here and now of the reality of all is immense. The concept of *compresence* is for religion a source of dynamism (Capitini, 1998:376), as it put continuous pressure on the limits of body and nature (Capitini, 1998:386). It is also a source of creativity (Capitini, 1998:339), as it shapes each human being and creates values in an infinite and always increasing process. In few words, the concept of *compresence* is a revolutionary drive at the centre of religion.

This revolutionary nature of compresence leads to what Capitini called an 'open religion'. Religion is in Capitini's view "a set of thought and action, of principles and acts (which can increase and change) in order to prepare and form a religious openness in us" (Capitini 2011:7). Capitini makes clear that only through practical commitments it is possible to understand what God is (Capitini, 1998:121). In this sense, religion is a ferment, an initiative to be renovated continuously. Religion is an "action of the soul" and not something similar to an "arithmetic sum" (Capitini, 1998:56). In other words, religion without work in society is not religion. It is instead another form of superstition (Degli Oddi, 2012:133). Thus, this different approach to religion makes of it a force of change to the status quo; religion is reality of transformation, of *tramutazione* (Capitini, 1950:166). It is a vital stimulus, invention, sacrifice, individual responsibility; it is the realisation here and now of a different reality, in which everybody takes part.

The consequences of this approach to religion are many. For a start, the concept of faith is no longer compatible with blind and passive obedience. Instead, faith is interpreted as the impossibility to accept an insufficient reality of divisions, pain, mistakes, and death. It is the hope that divisions and closures can and should be overcome. This includes a reduction and eventual overcome of the old distinctive practices and rituals, which represent occasions for closure and divisions. At the same time, a different idea of faith will not concentrate on obeying an authority. The religious person is a proactive and committed individual, focused on finding new ways of living the unity-love. For this reason, holding faith is equal to become a 'prophet' in Capitini's terms. This 'title' can be considered in-line with the post-Vatican II importance of the prophetic mission "that calls for individuals to speak out against worldly injustice no matter what the consequences" (Stepan, 2000:53). However, the prophet is neither sectarian nor a new authority; the prophet works to provide everybody with new opportunities for liberation, and it does not predict the future (Capitini, 2010:55). It is very different from the priest, who belongs to an institution and a tradition; who works with the authorities, objectively administering doctrines, formulas, and rituals (Capitini, 1966b:16). The prophet dedicates himself or herself entirely to the education of consciences. He or she criticises reality, proposing different paths to pursue with rationality and faith. Therefore, the prophet will never become a legislator; the aim of the prophet is to allow people to better and freely express their own convictions.

Consequently, it was not bizarre for Capitini to consider prophets of a nonviolent religion the most well-known 'pure religious spirits', such as Christ, Buddha, St Francis and Gandhi. They represent the authentic religious spirit against traditional institutionalism, along with a clear request for religious reform. Thus, the main concern of religion is no more to convert and judge who is entitled to join the group of the good and who is not; the issue is to enhance personal responsibility, along with opportunities for everybody to act for values. In acting for the production of values, people feel that they are not alone; they are doing something with the rest of humanity, they are participating in something bigger, enhancing a new reality, with an enormous difference in quality compared to the past.

At this point, an objection may emerge. How can an open and humble religion make sense of the many commands and rules embedded in it? To answer this question, we will look at the way in which Capitini looked at one of the key religious principles of Christianity, namely the command 'thou shalt not kill' (Capitini, 1962b:7-14). Traditionally, this command is part of an authoritarian approach to religion; it has been imposed on the population by an authority, whether through a delegate or a book. The words of the delegate or the book itself could decide concessions and limits, right and wrong implementation; it could even provide certain individuals or events with some sorts of privileges or exceptions. For instance, the authority could decide that abortion should be forbidden, while war allowed.

The idea of nonviolence proposed by Capitini turned this approach upside down. The philosopher of Perugia suggested looking at the words 'thou shalt not kill' from a personal point of view and through the concept of compresence. The command ceases to be an authority which rules an entire life; it turns to be a non-binding interesting occasion for reflection on past and future experiences. This does not mean supporting aggression and violence. It means that a person does not kill because persuaded that this choice is the best. More importantly, it is accepted and adopted because is persuasive, and it is the starting point for new personal thoughts and actions (Capitini, 1962b:8).

This approach does not lead to any limitation of freedom and reason. The absence of any authority, whether an institution or a book, describing the correct way to interpret any command is a precious occasion for the person, allowing him

or her to boost both 'reason' and 'freedom' (Capitini, 1962b:8). Indeed, reason is paramount in the continuous reinterpretation of those words. At the same time, the command has become an opportunity for new and creative ways to express a conviction, also taking into account the circumstances. It is no more a problem of dogmas, authorities, institutions, allegiance and obligation. The issue is not even the fact that we are talking about God's words. From this point of view, an open religion should base its many activities in society on this liberating approach, enhancing personal responsibility so that everyone has new opportunities and tools to seriously participate in the production of values. A liberating approach will permeate the traditional role of preparing human beings for suffering and death, implemented not via dogmatic tales, but through proximity and love towards any single human being.

The choice of a different approach to faith and authority has important consequences. Indeed, at the social level this approach enhances openness towards the others. For a start, openness means recognition of fallibility, of humility. Recalling the metaphor of the musician, who tended to realise music everyday as best as he could, the nonviolent tries every day to tend to realise nonviolence in the best way possible. The result is not always the purest music, nor the best nonviolence. However, the effort is important. In particular, religion represents an important cultural power, able, in Capitini's view, to add occasions of liberation in society, and making the struggle for peace something heroic (Capitini, 1962b:21). Thus, the prophet of an open religion will act in society conscious of its fallibility, but nevertheless, determined to make a change (Capitini, 1962b:39).

Radical change is also expected from the institutions. The choice of nonviolence implies considering any social relationship not in terms of authority, power, and repression, but in a more federative, horizontal and open point of view (Capitini, 1962b:37). For this reason, Capitini left Catholicism in 1929, when the institution decided to make an agreement with fascism instead of fighting it. This was also one of the reasons for his interest in Gandhi, who was trying to free his country from the yoke of colonialism.

Nevertheless, protest is not enough. Open religion is a cultural power, which works meticulously in society with actions aimed at openness and liberation. For instance, Capitini organised many different conferences in Italy to discuss the

idea of a different kind of religion. Out of one of them the *Movimento di Religione* (Movement of Religion) was founded, with the excommunicated ex-priest Ferdinando Tartaglia<sup>75</sup>. The aim was to gather people with different religious background in order to talk about the opportunity to overcome religious practices, which are too attached to revelation, dogmas and institutions, in favour of a religion able to foster liberty and sociality. The religious reform included helping the ex-priests, who were not allowed by the Italian constitution to have public jobs in contact with the citizens; conscientious objectors, such as Pinna (who met Capitini in one of the meeting of the *Movimento di Religione*, leading to the decision of becoming conscientious objector); pacifists and opponents of war. In 1950 Capitini took part in the World Congress of Religions for Peace Foundation in London, where he proposed to build up a Religious and Nonviolent International. In order to keep alive dialogue around religious reforms, Capitini started in 1951 to write Letters of Religion, which were periodical letters dealing with many different religious topics. The harsh critique to religion led him to defend an Italian couple, Bellando of Prato, who sued the bishop of their city for having accused them of being concubines, as they were baptised but decided to hold only a civil and not religious wedding. This led Capitini to write a letter to the bishop of Perugia, along with other tens of people, asking to be removed from the register of baptised, which was the symbol of being subject to a non-recognised authority. Later, he published *Battezzati non Credenti*, in which he provided an account of what happened, included the letter to the bishop of Perugia, and analysed baptism and the concept of mystical body.

These actions led to important efforts to spread different values and practices. It led to the establishment in 1952 of the Centre for Religious Orientation (COR). This project was founded with Emma Thomas, an 80 year-old Quaker. They organised weekly meetings open to everybody, independently from religion or faith, with the aim to foster knowledge of the many religions of the world, as well as stimulate discussions and criticisms of Catholicism. They met each Sunday in order to discuss spiritual, social and artistic topics related to religion, with the participation and introduction of guests of different religion and faith.

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<sup>75</sup> Ferdinando Tartaglia (1916-1987), was an Italian priest, theologian, and writer. Due to his very progressive ideas about religion, he was prohibited to celebrate the mass, and later he was excommunicated for having commemorated the excommunicated Ernesto Bonaiuti.

Beyond the COR, Capitini fostered the encounter between nonviolence, religion and education. Religion becomes 'education to openness', going beyond the actual insufficient reality, and the prophet (who promotes personal responsibility, values, and liberation) is the teacher par excellence. This meant for Capitini an endless work of help to introduce nonviolence in schools and universities. Moreover, it meant looking at examples such as the activity of Don Lorenzo Milani<sup>76</sup> in Barbiana, which impressed for his attention to the weak. The school that the Catholic priest ran, along with the writings published, were an important example of an open and inclusive idea of education.

The result of the link between religion and nonviolence included, as we have seen for the peace march, the promotion of different models of conduct and an open concept of sanctity. For what concerns models of conduct, an open religion focuses on action. Thus, it will promote people, belonging already to the religious group, who did outstanding work in society. In the case of Catholicism, it is worth referring to Mother Teresa and Óscar Romero, but also to look at the many worker-priests acting from the 1940s, to don Pino Puglisi<sup>77</sup> and the many priests killed by criminal organisations.

Nevertheless, belonging to a religion cannot be the reason for the adoption of a person as a model. Thus, religion should encourage people to look beyond. One famous example of nonviolence is Danilo Dolci. He is certainly a model for his important social commitment in Sicily, and for the total nonviolent ways of implementing it. His hunger and reverse strikes and famine marches became famous in Italy and the whole of Europe.

Finally, a nonviolent religion will also promote a different idea of sanctity in the social realm. The meaning of sanctity should be enlarged to include any 'pure spirit', independently from affiliation with any church. In this way, the sanctity of

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<sup>76</sup> Don Lorenzo Milani (1923-1967) was a Roman Catholic priest. He is famous for his work as educator of poor children in Barbiana, a remote village in the Mugello Region. Between the many important activities, he was a strong supporter of conscientious objection. He has even been put on trial for advocating it in *Lettere ai Cappellani Militari*. On the relation between Capitini and Milani, see: Degli Oddi, I. 2012, Aldo Capitini. Una Vita Nonviolenta, Roma:Aracne, pp. 156-8; Capitini, Aldo, *Educazione Aperta*, vol. 2, pp. 90-97; Giacche', P. (1991), *Opposizione e Liberazione*, *Scritti Autobiografici di Aldo Capitini*, Milano:Linea D'Ombra.

<sup>77</sup> Don Pino Puglisi (1937-1993) was a Roman Catholic priest working in Brancaccio neighbourhood in Palermo. He openly challenged the Mafia, and for this reason he was assassinated on the 15<sup>th</sup> of September.



Francis of Assisi and Gandhi should be put on the same level, representing two polar stars for the entire world (Capitini, 1962a:16).

Thus, an open and nonviolent religion is able to play a key role in society, overcoming the marginal role given to it by the process of secularisation. Nevertheless, some fears can remain about the role of such a religion in politics. Is the renewed role of religion in society a threat to democracy? For Capitini the opposite is true. An open religion can provide politics with the most pure and extreme examples of compresence, of maximum openness and liberation. In other words, nonviolence allows religion to focus on positive integration of valuable actions into politics. Religion at the political level should represent the 'impatience' of waiting for the end, claimed Capitini. From this point of view, religion represents the occasion of unification of means and ends. This means that a nonviolent religion is able to support politics, showing examples of heroism of peace. Religion is able to fill the political arena with people working endlessly to avoid violence, and sacrificing themselves for the others and for peace (Capitini, 1962b:33). Religion implements here and now peace, love, and liberty, in a society which still uses war for peace, violence for love, and dictatorship for liberty (Capitini, 1948:35).

In other words, religion is no longer a problem for politics; it is an opportunity and a stimulus. Indeed, the aim is not to impose on others rules and visions of life or death. The aim is the moralisation of politics; to propose a new attitude along with a lively production of values. This does not mean imposing laws in line with some specific religious belief. To the contrary, it means acting showing that love is possible, and thus expressing the tension towards values and openness; for instance, when politics is driven by a particular set of interests, or when it becomes mere dry administration.

Thus, an open religion is the opportunity to restrain closure and violence in the political arena. It surrenders neither to nationalisms, nor to a dry and juridical cosmopolitanisms. Indeed, there is no need of waiting for a world government or police; the new practices and the new commitment makes real here and now a different cosmopolitan reality, in which everybody, even the excluded, take part (Degli Oddi, 2012:125-6).

#### *4.4. Conclusion*

This chapter described the way in which Capitini's conception of nonviolence answers the concerns raised in chapter two. Nonviolence as praxis of liberation and openness is able to reconcile the tensions at the descriptive, praxeological, and religious levels. Section one showed that nonviolent action may be described as a protest-to-project, which is more than mere behaviour or a rigid principle to apply, and which includes both means and ends. We looked at an action, the peace march of 1961. The march was much more than the implementation of a technique. It was an example of a different style of action, which provided a new meaning to the term march and challenged the common idea of a protest. It was a nonviolent direct action directed not to put pressure on a challenger in order to force him or her to do something. To the contrary, it was focused on the participants themselves. It emphasised personal responsibility; it reduced the polarisations and encouraged participation at the political level, enhancing the power of all; it kept religion at the centre in an open-ended and inclusive project. The aim was to foster 'fraternity among peoples'. In other words, the first Italian peace march was not an example of a technique, but of a 'protest-to-project', a reinterpretation of an already available practice for a practical constructive programme, presenting a way towards a more nonviolent society.

Section two focused on the praxeological level. Nonviolence was the centre of a political approach described as 'realism and serenity'. This approach was at the centre of Capitini's fight against fascism, in particular with the foundation of the Liberal-socialist movement. After the war, nonviolence remained at the centre of his attempt to integrate democracy with COS and the model of the assembly, in order to build practically omnocracy, or the power of all.

Finally, nonviolence represents an opportunity for religion. Section three showed the consequences of the interpretation of religion as religious act. Indeed, religion becomes creation, union of thought and actions of liberation and openness; faith becomes hope that division and limits can be overcome; the priest is substituted by the prophet; the commands become opportunities to enhance freedom and rationality; closed models of conduct and confessional ideas of sanctity are overcome. The fresh air introduced by nonviolence lead religion to be fully dedicated to the integration of society as a vertical tension towards values, and to restrain violence and closure of politics.

To conclude, the concept of nonviolence as praxis of liberation and openness proposed by Capitini reunited means and ends, kept a balance between realism and moralism, reintroduced religion at the centre of nonviolence and society. The next step will be to reflect further on this heritage. In particular, we should find whether this concept of nonviolence is able to answer to the problems outlined in chapter two integrating Capitini's approach with the most recent literature on nonviolence.

## 5. RECONSTRUCTING NONVIOLENCE

This thesis started with a concern: the worrying uses of the term nonviolence revealed the urgency of creating a united, progressive and pluralistic concept able to face a changing historical environment. This triggered a theoretical reconstruction of the concept of nonviolence. In particular, the current internal split in pragmatic and principled is a problem. It was successful, as it better described the concept, spread its use, and introduced to the West a secularised version. Nevertheless, there is a heavy cost at the descriptive (division between means and ends due to a disagreement on the meaning of nonviolence), praxeological (a regressive concept focused on disruption and risking a split between politics and morality), and religious (isolation of religion in the category of principled nonviolence with consequent division between religion and politics). Aldo Capitini's approach to nonviolence is an interesting way out, but it should be developed further. Bernard of Chartres, as John of Salisbury in the *Metalogicon* referred, said "we are like dwarfs sitting on the shoulders of giants; we see more things and more distant things than they did, not because our sight is keener nor because we are taller than they, but because they lift us up and add their giant stature to our own height." Thus, now the issue is: can we be 'lifted up' by Capitini, and outline a different reconstructed conception of nonviolence that is united and pluralistic, and avoids worrying uses of the term, while acting effectively in a changed historical environment? This last chapter will attempt to answer these questions.

The first section will focus on the descriptive level. Starting from Capitini's conception of nonviolence as a praxis, we will better describe the latter in the light of the Italian debate over Marxism as a 'philosophy of praxis' started by Labriola. Praxis will emerge as a non-systematic revolutionary approach, a political ideology, a meticulous work of reinterpretation and shaping of reality. Then, we will further describe this praxis with the help of Arendt. Nonviolence as praxis is a 'mode of togetherness', which is different from *poiesis* (it does not necessarily produce democracy) and contemplation (it does not look for contemplative absolute truths). At the same time, nonviolence includes these extremes because it is an impure praxis made of less than perfect actions in an imperfect world. This

fact does not hinder nonviolence to keep its ambition of freedom (or liberation) and plurality (or openness).

This definition will allow us to redefine principled and pragmatic nonviolence as inseparable and complementary parts of a unique work of change. Principled nonviolence will be reinterpreted as an intentional bottom-up realisation of a public principle. This implies enhanced freedom, which may be called an ascetic act, or drawing from the literature on nonviolence self-restraint; the openness to plurality, or the ethical act, which accepts the risk of openness and tries to actively change the status quo; and the excellent actions, which reach the level of Capitini's religious act, meaning to be part of a big community in performing an act of value.

Instead, pragmatic nonviolence will be reinterpreted as practical wisdom, the art of judgment which can be drawn from the continuous reinterpretation and creation of human practices. This phronesis revolves around some key features for the construction of the reality of all: the enhancement of freedom as personal responsibility, of plurality with the power of all, and of always new open and inclusive projects. Thus, we will show that pragmatic and principled nonviolence need each other and work together towards a different reality.

Section two will turn to the praxeological level, offering a progressive concept to overcome the division between politics and morality. Here we will look at nonviolence as a different kind of realism. Nonviolence as a praxis of freedom and plurality represents an original form of realism, which can be found both in Gandhi and in Capitini, and which aims at changing reality on the basis of a realistic analysis of the current situation. This approach becomes a different kind of citizenship, a diverse citizenship based on praxis instead of status. This sort of realism is also capable of answering the concerns about a democracy in crisis. We will interpret this crisis as an example of 'order without life', and we will show that the phronesis offered by nonviolence is not only a useful path towards democratisation. Nonviolent phronesis offers the integration of freedom and plurality to the democratic order in crisis. This means offering freedom as self-restraint as well as enhancing personal responsibility against the apathy of citizens. It means offering plurality as an ethical act and enhancement of the power of all to face the dominion of political parties. Finally, it means offering excellent actions and support for new inclusive and open projects against the

existent dominion of powerful minorities. Walking this path, nonviolence is able to construct *via facti* a different society, in which an 'order with life' is established.

Finally, section three will focus on religion. Religion is reconceived in terms of a 'religious act', unity of thought and action at the centre of a post-secular society. Indeed, religion as such is able to integrate the 'immanent frame' with self-restraint, the society with ethical acts of openness to plurality, and pushes for the 'spiritualisation of politics' through excellent actions, without imposing law or using coercion. This means the definitive defeat of the myth of violence associated with religion, as well as an overthrow of the current dominion of the 'Westphalian Presumption', which assumes that religions should be kept in the private sphere as they represent a threat to the international order. Instead, the practical approach for nonviolence opens up the possibility that religions can build a new bottom-up presumption, which we called the Assisi Presumption.

### *5.1. Nonviolence as Impure Praxis*

Nonviolence needs a united and pluralistic conception, to avoid being reduced to mere behaviour or principle, means or end. A new conception of nonviolence should include the capacity to offer new techniques as well as social, spiritual, and even religious meanings. We believe that Capitini's definition of nonviolence as a praxis of liberation and openness represents a valid starting point for finding a solution, but it has to be extended and integrated.

For a start, what do we mean by praxis? In choosing the term praxis, Capitini was aware that this term meant something more than simple behaviours or principles, and that he was linking nonviolence to a larger debate (Lobkowitz, 1967). In particular, Italy was the arena for a heated debate on the topic since the end of the XIX century. The debate was sparked by the interpretation of the *Theses on Feuerbach*, in particular thesis three, in which Marx talked of "umwälzende praxis", or revolutionary praxis. One of the most famous Italian Marxists of the time, Antonio Labriola, gave great weight to this idea, interpreting Marxism as a real *philosophy of praxis* in his 1897 *Socialism and Philosophy*. The concept of praxis was the way to overcome the opposition between theory and practice in the interpretation of historical materialism. Here praxis was not practice; it was the mediation between theory and practice, past and present, what has been

done and the actual life, meaning what people are doing at the moment. Thus, it was important to link theory and practice, morality and the real evolution of society. At the same time, stressing the importance of praxis was a way to engender the philosophical autonomy of Marxism, without falling into the more orthodox Marxian economic materialism, which was associated more closely with Engels. Labriola proposed a non-totalizing philosophy, which rested on a tension towards transformation, new interpretations and critiques; it was an immanent philosophy, going “from life to thought, and not from thought to life: this is the realistic process” (Labriola, 1980).

Labriola’s interpretation was opposed by Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce. The former, in his translation of the *Theses on Feuerbach* in 1898, interpreted praxis as form, which was distinguished from matter. In this way, the dualism, which has been overcome by Labriola, comes back. For Gentile, Marx is turning Hegel upside down in the sense that matter is the beginning instead of ideas, while praxis is reduced to the metaphysics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis<sup>78</sup>. Instead, Croce reduced praxis to the opposite of theory. For the Italian philosopher, the concept of praxis is interchangeable with that of practice, and therefore, it is a manifestation of the spirit.

Opposed to both Gentile and Croce’s interpretations was Gramsci, who went back to the original text in Notebook seven, and came up with a different interpretation (Haug, 2000). Praxis was the overcome of the dualism between matter and spirit. It is activity *in concreto*, always related to a certain already organised matter, the force of production, and thus to nature already transformed by human beings. Like Labriola, Gramsci put the concept of praxis at the beginning, and not as the result of the dialectical unification of matter and spirit. The concept of reality, which is comprised of a mix of matter and form, individuals and society, is always changing and evolving, and thus is described as *impure* and complex. For this reason, Gramsci talked of *impure* act or praxis, as we are referring to something real, at work, always in a historical form depending on the circumstances. In other words, the concept of praxis was a dynamic concept

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<sup>78</sup> Later, Rodolfo Mondolfo contributed to the debate, but the dualism between human will and reality remained. For Mondolfo, the issue is that Feuerbach had a naturalist point of view, looking at the dualism between human being and external world, while for Marx and Engels the problem was historical, with a focus on future human activity in relation to the results of past activities. This was for Mondolfo the revolution of the praxis.

based on social relations, at the basis of theory and practice, continuously changing and acquiring new meanings<sup>79</sup>.

The concept of praxis continued to capture the attention of the Italian thinkers even after the war. In particular, the concept of praxis was at the centre of an anti-metaphysical effort which overcame what Pitkin would call 'process thinking', "the conviction that we are the helpless products of causal forces, historical or social, which leave us no choice or capacity for initiative" (Pitkin, 1981:340). This includes Marxism, as well as Croce's historicism and Gentile's actualism. For this reason, praxis became the centre of important philosophical contributions in the 1950s, in particular by a friend of Capitini, Mario dal Pra<sup>80</sup>, and by Giulio Preti<sup>81</sup>.

Unfortunately, we do not know the exact opinion of Capitini concerning this debate. Nevertheless, this small digression may be useful for us, as it allows us to further extrapolate upon the analysis of Capitini, developing what is already implicit but partly unexpressed in Capitini's writings. The idea of praxis of Capitini was the rejection of the 'process thinking' as the approach to praxis of Labriola, Gramsci, Dal Pra and Preti. It considers nonviolence to be a way of non-systemic

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<sup>79</sup> Unfortunately, Gramsci's interpretation of praxis entered the Italian debate very late, due to what has been called the 'camouflage thesis'. The first edition of the Prison Notebooks has been published between 1948 and 1951, but the editor Platone believed it to be a camouflage phrase for Marxism-Leninism. He even occasionally replaced the term philosophy of praxis with Marxism or historical materialism. Even Gerratana, who edited the critical edition of the Prison Notebooks in 1975, did not interpret the philosophy of praxis as a "possible re-working or further development of Marxism in which 'orthodoxy is essentially left aside'" HAUG, W. F. 2000. Gramsci's "Philosophy of Praxis". *Socialism and Democracy*, 14, 1-19.4.

<sup>80</sup> Mario dal Pra (1914-1992) was an Italian philosopher. On the concept of praxis, Dal Pra wrote many articles in the 1950s: M. Dal Pra (1950) A proposito di trascendentalismo della prassi, *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, 5:305-309; M. Dal Pra (1952) Ancora trascendentalismo della prassi, *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, 7:130-134; M. Dal Pra (1954), Discussioni e chiarimenti sul trascendentalismo della prassi, *Rivista Critica di Storia della Filosofia*, 9:278-284. These articles are important because describe an original philosophical approach named 'transcendentalism of praxis', by which Dal Pra unified theory and praxis in an anti-metaphysical approach. On this idea look: Parodi, M., Selogna, C. (2008), Per Una Filosofia Minore: Mario dal Pra e il Pensiero Debole, *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 24(4):771-789. Dal Pra was part of Liberal Socialist Movement founded by Capitini. Later in his life, he wrote on Capitini in: Dal Pra, M. (1944) *Valori Cristiani e Cultura Immanentistica*, Padova: Dal Pra, M. (1988), Momenti di Riflessione sull'Esperienza Religiosa in Italia tra Idealismo e Razionalismo Critico, in *La Filosofia Contemporanea di Fronte all'Esperienza Religiosa*, Atti del Convegno, Reggio Emilia 25-29 May 1982, Parma:Pratiche.

<sup>81</sup> Giulio Preti (1911-1972) was an Italian philosopher. Aldo Capitini cited many times one the most famous book of Preti, *Praxis e Empirismo*, published by Einaudi in 1957. Here, philosophy of praxis is an orientation towards interpretation and change of the world, in which interpretation and change, or theory and practice cannot be separated. The first chapter of this book revolves around Marxism and the the philosophy of praxis. In particular, it shows that the version of the philosophy of praxis found in the earlier Marx, which is different from the one found in the later, is closed to Dewey's pragmatism. For Preti, pragmatism, logical empiricism and Marxism were philosophies of praxis. Dewey is an important author for Capitini.



thinking, a political ideology<sup>82</sup>, whose key feature is its subversive and anti-metaphysical nature, of continuous reinterpretation and critique. The praxis of nonviolence is an orientation towards interpretation and change of the world, is always in becoming, and the idea of reality that follows is extremely dynamic. We can even claim that the praxis of nonviolence may be interpreted as the moment in which theory and practice are generated, and not as something that follows them. In other words, praxis is the endless effort of creation of a value and of better practices. Thus, the choice of Capitini to link praxis and nonviolence was extremely innovative<sup>83</sup>, because it gives a certain 'philosophical autonomy' and a revolutionary character to the latter. Nonviolence emerges as a non-systematic revolutionary approach, which creates and reinterprets theories and practices, and which cannot be reduced to mere behaviours or ideals.

Unfortunately, this definition is still quite vague, and Capitini, as well as other people who linked praxis and nonviolence after him<sup>84</sup>, never explored this

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<sup>82</sup> As we explained in the introduction, we refer to the interpretation of ideology provided by Michael Freeden. Ideology is neither an illusion nor a dogma, but an "understanding of the political environment of which we are part, and have views about the merits and failings of that environment".

<sup>83</sup> The relation between nonviolence and Marxism has been object of debate in Italy. Look for instance: Fondazione Centro Studi Aldo Capitini e Movimento Nonviolento eds. (1981), *Nonviolenza e Marxismo*, Atti del Convegno di Perugia ottobre 1978, Milano: Feltrinelli and to Badaloni et al. (1977), *Marxismo e Nonviolenza*, Genova: Lanterna. A propose, Norberto Bobbio wrote about this topic in: Besides, Alberto L'Abate also argued that there are important things in common between Gramsci and nonviolence in: Gramsci e la Nonviolenza, *Antologia Premio Gramsci – XII Edizione – Ales – Gennaio 2012*, Sassari: Editrice Democratica Sarda, 375-432. For a summary of his position: <https://www.transcend.org/tms/2012/08/gramsci-and-nonviolence/> (accessed on the 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2015).

<sup>84</sup> For instance, Weber talked of the 'Gandhian praxis' (WEBER, T. 2001. *Gandhian Philosophy, Conflict Resolution Theory and Practical Approaches to Negotiation*. *Journal of Peace Research*, 38, 493-513.) of *satyagraha*, not only as "a method of conducting conflict", but "a way of life, of living within the truth". In 1983, Pantham claimed that Gandhian social theory and action is a "mode of action", a praxis which "offers guidance in transforming what he called the 'nominal' democracy into a truer or fuller democracy" (PANTHAM, T. 1983. *Thinking with Mahatma Gandhi: Beyond Liberal Democracy*. *Political Theory*, 11, 165-188.). More recently, James Tully interpreted Gandhian nonviolence not as a status but a praxis. With this term the author means not the passive process of taking a practice of civic activity as a form of organisation; he means the continuous process of forming and negotiating practices of actors and activities in context. Within this praxis, nonviolence represents one of the "most important activities today" (TULLY, J. 2008. *Public Philosophy in a New Key: Volume 2, Imperialism and Civic Freedom*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.). Similarly, talking about *satyagraha*, Mantena argued that it has been wrongly associated with moralism, or to a set of actions which rigidly excludes any direct violence at all. Instead, the term refers to a 'practical orientation', a "strategic interplay of nonviolent techniques, methods, and stances that in themselves have to be as various and dynamic as the nature of political conflict itself" (MANTENA, K. 2012a. *Another Realism: The Politics of Gandhian Nonviolence*. *American Political Science Review*, 106, 455-470.). Nonviolent action is "a non-instrumental form of consequentialism that sought to curtail and mitigate endemic violence and sustain progressive change" (MANTENA, K. 2012b. *Gandhi and the Means-Ends Question in Politics*. [www.sss.ias.edu/files/papers/paper46.pdf](http://www.sss.ias.edu/files/papers/paper46.pdf) (Accessed on the 31st January 2015).). Thus, *satyagraha* as a 'practical orientation' includes both values and methods of action

relationship. In particular, we are interested in the issue: in what sense is nonviolence more than a behaviour and a principle? In order to help us draw out this implicit dimension of Capitini's choice to link praxis and nonviolence, we turn to Hannah Arendt's concept of praxis. She held a very similar but more precise conception of praxis, which may help us to make some step further. Indeed, when Arendt talks about praxis she refers to a key part of *vita activa* (opposed to *vita contemplativa*, which is the ideal of contemplation of an absolute truth), in particular to "the activity tied to the condition of plurality" (D'Entrèves, 1994:65), with social and political life. This means that praxis is neither labour nor work. The three are very different. "Labor is the activity which is tied to the human condition of life", while "work the activity which is tied to the condition of worldliness" (D'Entrèves, 1994:65). Labour focuses on "the biological process of the human body" (Arendt, 1998:7), on the satisfaction of the vital needs. In other words, labour is an endless process, which should always be implemented because human beings always need primary goods, trapping people "in the recurring cycle of labouring and consuming" (Yeatman et al., 2011:27). Instead, work transcends the function of nature. It "begins in the planning of the first step of creation of an article of use or of beauty, and ends in the completion of the act of fabrication" (Yeatman et al., 2011:28). It has a definite beginning and end. It is "the building of the world," as the products comprise of the world in which human beings live. This is the reason why its human condition is 'worldliness' (Arendt, 1998:7).

The distinction between praxis and both contemplation and work may be extremely beneficial for both understanding the peculiarities of praxis and its relation with behaviour and principle. Indeed, action is 'antithetical' (Bernstein, 1977:146) to the concept of behaviour. Instead, it is "essentially a public and political category" (Bernstein, 1977:147); it goes on between human beings. At the same time, it is not a practice that rigidly follows a principle. Action is a mode of human togetherness, which necessarily leads neither to the production of any goods, nor to any particular practice. One consequence is that action has different

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within the political conflict. Even those who do not talk directly about praxis may find in this term an effective way to describe what they mean. For instance, Ricoeur agreed that Gandhi's struggles are an attempt to bring goals and means together "in an action which is at one and the same time a *spirituality* and a *technique*" (RICOEUR, P. 1965. *History and Truth*, Evanston, Northwestern University Press.). In a very similar way, Hildegard Goss-Mayr claimed that for her "nonviolence is a life attitude, not just developing specific methods. Injustice will always reappear and it will be a long-term task" (KURTZ, L. R. 2001. Hildegard Goss-Mayr. *Peace Review*, 13, 457-461.).

principles and criteria in comparison to work. Work is judged by the ability to “build and maintain a world fit for human use and for human enjoyment.” To the contrary, action is judged “by its ability to disclose the identity of the agent, to affirm the reality of the world, to actualize our capacity for freedom and to endow our existence with meaning” (D'Entrèves, 1994:66). In other words, action is the moment in which human beings differentiate themselves from animals and Gods. In particular, action has “the central place in the hierarchy of human activities” because it has “the potential to realize our highest human capacities, such as freedom and individuality” (D'Entrèves, 1994:66). In other words, praxis is not simple behaviour, and at the same time it is not an ideal to implement rigidly in life. To the contrary, praxis is a mode of human togetherness, the moment in which the highest human capacities may realise, and mere existence can be endowed with meaning.

Thus, nonviolence is a praxis in the sense of it being a non-systematic revolutionary approach to ‘human togetherness’, which reinterprets and shapes theories and behaviours. This interpretation allows us to better understand the problem of the definitions of nonviolence as either a principle or a set of techniques. The division between principled and pragmatic nonviolence resembles the division between *theoria*, *vita contemplativa*, and *poiesis*. On the one hand, principled nonviolence is treading dangerously towards *vita contemplativa*. Nonviolence interpreted as an abstract principle, a universal rule with which judging any action clashes with an on-going and always changing reality and especially with acts of cruelty and violence. The risk is the creation of close groups of perfects, and the withdrawal from political life, towards speculation for its own sake culminating in contemplation of a formal truth. Instead, new standards of political life, new principles and values arise within political actions, and thus nonviolence has to be anchored to action, to praxis. On the other hand, pragmatic nonviolence shows the tendency of reducing itself to *poiesis*, to fabrication. Pragmatic nonviolence assumes that the use of certain tools will bring about a particular, and better, outcome. The concept of praxis proposed by Arendt reminds us that its aim is the realisation of a worthwhile good. This means that the aim is not the construction of an institution (i.e. a democratic state), but of more and better concerted actions, which are the key for the conservation and well-being of any institutions. Therefore, techniques of action

and principle should be kept together, because they are the products of the same praxis.

Thus the concept of praxis represents the way in-between *vita contemplativa*, or the contemplation of the absolute principle of nonviolence, and *poiesis*, or the fabrication or instrumental actions. Yet, does it manage to reconcile the means and ends? We believe that nonviolence as praxis keeps the tension between means and ends, without focusing merely on one or the other. Nonviolence cannot separate clearly the means and ends without running the risk of 'changing the tiger, but not the tiger's nature'. Sharp's idea of nonviolence did not give enough importance to the ends of an action; rather, his concerns concentrated on instrumental actions. On the contrary, political practices and conflicts are dynamic processes, and the choice of the means interacts endlessly with the particular end at a certain moment in time. Indeed, not being able to understand the needs of society at any given moment is likely to endanger the reputation of even the noblest means available. At the same time, the way in which an end is pled and pursued can create resistance, be counterproductive and lead to totally different and unexpected consequences. Thus, when the end justifies the use of all means, or the means are chosen independently from the ends, there is the risk of falling into a dangerous vortex of ideologies, violence and pretension of infallibility. The more we move toward those extremes of *vita contemplativa* or fabrication, the greater the risk becomes of falling back into violence, separating means and ends, and forgetting the unpredictability of the outcome of an action. Instead, the present interpretation of nonviolence as a philosophy of praxis, a non-systematic revolutionary approach to the mode of human togetherness, is centred on a different idea of action, which takes into account both means and ends.

Does this mean that the work of Sharp should be judged as mere fabrication, and thus excluded from our concept? Absolutely not. Nonviolence will never stop being unquiet, working at the extremes of fabrication and *vita contemplativa*. Indeed, nonviolence crosses the private, social and political spheres. Nonviolence without Sharp's work would be reduced to mere dialogue between pure souls about abstract love or peace. This would be a paradox, as nonviolence cannot reject the social struggle, which is where it was born. Gandhian nonviolence was born in a struggle against colonisation, which included issues of

economic and social independence. South American Catholics used nonviolence in their social and political struggle. The same can be said for many nonviolent actors. Thus, it is true that nonviolence as a praxis works at the level of human relations, aware that governments and institutions are formed and conserved by concerted human actions, based on at least some kinds of recognition by citizens. Yet, the concept of nonviolence includes extreme actions, in which the existent social and political world should be demolished. The many struggles for independence and liberation around the world are certainly part of the praxis of nonviolence. In extreme cases, nonviolence can even mean a violent behaviour, or even death. Nevertheless, nonviolence does not delude itself into thinking that a nonviolent technique, or even violence, will eventually solve the problems of colonisation, exploitation from a class, or even slavery. Nonviolence has a strong constructive concern: the actual means should already include a proposal of what the aftermath of the struggle should be. The reason being that nonviolence is much more than a technique of action; it is a positive driver, the courage to interpret and intervene to foster liberation and openness. It is the opportunity for change, for 'transcending the conflict', as Galtung would say. Nonviolence is an action, which may coincide with a particular method of action or its opposite depending on the situation. It may be a strike or a reverse strike, standing still or protesting, non-cooperation or cooperation.

At this point, an objection may emerge. Indeed, it appears that we are going against Arendt's conception of praxis in saying that it includes the extremes of fabrication of democracy and contemplation. However, our interpretation is based on two assumptions. The first is that the concept of praxis proposed by Arendt is useful to us if it works not merely within a communicative model, but also in an expressive one<sup>85</sup>. The latter kind of model of action is agonal and heroic; "politics is viewed as an agonal encounter between actors who strive for recognition and glory" (D'Entrèves, 1994:11). Concerning nonviolence, it includes real struggles between sectors of the population for being visible and recognised as a political

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<sup>85</sup> I am aware of the critique of insensitivity to moral consideration of Kateb in his 1997 article: *Freedom and Worldliness in the Thought of Hannah Arendt*, *Political Theory* 5(2):141-182. I am also aware of the reduction of Arendt's action to a communicative model given by Habermas in *Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power*, *Social Research* 44(1):3-24. For an answer to these critiques see: Canovan, Margaret (1983), *A Case of Distorted Communication: A Note on Habermas and Arendt*, *Political Theory* 11(1):105-116; D'Entrèves, Maurizio Passerin (1994) *The Political Philosophy of Hannah Arendt*, New York:Routledge, p. 90-95 and p. 99-100.

and social actor, as well as human beings. To the contrary, a communicative model of action is accommodational and participatory; “politics is viewed as the collective process of deliberation and decision-making that rests on the arts of persuasion and mutual accommodation” (D'Entrèves, 1994:11). This is much closer to discussions about principles and forms of nonviolence visible in less extreme and more democratic environments.

The second assumption is that the praxis of nonviolence is *impure*. Indeed, it includes less than perfect methods of action and interpretations of the principle. The reason for this is twofold. For a start, nonviolence as a praxis is a driver which is fully mired into everyday human life. This means first and foremost that it deals not only with the force of production, but with the tragedy of humanity, in particular pain, mistakes and death. It is not by chance that one of its opposites is cowardice, which we can describe as the acceptance of necessity and of the cruelty of nature. The other reason is that the circumstances of life are not perfect. Nonviolence is an action within an imperfect society, which rarely produces perfect behaviours, absolute principles, and even pure modes of human togetherness. Thus, nonviolent praxis directly faces the environment of violence and imperfection, slowly trying to build up an alternative with new methods and new interpretations of the principle.

Working between struggles, deliberation and decision-making, nonviolence makes sense only if it is conceived of as being an impure praxis. Indeed, it ranges from small issues tackled in a collaborative environment, to important actions of liberation and openness, keeping together reason and passion, action and talk, conflict and deliberation, recognition and participation. It would be a mistake to expect only pure actions of nonviolence. It would be a mistake to expect that a rigid adherence to a principle, as well as to a list of methods of action, will lead to pure forms of nonviolence. It would be a mistake to think of nonviolence as limited to overthrowing regimes. Even in democratic regimes, during rational democratic discussions to achieve consensus, nonviolence may well be present. Indeed, the praxis of nonviolence acknowledges that “agreement, when it occurs, is always non-consensual to some extent” (Tully, 1999:170). Thus, echoing Gramsci, and more recently Bernard Williams (Hall, 2015:8), we can claim that nonviolence makes sense only if conceived of as an impure praxis. Depending on the circumstances, nonviolence changes radically. What remains constant is an

impure praxis, a courageous, imperfect and criticisable effort to reduce violence as well as create a different society.

The fact that nonviolence is impure does not mean giving up its ambitions, or its ends. To the contrary, it is by action that human beings can create something new, strive for more liberation from the chains of reality and openness to the existent. In order to better describe these two tensions, we will again refer to Arendt. The concepts of liberation and openness outlined by Capitini strongly resemble what Arendt called freedom and individuality, or plurality. Indeed, freedom is not mere *liberum arbitrium*; it is far from being a reduction to a life of pleasure; it is exactly the opposite of reducing human action to a passive follower of necessity. “Freedom emerges out of – or merges with – necessity” (Bernstein, 1977:146). This means that an action is free when it is an interruption of necessity, of both the biological necessity embedded in natural life, which is a force that leads to death, as well as of the historical necessity. Arendt recognised that these forms of necessity exist. Nevertheless, human beings do not have to suffer them passively. Freedom is “the capacity to begin, to start something new, to do the unexpected, with which all human beings are endowed by virtue of being born” (D’Entrèves, 1994:66). Nevertheless, freedom cannot be achieved without plurality. It is only through the other’s sight and judgment that action becomes a meaningful activity. Action can only exist in a context defined by plurality. Freedom is the “public, political intercourse with one’s peers, as a reciprocal sharing of words and deeds, as the mutual endeavour to reach agreement on matters of collective concern” (D’Entrèves, 1994:177), which cannot be realised without the “paradoxical plurality of unique beings” (Arendt, 1998:176). Plurality is “the fact that men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world” (Arendt, 1998:7-8). It is both equality and distinction (Arendt, 1998:175-6); it is the acknowledgment that human beings belong to the same species, and therefore, they are sufficiently similar enough to understand each other; at the same time, “no two of them are ever interchangeable, since each of them is an individual endowed with a unique biography and perspective on the world” (D’Entrèves, 1994:70). Plurality is required when acting in order to preserve “the world of human affairs from the corruption and decay it would be subject to were it left to the automatism of natural processes” (D’Entrèves, 1994:67). In other words, plurality is the *conditio per quam* of political life; “we are all the same, that is,

human, in such a way that nobody is ever the same as anyone else who ever lived, lives, or will live” (Arendt, 1998:8).

To summarise, nonviolence emerged in these pages as an impure praxis enhancing freedom and plurality. With this term we mean a non-systematic revolutionary philosophical approach, a day by day work of reinterpretation and shaping of reality in different contexts and times, with different ideas and techniques, in order to foster freedom from necessity and plurality, which is the openness to the ‘paradoxical plurality of unique beings’. This mode of human togetherness includes moments of dramatic disruption of the status quo. The reason is that nonviolence is always an *impure* praxis, because it is an effort that deals with the tragedy of humanity and takes place in a less than perfect reality. This means for instance that social struggle, and thus the work of the pragmatic school, are and should be fully included.

At this point, another objection may emerge. We claimed that nonviolence is a praxis that is more than mere behaviour or principle. At the same time, we kept the tension between a principled and pragmatic dimension with the adjective impure. This is not enough, because our interpretation of nonviolence comes before the division between principled and pragmatic, meaning that it will inevitably change them. Yet, how? How are these two categories reinterpreted on the basis of our explanation?

At the basis of Sharp’s definition of principled nonviolence lies some kind of obedience to a creed. Our conception of praxis rejects this approach. It also rejects any conception of nonviolence which involves “finding and cultivating an ostensibly non-violent region of the soul and learning how to live accordingly to its dictates” (Butler, 2009:171). Instead, we espouse that principled nonviolence is found in action. This means that principled nonviolence emerges from the unity of spirit and matter, action and values. It also means that it emerges from human tragedy, by which we mean the recognition of the imperfection of human beings, for instance in pain, mistake and death. This means also understanding the possibility of one’s own violence. As Butler rightly claimed, “violence is not foreign,” there are violent aspects even in the norms that shape any human being at the beginning of their journey, as well as there is the drive of aggression, of rage (Butler, 2009:170). Yet, there is a third point, which is already present in the idea of praxis: the interrelatedness of life. Nonviolence as a praxis includes the



idea that the life of each human being is related, at least in the fact that we share our limits. This means that 'principled nonviolence' is incompatible with forms of 'moral sadism', meaning "a violence that righteously grounds itself in an ethics of purity wrought from the disavowal of violence" (Butler, 2009:177). Instead, nonviolence acts in the real world, which is dynamic and comprised of human relations.

Within this framework, principled nonviolence may be reconceived as an intentional bottom-up action of actualisation of a public principle. For a start, it is a decision, a more or less intentional choice not to possibly accept the status quo. It is a principle in the sense of a "fundamental conviction that a group of people share," which "moves human beings to act" (Cane, 2015:61). This conviction is that the current situation is intolerable. In particular, as Ricoeur would say, nonviolence emerges from the 'intolerance of the mixture' between violence and nonviolence (Ricoeur, 1965:233). Here we may say that nonviolence emerges as a conscious action, which is sparked by the intolerance of the mixture of passivity and freedom, closure and plurality, in a certain circumstance, and which aims to foster openness, or plurality, and liberation, or freedom.

This action involves first what Capitini called the 'acetic act', which is similar to the concept of freedom, and also what the literature on nonviolence may call self-restraint or self-limitation. Nonviolence requires self-restraint in at least two ways: refraining from aggressiveness and refusing to act without conviction. It is certainly required to halt personal aggressive, irrational, and brutal instincts. As Butler explained, "non-violence, when and where it exists, involves an aggressive vigilance over aggression's tendency to emerge as violence" (Butler, 2009:170). Galtung described the drive of aggression as a sort of 'self-assertion', which implies an effort to change social relations. However, it turns into a problem when "it becomes a drive to hurt and harm others because they stand in the way of one's own self-assertion" (Galtung, 1964:95). In other words, nonviolence is "a mired and conflicted position of a subject who is injured, rageful, disposed to violent retribution and nevertheless struggles against that action (often crafting the rage against itself)" (Butler, 2009:171). This idea implies that each person has a responsibility "to protect the other against its own destructive potential" (Butler, 2009:177), because any action has effects on other human beings, causing unexpected reactions and processes.

However, pushing the idea of self-restraint a bit further, we claim that it means something more. Self-restraint is the moment in which a human being refuses to act without conviction, without being persuaded, and acknowledges that reality cannot be separated from values. This description may be linked with what Ricoeur would call "*l'homme capable*", capable "of initiating new actions that are imputable to one as freely chosen activities" (Kaplan, 2008:3). A capable person is one who is able to do things, such as speaking, acting, suffering, recounting and being responsible, without forgetting his or her human vulnerability, or what Butler would call precariousness (Butler, 2009:181).

Besides self-restraint, the actualisation of nonviolence is also what Capitini called the 'ethical act', which is motherly love, or openness to the other, to plurality. The other person is not an image of the mind, and is much more than her or his ideas; he is a gift. This idea of love includes the features that Martin Luther King listed when describing it (King, 2010). It includes the capacity to forgive, which does not mean ignoring what happened, but averting the mistake of letting the event becoming a barrier, hindering reconciliation. Moreover, love implies the understanding that the other is more than his or her deeds, and that humiliation of the other should be avoided, as it could worsen the situation. These features are far from constituting a 'belief system'. Forgiveness, reconciliation and avoiding humiliation are central to nonviolent struggles around the world, if they want to be a solution and not mere disruption.

Nevertheless, the ethic act is also a great risk, which is intentionally taken. In comparison with the passive acceptance of the status quo, it is a risk to suffer, physically or not depending on the circumstance, and even to die. The risk is not only restrained to the self. It includes the risk of losing a friend or a fellow campaigner. This is evident looking at the many nonviolent revolutions around the world, at the Peace Corps, and at the actions of saints such as Francis of Assisi. For this reason, we agree with Devji about the fact that nonviolence implies the conviction that life is not an absolute value (Devji, 2011:270), as well as with Shridharani when claiming that nonviolence keeps open the drama of life or death (Shridharani, 1939:246). Does this claim clash with what is commonly described as the 'sacredness of life' (Abu-Nimer, 2015:39), which is considered to be a key feature of principled nonviolence? The answer is yes, if life means merely the survival of the body, and thus 'sacredness of life' means dogmatic

preservation of bodily life in any case. Instead, sacredness of life is at the centre of nonviolence if it means the refusal of reducing human beings to events, and therefore, it means the rejection of considering them as mere bodies to be kept alive.

Not merely an action of freedom, or of self-restraint, and a risky ethical act of openness to plurality, the choice of nonviolence is also an opportunity. Indeed, nonviolence is an opportunity, a different perspective, a creative activity of interpretation and intervention in the world, realising an open and inclusive project. This does not mean focusing on the mental construction of the idea of a better world to eventually be 'put in practice'. Nonviolence suggests the reverse. For instance, Havel explained that it is much better if "through the fact of your existence in the world, you create the idea or manifest it – create it, as it were, from the 'material world', articulate it in the 'language of the world'" (Havel, 1990:12). In this way, we can put "personal experience of human beings as the initial measure of things" (Havel, 1987:149). Instead of looking at general arguments of an abstract necessity based on hypothetical abstract case scenarios, human conscience and personal experience become central in the political sphere.

The idea of a 'religious act' proposed by Capitini brings the action of nonviolence to an advanced level that is completely compatible with what we have described up until this point. As described above, action is always in a chain of actions and reactions, and thus nonviolence is already a collective enterprise. Capitini claimed that this collective enterprise includes the actions of those who are dead, and even those who are yet to be born. This sounds less dogmatic if considered from the point of view of the idea of praxis. Any principle is the sum of endless actions and reactions, and within this chain of events the actions of value performed by the dead still count; likewise, the intervention of future generations is already visible in current actions. For this reason, death is overcome practically in acts of values. In excellent actions we are part of a bigger community, which transcends the actual presence of its members. The lack of this religious dimension would make nonviolence purposeless. For this reason, present, past and future generations are part of any excellent action including self-restraint, the ethical act, and an open project.

The result of this excellent action is the bottom-up creation, or actualisation of a public principle. However, what do we mean by this statement? Public principle should be distinguished from particular motives, such as non-participation in a war, refusal to ever touch a weapon, mere non-lying or non-collaboration. The reduction of nonviolence to a particular motive would be dangerous. Arendt clearly stated that action “acts into a medium where every reaction becomes a chain reaction and where every process is the cause of new processes” (Arendt, 1998:190). If nonviolence is reduced to a motive, it would lose its meaning when the latter was achieved, missed, or not appropriate anymore. It would be similar to saying that nonviolence misses its constructive drive, which cannot be limited to the fabrication of something, either the perfect revolution or a road. Moreover, nonviolence would be blind to the actual circumstances, which may dramatically change. When an end is discovered to be invalid or even counterproductive, it should be reconsidered. Finally, the focus on particular motives would inevitably move the attention to those who are against or even ruined the plan. This would represent a great mistake, as a key feature of nonviolence is turning the attention from the person to the actual issue.

For this reason, nonviolence is a principle that includes the opportunity for further reassessment and modification of aims. It is a different perspective, a principle, but only in the way in which Arendt refers to it<sup>86</sup>.

*“In distinction from its goal, the principle of an action can be repeated time and again, it is inexhaustible, and in distinction from its motive, the validity of a principle is universal, it is not bound to any particular person or to any particular group” (Arendt, 1978:152).*

This means that the principle of nonviolence is something that inspires people, without prescribing particular goals. It may inspire actions, and it becomes

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<sup>86</sup> The concept of principle in Arendt has been object of extensive discussion, which is not the main issue here. This thesis is inspired by the interpretation of principle in Arendt provided by Lucy Cane in her article *Hannah Arendt on the Principles of Political Action*, and the working paper by Wolfhart Totschnig titled *Unpredictable yet Guided, Amoral yet Normative: Arendt on Principled Action*, available online at the address <http://ptw.uchicago.edu/Totschnig11.pdf> (last accessed on the 4<sup>th</sup> February 2015). Both these scholars try to move forward from earlier debates on the topic, and underline the irreducibility of Arendt’s interpretation of principle to simple moral principles as we are used to see. For instance, see: Kateb (2000), *Political Action. Its Nature and Disadvantages*, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Hannah Arendt*, ed. By Villa, D., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 130-148; Benhabib, S. (1988), *Judgment and the Moral Foundations of Politics in Arendt’s Thought*, *Political Theory* 16(1):29-51.

manifest only when placed into action. Nevertheless, it judges any goal to the extent to which it exemplifies and sustains a principle in a particular set of circumstances.

Let us retrace our steps. Principled nonviolence is not about a moral standard, a sentiment, a motive, and it does not prescribe or hinder anything. It emerged as an intentional bottom-up actualisation of a public principle, an excellent action, which is at the same time freedom, or self-restraint, plurality, or ethical openness to the others, and an opportunity to enter into a bigger community that transcends the actual presence of its members. The key feature of nonviolence as a public principle is the ability to judge a certain goal or a certain customary behaviour as adapt or not in a certain situation, fostering freedom and plurality. Nonviolence is a principle which shapes, reshapes, and reassesses customs, and therefore, it is more a question of judgment than of 'belief systems'.

Judgment should not be confused with the kind of criticism made "to show hostility and contempt to speak or even to think negatively and critically" as that "would be to give in to the spiritual flaws that underlie violence, to have the wrong conception of moral judgment" (Bilgrami, 2003:4161). Nonviolence looks at universality, because the other is important, but it does not fall into what Bilgrami would call 'universalisability', which implies the attempt to force the other to accept our own view. From this distinction it does not necessarily follow that nonviolence is only an exemplary action without "a clear sense of its political relevance" (Mantena, 2012b:15). The opposite is true. Nonviolence as a praxis intervenes in reshaping and transforming political relationships. This intervention means having the capacity to stick to an idea or action in certain moments, and to not give up easily. This is the reason that led many works on nonviolence to compare it with military virtues. Indeed, intervening in action to foster a principle requires courage, prudence, and loyalty. We agree with Shridharani in claiming that "like war, Satyagraha demands public spirit, self-sacrifice, organization, endurance and discipline for its successful operation" (Shridharani, 1939:19). These virtues are required exactly because nonviolence is a public principle.

Recently, nonviolence has been described as the decision to "walk the line" (Butler, 2009:182), to reject necessity and cruelty by attempting to be virtuous. Walking the line means first "to live the line, the impasse of rage and fear, and to find a mode of conduct that does not seek to resolve the anxiety of that position

too quickly through a decision” (Butler, 2009:182), most of the time a violent action. At the same time, this different mode of conduct should not be confused with purity. Indeed, as Ricoeur asks, “what advantage is there for a man to refuse to kill and accept death in order not to soil his hands? For what does his purity matter? Is he pure if all others are unclean?” (Ricoeur, 1965:228). Nonviolence is valid only if it intervenes in reality, if it is an action aimed at changing the status quo. In other words, “if non-violence is to have meaning, it must fulfil it within the history which it at first transcends” (Ricoeur, 1965:228). Nevertheless, this has nothing to do with utopianism, with a naïve approach to life like the *Candide* of Voltaire. As Vaclav Havel would claim, “a heaven on earth in which people all love each other and everyone is hard-working, well-mannered, and virtuous, in which the land flourishes and everything is sweetness and light, working harmoniously to the satisfaction of God: this will never be”. Nevertheless, “it makes sense to wage this war persistently” (Havel, 1992:16).

If principled nonviolence is reinterpreted as the intentional bottom-up action of actualisation of a public principle, such as a decision to ‘walk the line’, pragmatic nonviolence also acquires a different meaning. Our approach rejects the idea that a technique of action, independent from the context and the subject’s intention, may be considered nonviolence. Nonviolence as a praxis certainly includes the many techniques listed by Sharp, as well as the many studies on contentious politics. Nevertheless, the analysis of the Italian Peace March made clear that a protest-to-project cannot be reduced to the implementation of various behaviours extracted from a list. Instead, it was an attempt to enter the many cracks within Italian society to shape and reinterpret certain ways of doing things. In other words, it is possible to claim that nonviolence as an impure praxis is the decision to act in the real world through ‘protest-to-projects’, and thus through reinterpretation and shaping of old *practices*, as well as the establishment of new ones.

The substitution of the term behaviour with the term practice may look pedantic. Nevertheless, the fact that pragmatic nonviolence looks at practices implies some key theoretical stances. Indeed, the focus would be less on singular behaviours of individuals and more on current and possible ‘social relations’, patterns of actions, realities, or ways of doing things. First, this means that any analysis should look at both the local context, as any practice is contextually embedded,

and at the general context, because we are talking about patterns of actions. Practices are performances between other performances, and this means that they have “no existence other than in their unfolding process” (Adler and Pouliot, 2011:7). In their unfolding, practices weave together the discursive and material world, acquiring different meanings depending on the particular circumstances. At the same time, these performances are, and should be, socially recognized and socially meaningful, as well as be more or less ‘competent’, which means that they have to stem from detailed knowledge of the actual situation, along with the other current practices. Second, when we talk about practices we refer to a flow of practices eliciting practices eliciting practices. Practices are “socially meaningful patterns of action” (Adler and Pouliot, 2011:6) working within a complex net of other practices. Thus, it would be wrong to isolate the ‘physical level’ from the moral and religious, as well as not trying to enlarge the debate at the level of social processes. Finally, from the perspective of an analysis of practices the aim is not to tell the truth about how the ‘real’ nonviolent process works, but to be useful in making sense of all these practices.

The point of view of practices may result useful for our discussion on nonviolence. From the analysis of Capitini, pragmatic nonviolence emerged as a logic, a method, a style of action. Here, we can go further, saying that the analyses of excellent actions are building a logic, an approach, a certain kind of ‘knowledge’ through which we can interpret (and direct) current practices as well as establish new ones. These practices are the most different, ranging from examples of community organisations, techniques to overthrow or defend regimes, models of education, approaches to deal with the excluded and the weak in society. Nevertheless, there are common points. Drawing from the example of the peace march, we can suggest here some coordinates, some key points in the way in which nonviolence shapes and reinterprets practices. These coordinates may represent a framework with which nonviolence interprets and intervenes under particular circumstances. The underlying rationale of this framework is the refusal of oppression and division, which are produced by, or at the basis of, certain practices. This means that the first coordinate is a realistic analysis of the situation in order to find cracks and forms of oppression as well as the right time and place for a possible action. As the peace march was backed by an analysis of the many practices that were dividing Italy, in the same vein pragmatic

nonviolence starts with a detailed analysis of the current practices, which does not stop at the physical level.

After this analysis, nonviolence looks for a second coordinate, which is personal responsibility. Does the current practice enhance or impair personal responsibility? With this concept, we mean both the capacity of being able to choose and cause our own actions, as well as being morally accountable. Its meanings remind us of the idea of self-restraint as refraining personal aggressive, irrational and brutal instincts, and refusing to act without conviction as well as without values. This is also called by the scholarship 'nonviolent discipline'. Thus, nonviolence fosters a work of preparation and knowledge of the many habits of society; the awareness of the unintended consequences of any human act, especially the violent ones; the exercise in operational planning, the deep importance of pride and egotism over reason and rationality in the conflict for power. It stresses the importance of developing the capacity to choose and deliberate, "the capacity of self-advice," and is destined for immediate application based on a praxis (Couceiro-Bueno, 2011:187). Nonviolence takes so seriously personal responsibility that in extreme cases it even requires that life be put at risk, in particular the agent's life.

The stress on the person is balanced by an equal focus on the others, on everybody. Indeed, the third coordinate focuses on the power of all. In particular, is the actual practice enhancing or marring the 'power of all'? How can we move forward with the power of all in this situation? These questions include an analysis of actions fostering plurality. It means reflecting on numbers; on ways of empowering citizens with instruments of participation; on decreasing the impact of repression as well as accelerating defection of the adversary; on the kind of leadership in place; on the ways in which confrontations may be solved while maintaining a link with the enemy, 'transcending the conflict' when possible. This does not mean an *a priori* and dogmatic rejection of any form of violence. As Galtung perfectly claimed violence may be introduced "like an induced TBC once a week producing anti-bodies that may also prevent cancer of the prostate" (Webel and Galtung, 2007). The struggle is in finding new actions that will spread power and empower citizens, without causing deeper fractures and hatred in society.



Finally, the last coordinate is to have an open-project, a 'grand strategy', a vision of tomorrow which is always in progress and in need of the positive contribution of everybody. Any excellent action is not the realisation of a personal plan; it is not closed to the possibility of further reconsideration of the ends to produce a new society. Thus, the problem does not end with overthrowing a dictator, having the right to vote, spreading vegetarianism or even establish democratic institutions; in fact, these are temporary ends, which represent only the beginning. Nonviolence is the conviction that only through sharing responsibility (in common projects) practices can last. This paradoxically means that no practice is necessary. There should always be the possibility to recognise that 'yesterday we were violent', and to stress the creative power of human beings in society. This is a great opportunity, as it means that a lasting order can be created through a continuous renegotiation of practices (it is not enough to have the number to protest; the participation of the largest amount of people is needed to create stability), and thus through a constructive programme. This is the way for the construction *via facti* of a different society. This fourth coordinate inevitably includes a reflection on symbols and cultures. Is this practice imposing a specific culture, religion, doctrine, project or idea? Indeed, nonviolence as a praxis of liberation and openness challenges reality in finding practical ways of adopting values, without forcing others to convert themselves.

To summarize, nonviolence as a praxis seeks ways to intervene in reality making realistic analyses of a situation, enhancing personal responsibility, the power of all, and by creating open and inclusive projects. This framework cannot be described as a rigid doctrine. Instead, this product of the praxis of nonviolence can be conceived of as an 'art of judgment' on how to act, what to look at in particular times and in a particular place. Consequently, when we think of nonviolence as an impure praxis we think of a 'style of action' (Galtung, 1965:230), a "style of activism" (Clark, 2015:58), a blueprint (Popovic, 2015), which is already an ideology, if with this term we mean a non-systematic approach to, or a mapping of, reality. With Saul Alinsky, we can say that nonviolence is "you do what you can with what you've got" (Clark, 2015:58). This style acknowledges the uncertainty of the future. The wisdom of nonviolence depends on the self in a world that is beyond our control. There is a possibility to learn, but it makes no sense to rigidly repeat patterns of behaviours. It is the unity of life and experience

which provides us with the tools necessary to act. In other words, the kind of knowledge that is created is not a sort of technical knowledge, or *techne*. It is a mistake to look for a fixed list of nonviolent practices that can always be used independently from the circumstances. At the same time, the kind of knowledge created cannot be defined as being general, theoretical, context-independent knowledge, called *episteme* (Brown 2012:446). The analysis, interpretation, and reshaping of existent practices, as well as the construction of new ones, moves the stress towards the 'art of judgment', which balances techniques and values.

The fact that pragmatic nonviolence cannot provide us with a list of things to do does not mean that it produces no knowledge at all. Nonviolence has the potential and actually produces a sort of practical wisdom, of *phronesis*. *Phronesis* can be defined as "concrete, practical, context-dependent knowledge" (Brown 2012:446). It has to do with deliberation on "the truth, involving reason, concerned with action about things that are good or bad for a human being" (1140b5). It is also about "knowledge of the particulars, since it is concerned with action and action is about particulars" (Brown, 2012). Theorists draw a certain kind of knowledge from nonviolent actions. This acquired knowledge is not a simple list of methods to use. It includes many methods of struggle, but also trainings on resilience, suggestions on how to interpret (in a more efficient way) a situation, examples from the past from which to take inspiration. From a continuous process of reinterpreting old practices and proposing new ones, a new very effective 'wisdom' is developed. Thereby, nonviolence produces a sort of *phronesis*.  
Phronesis

*"unquestionable involves learning to do things as they should be done and to face complex situations: it is foresight for the future, the capacity to learn lessons from the past in order to foresee what lies ahead in a world full of uncertainty"* (Couceiro-Bueno, 2011:187).

Re-conceiving pragmatic nonviolence as a sort of *phronesis* triggers important consequences for its relationship with the principled dimension. Indeed, the pragmatism of this category means that there are no systems of belief to adhere to. However, it does not mean that this approach may not be described as a political ideology. Indeed, pragmatic nonviolence is still part of a non-systematic revolutionary approach that interprets and intervenes in a dynamic reality. In other words, pragmatic nonviolence is part of the idea of nonviolence as a praxis. This

means that the two categories, principled and pragmatic nonviolence, live together and necessitate each other. Any action that aims to realise the public principle of nonviolence represents an attempt to interpret and reshape current practices. Thus, the more principled nonviolence works in its research of virtuosity, in its reflections and deeds, the more the phronetic knowledge of pragmatic nonviolence is enhanced. In particular, the serious commitment of principled nonviolence is necessary in order to work for years on finding alternatives and less violent ways of living together. It is not surprising to find that at the centre of the pragmatic school of thought there are scholars such as Sharp or Lackey, as well as actors, such as Gandhi, King, San Suu Kyi and many others, who are so much committed to look like clear examples of principled nonviolence.

Turning to pragmatic nonviolence, its practical wisdom is necessary to shape and reinforce new generations, new choices, and new commitments. The actual level of practical wisdom, the actual knowledge of new and old practices, represents the basis for any individual choice to walk the line, for the implementation of any values or principles. Any judgment is formed and transformed in light of other people's opinions. Pragmatic nonviolence includes new methods of education, of community, as well as conflicts of political action. This background may be crucial in many cases to shape, help and foster principled nonviolence.

Thus, principled and pragmatic nonviolence are different perspectives of the same impure praxis of freedom and plurality. Freedom is fostered by actions of self-restraint and analyses of practices enhancing personal responsibility; plurality is shaped through ethical acts and the research on the power of all. The aim is common: an open-ended and inclusive project, which is enlightened by always new excellent actions.

To conclude, this section offered a way to overcome the division between behaviour and ideal, as well as the means and the ends produced by Sharp's definition. We interpreted nonviolence as an impure praxis, a non-systematic revolutionary approach to enhance freedom and plurality. This definition allowed us to reconceive principled and pragmatic nonviolence as an intentional bottom-up action of actualisation of a public principle, and a practical wisdom, a phronesis. Thanks to this reinterpretation, the right balance between the means and the ends was achieved. Principled and pragmatic nonviolence are complementary, two sides of the same coin, two ways of looking at the same

revolutionary praxis. Nonviolence is now a reunited concept, a force for change, which can no longer be confused with pure souls or new weapons deployed for old ends.

### *5.2. Transformative Realism for Order with Life*

Nonviolence as praxis of freedom and plurality is a valid way to overcome the division between behaviour and ideal and to reconcile means and ends. However, we believe that our approach to nonviolence is also helpful to overcome the problems at the praxeological level as described in the second section of chapter two: avoid the focus of disruption, as well as the risk of falling into *duragraha*.

Let's begin with the first issue, which concerns the political attitude of nonviolence. It is already quite clear that nonviolence as a praxis does not focus on the destruction of a society, but it is inherently constructive, embedding an alternative path. Some may interpret this constructive drive, this lack of distinction between means and ends, as the proof that nonviolence may be reduced to a form of 'prefigurative politics' (Smith, 2015, Yates, 2014). As we claimed above, the meaning of this term is quite vague. It is mainly opposed to strategic politics, in which there is no means-end equality, and it broadly refers to the "attempted construction of alternative or utopian social relations in the present, either in parallel with, or in the course of, adversarial social movement protest" (Yates, 2014:1). Nonviolence as praxis has certainly a lot in common with this approach, but it is now clear that it cannot be reduced to that. It has already been described how nonviolence is more than a way in which a protest is performed, as it is much more than a set of techniques. Besides, it is true that nonviolence is an inspiration for the building of alternative movement or institutions. However, not all alternatives are nonviolence, and nonviolence is not always an alternative. There are occasions in which alternative institutions proposed by some movements are clearly the opposite of a praxis of freedom and plurality. For instance, the article of Yates looked at the practice of squatting, which is quite distant from the 'style of action' proposed by nonviolence. Finally, we already described that nonviolence does not look for utopias to implement here and now; it is a meticulous work of reinterpretation and shaping of practices. This also means

that nonviolence may sometimes be much closer to the police which re-established the order, rather than to a movement which went too far.

It should be clear now that nonviolence may manifest itself in actions of prefigurative politics, but it is much more than that. Nonviolence is a praxis. It is excellent actions and practical wisdom, aimed at reinterpreting and shaping reality enhancing freedom and plurality towards an always inclusive and open project. At the political level, we are referring to those activities that are “not only linked to understanding, explaining and acting in international relations but also transforming those relations to help constitute a more ethical, just and sustainable world order” (Gill, 2012:506). Thus, we are dealing with a real transformative political approach, which has been described by Capitini as walking in-between ‘realism and serenity’.

Taking seriously Capitini’s suggestion, we easily find that many of the people cited earlier have been described as realist. For instance, Gandhi has been described by Mantena as a political realist (Mantena, 2012a). The same label has been attached to Gene Sharp (Engler, 2013) and James Tully (Honig and Stears, 2011, Finlayson, 2015). Even Hannah Arendt has been described as a realist (Bernstein, 1977). It is not the place here to debate to what extent these persons are really realist. What matters is that these authors may help us to portrait some key features of this new kind of realism.

For a start, nonviolence as impure praxis of freedom and plurality is certainly a realism which is grounded in reality but open to novelty and virtues, as Bernstein defined Arendt’s approach (Bernstein, 1977:151). Her “counsel of realism” was in fact to “look for the unforeseeable and unpredictable”, without withdrawing from the political arena. In the same vein, our interpretation of nonviolence works in-between realism and serenity, between reality and openness to novelty and virtues. This means that it is not able to prescribe any precise solution before a serious analysis of the situation. Nonviolence takes into account the key concerns of political realism, such as circumstances, agent capacities, interests, and roles (Philp, 2010). It does not forget the importance of starting from “an account of our existing motivations and our political and social institutions (not from a set of abstract ‘right’ or from our intuitions)” (Geuss, 2008:59). At the same time, nonviolence does not accept any sorts of eternal necessity, which would guide events, as well as any claim that nothing new happens under the sun. Exactly the

opposite. It is in action that there are opportunities for change, novelty and freedom.

Mired in reality and craving for change, our interpretation of nonviolence is incompatible with arrogant attitudes of thinking of someone as being *super partes*. To the contrary, nonviolence presents a courageous way to be concrete and 'partisan', preparing an "ethico-political response" to the many problems of society (Bell, 2008:5), in particular those of state authority and the modern nation state, taking the vantage point of the victims. Being partisan means, as Arendt warned, being aware of the fact that it is extremely difficult to know "whether the virtues of political action or its terrible vices will be manifested" (Bernstein, 1977:151), and nonetheless trying to do something.

This attempt has been marvellously described by Karuna Mantena. Recently, she made explicit that Gandhi should be interpreted as the proponent of a different kind of transformative realism. At the centre of this realism there is a peculiar interpretation of means and ends (Mantena, 2012a). Gandhi brought to the fore a new approach to the dyad means/ends. Instead of drawing normative guidelines from existing beliefs and constraints, resulting therefore in conservative actions, Gandhian realism, as well as Capitini's and Arendt's ones, analyses existing beliefs and constraints to prepare a reaction (Mantena, 2012a:462). From Gandhi's perspective, what *is* becomes the more suitable *means* for an end, and thus it is a description linked to an action and a purpose. It is still a description, based on what actually happens around us, but it enters in a circle thanks to which it can change. Similarly, what *ought to be* starts by meaning pursuing one *end* through the right action, on the basis of the best description of reality possible (Mantena, 2012a). In other words, ends are the consequences, and not general and abstract ideas to implement.

This approach is exactly how nonviolence works. Indeed, it implies profound attention to strengths and limits of human actions, but at the same time it struggles to move beyond. It is from this realistic approach, which emphasise the potential of action along with the link between means and ends, that nonviolence offers new opportunities, redrawing the classical boundaries of politics. We have already clarified that the boundaries between the social and the political are not respected by nonviolence. Nonviolent social struggles turns the social into political. This means first that nonviolence as impure praxis creates space for

politics even when there is none. Arendt claimed that nonviolence needs some pre-existing “space of politics and therefore for power” (Frazer, 2008:102). Indeed, she claimed that nonviolence could not have been effective against anti-political regimes, such as Nazi Germany or Stalinist Russia. This idea is based on the fact that Arendt reserved to violence the role of dealing with cases of extreme violence, as well as to open up space for politics. Instead, nonviolence as praxis starts from the belief that this assumption is not absolute. It is true that violence may be required in some precise circumstances, but this can change in future. Nonviolent research already revealed the success of some nonviolent actions against Nazism. These episodes are the signal that Arendt’s assumption is already not an absolute truth. Indeed, the praxis of nonviolence is a meticulous work which makes this assumption more and more contested.

The redrawing of the boundaries of politics go together with the redrawing of the boundaries between private and public. This means that nonviolence is a praxis which looks at progressive inclusion in the public sphere of actors who were excluded or simply not taken into consideration before. Indeed, nonviolent actions also comprises of conflicting actions, in which emerge new identities as well as ways of life once invisible and excluded (Norval, 2012). Besides, the progressive shaping of reality through virtuous actions will inevitably include those who cannot take part in public life, such as the ill, the weak, the old, the child, and even the past and future generations. Therefore, nonviolence is based on the necessity of de-reification of the private/public dichotomy (Pantham, 1983:174), promoting the idea that personal judgment and the state are not two opposing forces. The state, with its many institutions and bureaucracies, as well as its radical groups, is constructed from the practices of citizens, officials, protestors, politicians and professionals, who chose to accept the status quo or walk the line. New choices to walk the line, as well as new practices, may create a different society.

To summarise, nonviolence as impure praxis develops a transformative kind of realism, which is grounded in reality but looks at novelties; reinterprets is and ought as the analysis of means towards ends; enhances the political and enlarges the public sphere. In other words, the kind of realism developed by the praxis of nonviolence aims to integrate the status quo, which is somehow imperfect, with new ways to live and enlarge the social and political life of a community. In this sense, nonviolence represents the integration of what James Tully called ‘diverse

citizenship'. In his *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, the American scholar found in Gandhi an example of 'diverse citizenship', which is a kind of 'global citizenship' looking at citizenship not as a status but a praxis. With this term the author does not mean the passive process of taking a practice of civic activity as a form of organisation; he means the continuous process of forming and negotiating practices of actors and activities in context. We can add that this activity is not opposed to the idea of citizenship as a status. To the contrary 'diverse citizenship' works to create, defend, or reinterpret some status, in particular on behalf of those who cannot participate.

Within this praxis, Tully claims that nonviolence represents one of the "most important activities today" (Tully, 2008:294). It is important because this kind of practical citizenship does not aim at imposing one precise vision of citizenship and peace, whether through coercion or discussion. It is not based on augmenting antagonism, distrust and fear. To the contrary, nonviolence is a different way of building up a peaceful society, contributing to overcome distrust and powerlessness. Nonviolence is therefore an approach whose premise is the existence of some sort of civic relationship in any culture, along with a "courageous and disarming comportment of groundless trust" (Tully, 2008:294-5), which alone can initiate a "reciprocal, pre-linguistic response," which is the basis for any relationship and negotiation.

This different kind of citizenship leads to the formation of trust among citizens, and to the empowerment of people. Trust is one of the key factors in organising a revolution. For instance, it is not by chance that the core founding members of the Serbian Otpor! Movement were all close friends since high school. "The close interpersonal ties the members shared laid the foundation for the core activist group that would go on to plan the nationwide movement". This is extremely important as there was a kernel of trust which spread. "This meant that the amount of time activists spent together strengthened the bonds between them and increased the likelihood of success" (Popovic and Alvarez, 2015:108).

Trust and empowerment will inevitably have a revolutionary impact on the society. They will produce more and more "features of social life – networks, norms and trust – that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam, 1996), it will enhance the "sense of belonging to a neighbourhood, caring about people who live there, and believing that people



who live there care about them” (Portney and Berry, 2001:71). In particular, it will enhance reciprocity, without forcing anyone. In one concept, the risky praxis of nonviolence creates social capital. This means that nonviolence will not end with the obsession of the substitution of those in power with a different group. The conquest of an office is not the aim of the praxis of nonviolence. To the contrary, the integration of social capital into society will qualitatively change the different institutions, making them less and less central for the good of the community.

Thus, the impure praxis of nonviolence integrates society with diverse citizenship and social capital. The problem now is: it is clear that the risks of falling into realpolitik and moralism is averted, but what about the crisis of democracy? The crisis of democracy manifests itself in the apathy of citizens, who in the best case scenario are merely able to monitor those in government; in the defence of positions of privilege by political parties; and in the inefficiency of governments to constrain powerful minorities. How is nonviolence going to deal with these issues? From the perspective outlined up to now, we can claim that democracy is dangerously evolving into what Havel would call a new form of ‘order without life’, in which there is no place for the ‘aims of life’, humans’ dreams of peace and self-realization, dignity, free expression, expression of individual, group, or spiritual interest, harmony with one’s self, security (Tucker, 2000:157). Nonviolence is precisely the effort of bucking these trends as well as moving towards a different direction freedom and plurality. Principled and pragmatic nonviolence work together to overcome citizens’ apathy, the dominion of political parties, and the private interests of powerful minorities.

Indeed, citizens’ apathy is contrasted with an enormous work to foster freedom. This means first and foremost the analyses and improvement of current practices enhancing personal responsibility. The many revolutions around the world allowed millions of people to make a short step toward personal responsibility, from a condition of passive obedience and acceptance. Here the commitment of Gene Sharp and the pragmatic school has been and still is invaluable. The spread of a new praxis, of techniques of civil disobedience has allowed people to protest effectively without using bullets and knives, putting at risk the existence of entire countries. Dictatorships have been overthrown, and battles have been won for the recognition of rights and minorities. Besides, the successes enhance trust in nonviolence, which in turn helps spreading this form of practical wisdom.

All this makes of nonviolence a real source of democratisation, and a starting point for something new.

Nevertheless, the apathy of the citizens require also new actions of self-restraint. For what concerns democracy, these actions cannot be reduced to the spread of practices of dissent. These kinds of actions are important, especially to avoid democracy to fall back into dictatorship. However, nonviolence offers more. New actions are needed, which continuously retrain personal aggressive, irrational, brutal instincts as well as enhance values and personal persuasion. In other words, nonviolence lies in actions showing alternatives to necessity and cruelty and aiming at knitting the social rift. No fight against oppression or violence should forget that the aim is knitting the social rifts showing alternatives to necessity and cruelty. This implies a complex work both on citizens and on politicians. For what concerns the former, the process of knitting the social rift starts with actions paving the way for the substitution of the principles of control and discipline with those of self-control and self-discipline. Along with it, work should be done for the flourishing of a “culture in the widest possible sense of the world, including everything from what might be called culture of everyday life – or ‘civility’ – to what we know as high culture, including the arts and sciences” (Havel, 1992:12). Turning to politicians, the necessity for realpolitik and the myth of always dirtier hands of politicians should be reversed with actions of always more self-restraint and accountability. For instance, in the first days of democracy in Czechoslovakia Havel was preaching that the tendency towards always ‘dirtier hands’ may be reversed by the concepts of ‘tact, proper instinct, and good taste’. “It is simply not true that a politician must lie or intrigue“ he claimed. It is “utter nonsense, spread about by people who – for whatever reasons – wish to discourage others from taking an interest in public affairs” (Havel, 1992:10). In particular, good taste is extremely important, in that “it means having a certain instinct for the time, the atmosphere of the time, the mood of the people, the nature of their worries, their frame of mind”. This is more important than for example holding a degree in political science. Good taste embeds qualities like fellow-feeling, the skill to talk to others, insight, the capacity to grasp quickly both problems and human characters, the ability to make contact, and a sense of moderation (Havel, 1992:11).

This complex work of freedom as self-restraint and enhancement of personal responsibility goes hand in hand with a long and hard work of plurality as ethical acts as well as enhancement of the power of all. This perspective does not distinguish between actions against and in favour of the state, because nonviolence looks at mode of human togetherness, at integrating human relations. Focusing on political parties, our perspective acknowledges that we are dealing with a very imperfect practice of participating in power. The literature on nonviolence share a negative evaluation of political parties. If we look at the medium and long term, most authors and activists would subscribe the Manifesto *On the Abolition of All Political Parties* written by Simone Weil (Weil, 2013), as well as the harsh critiques to parties' behaviour by Havel.

Nevertheless, nonviolence does not offer utopian alternative institutional architectures to implement. The aim is not to get rid of the enemies, to dominate over them. Nonviolence works integrating the existing reality with actions of forgiveness, reconciliation, avoiding humiliation. For what concerns political parties, nonviolence looks at overcoming strong divisions friends/enemies, creating actions which include more and more citizens in the decision making process, having the model of the assembly as inspiration for many different attempts to change the actual ways of doing things. This means on the one hand what Havel would call 'anti-political politics'. With this term he meant both a method of spiritual survival under coercion and a political strategy of enhancing participation and liberty. It is an indirect, sometimes imperceptible work directed towards the reconstruction of civil society. This work manifests itself in a galaxy of different groups, associations and movements, ranging from Solidarity in Poland (Michnik, July 18, 1985) to the many transnational movements around the world. The many networks and movements promote a pro-active attitude, creating forums or experiments of communities, and contribute to the diffusion of techniques of nonviolent actions (on obviously different degrees), empowering citizens with tools to dissent. Here is where the pragmatic school did an invaluable job of analysis of more effective ways to act in order to put pressure on governments, and where there is already a debate about forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoiding humiliation.

Instead, less studied are focused on attempts to propose different kinds of parties, showing that nonviolence cannot be reduced to fight against political

parties. Thus, we witness movements becoming parties, as well as parties becoming explicitly nonviolent. The German Green Party of Petra Kelly (Kelly, 1984, Kelly, 1994), and to less extent also more recent parties such as Podemos and The 5 Stars Movement, may be considered examples of the first group; the Nonviolent Radical Party Transnational and Transparty is an example of the latter (Radaelli and Dossi, 2012). They are attempts to radically reinterpret and shape political parties with many features which enhance the power of all. They tend to transcend classical political cleavages in different ways, sometimes accepting only people who have never been members of a party; other times opting for non-exclusive membership. They all fight for greater transparency and accountability. Some focus on territory, for instance with citizens' councils; others on new technologies, as the Meetup and software such as Liquid Feedback; other focus more on helping right's campaigns, fostering large and flexible networks. The aim is to 'transcend the conflict', creating a closer relation between representatives and citizens. Drawing the concept from Kelly, these parties can be rightly considered examples of 'anti-party parties', meaning a party which tries "to transform power in order to enable people to achieve self-determination in their lives", as well as is

*"capable of choosing between morality and power, which uses creative civil disobedience to combat every form of repression, which combines audacious imagination with efficient working methods, and which recognizes the link between world peace and peace in every individual" (Kelly, 2001:159).*

The difficult job of enhancing personal responsibility and the power of all aims at promoting an inclusive open-ended project. Our approach may accept to refer to extreme disruptive actions as excellent actions in extreme circumstances. However, excellent actions are actions of extreme freedom and plurality, which include everybody, including past and future generations. For these reasons, nonviolence as a praxis of freedom and plurality aims to integrate the actual reality of domination of the private interests of small minorities. Yet, how? An inclusive open project may include some changes in the actual architecture of the state. Nevertheless, this cannot be the main issue, because we cannot confuse principles with goals or motives. This means that the solution of producing new and more stringent legislations against the dominion of giant corporations (Crouch, 2004) may be useful, but it is insufficient. In the same vein, nonviolence

is not necessarily equal to 'strong democracy'. There is obviously a strong link between the two, as the former is working towards something similar to a

*“self-governing community of citizens who are united less by homogenous interests than by civic education and who are made capable of common purpose and mutual action by virtue of their civic attitudes and participatory institutions rather than their altruism or their good nature” (Barber, 2003:117).*

Yet, nonviolence is a realistic and impure praxis. It does not emerge from legislations or abstract visions of society; it blossoms from a bottom-up work of enhancement of personal responsibility, the power of all, and an open and inclusive project. It deals with a far from perfect world, and many times with heavily oppressive and violent regimes. Thus, nonviolence can prosper under any kind of regimes. It is a continuous work of bottom-up reinterpretation and shaping of current practices.

What does this mean in relation to the power of elites, with skilful administrations and capital funding? It means creating new opportunities to keep everybody on board. Economically, it means creation and spread of new bottom-up ways of funding projects, running banks or business, creating and acquiring energy. It means reconsidering responsive theory and all the presuppositions on punishment, looking for alternative ways for compliance. It means fostering different ways to 'transcend the conflict', defending a country as well as intervening in international crises.

All these efforts inevitably trigger some internal clashes. However, the aim is not to initiate a clash, based on principles, with experts and bureaucrats. They are necessary in this struggle; they are the necessary pillars of support for the construction of a new society. Thus, nonviolence does look for a new relationship between experts and citizens. These attempts of integrating power do not lead to a full rejection of technology or expertise. Capitini explained quite well that participation should not substitute for expertise. The aim is to integrate technology and expertise with the maximum of participation possible. In other words, the aim is to enhance and spread values, culture, art, education, aesthetics, in order to diminish the heavy price to be paid for progress. Moreover, simplification of life is to be praised, as well as it should be encouraged some sorts of rotation in those

technical jobs which do not require high expertise. This and other ideas would avoid fostering a closed and powerful group of experts and bureaucrats.

Does this mean that a simple increase in participation is the panacea? Not at all. Nonviolence acknowledges that participation cannot be considered a panacea. We agree with Barber that there is an enormous distinction between masses, people, and citizens. People are not yet citizens as they do not belong to a mode of social being made of participation and community, and masses “are only nominal freemen who do not in fact govern themselves” (Barber, 2003:154). Nevertheless, the ‘diverse citizenship’ approach recognises the difficult and complex process of citizens’ formation. The aim of Capitini’s Liberal-socialist movement was to prepare citizens morally and intellectually, in order to be able to propose a real alternative to fascism. Besides, the diverse citizenship prospered by nonviolence acknowledges the fact that some cannot be full citizens. In this category we include many foreigners, the poor, the weak, the ill, and even the dead and the future generations.

Therefore, actions enhancing participation both qualitatively and quantitatively is what nonviolence proposes. Thus, nonviolence may be considered a non-linear approach to politics, which does not seek institutional and constitutional solutions to the problems of democracy; the starting point of the non-linear approach is “the problematic of the social production of reflexive autonomous subjects” (Chandler, 2014:46). The starting point is empowering individuals and communities, able to respond the world enhancing freedom and plurality. For this reason, “the democratic state thereby no longer stands above or separate to society but works to facilitate a more responsible or reflexive operation of plural and differentiated private judgment” (Chandler, 2014:43). The result is that nonviolence looks at democracy as “adaptive learning in societal sphere”, no more representation and contestation only (Chandler, 2014:50), and not necessarily as strong democracy.

In practical term, nonviolence propose many examples of politicians<sup>87</sup>, businessmen, shareholders, leaders of local communities, workers or unemployed, who adopted and reinterpreted nonviolence in their own community and for their own aims. This is still a very understudied and underrated field of

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<sup>87</sup> There is no study which tries to compare and show similarities between the work of presidents such as Vaclav Havel or Zoran Djindjic; of party leaders such as Kelly or Pannella; of ministers, diplomats and others, who adapted nonviolence to institutional work.

nonviolence, mainly because of the present focus on protests and dissent. Nevertheless, they are the epitome of nonviolence as a praxis.

Nonviolence as impure praxis of freedom and plurality is a kind of 'adaptive learning' to overcome people's apathy, the dominion of political parties as well as of powerful minorities. This means that nonviolence does not defend democracy *a priori*. The praxis of freedom and plurality, with its realist approach to problems, working in society through the continuous renegotiation of old practices as well as the establishment of new ones, looks also beyond democracy. Nonviolence is certainly compatible with discussion, deliberation, consensus, respect of rules, majority government, tolerance of minorities, and control of the government. Nevertheless, nonviolence establishes a 'permanent tension' in democracy (López, 2010:410), which does not exclude *a priori* to overcome democracy. In other words, nonviolence as a praxis of freedom and plurality reveals itself in a work of integration to democracy, of enhancement of the horizontal tension of the society towards inclusion, decentralisation and sharing of power, which aims at changing qualitatively democracy. Gandhi himself was looking for a radical form of democracy, "which he referred to as *purna swaraj* (complete or integral democracy), *ramarajya* (sovereignty of the people based on pure moral authority), or *sarvodaya* (a social order promoting the good of all)" (Panham, 1983:165). This radical democracy is described not as a pyramid, but as an oceanic circle (Gandhi, 1997), ever-widening from the person to the 'villages', or more generally, the community and the world. More recently, Havel talked of 'post-democracy' (Havel, 1985), which is something quite different from the post-democracy described by Crouch. The new regime of post-democracy cannot be achieved through violence. What is needed is a continuous personal, bottom-up reconsideration, integration and a progressive substitution of the historically violent institutions, including those of the military, political, and even religious orders. This idea is close to Galtung's nonviolent horizontal society (Galtung, 1992), and to Capitini's omnicracy. All these terms refer to the same work of change in the modes of human togetherness, change in the relations between human beings.

To summarise, nonviolence as praxis of freedom and plurality is offering a challenging but stimulating path of 'adaptive learning' to the current democratic crisis of democracy, aimed at rebalancing what Havel called 'order with life'. This

path offers self-restraint and personal responsibility; ethical acts and the power of all; excellent actions and open and inclusive projects, which may even overcome democracy as we know it now.

### *5.3. Religion and Nonviolence: Towards the Assisi Presumption*

The balance between order and life, the process of adaptive learning should include everybody. Thus, it should include religious groups as well. As we have seen, the predictions of an extinction of religion revealed incorrect, and now religion is coming back in political science. Here we may even claim something more: a public dimension of religion is necessary for nonviolence and the construction of a new post-secular society.

In order to do so, religion has to debunk the current 'myth of religious violence' and the linked Westphalian presumption. This is possible only through the change of perspective offered by nonviolence. Indeed, religion is more than ideas and ethical knowledge claims (Dillon, 2012), it cannot be reduced to "materially existing institutions organized for the pursuit of 'religion'" (Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003:86); it is not a "menu of ideas and principles" (Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003:27). In other words, religion cannot be considered a "set of privately held doctrines or beliefs" (Hatzopoulos and Petito, 2003:25), or a choice of allegiance and obligation. Insufficient, as well, is the pre-modern definition of religion as a community of believers. Instead, the praxis of nonviolence looks at religion as a set of thought and action, principles and actions which is directed first and foremost to prepare a personal openness. From this perspective, religion is reinterpreted as what we called the 'religious act', the purest moment of freedom and plurality, the deepening *via facti* of the link with other human beings. In particular, it represents the choice of reducing the necessity of death, pain, and mistake through free and open acts of freedom and plurality. An open nonviolent religion is therefore the purest moment of self-restraint, of ethical act and open project.

A religion interpreted in such a way would represent a valid practical answer to the role of religions in a post-secular society. Indeed, religion would heal the wounds created by the process of secularisation, which separated religion from the rest of society. The three levels of division described by Ferrara, the political,



social and personal, can be now healed *via facti*. At the personal level an open religion does not aim to put an end to the 'human flourishing' described by Taylor. The religious act does not clash with the immanent frame because it manifests itself as an integration, a new and unexpected opportunity. It is an excellent action limiting aggressive tendencies as well as moving beyond the necessity of acting like a 'bag of sensations'. Thus, a nonviolent religion would integrate the myth of human flourishing. In particular, the prophet of an open religion can provide humanity with a further opportunity, with an important assistance to the secular framework. The 'human flourishing' is destined to clash against pain, mistakes, and even death. The religious can intervene at this point, showing that life cannot be reduced only to despair; that there is opportunity to integrate this harsh reality with an act of value, in which we perceive a profound connection with the others. This opportunity does not constrain itself to these extreme moments. These moments may represent the beginning, the bases on which to continue strengthening human relations, creating another reality, which grows out of the infinite interdependence between everybody.

Thus, the dilemma is no more to convert and judge who is entitled to join the group of the good and who is not; the issue is to enhance personal responsibility, along with opportunities for everybody to act for values. In acting for the production of values, people feel that they are not alone; they are doing something with the rest of humanity, they are participating in something bigger, enhancing a new reality, with an enormous difference in quality compared to the past.

The choice of enhancing actions and personal responsibility constitutes an important change of focus of religious institutions. It means leaving aside the past focus on dogmas, along with the obsession in predicting how things will be. This is not what religion can offer to a post-secular society. Instead, the opportunity provided by religion is practical. It consists in enhancing personal responsibility, which means the skills for acting under personal persuasion, as well as being morally accountable to the rest of the society and beyond. This is translated in actions which do not depend on beliefs and convictions of the receiver. It is true that everyone shares the same human limitations; some are even hit harder by life, physically or psychologically. Nevertheless, a nonviolent religion shows that everybody can share a key opportunity in any action: transcending human limits

by participating in the construction of values. The cruelty of the material life can be overcome by an act of love and openness, creating here and now a new reality that transcends nature and materialism.

Turning to the social level, religion offers ethical acts of openness to plurality. It has already been described that an open and nonviolent religion can neither survive nor make sense at the margins of society, due to its inescapably social character. This means that religion lies in acts of forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoidance of humiliation. These risky and courageous actions are destined to buck the trend of closing down into small groups and sects, without generating further violent clashes with other groups. This means not being limited to ceremonies and rituals, but promoting federal structures, change from vertical diktats to further occasions for discussions, and the promotion of models that make peace heroic. Instead of being a divisive force, religion becomes a true force of debate and cohesion.

Finally, at the political level religion turns upside down the spread conviction to be only a threat for the international order, because it has nothing to do with privileges, the creation of religious states, or the imposition of its own truth to everybody. Instead, religion embraces fully the chance of a 'diverse citizenship', becoming the Avant-guard of freedom and plurality. Thus, there will be no interest in both trying to gain privileges in democratic institutions, and using the coercive power of the state to implement their beliefs; this is not the right path for change. Nonviolence agrees with the idea of Stepan that "religious institutions should not have constitutionally privileged prerogatives that allow them to mandate public policy to democratic elected governments" (Stepan, 2000:39).

At the same time, the nonviolent praxis goes further than mere "twin tolerations", both of freedom for democratically elected governments and freedom for religious organizations in civil and political society (Stepan, 2000:40). The reason is not only that an open and nonviolent religion does not look at creating a state, perhaps a religious state (Juergensmeyer, 1995). It does not surrender to nationalisms, even when life is at stake, and at the same time avoids the flaws of a dry and juridical cosmopolitanisms, as there is no need of waiting for a world government or police. The choice by religions of the praxis of nonviolence would make of it no longer a problem for politics, but a needed opportunity and a stimulus. Capitini reminded us that the new practices and the new commitment

makes real here and now a different cosmopolitan reality, in which everybody, even the excluded, take part (Degli Oddi, 2012:125-6). The aim is not to impose on others rules and visions of life or death. The aim is the “spiritualization of politics” (Jahanbegloo, 2014:180); to propose a new attitude stimulating a lively production of values. This does not mean imposing laws in line with some specific religious belief. On the contrary, it means expressing the tension towards values and openness day by day, shaking the society when politics is driven by a particular set of interests, or when it becomes mere dry administration. Religious organisations are already doing important effort in peacebuilding and peacekeeping (Alger, 2002, Hermkens, 2007). Nevertheless, religion can contribute even more towards openness and liberation towards a new ‘order with life’. It can provide examples who are willing to sacrifice their lives proposing a different society. It can provide examples who are able to make peace something heroic. This role may be implemented both domestically and in the world, for instance providing a crucial help in the development of armies of peace, such as the International Peace Brigades (Checa Hidalgo, 2008).

Pushing the argument a bit further, this new practical citizenship paves the way for the *de facto* disempowerment of the Westphalian presumption, which assumes that religion should be kept in the private sphere as it would represent a threat to international order. At the same time, it provides the basis for another belief, called here the *Assisi* Presumption. This presumption claims that an open nonviolent religion is able to offer key help to the flourishing of an open society and democracy. A nonviolent religion is the best set of thoughts and actions able to create a new reality, which includes everybody. The contribution of a nonviolent religion is important to avoid perpetration of violence by authoritarian regimes. At the same time, religions would not constitute an element of division in society. They are able to work fully to keep values and morality central to society, offering the needed tension towards values in an always more global and inclusive society. In other words, the clash of civilization is replaced by a religious collaboration in the construction of a new reality.

Assisi is the perfect symbolic place for this presumption. It has been chosen not only because it is central to Umbria and is extremely beautiful; Assisi represented the perfect symbol of an ‘open religion’ for Capitini (Capitini, 1962a:16), because it is the place where the most important Western nonviolent iconic figure, St.

Francis, was born. It is a symbol for the celebration of what Capitini called *familiarity*, which means proximity and openness (Capitini, 1962a:16). Moreover, we can say that Assisi still represents a different way of living religiously, based on humility and ecumenism, free from extremisms, such as a Manichaeism or an exacerbated asceticism, and close to everybody, not only the elites.

To conclude, the interpretation of nonviolence as praxis reinterprets religion as a set of thoughts and action, as the 'religious act'. This opens up an interesting path for healing the wounds of the process of secularisation, casting religion at the centre of society and politics. The Assisi Presumption would represent the definite overcome of the myth of religious violence, along with its most well-known products, secularisation and the Westphalian Presumption.

### *Conclusion*

This chapter had the ambitious aim of reconstructing nonviolence, overcoming the division between means and ends, politics and morality, and religion and politics. Healing these wounds will give new strength to nonviolence, in order to avoid worrying uses of the term, reunite the field, and face a changed historical environment.

The first section overcame the distinction between behaviour and ideal, reconciling the tension between means and ends. We reinterpreted nonviolence as impure praxis, a non-systematic revolutionary approach, which represents an everyday work, with different techniques and ideas, of reinterpretation and shaping of reality, to enhance freedom and plurality. This praxis is impure, as it takes less than optimal forms due to the hard environment, but it always look at freedom and plurality.

This approach helped us in reconceiving principled and pragmatic nonviolence as inseparable and complementary parts of a unique work of change. Principled nonviolence has been reinterpreted as an intentional bottom-up actualisation of a public principle to reinterpret and shape reality. This 'excellent action' implies the ascetic act or self-restraint, meaning both control over personal aggressiveness and refusal to act without conviction, persuasion, and value; the risky ethical act of openness with motherly love to the others, looking at new

possibilities for forgiveness, reconciliation, and avoidance of humiliation; the chance of a 'religious act', which is the realisation of a link with everybody. Instead, pragmatic nonviolence is centred on practice. It is a phronesis, an art of judgment drawn from the continuous reinterpretation and creation of human practices. This phronesis revolves around some key features: a careful analysis of the status quo, the enhancement of personal responsibility, the power of all, and the construction of open and inclusive projects. Thus pragmatic and principled nonviolence work together towards a different reality, the reality of all.

Section two focused on the division between politics and morality. Nonviolence represents a practical way in-between realism and moralism. It is an approach grounded in reality but open to novelty and virtue, able to reinterpret any practice as a possibility for change, to redraw the boundaries of politics, and to shape a 'diverse citizenship' which fosters trust and social capital. This innovative approach is able to reunite 'order with life', helping the current crisis of democracy. It provides practical ways to enhance personal responsibility against the apathy of the citizens; it enhances the power of all in many forms, ranging from movements to new kinds of political parties; it gives people more opportunities to participate against the dominion of powerful minorities. The result is not the establishment of a precise architecture of the state. Instead it is the growth of 'order with life'.

In section three we turned to religion. Nonviolence interprets religion as 'religious act', as the deepening via facti of the link with the others. This approach may be the basis for a new post-secular society, in which religion integrates the 'immanent frame' with self-restraint and personal responsibility; goes back at the centre of society with ethical acts of openness to plurality; and pushes for the 'spiritualisation of politics' abstaining from coercion and imposition of laws. This will pave the way for the practical construction of the Assisi Presumption, by which we mean the idea that an open religion is key for the flourishing of an open society and better democracy.

## Conclusion

This thesis started with the conviction that nonviolence is at the beginning of a new fight for its existence. The history of the term started with the innovative interpretation of the concept of *ahimsa* by Gandhi, with its meaning emerging from the struggles against colonisation, especially in India. The Mahatma offered to the West a concept, a theory, an efficacious technique, and a whole vocabulary, with words such as *Satyagraha*, *swaraj*, *sarvodaya*, and constructive programme. In the beginning, the West tried to resist this innovation, reducing the concept of nonviolence to more common terms such as civil resistance, passive resistance, and non-resistance. Nevertheless, the first battle was won. Nonviolence began to be used, especially by activists and pacifists, but it faced another challenge. While it was perhaps a useful tool for protesting under democratic regimes, nonviolence was ignored by academia and it was criticised for being useless against dictators and extreme conflicts, such as in WWII and the following Cold War. Nevertheless, the key contributions of scholars such as Galtung, and especially Sharp, proved the contrary. Nonviolence was there during these extreme conflicts, and it was a valid alternative against dictatorship and international crises. This paved the way for the introduction of nonviolence as a sub-field of many different areas, such as security studies, peace studies, and social movement studies.

The relative success of nonviolence came with a cost: the division of nonviolence into two. On the one hand, is a principle; on the other hand, are the techniques of action. At first, this resulted in a strength, but it has now become a problem. In particular, we highlighted that the rise of troubling uses of the term urges the creation of a unified and pluralist concept, able to face the changing historical environment, with the crisis of democracy and the emergence of a post-secular society. For these reasons, we highlighted the necessity to reflect again upon the meaning of nonviolence.

This thesis addressed these concerns 'reconstructing nonviolence'. In other words, we believe that only a different unifying definition of the term will represent a decisive contribution to solve all these issues. This new definition should help to heal the division between the principled and pragmatic dimensions, avoiding worrying uses of the term, reuniting the field, and being fit for democracy and post-secularism. We believe that our conception of nonviolence as an impure

praxis is able to contribute to this debate. Nonviolence emerged here as a praxis, a rising political ideology, a continuous effort to reinterpret and shape reality in order to always find new occasions for freedom, or liberation from the cruelty of existence, as well as plurality, or openness to the other. This conception redefines and keeps together two complementary dimensions, principled and pragmatic reconstructed. The principled dimension is reinterpreted as the actualisation of a public principle, which gives rise to new practices; the pragmatic dimension is practical wisdom drawn from the analysis of those new practices, and is a key to providing new stimuli for innovative choices.

The journey to arrive here started in chapter one with an analysis of the success of the concept of nonviolence. Today, this concept is used in many different ways. Nonviolence is used to describe ways of overthrowing dictators; defending a country against invasions or internal *coup d'états*; protesting effectively against a government; regulating society; implementing a kind of everyday revolution, and is linked with pacifism and religious ideals. Among the many reasons for the growing use of the term, a key role has been played by the acceptance of a definition of nonviolence as either a principle or a set of methods of action. The tension between these two perspectives can be traced back to the introduction of the term non-violence in the West during the 1920s and 1930s. We described the opposition between those who interpreted non-violence as a substitute for war or for violent protests, such as Shridharani and Gregg, and those who interpreted it as a pacifist or a religious principle at the basis of a radical personal, social and religious revolution. This division continued to be recognised by the vast majority of those who wrote on nonviolence. However, it is thanks to Gene Sharp that the distinction between principles and techniques of action became more polarised, and it has been crystallised in the categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence.

Some of the key reasons for the success of this division are the following: For a start, nonviolence was easier to describe, operationalise, and to associate with people and events. On the praxeological level, more and more groups could adopt the term, either averting discussions about values or about effectiveness, and it rejected the conviction that nonviolence was effective only with democratic regimes. Finally, at the religious level, the Western process of secularisation required to find a secularized notion in order to be accepted and taken seriously.

The result is that nowadays the two categories of principled and pragmatic nonviolence dominate, and represent two very different approaches. Pragmatic nonviolence is an approach interested in developing new and more efficient techniques by which citizens can gain social and political power. This means to foster the 'people power', which is the power of the people to dissent. To the contrary, principled nonviolence is an approach focused on describing and implementing the principle of nonviolence. This approach is based on person power, meaning the power of each individual to change reality, and it is typically associated with pacifism and religion. The result is that in contemporary debates nonviolence is split into two.

If this split benefited nonviolence by allowing it to be part of many different fields, it also carried with it some important costs. We now find ourselves with new worrying uses of the term and a regressive and divided field of research, unable to face the crisis of democracy and contribute to a post-secular society. In order to move on, we focused on three wounds to heal in chapter two. For a start, section one showed that there are important issues at the descriptive level, where we find a divided concept. Indeed, principled and pragmatic nonviolence have in common the rejection of cowardice, or inaction. Nevertheless, they reduce action either to behaviours or to the rigid implementation of an ideal with certain practices. This leads to a dangerous division between the means and the ends. While pragmatic nonviolence overlooked the importance of circumstances and ends, unconsciously paving the way to terms such as 'nonviolent extremisms' and others, principled nonviolence focused excessively on the ends and abstract speculations, sacrificing an honest evaluation of the means, and leading to ineffectiveness and the accusation of conservatism.

A second problem, outlined in section two, related to the regressive character of nonviolence at the praxeological level. Due to many different factors, both streams of nonviolence focused mainly on disruption, leaving aside a serious reflection on order and construction. In particular, further analysis is needed of which type of democracy to construct. The democratic model is in a period of crisis, due to the passivity of citizens, dominion of small minorities, and inefficiency of political parties. In such a difficult time, nonviolence tends to be a further problem for democracy as it risks falling into realpolitik or moralism. In other words, it risks falling into stubborn persistence in implementing a project



considered valid by someone in advance. *Satyagraha*, in contrast, is the research of including everybody in an open project.

Finally, section three outlined the last key problem: the exclusion of religion and 'belief systems'. The category of principled nonviolence followed the process of secularisation of the West. Nowadays, times have changed. Religion did not disappear, and the debate has turned to focus on its role in a post-secular society. For this reason, an alternative definition of nonviolence should re-include religion, in order to suggest to the former a way to become central in a post-secular society.

To provide an answer to these problems, we turned in chapter three to Aldo Capitini under the conviction that his thoughts may offer a precious contribution to the field. Section one showed that the Italian philosopher interpreted nonviolence as a tension, a praxis of liberation from the chain of cruelty and openness to the other. This praxis has a strong constructive drive, which looks at building up *via facti* the reality of all. This concept does not distinguish clearly between pragmatic and principled; they are integral to nonviolence. Nevertheless, we tried to find a pragmatic and a principled dimension. For what concerns the former, we showed in section two that nonviolence cannot be reduced to techniques of action. Instead, it is a method, a logic, a style, a way of doing. This kind of wisdom includes techniques but those are not simply implemented. They become nonviolence when reinterpreted and shaped by such logic. Instead, the principled dimension of nonviolence emerged in section three as a craft, an act, and a meticulous work of integration of reality. The starting point is the acknowledgment of human limits, and the choice to act to deepen this link with the other, trying to collectively face the burden. This leads to the refusal to believe in death as the end of everything, and in the laws of nature as something necessary. The consequence is that principled nonviolence is a process of integration of reality divided by Capitini in three acts: ascetic (retreat to free the subject from the dominion of necessity), ethical (the openness to the other), and religious (the unity with everybody in a virtuous action). These acts are not movements of the body, but moments of the process of integration into a new reality. The aim, the connection with everybody in a virtuous action, is described with the concept of compresence, which is the moment of maximum practical liberation from the chains of reality and openness to the existent.

Chapter four explored in depth the consequences of the concept of nonviolence proposed by Capitini. In particular, it provides an answer via examples to the issues raised in chapter two. For what concerns the problems described at the descriptive level, we analysed the first Italian peace march in 1961. This example showed that nonviolent action cannot be reduced to a simple implementation of a technique, a means, or a normal example of contentious politics. A nonviolent action is instead a protest-to-project, an event with a strong constructive drive and the attempt to create a different reality, not a simple way to put pressure on someone else to make him or her do something. Turning to the praxeological level, nonviolence emerges as a particular kind of realism. This approach does not fall into realpolitik or moralism, and it keeps a balance between 'realism and serenity' towards the construction of day-by-day *via facti* of omnocracy. This meant non-cooperation and the foundation of the liberalsocialist movement during fascism. After the war, Capitini's transformative realism meant actions of integration of a far from perfect democracy. In particular, the Italian philosopher integrated the violent contentious repertoire and the myth of guerrilla warfare with the promotion of nonviolent techniques of action; the actual political parties with the COS (Centre for Social Orientation); the dominant majority rule and the institutions with the idea of the assembly. Finally, nonviolence introduced compresence to religion, reframing it as a mix of thoughts and actions aimed at preparing personal openness. This led to interpreting faith as a hope for change and personal persuasion, commands as free and non-binding occasions for reflection, authority as prophetic work of helping liberation and openness. This approach led to the creation of the Movement of Religion, the composition of the letters of Religion, as well as to many struggles for conscientious objection and non-domination of the church. It also led to the foundation of the COR (Centre for Religious Orientation), the link with innovative examples of education, as well as to new models of conduct and concepts of sanctity. These activities were aimed at casting an open religion at the centre of society and as an important player in the renovation and health of politics.

Drawing from the framework provided by Capitini, we offered a new interpretation of nonviolence that was able to overcome the divisions outlined in chapter two and provide new strength to the concept of nonviolence. In other words, our interpretation was aimed at reconstructing a united, progressive, and pluralistic

idea able to reconcile means and ends, politics and morality, and religion and politics, in an attempt to represent a valid answer against worrying uses of the term as well as a changed historical environment. Section one proposed to interpret nonviolence neither as a behaviour, nor as a rigid practice implementing an ideal, but as a non-systematic revolutionary approach, an ideology, an everyday work of reinterpretation and shaping of reality. In other words: a praxis. More precisely, we described it as an *impure* praxis, because many times it takes less than optimal forms due to human limits and the hard environment in which it is mired, in order to foster freedom, or liberation, and plurality, or openness.

This approach allowed us to re-describe the two dimensions of nonviolence, the principled and the pragmatic, reconciling means and ends. Principled nonviolence has been reinterpreted as an intentional bottom-up actualisation of a public principle. This excellent action implies fostering freedom with the ascetic act, or self-restraints; plurality with the ethical act or openness to the other; and an open and inclusive project with an excellent action, or the religious act, through which we become part of a big community with past and future generations.

Instead, the pragmatic dimension is a practical wisdom, an art of judgment drawn from the continuous analysis, reinterpretation and creation of human practices fostering freedom and plurality. This *phronesis* revolves around several key features: a realistic analysis of the situation; the research of freedom in the enhancement of personal responsibility; the craving for plurality with the focus on the power of all; and the construction of an open and inclusive project. From this reinterpretation of principled and pragmatic nonviolence it is clear that behaviour and principle, as well as means and ends, are no longer divided.

Section two focused on the praxeological level, on reconciling politics and morality, due to the risk of falling into the regressive path of focusing only on mere destruction and *duragraha* (realpolitik and moralism). Nonviolence emerged as a transformative kind of realism, a crossroads in-between realism and moralism. This approach interprets and shapes any practice as an opportunity for change. This leads to a continuous redrawing of the boundaries of politics, fostering trust and social capital through a 'diverse citizenship'. This approach looks at the current crisis of democracy as 'order without life'. Instead of proposing alternative abstract models, nonviolence works by reinterpreting and shaping the current reality. This means offering excellent actions and phronesis, an 'art of judgment'.

This means actions of self-restraint and the creation of practical ways to enhance personal responsibility against the apathy of citizens; ethical acts of openness to the others and enhancement of the power of all through new movements and political parties; and excellent actions and new and more opportunities to take part in social and political life against the dominion of powerful minorities. In a few words, the *phronesis* developed by nonviolence looks at integrating 'order with life'.

Section three turned to the role of religion. Nonviolence proposes to think of it as a 'religious act', a thought and action of deepening *via facti* the link with everybody. This approach casts religion at the centre of a post-secular society, as it consists in a work of integration of the 'immanent frame' with actions of self-restraint; of society with ethical acts of openness; of politics with excellent actions aiming at its 'spiritualisation' without imposing law or using coercion. This path leads to the construction of what we called the 'Assisi Presumption', by which we meant the conviction that an open religion is the key for a post-secular society and allows a better democracy to flourish.

At this point, some doubts may emerge. Our understanding of nonviolence is quite different from the dominant one, and a change is always risky. Thus, are we sure that this reading is a step forward and not a step backwards? In other words, are we sure that our interpretation is able to keep the advantages at the basis of the success of Sharp's distinction, as well as answer the problems outlined in chapter two at the descriptive, praxeological, and religious levels? At first glance, the interpretation offered here may appear to be a step backwards from Sharp's conception. At the descriptive level, our interpretation may jeopardise the 'conceptual order' reached with great fatigue by Sharp. Praxis is certainly not an exotic word or theory, but it is definitely more difficult to describe and study than a set of techniques or even a religious principle. It is much easier to focus only on details of a technique of action than to what an 'excellent action' means in particular circumstances, or to talk about an 'art of judgment'. Our interpretation requires further scrutiny before judging whether an event or behaviour may be catalogued as nonviolence in a certain situation. It will become harder to describe nonviolence if we do not divide between the 'political struggle method' and the 'socio-economic programme'. At the same time, it is much easier to describe in general terms what the principle of nonviolence commands, perhaps shaping this

definition on the basis of a prophet's words or deeds, and put it in the list of principles prescribed by a certain creed. It is harder to acknowledge personal responsibility to live contradictions and to create bottom-up new interpretations of a public principle.

Turning to the praxeological level, some may worry that the quickened pace in the adoption of the term nonviolence risks being stopped, or worse, even reversed. Fewer groups will adopt this concept because something more than the implementation of a technique of action is needed and the nonviolent character of some past revolutions may be reconsidered. Some may even wonder whether it will jeopardise the success of the term in describing revolutions that are happening around the world. At the same time, our interpretation will certainly create further problems for the relationship between nonviolence and pacifism. No group may be considered nonviolent by default or command. Indeed, the 'impure' and bottom-up character of our definition may clash with dogmatic and purist views; the concern with effectiveness would not be left aside anymore; the requirement of 'openness' or plurality may not be compatible with extreme choices of withdrawal from the world.

Finally, the interpretation of nonviolence as an impure praxis towards freedom and plurality may represent a threat to the slow but important process of secularisation of the concept. We may be accused of dangerously reintroducing a religious flavour to nonviolence. This is a threat because nonviolence may be excluded again from politics due to the Westphalian presumption. Indeed, the weapon of nonviolence in the hands of religious groups may lead to further disorder and increase clashes within society. At the same time, the reunification of the concept threatens religions as well. The social character of an open religion and the effort towards plurality may endanger the purity of some groups. Moreover, the focus on dogmas is threatened in favour of scientific and historical knowledge.

These concerns are understandable. The reasons at the basis for the success of nonviolence should be defended. Nevertheless, we strongly believe that our interpretation appreciates the advantages drawn from the division in two, and at the same time it allows us take a step further. Indeed, nonviolence as an impure praxis may represent an important step forward at the descriptive level. Our interpretation may represent a useful integration to Sharp's 'conceptual order',

without falling into a rigid 'ethical theory'. Scholarship may still analyse behaviours and values, but with the assumption that they are focusing on the symptoms. Moreover, the fact that it is harder to describe and find examples of a praxis than a behaviour or a generally described principle may represent an opportunity. It may trigger reflections on whether what happens in a circumstance is really nonviolence, which is a praxis with a clear and different constructive drive, or if it is merely a refinement of the traditional way to wage war, coerce, and impose one's will. This is extremely important under both dictatorships and democratic regimes. For what concerns the former, it put emphasis on determining which society will come out of a nonviolent revolution. Turning to the latter, it is important in order to stay focused in front of extremist groups, who do not use physical violence but still support closure and separation.

At the same time, a new definition of nonviolence will replace sterile debates on whether a person or an event is part of a principled or pragmatic domain. Instead, the focus will be on analysing actions. In particular, at the centre of people's concern will be the notion of whether an action is or is not a protest-to-project: does it represent a rejection of cowardice? Is it an attempt to open up to the others and exploit an opportunity for a bottom-up creation of a public principle? At the same time, the analysis of an action may refine the present level of practical wisdom embedded in the concept of nonviolence. In other words, is it always positive to enhance personal responsibility, and how does one execute it in a proper way? Is the power of all enhanced by this or that action in that particular circumstance? Is this particular action promoting an inclusive open project, or it is imposing the will of a group in spite of the others?

The focus on action may represent a real bridge to reintroduce principles, which are at the basis of religious and system beliefs, helping to avoid to say again that nonviolence is passé. It is true that our focus on the bottom-up actualisation of a public principle clashes with mere obedience to a command or a prescription of a certain creed. Nevertheless, this may be an opportunity for the development of religions. It may trigger further internal religious disputes on what it means to consider a prophet or a book an example of nonviolence. In particular, the focus on action is an opportunity to overcome the obsession with dogmas, and the confusion between nonviolence and creeds.

At the praxeological level, we believe that the growing use of the term will not be halted, but increased and qualitatively improved. Our interpretation does not represent a step back to a situation in which only pacifists and religious groups will be included. Nonviolence as an impure praxis does not focus on dogmas or utopias; it demands much more. Indeed, religious groups and pacifists are required to not withdraw from society because of disillusion. There is no place for 'two cities'. They are nonviolent only when they act at the centre of society. In addition, nonviolence as a praxis helps not to confuse openness to the other with mere research of new adepts. Nonviolence is something different, being an action of love, of openness to the other, of helping the other to realise him or herself, which has nothing to do with imposing a creed.

Turning to groups who adopted a more pragmatic kind of nonviolence, our interpretation may represent the occasion for further reflections. In particular, it will introduce some concerns with means, and in doing so clearly show that nonviolence is incompatible and cannot be used as a shield to protect extremist (and very violent) groups. At the same time, our interpretation of nonviolence includes the many revolutions which are called 'nonviolent' around the world, even though it does not stop there.

Finally, nonviolence as a praxis of freedom and plurality represents an important opportunity at the religious level. As we have seen, this conception is not a threat to the process of secularisation. To the contrary, secularisation is at its basis, especially because it highlighted the aspects of religions which have not been incorporated into nonviolence: dogmas, commands, hierarchies, sectarianism. For this reason we did not limit the problem to ethics, instead we talked throughout the thesis about religion. Our definition of nonviolence does not only represent the return of ethics at the centre: we are proposing a real post-secular concept. Religion is reintroduced at the centre of nonviolence and society. This conception offers religion to represent its highest and extreme moment as excellent action of freedom and plurality. However, this implies a radical change of the concept of religion itself. Indeed, nonviolence is compatible only with an 'open religion'. From this perspective, religion is thought and action of liberation and openness to the existent. In other words, religion is at the centre of our concept of nonviolence as excellent action showing extreme freedom and plurality, as the highest risk due to the highest hope. Thus, their creed is not the

main issue here. What matters is a certain kind of action, even though it means helping people with different views to do what authorities would forbid.

For all of these reasons, we believe that our interpretation of nonviolence as an impure praxis does not represent a step back, as it keeps the advantages already achieved by Sharp's division. Nonviolence as an impure praxis of freedom and plurality may qualitatively improve the current way in which nonviolence is described and found; it may improve the current use of the term in political, pacifist, and religious groups; and it may represent a real post-secular concept. However, our conception of nonviolence is not satisfied with this alone. Indeed, nonviolence as praxis is a conception able to represent the needed unifying and pluralistic understanding able to avoid the worrying uses of the term and face the challenge of a changed historical environment.

For a start, we believe that our interpretation represents a unifying and pluralistic framework. Our definition is compatible with the primary different uses of nonviolence outlined in chapter two. Nonviolence as an impure praxis is a valid definition which includes methods for protesting as well as ways of governing, actions of overthrowing dictators as well as following Christ. This means that our definition may represent a useful platform for scholars' exchange, without being a single binding method of studying nonviolence. Moreover, it also means that the complexity of Gandhian nonviolence is rescued. This does not mean that we rigidly adhered to the Gandhian doctrine. We already acknowledged its complexity and vagueness. However, we maintained knowledge of the self and openness to the other, self-rule and the welfare of all; now principled and pragmatic nonviolence are strongly reunited under the focus on actions of freedom and plurality. Consequently, this interpretation may result more progressive because the internal tensions to nonviolence are kept without breaking up the concept in smaller ones, fostering new understandings and research. In this way, activists and scholars may still acknowledge that they are part of the same, open-ended project.

At the same time, our conception is also pluralistic. This means that we aim to foster a plural conception of the good which requires free exercise of reason, excluding any dependence upon commands and diktats. At the same time, we avoid the risk of ignoring, or worse repressing, values and belief systems looking at nonviolence only from a strong scientific, value-free, and purely behavioural



approach. Nonviolence cannot exist but in actions, which include both behaviours and values.

Does it mean that our interpretation is incompatible with the important effort of the pragmatic school? Absolutely not. The conception of nonviolence as a praxis requires the effort of gathering and creating more efficient techniques of collective actions short of violence. This is one of the most interesting challenges to other ideologies. However, it reminds us that nonviolence is something more than that. It is an approach looking for freedom and plurality that actively chooses, reinterprets, and shapes techniques.

Is the reintroduction of values, and even religion, at the centre of nonviolence, going to spark more debates and contestations? Yes. The reintroduction of values once again makes nonviolence a full political ideology, which is indeed thought-provoking and contestable. This may mean a very different future for the category of principled nonviolence: from being the container of leftovers, it may become the most advanced and extreme field of research of nonviolence. The silence of these years prompted the urgent need for new reflections on the relationship between nonviolence and values.

What are the results of this new interpretation of nonviolence? We outlined here a notion of nonviolence which is much more complex than a simple lack of physical violence. Thus, it is incompatible with the current 'non-violent forms of right wing extremisms', as well as with the concepts of 'nonviolent extremism', 'nonviolent offender', and 'nonviolent crime'. To better describe these concepts, it would have been much better perhaps to have used terms such as 'no violent', 'not violent' or 'non-physically violent'. Most definitely, this should be the subject of further research. At the same time, the praxis of freedom and plurality is far from being something fashionable, which can be *passé*. It is an urgent necessity for the upcoming years, and the fact that important political actors, such as Blair, have pondered this idea, reveal how much the literature on the topic must improve and spread.

Finally, our interpretation deals with both the crisis of democracy and the resurgence of religion. The way we handled these problems may appear a bit vague, and perhaps insufficient. It was not the aim of this thesis to offer a thorough solution to such enormous contemporary issues. Nevertheless, we

proposed an approach, a point of view on where the issue stands and how to react. Further research may highlight consequences, challenges and further opportunities for this approach.

Before ending this thesis, it is worth reflecting on the possible consequences of our effort. Indeed, this thesis did not intend to put an end to the study of nonviolence. To the contrary, it hoped to reinvigorate the theoretical debate on the topic. For a start, we hoped to have clarified the fact that a new theoretical reflection on the meaning of nonviolence is urgent and beneficial. Indeed, there are still too few books and articles focusing on theoretical challenges and possibilities of the concept of nonviolence. This effort should not undermine the (legitimate) more practical focus of the current scholarship. To the contrary, more theoretical work will surely reinvigorate the latter, which may become aware of new and unexpected meanings of what they are actually doing.

In order to do so, this thesis highlights the fact that a concept split in two autonomous categories is a threat to the united complexity of the nonviolent project. For this reason, the aim of this research was to unify and not to further divide. The idea of nonviolence as praxis may represent this bridge. It may represent a 'temporal' bridge, linking old and new nonviolent movements and actors, as well as a 'spatial' bridge, linking departments, centres for the study of principled or pragmatic nonviolence, and people from different faiths and parts of the world. The concept of praxis may even be the bridge between the continental and the analytical tradition, as recently claimed by Floyd (Floyd, 2015). It is a concept which had fortune on both sides of the Atlantic, and in different schools of thought. Thus, we claim that it may represent an interesting platform from which to start.

Further research is needed to analyse the relation between nonviolent praxis and other political ideologies, such as conservative, socialism, or green thought. Nonviolence is certainly an open ideology, which may easily be mixed and even included in others. Nevertheless, the integration of nonviolence may have important indirect consequences. The morphology offered by nonviolence may create frictions and clashes within the different ideologies. Moreover, the stress on open and inclusive projects will certainly create uneasiness, and it may be considered an incentive to betray.

The 'reconstruction' of the concept of nonviolence proposed here may have consequences on the way nonviolence is taught and trainings are organised. Nonviolence can be less easily taught: the problem is no more to use effectively a set of techniques. It will be interesting to look at whether existing trainings on nonviolent action are compatible with such a view, and whether the concept presented here may contribute in developing alternatives. We acknowledge that the idea of praxis as a dynamic relation between excellent actions and phronesis may give more importance to storytelling, examples, and testimonies, even though this does not mean underplaying important statistical works, such as Chenoweth's, which undermine with rigour existent beliefs. Moreover, time has come perhaps to start thinking of trainings (or at least workshops) on nonviolent politics (on how to imagine a nonviolent politician) or even business (both as a different reflection on businessmen, shareholders or consumer).

What about our reinterpretation of principled and pragmatic nonviolence? We hope to have tabled a challenging description of both of these streams. An action-centred version of principled nonviolence may prompt further debates on what it means for a religious group to embrace nonviolence. For instance, this interpretation may represent a further element of reconciliation in the Catholic world between the more conservative strands and the liberation theology. The link between nonviolence and liberation theology is strangely absent or understated by handbooks and introductions to nonviolence. Nevertheless, our conception may help the scholarship on liberation theology abandon (even more than what they already did) divisive aspects of Marxist vocabulary and means of analysis. In particular, it may help tie together the term plurality (or openness) with that of liberation, finding new grounds for overcoming divisions without surrendering the precious social role played in South America. This may enlarge the struggle beyond the exact interpretation of the Gospel, as well as beyond the poor and socialism. At the same time, more effort will be required by the church to act instead of focusing on dogmas.

Turning to our interpretation of pragmatic nonviolence, the focus on phronesis and art of judgment may open up new opportunities for research. It links protest and government with the centrality of construction and bottom-up value formation. In this effort, the existent stress on statistical analyses, like Stephan and Chenoweth, represents a valuable attempt to criticise existent practices,

showing persuasively that a different action is possible (and perhaps desirable). These kinds of works are valuable ways to foster a different phronesis, a new art of judgment. However, they should not lead us to think that an event or a person should be judged solely on the basis of the techniques of action used. Moreover, the focus on 'regularities' should not lead us to give less attention to 'exceptions', to new and sometimes apparently utopian excellent actions.

Then, this thesis hoped to bolster interest towards Aldo Capitini. We believe that the introduction of his thought into the English language should not be postponed. The time has come to produce an introduction to the thoughts and deeds of the Italian philosopher. It is not enough to translate an Italian monograph in English, because the audience, the writing style, and the 'sensibilities' are different. More works on Capitini will inevitably trigger a larger interest on the actual impact of this philosopher and of nonviolence in the Italian and European debates. This is something that has not even been accomplished in Italian. Moreover, the rich reflections of the Italian philosopher may support contemporary and future debates about nonviolence.

Finally, going back to the introduction of this thesis, another possible topic of research may be to look at the opposite of nonviolence as praxis of freedom and plurality. This thesis began by discussing opposites, but it did not delve into that supposition of what would be the opposite concept of nonviolence. We sketched here a positive conception of nonviolence, which may take different opposites depending on the field, time, and circumstances. This may certainly be a topic for further research.

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