



The Cultural Violence of Non-violence

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Abstract

This paper explores the difference it makes to incorporate the multi-focal conception of violence that has emerged in peace studies over recent decades into the discourse of non-violent direct action (Galtung 1969, 1990; Uvin 2003; Springs 2015b). I argue that non-violent action can and should incorporate and deploy the distinctions between direct, cultural, and structural forms of violence. On one hand, these analytical distinctions can facilitate forms of self-reflexive critical analysis that guard against certain violent conceptual and practical implications of non-violence, however inadvertent those may be. At the same time, these lenses help reconceptualise non-violent action in ways that open up an array of strategies and tools not previously prevalent among activists committed to non-violence.

Non-violent action may itself be either complicit in, or might be enabled to illuminate and cut against, forms of violence that infuse social, political, and economic structures (i.e. structural violence). Appeals to non-violence and the actions with which they interweave may be complicit in, or might be enabled to illuminate and cut against, religious, ideological, aesthetic, and even scientific understandings and conceptual frames that underpin and support structural violence (i.e. cultural violence). In each case, non-violence must be critically examined with all these possibilities in mind. I first define and contextualize a multidimensional account of violence in terms of direct, structural, and cultural violence. I then consider two examples of how it challenges thinking about non-violence.

Keywords

Cultural violence, non-violence

Structural and Cultural violence

The analytical lenses of structural and cultural violence emerged among peace studies scholars in order to identify, explicate, and critically intervene in deep and pervasive forms of violence. Their concern was to do so especially when such violence is neither physical, nor intended, and in many cases, not deadly. In distinguishing between types of violence, peace studies scholars responded to the insufficiency of a conception of “peace” understood as those conditions that naturally emerge once explicit (i.e. “direct”/ “personal”) forms of violence have been assuaged or eliminated (“the absence of



violence, the absence of war,” i.e. “negative peace”). To be substantive, any conceptualization of peace would have to be paired with the persistent and simultaneous cultivation of social justice (i.e. “positive peace”). This required identifying and addressing the underlying causes and conditions that give rise to direct violence. Such conditions include structurally in-egalitarian distribution of power and resources, and the various forms of exclusion and exploitation such dynamics typically entail.

By this account, “violence” is understood to be present “when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations.” Violence thus becomes “the cause[s] of the difference between the potential and the actual” (Galtung 1969: 168). Structural violence is then understood to be those anonymous and/or unintended “patterned relationships among components of a social system” (Maas-Weigert 2008, 2006). Through these patterned relationships “...individuals may do enormous amounts of harm to other human beings without ever intending to do so, just performing their regular duties as a job defined in the structure. ... [Or] as a process, working slowly in the way misery in general, and hunger in particular, erode and finally kill human beings” (Galtung 1985: 145).

[Note: Galtung elsewhere explained: “Thus, when one person beats his wife there is a clear case of personal violence, but when one million husbands keep one million wives in ignorance there is structural violence. Correspondingly, in a society where life expectancy is twice as high in the upper class as in the lower classes, violence is exercised even if there are not concrete actors one can point to directly attacking others, as when one person kills another” (Galtung 1969: 110-111)].

In later work Galtung refined the account of structural violence by indexing it to the differential between actual and potential to an account of basic human needs. He thus recalibrated the definition of violence as the deprivation of basic needs— “Avoidable insults to basic human needs, and more generally to life, lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible.” This account identified four basic needs categories— survival needs (the negation of which results in death), well-being needs (the negation of which results in misery and increased morbidity), freedom needs (the negation of which results in alienation), and identity needs (the negation of which result in repression and humiliation) (Galtung 1990:292).

Structural violence typically results in direct / explicit violence in 4 broad patterns. First, the structurally subjugated will resort to direct violence to challenge the structures that oppress them. Second, those who benefit from the system will use direct violence to protect their status. Third, competition for resources leads to direct violence between oppressed groups. Finally, rather than generate efforts to change the structures, it solidifies group identities and ignites scapegoating of allegedly inferior groups (Uvin 2003: 147-163).

Of course, as an analytical category, structural violence does not only address physical forms of deprivation of basic needs (say, the effects of poverty, exclusion, and diminishment of basic rights). It also illuminates violence “that works on the soul.” “A violent structure leaves marks not only on the human body but also on the mind and the spirit,” writes Galtung. Such effects of structural violence are manifest and reinforced through processes identified as *penetration*— “implanting the top dog inside the underdog.” Penetration thus refers to processes by which those who are victimized by certain forms of



direct and structural violence come to internalize that subjugation psychically/spiritually/emotionally. Penetration makes the socio- culturally generated, and perhaps (but not necessarily) legally reinforced, stigmas seem and feel inescapable and/or necessary, even—perhaps especially— for the people victimized by those stigmas. This may manifest in forms of diminished self- worth, self-abnegation, inferiority, or a general sense of being unsafe, at risk, or endangered. Along with “penetration,” Galtung further identified “segmentation” (“giving the underdog only a very partial view of what goes on”) “marginalization” (“keeping the underdogs on the outside) and “fragmentation” (“keeping the underdogs away from each other”) as modes by which structural violence manifests itself (Galtung 1990: 294).

Some argue that the structural violence lens multiplies the valences of the concept “violence” to the point of unmanageability. [Note: *While limitation of space prohibits my entering into the specifics of these objections, they occur in some of the classic debates between Galtung and Kenneth Boulding over how to conceptualize peace studies (Eide 1971; Boulding 1977). Galtung is far from the only thinker to develop the lenses of structural and cultural violence. Numerous works both apply and critically expand upon analysis through lenses of structural and cultural violence. Such examples have addressed structural causes and conditions of poverty (Scheper- Hughes 1992, Uvin 1998, Farmer 2003, Ehrenreich 2001); gender-based discrimination and subjugation (Price 2013); race, ethnicity, religious identities and institutions (Zaru 2008); the interface of religion, ethnicity, and nationalism (Omer 2013, Sells, 1998, Springs 2015a); law, criminal justice, and prison systems (Bourgois 2003, Alexander 2010), and environmental peace and justice (Nixon 2013). For a clearer sense of how these deploy and expand lenses of structural and cultural violence, see Springs 2015b.]*

It is important to keep in mind that the multifocal lenses for identifying different forms of violence intends to identify with greater analytical precision how these forms of violence inter-relate and mutually reinforce one another. The key focus is upon how different forms of violence may inter-relate symbiotically. The primary purpose is to illuminate how one form of violence (e.g. direct violence) might be reduced in ways that actually sustain, increase, or exacerbate another form of violence (e.g. structural violence) in a given context.

What advantages emerge from this multi-focal conceptualization of violence? Recasting the definition of violence illuminates the arguably more insidious operations of structural violence, namely, its normalizing functions. The power and effectiveness of structural violence consists precisely in its capacity to hold exploitative, repressive, and dehumanizing conditions in place without producing direct or deadly effects. In fact, frequently, it is in virtue of not leading to direct violence or deadly conflict that structural violence avoids drawing attention to itself. Direct or deadly forms of violence, by contrast, typically do. They attract attention from people concerned to understand and combat direct violence (or perhaps structural violence identifiably related to direct violence). Structural violence is often more difficult to discern (or easier to overlook or rationalize) precisely because it may not be identifiable as immediately deadly. As a result, direct violence may be resolved, successfully managed in ways that actually aid in maintaining, perpetuating, or even increasing structural violence.



Non-violence and structural violence

The structural violence lens facilitates critical judgments about non-violent action when “non-violent” action is understood as the refusal of “direct violence” (i.e. refusal of explicit, physically coercive or destructive, goal-oriented, and/or deadly action). Not all instances of non-violent action are equal. While non-violent efforts may decrease the sum total of deadly or physically coercive conflict (direct violence) in a given circumstance, they might also be exposed as implicated in structural violence. Appeals to direct non-violent action, then, must examine how such actions and initiatives relate to—or perhaps conceal— structural forms of violence. One purpose of a multi-focal conception of violence is to detect when and how non-violent action (however inadvertently) may serve ends of structural violence (e.g. injustice, humiliation, inequality, exclusion).

One famous instance of this emerges in the final paragraphs of Martin Luther King, Jr.’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (King 1963; Bass 2001: 120-140). There King responds to claims by a group white moderate Birmingham clergy who partially inspired his letter. They had claimed that police in Birmingham reacted to civil rights demonstrators’ disruptive uses of nonviolent direction action with marked restraint and discipline. In his letter from jail, King conceded that the Birmingham police had responded “non-violently” to the protests in many instances. And yet, he argued, their restraint and uses of non-violence were in crucial ways more insidiously violent than the direct force and deadly violence that police had used in other instances.

The fact that Birmingham police responses to protestors were, in some cases, physically more non-violent was seized upon by the white moderate clerical leadership who then portrayed those efforts as broadly commendable (**Carpenter, Durick, Grafman, Hardin, Harmon, Murray, Ramage, Stallings, 1963**). Indeed, the police responses to protestors appeared commendable to white moderate sensibilities. This was especially in contrast to the tension-exposing, disruptive, and at times quite dramatic character of the direct actions of the non-violent demonstrators there. The uses of discipline and restraint to prevent more violence by the police allegedly reduced the sum total of direct violent action in that context. And, in fact, invoking that reduction and restraint as their justification, the Birmingham clergy urged the local community members—especially African-American community members—to withdraw their support from the demonstrations that King was leading. The moderate Birmingham clergy implored their fellow citizens to, instead, work non-disruptively and cooperatively (as they put it, more genuinely “peacefully”) with leaders and law makers in the community. The clergy argued that, while actions of the demonstrators were “technically peaceful,” their disruptiveness was prone to incite hatred and violence. Above all, the clergy called for order and obedience to the laws.

The surface level concern for order and appearance of non-violence in the police action camouflaged the ways in which that non-violence served the ends of “preserv[ing] the evil system of segregation” (King, 1963). The clergy, in effect, called for incremental adjustments to a system that was structurally exclusionary and humiliating to black people. As King said of the Birmingham police, the unjust ends toward which they devoted their uses of non-violent restraint contaminated the non-violent means for which the moderate Birmingham clergy commended them. What presented itself as explicit



non-violence served unjust ends. The surface appearance of restrained tactics obscured and seemingly vindicated the police efforts to defend the racist status quo. If we transpose this into the categories I introduced above, we can say that the sum total of surface-level, direct or acute violence was reduced. However, this occurred at the expense of defending and preserving violence that suffused the socio-political-economic structures.

King described this insidious discrepancy in terms of a means-ends relationship. It was, he countered, an attempt “to use moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice” (King, 1963). This was a discrepancy that contradicted the necessary logic of non-violent action. King derived this logic from Mohandas K. Gandhi, who had insisted on the unity of means and ends in non-violent action (Gandhi, Chap. XVI). This logic reflects the principled commitment that a non-violent goal must be pursued by non-violent means, or else the end becomes subverted by those means. But the unity of means and ends meant that the converse was true as well. Attempting to achieve an objective that was violent through non-violent means would contaminate the putative non-violence of the means. Accordingly, the tactics of restraint by the Birmingham police appeared to be non-violent at the surface level. But this cloaked the fact—and was invoked by some to justify—that police restraint served to preserve and reinforce intrinsically unjust (and structurally violent) status quo conditions. One form of violence (i.e. momentary direct or explicit violence) was reduced at the expense of maintaining, reinforcing, and even camouflaging another—arguably more insidious— form of violence. The sum total of direct or personal violence in that context is reduced in order to preserve and sustain socio-legal structures which produce high inequality, exclude, and humiliate.

Nonviolence as Cultural Violence

Detecting the violence diffused in impersonal, sometimes unintended, even anonymous operations of social, political, and economic structures is crucial, but insufficient. In fact, a greater danger—the *cunning* of structural violence, as it were— is that the conditions, causes, and effects of such forms of violence come to appear, to present themselves, as “natural,” even “necessary” or “inevitable.” They become accepted within—interwoven with—average, workaday, normal perceptions. They colonize the common sense of both the people benefitting from them, and even those who are harmed by them. The effects of structural violence become justified and legitimized by conceptions of “simply the way the world is.” Thus, the great challenge presented by thinking in terms of structural violence is not merely in applying lenses that illuminate and track it in the operations of social, political, economic structures. Indeed, the greater challenge is in figuring out how to *denaturalize its* operations—to render it visible and subject to change. For these purposes, Galtung derived a further analytical lens— *cultural violence* (Springs 2015b: 157-158).

Cultural violence, Galtung defined, as “those aspects of culture, the symbolic sphere of our existence—exemplified by religion and ideology, language and art, empirical science and formal science, that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence” (Galtung 1990: 291). He continued,



“The study of cultural violence highlights the way in which the act of direct violence and the fact of structural violence are legitimized and thus rendered acceptable in society” (Springs 158). Even common language that purports to name and illuminate injustice and violence may actually obscure and mitigate the severity of what is at stake. Galtung offered an example:

Africans are captured, forced across the Atlantic to work as slaves; millions are killed in the process—in Africa, on board, in the Americas. This massive direct violence over centuries seeps down and sediments as massive structural violence, with whites as the master topdogs and blacks as the slave underdogs, producing and reproducing massive cultural violence with racist ideas everywhere. After some time, direct violence is forgotten, slavery is forgotten, and only two labels show up, pale enough for college textbooks: ‘discrimination’ for massive structural violence and ‘prejudice’ for massive cultural violence. Sanitation of language is itself cultural violence” (Galtung 1990: 295). Such an example makes evident how the cultural violence lens illuminates dynamics and forces that are subterranean to direct and even structural forms of violence.

Cultural violence may exert itself even in contexts in which human and civil rights are legally in place, and in some cases, where an account of “justice” is in force. And yet, the terms that articulate that account of justice, or which track injustice (e.g. “discrimination” and “prejudice” in the example above) become thin and one-dimensional. In some social and political contexts those terms actually remain suffused with tacit or unrecognized discriminatory perceptions, values, and meanings. When this happens, many people come to be beneficiaries and/or have the luxury of unawareness or benign neglect of the ineffectiveness, or insidiousness, of language that presents itself as brimming with ethical content.

To carry the previous example forward, for example, consider the broadly used terms “prejudice” and “discrimination” in the contemporary United States. These terms have come to denote no more than the direct, intentional, and explicitly agent-originating attitudes, thoughts, and deliberate actions. But such limited delineation of terms actually enables the undercurrents from centuries of chattel slavery, and then Jim Crow culture, to become all the more suffused at the level of structure. These manifest unreflectively. They are legitimated and perpetuated by cultural practices, processes, and social and political institutions that portray themselves in all sincerity as “not racist” (because not *intentionally* racist), and even “colour-blind.”

[Note: The vindication of structural racism in the United States may have occurred most pointedly in the U.S. Supreme Court Case, McClesky v. Kemp (1987), considered a landmark decision on the basis of which explicitly identifiable “discriminatory intent” must be established (rather than “discriminatory effect”) in order for claims of racial bias to have any legal merit. For a textbook analysis of modes of structural and cultural violence—and forms of structural racism—that pervade late twentieth and early twenty-first century U.S. society, with specific focus on the systemic racism of the U.S. criminal justice system, prison-industrial complex, “war on drugs,” and “tough on crime” legislation see Alexander 2010.]

Dynamics of humiliation cannot be isolated in socio-economic marginalization. Nor can they be limited to legalized inequality and formal exclusion of groups of people. Humiliation manifests in the form of psychological and spiritual dimensions that provide a kind of cultural mortar with which the bricks of structural and direct violence are held firmly in place. In the U.S., these tacitly sustain what are,



in effect, forms of white supremacy in many structures and cultural dimensions (West 2001: vii-x; Springs 2015b: 162). Sometimes this happens in simple linguistic forms. Again, for example, Martin King pointed out:

[Roget's Thesaurus] has 120 synonyms for blackness and at least sixty of them are offensive, as for example, blot, soot, grim, devil and foul....[of] the 134 synonyms for whiteness...all are favourable, expressed in such words as purity, cleanliness, chastity, and innocence....Maybe the English language should be reconstructed so that teachers will not be forced to teach the Negro child sixty ways to despise himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of inferiority, and the white child 134 ways to adore himself, and thereby perpetuate his false sense of superiority (King 1992: 470-471).

This point of analysis does not simply address the adverse impact (however inadvertent) of a role routinely fulfilled in the average everyday operations of the society (i.e. English teachers). It also lays bare the various shades of what peace studies categories describe in terms of processes of “penetration” by which understandings and perceptions of the “top dogs” become “implanted” inside the “underdog.” As such, they exemplify what analysts much later came to identify as effects of cultural violence exerted even through the subtleties of workaday language. These are cultural practices and understandings that make forms of structural and direct violence appear natural or necessary—to look, to even feel, right; or at least not wrong. They manifest in the forms of psychological and spiritual self-abnegation that King described as an effect of “cultural homicide” (King 1992: 171; Springs 2015b: 162).

If we apply the lens of cultural violence to the case addressed in King's “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” above, additional layers of justification of violence—and justification of injustice under the auspices of “non-violence”—come into view. As we saw above, the Birmingham clergy invoked the presumptive de-facto moral superiority of non-violent means. Specifically, they applauded the restraint exercised by the police in response to disruptively non-violent protests. Their visibility and status (e.g. cultural capital) as clerical leadership in that community amplified the *prima facie* authority of their declaration of the preference for “order” and “disciplined restraint” of the police. They contrasted those accolades with the intrusiveness and unruliness—in many cases civil disobedience and provocation—of the movement activists.

Viewed through the lens of cultural violence, the Birmingham clergy's institutional and cultural authority in that context—and its amplification of the presumptive default moral superiority of non-violent means—take on a different significance. They present instances of cultural perceptions and cultural influence which functioned, in effect, to morally legitimate the work by the Birmingham police to protect their city from violence. As such, these cultural perceptions and processes actually contributed to the maintenance and amplification of structural violence, even in so far as they may have reduced the sum total of explicit deadly or harmful force. Applying the lens of cultural violence helps illuminate the complex symbiotic co-imbrication of these layers of violence that is camouflaged under the auspices of “non-violent” means. In fact, those non-violent means serve structurally violent ends.



These theoretical lenses that emerge from peace studies find more recent, but equally instructive, practical application in the discussion of stone throwing by Palestinian youth in the Occupied Territories of Israel/Palestine by the Quaker Palestinian peacebuilder living and working in Ramallah, West Bank, Jean Zaru. Zaru explicitly brings to bear lenses of structural and cultural violence in order to expose the power asymmetries that inscribe the discourse about the nature of violence and non-violence, itself, in the Israeli/Palestinian context. She writes:

My late husband was the principal of the Friends Boys School in Ramallah during a very critical time from 1968 to 1986. In the early '80s there was a great deal of tension in the West Bank due to Israeli car bomb attacks against three of our mayors. One bomb attack injured the legs of the mayor of Ramallah. The mayor of Nablus lost both of his legs due to another bombing. The mayor of Al-Bireh was late that day. When he heard of what happened to the others, he consequently asked soldiers to check his car and garage. The Israeli Druze soldier who dismantled the third bomb unfortunately lost his eyesight. There were widespread demonstrations, and a curfew was imposed. One evening in the midst of all this tragedy, we received a phone call from an American Quaker; he was very concerned. An American teacher in the school had reported to him that some of our students had thrown stones at Israeli soldiers. He asked me, "How do we respond to our constituency? Why do students at the school use violence?" I answered him and said, "How should I respond to you as a Christian pacifist when you say nothing about the recent violence of Israelis or about the structural violence from which we are suffering on a daily basis?" And then I continued, "We need prophets of justice rather than the prophets of judgment!" It made me see how much the discourse about violence is controlled by the powerful. When our students throw stones, it is violence. When the Israel soldiers brandish weapons, it is law and order. When young Palestinians commit acts of desperate violence against the occupation, it is called terrorism. When Israelis commit acts of desperate and indefensible violence, it is called security" (Zaru 2008: 16- 17).

Zaru's comments here demonstrate, in effect, how cultural violence branches almost inevitably from, and then feeds back into, structural and direct violence. Specifically, her response lays bare how language, and de-contextualized pre- conceptions about "violence," "non-violence," "terrorism" in particular, make categorical revulsion of direct violence itself reflective of cultural violence.

Zaru's point is not to vindicate the stone throwing by Palestinian children in virtue of its disproportionate contrast to Israeli power. It is, rather, to demonstrate how the preconceptions inscribed in language in this case sanitizes a naïve dichotomy between violence and non-violence. That dichotomy then sponsors unthinking judgments that are blind to the context-specific operations of structural and cultural forms of violence. Moreover, it does so for people who are themselves deeply committed to building peace non-violently in that context. Zaru also highlights how the basic frame for understanding the situation—the basic terms of "violence" and "terrorist" and "legitimate use of force" and "law and order"—reflect the influence of the parties who wield the greatest cultural and material influence there. It



raises the questions of which party has the power to, in effect, influence the terms and categories in which the circumstances are understood and evaluated. Zaru's analysis exemplifies that what matters most is not invoking a static—if allegedly final and all encompassing—conception of non-violence. The most pressing issue, rather, is *how* one invokes justice, and the indispensability of context-sensitivity and analytical self-reflexivity in how any conception of non-violence is applied in particular cases. In short, any conception of “nonviolence”—any use of the word—must, itself, be persistently assessed and re-assessed through lenses of structural and cultural violence.

Zaru's explicit application of what she identifies as “cultural structural violence” and “religious structural violence” brings to light a tacit Manicheism veiled in the terms of a spirituality of non-violence in this instance. This spiritualizes the discourse of violence/non-violence without regard for particularity, or the mixed legacies, ambivalences, multi-valences of identity. It fails to consider the radical differentials power, institutional resources, and esteem and image that hold those in place. Zaru's comment clarifies the ways that lenses of structural and cultural violence require application to even the best efforts and circumstances of the peacebuilder, him or herself, and of course, to any who would apply those lenses.

The Difference It Makes

What are the implications of the foregoing analysis for practice and action? Above I argued that applying lenses of structural and cultural violence forces thinkers and activists to critically and self-reflexively re-conceptualize non-violent action. This might open up an array of strategies and tools not previously prevalent among activists committed to non-violent action. Consider again the effects of cultural violence in the case of the 1963 Birmingham, Alabama protests. There it served to camouflage, preserve, and even justify, the insidiousness of structural violence. Such analysis re-orientes the character and significance of non-violent action in that context. Likewise, when filtered through the lenses of structural and cultural violence, the value and significance of coercive tactics came to be inverted.

For instance, the Birmingham Police Commissioner, Bull Connor, had ordered his officers to forcefully remove civil rights protesters by beating them back with the spray from fire hoses and attacking them with police dogs. From the vantage-point of strategic non-violence, these tactics were preferable to the allegedly restrained, seemingly non-violent, methods that some Birmingham police employed, and for which the moderate Birmingham clergy publicly commended them. Connor's responses to protestors, by contrast, drew the attention—and indeed, the outrage—of bystanders near and far. Alarming scenes of police abuse of non-violent marchers in Birmingham's Kelly Ingram Park were repeatedly broadcast on national television, and internationally in Europe and Russia. These images generated broad sympathy for the civil rights protesters. Many who came to sympathize with the protestors' cause were otherwise unaware of the severity of these events and the conditions in Birmingham (and throughout the U.S.). These same broad-based sympathies turned out to be pivotal in provoking wide-spread support and even, in some cases, generating political pressure. Both were necessary for the U.S. Congress to pass landmark Civil Rights legislation the following year.



How might this example instruct contemporary activists in re-conceptualizing non-violent action? In what way does it exemplify the ways that analysis through lenses of structural and cultural violence can open onto an array of strategies and tools not previously prevalent among activists committed to non-violent action? For one, it presents a powerful example of what Gene Sharp has called “political jiu-jitsu” (Sharp 1973: 109-115). Jiu-jitsu literally means “soft art,” referring to a Japanese martial art form. The central premise of this technique is to redirect and use the force exerted by one’s opponent in opposition to him or her, rather than attempting to confront that opponent with an independent force of one’s own. Political jiu-jitsu is a technique of strategic nonviolence. It attempts to redirect the coercive force and direct violence deployed by one’s opponent to rebound in ways that undermines their own efforts. This throws the opponent “off balance” politically, “causing his repression to rebound against his position, and weakening his power” (Sharp 110). In the Birmingham example, this occurred most effectively when images were broadcast of Civil Rights protestors being attacked by police dogs and beat back by the spray of high pressure fire hoses. Such coercive force by police may have contained the protestors in that location. But it also generated powerful sympathy and support for their cause. It detracted from the legitimacy of the police efforts, and the political authorities there.

Of course, Sharp’s account of political jiu-jitsu presupposes that one’s opponent uses coercive force or violent means. What happens when that opponent is savvy enough to employ disciplined restraint and even non-violent means to enforce and sustain a structurally violent set of circumstances? As we have seen, events of this sort unfolded in the context of the Birmingham civil rights campaign of 1963. There some of the Birmingham police used tactics that functioned, in effect, as an insidious reverse of Sharp’s jiu-jitsu technique. As the Birmingham clergy pointed out in their open letter to the community, police deployed forms of crowd control that were not explicitly violent. Moreover, the effectiveness of the police discipline and restraint were amplified by the calls for cooperation—and denunciation of outside intervention (i.e. Martin King and his fellow activists)—by the white, moderate clergy. This added a layer of cultural violence, as the clergy deployed their own cultural capital, influence, and moral standing in support of the police, and against people they considered to be outside agitators. They advocated for the moral high ground exemplified, they claimed, by the more non-violent tactics of the police.

Indeed, it was the insidious concealing effect of this dynamic that King challenged when he questioned both the “non-violent” restraint of the police and the moderate clergy support for the police in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” Both of these groups (moderate clergy and non-violent police) presumed a moral high ground in contrast to the disruptive intrusiveness of the civil rights protesters. Many of those protestors, like King himself, were jailed for their refusal to obey unjust laws. In effect, King exposed the appearance of non-violence (i.e. momentary reduction of direct violent action by police) as actually serving pervasive injustice, and more importantly, complicit in deeper forms of structural violence.

As I argued above, when viewed through the lens of cultural violence, intervention by the clergy presented an instance of moral and cultural justification of structural violence. These dynamics of cultural



violence required newly strategic modes of practice. The Birmingham civil rights activists could not simply let the moderate Birmingham clergy claim the moral high ground as justification for status quo conditions. The movement organizers had to reconceive their interventionist tactics in ways that would expose this as cultural violence, and work to change it.

Just as the moderate clergy who took aim at Martin King and SCLC intrusion in Birmingham were white people, so were most of their congregations. Those churches may not have had formal rules banning African American Christians from participating in their worship services. However, the customary practice of those churches was to keep the church services segregated. Black people could attend worship services at black churches. If the segregationist practices of these Christian congregations were exposed, the moral standing of the ministers that supported the police efforts, and who undermined the civil rights protestors, could be disputed. This is precisely what the Southern Christian Leadership Conference activists set out to do.

During Easter week of 1963, the SCLC activists sent small groups—sometimes integrated groups of white and black Christians—to attempt to enter and worship in several of the Christian congregations in Birmingham. They were frequently denied admittance by ushers, lay people, and many of the church pastors as well. Where they were admitted, many white congregants immediately left in protest. The civil rights activists presented formal letters, explaining their motives—namely, to seek reconciliation together with their “separated brothers and sisters” (Bass: 77). If denied admission, the activists knelt in prayer on the steps of the respective church. Some disruptively knocked on the closed front door, asking for admittance to worship while the service was in session. The results were broadly publicized in the media. These actions came to be known as “church testing,” “kneel-ins” or “pray ins” (Marsh: 129, Bass: Chap. 4)

Translated into the language of the categories in this article, these actions aimed to expose the hypocrisy and mendacity of ministerial officials, Christian lay people, and congregations who publicly called for calm and cooperation with the legal authorities, who commended police restraint, who denounced outsider intervention by civil rights protestors, and implored local black people to refuse to cooperate with them. These clergies placed the cultural capital and visibility of their ministerial offices in support of efforts to defend and sustain unjust laws and structural forms of violence. Their claims of moral high ground for the non-violent Birmingham police tactics—and their advocacy for incremental reforms of Jim Crow segregationist laws and informal practices—were forms of cultural violence. In kneel-ins and church testing, civil rights protestors confronted them and their congregants publically and non-violently. These interventions brought latent conflict and hypocrisy to the surface. In effect, it challenged the religious cultural capital the ministers deployed by illuminating these figures and groups as something other than the morally up-standing people committed to reconciliation and Christian love, and brother- and sister-hood with fellow- Christians, that they claimed to be.

At the same time, in some cases, the church-testing precipitated opportunities for reconciliation. Some the ministers of tested churches conceded. This was the case of Pastor Earl Stallings, one of the signatories to the open letter that prompted King’s “Letter from a Birmingham Jail.” On Easter Sunday



of 1963 Stallings admitted and later welcomed a small cadre of black Christians seeking to worship alongside their white brothers and sisters at the First Baptist Church of Birmingham. Although some seventy white congregants immediately left in protest, Stallings did not protest. In fact, his picture later appeared in the newspaper shaking the hand of SCLC member, Andrew Young, at the conclusion of the service, and welcoming the black protestors into the church (Bass: 75-77).

Arguably, even this result can be described as an instance of strategic non-violent jiu- jitsu. It served to reinforce the efforts of the civil rights protestors in Birmingham. They confronted one of the ministers who most visibly renounced them as outside agitators that were likely to incite violence and hate through tactics that were only “technically peaceful.” He was now pictured—for the entire city to see—welcoming those very protestors into his church to worship together. Moreover, the congregation itself, officially not segregationist (as it embraced no *formal* segregationist policies) was exposed as harbouring large numbers of deeply segregationist members. On one hand, they claimed to espouse the reconciling love of Jesus. At the same time, they refused to worship with their Fellow-Christians who were black.

Martin King commended Reverend Stallings by name in his letter for welcoming Blacks to his church in a non-segregated way. The result of this church-testing was a micro- instance of precisely the integrationist objectives that the civil rights protestors sought for the entire City of Birmingham, and across the United States. With the non- violent tactic of “church testing,” the SCLC activists confronted cultural violence. Their interventions caused the force of that violence to rebound in ways that undermined the authority of ministers who supported, and lent legitimacy to, the structurally violent status quo. In some cases, through a kind of “cultural jiu-jitsu” (i.e. addressing forms of cultural violence) they transformed that cultural violence by re-channelling its force into the service of their own objectives, and even thereby prompting moments of reconciliation with their opponents (as in the case of Rev. Stallings).

Conclusion

As the examples of King and Zaru make clear, rigorous inclusion of the lenses of structural and cultural violence is imperative for those who work in non-violence. This challenges preconceptions that non-violence provides a set of commitments and actions that are, by default or by definition, un-implicated in forms of violence sponsor un-critical judgments which are blind to the context-specific operations of structural and cultural violence. Moreover, these lenses open possibilities for an array of novel applications by which to challenge and redirect the force of structural and cultural forms of violence.



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