

Chapter Seven

Power as Subordination and Resistance as Disobedience: Nonviolent Movements and the Management of Power*

Stellan Vinthagen

On 22nd November 1999, solidarity activists made their way into the military training camp of Fort Benning in the USA. They entered in memory of the murder of six Jesuit priests, their housekeeper and her daughter, who, on this day ten years earlier, were killed by the military of El Salvador. For the occasion the activists dressed in mourning and entered the camp carrying coffins and crosses. Names of people who had been killed or tortured by regimes in Latin America – were written on the crosses. Some of the activists wore white death-masks; others painted their faces blood-red. Amongst the activists were Hollywood star Martin Sheen, Catholic priest Daniel Berrigan, and a civil rights activist from Guatemala, Adiana Portillo-Bartow. During one weekend, 12 000 people of varying backgrounds and nationalities gathered to take part in a protest meeting against the US army's School of the Americas at Fort Benning. 4 408 of these people took the final step onto the grounds of the military training camp where officers from Latin America are educated in warfare and interrogation techniques. The purpose of the action was to shut down the facility by occupying it. By a persistent and peaceful presence, they hoped to disturb the business-as-usual of the camp.

Soon the police arrested them. Through discussions and training, they had prepared themselves mentally for arrest. Each solidarity activist risked several months' imprisonment. Some were taken away singing. Some quarrelled with the police about obedience to a system that violates human rights. In accordance with the guidelines of the action, activists did not

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use any violence against people when defending their occupation. Some sat down, others prayed, or held one another's arms. They did not run away. They stood their ground, facing the strongest empire in world history – the USA – with their undefended bodies. The action was public, advertised in advance to the authorities, and those arrested took complete personal responsibility for the “offence” they committed. The following year another 3 000 activists were again arrested. It still goes on. This is one example of a special kind of resistance action, called *nonviolent action* (sometimes also called e.g. nonviolent direct action, civil disobedience or civil resistance).

A nonviolent movement is here understood to be a movement where people in their action repertoire let their nonviolent means express their (nonviolent) goals. In a nonviolent movement activists contest “violence” or “oppression/injustice”, while they themselves avoid using such means (Vinthagen 2005). Nonviolent movements relate to a tradition formulated by Mohandas K. Gandhi, the person who created the concept of “nonviolent resistance” or “satyagraha” (Gandhi 1999:Vol. 8:31, 80). My interest lies in political nonviolent movements which make claims to contest a dominant or hegemonic power, and act within a society where organised violence and oppression is legitimised, normalised or *de facto* accepted by a vast population. In the anti-colonial liberation movement in India, nonviolent resistance was given both a practical and a theoretical content within a certain context and dynamic relations, which furthered a development and diffusion of the nonviolent repertoire (Chabot 2003).

Social movements using nonviolence in their efforts to obtain changes in society are not a rare phenomenon in the world. Such movements sometimes made progress even against brutal regimes (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994; Zunes 1999:302-322; Sharp 2004). Movements that have followed and developed the Gandhian repertoire, are, for example,

- ◆ the civil rights movement in the USA;
- ◆ the international anti-apartheid movement;
- ◆ the “tree-huggers” in the Indian Chipko movement;
- ◆ the movement against nuclear weapons in Great Britain during the 1960s and the peace camps near nuclear weapon bases in western Europe during the 1980s, among them the famous Greenham Common women's peace camp in England; and
- ◆ the ongoing struggle by hundreds of thousands of farm workers in Brazil, who are occupying land.

To peace research, nonviolent movements are of interest since they undermine wars, injustice, and dictatorships by employing peaceful means. The condition of *peace by peaceful*

means is the core of peace research. Nonviolent movements point to a possibility of peaceful social change even under difficult conditions. Since *power* is one of the main difficulties determining the success and failure of a nonviolent action, this investigation focuses on the *fundamental possibilities* available to nonviolent resistance in managing power in conflicts.

Other research needs to investigate the specific dynamics, meanings and typologies of power emanating from concrete contexts and interactions of nonviolent movements, in internal and external relations, during and after the social changes for which these movements strive (Vinthagen & Chabot 2002). Expressions of power may depend on what kind of conflict, resistance or relationship one is investigating. Here the discussion will only deal with power and resistance in general.

Resistance to power

In order to clarify the logic of my analysis I will summarise the main argument. Since the aim is to discuss the possibility for nonviolent resistance to affect the foundations of power, evaluating theories on *what resistance to power means* will be central.

Ever since Gandhi and the liberation movement in India, nonviolent resistance builds on an innovative consent theory of power. Here, as we will see, “power” is understood to be “*chosen subordination*” by subjects who are seen to be “dominated”, thus opening up possibilities of resistance by disobedience. Neither the force of “coercion” nor that of “violence” is seen as power in itself; they are only methods, which may sometimes facilitate power, and sometimes resistance.

Existing research on nonviolent movements focuses on centralised state power and does not consider the (less obvious) power that moulds, disciplines and constitutes perception and behaviour (cf. Ackerman & Kruegler 1994; Randle 1994; Sharp 1973; 2004; Zunes 1999).¹ In this investigation I use Foucault’s power theory, which contradict the simplified analyses of nonviolent “consent theory”, in order to reconstruct the nonviolent theory of power, and in the process I attempt to reinterpret Foucault. The power-producing rules of both behavioural schemata (techniques) and patterns of speech-acts (discourse) do need to be actively and constantly *applied* in order to dominate, even when the applications themselves are moulded by power. Rule-application involves the *de facto* cooperation of the actor, irrespective of a

free will or knowledge. An actor, per definition, is acting and *making* a choice – and a “rule” is not an actor. Even if power is everywhere, it is not everything. Power is not total.

Accordingly, my conclusion is that power is *participatory subordination*, and resistance is not, as is often assumed, simply another form of power fighting domination (“counter-power”), but *the undermining of subordination*, or “anti-power” (Holloway 2002). Resistance is concerned with breaking up the power relations where humans are made into “tools” for external interests or servants in oppressive hierarchies. Nonviolent movements’ use of disobedience and non-cooperation thus attacks the very foundations of power.

Let us now take the argument step by step. I shall start by clarifying what “power as consent” means and in next section initiate a necessary theoretical development with the help of Foucault, arguable still the most influential power researcher in social science.

Power as consent

“If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be”.

Max Weber (Sharp 1980:212)

Concepts like “coercion” and “dominance” imply the existence of a force from “above” in a hierarchy and are usually understood as “power” (cf Waters 1994). Sometimes violence or war are also seen as power. The nonviolent tradition, however, does not treat coercion, dominance, or violence as characteristics of the social phenomenon “power”. Nonviolent activists, as I will argue, handle power as cooperative *subordination* (“obedience”). Power does not primarily emanate from above, on the contrary it originates from below, through subordinate behaviour. Power “over” someone does not exist; it is a produced illusion resulting from normalised subordination. Basically subordination is seen as (*de facto*) accepted by the subordinates, even when it is involuntarily accepted in the shape of obedience, since all obedience (like all human acts) implies choice (Sharp 1973:7-62). “Therefore, *all government is based upon consent*” (Sharp 1973:28). “Power as consent” seems to be a common perception of different nonviolent movements, at least implicitly (Sharp 1973:6; Zunes 1999:2; Ackerman and Kruegler 1994). Power relations are created,

¹ Martin 1984 and 1989 are in their approach on general power supportive institutions generally exceptions, but without using Foucault.

according to the nonviolent movement, by subordination; expressed as obedience and by voluntary or involuntary cooperation.

The work of US political scientist Gene Sharp (e.g. 1973; 1979; 1980) is classic, in both nonviolent research and activism, and his latest work (2004) – *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential* – probably will be. Sharp, “the foremost writer in the world today on the subject of non-violent action”, essentially claims that “people in society may be divided into rulers and subjects; the power of rulers derives from consent by the subjects; non-violent action is a process of withdrawing consent” (Martin 1989:213). Sharp gives historical examples and shows the effective use of hundreds of action forms, and defines *social power* as the ability to control the behaviour of others, directly or indirectly, by handling groups of people, whose actions affect other groups of people (Sharp 1973:7-8). This is expressed in the strategic struggle between actors of different “loci of power”. Political power is social power relating to political questions. Political power is about the authority and influence leaders can use to enforce their will upon others, and, on the other hand, the means people use to influence persons in positions of power. What is unique in Sharp’s contribution lies in his development of theories from Hanna Arendt and Gandhi. Gandhi stresses the force of disobedience in power relations (Gandhi 1970), and Arendt claims that “The extreme form of power is All against One, the extreme form of violence is One against All” (Arendt 1972:141). As Arendt sees it, power is built upon some form of organised cooperation between people, while violence is basically an act by the individual. Sharp argues that violence is not only an expression of irrational wrath, but also as a working method to attain certain political goals (Sharp 1980:158). Violence, not power, is the moral problem and is what could and should be abolished (Sharp 1980:190). Sharp agrees with Arendt’s reasoning on power as a creative human ability to act collectively in consent, but emphasises nonviolent sanction-techniques as alternatives to violence in the transformation of power/cooperation (Sharp 1980:23-24). To Sharp, in agreement with Gandhi, the counter-power of resistance becomes a form of *non-cooperation* with power systems.

Sharp’s starting point, when referring to the dominant understanding of power at that time, is a criticism of what he calls the established “*Monolith theory*”. This amounts to people being dependent on government, and assumes that political power is massive and uniform, that power really can emanate from leaders and that power is an entity (Sharp 1973:7-10). This is an over-simplified theory of power or a popular perspective which nevertheless can describe reality correctly if, and only if, both the opposition and the general public within an existing power structure are made to believe in it and therefore act *as if* it were true (Sharp 1973:9).

The normalised monolith perspective has created the absurd phenomenon of a whole country with millions of inhabitants considering itself “occupied” simply because its house of parliament has been taken over and the government is incapacitated. Furthermore, the monolith theory is the basis of a belief in political violence, especially in military struggle and war. By physically capturing “the place” of power, one gains power, as if it were a thing or position that generates power from within itself.

On the contrary, resistance, in the form of nonviolent actions, assumes that governments are dependent on people; that power is manifold and vulnerable, because the control of power sources depends on many groups (Sharp 1980:23-24). Nonviolent resistance is built upon the idea that *political power is easiest controlled at its origin* (Sharp 1973:10). The ruler’s power “depend *intimately* upon the obedience and cooperation by the subjects” (Sharp 1973:12). It is from the (re)production of the economy, social institutions, ideology and population that the power of the leaders derives its nourishment. That nourishment comes from the subordinated inhabitants, who may choose to disobey. “Obedience is at the heart of political power” (Sharp 1973:16).

Sharp differentiates the social roots of power as authority, human resources, knowledge and ability, psychological and ideological factors, material resources and sanctions (Sharp 1973:11-12). The strength of power is completely dependent upon how much of these various resources the power-holder can access, which ultimately depends on the degree of cooperation from the subordinates. The main point is that all sources of power lie *outside* the formal executor of power (a leader or government). Using his charismatic personality, a skilful leader plays on the feelings and traditions of the subordinates, but this does not change the fact that the sources of power lie outside him.² Charisma is especially important because a power-holder gains access to power through the enthusiasm of his people. The only judges who decide on what behaviour counts as “charisma” are the people themselves.

The power-holder himself does not create power, instead it is *given* to him by others in their daily cooperation and support.³ It is actually in the power-holder’s dependency that the

² In this text I call the leader “he” and the subordinated “she”, as men have traditionally been the power-leaders over subjugated “others”: women, slaves, children etc.

³ This suggests that the more extensive and detailed the power of a leader and his control is, the more dependent he is upon the cooperation of the subordinates. Accordingly, a late-modern, complexly organised and highly technological society is in some aspects more dependent on cooperation and obedience from different groups to continue to function. Power relations may be more diffuse and mobile, i.e. where power resources are replaced if necessary and where networks of linked power relations are difficult to detect. At the same time, this should mean that resistance in key nodes of a power system involves more possibilities for obstruction than ever before in history. Today a single individual may seriously affect the computerised world economy by unleashing a virus that disturbs the communicative IT-network on which global cooperation is built.

necessary act of choice by the subordinate, the leader's weakness and the possibilities of resistance are manifested.

The cooperation that generates power consists of active support, passive acceptance, or unwilling obedience to demands or rules from the power-holder. He depends directly on cooperation from a significant section of the citizens to maintain the economic and administrative system and its supportive sanctions system in practice. Yet, he is clearly dependent on the vast majority actually paying their taxes and following the rules of the society and not putting up collective resistance. When only 0.01% of the Indian population ended up in prison it became a political and practical problem for the British colonial system. 60 000 people in jail and scandals of brutal violence, forced the Empire to make concessions and engage in negotiations.

While power's dependency on its subordinates might be fundamental Sharp pays no attention to the fact that there are groups that the power can do without, groups that are excluded and still subordinated (Burrowes 1996:11-12). At the same time, one group of leaders may be in alliance with other power systems, thus compensating for a lack of internal power with external support, e.g. an international finance agreement. But this kind of critique does not overthrow the theory as such. It only indicates that the nonviolent struggle must influence or be organised within the very groups that power *de facto* is depending upon (Burrowes 1996:96). Therefore, a strategic struggle needs to be based on a relevant analysis of the targeted power.

Sharp argues that power systems are built upon hierarchies, chains of *obedience* where the leaders stand or fall by the level of *cooperation* within the power pyramid. According to Sharp, people are obedient for many reasons, for example habit, fear of punishment, sense of duty, secondary advantages, psychological identification with the leading group, acceptance or lack of confidence and resources. For the purpose of this analysis, it is enough to accept that in *de facto* behaviour people do subordinate themselves, whatever the reasons.

Sharp claims that even unwilling obedience is a choice (Sharp 1973:25-30). Obedience is not automatic since there is always a choice; resistance is an option. Sharp considers the subordinate's *obedience a kind of voluntary cooperation*, even when violence is used as a threat. This gives resistance new and unthought-of possibilities of changing power relations, possibilities Sharp regards as his task to investigate.

Violence is a central part of the punishment for rule-breakers, and it is assumed it will make people obedient even when they do not want to be obedient. Key groups such as the police and military support political and financial elites by the threat of organised violence.

Since one cannot force anyone to do something unless they fear the punishment (Sharp 1973:28), it suggests that the key to successful resistance lies in finding ways of changing the relationship to punishment or other harmful consequences of disobedience. Accordingly, Gandhi stressed fearlessness and voluntary acceptance of suffering as central for nonviolent resistance. How this ability is fostered then becomes the difficult problem to solve. To Gandhi it is through spiritual purification, to Sharp through informed and disciplined strategy, to feminist nonviolent activists' through the empowerment of communities of support ("affinity groups") (Vinthagen 2005).

From Sharp's consent theory of power, we can anticipate that possibilities of resistance to power are created by the organised and strategic use of different techniques of disobedience. Sharp maps a way for nonviolent resistance and indicates a number of basic techniques and dynamics based on historical research. Many examples of how nonviolent resistance can be expressed in different societies and situations are given (Sharp 1973:Part II). Since power depends on cooperation, resistance become possible as non-cooperation, and the disobedience of nonviolent action becomes a means for change in society. Organised nonviolent resistance in the form of disobedience can be powerful by being a way of action which challenges the very foundations of power, that is, if this concept of power is correct.

Using Sharp's theory one can actually maintain – in an analytical sense – that the citizens or the people in a society have the power in their own hands. It may be true and still be impossible in real life. Whether the citizens are aware and able to change the relations of power, is a completely different question. The capacity of resistance depends, according to Sharp, on knowledge and strategic understanding. I maintain, however, that the citizens' capacity for resistance in a profound sense depends on whether or not power has the ability to shape people. If power is able to shape our ways of thinking, behaving, and acting, resistance becomes much harder. Then power is incorporated within us as individuals and in our culture. Then even thinking and speaking of resistance may be marked by features of power. The problem is that Sharp simplifies the ability of power to influence the conditions of resistance.

To Sharp, nonviolence is something you will consciously choose in order to correct an unjust situation, once you have learned the techniques of nonviolence and realised the force of organised and strategic resistance. It is all a matter of cognitive knowledge and strategic thinking in applying the effective techniques of nonviolent struggle. His view of both power and resistance is pragmatic and technical. To be sure, Sharp's perspective is fruitful and he develops our understanding of nonviolence beyond earlier mostly religious, ethical and personality-based interpretations (Vinthagen 2005:Chapter 2), but at the same time it is rather

one-dimensional (Holm 1978; McGuinness 1994; Burrowes 1996:83-96), becoming a kind of anti-thesis of idealism and spiritual pacifism. With a simplified concept of power, comes a simplified concept of resistance.

Sharp is presented as the foremost interpreter of this concept of power as it is understood today, even by critics. In my view, though, a nonviolent movement expresses a more nuanced understanding of power, and thus adopts a more realistic application of resistance (Vinthagen 2005). Sharp's theory is a reaction to the simplified theories of that time (e.g. classic realism), and is but one step in a direction that was independently developed in a much more sophisticated way by others (e.g. Lukes 1974; Foucault 1974). Such power theories are not incorporated within the later Sharpian "technique approach" (cf. Ackerman and Kruegler 1994; McCarthy & Sharp 1997; Sharp 2004), nor by researchers slightly critical of the approach (Burrowes 1996; Martin 1989:note 3).

Although Sharp's reasoning assumes the existence of a conscious and free will, not formed by power (Sharp 1973:25-32), I assert that the autonomous mind is not necessary for the survival of the basic theory. The power theory is ultimately built upon *the fact* that subordination is created or changing, not on how this is done (Sharp 1980:98, 212, 341). Even if power does form people's consciousness and actions, I claim that the perspective remains sensible: power arises from the *participation* of the subordinate. In fact, Sharp does ask for research about how the will of a person is formed by institutions and how it could be liberated (Sharp 1980:20), indicating the need to incorporate such an understanding into the consent theory.

Power as productive discipline

In a sense, Sharp and Foucault complement each other. Using the metaphor of "war" both investigate strategies and techniques to describe political struggles. A slight difference is that Sharp emphasises resistance, and Foucault power. Still, the theoretical differences are considerable. It is true that they are unanimous in their opinion that power is unstable, changeable, and spreading, but Sharp perceives power as a zero-sum-game (McGuinness 1994). There is a certain amount given to share and fight over. When one group gains power, another group loses power. Foucault, on the other hand, thinks power can increase without diminishing somewhere else. Sharp's concept of power is characterised by the Anglo-Saxon

philosophy of the subject, where individuals with a free will try to govern others against their will. Coming from a European continental tradition, Foucault is more interested in how different techniques of power form our consciousness and actions. Power is not only *prohibiting* – using laws that you may annul through substantial disobedience – but is also *producing* society and is partly *incorporated* in people's minds, language, and behaviour. Foucault understands power as unstable and dynamic, yet constantly reproduced.

Different behaviour-forming techniques and discourses reconstruct social life irrespective of what the participants want or do not want. Power is “not built up out of ‘wills’ (individual or collective), nor...derivable from interests” (Foucault 1980:180), “neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised ... in action” (1980:89) within “an unequal and relatively stable relation of forces” (1980:200). Power is about how actions, independently of the actor's intentions, can actually structure the space of other actions (Beronius 1986:25). According to Foucault, power is a productive act of dominance. The acting individual does not control the activity, rather it is the activity that controls the individual and forms her personality. A set of techniques dominates those who exercise these techniques, irrespective of whether they are “leaders” or “subordinates”. The individual does not exercise power, the power expresses itself *through* the individual (Foucault 1974:36-37).

Foucault actually maintains the opposite to Sharp. The nonviolent activist cannot be outside power, make a decision to resist and then act against the power. Resistance exists as a possibility to be sure, but the fibre threads of power have infiltrated the thinking, language, methods, and culture of the nonviolent activist. To Sharp, the struggle for power goes on between participants, while, to Foucault, it creates the participants. Since the standpoints do not seem to be mutually exclusive, the question is whether this necessarily leads to the eradication of the nonviolent understanding of power as subordination.

Here it is important that we do not get power and the techniques of power mixed up. With Foucault, power has a tendency to appear as a virtual force without individuals or actors (Foucault 1980:117). This is probably not a correct understanding of Foucault, but some of his followers tend to abolish the actor and her choice (Cheater 1999:Chapter 1), making the jagged intentions and consciousness of people solidify into pure power. This creates a risk of mythologizing power as being *self-acting* techniques and discursive structures. Power techniques (of behaviour) or discourses (of speaking) have to be applied and therefore also followed by people, otherwise they will not be effective in creating power. Techniques and discourses are social performances, not performing objects. When we subdue our behaviour to fit a routine or scheme of techniques, we become part of the power shaping. If this happens to

be what we want to do, or we do it without thinking, is of no importance (for power production). Power will be at work anyway, as our acting does form subordination.

Foucault has wrongly been criticised for reducing everything to power (Foucault 1994:133). But knowledge, truth, discourse or resistance are not the same as power. If they were, there would be no need to talk about how power forms these other phenomena. Despite everything, there are, according to Foucault, “no relations of power without resistance ... [and it] exists all the more by being in the same place as the power” (1980:142). After all, spaces free from power always exist somewhere. The choice, will, desire, decision or personality of the actor are not completely determined by power. If they were, people would not act, they and their behaviour would simply be “power effects”. Foucault speaks of “plebs”, “a feature in the social body, in classes, groups and individuals themselves which in some sense escapes relations of power” (Foucault 1980:137-138). It is not a social entity but a plebeian *quality or aspect* of different entities. This plebeian quality evades power by existing on its borders or under it; and interestingly enough by disengagement, by *not* resisting. When unmanageable resistance is stabilised after some time, the risk of power creeping into and configuring the resistance arises. Then resistance may become normalised, disciplined, and shaped by power. I maintain that this plebeian quality of evasion from power opens up possibilities of resistance which involve not just counter-power, but Foucault does not help us to understand the resistance that confronts power. Even though Foucault claims that resistance is where power is, plebeian avoidance or resistance is not explored, since power itself is what interests Foucault. While no person or group as a whole can exist outside power relations, they cannot either exist totally within power.

Power as subordination

The scientific discourse on power is preoccupied by the argumentation on different *aspects* of power, often with exclusive theories naming one or other form of power as the only ultimate one (Vinthagen 1998; 2001). This leads to a conceptual inflation, which makes it difficult to identify what is *characteristic* of the power phenomenon or anything that is not power. Some authors, like Foucault, are completely focused on *how* power works, what techniques are used and how powers manifest themselves in different ways. In fact, Foucault consciously avoids the question of what the common factor of “power” is (Foucault 1994:128-129). An

understanding of what constitutes power cannot be based upon certain individual expressions of power. From Sharp, we have seen that, within the nonviolent tradition, power is coupled to cooperation or obedience. Foucault uses the term “subjugation” which implies someone who has been defeated by overwhelming force, or even “manufactured” (Foucault 2003:45). My central concept continues to be “subordination” implying participation by the subordinate: “As doers separated from our own doing [through power], we re-create our own subordination. As workers we produce the capital that subordinate us. As university teachers, we play an active part in the identification of society, in the transformation of doing into being” (Holloway 2002). The social phenomenon of “power” is characterised by *one actor who subordinates herself, partly or entirely, by relinquishing the practical responsibility or intention of her own behaviour* (Vinthagen 2005). The actor behaves like a “non-actor”, as an instrument to be used. The crucial point is that a transfer of the control of behaviour does happen through the actor relinquishing control, whether it is wished for or not, done consciously or not. What matters is the existence of obedience or, rather, the active and participatory transfer of responsibility, which produces subordination, *the de facto behaviour*, no matter what motive, reason, or cause underlies the act of subordination.

Subordination is essentially an activity that is expressed in relationships and interactions. It does not have to be a person to whom the actor is subordinate. That which we obey is that which we let rule our activity. It can be a person, a group, or an imagined nation, but equally it may be an idea, a principle, a place, a machine, an ideology, a tradition, a god, or a part of nature. The person who gives up her control over her actions does not have to feel forced to do so and may not even be aware of the power that is given away. Subordination may, for example, take the form of an obvious yet unquestioned way of structuring our lives according to the “laws” of a watch chained to the wrist. Or subordination may mean a subconscious obedience to a dead yet internalised and “active” father.

Subordination may even be like sticky glue, something that stays the more you try to rub it out, refusing to go away, similar to the situation of poor Brian in the Monty Python movie *Life of Brian*. Brian, who is mistakenly believed to be the Messiah, succeeds in fleeing from his fans through the labyrinthine streets of Jerusalem. He wakes up the next morning in his house, opens the window shutters and is startled by the sight of hundreds of his devotees patiently sitting outside waiting for their Saviour. They greet him with a solemn “God

Morning Master!” Frustrated he shouts: “I am not the Messiah! Stop following me. You have to think for yourselves!” With one voice they all answer: “Yes Master, teach us more!”⁴

In this way, power becomes a very special form of relationship, a subject’s inferior positioning in relation to socialised objects, or a social interaction in which someone repeatedly subordinates herself, thus giving someone else power to master the subordinated one. This signifies that power is only a possibility; it is something we can do, or stop doing. Subordination is not a state. To subordinate your self is an action. It also indicates that power is reproduced through repeated subordination. Power may be produced every day as a routine, reluctant and slow, or with growing intensity and willingness. It can always change. The power-holder is a power-holder only for as long as subordinated people keep reproducing the power. The more people refuse, the less power a leader is given. If the very groups who give a leader access to the sources of power refuse to obey, the leader loses his power. The better a group can withstand the sanctions of a leader and reject his temptations, the less power he has over the group. The very existence of incitements – “the carrot and the stick” – implies that power is dependent on a certain cooperation from those who are subjugated.

It is a fact that there are almost always people who, despite everything, choose to resist by not subordinating themselves. The dependence of power is brought out by the fact that dictatorships react with massive sanctions and retaliation upon even small numbers of people who resist them. Still, it is a common belief that non-cooperation only works within a liberal democracy. Perhaps the power-holders are more aware of their vulnerability and dependence on massive cooperation from the inhabitants who provide the power with strength, than are their subordinates?

But when oppressed people realise this and are given the means to break off their cooperation, the men in power do not sit tight any more. In a society of minority rule, this is more visible. As early as 1920 Gandhi claimed that India would be able to liberate itself as soon as its people realised the injustice and fragility of the colonisation of a vast country by a few thousand colonisers (Sharp 1979:44-46, 54). The British Empire would not be able to build all the prisons required to keep in order millions of Indians on the day they decided to disobey the regime and follow their own “laws”, i.e. decisions made by the parallel government, the All-India Congress, constituted by the Indian liberation movement. Furthermore, the Empire would not profit from keeping its colony if the administration and economy collapsed. After a few decades, Gandhi’s revolutionary ideas were victorious. India

⁴ The quotes are not literal, only grasping the message of this scene in *Life of Brian*.

became independent through a struggle in the form of massive non-cooperation and civil disobedience, despite repeated massacres, brutality, mass-imprisonment, and torture.

At the other end of the spectrum – where power is normalised and accepted, not seen as colonial occupation or oppression, but as natural or even a holy blessing – subordination is less visible. As power seems to be able to exist even when the actors act mainly in their own interests, consciously and of their own free will – the importance of power can be difficult to display. Power is simply at hand if you can establish that the actor abandons her individual and practical responsibility for her actions. It is harder, though, to establish the significance of a certain power relationship, since this depends on whose interest we emphasise and the importance given to it. A typical example of renouncement of responsibility is the worker who acts through her union to improve her working conditions, but lets the professional union leaders decide what should be improved. Or the citizen, who obeys the laws of a society, even when some laws are seen as unjust, in order to be able to lead a quiet life.

Power as “relinquishing of responsibility” concerns practical responsibility, the initiative, decision, and control of our own activity. Ethical responsibility is something different. It would be naive to claim that the participant should blame herself when things start going bad. Personal blame should rather refer to the person who profits from the relationship, not to the one being exploited. That the subordinated actually do participate signifies that there is hope of resistance against power abuse. Any ethical judgement must consider how subordination is created – usually by a combination of threats and temptations, but mainly through a lifelong moulding process – and what is reasonable for a human being to accomplish in a certain situation or position. Such an ethical judgement is beyond this investigation. What does concern us here is to gain an understanding of systems of subordination and the potential of resistance.

Resistance as fighting subordination

If we understand power as subordination, resistance becomes the attempt to hinder or break relations where humans are made into tools for others or servants in a hierarchy. Thus, *resistance means a hindrance of subordination*. Resistance might be directed towards the structure, process, relations or techniques of subordination.

Foucault has shown that power might form several different global and local strategies (Foucault 1980:142). Similarly, the hindrance of subordination is formed dependent on what specific power being fought and in what situation.

On an utopian level nonviolent movements is about *dissolving* all subordination, creating space for a social order that all involved in free agreement have agreed on. But in reality nonviolent resistance is about hindering the present and serious subordination that certain activists consider wrong.

Hindrance of subordination might happen in diverse ways. Since subordination does not arise through effective coercion, but through the subservient's own subordination, violence seems not necessary or even central for resistance. Still, violence might compensate a weak mobilisation of people. Through an armed resistance movement the violence apparatus of the state might be destroyed and thus the threat of violence which supports state power. To avoid confusion it is important that we make an analytical difference between the *goal* to make resistance to power and the *tool* violence, which clearly might be used to make resistance, but which is only one of several possible tools. Gandhian nonviolence then is another possibility. For Gandhi nonviolence is a struggle against both violence and power, in an attempt to reach both reconciliation and truth (Gandhi 1999).

Thus, resistance does not demand the use of violence. But if power is supported by the threat of violence it seems on the other hand to be necessary for the success of a resistance movement that the struggle continues despite opposing parties or power holders' threat of, or use of violence. Otherwise nonviolent resistance would have to be cancelled every time activists were threatened with violence.

A number of resistance types are possible to distinguish (Vinhagen 2005).⁵ Resistance might involve *communicative* attempts of convincing by e.g. appeals, witness, reinterpretations, information, good arguments, symbolic counteracts or the undermining of emotional impediments. Oppositional parties, those who subordinate themselves or temporary non-engaged groups might be persuaded to change their understanding and behaviour through

⁵ The literature gives different proposals of categorisations of nonviolent techniques (Bondurant 1988; Naess 1974; Sharp 1973). These lists are all very different in structure and purpose. Naess is constructing a norm system with a logic hierarchy of proposals which taken together tries to capture the gandhian nonviolent philosophy and practical guidelines of nonviolent struggle. Sharp distinguishes 198 different methods from a rich historical case material of more or less peaceful actions where the manifest behaviour of participants is divided into three broad categories: protest, non-cooperation and interventions. Galtung propose yet another type of categorisation, one differentiating nonviolent techniques of (positive and negative) influence, structuring of action space, physical dimension, sanctions, amplification and roleplaying (Galtung 1965:251). There are also in books on training and education in nonviolent action other proposals of categorisations of nonviolent methods. There is a need for a systematic comparison between different types of categorisations.

dialogues or negotiations. As resistance communication is a matter of arguing against and deconstruct the propaganda and ideology of power, to break the rules of hegemonic discourse.

But in power loaded conflicts it is not likely that dialogue is enough. The creation of *competing* and alternative patterns of relations and interaction, through the production of parallel cultural, economic or political institutions, might be necessary. Then a social space for a new order is created. While the announcement of a “parallel government” is virtually a “war declaration”, the effective work of such a governing body makes the resistance self-sufficient. Through the “constructive program” Gandhi emphasised the social integration of the new society and the creation of alternatives to the oppressive institutions that the movement tried to overthrow. The dismantling of oppression is not nonviolence in itself or enough for social change, according to Gandhi. The new society does not arise with ease from the ashes of the old. The development of the new society should be initiated during the resistance struggle in order to sincerely show what is wanted instead of the present situation, and in order to make success possible (Sharp 1979:81).

In stark contrast to violent resistance strategies the gandhian nonviolence involves simultaneous *non-cooperation* with the oppressive system role-behaviour of the opponent, as well as *cooperation* with every human being as part of the unity of humanity (Burrowes 1996:108; Galtung & Naess 1990:147-153, 199ff, 243). To Gandhi it was decisive that the nonviolent activist both protected the legitimate needs of the opponent and came to assistance when the personal security of anyone was threatend. Even a readiness to die during the protection of the life of your “enemy” was advised. The movement should also try to find allied sub-groups within the “enemy camp” that might want to take part in some cooperative project benefiting the creation of a more just society. E.g. Muslim and Hindu groups together doing relief work and reconstruction after communal riots among Muslims and Hindus. When there is something both parties agree on: the nonviolent activists, according to Gandhi, should even try to develop cooperation directly with their opponent. Then emotional ties and the constructive change of society might be facilitated, and enemy images and the power base of the oppressors might be undermined. This flexible and complex approach which differentiate between aspects of others might then both strengthen the nonviolent aspects of exisiting society and give a base of mutual cooperation in social change.

The creation of competing institutions that can replace what the nonviolent movement resist is complemented with the strengthening of specific existing institutions that are *not* part of what they fight. Thus resistance is targeted on the real enemy: oppressive power and

organised violence. In connection with the West German nonviolent movement's blockades of the nuclear weapon base in Mutlangen during the 1980s, some of the organisers considered it to be as important to invite the soldiers to dinner in their homes, while others were drinking beer in the local pub together with them. The peace activists and the military did perhaps have divergent goals but despite that they could unite around a genuine human need: eating and drinking. In a nonviolent resistance the opponent is understood as a human being despite the conflict situation and is supposed to share at least some values and wishes with the resistance movement.

Non-cooperation in existing power relations is at the same time central in order not to naively be used and manipulated. The combination of focused cooperation and non-cooperation with the opponent is but one expression of the consensus-oriented dialectical action-approach which constitutes the core of nonviolent conflict transformation (Vinthagen 2005). It is the combination that makes it part of the Gandhian form of nonviolent resistance. Despite that it creates an unusual contradictory repertoire of resistance it seems reasonable. Every functional society demands some sort of social order or integration, which means that an effective hindrance of cooperation risks collapsing the present social order. The parallel creations of new forms of order exist in order to diminish this risk arising from the powerful force of nonviolent resistance. Gandhian nonviolence intends to strengthen social integration while doing resistance – indeed a profound and unique approach to revolutionary resistance.

When power is prevailing nonviolent resistance might have to involve the avoidance of subordination; in the plebeian sense an *evasion* of power relations where liberated geographical or social zones are established. Mass emigration was proposed as a resistance act by Gandhi. Sometimes it is difficult to categorise a technique, since it has several aspects and is part of a context. Emigration is possible to understand partly as refusal – to partake in the activities or identification as citizens of a specific country or place – and partly as avoidance from repression, to find a new life somewhere else. During their nonviolent resistance to the communist regime 1989 thousands of East Germans were fleeing through Hungary which proved to be instrumental in forcing the opening of the Berlin Wall.

Avoidance of power might be perceived as the opposite to “resistance”, but it is part of the nonviolent movement's combinatory repertoire of resistance techniques and strategy. Through avoidance of power *space* is created which facilitates reflection, initiative, mobilisation and action – at the same time as *absence* arises for the power holder (of potential subservants). Sometimes indeed avoidance or the choice to “not express resistance” to a hegemony is

necessary for the success of a subordinate group (Cheater 1999:5), or even a prerequisite for power not being able to dominate (Foucault 1980:138).

But even when many are persuaded and refuse to subordinate, there exist perhaps an effective group of people who do subordinate themselves. It is then also necessary with a *direct hindrance* which blockades power systems' processes. It might happen through action forms like collective, organised and peaceful sabotage or civil disobedience, as the occupation of the School of the Americas described above.

Lastly it is as well possible to imagine the *redefinitions creating chock, humour and irony*, or other playful forms turning normal perceptions, social prejudice or conventional concepts upside down (Johansen 1991). During the 70ies Swedish homosexuals fought the WHO medical definition of homosexuality as being a sickness, through numerous persons who claimed sick-leave at work (Dielemans & Quistbergh 2000). "Hi love, I feel slightly homosexual today and unfortunately I can't go to work, since it might be infectious. Let's hope I recover until tomorrow. Bye dear!". Or, when Norwegian conscription objectors, in protest against their friends present in prison, escaped into (sic!) prison. When they refused to leave if not their comrades were released, police carried them out of prison while the photo-cameras of the media were flashing bright. In both of these actions the definitions and methods of power were dramatically rendered non-frightening. The homosexual activists made a stigmatizing label of "sickness" ridiculous, while the army objectors made the punishment of prison meaningless, since what sentence could any court give these criminals, certainly not prison. In a similar fashion it is possible to understand the queer group Outrage! and their carnevalesque treatment of the British society's prejudice of homosexuals during the 90ies, as the conscious undermining of power relations built on fear, avoidance, misrepresentation and silence. They performed a Kiss-in involving hundreds of gays and lesbians openly exposing their love, in an epoch where the government tried to forbid information on homosexuality in school books. Once some activists dressed in costumes performed The Exorcism of Lambeth Palace outside the home of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The exorcists commemorated the historical tradition of Christian persecution of homosexuals, and through rituals and prayer they tried to drive out "The Demon of Homophobia" and compel God to forgive the church.

These nonviolent resistance techniques can together shape the space for mobilisation and alliances (through communication, redefinitions and cooperation), alternative social systems (constructive work and competition), removal of supportive involvement from the existing system of oppression (refusal and evasion), and make existing system's processes difficult to

run or even impossible (hindrance). Both the dismantling of the present social system and the creation of new ones become possible.

When applied effectively it becomes the self-interest of elites to enter negotiations, since when nonviolent resistance is escalated oppressive power will sooner or later dissolve. If fully applied these techniques might together lead to a “living revolution” (Lakey 1987); the power breaking resistance by a strong nonviolent movement making negotiation with different power groups and a new and more accepted social order possible. Such power groups do not only consist of elite fractions. In a nonviolent perspective of power and resistance it becomes more important to enter into dialogue with those who do subordinate themselves, as negotiate with “power holders”. After all, it is the subordinates that produce power.

Subordination is created in advanced and complex social systems. Thus it becomes reasonable that even resistance should need to be manifold and organised. Further resistance techniques than those I have described might exist but it is difficult to envision any successful nonviolent struggle without at least these methods.

Nonviolent resistance can therefore generally be understood as a behaviour that includes endurance of violence and oppression, while creating alternatives and hindrance, as well as new definitions and evasion of both subordination and violence – in an attempt to undermine power and the legitimacy of violence, and create conditions of reconciliation and dialogue.

That would imply that nonviolent movements in principal are well equipped of resistance against power. Nonviolent resistance seems as well to have possibilities to function as a form of peaceful conflict handling in power loaded conflicts (Vinthagen 2005).

Other investigations have to answer whether nonviolent techniques are effective in practice or not. Some preliminary investigations within the underdeveloped discourse of nonviolent studies seem to imply such a possibility (Randle 1994; Zunes 1999). Movements have struggled successfully against brutal regimes without major use of violence, in .e.g. Philippines, South Africa and Poland during the 1980s.

By the Way of Conclusion

Like Sharp, I have argued that you can understand power as a form of obedience or active subordination, where cooperation from the subordinate is crucial. Unlike Sharp, I have with the help of Foucault argued that power is many-faceted and an obvious element in social

activity and thereby also a silent and often hidden shaper of people. Accordingly, not even the will, body and mind of the resistance fighter is free from power.

Opposing the common interpretation of Foucault, I have argued that incorporated techniques of power are possible to combine with “power as subordination”, therefore with choice and active cooperation. Power as subordination is integrally linked to resistance as disobedience. Nonviolent movements are very significant examples of resistance to power as well as transformation of it.

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