1-1-2012

Evaluating Violence and (Non)violence: A Critical, Practical Theology of Social Change

Julie Marie Todd  
*University of Denver*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd](https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd)

**Recommended Citation**

[https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/652](https://digitalcommons.du.edu/etd/652)

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate Studies at Digital Commons @ DU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ DU. For more information, please contact [jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu](mailto:jennifer.cox@du.edu,dig-commons@du.edu).
EVALUATING VIOLENCE AND (NON)VIOLENCE: A CRITICAL, PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF SOCIAL CHANGE

———

A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the University of Denver and the Iliff School of Theology Joint PhD Program

———

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

———

by

Julie Marie Todd

June 2012

Advisor: Dr. Katherine Turpin
Abstract

This dissertation uses a practical theological approach to evaluate Christian (non)violence in light of interviews with twelve scholars and activists in the United States about the means of social change and the relationship of those means to social location. Social location conditions an understanding of what violence is and how different groups justify and respond to various uses of violence and (non)violence within society and for social change. The project sets Christian (non)violent practice within the context of direct, structural and cultural violence, and implicates Christian tradition, theology and practice in each level of violence. The qualitative data exposes the rationalizing mechanisms of the dominant culture’s violence: the denial of violence; the reversal of the perpetrators of violence, and; the entitlements of privileged social location. When Christian (non)violence emerges from a dominant social location and does not address these levels and mechanisms of violence, it functions ideologically to obscure the operation of political and economic power, maintains the violence and privilege of those in power, thereby undermining fundamental social transformation.

Interviewee data also portrays a comprehensive constellation of effective practices of social change, be they violent or (non)violent, that destabilize the dominant trajectory of rationalizing violence. Emergent qualitative perspectives on questions and practices of organized violence and (non)violence point towards renewed Christian praxis for social transformation. The practical theological model offers an approach to social
change which values: practices determined in the context of social struggle over theological abstractions; collective modes of action that undermine individualism; disruption over pacification; and self-critical, Christian solidarity that welcomes differences in belief regarding the justifiability of various means of social change.
Acknowledgements

I express my deep gratitude first of all to the twelve persons I interviewed for this dissertation. Taken together they understand more about the violence in and of the United States than I can reasonably communicate so as to do justice to their experience and knowledge. These twelve persons have studied, experienced and articulated for and with their communities more about suffering and death, resistance and transformation than is almost fathomable. I both honor and lament what they know. I was humbled by their acceptance of my invitation to interview them, and continue to live in awe of what I learned from them. They will forever inspire me as a scholar, activist and human being.

I thank my dissertation committee chairperson, Dr. Katherine Turpin, for her unending encouragement that this was an important project, and so to improve the quality of my writing and the clarity of my thinking.

With undying affection and respect, I thank my student colleagues in the DU/Iliff Joint Ph.D. program, without whose camaraderie and support this program would have meant little.

I offer my gratitude and love to the community at Nada Carmelite Hermitage in Crestone, Colorado who provided me solitude and refuge during which the bulk of this project came together.

To my parents, Mary and Jim Todd, thank you for your unconditional love for me and whatever I seek to do in this world.
# Table of Contents

Chapter One: Introduction ........................................................................................................ 1
  Evaluating Violence and (Non)violence ................................................................. 1
  Method ......................................................................................................................... 8
    Qualitative Methodology .................................................................................... 9
  Data Gathering and Analysis .............................................................................. 20
  Practical Theology from a Liberationist Perspective .................................. 22
  Chapter Outline .................................................................................................... 28

Chapter Two: What Is Violence?............................................................................................ 35
  Direct Violence, Structural Violence ................................................................. 39
    Institutions, Structural Violence and Accountability ..................................... 43
    “Where You Stand Determines What You See”: Social Location and
    Structural Violence .......................................................................................... 45
  Cultural Violence ................................................................................................. 50
  Structural and Cultural Violence: ......................................................................... 51
  How We Came to “Where We Stand” in the United States .................................. 51
  The Rationalizing Mechanisms of Structural and Cultural Violence ............... 56
    Rationalizing Violence: Denial .......................................................................... 58
    Rationalizing Violence: Denial and Reversal ................................................. 59
    Rationalizing Violence: Entitlements and “Only Some People Count” ....... 64
  “Justifiable” Violence ............................................................................................ 69
    Repressive State Violence and Response ....................................................... 70
    Justifiable Violence: Individual and Community Self-Defense .................... 72
  Self-Defense and Denial, Reversal, Entitlement .................................................. 80
  Reversing the Reversal: “Resistance Breeds Repression” .................................. 82
  Social Location and the Justification of Violence ................................................ 87

Chapter Three: Christianity, Violence and (Non)violence .................................................. 89
  The Christian History of Violence ...................................................................... 89
    Christian Violence: Direct .............................................................................. 89
    Christian Tradition: Structural Violence, Cultural Violence ....................... 91
    Christian Violence: “The One, True Religion” ............................................. 94
  Christian Violence: Denial, Reversal, Entitlement ............................................ 98
    Christian Violence: Pacification and Reversal .............................................101
  Is the White, U.S. Christian Tradition Uniquely Violent? ................................105
  A Uniquely Christian, Cultural Substrata of Violence ......................................108
    Christian, Cultural Substratum I: Human Supremacism and Progress ... 109
    Christian, Cultural Substratum II: Individualism .........................................119
    Christian, Cultural Substratum III: Abstraction ..........................................125
  Practical Theological Applications of Violence and (Non)violence .................130

Chapter Four: Loving The Enemy .........................................................................................132
  How This Theme Arose .........................................................................................132
  The Normative, Christian (Non)violent Theological Tradition .......................134
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Representatives: John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving the Enemy as Christ Did: Revolutionary Subordination</td>
<td>135</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving the Enemy: Affirming Human Interconnectedness</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loving the Enemy in the Christian Tradition: Critiques</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique I: Human Supremacism</td>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique II: Individualism</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique III: Abstraction</td>
<td>153</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique IV: When Loving the Enemy Privileges Power and Enables Violence</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Practical, Theological Reconstruction of Loving the Enemy</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructing Loving the Enemy I: Practice over Abstraction</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructing Loving the Enemy II: Interconnectedness as a Practice</td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructing Loving the Enemy III: Vision and Practice</td>
<td>183</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Faithful, Not Effective</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How This Theme Arose</td>
<td>187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Faithful, Not Effective”: The Dominant View</td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tensions Within the Dominant View</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension I: Abstraction and the Need for Structural-Cultural Analysis</td>
<td>191</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension II: Historic Denial</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension III: Who Is In Control?</td>
<td>198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tension IV: The Liberal-to-Radical Divide</td>
<td>203</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective Practices for Effectiveness</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness I: Consciousness-Raising</td>
<td>208</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness II: Organizing for People Power</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness III: Alternative Communities</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effectiveness IV: Disruptive, Direct Action</td>
<td>229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Effectiveness</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Effectiveness I: Habit and Embracing the Familiar</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Effectiveness II: Self-Interest (Entitlements)</td>
<td>239</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barriers to Effectiveness III: Fear and Risk</td>
<td>242</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faithful and Effective: Conclusion</td>
<td>247</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Solidarity</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How This Theme Arose</td>
<td>251</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reinforcing Violence: Bringing Dominance into Movements</td>
<td>252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undoing Dominance: Asking, Listening, Awareness of Social Location</td>
<td>254</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Non)violence: Not Imposing From a Position of Dominance</td>
<td>259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence</td>
<td>265</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence: Showing Up</td>
<td>267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)Violence: Material Support</td>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence: Turning over Privilege</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence: Suffering Powerlessness With</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence: Do Your Work With Your Own People</td>
<td>276</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solidarity as (Non)violence: Accompanying as Reciprocal Relationship</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Solidarity as (Non)violence: Mutual Accountability Practices .......... 287
Practical Theology and Social Change: Self-Critical Solidarity............... 290

Chapter Seven: Conclusion ........................................................................... 295
A Critical, Practical, Theological Model of Social Change ...................... 295
Element I: Critical – Structural Analysis and Transformative
Historiography .......................................................................................... 295
Element II: Practical – Contextual Experimentation with Diverse Modes
of Action ....................................................................................................... 301
Element III: Theology – Disrupting a Unified Christian Discourse .... 309
Element IV: Social Change – Communities of Creative, Counter-Cultural
Resistance ....................................................................................................... 312

BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................. 315

Appendix A .......................................................................................................... 335
List of Tables

Table I. Galtung’s Taxonomy of Religious Hierarchy ......................................................... 92
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Evaluating Violence and (Non)violence

I just don’t want one person killed. I don’t believe in that any more. I don’t want to kill anybody, no matter how noble the cause is. I don’t see it. I don’t see that as bringing peace. I don’t understand it any more. So, it’s all bad.… I’m against all violence at all levels.¹

I believe very strongly in nonviolence. I really believe that it does have a very strong spiritual force. Because I’ve seen it. … When I talk about the strength of it, it’s also a communication. It spreads from the person to the perpetrators.²

I thought [nonviolence] was a good idea. I don’t have a problem with that. Whatever works! It’s all tools. By any means necessary. Sometimes you need a hoe, sometimes you need a shovel. Sometimes you need a mule. A plough. It depends on the ground.³

You want to do a million people protest? You did that at the onset of the Iraq war. Biggest protest they say, ever. At the very onset of a war, did you notice some kind of effect on the war? I didn’t. I drew a lesson from that. And this is my point. If you believe in it, try it. If it works, great. But when it doesn’t work, now what? Well now that’s a different question for you, having your moral objections when there’s people who are literally being turned into hamburger.⁴

¹ John Dear, interview with author, August 3, 2010, Ghost Ranch Education and Retreat Center, Abiquiu, New Mexico, unpublished transcript. As all of the twelve interviewees are quoted at length from their interviews throughout the dissertation, I will only cite each participant’s interview the first time I make reference to it. Throughout the dissertation I will make clear the distinction between quotations from the interviews and other sources, uniquely citing references to interviewee materials from sources other than the interviews.


³ Rita “Bo” Brown, interview with the author, December 1, 2010, Prison Activist Resource Center, Oakland, CA, unpublished transcript. Bo Brown requested that throughout the dissertation she be referred to as B♀.

These four quotations represent a “spectrum of belief” about the justifiability and effectiveness of social change strategies from principled (non)violence\(^5\) to “by any means necessary.”\(^6\) These words come from four of the twelve persons I interviewed for this dissertation, all of whom represent different histories and emphases along this spectrum.

There are those who believe that only (non)violent practices of social change are appropriate means to greater economic and political justice that are both effective and justifiable. They reject violent tactics as a means to social change. Others believe that circumstances of suffering and oppression are so extreme, so intractable and accepted by the population at large, that a commitment to (non)violent means alone will never mount a strong enough challenge to structures of injustice. Therefore all means, violent and (non)violent, must be potentially considered and employed. The main topic for this dissertation is to consider the contours of these varying perspectives along this spectrum, how these perspectives relate to individuals’ and communities’ social location, and the religious/ethical resources in which they are grounded and by which they are deliberated.

These questions are of central importance to my own life and work. I am a white, middle-class, Christian woman and U.S. citizen. I was raised in a pastor’s household during the era of anti-Vietnam war protests and the integration of schools through bussing. I was born and bred into a social gospel activism in which (non)violent protest was assumed. I understood that (non)violence flowed naturally from biblical-prophetic,

\(^5\) The written formulation of (non)violence with parentheses is intentional. I describe the reason for this formulation on page 6 of this introduction.

\(^6\) “By any means necessary” is a phrase popularized by Malcolm X implying that all means – violent and nonviolent – may be justified for the purposes of social transformation. Malcolm X employed this phrase in many of his public speeches. Among many sources, see Malcolm X, The Final Speeches: February 1965 (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1992).
theological mandates for peace and justice rooted in the call of Jesus Christ as found in the Bible. In my doctoral work, I intended to study the religious rootedness and practices of historical (non)violent social change movements. I wanted to see how churches might be informed and formed by the (non)violent practices of persons and communities involved in these movements. (Non)violence was my starting point. I assumed that the best form of social change was (non)violent social change; or, at the very least the most suitable place to discover authentic forms of spirituality and religious practices that propel public faith.

Throughout my studies, the professors who most encouraged my investigation of this topic were also scholars who encouraged interrogating theological proposals and religious practices from the perspectives of marginalized and oppressed communities. Through their influence I began to suspect, despite what I understood to be the faithful successes of religiously motivated (non)violence in social change, that some theological commitments and practices of (non)violence might also be invested in the maintenance of systems of injustice.

Other circumstances also caused me to wrestle with this spectrum of perspectives. Through relationships with faculty mentors at the Iliff School of Theology, I joined activist struggles with Latin@ immigrant and indigenous communities in Denver. These struggles exposed me in greater depth to experiences of violence in society and social change movements. I witnessed and shared in the impact of the daily, brutal impact of all levels of violence upon undocumented day laborers. I began to understand both the motivating and debilitating effect of the consequences of state and interpersonal violence on organizing oppressed communities. In a (non)violent protest, I experienced the impact
of police brutality in my own body, which shook the foundations of my privileged white, Christian citizen identity. While continuing to live my life in highly privileged communities, these glimpses into the realities of violence caused me to move in and perceive my own world differently, particularly in regard to my assumptions about the role of (non)violence in social change.

My first foray into a critique of Christian (non)violence was an investigation of Matthew 5:38-42, Jesus’ commandment from the Sermon on the Mount to love the enemy, to not resist and evildoer and turn the other cheek. Walter Wink’s exegesis of this text results in an ethic of (non)violence that was extremely influential on me.\(^7\) Liberal Protestant peace and justice circles often refer to Wink. Yet no scholarly exegeses on this passage appeared from marginalized perspectives. At the same time I was reading Stony the Road We Trod: African Americans and Biblical Interpretation for a class. The author related a story about a grandmother’s outright rejection of Paul’s letters because they endorsed submission and slavery.\(^8\) Was there a similar dynamic going on here? Might marginalized communities reject Matthew 5:38-42 because it has historically been used to oppress by using Jesus’ words to demand passivity in the face of violence? The texts we choose and think are central and the questions we bring to them are the primary pitfalls for privileging certain biblical interpretations. I realized that in order to talk about


\(^8\) Cain Hope Felder, Stony the Road We Trod: African Americans and Biblical Interpretation (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1991): 61.
(non)violence from the point of view of marginalized communities meant, at first, to move away from the text. This move surfaced one point immediately: the daily reality of the vast majority of exploited people in the world is that of violence, not (non)violence. To begin an analysis from a position of (non)violence may be to miss the reality of the oppressed.

If I have come to grasp one thing with clarity through this research it is this very point: ignoring the complexity of what constitutes violence is where the (non)violent thought and praxis represented by white, liberal Christians in the United States has fallen short. We have failed to include a comprehensive analysis of concrete situations of structural violence and oppression within which (non)violence has historically operated. Any practice or theory/theology of (non)violence must begin with a critical examination of the situation of violence.9 Speaking about Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount, Paul Ricoeur, a French academic, wrote that nonviolence “…introduces vertically into this history an extremely difficult demand.”

The first condition which an authentic doctrine of nonviolence must satisfy is to have passed through the world of violence in all its density… It is first necessary to have measured the length, the breadth, and the depth of violence – its expansion throughout the length of history, the spread of its psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual ramifications, its deep roots in the plurality of consciousness itself. The recognition of violence must be extended to the point at

---

9 It is not as if these debates over or insights into the nature of violence and (non)violence are new to Christian communities. The World Council of Churches (WCC) argued and documented many of these issues, particularly during the emergence of liberation theology from world-wide revolutionary situations in the 1970s. These conversations appear to have had little influence on the liberal Christian theological academy that continues to privilege (non)violence alone despite the experience and knowledge of an earlier generation of activist and scholars living in and representing oppressed communities. The contours of earlier conversations can be found in many progressive Christian magazines in the United States during this era, particularly Christianity and Crisis and Social Action, Social Progress. Many of the documents and editorials on the formal conversations in the WCC can be found in the quarterly publication of the WCC, The Ecumenical Review, Vol. XXV, Number 4, October 1973 (and other volumes and issues), and; Donald Durnbaugh, ed., On Earth Peace : Discussions on War/Peace Issues Between Friends, Mennonites, Brethren, and European Churches, 1935-75 (Elgin, IL: Brethren Press, 1978).
which it displays its tragic grandeur, appearing as the very motor of history itself – the crisis, the critical moment and the judgment – which suddenly changes the configuration of history. Only at the price of this veracity does the question arise as to whether or not reflection reveals something left over, something greater than history, whether or not consciousness has any real basis for making claims against history and for recognizing itself as belonging to another order than the violence which forges history.\textsuperscript{10}

In a seminal 1969 essay stimulating the field of peace research, Johan Galtung suggested that if the definition of peace is the absence of violence, then any viable discussion of peace “hinges on making a definition of ‘violence.’”\textsuperscript{11} Similarly, in this dissertation, I attempt to understand (non)violence for social change in the context of the depth and breadth of violence. In our interview, Huerta echoed the common lament, “One of the things I say is we don’t have a good word for nonviolence. You know, it’s two negatives. ‘non’ and ‘violence.’” Huerta makes a familiar point: in our efforts to speak about eradicating violence, our main option to describe an alternative to violence emphasizes its centrality. While Huerta regrets this limitation of the English language, throughout the dissertation I formulate the writing of the term (non)violence with parentheses precisely because I believe it is critical to identify the pervasive violence to which (non)violence is a response. My purpose in parenthetically marking off “non” from the word violence indicates that it is impossible to negate the reality of violence with appeals to (non)violence either as a principle or as a strategy. My research has affirmed the necessity of overcoming an overly false dichotomizing of violence and (non)violence in historical analysis, as incompatible tactics or as separate dimensions of social change.


This parenthetical formulation is a form of accountability to recognize that even the most thorough-going efforts at individual and collective (non)violence are still implicated in violence.\textsuperscript{12} In the purest sense, there is no such thing as nonviolence.\textsuperscript{13}

When I first drafted my dissertation proposal I planned a critique of white, Christian (non)violence. I intended to interview individuals for interviews that I thought would support the hypothesis that white, Christian (non)violence is hegemonic. When I began to better understand qualitative method, I recognized this approach was not going to be helpful. It was presumptuous to assume that I already knew what my research participants were going to say. Indeed, the interviewees’ critiques of (non)violence are far from monolithic. By engaging various perspectives on (non)violence by asking persons with a variety of commitments and diverse backgrounds in an open-ended, open-minded way, a more nuanced and accurate picture organized violence and (non)violence might emerge. Through this process, my goal is not to present a definitive position but to illumine the confusions, the contradictions, the limitations of violence and (non)violence within the context of U.S. social change.

It is not my intention to argue against (non)violence. Some may argue that the problem is not white, Christian (non)violence but white, Christian violence. One suspicion I bring to the research is that the white, liberal Christian discourse and practice

\textsuperscript{12} I only use the parenthetical formulation when I am using my own words, not when I am quoting interviews or other texts.

\textsuperscript{13} Beverly Wildung Harrison makes this point in \textit{Making the Connections: Essays in Feminist Social Ethics}, Carol S. Robb, ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1985). Harrison critiques white, male progressive U.S. academics in Christian theology for failing to develop a critical awareness of how social location affects one’s theological and moral ethics, including a generalized opposition to the use of revolutionary violence advocated by some theorists within the early traditions of liberation theology. She writes, “The presumption in favor of nonviolence must not be confused with the actual existence of nonviolence in our world. To discuss moral principles on nonviolence as if nonviolence existed is a fallacy of moral reasoning that renders a discussion untruthful from the outset” (257).
of (non)violence has to some extent served to obscure the operation of political and economic power, maintaining the violence and privilege of those in power, thereby undermining fundamental social transformation. The main focus of my research is to discover the ways in which my suspicion is both true and false, as well as any ways it is true or false. From my perspective as a white, middle-class, Christian woman in the U.S. whose own commitment to (non)violence was shaped by this social location, Christian (non)violence praxis has been neither sufficiently self-critical nor sufficiently revolutionary. I am primarily writing to my own people – white, Christian, middle-to-upper-middle class U.S. Christians invested in progressive or revolutionary social change. If white, Christian scholars and activists desire to continue to work for social transformation through (non)violent means, we must deepen and broaden historical, theological and strategic analysis across different contexts and analyze the location of our own points of view. In our contemporary context, we have failed to address critical questions of our complicity in violence, failed to address power, failed to define for ourselves the contours of violence and (non)violence.

**Method**

One of the recurring themes of this dissertation is that questions and discussions about violence and (non)violence cannot be properly understood outside of a given historical context. Thus, the methodological and disciplinary approaches to the topic are ones which emphasize and embody a commitment to context: qualitative method (interviews) set within the theoretical framework of practical theology from a liberationist perspective.
Qualitative Methodology

Unlike a purely textual analysis, interviews with activists ground the theory and practice of organized violent and (non)violent social change methods in the concrete experience of practitioners in social struggle. Currently many of the discussions and debates among academics and activists over the connections among religion, violence, and (non)violence pertain to contexts in other countries. I focused this project on the thought and praxis within recent and contemporary historic social change movements in the United States. I hoped the interviewees would provide insight for analysis about social transformation at a critical time in which the United States is continues to reveal itself as “the greatest purveyor of violence in the world today.”\textsuperscript{14} There are a number of tensions with such a choice. The United States is not the center of radical or revolutionary movements in the world. It could be argued that the most interesting data for thinking about radical social change is found outside of the United States. But this would be to ignore our own history of radicalism. Since the United States is the center of power and global transformation does seem to be afoot, I wanted to know what we might learn from more revolutionary times and revolutionary actors in the United States to think about the ways in which the seeds of transformation might be nurtured in this current social context.\textsuperscript{15}

I decided to invite twelve persons to interview who represented as broadly as possible some of the most forceful movements for social change over the last sixty years:


\textsuperscript{15} The interviews all took place before the start of the Occupy movement in the United States.
civil rights and black power, indigenous sovereignty, women’s and gay liberation, worker justice, immigration, earth justice, anti-war, and anti-globalization. Each one of these movements has held within it the tensions between the use of organized violence and (non)violence to achieve the movements’ various liberation aims. As both activists and scholars, the individuals demonstrated significant investment into reflecting on the efficacy of various means and ends for social change in order to offer information-rich experience for in-depth study.\footnote{16} I initially chose these persons because of their apparent commitments in their activism and scholarship to one or the other “side” of a so-called violence-(non)violence spectrum. However, none of these persons fall neatly into one place on this spectrum. While their perspectives become apparent, I resist definitively labeling their positions.

I intended that the interviewees’ identities would differ from one another as much as possible: where they live, their religious perspectives, race, gender, sexual orientation, and socio-economic class status. Although all of them were born and reside in the United States, they hold different views of their citizenship status. The advantages of interviewing such a diverse group of individuals versus focusing on one movement, one racial/ethnic group, or religious perspective was that it provided the kind of rich, complex and grounded data that upset neat answers to the questions of violence and (non)violence which most people prefer. Furthermore, contemporary critical theory emphasizes the need for analysis across and between categories of difference. Structures of oppression and privilege in social change cannot be adequately understood through only one lens of

identity, but are co-constituted.\textsuperscript{17} Furthermore, a liberationist commitment recognizes that movements for social change do not originate from the center of societies’ dominant cultures. I made every effort to include persons in the interview group that did not identify as white nor Christian with the assumption that their knowledge is critical to future movements for progressive social change.

I wanted to inspire myself and be challenged to deeper levels of awareness and action by speaking with revolutionary elders.\textsuperscript{18} All of them have confronted questions about the realities and uses of violence and (non)violence in social change. We talked about how they believe social change happens and the means by which they understand it is necessary to respond to end suffering and injustice. I asked them about their social locations and how their own and others’ race, nationality, socio-economic class status influence the ways in which they understand violence and (non)violence in social change. I talked with them about what it means to be an ally across differences in social location in the pursuit of social transformation; but also what it means to be in solidarity with persons and movements that differ over the means to social change, violent or (non)violent. I inquired about their religious faith, non-religious spiritual, and intellectual

\textsuperscript{17} This idea is commonly referred to as “intersectionality.” This concept was developed by women of color to describe their experience with “interlocking” forms of oppression: race, class, gender, sexual orientation. For example, see: Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement,” in \textit{This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color}, ed. by Gloria Anzaldúa and Cherrie Moraga, 210-218 (Boston: Kitchen Table Press, 1982).

\textsuperscript{18} Faculty mentors acquainted me with a number of the persons who became interviewees. Of the twelve persons I interviewed, I contacted five persons directly without any intervention. Two of the interviewees served as gatekeepers to four others. Three additional personal contacts served as gatekeepers. Under review from by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects at the University of Denver, I invited all of participants with an approved invitation to an in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured, ninety minute interview. Gatekeepers also received a formal invitation to introduce me to their contacts. Once individuals agreed to an interview, we arranged to meet at a location of their choosing. Prior to the interview, I secured their written consent to conduct, record and analyze the interview.
commitments and how they saw different aspects of identity impacting or not impacting perspectives on violence and (non)violence.

The research design was inductive and emergent.\textsuperscript{19} Inductive analysis intends that the important dimensions of information and interpretation will come from the interviews themselves. The design was “emergent” to the extent that the interviews themselves are open-ended and provide the parameters for developing the theoretical direction of the research. I developed an interview guide\textsuperscript{20} which generally prepared me to ask certain questions, but I enlarged the list of potential questions based on the researching the interviewee and familiarizing myself with their written works. Primarily I began each interview asking each person about their social location and social movement experience, described my reasons for conducting the research, and let the conversation evolve from there, only returning to the interview guide if it seemed appropriate and relevant.

\textbf{The Twelve Interviewees}

As well known as these persons are within certain circles of social struggle, most of these scholars and activists are not widely known in Christian, liberal-to-progressive Christian circles, either in the church or the academy. There is intrinsic value in introducing these persons to a wider audience. Very little has been written about most of them. For this reason I chose not to leave them anonymous or treat them merely as

\footnotesize{

\textsuperscript{20} See Appendix A.
}
sources of theory from their written works. Here is a description of each person in the order in which I interviewed them.21

Kathy Kelly is a peace activist currently associated with Voices for Creative Nonviolence22 (VCNV) based in Chicago. Kelly travels with teams into active war zones: first in Central America during the 1980s, then throughout the Middle East (Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan). She has been arrested dozens of times, most recently at a die-in23 front of a military base near Syracuse, New York that operates drones over Afghanistan. She was also a passenger on the U.S. Audacity of Hope, part of the Freedom Flotilla attempting to break the blockade on the Gaza Strip in Palestine in 2011-2012. She has served a number of prison sentences and connects U.S. domestic and international violence in her book Other Lands Have Dreams: from Baghdad to Pekin Prison.24 She has been a tax refuser since 1980. She is white of Irish descent, Roman Catholic, heterosexual, living in voluntary poverty, in her mid-fifties.

Sarah Schulman has been associated with a number of social movements: gay liberation and feminist movements, abortion rights, tenants’ rights, and Palestinian self-determination. Schulman is the author of seventeen fiction and non-fiction works and

21 After I had done the bulk of my interpretive synthesis and writing for the dissertation, the participants were invited to review my work to ensure that the findings adequately represented them. At that time the participants were also asked if they were willing to make their names, their words from the interview and other identifying information public in the dissertation. All participants agreed and signed a second consent form.

22 A full biography of Kathy Kelly and description of VCNV can be found at: Voices for Creative Nonviolence, www.vcnv.org. VCNV emerged from a previous organization, Voices in the Wilderness, which was established to end the United Nations/United States’ economic sanctions against Iraq during the first Gulf War.

23 A die-in is a form of protest or direct action in which participants pretend to be dead, lying on the ground en masse to represent a concrete context in which unjust deaths occurred or are occurring.

24 Kathy Kelly, Other Lands Have Dreams: From Baghdad to Pekin Prison (Petrolia, CA: CounterPunch, 2005).
numerous plays whose characters and themes are oriented towards gay and lesbian life and politics. She is well-known for her journalism, documenting the AIDS epidemic in New York City in local publications during the 1980s from her perspective as an active leader in the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP). She is Distinguished Professor of the Humanities at City University of New York (CUNY) at Staten Island and co-director of the ACT UP Oral History Project.25 Her most current work is The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination.26 Schulman is a Jewish woman, lesbian, middle-class, in her mid50s.

Katherine Power was a student activist who joined a small revolutionary action group in the Boston area in the 1970s which advocated the use of violence to oppose U.S. imperialism (in particular, the war in Vietnam) and support Black Nationalism. After the murder of Boston Police Officer Walter Schroeder by a member of her group during the course of a bank robbery, Power lived as a fugitive for twenty-three years. She turned herself in and served six years in prison.27 She is an AIDS activist in Boston, Massachusetts. She is a white woman, raised Roman Catholic with no current religious affiliation, middle-class, in her early sixties, married to a woman. She writes a blog called PracticalPeace (http://www.practicalpeace.com/blog.html).28

25 A more extensive biography of Sarah Schulman can be found on the ACT UP Oral History project website: www.actuporalhistory.org.


John Dear is a Jesuit priest, primarily associated with anti-war and nuclear disarmament movements. He has authored and edited over two dozen books on peace and nonviolence, most recently *Lazarus, Come Forth!: How Jesus Confronts the Culture of Death and Invites Us into the New Life of Peace*.\(^{29}\) His autobiography is *A Persistent Peace: One Man’s Struggle for a Nonviolent World*.\(^{30}\) He writes a weekly column for the National Catholic Reporter.\(^{31}\) He has lived and worked in Central America, and lectures throughout the world full-time. He has been arrested dozens of times, and has served time in federal prison for his involvement in a Plowshares action trespassing on a military base and attempting to destroy a weapon of mass destruction.\(^{32}\) He makes his residence in Cerrillos, New Mexico. He is a white, Roman Catholic man in his early 50s. He took a vow of poverty, chastity and obedience.

Ward Churchill is an activist scholar, teacher, and writer. He has authored or edited more than twenty books and published well over a hundred book chapters and journal articles. As regards questions of organized violence and (non)violence for social change, his best-known work is *Pacifism as Pathology: Reflections on the Role of Armed Struggle in North America*.\(^{33}\) A member of the early Rainbow Coalition in Chicago, he has been associated with the Black Panther Party, Students for a Democratic Society


(Weatherman faction), Vietnam Veterans Against the War, and the American Indian Movement. A self-described "mongrel," his heritage includes German, Scotch-Irish, Cherokee and Creek. He identified a Methodist upbringing, is in his early 60s, and, although his background is decidedly working class, sees his present station as middle class.

Vincent Harding is Professor Emeritus of Religion and Social Transformation at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO. He is president of the Veterans of Hope Project, a “multifaceted educational initiative on religion, culture and participatory democracy.” He is an author of over fifty books, essays, and articles. He is well-known as an advocate of nonviolence in the southern movement for freedom and for penning the first draft of Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous speech “A Time to Break Silence.” He is an African-American in his early 80s, middle-class, and heterosexual. He has a Christian background but claims no current formal religious affiliation. He is currently writing his memoir.

Akinyele Umoja is Associate Professor and Chair of the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University. His area of scholarly expertise is black resistance, particularly the Civil Rights and Black Power movements. He is the author of numerous scholarly articles, and his forthcoming book is entitled We Will Shoot Back: Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Struggle. He was associated with Black

34 [http://www.veteransofhope.org/footer/about.htm](http://www.veteransofhope.org/footer/about.htm).
36 Pending publication.
Nationalist movements in the 1970s; specifically, two successor organizations to the Revolutionary Action Movement: the Afrikan People’s Party and the House of Umoja. He identifies as a New Afrikan, is in his late 50s, heterosexual, and middle-class. He identified his conservative Christian upbringing, has no current formal religious affiliation, but connects with traditional African religions, and their offspring in the Diaspora. He is one of the founders of New Afrikan People’s Organization, out of which he and others also founded the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, with which he is currently involved. 37

Dolores Huerta is known primarily for her role as a founder and organizer of the United Farm Workers (UFW) union in California in the 1960s and 1970s, and has been organizing farm workers in California for her entire life. She is still associated with the immigrant rights and feminist liberation movements. Currently she is the President of the Dolores Huerta Foundation. 38 She is Mexican-American, Roman Catholic, in her early 80s, heterosexual. She is the author of a number of articles and is featured in a number of documentaries.

B♀ Brown was a member of a radical anti-imperialist/anti-authoritarian, anti-racist group in the Pacific Northwest called the George Jackson Brigade during the 1970s. She was a political prisoner 39 for eight years as a result of her involvement in the bombings and bank robberies of the Brigade. She resides in Oakland and her current

37 Information on the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement can be found at http://mxgm.org/.
38 See information on the Dolores Huerta Foundation, including a full-length biography of Dolores Huerta at http://www.doloreshuerta.org/.
occupation is as a highway worker for the California Highway Department. Her other vocation is as a volunteer with the Prison Activist Resource Center and All of Us or None.\textsuperscript{40} She was an editor of \textit{Out of Time}, a magazine sponsored by Out of Control: Lesbian Committee to Support Women Political Prisoners, which was published within LAGAI’s (Lesbians and Gays Against Interventions) magazine the online publication \textit{UltraViolet}.\textsuperscript{41} Her life and the work of the George Jackson Brigade have been featured in two recent publications: \textit{Guerrilla USA: The George Jackson Brigade and the Anticapitalist Underground of the 1970s} and \textit{Creating a Movement with Teeth: A Documentary History of the George Jackson Brigade}.\textsuperscript{42} She is in her early 60s. She had an unaffiliated Christian upbringing and currently has no religious affiliation. She identifies as a white, working-class, butch dyke.

Derrick Jensen lives and works in Crescent City, CA. He is a writer of fiction and non-fiction dealing with the destruction of the environment and the end of civilization. He has authored and co-authored over twenty books. His most recent work related to violence and (non)violence, co-authored with Lierre Keith and Aric McBay, is \textit{Deep Green Resistance: Strategy to Save the Planet}.\textsuperscript{43} He is in his early 50s, middle class, heterosexual. He was raised in the Seventh Day Adventist tradition. Though he rejects a personal label he said his spiritual perspective might be considered animist.

\textsuperscript{40} For more information see \url{http://www.prisonactivist.org/}; \url{http://www.allofusornone.org/}.

\textsuperscript{41} \textit{UltraViolet} and \textit{Out of Time} can be found at \url{http://www.lagai.org/ultraviolet.htm}.


I interviewed Staughton Lynd and Alice Lynd together in their home in Niles, Ohio. Staughton Lynd is an historian and lawyer. He was the director of the Mississippi Summer Freedom Schools in 1964. He is also generally associated with the early anti-Vietnam war movement. His antiwar activity caused him to be blacklisted as an academic historian. Thereafter he went to law school and associated himself with the labor movement and prisoner advocacy as a lawyer. His most recent work includes *Wobblies and Zapatistas: Conversations on Anarchism, Marxism, and Radical History* and *From Here to There: The Staughton Lynd Reader* and *Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change*. He was also the subject of a recent biography *The Admirable Radical: Staughton Lynd and Cold War Dissent, 1945-1970*. He is in his early 80s. He was raised in the tradition of ethical humanism and is a Quaker. Alice Lynd was a draft counselor during the Vietnam War. She served for years as a lawyer for workers and retirees and currently for prisoners in supermaximum security and on death row. She has authored and co-authored with Staughton a number of oral histories on draft resisters and rank-and-file workers. She was raised in the Quaker tradition. Like Staughton, she is in her early 80s. Staughton and Alice celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary in 2011. They


45 Forthcoming, 2012.


co-authored their autobiography *Stepping Stones: Memoir of a Life Together*,\(^{48}\) and are the co-editors of *Nonviolence in America: A Documentary History*.\(^{49}\)

**Data Gathering and Analysis**

I met with each interviewee for a period of time that ranged from ninety minutes to approximately three hours. I transcribed each of the recorded interviews soon after every interview. I analyzed, coded, and reflected upon each interview separately. I used three different first-cycle coding techniques: in-vivo, initial, and descriptive.\(^{50}\) These three methods led me to identify broad themes that cohered across the interview data, even if the interviewees’ perspectives on these themes were in opposition to one another. I created a document that listed these themes and the most relevant pieces of the interview transcripts related to these categories.\(^{51}\) Once I finished conducting, transcribing, and analyzing every interview through these methods, I entered into a


\(^{50}\) For a description of these three coding methods see Chapter Three in Johnny Saldaña, *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009). I also went through each interview and noted in every case where a social locator was mentioned, what the interviewee was talking about at that time, whether or not it related specifically to the question of violence and (non)violence for social change.

\(^{51}\) Saldaña states that while normally “themes” (extended phrases or sentences) are not considered “codes” (one word labels), a researcher may choose to “theme the data.” I found this flexibility necessary to my coding process. My interviewees were so knowledgeable and continuously active in social movements and scholarship that the sheer magnitude of major themes (twenty-three) emerging from only twelve persons was almost unmanageable. Saldaña notes that with theming, the “analytic goals are to winnow down the number of themes to explore in a report, and to develop and ‘overarching theme’ from the data corpus, or an ‘integrative theme’ that weaves various themes together into a coherent narrative” (139-140).
second-cycle coding process, using the method of “focused coding,” attempting to integrate the many themes identified in the first cycle of coding.52

The qualitative method I employed applied a critical, self-reflexive approach. By critical and self-reflexive, I mean that I made every effort to reflect on my own social location as it interacted with the interviewees’ social locations and the movements.53 I used an intentional, reflexive written method throughout the information gathering and process of analysis which promoted my own transparency and credibility. I took copious notes and analytic memos in a journal while coding each interview. This process served as a means to both identify, bracket54 and share my own assumptions and biases as I proceeded with research and writing, including the issues involved in representing and interpreting the experience of the participants in the research whose social location differs from my own. This technique allowed me to keep potential intersections and differences I began to note among the interviews together but aside, so that I might complete the

---

52 To see a description of focused coding, see Saldaña, 155-159. Using focused coding on the themed data and the analytic memos I took throughout data analysis, allowed me to come up with the foci of each chapter: a theory of violence in Chapter Two, the relationship of Christianity to the theory in Chapter Three, and the three integrative themes reflected in Chapters Four through Six.


analysis of each interview, as far as possible, as it stood on its own. It also served as a source for theoretical reflection, influencing the formation of key points for chapters, and therefore was a method itself of practical, theological analysis.

Practical Theology from a Liberationist Perspective

The qualitative research is set within the field of practical theology. While qualitative methodologies have not been fully articulated within the field of practical theology until recently, these data-gathering methods are essential to the practical theological method.\(^{55}\) Central to practical theology is the understanding that lived practices are theological expressions.\(^{56}\) While the practices for theological reflection have primarily focused on ministerial formation and congregational ministry,\(^{57}\) other scholars argue for a broader range of “practices” beyond local church ministry which appeal to our contemporary, post-modern, pluralistic reality.\(^{58}\) Within the field of practical theology and using the interviews as the context within which Christian (non)violence and


\(^{57}\) Since much of twentieth-century practical theology focused on practices of pastoring and, in particular, pastoral care, often “notions of pastoral theology and practical theology are often confused, used differently, or used synonymously” (Woodward and Pattison, 2000, 75).

violence might be evaluated, this dissertation will take this postmodern challenge seriously. It will investigate how an engagement with differences of social location, experience and opinion among seasoned activists and scholars over the questions and practices of organized violence and (non)violence might affect Christian praxis for social transformation. Elaine Graham notes that without a serious engagement with otherness, Christian theology and practice has little chance to remain relevant in our contemporary context.59

There is a potential danger in using a practical theological method with this project and these informants. Rebecca Chopp demonstrates that, to the extent practical theologies have attempted this kind of serious postmodern, political engagement, they have often failed. Practical theologians appeal to a “revised method of correlation”60 between Christian and non-Christian practices and beliefs “in the world,” whereby the Christian tradition continues to stand as the normative, universal vision of historical reality.61 She criticizes this liberal, revisionist theology as limited for analyzing the structural contexts and historical realities of the present situation. Furthermore, practical theology potentially serves as a set of discursive practices that continue to reinforce

59 Graham, Transforming Practice, 6-8.


Christian ideology and allows for little to no radical questioning of Christian categories themselves. As she and other liberation theologians note, Christian tradition itself must be de-ideologized, and this holds true in relation Christian traditions of (non)violence. I hope that this critical, self-reflexive work might contribute to this de-ideologizing.  

For this reason, within the field of practical theology a liberationist perspective is essential. Emerging from Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s, liberation theology affirmed a privileging of the experience and knowledge of the oppressed as a source of theology. Therefore, within this dissertation, privilege will be given to the perspectives of the victims of violence as the interviewees articulate such a perspective (their own experiences as members of oppressed and marginalized communities or their experiences in solidarity with such communities). Additionally, liberation theologies affirm that theology is born from praxis, that is, the work of action and reflection by oppressed and their allies in the struggle for liberation. The work of uniting theory/theology with struggle for social change will be privileged over the contentions of theologies as

---

62 Given my social location and political commitments, I am keenly aware of the issues involved in attempting to represent and interpret the experience of the participants in the research, particularly those individuals to whose racial, religious and/or national identity groups I do not belong. I recognize that I may over-represent the issues each person presents that resonates with my own white, female, middle-class, Christian identity and make representations of other peoples’ experience that replicate dominant power relations. As Chopp highlights, I may have asked participants to reflect in ways that assumed certain kinds of knowledge of religious and theological categories for reflection, which for me are based in and biased toward the Christian tradition. There is a danger of correlating meanings in the interpretation of the information they provided, which in many cases do not stem from a Christian belief system. Nonetheless I remain committed to seeking out information that represents an experience that does not come from my own tradition and experience, and make every attempt to bracket and put into dialogue the presuppositions I bring to the process. Mauthner, et.al., write about replicating dominant power relations in qualitative research in *Ethics in Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002): 38-39, 152.

63 A “liberationist perspective” is a broad category which includes different contexts and identities. For the purposes of this dissertation, I primarily refer to the perspectives of a few early Christian liberation theologians who dealt explicitly with violence and (non)violence in their revolutionary contexts and written works: Dom Helder Câmara, James Cone, José Míguez Bonino and Juan Luis Segundo. Many well-known, contemporary white, male, U.S. Christian theologies of (non)violence today are ongoing reactions to these traditional liberationist perspectives.
abstractions. The information coming out of the interviews, the interviewees’ own experience and perspectives, will serve as the context which “acts” upon the more abstract theological tradition of (non)violence.

Chopp suggests liberation theologies provide a method best called “critical praxis correlation” where the primary context for “practice” is not merely an individual activity but takes place within a political and structural context and the daily practices of power and oppression. ⁶⁴ This critical consciousness forged the basic critique of power at the heart of many of the U.S. social movements with whose participants this dissertation intends to interact. Indeed, the liberating praxis of struggle in these movements for transformation, and the theologies which emerged from them, served as their own forms of ideology-critique about which most theologians from privileged social locations have only barely reasoned. Chopp urges all praxis-oriented transformational theologies to continue to do the work which movement-related liberation theologies began but have not completed – to develop an adequate critical, social theory to do justice to the “full meaning” of transformational practice in the context of political structures and practices of power. ⁶⁵ With Chopp’s exhortations to include a robust, liberationist perspective in mind, I intend to interpret the interview the data within the field of practical theology.

The work of joining data on thought and practice from very diverse sources and putting them into conversation with a Christian theological tradition of (non)violence has been a challenge. My initial intention was that all of the themes which emerged for discussion in this dissertation would come out of the interviews first. Then I would put

⁶⁴ Rebecca Chopp offers these critiques in *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1986) and “Practical Theology and Liberation.”

them back in conversation with previous literature as it seemed relevant. The interview data would be foremost in determining the direction and interpretation of practices and theological themes.

However, now I better understand the dilemma about which Chopp writes. In more typical projects of practical theology, Christian persons, practices and beliefs are put in conversation with already established traditional, normative categories of Christian theology: the nature of God, sin, salvation, the church, Christology, and so on. By creating an interrogation of a white, liberal Christian tradition of (non)violence, I already held assumptions that such a tradition of Christian (non)violence uniquely existed with its own unique set of normative themes. However, the normative themes of Christian (non)violence have not been identified in the same way, with the same level of precision and conformity, over millennia of history, as have the overarching categories of Christian systematic theology. Furthermore, these overarching categories of Christian theology – the nature of God, the role of Christ, etc. – are already implicit in the subthemes of Christian (non)violence. So the white, liberal Christian tradition of (non)violence was already shaping my reading of the data for themes I intuitively understood to be operating, but which were not entirely clear to me.

In this dissertation, I have named two themes for interrogation in Christian (non)violence: “loving the enemy” and “faithful, not effective.” I deal with these two themes in chapters four and five. These themes assist me to investigate my suspicion into the ways Christian (non)violence may serve to obscure the operation of political and economic power, maintain privilege, and undermine social transformation. I believe that these two themes constitute normative categories within the tradition of Christian
(non)violence in both theology and practice. Although I was not consciously looking for these themes, they shaped my reading of the data. At the same time, it was the diverse interviewee data that led me to identify these themes as normative. In doing so, I have fulfilled my intention to keep the data primary to driving the project, while recognizing the privileging of Christian ideas in my analysis.

I suspect that broad analysis of social change practices and thinking under a Christian theological rubric is limited, and potentially serves to bolster Christian ideologies and allow for little to no radical questioning of Christian categories of analysis themselves. While there appears to be much discussion about how post-modern, non-Christian practices and communities might impact practical theologies, there also appear very few attempts to do a practical theological project that reach beyond the borders of commonly conceived church and theology. Combined with a liberationist perspective and a qualitative method, the development of this research is an experiment to test the possibilities and limits of practical theology. A liberationist commitment keeps potential pitfalls in check by: confronting injustices and linking them across differences; articulating material power and its practices of enforcement; the emancipation of oppressed communities through struggle; understanding relationships between social structures and ideologies; and, continuing to bear in conscious mind the relationship between the researcher, research topic and research participants.66

---

This project takes seriously the challenge within the field of practical theology to address “practices” beyond local church ministry as a starting point for reflection. It will further examine how a concrete engagement with “otherness” outside of strictly Christian communities might impact Christian practice. In this way it will serve as a critique of the largely provincial and liberal nature of the Christian practical theological enterprise to date. It will aspire to the work of including an adequate liberationist perspective to do justice to the full meaning of transformational Christian practice in the context of structures and practices of power, including Christian ones. The results may make it possible to conceive of new ways of constructing Christian praxis as it relates to solidarity in social struggle today between and among oppressed and privileged persons and groups as communities work together for fundamental social change.

Chapter Outline

In the second chapter, I set out to define the broader context of violence within which violent and (non)violent actions for social change take place. I begin to develop a method of analysis of violence and (non)violence for social change that is the heart of the dissertation. I use Johan Galtung’s theory of violence in order to frame the interviewees’ responses to my questions about deliberating over the means, violent and (non)violent, of social change. Interviewees’ perspectives draw out and complicate Galtung’s notions of direct, structural, and cultural violence as the context in which actions for social change take place and broaden the definition of violence. Interviewee information sharpens the

need to critically identify the cultural bases for the mystification of violence, particularly within the United States: mythological historical U.S. narrative and Christian theology.

The mystification of these broader understandings of violence then takes on a certain reasoning that the interviewee data illuminates: (1) the denial of the dominant culture’s history of the United States as a violent history; (2) the reversal and projection of this violence onto the victims of violence as the perpetrators of violence, and; (3) the construction of a sense of entitlement gained by the material and psychological advantages of this violence by members of the dominant culture. In this chapter, I describe the terms social location and dominant culture and the ways in which identities and communities condition an understanding of what violence is and how different groups respond to various uses of violence within society. Social location influences views on who the perpetrators of violence are. The justifiability or unjustifiability of the use of violence is based on the dominant historical U.S. narrative and cultural determinants. Individual and community self-defense will serve as an example of how the trajectory of rationalizing violence in dominant culture – denial, reversal, entitlement – works.

The third chapter covers the relationship of the Christian tradition to the three forms of violence – direct, structural, and cultural. From the interviewee data we consider the ways Christianity has been implicated in various forms of violence within the creation and maintenance of dominant U.S. culture. We will look at Christianity as a “deep structure” of Western consciousness and ask if it is possible to assert the Christian tradition as a source or norm for (non)violence theory and practice in light of its theoretical underpinnings and historical role in all forms of violence and oppression. The
trajectory of rationalizing violence in dominant culture – denial, reversal, and entitlement – will help us to see if and how (non)violence, in thought and in practice, contributes to the reasoning and mystification of violence in the United States. We will also view the counter-cultural role of Christian (non)violence as a principle and strategy of resistance to oppression and a vehicle of social change. We will consider the ways in which (non)violence may undermine the dominant trajectory of rationalizing violence: how it exposes denial, potentially reverses the reversal of violent perpetration, and functions to dismantle entitlement.

Practical theology takes seriously the intersections of practices and theology in the church and world, intending that an engagement of these intersections leads to social change. If Christian (non)violent activists take their own words, beliefs and actions seriously, then they must examine the actual impact of their discourse and tactics. Chapters Four and Five each address one overarching theme that interviewee data helped me to identify as constituting normative categories within the tradition of Christian (non)violence: “loving the enemy” and “faithful, not effective.” Through these themes, Chapters Four and Five investigate the ways white, liberal Christian (non)violence as practice and theological discourse may obscure the operation of power and undermine the potential for the structural transformation of violence. Some interviewee perspectives on these themes demonstrate the potential effective power of (non)violence for fundamental social transformation. Chapters Four and Five are both critiques and reconstructions of these themes within Christian (non)violence.

Chapter Four takes up the theme “Loving the Enemy” and the Christian theological discourse of (non)violence. Christian scriptural references, particularly loving
the enemy, come forward repeatedly in Christian demands for (non)violence and came forward repeatedly in the interviews. Interviewees’ perspectives illuminate what it means concretely to deal with adversaries in the context of social struggle; who or what the enemy is and what loving the enemy looks like in socially located, historic practice. These perspectives highlight the tensions and contradictions between a theological claim and demand to reverence all of life and the realities of violence towards those who “don’t matter,” both human and non-human. These points of view complicate what it might mean in practical terms to love the individuals and structures responsible for various levels of violence. Reflections by interviewees pose questions of how an abstract, human-centered, Christian moral demand to love, embedded in a Christian history of violence, may square with the maintenance of structures and practices of violence and the entitlements that violence justifies. “Loving the enemy” may manifest as an ideological discourse that obscures and perpetuates violence in various forms.

Yet both interviewee perspectives and the tradition of Christian (non)violence also indicate the power of two essential insights of loving the enemy, and therefore its potential transformational power: the interconnectedness of all life and a vision of a world without violence. Since the purpose of practical theology is to construct both a better theology and practice for the purpose of transformation, I will begin to construct a more robust idea of what a meaningful concept of loving the enemy might be and might mean for social change.

Chapter Five engages the claim in Christian (non)violence that Christian agents of social change are called to be “faithful, not effective.” As Chapter Four describes, (non)violence is named as the most faithful, moral Christian response to injustice,
regardless of whether or not (non)violent practices are effective to reduce structural violence and make social change. The interviewees’ experiences in social struggle challenge this claim and make the need for effectiveness obvious. The analysis of the interviews identified a constellation of four actual, collective practices of effective social change tactics and strategies in history: consciousness-raising, organizing, building alternative communities, and disruptive, collective action. The interviews underscore the conflict between the need for social change tactics and strategies to be effective and the reality that the transformation which social change agents seek is often not realized in the course of one generation or lifetime.

Interviewees also emphasize that all effective social change in any historic moment has required remarkable levels of sacrifice. The willingness or unwillingness to make sacrifices for effective social transformation is often conditioned by social location and the fear of loss of privileged entitlements. Therefore, the notion “faithful, not effective” may serve to conceal individual and/or collective fear to make the material and/or psychological sacrifices required for effective and profound transformation of the structures of violence. On the other hand, Christian interviewees appeal to certain aspects of the Christian tradition of (non)violence as a unique source for effective social change: the language and examples of Christian sacrifice in scripture and history; a language, tradition and practice of consciousness-raising and community-building. Christian history and practice includes alternative, pre-figurative communities that actually and potentially resist the dominant U.S. political and economic order. In light of a need and a desire for effectiveness, and in the face of profound structural and cultural resistance in dominant, U.S. society, consider what a critical, Christian practice of effective tactics might include.
Chapter Six is about solidarity. All interviewees recognized that transformation of the structures of violence will only be accomplished collaboratively, across various kinds of difference: differences of identity, power, belief and practice about the legitimate means of change, violent and/or (non)violent. As allies in social struggle from the dominant culture bring their patterns of dominance into movements, alliances among groups have been fraught with problems of power associated with differences. Social justice movements have reproduced the very forms of violence, power and privilege they say they oppose. In this chapter, I consider the various answers that the interviewees gave in response to the meaning and practice of solidarity, historically and currently. Some interviewees questioned altogether the unequal power dynamic implied by the language of being allies. They identified multiple practices of solidarity that embody dismantling the inequalities of structural and cultural violence. A liberationist commitment privileges the knowledge of the oppressed and recognizes that historically long-term social change has rarely, if ever, originated in the centers of dominant identities and culture. Interviewees reaffirmed this radical-liberationist commitment to solidarity with and the self-determination of the liberation struggle of the victims of violence. But a new historical moment and conflicting interviewee perspectives questioned if it is possible and desirable to think through to a more comprehensive position on solidarity through genuinely mutual shared struggle. Interviewees affirmed that it is difficult to make collective contributions to social transformation as privileged allies in social struggle that do not amount to the reproduction of the values and practices of the socio-political, economic order of white, heterosexual, bourgeois, Christian dominant culture. But it is possible through practices that the interviewees named.
In light of this evaluation of interviewee data on violence and (non)violence for social change, in the conclusion I will frame a critical, contextual and practical theological model for thinking about and acting for social transformation. This critical, practical theological model will attempt to construct a role for Christian (non)violence, including the role of social location, as a potentially liberatory practice of social struggle. The practical theological model itself will invite its own criticism by revisiting the questions, limits and problems of setting and interpreting diverse interviewee data on social struggle within a normative, dominant and historically violent Christian theological frame.
CHAPTER TWO: WHAT IS VIOLENCE?

Many persons who consider themselves adherents of (non)violent social change have failed to include a comprehensive analysis of the violence and oppression within which (non)violence has historically operated. Any practice or theory/theology of (non)violence must begin with a critical examination of the situation of violence. Violence pervades even the most thorough-going efforts at individual and collective (non)violence. In order to understand violence and (non)violence for social change we must first comprehend the nature of violence.

The list of interviewees’ descriptions of violence is long. All of them recognized different kinds and levels of violence, mentioning the following forms in their discussions: warfare and training for warfare, the violence of poverty, the imposition of religious and cultural norms in Christian missions, dehumanization, nuclear proliferation, consumerism, indifference to suffering and death, verbal abuse, domestic abuse, physical retaliation, colonialism, state-police repression, individual and community self-defense, property destruction, murder and the death penalty, rape, racism and racial violence, queer-bashing and gay hate crimes, patriarchy and misogyny, armed struggle, rebellion and riots, the domination of the earth by humans, exploitive working conditions and the diseases of industrialization, genocide, incarceration, toxic waste, commodification of the non-human natural community, unjust legal systems. Given this wide range of understandings of violence, the first challenge is making sense of how one thing named
violence takes so many forms. The second challenge is to understand that which comes to be regarded as justifiable or unjustifiable forms of violence and how these views may be based upon one’s position in society in relation to dominant culture.

Over half of the interviewees identified their awareness and experience of suffering as a young person as the root of their willingness to engage in radical action and scholarship at a later time. Engaging in action for social change happened when the connection between the overt forms of physical violence they witnessed or experienced directly and the systems they identified as primarily engendering this violence became clear. While the interviewees all took seriously individual acts of direct, interpersonal violence, this was not the focus of any one of them. They understood individual violent acts primarily as outgrowths of larger, more destructive forces. The main task for this section is to highlight these larger, systemic perspectives on violence.

Except for Dear, I never directly asked the interviewees for their definitions of violence. After learning about their personal backgrounds and identifications with certain movements, I asked each interviewee about the social movements and struggles with which they primarily identified. Then I asked them questions about the use of violent and

---

67 The awareness and experience of suffering as a motivating factor in social activism is also true of the interviews in the book Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World, Laurent A. Parks Daloz, et.al. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1997). Schulman also notes the “two distinctly different experiences” of AIDS activists from ACT UP and young, normalized New York City queers “separated by the gulf of action fueled by suffering on the one hand and the threat of pacifying assimilation on the other” (Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 6).

68 I asked Dear this question later in the interview because one of the central points of his theology of (non)violence is his theological definition of violence, described at length in two of his books, Disarming the Heart and The God of Peace: Toward a Theology of Nonviolence (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1994).
(non)violent tactics in social change along the lines of the questions I had prepared in my interview guide:

In your own experience with these movements and organizations, have you been exposed to situations in which you and your colleagues had to deliberate over the use of what kinds of tactics to use in social change, violent or nonviolent? Can you give an example? Tell a story? What were/are some of the resources by which groups of persons engaged in these social movements/groups have made such deliberations? What factors contribute to how those decisions get made? Can you give an example?

Only Schulman definitively responded that, in her experience within the context of ACT-UP New York, there was never a discussion about the use of violent tactics. Other interviewees’ foremost responses were to indicate that they were always discussing violence, because the entire context for social movements and social struggle is violence.

Dear’s initial response to this line of questioning was:

I’ve been in that conversation every single day of my life. I mean if you are involved in nonviolence, it means you are dealing with violence. And if you are not dealing with violence, then it’s not nonviolence.

The main thrust of Kelly’s interview was to understand violence primarily as the consumptive lifestyle of the United States and her community’s call to (non)violently resist the structural violence of warfare required to literally fuel that consumption.

There has to be some serious grappling with the inherent violence in being part of the have and the privileged people in this world. You know, the privilege of being able to flip on the electricity and consume like there’s no tomorrow. Or having access to transportation modes that are so safe compared to other people. Having access to food without having to pull it out of the ground or engaging in back-breaking labor and having ample amounts of it. And all of it, this is a privilege that I think has been protected with just an obscene and a menacing level of violence…. the war against the poor I think is constantly being waged, decade

---

after decade in this country. And one of the reasons that impoverished people in this country don’t get a fair share of the pie is because so much of the wealth and productivity goes to make even more obvious and often brutal and lethal warfare against people in other countries, ostensibly to protect an American way of life, which is an unattractive way of life in the first place.\(^70\)

Dear also spoke of the interconnections between the development of nuclear weapons and warfare abroad with poverty and violent individual behaviors in his home state of New Mexico.

Poorest state in the country, New Mexico. Number one in nuclear weapons, number one in military spending, and number one in drunk driving, domestic violence, suicide, worst education system in the country. …Thousands of very poor parishioners had no money, no jobs, no health care. You get sick, you die. The priest in the next town over, which was the third or fourth largest city, told me when I came, “your job as a priest for the poor in New Mexico is to say their funerals.” You get cancer, you’re dead. I was preaching to and ministering to thousands of very poor people. And demonstrating against the war in Iraq on their behalf, even though they hated it; against nuclear weapons even though they hated that. The money going to Los Alamos belongs to the poor people of New Mexico, and the United States, and the world. Los Alamos is destroying the land and the water of these poor people. From the indigenous people to everybody.

By simply invoking the experiences of social struggle, the interviewees indicated there are conditions of violence structured into society which can and must be identified first of all. These conditions evoke transformation through social struggle; the suffering, poverty, injustice, exploitation and death out of which social movements are born and formed. Whatever the principles and practices of these movements are, whether violent and/or (non)violent, their participants are responding to pre-existing conditions of what is referred to as structural violence.

\(^{70}\) Kathy Kelly, interview with the author, June 9, 2010, Maryhouse Catholic Worker, New York City, New York, unpublished transcript.
Direct Violence, Structural Violence

The reason for the existence of various forms of injustice is that some persons have political and economic power that bring material and psychological advantages while others do not. Privileged status requires suffering and injustice in order to gain and maintain that advantage. Dear points out not only that a majority of persons in New Mexico are poor, but the vast majority of persons in New Mexico are poor and deprived of state resources because of those who profit enormously from the wealth of the military-industrial complex.\(^71\) The people of Iraq suffer under military occupation so that multinational companies and political elites may profit and so that U.S. citizens may continue to lead the material lives to which we have become accustomed. At issue here is the way in which these structures of violence and the everyday operations attendant with the structures come to be seen as normal and natural for some people and experienced as violence by others.

The common, everyday understanding of the word violence is not usually related to the larger forces of violence the interviewees described. Robert McAfee Brown writes that “our immediate response to the word violence is to think of it as describing an overt, physical act of destruction…”\(^72\) Ransom Eugene Casey-Rutland’s survey of dictionary definitions reinforces this predominant understanding. Violence is generally conceived of

---

\(^71\) Dwight D. Eisenhower coined this term in his final speech to the nation as President of the United States in 1961.

as “observable, instrumental, forceful behavior,” with attention focused on the person or agent of that force.\footnote{R. Eugene Casey-Rutland, “An Examination of the Issue of Violence in the Writings of Selected Latin American Liberation Theologians,” (Emory University, Ph.D. dissertation, 1991): 36.}

As opposed to this forceful, observable behavior, the interviewees primarily identified structural violence, a term described by Johan Galtung. Galtung wrote that “violence is present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realizations…”\footnote{Casey-Rutland, 54. Casey-Rutland refers to this understanding of violence as the “conventional” understanding and includes Hannah Arendt’s classic and influential book On Violence under this rubric. The “unconventional” understanding about to be delineated includes Marx, Frantz Fanon, Georges Sorel, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Johan Galtung.} or “lowering the real level of needs satisfaction below what is potentially possible.”\footnote{Johan Galtung, “Violence, Peace and Peace Research,” 168. The needs Galtung defines are: survival, well-being, identity, and freedom.} Galtung’s theory of violence includes direct violence, the observable and overt violence described above, a form of bodily incapacitation as the result of direct, physical force and the range of deprivations such bodily harm causes. Yet there are also need deprivations\footnote{Johan Galtung. “Cultural Violence,” Journal of Peace Research, vol. 27, no. 3, 1990: 292.} as the result of poverty, hunger, racial discrimination and so on, that cannot so easily be traced back to concrete persons as agents of violence. Whether or not there is or appears to be a subject

When the language of structural violence entered into the vocabulary of peace and justice studies with Galtung’s 1969 article, the impact of structural violence as needs deprivation was often related to comparisons of life expectancy within industrialized countries and between industrialized and non-industrialized countries. See a discussion of this early work using Galtung’s paradigm in Kathleen Mass Weigert, “Structural Violence,” Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict. Lester Kurtz, ed. (San Diego: Academic Press, 1999): 431-439. Political philosopher Ted Hondereich demonstrates how such comparisons are relevant in the twenty-first century, using current life-expectancy data to illuminate the ongoing “wretchedness” of structural violence, which Hondereich describes as the root of most contemporary terrorism. Hondereich argues that in order to be understood, political violence must be identified on the basis of its connection to conditions of wretchedness. Terrorism for Humanity Inquiries in Political Philosophy (London: Pluto Press, 2003).
(person) that acts violently is critical to comprehending structural violence. “There may not be any person who directly harms another person in the structure. The violence shows up as unequal power and consequently as unequal life chances.”

The fundamental characteristic of structural violence is structural inequality. Inequality viewed this way is neither merely random nor strictly a matter of choice, but structured into society itself. Galtung urges making a distinction between direct, personal violence and structural violence a basic point of comprehension in peace studies, as “there is no reason to assume that structural violence amounts to less suffering than personal violence.”

None of the interviewees reduced the causes of all forms of direct, interpersonal violence to structures. Yet every one of them stated or implied a relationship between structures of violence and acts of violence by individuals or groups whether for political or non-political purposes. This was true of the maximum-security prisoners with whom Alice and Staughton Lynd have relationships. Many of these men committed extreme acts of personal, direct violence against other human beings. The Lynds described that without exception these men, almost all of them men of color, had been subjected in their young lives to the extreme deprivations and dehumanization of direct and structural violence. Galtung emphasizes that structural violence cannot be simplified as the root of all personal, direct violence. For our purposes, however, it is critical to grasp the “cross-breeding” of personal and structural violence, the scope of the truly harmful

---

79 Ibid., 173.
80 Staughton and Alice Lynd, interview with the author, December 28, 2010, Niles, Ohio, unpublished transcript.
consequences of structural violence, and to understand more fully who the subject/actors in structural violence are.\textsuperscript{81}

When discussing violence, Dear and the Lynds referred to the writing of Archbishop Oscar Romero of El Salvador as a source for grasping various kinds and levels of violence. Romero echoed the analysis of the Roman Catholic Latin American bishops’ gathering in Medellin, Columbia in 1968.\textsuperscript{82} These bishops and founders of Latin American liberation theology were central to introducing the notion of institutional violence to Christian audiences as they grappled with the centuries-old violence of their continent.

The violence we are talking about is the violence that a minority of privileged people has waged against the vast majority of deprived people. It is the violence of hunger, helplessness, and underdevelopment. It is the violence of persecution, oppression, and neglect. It is the violence of organized prostitution, of illegal but flourishing slavery, and of social, economic, and intellectual discrimination… We call this “violence” because it is not the inevitable consequence of technically unsolvable problems, but the unjust result of a situation that is maintained deliberately… rooted mainly in the political, economic, and social systems that prevail… based on the profit motive as the sole standard for measuring economic progress.\textsuperscript{83}

The bishops describe structural violence as deliberate. Yet this structural understanding is not understood to be violence by dominant classes in society because they rarely feel it.

\textsuperscript{81} In “Violence, Peace and Peace Research,” Galtung deals with the relationship between structural and personal violence in pages 178-180.

\textsuperscript{82} The Medellín conference is known officially as the Second General Conference of Latin American Bishops. The conference documents in English are commonly known as “The Medellín Conclusions” and can be found in The Church in the Present-Day Transformation of Latin America in Light of the Council (3\textsuperscript{rd} ed.) (Washington, DC: Secretariat for Latin America, National Conference of Catholic Bishops: 1979).

Nor do most members of the dominant culture perceive themselves as implicated in these structures of violence or as benefitting from them. This “commonsense” understanding and use of the term violence as only coercive action functions to marginalize and obscure competing accounts of what violence is for the purposes of maintaining the privileges of the members of the dominant culture.\(^84\)

**Institutions, Structural Violence and Accountability**

The terms institutional violence and structural violence are often used interchangeably. Using the term institutional versus structural may help to more closely identify the concrete institutions of violence,\(^85\) who operates the institutions, who benefits from the institutions, and therefore who is implicated and/or responsible for the consequences of the behavior of these institutions. I will continue to use the term structural violence throughout this dissertation, which in Galtung’s framework includes institutions. Yet Galtung goes so far as to suggest that actors do not exist in a meaningful way in a conception of structural violence.\(^86\)

---


\(^85\) Peter Iadicola and Anson Shupe identify the five primary institutions of society as economy, polity, family, education, and religion, in *Violence, Inequality, and Human Freedom* (2nd ed) (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publisher, Inc., 2003): 29. They describe institutional and structural violence as distinct spheres of violence. Their notion of structural violence is the “hierarchical ordering of categories in society” that maintains and extends institutional violence. This notion of structural violence coheres more with Galtung’s notion of “cultural violence,” to be dealt with later. In *Essays in Peace Research, Volume I* (Copenhagen: Christian Ejlers, 1975): 24, Galtung is clear that he does not see structural and institutional violence as strictly the same because structural violence is not concretely tied to any one specific institution, and is far more open-ended in relation to its precise mechanisms.

The activist orientation of the interviewees shows, however, that researching, discovering, naming and analyzing the agents of structural violence is a key to accountability and structural transformation. As organizers, Huerta, Schulman, and the Lynds all described concrete processes by which local and national institutional agents of structural violence came to be known and targeted in their advocacy and movement work in order for specific social changes to come about. Huerta described organizing in central California in order to get water sewers for poor farm workers by identifying the processes and agents of power and replacing them locally. Schulman talked about research and tactics involved in holding pharmaceutical companies and the U.S. government accountable in order to provide needle exchanges and housing for homeless people with AIDS, and to make needed HIV/AIDS drug treatments available. Jensen identified Union Carbide CEO Warren Anderson and Tony Hayward of British Petroleum as clearly responsible for the destruction of human and non-human life within the corporate structures of economic and environmental violence in certain cases. It is easy to identify the U.S. government as responsible for war and the occupation in Iraq and Afghanistan, but making this general claim does not change the conditions and precedents of war-making. Schulman felt it appropriate to identify and hold President George W. Bush responsible for war crimes. By relating specific persons to specific institutions within broader structures of violence in concrete contexts, the interviewees challenge Galtung’s notion of non-actors in structural violence.

Comprehending the matter of accountability is critical as a more broad definition of violence unfolds. A more expansive comprehension of violence illuminates how conceptions and practices of violence and (non)violence interrelate. The extensive, all-pervasive nature of structural violence implicates not only executive power-holders that are responsible for the institutions and enterprises that perpetrate violence; but all persons are implicated in this violence.

“Where You Stand Determines What You See”: Social Location and Structural Violence

In order to understand that pervasive implications of structural violence in this context, it is necessary to understand oppression and privilege in the United States. In this country, how we determine who is privileged and who is oppressed relates to what is often referred to as social location. Social location denotes various markers of social identity which have been constructed under historical circumstances: race, class, gender identity, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, physical/cognitive dis/ability, religion and citizenship status. In the United States each of these categories of identity offer material advantages to members of one group while disadvantaging others. For example, a heterosexual male has legal and social privileges not offered to the same degree to a man who loves other men. More often than not, persons with institutional power in this

society come from favored categories, the combination of which constitute themselves into a dominant, cultural identity in the United States. This is what is meant by dominant culture. Furthermore, to be a white, heterosexual, middle-class, able-bodied, Christian, U.S. citizen of European descent becomes a norm for what it means to be human. The not-white, not-heterosexual, not-Christian, poor, female or gender queer person gets demarcated as not normal, less than human or “other.”

We must understand but not oversimplify this statement. Certainly within any one person, or a social group or movement, there are multiple privileged and marginalized identities which all intersect and interact to create a complex mix of identity. For example, Schulman asks what “white” means.

Does “white” mean working-class Italians, new immigrants from Eastern Europe, low-income artists, low-income students, low-income homosexuals, who are out of the closet and don’t want to be harassed? Or does it mean whites who are speculators, or who come to work in the financial industry, to profit from globalization, or who live on income other than what they earn? Identity categories are not easily demarcated. The employees at the nuclear development complex that Dear protests at Los Alamos, New Mexico are most likely a mix of many identifiers of social location: men and women, white people and Mexican-American-indigenous, upper-class and working class, gay men, straight women, Christian and non-religious persons. While some working class people benefit from jobs in these industries, the point is that those who are in power and who profit at extreme levels in these industries consistently represent persons from the dominant categories of identity, the dominant culture: white, male, Christian, and so on. These systems of oppression and

\[89\] Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind*, 34.
privilege exist to maintain the continued political and economic power of these groups. To reiterate, structural violence – the conditions of oppression and injustice, whether poverty or racism or sexism – exist because some persons have power that others do not as a result of the identity groups to which they belong. Persons from primarily privileged social locations are socialized to believe that this is not the case. On the contrary, the U.S. dominant narrative leads citizens to believe that all persons are created equal and have equal opportunities to participate in the pursuit of life, liberty and happiness.

The interviewees came to personally understand and demystify these larger forces, narratives, and operations of dominant culture for a number of reasons. Some are not members of dominant cultural identity groups: they are not white, not Christian, not heterosexual, they grew up poor. For many of them, the experience and deprivations of direct and structural violence in their early years were real. Their social location influenced what they could see and understand about violence. Umoja grew up in Compton, California, but his earliest memories are from the time his family lived in Oklahoma, which was still racially segregated into the late 1950s. B♀ described growing up working poor in rural southwest Oregon. She described that the main difference between the rich and poor classes is the ability of the rich to insulate themselves from certain kinds of structural violence, though not always direct violence. For example,

---

90 This does not mean that the structural nature of violence was obvious to all of them in their younger years. However, within the literature, beginning with Galtung, structural violence is also referred to indirect, invisible, covert, or hidden violence. McAfee Brown (Religion and Violence, 35) notes the privileged stance of using such terms. To the victims, violence is not covert or hidden, invisible or indirect. This terminology reflects privileged viewpoints.
though growing up in a relatively economically and racially privileged family, Jensen writes openly about the vicious domestic abused perpetrated on his family by his father.91

Others’ eyes were opened to the structures of violence because of a change in their geographic location. For Vincent Harding, military boot camp removed him from his immediate Christian culture and caused him to question violence. Although he grew up within dominant culture, Ward Churchill served in combat in the Vietnam War. Kelly described how her consciousness of the daily operations of power and violence began changing after college when she moved out a wealthy area of Chicago into one its poorest neighborhoods in the late 1970s. This shift in location provided Kelly with two critical points that deeply influenced her radicalization and the beginning of her long career in activism.

The first was to better understand the violence of impoverishment. And then to understand my own personal collaboration with that violence by paying taxes… secondly to embody this notion of “where you stand determines what you see” and if you are standing with people, alongside of people who are in the crosshairs of the bombs or of the snipers or of the potential explosions you have a different perspective than the persons who are either comfortably not even engaged, even though they might be paying for the whole thing, or part of the country that’s launched the war, or if you are ready to shoot or launch the explosives, whatever the weapons are, or the economic weapons.

Kelly identifies that “where you stand,” your identity as it relates to dominant structures of power, determines what you consider to be violence. A dominant cultural social location most often prevents understanding the realities of structural violence as well as protects privileged individuals and groups from the most harmful effects of all

---

91 While Jensen writes about this in a number of texts, he uses this experience of abuse as a touchstone to understanding the devastation of the earth in *A Language Older than Words* (White River Junction, VT: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2000).
forms of violence. As Kelly pointed out earlier, “the privilege of being able to flip on the electricity and consume like there’s no tomorrow” in this country is “protected with just an obscene and a menacing level of violence,” from the war on terrorism to the war on drugs. Kelly writes,

Many of us westerners can live well and continue ‘having it all’ if we only agree to avert our gaze, to look the other way, to politely notice that in order to maintain our overly consumptive lifestyles, our political leaders tolerate child sacrifice. Those of us who use electricity and consume products in this country collaborate with the direct violence by which our material culture exists. We are implicated in the violence because we allow our tax dollars to pay for the system that perpetrates war. Therefore we are responsible, if not accountable, for the direct and structural violence that characterize our life as a society. Broader understandings of violence complicate and expand the implications for personal responsibility. Churchill noted continuities but also important distinctions between perpetrating violence and benefiting from it, whether directly or indirectly. War is only one example. Members of the dominant culture participate in structures of violence in multiple ways. In order to grasp the complexity of the actors involved in structural violence we must understand how these structures came to be and why these structures of violence are so unclear to members of this culture.

---

92 Kelly, Other Lands Have Dreams, 36. Here Kelly refers in particular to the comments of former U.S. Secretary of State Madeline Albright, who, “when she was asked about the fact that more children had died in Iraq than in Hiroshima and Nagasaki combined, “ responded, “It’s a difficult choice to make, but we think the price is worth it.”
Cultural Violence

Twenty years after defining structural violence, Galtung marked cultural violence out from structural violence. He defines it as “the symbolic sphere of our existence… that can be used to justify or legitimize direct or structural violence.”

Whereas Galtung describes structural violence as an uneven process, cultural violence is characterized by its permanence, a “deep substratum” from which direct and structural violence flow.

According to Galtung, cultural violence is exemplified in six domains – religion and ideology, language and art, and empirical and formal science (logic, mathematics).

Galtung’s definition of cultural violence is somewhat imprecise. Political philosopher Iris Marion Young’s concept of cultural imperialism more clearly articulates Galtung’s notion of cultural violence.

[Cultural imperialism] means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other…. [it] involves the universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm…. An encounter with other groups, however, can challenge the dominant group’s claim to universality. The dominant group reinforces its position by bringing the other groups under the measure of its dominant norms…. [T]he culturally imperialized are stamped with an essence. The stereotypes confine them to a nature which is often attached in some way to their bodies, and which thus cannot easily be denied. These stereotypes so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable.

---

94 Ibid., 294.
95 Ibid., 291.
96 Iris Marion Young, Justice and the Politics of Difference (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990): 58-59. Cultural imperialism is Young’s “fourth face” of oppression. Young defines oppression as a “family of concepts and conditions that she names “the five faces” of oppression (40). The first three “faces” – exploitation, marginalization and powerlessness – describe different aspects of oppression within an economic-distributive frame, more or less approximating Galtung’s definition of structural violence. She calls the fifth face of oppression violence, defined by its instrumental and
From the interviewees’ perspectives, there were two primary cultural sources for the universalization of U.S. dominant cultural norms, the marking out of marginalized and oppressed others, and the consequent mystification and justification of structural violence in the United States: 1) the mythological dominant U.S. historical narrative and 2) Christian theology. The latter will be taken up in the next chapter.

**Structural and Cultural Violence:**

**How We Came to “Where We Stand” in the United States**

The dominant historical narrative of the United States is a main form cultural violence by which the direct and structural forms of violence are defined, legitimated and obscured. The popular U.S. historical narrative universalizes the experience of white, male, Christian historical actors in their quest for freedom, equality, and liberty and establishes it as the norm for what U.S. history “is.” The normative history reinforces the position of elites by a positive, moral interpretation of the events of history. This interpretation obscures and in effect erases from dominant narratives the actual violence and subjugation necessary for white male, land-owning Christians to come into and maintain power.

Churchill and Harding’s scholarly works help us to understand how interrelated structures and institutions of economic and racial privilege and oppression came about in observable nature such as attacks on person and property (61). This coheres with Galtung’s idea of direct violence.
United States history and how these relate to conceptions of violence. For example, in *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America*, Harding details some of the precise historical mechanisms by which those who immigrated to North America from Europe came to understand themselves as white in relation to the developing economic system of servitude and slavery for the black descendants of Africans. At the time of the arrival of the first slave ship in Jamestown, Virginia, the category of slave was not clear. In the earliest years of the southern colonies, not all of the Africans were limited to the status of slaves. What was at first a fluid society of racial identity, status and servitude became increasingly codified over the next few centuries as the United States established itself.

The high European demand for certain goods such as tobacco and rice made it apparent how profitable such crop-rearing could be with the use of slave labor. Throughout the 1600s and 1700s states such as Virginia introduced laws to establish categories for life-long slavery and perpetuating slavery to the children of slaves, followed by other laws conscribing black behavior: prohibiting black-white intermarriage and property ownership by Africans; denying blacks basic political rights; outlawing the assembly and education of Africans; banning the ownership of weapons and forbidding

---


99 Harding, *There is a River*, 26.
Africans to raise their hands against whites in self-defense; making African religious ritual practices illegal, and proscribing the use of African languages. The laws served a two-fold purpose: 1) to establish economic, political, and cultural domination and definition of black captives from Africa; and 2) to build a new, fundamentally false solidarity between the upper and lower economic classes of the white population based on race and racism. The growing legal structure of the early colonies created antagonism between these newly historicized races of people:

By defining the black workers as permanent slaves held out of the mainstream of human development; by defining Christian whiteness as automatically privileged; by developing a situation in which the economic welfare of every white seemed to rest on enslaved black labor – by all these means and more, the dominant classes of the colonies consciously worked to create a white laboring force isolated from and antagonistic to black concerns…. the dangers of black-white solidarity at the bottom of society were decreased as poorer whites were legally and socially defined in a distinctly favorable status relative to Africans, and as Africans were forced to become the slaves and the subalterns of the entire society… From the outset, then, European laws for African people meant black subjugation and repression, arbitrary advantages for whites, and racist distinctions among laboring forces. Always behind the laws were the whips, the scaffolds, and the guns, buttressed in turn by the ever deepening layers of fear and mistrust.

The power that whites sought over blacks was not only to hold black and their children as prisoner-laborers for their entire lives.

… even more profoundly, it was the power to define them in North American terms according to Euro-American social, political, and economic needs. Whites in this way attempted to deny millennia of African history, pressing the tragic ironies of European names, faiths, and categories on the black present, seeking in that and other ways to guarantee black cooperation and submission far into any future created by white racism and greed.

100 Ibid., 27.
101 Ibid., 28.
102 Ibid., 29.
Note here the levels and kind of violence Harding described. There is the direct violence of slavery and law enforcement: the “whips, scaffolds, guns” by which slave labor and disciplinary punishment were enforced. From within the structure of laws and the legal system itself, a deeper layer of violence emerges. The construction and codification of racial categories and the prohibitions on Africans and their descendants literally create the economic and political advantages which accrued to white, Christian men and which oppressed others. This process forms the basis of structural violence, the effects of which continue today. The very history and existence of U.S. institutions of law and commerce that we now take for granted depend on inequalities that are structured deeply into society. Here structural and cultural violence overlap. Through the development of specific structures in U.S. society, enforced by the means of direct violence, whiteness and racism are established in the United States as a deep substratum of culture and become forms of cultural violence themselves. Yet the dominant cultural history of the United States serves to deny and erase these violent realities. The formation of U.S dominant history serves as a primary form of cultural violence itself.103

The history between Euro-Americans and American Indians that Ward Churchill describes is no less troublesome and disturbing than the history of slavery and the racial caste system in the United States. “In the United States, the native population bottomed out during the 1890s at slightly over 237,000 – a 98 percent reduction from its original

103 Gyanendra Pandey’s discussion of the roots of nationalist political violence in India focuses on the “routine violence” enabled by the construction of history in the production and naturalization of certain categories of thought and the communities such as the “minorities and majorities” which historical construction marks. Routine Violence: Nations, Fragments, Histories (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006).
size.” Ward Churchill details the precise processes by which this genocide occurred.

Commonly portrayed, genocide is a matter of direct violence – outright physical slaughter. Certainly this was a central feature of U.S. indigenous policy, which has played itself out in many different ways over time.

The people had died in their millions of being hacked apart with axes and swords, burned alive and trampled under horses, hunted as game and fed to dogs, shot, beaten, stabbed, scalped for bounty, hanged on meathooks and thrown over the sides of ships at sea, worked to death as slave laborers, intentionally starved and frozen to death during a multitude of forces marches and internments, and, in an unknown number of instances, deliberately infected with epidemic diseases. Today, every one of these practices is continued, when deemed expedient by the settler population(s) which have “restocked” the native landbase with themselves, in various locales throughout the Americas. In areas where it no longer poses a “threat” to the new order which has usurped and subsumed it, it is kept that way through carefully calibrated policies of impoverishment and dispersal, indoctrination and compulsory sterilization. Insofar as native peoples retain lands in these latter regions, it is used as a convenient dumping ground for the toxic industrial waste by-products of the dominant society.

Churchill delineates that genocide is also a matter of the creation of an entire system of laws and other methods by which indigenous peoples were destroyed by means other than outright murder. Contrary to popularly held beliefs about the fairness of the U.S. justice system, the legal system itself has represented the interests of those in power


it has served as a basis for the establishment and longevity of injustice – structural violence.\textsuperscript{107} Beyond and including the myriad instances of direct physical violence, broken treaties,\textsuperscript{108} land grants, Indian removal policy, residential schools,\textsuperscript{109} and the reservation system were all means of violence by which the government eradicated American Indian nations and subjugated their land and labor.

**The Rationalizing Mechanisms of Structural and Cultural Violence**

Churchill and Harding’s historical accounts are not reflected in the common narrative of U.S. history. The dominant construction and communication of history obscures and attempts to erase the memories direct and structural violence by those who became elites in the white male, property-holding, Christian majority.\textsuperscript{110} The dominant U.S. historical narrative itself serves as a form of routine, cultural violence to those whose histories are marginalized and subjugated by it. Harding and Churchill’s delineation of U.S. history helps begin to deconstruct popular notions of violence in U.S history and runs counter to the popular U.S. narratives of freedom, peace, equality, and


justice. Historical narratives like theirs and the oral histories of militant working-class organizers and conscientious objectors to war gathered and published by the Lynds provide historical accounts of resistance to oppression and structural violence which the popular historical narrative fails to provide. Schulman says about the marginalization of the history of the AIDS crisis and of lesbian literature, “How can we be equal citizens if our stories are not allowed to be part of our nation’s story?” B♀ commented on why the radical histories of authors like Churchill, Harding, Schulman and the Lynds are so crucial.

That’s why it’s important to write down the history. And for us to write down the history. For us to write our stories down. Because we can’t trust them to write our stories down. We’re always the, the criminals, you know, and the this and the killers and the that and the... You know? What are they?

Kelly wrote her book Other Lands Have Dreams about U.S. violence precisely in order to tell the stories of the victims of structural violence, in particular the victims of U.S. wars and the prison-industrial complex. She recounts visiting a school for young women in Dijla, Iraq, during the height of U.S. economic sanctions against the country, when students asked her why they were being punished by starvation and lack of medical supplies, “Who are the criminals?”

111 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 151.


113 Kelly, Other Lands Have Dreams, 33.
Galtung explains that

One way cultural violence works is by changing the moral color of an act from red/wrong to green/right or at least to yellow/acceptable; an example being ‘murder on behalf of the country as right, on behalf of oneself wrong’. Another way is by making reality opaque, so that we do not see the violent act or fact, or at least not as violent.114

Young’s definition of cultural imperialism noted that when an encounter with another group arises to challenge the dominant group’s universal interpretation of history, the dominant group must reinforce its position “by bringing the other groups under the measure of its dominant norms.” One way to bring other groups under such measure is direct and repressive state violence. Yet a number of interrelated processes were also identified among the interviewees that help to see how the dominant group reinforces its norms, including normative versions of history.

Rationalizing Violence: Denial

The first means of reinforcing the dominant group history is the outright denial of competing versions. Much of Churchill’s written works have been devoted to the task of exposing competing accounts of dominant U.S. history. He contends that the denial of the violent history and destruction of whole societies and cultures in the establishment of the United States is so deep as to constitute the essence of U.S. culture. In Churchill’s research on genocide, he is “dealing with carnage continuously.” In response to his work, he describes the response in the university and culture at large as “either a blank wall or vociferous denial and attempts to discredit it at this point.” Churchill notes that “there are

entire disciplines, whole academic disciplines, entire rubrics in our culture devoted to
denial.”

Rationalizing Violence: Denial and Reversal

Dominant U.S. historical narratives fail to include the fullness of violence by
which U.S dominance has been wrought. Paradoxically, the U.S. socio-historical
narrative succeeds in denying the violence at the core of its culture by projecting its
violence onto the oppressed other. For example, indigenous natives of the Americas are
portrayed as savage, while the white immigrant brings them Christian civilization.

Churchill pointed out that this inversion of violence is a pattern throughout U.S. history,
applied to American Indian and black men alike.

They’re forever imputing what they do to those they do it to, denying that they’ve
done it and claiming that the other guys did. I mean, there are all these truly
amazing inversions of reality, quite often racialized in the extreme. The old
“Indian as rapist” stereotype is a prime example. “You know what ‘they’ do to
white women, don’t you?” Well, the record doesn’t really bear this out…. On the
other hand, rape was endemic in the way white guys dealt with Indian women.
That’s clearly documented, but very seldom mentioned in the dominant culture
narratives. And, of course, it wasn’t just the Indians. Did you know that some of
the troops took a little time off from butchering to rape themselves a few women
during the My Lai massacre? That, too, is clearly documented but left
unmentioned. And then there’s the myth of the black rapist, so prevalent that it’s
long since become a cliché, and a traditional predication for lynching, but, if

115 Here Churchill referenced Susan Griffin’s A Chorus of Stones: The Private Life of War (New
York: Doubleday, 1992). In this volume, Griffin delineates how the denial and secrecy around war and
violence at the cultural level affects personal lives, including family history. Jensen’s Culture of Make
Believe is devoted exposing the denial of all forms of violence at the heart of U.S. culture. From Reinhold
Niebuhr’s The Irony of American History (New York: Charles Scribner Books, 1952) to Jon Pahl’s Empire
there are numerous academic analyses on the religious themes of American innocence and virtue giving
rise to the historic realities of violent domination upon which the United States has forged its economic and
political power.

116 Here Churchill is referring to the common, extra-legal practice during and after slavery of
lynching black men who had been accused of raping white women. While there are many historical sources
on the practice of lynching in the United States, a recent exposition of the topic related to black American
history and Christian theology is: James Cone, The Cross and the Lynching Tree (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis
you look at the record it was all invariably the other way around: white men raping black women. That’s how you end up with all those “mulatto” slaves in the South, for god’s sake… The bottom line is that the dominant society systematically projects whatever modes of violence it imposes on Others as something that is being or at least will be imposed by the Others on them, and then describes the violence as “human nature.” It’s entirely irrational, but at the same time self-rationalizing.

As Churchill emphasizes at the end of this last statement, all of the interviews demonstrate the extent to which the operations of structural violence are grasped by the dominant culture not as violence, but as the nature of things, the culture itself. The deeply structured, normalized yet denied violence of the dominant culture is projected onto racialized others as those who are portrayed as violent by nature.

Through the institutions of structural violence, modes of cultural, symbolic communication demarcate who is normal and who is not, who is violent and who is not. In order to mystify its own deeply structured history and practices of violence, the dominant culture must invert and project its own violence. Those who appear different from the cultural norm – those who are not white, not Christian, not heterosexual, and those who are poor – are the violent ones. This pattern of denial and reversal gets repeated over and over again. Schulman described this “basic paradigm of reversal” – the process of making direct and structural violence into a projection and then an abstraction – in the following long description of gentrification in New York City neighborhoods. I have left the narrative in its entirety in order to preserve the complexity of her argument, because it reverses the “commonsense” understanding of violence in dominant culture.

You have a nonhomogenous neighborhood, which is what urbanity is. Urbanity is the realization that other people are different than you. Then, through city policy, through AIDS, through a number of concurrent social events, certain people are removed from that neighborhood and they are replaced by a homogenous group of people who basically grew up in the suburbs and are brought back into the city. Their parents were city dwellers who left on the G.I. Bill to the suburbs. They are children who grew up in gated communities, and racially and class stratified privatized suburbs [who] are now being invited to move back into the city, so the city can expand its tax base. That’s what gentrification is. So you take a neighborhood that has become dangerous to its inhabitants, because they are losing their homes. And it’s described as a neighborhood that’s getting better. And it’s exactly that same flip. The threat becomes the people who live there, who are being displaced. They are being seen as dangerous to people who have a gated community mentality and are willing to trade freedom for security. And that’s again people seeing their own actions as benign and not taking place and seeing the reaction as the assault. It’s the false neutrality of the self…. So the way that it affects the way people think is that people think of themselves and conceptualize themselves falsely, they see themselves as benign and neutral, and objective, value-free, and natural and regular and just the way things are. When actually their position has been highly constructed and imposed by force. Of which they have no awareness…. You take four rent controlled apartments and you throw out all those people and you knock down all the walls and you make a luxury loft. That becomes a desirable place to live, when actually it should be a very stigmatized, very anti-social place to live, because four families have been displaced so that you can have this loft. But its actual meaning is obscured by a false value. So that the people who live there think of themselves as elevated, when actually what they are doing is debased. So there’s a false sense of self. That’s what gentrification of the mind is. Because the people you’ve displaced are not there to tell you what you’ve done to them. You never see them. You never know them. You never know what happened to them.117

Schulman also describes the sense of positive morality which adheres to the persons who are marked as normative within the dominant culture.

Schulman used a number of terms to describe how those who are subjected to structural violence, the oppressed, are represented in the dominant culture as the violent predators. The various manifestations of this reversal she described as “supremacy

117 Schulman describes this gentrification process in much more detail and its relationship to AIDS in Gentrification of the Mind, particularly in Chapter One, “The Dynamics of Death and Replacement.”
ideology masquerading as reality.” In the case of gentrification, the poor (who are often racialized) become the danger when they are the ones losing their homes. Schulman described “the flip,” this same process of reversal and the abstraction of violence at work in the struggles of the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP), as that movement intersected with sexual orientation.

Gay people are constantly being accused of being predators… But it is the opposite of the truth. There’s always the story that they are going to get you, they are going to get your children, they’re going to infect you with HIV… you know there used to be this whole thing that the gay person was going to bite you and you were going to get AIDS. You can’t be in the army with them because they are going to sexually aggress you. They are constantly positioned as predators and yet there’s no really historic evidence of openly gay people doing anything physically aggressive. Sexual abuse, by priests and whatever, has to do with profound closeting and repression situations. But openly gay people, no. It is just one of those strange situations where the opposite of the truth is the common stereotype.

In his book *Endgame*, Jensen makes Schulman’s basic point about structural violence, abstraction, and morality in one of the twenty premises he posits about industrial civilization:

Civilization is based on a clearly defined and widely accepted yet often unarticulated hierarchy. Violence done by those higher on the hierarchy to those lower is nearly always invisible, that is, unnoticed. When it is noticed, it is fully rationalized. Violence done by those lower on the hierarchy to those higher is unthinkable, and when it does occur is regarded with shock, horror, and the fetishization of the victims. 

---

118 In *Gentrification of the Mind*, Schulman writes that the essence of supremacy is “the self-deceived pretense that one’s power is acquired by being deserved and has no machinery of enforcement.” “Privilege” is the privilege of not being aware of one’s power “or of the ways in which it was constructed” (27).

Jensen offered an example of how this works:

I’m making this up: a million and a half children die every year from starvation in the world? It’s just a huge number. Half million children die every year from as a direct result of debt repayment from the so-called non-industrialized nations? Those don’t count. Violence only flows when it’s flowing upward, then it’s called violence. But really also it is often times an often intentional ignoring of institutional violence. And that someone doesn’t count. If the people of India … burn down a building, a Monsanto headquarters, which they’ve done, that’s construed as violence. But what Monsanto is doing systematically forcing them off their land, or what Coca-Cola is doing by depleting the aquifer that then causes them… that’s not considered violence. And it’s that systematic, invisible violence. It’s one of the things that I wrote in Culture of Make Believe, any hatred felt long enough no longer feels like hatred. It feels like economics, religion, just the way things are. And we can just substitute the word violence in there.

Any violence felt long enough no longer feels like violence. It feels like economics, religion, just the way things are. This is structural and cultural violence. It functions first through the denial of the violent history against those demarcated out by the dominant history itself as “others” – the poor, non-white, non-Christian indigenous other. Then in a projection of the denial of violence deeply embodied and embedded within us, the perpetrators of violence are reversed. Those groups who have been victimized by the dominant white, Christian male culture are portrayed as the violent actors and threats within society. The question then is: to what are these “others” a threat? They are a threat to the material and psychological advantages which have accrued to the

---

120 For a description of what Jensen is talking about with Monsanto and Coca-Cola in India see Vandana Shiva, Stolen Harvest: The Hijacking of the Global Food Supply (Boston: South End Press, 2000).
dominant culture by virtue of its denied, violent past. These material and psychological advantages are referred to generally as privilege or entitlement.\textsuperscript{121}

Rationalizing Violence: Entitlements and “Only Some People Count”

A sense of entitlement is socialized into dominant culture persons, as Jensen puts it quite plainly:

Why is the problem the culture itself? Because this way of life is based on exploitation, domination, theft, and murder. And why is this culture based on exploitation, domination, theft, and murder? Because it is based on the perceived right of the powerful to take whatever resources they want. If you perceive yourself as entitled to some resource – and if you are unwilling or incapable of perceiving this other as a being with whom you can and should enter into a relationship – it doesn’t much matter whether the resource is land, gold, oil, fur, labor, or a warm, wet place to put your penis, nor does it matter who this other is, you’re going to take the resource.\textsuperscript{122}

The denial and reversal process communicates and imposes a dominant identity norm, which confers both value itself and material advantages to those within the dominant culture while dehumanizing, devaluing and dominating those outside of it. As Iris Marion Young points out, part of the mystification of domination and power is that many persons may be agents of power and reproduce domination without feeling that they have power, or even feeling privileged.\textsuperscript{123} Nonetheless, certain social locators confer psychological dominance and material advantages upon members of the favored groups. This shows up

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{121} It has become common to use the language of privilege. I have chosen the language of entitlement because it emerged specifically from a number of the interviews despite my framing the dissertation initially in the language of privilege. Also, conversations with Harding outside of the formal interview have led me to ask questions about the adequacy of the term privilege itself. In conversation with Churchill, he suggested that a more accurate sense of the meaning and use of the word would be the “sense of entitlement.” I use both terms throughout the dissertation.

\textsuperscript{122} Jensen, \textit{Endgame I}, 92.

\textsuperscript{123} Young, \textit{Politics of Difference}, 33.
\end{flushleft}
as a fundamental psychological sense of superiority. In the case of whiteness, Diane Goodman describes that

Superiority is not always conveyed in blatant and intentional ways. In reference to racism, bell hooks… calls this type of superiority “White supremacy.” She defines it as the unconscious, internalized values and attitudes that maintain domination, even when people do not support or display overt discrimination or prejudice… This sense of superiority extends from the characteristics and culture of the dominant group to the individuals themselves. Oppression is commonly defined, in part, as the belief in the inherent superiority of one group over another.\(^{124}\)

Certain persons and groups are valued more highly than others. A great preponderance of the interviewee information pointed to the notion that the underlying framework of this country is: some lives matter more than others. Most often the worth of those lives is valued in economic terms. Jensen reported his discovery of a little-known United Nations’ resolution called “Responsibility to Protect” in which “governing bodies have a responsibility to protect people from genocide, from mass rapes, from various atrocities.”\(^{125}\) In a panel on war crimes in the Republic of Congo, a co-panelist described that the application of this resolution, nearly ten years old now, doesn’t go anywhere. The mainstream makes virtually no reference to it. It doesn’t matter. It is not enforced. Why? “The reason it’s not enforced is because of the system, the systematic violence of capitalism. They can’t do anything about the Congo because [in] the Congo there are all the resources that are used for cell phones and laptops,” which are more important than

\(^{124}\) Goodman quoting hooks, Promoting Diversity and Social Justice, 19.

\(^{125}\) For more information on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P or RtoP), see the International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect, http://www.responsibilitytoprotect.org/, where the original R2P statement from the United Nations Assembly (2005) can also be found.
the Congolese. Schulman said that although more than 80,000 persons died of AIDS in New York City alone during the epidemic, these people “are just a blank. Meanwhile,

Every person who died at 9-11 has their name read every year. That’s the thing about some people’s lives matter and some people’s lives don’t matter. It’s so obvious in the way this is all handled. Of course people who died of AIDS because of the U.S. government. People who died in 9-11, you know, it’s who’s the perpetrator? That also affects the way the death is treated.

To Schulman, the “centerpiece of supremacy ideology” is

That one person’s life is more important than another’s. That one person deserves rights that another person does not deserve. That one person deserves representation that the other cannot be allowed to access. That one person’s death is negligible if he or she was poor, a person of color, a homosexual living in a state of oppositional sexual disobedience, while another death matters because that person was a trader, copy, or office worker presumed to be performing the job of Capital.  

The matter of whose lives count relates to the question of history, denial and memory. Jensen writes, “Imagine how our discourse and actions would be different if people daily detailed for us the lives… of those whom this culture enslaves or kills.”

Privileged status is defined by an inherent sense of superiority, conscious or unconscious. This sense of superiority leads to a sense and practice of entitlement. Time and again, members of U.S. culture have demonstrated that our right to material advantages and comfort is more important than the lives of the Congolese, the Iraqis, farmers in India; and, as Jensen never fails to bring to light, human lives are always valued as superior to non-human lives.

What do all of the so-called solutions to global warming have in common? Saving capitalism…. that’s the independent variable. That’s what must be saved. And the

126 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 47.
127 Jensen, Endgame I, 59.
dependent variable is the natural world. The natural world must conform to industrial capitalism. And that goes to A: that’s insane and B: that has to do with the question of identification. Who are you trying to save? There’s another damn article in *The San Francisco Chronicle* a couple days ago. It was how about the salmon have gone down like ninety percent in the last ten years in California. All they mentioned was the economic effects. It’s always the identification with that…. It’s so clear, and this goes to the heart of everything. It’s like, what are you trying to save? They are trying to save the system and frankly also, if we’re really honest, their trying to save their own privilege.

Jensen hammers the point that the material entitlements and comforts of the consumptive lifestyle of civilization go about destroying all life as we know it. Yet most people prefer these entitlements over an end to the violence upon which the life of U.S. civilization is structured. Churchill echoed that the right of “consumption overall and a set of expectations that go into the nature of the economy” defines entitlement, “for even a working class life… style, quality of life, in this country.”

Schulman distinctively articulated other aspects of privilege and a sense of entitlement beyond the economic and material. What gay and lesbian people demand within the gay liberation movement is

A different kind of revolution. It’s a behavioral revolution at some level. It’s transforming social custom. It’s not a power, it’s not regime change…. What gay people want is not that gay people run the world. It’s that straight people change the way they think about themselves. So it’s a completely different kind of social demand. Gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer communities face structural and direct violence. But transforming injustice with regards to sexual minorities also addresses cultural violence, though it has political, economic and legal dimensions. It includes other dominant social institutions such as Christian churches, the media, and the arts and entertainment
industries which select and control the portrayals of gay and lesbian lives. With homophobia, the family plays a particularly important cultural role as the family is often the first place in which people learn what it means to belong within dominant, heterosexist normative understandings. The transformation of homophobia requires change at a deep cultural level, implying tangible losses that heterosexism demands as privileges. Schulman makes the loss of entitlements in the case of heterosexism clear:

I believe that the most ethical position for straight people, in the age of homophobia, is to relinquish all their privileges until we have them too. It is the sexuality version of boycotting grapes. If a critical mass of straight people withdraw from discriminatory social institutions until they are available to gay people, those institutions will cease to have social currency. They will not be able to function until homophobia is eradicated.

Schulman’s analysis of homophobia makes clear that modes of structural and cultural violence control and keep in place the dynamics of oppression in smaller units of society. With violence of all forms, denial, reversal and entitlement play out throughout dominant society at every level. To deeply address cultural and structural violence, to dismantle them through any means, would result in privileged people losing entitlements ranging from a profoundly held psychological superiority to extensive material costs.

Power and Churchill both defined entitlement as including “a presumption that [members of dominant identities] have the right to be in control” at every level, no matter what – economically, culturally, psychologically, spiritually. Entitlement is not only a result of structural and cultural violence, but becomes the motor and justification itself to actively

---


129 Ibid., 32.

130 Ibid., 49-50.
and passively resist fundamental socio-structural transformation so that privileges may be kept in place and not be lost. A comprehensive practice of (non)violence must address violence at these structural and cultural levels or it cannot claim to fundamentally address violence.

“Justifiable” Violence

Once we begin to grasp the nature of violence – direct, structural and cultural – and the considerable entitlements gained by members of the dominant culture because of them, we see that certain forms of violence by oppressed and exploited individuals and groups may be responses to their experiences of structural and cultural violence. Yet because of the processes of denial, reversal and entitlement underlying cultural and structural violence, this violence is rarely conceded as justified in the dominant moral imagination. On the contrary, this violent behavior is usually labeled and judged to be immoral and wrong.

Meanwhile, other forms of violence are justified. Brazilian Roman Catholic Archbishop Dom Helder Câmara outlined a causal model of the relationship between the structural-cultural violence of oppression to other acts of violence as responses. A founder of Latin American liberation theology, he called structural violence “everywhere the basic violence.” Structural violence is injustice. It is “Violence No. 1.”

\footnote{It is easier to speak the words of fundamental social-structural transformation than to define their content. I take my cues for what such transformation might entail from Jennifer Harvey in *Whiteness and Morality: Pursuing Racial Justice through Reparations and Sovereignty* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). If racial and indigenous justice were to be realized in the U.S., for example, Harvey’s Christian liberationist ethic requires nothing less than the complete economic reconstruction of U.S. society at remarkable cost to whites. Her analysis makes plain why white people who speak of justice might resist its achievement.}
2” is the violence of revolt, when “conflict comes out into the streets.” When violence No. 2 tries to resist violence No. 1, the authorities consider themselves obliged to preserve or re-establish public order, even if this means using force. This is Violence No. 3. This repression completes the cycle Cámara referred to as the “spiral of violence.”

Repressive State Violence and Response

Generally speaking, the dominant culture regards the use of Violence No. 3 as justified. It is not often referred to as violence, but as “the use of force.” This is Max Weber’s classic formulation of violence as central to the institution of the state itself:

[T]he state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory…. [T]he right to use physical force is ascribed to other institutions or to individuals only to the extent to which the state permits it. The state is considered the sole source of the ‘right’ to use violence…. Like the political institutions historically preceding it, the state is a relation of men dominating men, a relation supported by means of legitimate (i.e. considered to be legitimate) violence. If the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be.

Cámara describes the growing self-awareness of oppressed people who come to reject the legitimation of state and cultural exploitation, dehumanization, and repressive violence. Given the extreme levels of state repression against movements for liberation, and while consistently advocating nonviolence alone, Cámara counsels grappling with why

---

132 The full description of the spiral of violence is found in Helder Cámara’s *Spiral of Violence* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1971): 29-34.

oppressed persons may consider the use of violence No. 2 – riots and rebellions, 
organized and spontaneous forms of self-defense, and organized insurrection (also called revolutionary violence or armed struggle) – the only justifiable solution to their oppression.  

Those interviewees who accepted and advocated for social change “by any means necessary” spoke about the possible justification for the use of violent tactics in the midst of intractable structural violence, repressive violence and oppression. They confirm the possibility posed by white, North American liberation theologian McAfee Brown that structural violence can become so deep-seated, so powerfully entrenched, and so destructive and despotic that there remains no way to overthrow it short of physical violence… [that the] need to overthrow it by such means is not only permissible, but is demanded in the name of justice, equality, and love.  

Mary Wallace explains that one of the central assumptions of political theory is that “it is possible to draw a clear line between legitimate and illegitimate violence.”  

Liberal, Western theory depends upon the idea that there must be such principles or societies would descend into the violence of sheer brutality. But Wallace demonstrates that “our own moral understandings of the ends for which we employ violence are not enough to make our violence legitimate in any universal sense.”  

What justice or peace

---

134 Cámara’s nonviolence “is not a condemnation of violence, but an insistence that for ‘his’ people violence would be suicide. He wrote, ‘I respect and shall always respect those who, after thinking about it, have chosen or will choose violence,’” Spiral of Violence, 22.

135 McAfee Brown, Religion and Violence, 56-57. In this chapter, McAfee Brown is arguing that principles of just war be applied to the possibility of just revolution.


137 Ibid., 16.
looks like for different groups in any context of social struggle “will always be contested and, ultimately, uncertain.” Since moral frameworks are never fully agreed upon, maintaining the peace of the current order with state violence is not understood as a moral choice or moral end (though they are disguised as such) for all members of a culture or society. The justifiability of the use of violence by different groups within the culture, besides the state, cannot be universally condemned. Furthermore, if we consider the liberation of the oppressed as a just end or goal, this may imply the justifiability, or justifiable consideration, of various means to achieving such ends.

Justifiable Violence: Individual and Community Self-Defense

The interviewee discussions of the justification of the use of violence by oppressed communities in social struggle included primarily two forms: individual and community self-defense and armed struggle. Here we delve more carefully into self-defense. Self-defense may act both as a means of resistance to the three forms of violence, and serve community efforts for self-determination and social transformation. We will see how individual and community self-defense serves to both resist and transform, as well as reinforce the dominant mechanisms of denial, reversal and entitlement within the dominant culture.

Churchill and Umoja both used examples of armed self-defense during black liberation struggles to describe how organized, armed self-defense is a justifiable form of

---

138 Ibid., 16.
resistance to structural and cultural violence. Here, Churchill is talking about voter registration in 1960s rural Alabama.

The pre-existing condition down there was endemic Klan violence intended to keep blacks “in their place.” So much so that the nonviolence people wouldn’t even try to organize voter registration in the area. Stokely [Carmichael] went in there pretty much by himself – other people came in, so he wasn’t the only SNCC person there – but, in any case, Stokely didn’t tell blacks to turn the other god-damn cheek when these night-riders came, because he knew they were lethal. Lethal, but not brave. So he told people to arm themselves, and that they probably wouldn’t have to kill anybody because, once the Klan knew they’d shoot back, the nightriders wouldn’t even show up. And he was right. The rate of Klan violence dropped off dramatically. Those on the receiving end not repudiating “resort to violence,” and instead preparing for it, not only caused the actual level of violence to abate very quickly, it instilled a sense of empowerment in local black folks. They lost the fear which had prevented them from asserting even their most basic rights, and the number of registered black voters – which had been almost nil – went right through the roof. That’s how it works.

Churchill is suggesting that white supremacist racial violence was so vicious in certain parts of the South that armed self-defense was not only a justifiable but a necessary response, often essential to a community’s very survival. Armed self-defense in this case resulted in a decrease in white violence and a space in which some black residents felt it was safer to register and vote. It was both a means of survival and a means of change. Churchill suggests that armed self-defense both unveiled and disarmed, to an extent, direct and structural violence in this context.

Churchill goes on to illustrate a similar pattern of direct-structural violence in 1960s-1970s Oakland, California leading to the development of the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense (BPP). The Black Panther Party used armed street patrols, wherein black

---

139 SNCC is the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, in which Stokely Carmichael (a.k.a. Kwame Ture) was a key leader and organizer. Ture described his perspective on SNCC, civil rights and black power in Black Power: The Politics of Liberation (2nd ed.) (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).
men openly carried weapons and law books in hand. California law gave them the right to carry arms, and by doing so they challenged the discrimination and brutality of local, white law enforcement towards black people. Churchill reported that under this strategy the level of police violence in Oakland dropped nearly 40% in one year. In Oakland, a means of resisting police violence became a means of reducing direct violence and promoting self-determination to end structural (economic and political inequality) and cultural violence (racism).

Umoja explained a number of reasons why he believes that organizing for self-defense was predominant in certain communities in rural Mississippi. In the first place, individual self-defense was a means of survival for many rural Southern black people. Umoja described debates between Robert Moses, the first person in SNCC to go to Mississippi, and a farmer he stayed with, E. W. Steptoe, about Steptoe carrying guns. Moses described that when Steptoe went to register to vote his wife would have to pat him down because he’d have a little Derringer in his sock.

They had to plead with him when he went to Washington, D.C. and they were going to speak to Congress not to carry a gun into the congressional chambers. So he’s like, that’s who he is, that’s how they’ve been surviving in this small county in Mississippi where he had known people who had been shot down on the street. And so he just had that type of survival mentality.

Members of SNCC originally believed that nonviolence would effectively change structures in the south as did many prominent groups with the southern freedom

---

movement. Umoja believes that differences over the justifiability of self-defense arose within SNCC not on a philosophical basis (whether either violence or nonviolence were justifiable in principle) but on a strategic one (organizers wanted to discuss what would be most effective in voter registration campaigns and changing these communities and society as a whole). At a point in time, organizers believed they were going to get support from the federal government. They believed the federal government would intervene to get black people registered. But the Democratic Party held contradictory interests in blacks being able to vote while not offending white southerners. SNCC and CORE 141 believed early on that nonviolent direct action was going to ultimately bring some change by forcing the federal government’s hand. In the following long passage from the interview, Umoja describes the complexities of the situation. I include the following extensive direct quotations in their entirety, as they serve to address a historical narrative of the southern freedom movement not commonly held in the knowledge or memory of the dominant culture.

On [one] level, we don’t think other forms of struggle are going to be viable, and we have to get the support of the federal government. And we have to get support of Northern liberals. We don’t want to offend them and we know that the image of black people with guns scares the hell out of white people in American society. So we don’t want to do anything that’s going to not get their support. So that’s why I think it’s a turning point for some elements of the black freedom struggle when they say, “Look, the cavalry ain’t coming! We’re going to have to protect ourselves because the cavalry’s not coming.” So by the time of 1966, 142 it was

141 CORE is the Congress On Racial Equality, whose history and strategy is outlined in Inge Powell Bell’s *CORE and the Strategy of Non-Violence* (New York: Random House, 1968).

SNCC and CORE saying, “No, we’ve got to have the Deacons on the march.” You know, the Deacons for Defense have to protect us. We can’t rely on the… In fact, in that particular march, what I didn’t know at that time but I know now from just a little bit more study is the federal government wasn’t going to come and protect them anyway. It was going to turn the protection of the march over to the state of Mississippi. Which they didn’t feel like they could rely upon to protect them when they were going to certain areas of the state. In fact, the state troopers would attack the march in Canton, Mississippi, tear gas them and beat folk. There was a conflict over whether they were going to camp. They wanted to camp at this black high school, which was state property. Or really property of a local municipality. And the local municipality said, “No, we are not going to allow you Negroes to camp here.” And they said, “We’re going to camp there anyway.” That created a conflict and state troopers came and beat ‘em up. Tear gassed them. King and others told people to stand down and the Deacons not to fight and confront them, so a lot of people were hurt that night. But they really felt the state troopers were the enemy. And they weren’t going to get any federal support that night because Johnson didn’t want to offend white voters in the South by sending federal troops down there at that particular time. So they weren’t a reliable ally. I think that march pushed people even further over in thinking like, “No, we’re going to have to protect ourselves. We’re going to have to defend ourselves.” You know it’s at that march where the slogan “Black Power” really becomes popular and the thinking is, “We need our own power to neutralize white power.” So I think that even radicalizes folks even more, and pushes them in a position around self-defense.

Umoja’s narrative reveals how the black community understood that the realities of violence had been reversed: white people considered black persons with guns a threat to white supremacy when in reality black people were armed to defend themselves from white violence. There was also a deeper sense of the historic reality that, in fact, the U.S. government could not always be depended upon to serve and protect all of its citizens. The comfort, political support and appeasement of white citizens mattered more than the human and civil rights of black people.

---

143 Umoja refers here to the Deacons for Defense, an African-American, paramilitary, self-defense organization that emerged in Louisiana with chapters throughout the South during and after the civil rights movement. See below.
Indeed Umoja defines himself as a New Afrikan and not as African-American because he believes the United States has not atoned for centuries of slavery and decades of apartheid (segregation) and allowing genocidal pogroms (lynchings) on communities of African descent. Moreover he believes that historically, a significant portion of the African descendant population has desired to be self-determining and the U.S. has denied the right of self-determination. Defining himself as 'New Afrikan' to him represents a consciousness that the descendants of enslaved Africans must view themselves as a nation with the objective of self-determination and not just a minority of the U.S. empire. In this sense, individual and community self-defense undermined the entitlements of white superiority to marginalize black participation in democracy and to prioritize black allegiance and self-dignity. Umoja further described how self-defense aided other tactics of structural and cultural transformation.¹⁴⁴

In Mississippi, from like '65 through '79 you had all these boycotts. I think it was more based on a self-reliance strategy. Really in Mississippi you never really had a lot of nonviolent direct action. As far as I know it was maybe on like three different occasions where you had demonstrations utilizing a nonviolent [strategy]. In McComb, Mississippi they had some sit-ins, and [in] Jackson, Mississippi when you had the Freedom Rides, you did have a Jackson student movement that did some desegregation stuff utilizing nonviolence. Then in Greenwood, Mississippi, there was a nonviolent march down there in 1963. But other than that most of it was voter registration work and people just committed not to carry guns and things like that. So you really didn’t have that tradition of nonviolent direct action. But I think it was under the same thinking that if they did carry guns or they did emphasize that in the movement, self-defense, then just the thought of black people with guns would really be counter to… getting the support from the federal government. But I think when they saw that wasn’t going to happen, they went on a more strategy of self-reliance which included them

protecting themselves, but also saying, if we can convince people in the community not to purchase, that’s something they could do on their own and we could force these white power structures to negotiate with us on issues like employing black people, about respecting black consumers, about how the police deal with us. Things of that nature. I saw those boycotts as being very effective at a local level of changing race relations. Sometimes the question of where folks [were] going to be able to go to school were tied to boycotts. But it just changed the dynamics. I think that the black community felt more empowered from this. I think they had to respect them on a whole different level… because they demonstrated their power, at least on a local level…. The last significant boycott I found on this level [was] in ’78-’79 in Tupelo, Mississippi, and towns smaller than Tupelo like Holly Springs, Mississippi, Okolona [sp?], Mississippi, Lexington, Mississippi, places like that. Some of them continued the struggle up to the end. All of those places had a strong self-defense component where a couple of people were attacked and they were able to respond back and just scatter the Klan. One of arguments I’m making in that period of time is whereas people would stay home and would be more fearful of the Klan when the Klan would come out to counter-demonstrate some of their demonstrations, you’d actually have black folks coming out and heckling the Klan and fighting with them. It was just a whole different dynamic where they weren’t as scared anymore. I think part of this decrease of fear comes from some people being armed in their communities.

The subtitle of Christopher Strain’s book *Pure Fire: Self-Defense as Activism in the Civil Rights Era*¹⁴⁵ would indicate that the author sees self-defense as a form of activism itself. A closer reading of his conclusions reveals that Strain shares with Umoja the idea that self-defense as tactic of resistance was and is an affirmation of the humanity and agency of black persons. Like the legal tactics of the civil rights era, self-defense was also used by African-Americans as a means to demand that, according to U.S.-constitutional and international law, black persons were humans and had as much right to self-defense and to bear arms as white persons. Strain argues that this is true whether or

---

not these acts of self-defense were self-consciously political. This affirmation of black humanity, dignity and agency was a central to all efforts towards black liberation. By way of affirmation of dignity, armed self-defense was a direct, internal refusal of the cultural violence of racism. Yet in attempting to reverse the entitlements of white supremacy, depictions of armed black men served to reinforce reversal – the imputation of violence by whites onto communities of color. But in a 1968 essay, Harding questions whether or not this “American shibboleth” is “really the source of freedom” for black men. He asks whether one’s human agency really depends upon the capacity to defend one’s life, or in the capacity to “create new grounds for response to danger, and in the act of bringing new life into being, rather than in the animal capacity to strike back.”

Strain puts less emphasis on agency and more emphasis on how early scholars of the civil rights movement marginalized self-defense from the historical narrative, dichotomizing violence and (non)violence in the struggle for black liberation and denying the co-existence of self-defense with (non)violence. This dichotomizing of violence and (non)violence as mutually exclusive tactics and principles served to marginalize the important role of self-defense in black liberation and may serve the dominant cultural

---

146 Strain, 6-7. Danielle L. McGuire also writes about the marginalization of radical black women’s activist history, beginning with the story of Rosa Parks. In At The Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power (New York: Alfred Knopf, 2010), McGuire delineates the birth of civil rights in Rosa Parks’ investigation for the NAACP of the gang rape of a black young mother, Recy Taylor, at the hands of six white men in Abbeville, Alabama in 1944. McGuire shows that Parks’ involvement in the Montgomery bus boycott grew out of a “decades-long struggle to protect black women… from sexualized violence and rape” (xvii). The bus boycott and the civil rights movement were part and parcel “of African-American women’s struggle against sexual violence” (xix). Throughout the book, McGuire recites historic examples of African-American women’s radical resistance to and self-defense against all forms of violence grounded in racism, sexism and classism.

U.S. narrative that would deny the legitimacy of self-defense on the part of marginalized communities. The marginalization of such critical history results in the conflation by white outsiders of all tactics, including self-defense, as violent.148

Self-Defense and Denial, Reversal, Entitlement

Umoja, Strain and Hill all note that white people’s fear of black people retaliating against them violently with guns for the violence they have experienced is at the root of condemnation of black people’s right to self-defense.149 Whether for self-defense or in armed struggle, black people with guns constitute a violent threat to white supremacy.150 This portrayal is a direct reflection of the trajectory of reasoning from denial to reversal to entitlement. It denies the history of white violence. Conflating all black resistance as violent serves to reinforce historically false cultural stereotypes that black people are violent and white people are not. Huerta described a lecture where she “heard this woman

148 In *Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), Lance Hill argues more forcefully that self-defense as embodied in the Deacons’ organization stood in many ways in opposition to the (non)violence of the mainstream civil rights movement. Hill describes that groups like the Deacons were reflections of the frustrations of working-class blacks with pacifistic, middle-class, reformist strategies that only served to reinforce the submissiveness of blacks (3-4).


150 In “In the Shadow of the Gun,” Baldwin argues the historical importance of disentangling the armed, violent revolutionary image of the Black Panther Party from its overall goals in local contexts: community survival and self-determination. Armed resistance was “merely one part of their larger discourse of self-defense” (77) where self-defense “took on a broad form with violence as only one component in resisting state oppression” (86). This more complicated historical representation of self-defense in the BPP is critical, so as not to reinforce the reversal portrayed by dominant, white culture (and reinforced by some of the rhetoric of the Party itself), which depends upon the reversal to construct its own version of history and justify violent acts against the Party. The contested role of violence in the BPP is also the subject of Curtis J. Austin’s *Up Against the Wall: Violence in the Making and Unmaking of the Black Panther Party* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2006).
saying that you don’t have to say the word nigger, nigger, nigger anymore. Because all you have to say the word is “criminal” and people already think of a black person.” The reversal has been attached to black, male bodies in a string of discriminatory social policies and practices that Umoja identified from education testing to racialized police profiling to black incarceration rates. Kelly made a related statement about how the war against the poor gets played out in prisons, how race and class reversals benefit the entitlements of dominant culture through structural violence.

With the war against the poor here, we just presume that youngsters, teenagers, are criminals. The median sentence length in the Pekin prison, for men, was 27 years. So can you imagine your kids are walking off those buses shackled and they’ll be old men by the time they get out? It’s a good education to go inside the prisons. You learn in a way that it’s difficult to pick up in other contexts what the war against the poor feels like; as it’s played out between prisoners and guards, loved ones outside…. You know, we all drive past these prisons all the time. You are walking past them…. and we don’t really imagine what’s going on inside: the racism of it, the ripeness for fascism, or a reenactment of slavery. There are so many companies making money off of this now. Every university graduate is a glut of new lawyers. How are you going to keep all these lawyers employed? You have to have criminals… they are the raw material. And it goes unquestioned. We just keep it going when it’s discernibly solving the problem or not. That’s not a question. You know, it’s the economy. How are we going to keep all of our lawyers employed? How are we going to keep up with our fastest growing new industry, the prison industry?

As Jensen explained, in the dominant culture structural violence is not violence. It’s the economy. It’s in the nature of things. To many members of the dominant culture, all violence on the part of people of color is the same: it is unjustifiable. There is a failure to distinguish between various forms of violence and the reasons for violence by different parties. While self-defense may result in acts of direct violence, certain questions must be asked. What was the context? To what conditions is self-defense a response? Members of the dominant culture regularly fail to make such distinctions and ask such questions. As
Kelly points out, this violent portrayal serves structures of inequality by making poor, young men (usually men of color) into profits. The purpose of the portrayal is a complete dehumanization of the (reversed) perpetrator of violence.

The portrayal of violence serves another purpose: maintaining control. The dominant culture perceives and fears a potential loss of material advantages and psychological advantage by the threat of violent mass insurrection against vicious inequality and its entitlements. In terms of indigenous sovereignty, Churchill labels this “The Great Fear” – the deep-seated fears of white people that American Indians may take their lands back by force, so that “the immigrants will correspondingly be dispossessed of that which they have come to consider “theirs” (most notably, individual homes, small farms, ranches and the like).”\textsuperscript{151} In relation to African-Americans, a similar fear arises from the real historic and imagined insurrections of slaves against their slave masters.\textsuperscript{152} The denial of the violence of U.S. history is part of what gives rise to such deep-seated cultural fears that imply (even if only imagined) real material losses, including the power to control psychological blows to perceived superiority (a sense of entitlement).

\textbf{Reversing the Reversal: “Resistance Breeds Repression”}\textsuperscript{153}

The U.S. social movements represented by the interviewees from the 1960s forward held within them the seeds of transformation of structural and cultural violence


\textsuperscript{152} See \textit{Antislavery Violence: Sectional, Racial, and Cultural Conflict in Antebellum America}, edited by McKivigan and Harrold (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1999).

\textsuperscript{153} This heading is a play on Umoja’s article title “Repression Breeds Resistance: The Black Liberation Army and the Radical Legacy of the Black Panther Party,” in \textit{New Political Science}, Volume 21, Number 2, 1999.
such as racism, poverty, sexism, and war by affirming the dignity and self-determination of oppressed groups. Ruling structures and cultures of violence tended to view affirmations of human dignity, human agency and creativity on the part of marginalized others within the dominant culture as threats to their psychological supremacy and material, economic power. When oppressed people organized whole communities around affirmations of “we count” for the purposes of fundamental social transformation, this amplified the threat. When those tactics were perceived by the dominant culture as violent, then the threat grew exponentially. In particular, organized armed self-defense by communities of color in the U.S. during the second half of the twentieth century was targeted for elimination by the ruling classes within the dominant culture.

In order to maintain the entitlements among the membership of the dominant culture, reversals of the prevailing order could not be allowed. The state, through the means of law enforcement (police and courts), entered with repressive violence to reinstate and reinforce the order of structural violence. Churchill describes that the level of punishment for threats to the ruling social order is based upon the confluence and relationship of certain factors: social location, community organization, tactics, and the target of protest. But particularly the dimension of race, conflated with the reverse reasoning of violence imputed to the racialized other, makes calculating the level of repressive violence and punishment “a differential equation.” Churchill asked if I knew any professed radical, nonviolent activist or spokesperson that has spent any really serious amount of time in prison in the United States. By serious time he meant ten years
or longer. I did not know any. He went on to outline the number of black men from the era of black power who were served lengthy prisons or were still incarcerated. Geronimo Pratt served 27 years, eight in solitary confinement “for an act he didn’t even commit.” Jamil Al-Amin, also known as Rap Brown, is doing a life sentence for a crime that is questionable that he committed. David Rice and Edward Poindexter have been serving sentences in an Omaha prison since 1972. There are many more examples, not to mention radicals who were killed. Churchill explained the reasons why these persons were such a threat, including Martin Luther King as a (non)violent activist.

King was galvanizing a community in such a way as to bring it out of its assigned station. Let me explain it this way: There are a lot of Germans in my family, and they drilled into me from a very early age that there’s a place for everything and everything should be in its place. Any other arrangement is considered disorderly and uncomfortable, and not much tolerated. As a result, I’m something of a neat freak in how my domestic life is organized. It’s both subliminal and compulsive, you know? Now, let’s translate this into the terms of social organization. The dominant culture, which is largely Germanic, decrees that there’s a place for everyone and everyone is to remain in their assigned place. This, of course, extends to entire groups, typically defined by race, gender and ethnicity. There’s plainly a direct correlation between privilege and social station, but, even without that, the departure of any from its assigned place disrupts the order of things is therefore not only resisted but deemed intolerable by those conditioned and comfortable with the status quo. The further down you are in the pecking order of assigned places, of course, the less comfortable you are, and the greater your

---

\[154\] It is interesting to think about this analysis in relation to the interviewees themselves. Four of the twelve interviewees have served prison sentences, though others may have been jailed at various times for short periods for violating the law. All of these four persons are white: Kelly, Power, Dear, and B♀. Kelly and Dear have both been imprisoned for (non)violent civil disobedience and have served sentences of a year or less. Both of them referred to the risk entailed in going to jail as a consequence of their activism as a conscious choice, as desirable in theological terms in terms of living a life of sacrifice in solidarity with the poor and marginalized. Power and B♀ were both imprisoned for what were considered acts of armed struggle, serving several years each. Power expressed that she knew she was a successful fugitive because she was white. She recognized that her experience in jail was also different because she was white and middle class. She had an education, straight teeth and good health. It made a difference that she looked like the guards, and she remembered many occasions in jail when she walked into a room in prison and knew “people see me differently.” Kelly, Dear and Power all spoke of what the experience of jail did for their spiritual consciousness, and all four of them of initiating further consciousness of political and economic violence, particularly along the lines of race.
need, or at least your desire to disrupt the social order, and the politico-economic order as well, by departing from your assigned place. And so the methods employed to keep you in that place become harsher and harsher, the further down you are. The principal lesson embodied in King’s assassination is that it really doesn’t matter whether your approach is violent or nonviolent; if you’re effective in galvanizing the oppressed to improve their place, you’ll be targeted for elimination. Period. That being so, the only valid question is which approach is most effective in any situation. That’s the one you use.

Churchill notes that most of the Panther programs were not armed. The federal government targeted the Panther Breakfast for Children Program as a top priority for neutralization. Any efforts to organize and empower persons of color “another further step down” on the human hierarchy meant increased punishment. If you push or step too far out of place,

They’ll simply kill you. They killed pretty frequently here in some of these communities. These are not abstractions. They don’t kill white people and they don’t even put them in prison for long periods of time. It’s not that no white people ever get killed. James Rector got shot right off his roof in Berkeley. There’s certainly four carcasses and a paralyzed guy and everything else out of Kent State. There’s other examples, it’s not that it never happens but it’s so exceptional it proves the rule!

---

Persons of color are dealt with more extreme repression and punishment than white people because they are disrupting their assigned place. Staughton Lynd made a similar point about activists he knew in the southern freedom movement.

The Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee as I knew it in the early 1960s was implicitly anti-capitalist and explicitly anti-imperialist. Very few people recognize that SNCC took a public position opposing the war in Vietnam and supporting draft resistance a year before SDS. And those SNCC staff members, I mean just imagine a black civil rights activist in the hands of a southern draft board. They received savage prison sentences. Bob Moses and Stokely Carmichael fled to Africa.

Since persons of color are further down in the hierarchy of dominant culture, harsher methods are used to maintain this place. Extreme state repression towards people of color is evident whether those communities attempt to “reverse” the reversal – defy assigned place by the use of armed struggle and self-defense, or by organizing communities (non)violently in such a way that threatens power.156 Over half of the interviewees noted that these conditions of repression either have not changed or have worsened in the United States today.

B♀ described made reference to the work of the Symbionese Liberation Army (SLA) in their use of armed struggle to seek rectification of economic, political, and colonial injustices. The members of the SLA were primarily white, upper-class, well-educated, urban radicals. About them B♀ said,

Even though some of their shit was really fucked up, it was two things. It hooked up prisoners and college students. And the most important thing they did is that

---

156 See Churchill and Jim Vander Wall, *Agents of Repression*. 

---

information and an annotated bibliography on the Kent State murders, see Jerry R. Lewis and Thomas R. Hensley, “The May 4 Shootings at Kent State University: The Search for Historical Accuracy,” [http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/lewis/lewihen.htm](http://dept.kent.edu/sociology/lewis/lewihen.htm).
they got a million dollars out of Patty Hearst’s daddy to feed people. To feed poor people. In a poor-ass mother-fucking neighborhood in Compton, California. All right? And then they got fried on the six o’clock news.157

B♀’s implication is the reason the SLA “got fried” was because they were a potentially effective threat to reversing power: creating solidarity among oppressed and elite classes (prisoners and college students), redistributing wealth, questioning U.S. racism and imperialism by shedding light on the ubiquitous denial of U.S. violence on a global stage while it was taking place.

Social Location and the Justification of Violence

This chapter has argued that the way we understand what violence is and is not – direct, structural, and cultural – is very much tied to our social location. Whether or not we have experienced and can name the impact of these three forms of violence in our bodies and in our communities will influence our approaches to justifying the use of violence by the state or other individuals and groups. All justifications for the use of violence for social change or social control are just that: justifications.158 We need to be clear that these justifications are shaped, though not determined by, social locations.

Individual and group identities are reflected in or othered by the dominant culture. This informs what we know and what we don’t know about violence, particularly in its


158 In The Ideologies of Violence, Grundy and Weinstein outline four primary legitimations for political violence: legitimist, expansionist, pluralist and intrinsic.
structural and cultural forms. The maintenance of dominant cultural arrangements, particularly economic, depends upon certain cultural narratives which deny the historical truth of violence as it has exploited and destroyed communities of color and poor communities. The portrayal of the perpetrators of violence is reversed in order to justify the dominant culture’s existence and ongoing dominance and exploitation of these same groups. In turn, those who benefit because their social location primarily coheres with dominant culture depend upon this denial and reversal to maintain whatever relative material and psychological privileges these structures of violence bestow. In this process of denial, reversal and entitlement, social location also shapes what we believe to be justified or unjustified manifestations and uses of violence in the perpetuation of, resistance to, and/or destruction of the structurally and culturally violent status quo. All of this is relevant to our understandings of (non)violence, for if (non)violence claims to address fundamental conditions of violence, it must address all of these levels.

The next chapter considers: 1) the role that Christianity has played in direct, structural and cultural violence and the processes of denial, reversal and entitlement, and; 2) ways in which Christian (non)violent practices and theologizing may undermine the dominant trajectory of rationalizing violence; how it exposes denial, potentially reverses the reversal of violent perpetration, and functions to dismantle entitlement.
CHAPTER THREE: CHRISTIANITY, VIOLENCE AND (NON)VIOLENCE

The Christian History of Violence

The previous chapter delineated Galtung’s three-fold definition of violence in its direct, structural and cultural dimensions and how violence in all forms is enabled by the processes of denial, reversal and entitlement. This chapter discusses the relationship between Christian history and theological traditions and the preceding analysis of violence. This analysis applies also to (non)violence. Exploring the connections between violence and (non)violence and their relationship to Christianity in this chapter prepares the reader for a more in-depth analysis of certain topics in subsequent chapters and for practical theological analysis and construction of violence-(non)violence for social change.

Christian Violence: Direct

All twelve interviewees described in different ways that Christians, as individuals and as institutions, have been active throughout history and currently in perpetrating

159 It is impossible to claim that there is one thing called Christianity, for there are many Christianities throughout history and in the world. Yet the interviewees were all able to speak of something called Christianity (and more specifically Catholicism and Protestantism, also not monolithic traditions or entities) that pervade and undergird U.S. dominant culture. U.S. dominant culture includes Christian norms, which, as previously defined, cohere with other dominant social locators such as whiteness, middle-to-upper class, gender-conforming maleness and heterosexuality. It is of this general sense of Christianity as an aspect of dominant U.S. cultural norms that I write.
direct violence out of a conscious and stated claim to Christian identities. There were a number of examples of Christian direct violence in U.S. history that arose in the interviews repeatedly, such as the Christian perpetration of war justified as a righteous mission of God against non-Christian populations. Churchill and Jensen spoke of direct violence as the attempted eradication and assimilation of indigenous peoples by Christians throughout United States’ history. Huerta, Kelly and Schulman made explicit references to Roman Catholicism contributing to direct violence against gay, lesbian and transgender persons in this country. To the interviewees, the history of direct violence perpetrated by Christians was so pervasive and continuous as to be the norm. Most of the interviewees also stated that the predominant U.S. Christian culture uses its theological power to legitimize the authority of the state to perpetrate direct violence.

Taken as a whole, all of the interviewees were cognizant and articulate about the role and responsibility of Christianity in perpetrating and maintaining all forms of violence. But direct violence was not the focus of any individual’s comments vis-à-vis the role of Christianity in violence. The central tension that arose in the analysis across the interviews was whether or not this violence and domination was intrinsic to the very nature of Christian tradition itself. Does violence of all kinds abide deep within the structures of Christian theology and experience? If so, might Christianity be fundamentally implicated as the source of direct, structural and cultural violence in the United States today? While most interviewees clearly saw Christianity’s role in perpetrating and legitimating all forms of violence, they rejected the notion that this violence was fundamental to Christian religion. Most of these same interviewees saw the
direct, structural and cultural violence of Christianity as a corruption of the fundamental nature of Christian tradition.

Christian Tradition: Structural Violence, Cultural Violence

Galtung touched on the role of religion in different articles on peace studies, demarcating religion as a but not the primary domain of cultural violence in which the symbolic sphere serves to justify direct and structural violence. As for how and why Christianity is a primary foundation for violence at a cultural level, Galtung explains that Judaism, and Christianity as an inheritor of Jewish monotheism, are the first religious traditions to establish a transcendent God “as a male deity residing outside planet Earth.” Christianity went on to enshrine the Greek philosophical, Western tradition of dualism, sharp hierarchies and dichotomies where the “good” is associated with the dominant social class as chosen by and associated with the qualities of the one, transcendent God. Evil is associated with all else. This transcendent dualism provides the justification for direct and structural violence, as described in general terms by the following table from Galtung:161

---

160 Galtung is speaking broadly about Christianity, not about any one context or specific tradition.

Table I. Galtung’s Taxonomy of Religious Hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>God Chooses:</th>
<th>And Leaves to Satan:</th>
<th>With the Consequence of:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human Species</td>
<td>Animals, Plants, Nature</td>
<td>Speciesism, Ecocide</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Sexism, Witch-Burning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His People</td>
<td>The Others</td>
<td>Nationalism, Imperialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whites</td>
<td>Colored</td>
<td>Racism, Colonialism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Classes</td>
<td>Lower Classes</td>
<td>‘Classism’, Exploitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>True Believers</td>
<td>Heretics, Pagans</td>
<td>‘Meritism’, Inquisition</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Understood in this way, Christianity not only legitimizes the structures of violence in economic and political orders. Its language and symbolism intimately ties it to the existence of structural violence by the development of hierarchical and dualistic ideologies derived from Christian texts and theologies.\(^{162}\) The left-hand column of Galtung’s table demonstrates what categories of people these texts and theologies privilege. Modern Western dominant cultures, their systems of law, education, government and ruling economic principles all derived from Christian theological frames. Galtung explains that even if one believes that religion is dead and modern Western societies are primarily governed by secular thinking, he suggests that Christian-based ideologies continue through secular ideologies of “othering.” These contemporary secular

\(^{162}\) There is disagreement over whether or not these sharp categories arose co-extensively with Christian tradition or are more modern products of Enlightenment thinking.
ideologies are found primarily in the realm of politics, where the nation-state becomes God’s chosen successor.\textsuperscript{163} The hierarchical foundations of the Christian worldview persist in secularism as the foundation of oppression and all forms of violence.

In later extrapolations on these ideas, Galtung attempts to sort out the major world religions into a taxonomy in which those that promote violence in all its forms are referred to as “hard” and religions that promote structural peace are called “soft.” The “hard” religions have characteristics that promote violence: chosenness as self-righteousness, aggressive missionarism, a vertical archetype reinforced by monotheism that implies the transcendence of good and evil, singularism (that there is only one faith), and universalism (that the faith is valid for everyone in the whole world or universe).\textsuperscript{164} Peacemaking from a religious standpoint means strengthening the “softer” aspects of any tradition, the characteristics of which emphasize the unity and immanence of all life and an inherent pluralism, including plural gods. Though he affirms that all religious traditions contain hard and soft elements, Christianity falls into the “hard” category for Galtung. Interviewee conversations provide evidence of many of the different “hard” aspects of the Christian tradition that Galtung delineates as central to the promotion of violence.

\textsuperscript{163} Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 298.

Christian Violence: “The One, True Religion”

Churchill said of Christianity, “This is a monotheism that is proselytizing in the extreme. There’s all sorts of enjoiners in church doctrine and the text itself to proselytize. It is the ‘one, true religion.’” In other words, it is the essence of Christianity to define and defend a transcendent, vertically organized order of the universe and impose that order on the world through privileged categories of chosenness and difference. By its dualistic good-and-evil nature, the imposition of the order is carried out aggressively and violently upon those who are not chosen. Chosenness as Christian identity in the United States combines with other categories of dominance – in particular, whiteness, socio-economic class, and male gender – in the founding of the United States and throughout its history. Culturally, Christian theological justifications have been used throughout U.S. history to justify every major form of oppression: slavery and racism, homophobia and heterosexism, sexism, and so on.165

In her opinion, Power said the United States was a theocracy until 1960,166 and that all public policy and law throughout United States history until that time arose from the uncriticized, unexamined beliefs of Christianity. Judaism was kind of tolerated in a more or less respectful way. But that there would be any other moral order of the universe was unthinkable.

Calling herself once a “true believer,” Power described how the notions of a right and moral order were instilled in her as a young person growing up in the Roman Catholic

---

165 I argue that the Christian theological justifications for all forms of oppression and violence in the United States constitute a form of supremacist ideology, particularly when Christian identity intersects with other dominant cultural identities. See Julie Todd, “Confessions of a Christian Supremacist,” in Reflections: Narratives of Professional Helping Vol. 16 (1), Winter 2010: 140-146.

166 Power referenced the Supreme Court case involving Madalyn Murray O’Hair (1963 Abingdom School District v. Schemmp) as a turning point away from theocracy in the United States.
community in the 1950s. “I was really raised with the religious, the sense that the spiritual order and the moral order that proceeds from it has to be central. You can’t just not pay attention to it. Your life has to be about that.” On the one hand she was taught that there was a spiritual impulse of infinite love and mercy that demanded right action, a set of behaviors in defense of the moral. But what constituted the moral order in society as defined by the Roman Catholic Church often conflicted with the loving, ordering impulse she felt to emanate from God. Power described a deep desire as a child to “experience the congruence” of the spiritual impulse with the order. Yet “how to live rightly” meant in practice conforming oneself individually to the proper order as the church defined and defended it: the one, true religion. The impulse to love conflicted with the stated, Christian order. Power described her instincts about certain forms of injustice as a child:

I was really aware of the disorder in how we lived fundamentally in a number of ways. I remember seeing and smelling and experiencing a feed lot for the first time. And I just like, knew. I was like, “No. No.” I saw poverty, unnecessary suffering. I grew up in Denver. I would read the news: “The farmers are going to have a bumper crop but they won’t get any money.” I’m like, market economies are no way to run an agricultural system. It can’t work. So I had this critical awareness of the things around me that I thought, “That just isn’t right.”

Yet the church did not provide guidance to understand such economic arrangements as immoral. Structural violence was neither defined nor placed within the context of the moral order in Power’s world. The moral order meant individual right behavior. Power recalled an experience of being taken to the Colorado legislature by the nuns of her Roman Catholic high school.

My Catholic community had the sense of being under siege in some way. Colorado was one of the first states to liberalize divorce laws. When I was in high
school I remember we all put on our dress version of our uniforms, which included your black pumps and hose, and [we] went to the legislature. We were supposed to speak up. I recall that I kind of disappointed the nuns because I really didn’t have anything to say. For some people who are very articulate and confident about their traditions and implications in society, it has all the fierceness of coming directly from God. But it has all the arrogant confidence of human need not to test things, but just to grab things…. In that moment sitting there I could not find any impulse or any argument that united the impulse with the stated needs of the situation according to the Catholic Church.

In this example, the Catholic moral order defended and attempted to impose on society a hierarchical divine order defined by gender submission and heterosexual normativity. This is an example of Christian cultural norms imposing and justifying the structural violence attendant with gender and sexual minority oppression. The articulation of cultural and structural violence and the church’s role in this violence was absent.

In college, Power’s deep desire to find congruence between her sense of God’s love and order manifested itself in joining a militant group that attempted to “right” the unjust racist and imperialist, structurally violent order of the United States through the use of revolutionary violence. At the time she believed that her actions were in line with a love for the oppressed in the United States and Vietnam and a commitment to their liberation. Her actions contributed to the murder of a police officer in the midst of a bank robbery intended to amass funds to support the revolutionary movement. After twenty-three years of fugitive status and six years of prison time, Power came to understand that the congruence of the impulse to love at the heart of the divine order and “right action” must be tempered by humility. “That impulse, when that impulse is married to overconfidence, to hubris, that’s a really dangerous mix. Because that’s religious
fanaticism. Or dogmatic fanaticism.” For Power, humility comes by “letting go of the idea that anything we think has any absolute truth.”

I know that being a true believer is a blinded position. It’s a dangerous position to act from… when people are acting in the world with a religious fervor… righteousness can really blind them to human finitude and to the fact that we are all culturally situated. We cannot see. I think any time that religion, religious fervor identifies an “other” it’s a heresy. It’s coming from a set of very confident, very powerful teachings. Catholicism is extremely confident. As a political order it imposed Christianity on much of the world. Despite the way that it was transformed by the more modern thinking of the Protestant Reformation or revolution, Christianity is shot through with a sense of dominance mission. So every tradition is going to have all of these clunky incorrectness, incompletenesses of vision. If we take them as “from God” with that level of authority, commanding us to act with that level of authority in a human world, disaster will ensue. …I think that if there’s a virtue that Christianity is desperately in need of, humility would be it…. I feel like this is exactly where I was wrong and caused a lot of wreckage, [being] so confident… and acting on that without the restraint that humility brings.

Power’s reflections on humility can extend to a number of insights about Christian social location and power. She cautions Christian believers to remember that religious beliefs are culturally situated. They are connected to identities and those identities interconnect to systems of power, dominance and oppression. While Christianity may not be the official state religion, a white, Christian moral order pervades U.S. cultural thinking. Despite that U.S. ideology claims religious freedom at the heart of its politics, Christian dominant understandings of individual and social morality and order take on the proportions of an all-encompassing, normative worldview. This Christian normative worldview is tied to the racism, classism, sexism, heterosexism and genocide that were inherent in the founding of the nation. To divest oneself of this personally and nationally normative, supremacist ideology is to begin to divest of the entitlements which
this ideology justifies. Such divestment requires humility and sacrifice and has direct implications for Christian practice in social movements.

**Christian Violence: Denial, Reversal, Entitlement**

The dominant, white U.S. cultural Christian norm is to deny the role of Christianity in the structural and cultural violence of the United States. As described in Chapter Two, this denial is essential to the perpetuation of violence. A false sense of the classed, white, U.S. Christian self and community denies the connectedness of Christian theology to the creation and maintenance of the economic-political status quo that are grounded in the social identifiers of race, gender, class status, and religious identity. Adapting Schulman’s language from Chapter Two helps us to think about the ways in which Christians adopt “the false neutrality of the [Christian] self.”

So the way that it affects the way [Christian] people think is that [Christian] people think of themselves and conceptualize themselves falsely, they see themselves as benign and neutral, and objective, value-free, and natural and regular and just the way things are. When actually their [Christian] position has been highly constructed and imposed by force. Of which they have no awareness. …So that [Christian] people think of themselves as elevated, when actually what they are doing is debased.

Since Christianity is the cultural norm in the United States, Christians do not see the imposition of their worldview as doing violence, but simply “the way it is.” Commenting on a protest in which the AIDS Coalition To Unleash Power (ACT UP) interrupted mass as St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City,¹⁶⁷ Schulman explained this reversal:

---
¹⁶⁷ Information about ACT UP’s “Stop the Church” action at St. Patrick’s Cathedral in New York City can be found in a number of places, including ACT UP’s main website [http://www.actupny.org/YELL/stopchurch99.html](http://www.actupny.org/YELL/stopchurch99.html). Also, for one participant’s discussion of perceptions of
The Catholic Church got on local public school boards and passed a thing saying that public schools could not give out condoms. Now we don’t care what they do in Catholic schools… But we felt that people would die as a consequence of this policy and for that reason we were justified in going to and interrupting mass. Now the problem is when they construct us as interrupting mass as violent, and them causing people to die as benign. It’s very, very distorted. It’s a kind of paradigm where the perpetrator depicts themselves as the victim when they are actually causing the pain. So their actions are not described. They are seen as neutral, and the response is created as the assault. That’s how that event was described. Because people were more offended that mass was interrupted than that people would die because of their policies… Of course the people who interrupted that mass, many of them did die…. Their perception was that gay people should grin and bear it. If we did something they were suddenly threatened. But when our lives were threatened it didn’t have any meaning. Because their lives mattered and our lives didn’t.

Another example of this false construction of the self is the way, as Churchill described it, “Christian theology has been used in a manner to support property interest. Pure and simple.” Jensen speaks of this throughout his written works.

The early Europeans faced much the same problem we face today: their lofty goals required the destruction of these forests and all life in them, but they couldn’t do it without at least some justification. The first two claims to virtue were the intertwining goals of Christianizing the natives and making a profit. These embodied a bizarre yet efficient exchange in which, as Captain John Chester succinctly put it, the natives gained “knowledge of our faith” while Europeans acquired “such riches as the country hath.” Both the natives and the “riches” – were quickly cut down. Soon the claim to Christianization was dropped, and the rationalization became “Manifest Destiny,” the tenet that the territorial expansion of the United States was not only inevitable but divinely ordained. Thus it was God and not man who ordered the land’s original inhabitants removed, who ordered the destruction of hundreds of human cultures and the killing of tens of millions of human beings, who ordered the slaughter of 60 million buffalo and 20 million pronghorn antelope to make life tougher. 168

---

168 Jensen, Language Older Than Words, 86.
Euro-American, Christian theology undergirded multiple arguments for the eradication of indigenous nations, including manifest destiny, the portrayal of American Indians as uncivilized, inhuman savages, and the “terra nullius” argument.\(^{169}\) Similarly, white Christian theology and biblical texts also justified the inhumanity of black persons of African descent, encoded their being as three-fifths of a human being in the U.S. Constitution,\(^{170}\) and thus their legitimate enslavement as property. Christian theological justifications of genocide and slavery were the basis for the accumulation of property and wealth by white Christian men. Yet the particular role of a racialized and classed Christian theology is denied and obscured by the dominant white, Christian culture even as the theology continues to undergird an ongoing legacy of political and economic oppression of indigenous persons and African-Americans, among others. The cultural situatedness of belief about which Power spoke is denied. The reversal expresses itself in a false and abstracted nationalistic value of being a benevolent, freedom-loving, democratic, Christian nation, while marginalizing and othering whole groups as debased.

Galtung adds constructively to the interviewee data about the development of denial and reversal, the false sense of the Christian individual and communal self. Part of Christianity’s structural denial is the way it covers over its perpetuation of the dominant economic order with a stated and practiced sympathy for the victims of violence: “The

\(^{169}\) Robert Williams Jr. ’s *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990) traces the foundations of official U.S. law, both federal American Indian policy and all U.S. property law, directly to the Christian tradition and its theological justifications for colonial conquest beginning in 1246 C.E.. *Terra nullius* argues that indigenous lands were not properly “used,” empty, and therefore subject to conquest.

\(^{170}\) Known as the “3/5 Compromise,” Article 1, Section 2, Paragraph 3 of the U.S. Constitution determined how representation and taxes would be determined in the republic based on the number of free persons. In this compromise, American Indians were also not counted unless they were taxed on property, also effectively excluding them.
good Samaritan is at work where direct or structural violence is rampant, removing pain: but not the causes of direct or structural violence.” Furthermore, the Good Samaritan complex is heightened by the very structure of economic inequality itself.

It becomes highly predictable in society who will be a victim and who will be a sufferer and who will be a reliever of pain... It is the rich in the rich societies “helping” the poor in the poor societies, often with the money collected or extracted from the poor in the rich societies, thereby reasserting their position and reestablishing themselves.171

Christian Violence: Pacification and Reversal

In Chapter Two, Churchill described the repressive violence against people-of-color social movements for “disrupting their assigned place.” He said, “Society functions on: there’s a place for everyone and everyone in their place.” As described in Galtung’s table above, Christianity has been a if not the principal source to legitimate the violence used to maintain the assigned place of the oppressed. It plays another role by attempting to mitigate threats to the established order before they break out. This is Christianity’s role in pacification.

The Christian emphasis on pacification values claims of peace over claims for justice. Argentinian liberation theologian José Míguez Bonino traces Christian institutional support for political order to Augustine, who solidified the theological relationship between the Roman empire and Christianity in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Augustine understood that justice and love were the foundations of the

heavenly city, and that the principles of justice and love were meant to impinge upon and judge the badly ordered earthly city.\footnote{The concept of the ordering of the earthly and heavenly cities is found in Augustine, City of God (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).} According to Míguez Bonino’s interpretation of Augustine, however,

Injustices should be corrected whenever that can be done without endangering order and peace. But if any redress of wrong threatens to become disruptive, it should be avoided. The premise of Augustine’s position in these cases is quite clear – peace understood as order. Society is an organism that must function harmoniously. The chief purpose of societal organization is the suppression of conflict and tumult. Changes, or the respect for personal freedom or for justice, might endanger that order. Whenever an alternative emerges, therefore, the Christian ought to work for the best possible solution, the most just and generous one, \emph{short of endangering the existing order}…. Peace, therefore, understood as order is the basic direction, the ultimate ethical key. Theologically, justice and love are supreme, but historically both are subordinated to order.\footnote{José Míguez Bonino, Toward a Christian Political Ethics (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983): 83.} Christian liberation theologians seek to upend the subordination of justice and love to order. Míguez Bonino wrote that the most important question for social transformation is not what extent of justice is harmonious with the peaceful maintenance of the existing order, but “\emph{What kind of order, which order is compatible with the exercise of the justice?}”\footnote{Ibid., 86.} If justice is defined as the end of violence and the liberation of the oppressed, then social change is “not change just for the sake of change,” but for the sake of achieving a new order that is not based in violence as the current order is.\footnote{Ibid., 86. J.G. Davies outlines the relationships between law and order, love and justice, morality and revolutionary violence in Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 102) The establishment of a just order will require a disruption of peace.

\begin{thebibliography}{1}
\bibitem{1} The concept of the ordering of the earthly and heavenly cities is found in Augustine, \textit{City of God} (New York: Penguin Classics, 2003).
\bibitem{3} Ibid., 86.
\bibitem{4} Ibid., 86. J.G. Davies outlines the relationships between law and order, love and justice, morality and revolutionary violence in \textit{Christians, Politics and Violent Revolution} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 102)
Yet the churches of the dominant culture have consistently supported pacification over disruption. B♀ said she regularly sees Christian churches covering the realities of direct and structural violence with calls for peace.

Religion always kind of is the cover-up. Oh, it'll be okay. God loves you. I see that happening right now today. We have police shooting up communities all over this country. Then the churches all come out and say ‘Oh, let’s have peace.’ But people still get shot by the police! I don’t think it’s working very well. I think the success rate is a little whacked there.

In other words, Christianity often serves as a form of pacification when there is a threat to the order in order to hold entitlements, and the false portrayal of the oppressed as the primarily violent actors in society, in place.

Jensen claimed that the development of urban civilizations was attended by the birth of the religions of civilization and pacification of conquered peoples through these religions. The great traditions of pacifism arose from Christianity and Buddhism during the earliest stages of civilization. Civilization, or life in cities, required the importation of massive resources into urban areas, extracted from those places where the resources exist. Jensen notes that at the heart of pacification of indigenous populations, Christianity divorced the spiritual life from the material realm. Christianity removed all meaning from the land, “excised it from the tree, excised it from the soil, and put it on some, you know, big God-Daddy out there.” The earth as material and not spiritual is not a home. It is only a place where believers wait out their bodily days until reaching an eternal home in heaven. Christianity imposes a spiritualized worldview wherever and on whomever it seeks to dominate, in order to separate populations from literally life-sustaining

connectedness to their material landbases. He views the colonization of the American Indian population in the United States as a process of pacification achieved through Christian theological support, “We can really talk about the process of colonization as a process of pacification. I love the fact that pacifism is the same word essentially as pacify.” For the colonial project in the United States to succeed, white Christian colonialists had to find means to take land and its resources. General means of pacification of native populations through Christian evangelizing practices partnered with more directly violent means of assimilation, elimination and eradication.

Jensen is not only pointing to historical processes and concrete means of pacifying oppressed populations. He suggests that (non)violence from a Christian social location (and other dominant social locators) as a social change demand often serves the same purpose of pacification in modern conflict and social change contexts as well as in colonial contexts. Versus developing strategies of resistance and non-cooperation with violent structures, Christian (non)violence appears to pacify eruptions of conflict and anger occasioned by the vicious nature of structural violence and the false, reversed portrayals of who the perpetrators of violence are. In eras of both historic colonization and contemporary social change, (non)violence as pacification reinforces the material order and entitlement rewards of the dominant culture. When they serve the dominant

\footnote{Jensen deals with these ideas about the impact of the great religions of the world arising from civilization to enforce pacification by spiritualizing a relationship to the land throughout \textit{Endgame I}, see for example pages 285-6, 295, 301.}
culture’s need to enforce pacification, white Christian calls for (non)violence are forms of cultural and structural violence.\(^{177}\)

**Is the White, U.S. Christian Tradition Uniquely Violent?**

Schulman asserted that a particular religious justification is irrelevant to understanding systems of domination. She said, “You can come to the same conclusions, secularly or religiously, because you can use secular ideas or religious ideas to justify just about anything.” Speaking about his own involvement in traditional African religious practices, Umoja said that African religious traditions were influenced by The monarchies during a particular historical moment. Or power relations during a particular moment. So just like Christianity and Islam, you might see certain things reflecting a political sociology of a particular period. Theologies and religious practices always reveal the social configurations of the dominant culture: gender relations, social class mobility, and so on. Umoja described when he explored converting to Islam as an alternative to Christianity. At that time, he had come to understand Christianity as “the white man’s religion.” An acquaintance introduced him to a scholarly work that demonstrated the extent to which Islam

\(^{177}\) Donna Francis is a professional consultant in organizational and international conflict transformation throughout the world and a former president of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR). In her most recent book, *From Pacification to Peacebuilding: A Call to Global Transformation* (New York: Pluto Press, 2010), she urges all people who work for and “espouse the values of peace” to recognize the possibility for co-optation into an dominant culture agenda of pacification, which intends to “subdue or pacify those whose threaten instability or insubordination” (ix). She admits that, as with the threat and practice of violence, underneath the language of peace often lay the intention of pacification. She urges a multi-faceted model of peace building that includes a much more proactive, confrontational approach to social transformation, which she bases on interpretations of past (non)violent historic social struggles.
contributed as much to the enslavement of Africans as Christianity did. In other words, all religious traditions play a role in legitimizing structural violence and oppression. Christianity is no different in this regard.

The question over whether or not religion has a particular role to play in legitimating violence is a huge debate within burgeoning field of “religious violence.” In one of the more recent expositions of the debate within the Christian tradition, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict*, William T. Cavanaugh attempts to undermine the often assumed connection between religion, Christianity in particular, and violence. The idea that “religion causes violence” is based on the assumption that “religion is a transhistorical and transcultural feature of human life, essentially distinct from ‘secular’ features such as politics and economics, which has a peculiarly dangerous inclination to promote violence.” Unlike religion, the traditional view goes, the secular state is the natural, rational actor through which the dangers of religion are tamed. Cavanaugh tries to undermine the myth by pointing out the vague definitions of “religion” employed by major scholars of so-called religious violence. Religion is “absolutist,” “divisive,” and “insufficiently rational,” particularly when held up against the liberal-rational politics of the state. He argues that political power has in essence “invented” religion and the dichotomy between religious and state violence for its own purposes – to invent itself as peaceful and the religious absolutist as violent. He

---

178 Here Umoja is referring to Chancellor William’s *Destruction of Black Civilization* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1987).


180 Ibid., 17-18.
faults this construction of religion because “ideologies and institutions labeled secular can be just as absolutist, divisive, and irrational as those labeled religious.”

Cavanaugh attempts to undermine the sharp division between liberal secularism and religion and their connections to violence. But he, the authors he cites to support his work, and the authors he critiques, all generally define violence as “injurious or lethal harm and is almost always discussed in the context of physical violence, such as war and terrorism.” Cavanaugh’s notion of violence is limited to what Galtung names direct violence. Cavanaugh and his colleagues in the academy do not grapple with whether or not Western political ideas of the state and Western Christian worldviews are basically the same. Neither does Cavanaugh nor Galtung delve deeply into the possibility that Christianity, as it developed parallel with the modern nation-state, may actually be the basis for creating and maintaining the structures and cultures of violence themselves, from which direct violence often results. These scholars do not seriously consider whether or not the Western cultural worldview embedded in Western religions and nation-state politics are essentially cut of the same cloth, that is, co-extensive with one another in fundamental ways.

181 Ibid., 6.

182 Ibid., 7.
A Uniquely Christian, Cultural Substrata of Violence

Cavanaugh wants to argue that in historic context religions cannot be “theoretically separable from secular realities”\(^\text{183}\); therefore religion cannot be “blamed” as the source of violence. Yet some of the interviewees’ perspectives would suggest that because Christian monotheistic traditions are the basis for liberal, Western democracies, they cannot be usefully separated. The Christian religious worldview (as well as the more obvious institutional collaborations between church and state to support violence of all kinds) must be considered as a unique cultural and structural source of the direct violence attributable to both Christian and secular entities. In this argument, white Christian theology is not only reflective of a given historical context and its dominant culture, but is the very essence of a Western worldview whose cosmological foundations render it fundamentally violent.\(^\text{184}\) Galtung touches briefly upon the idea that the very cosmology of what he terms “occidental” [Western] culture may serve to justify structural violence.

The cosmology concept is designed to harbor that substratum of deeper assumptions about reality, defining what is normal and natural. Assumptions at this level of depth in the collective subconscious are not easily unearthed, not to mention uprooted. And yet, it is at this level that occidental culture shows so many violent features that the whole culture starts looking violent.\(^\text{185}\)

\(^\text{183}\) Ibid., 9.

\(^\text{184}\) I am indebted to my mentors and colleagues at the Iliff School of Theology – Dr. Tink Tinker, Dr. Loring Abeyta, and Mark Freeland – for my ability to grasp the importance of comprehending a certain notion of worldview (that Galtung speaks of as “cosmology”). These colleagues helped me to comprehend that there are deeply held worldviews that are essentially different from one another. Different Western political or economic ideologies may nonetheless be undergirded by the same worldview. An article that also aided understanding the absolute difference between a Western and indigenous worldview of “nature” is Kwasi Wiredu, *The Akan Worldview*, a colloquium paper for the Program on History, Culture, and Society presented at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, May 19, 1985.

\(^\text{185}\) Galtung, “Cultural Violence,” 301.
Along with the aforementioned notion of chosenness, Galtung includes in his list of occidental “deep structures”: privileging dichotomous and deductive thinking, hierarchy, arrogance toward nature, a focus on individual agency, linearity and progress.186

From the interviewee data, the features of this worldview which render it so violent include: human supremacism and progress, individualism, and abstraction. As we consider arguments for the ways in which Western, Christian tradition and theology is predisposed to violence at its underlying core (substratum), we will also begin to glimpse the ways in which (non)violence, as a part of the tradition of Western Christianity, may be implicated in this violent foundation. In other words, though advocates of Christian (non)violence may understand it as an attitude or practice that is completely at odds with violence of all forms, it is nonetheless a part of the same tradition of Christian thought and practice which has been and will be described in practice, if not fundamentally, as violent.

Christian, Cultural Substratum I: Human Supremacism and Progress

Galtung notes that an ecologically balanced planet is the basis for all human survival and thus a prerequisite for peace.187 He includes the human species first among all of God’s chosen in the table above, resulting in ecocide. Yet he admits that the natural world has been left out of his definition of types of violence and that his analysis of

---


violence is anthropocentric.\textsuperscript{188} Despite speciesism being at the top of Galtung’s table, all of the types of violence associated with direct and structural violence relate only to human oppression. The only matters under consideration in the search for peace address the denial of basic human needs for survival and human well-being, identity, and freedom.

In their interviews, both Churchill and Jensen argue that the alienation from nature is inherent in the Western-Christian mindset and constitutes the fundamental basis for legitimating all forms of violence. Churchill speculates that the description of the flood narrative in the book of Genesis is a response to a half-mile high wake that crashed into the center of Minoan civilization on what is now the Turkish coast of the Mediterranean Sea.

[The cataclysmic event triggers] this really, really, really, really, really traumatic level of alienation, not detachment from, but alienation from nature. There was this absolute compulsion to figure out how to get a handle on nature so that it can never do this to you again, at a cultural level.…. You know, it’s a comprehensible response…. But that’s how I view it as originating. And it having been extrapolated to the point where people don’t even want to remember where it came from.

As a result of this event, Churchill explained that the need to control and to dominate nature becomes a Western-Christian mental disorder, a pathology “that is put in terms of a theology.” Nature becomes the ultimate perpetrator of violence in a reversal where the earth itself is the destroyer of life rather than the creator-mother and life-giver. Humans

become so obsessed with controlling the natural world that anything associated with

time nature also is an uncontrollable threat identified for elimination. On the other hand,

You encounter indigenous traditions, which conceive of the place of humans as

not something apart from and working its will upon nature, but rather as integral
to nature. They see themselves and are seen by Christians as being part of nature.

This must be subdued and transformed into other than what they are. Or

eradicated. But that’s a transformative process in the Christian mind too. The

Western mind, we should call it. I don’t know how you distinguish the Western

mind, so-called, from Christianity. … So the interface between Christianity and

colonialism, they are absolutely inseparable. The Western outlook, worldview is

impossible without one, Christianity, and two, the colonizing drive of

Christianity. To convert the heathens into Christians.

Though Christianity is also demarcated from other major religious traditions by its

extreme proselytizing, the fundamental core of Christianity is related to this primary

alienation from nature. This alienation is so deep that it might hardly be understood as a

form of denial, as was the case with the culture of denial in U.S. history. However, this

alienation from nature has severe implications for the rest of history.

People are apart from. That’s so deep-set, utterly intractable, never thought of. It’s

simply automatic, that’s how the world is. That’s the world view. [When] you

encounter people who see themselves in a diametrically opposing way, they have
to be eradicated. Because they are a part of what it is that they can’t be part of!

You have to kill them, literally or figuratively.

Churchill’s idea here is succinctly expressed in a different interview:

The dominant culture – the colonized mind – is at war with nature, and so by
definition is at war with all peoples of nature. The more natural the people, the

greater the degree of hostility the dominant culture manifests towards them. This

is an alienation so profound and so virulent that no one in the dominant flow of

things wants to acknowledge that it even exists. Theirs is the normal and correct

ordering of consciousness to relate to the world they say, they assert, they insist.

So long as they look at it that way, there can be no admission of pathology. It

follows that, absent an acknowledgement of the pathology, there can be no cure.
What’s necessary is for people to come to grips with the tradition into which they’ve been conditioned, and for these people to want to get out of that.\textsuperscript{189}

The implication of Churchill’s idea is: Christian social location is one that is inherently about domination and control deeply in its text and theology. Christianity’s fundamental alienation from nature is deeply structured into its worldview, which whether explicitly “religious” or not, is the dominant Western worldview. God creates the human and gives the human dominion over the earth:

\begin{quote}
And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the Earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.\textsuperscript{190}
\end{quote}

Even when the biblical command for humans to “have dominion” over the earth is interpreted as stewardship and care, the earth and its creatures are still the patronized, unequal and dominated “other.” Humans are superior to the being/s of the entire natural world. It is not only the non-human natural world that is the focus of this domination, but those creatures that come to be associated with nature; indigenous persons of all nations, and all women and children generally.\textsuperscript{191} Jensen refers to this as “the death urge” of civilized culture.

From birth on… we are individually and collectively enculturated to hate life, hate the natural world, hate the wild, hate women, hate children, hate our bodies,


\textsuperscript{190} Genesis 1:28, King James Version of the Bible.

\textsuperscript{191} Rosemary Radford Ruether writes about the inter-related patterns of domination among sexism, racism, anti-Semitism and environmental destruction in \textit{New Woman, New Earth: Sexist Ideologies and Human Liberation} (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995). As dedicated as she is to the articulation of pre-patriarchal religion and ecology and an end to the earth’s devastation, even Ruether’s title betrays the human supremacist focus where the earth is restored for the purpose of achieving human liberation.
hate and fear our emotions, hate ourselves. If we did not hate the world, we could not allow it to be destroyed before our eyes.\textsuperscript{192}

Churchill makes historical references throughout his works as to how this worldview, deeply embedded in the Western mindset through Christianity, has played out historically. He spoke of the occupation of the Pine Ridge reservation by the American Indian Movement in 1973, and the grappling among American Indians and their allies about why the United States’ government brought such intense firepower and focus to the repression of the occupation:

Trudell actually said … “They had to kill us. They had to kill us. They didn’t have any choice.” [The] American Indian Movement (AIM) and he’s talking about Pine Ridge.\textsuperscript{193} “No, what are you on about? They had to kill us. It’s the nature of the relation.” He’s talking third quarter of the twentieth century…. “Why are you so mystified about what they were doing? Of course they did that, they had to do that.” ‘Cause however imperfectly, the whole point [of AIM] was to get back in touch with those traditions and assert them. Well, nothing’s changed since 1492 in that regard.

The Christian tradition in the dominant culture serves to reinforce categories of chosenness and otherness, strengthening the isolation among categories of humans, and the human and not-human natural world. These differences become understood as natural and create the pretext for justified violence against oppressed communities.

Jensen drew further emphasis onto the inherently anthropocentric nature of the Christian tradition. He said, “In a culture that’s narcissistic enough to believe that \textit{man and only man} was created in God’s image, there might be just a wee touch of narcissism

\textsuperscript{192} Jensen, \textit{Endgame I}, 283.
\textsuperscript{193} Here Churchill is referring to John Trudell. Trudell was the spokesperson for All Tribes Occupation of Alcatraz Island and was present with the American Indian Movement during the occupation of Pine Ridge, South Dakota in 1973, to which Churchill refers to here. For more information on Pine Ridge, see Churchill and Vander Wall’s “Why Pine Ridge?” and “The Pine Ridge Battleground,” Chapters 4 and 5 in \textit{Agents of Repression}. 

113
that’s going to run everywhere else.” Jensen makes it clear: the core problem with
Christian tradition is, within its many hierarchies, the privileging of human life over other
forms of life. While all of creation is described as good, only the human being in the
Genesis story is created in God’s image. I asked Jensen if he regarded the concept of
imago dei as a central problem. He responded,

Well, I don’t have a problem with it as long as in the next sentence you say that
the banana slug is made in the image of God. And so is the red-legged frog. And
so is the redwood tree. And anybody who doesn’t see God in any of those has got
some problems.

Jensen gave various examples about the profound difference between indigenous and/or
animist worldview (he does not equate the two) and the Christian worldview.

One of the indigenous people that I was just talking to a couple weeks ago, his
people were people of the salmon and they have one song, “We are the salmon.
The salmon are us. What happens to the salmon happens to us.” He says his
people have absolutely failed because they’ve allowed the salmon to be harmed.
He says there’s a sense in which they’re not blaming the dominant culture. They
hate the dominant culture. That’s a given. But in addition they’re accepting that
they have failed in not resisting sufficiently. You see the difference? … instead
of singing “Jesus loves me, this I know for the Bible tells me so,” it’s like, “I’m in
love with the redwood and the redwood loves me.” How different would that be if
those were your songs? From infancy?

Human supremacism and human exceptionalism are central issues in discussions
of violence and (non)violence for Jensen. “This form of narcissism – that only human
(and more specifically the some very special humans, and even more specifically the
disembodied thoughts of these very special humans) matter – is central to this culture.”

He used the following example, speaking of where he lives in northern California:

The crab season is very short. The crabbers work very hard here. The local
harbormaster was saying why they work so hard. He said, “Each crab is worth a

---

dollar-fifty.” Now imagine if there’s all these envelopes all over the ground and each one has a dollar-fifty in it. You’re going to run around picking up as many envelopes as you can, as fast as you can. Well, you know what? They’re not actually envelopes full of money. They are actually living beings. And I don’t have a problem with eating crab. But it’s the recognition that you’re not picking up an envelope full of money. How would he like it if there are these space aliens running around going, you know, “Each human is worth a dollar-fifty, and you are running around killing as many as you can so that you can get a dollar-fifty each.” Suddenly it’s violence. … I don’t see any right now but the birds that were flying outside the window earlier. Their lives are just as valuable to them as mine is to me. And those trees, their lives are as valuable to them as mine is to me. And the bacteria whom I’m going to defecate out, their lives are as valuable to them as mine is to me. That doesn’t mean that we don’t kill. It just means that we recognize that it’s not an economic transaction.

That human beings are created in the image of God is beautiful notion for humans, but becomes the basis by which every other creature is devalued.

This view of the Christian tradition throws into question whether the tradition itself might actively redeem its way out of violence if its fundamental disposition toward the earth and the earth’s creatures is domination and death. The anti-nature worldview of dominant Western Christianity renders the tradition fundamentally culturally violent, justifying structural and direct violence through its basic theological claims to *imago dei* and natural dominion. Churchill acknowledged there have been many good Christians motivated by a liberationist understanding of their tradition who have contributed meaningfully to liberation struggles. Yet the dominant alienated, hierarchical, anti-nature worldview remains in place.

In my analysis of the interviews, there was nothing that served to counter the violently anthropocentric focus of the Western, Christian tradition as portrayed by the preceding analysis. Two interviewees who advocated (non)violence alone mentioned the horrible destruction of the earth. Yet there was almost no material beyond the
perspectives of Churchill and Jensen which suggested that the structural and cultural transformation of inequality and injustice would imply any subjects other than human. From my research and experience in (non)violence thought and practice, there is little to nothing to address this critique. There may be many good Christians who, within a rubric of (non)violence are engaging in earth-friendly practices and resisting the structures of environmental destruction to varying degrees. But until the anti-nature, Western, progress worldview is addressed, much less dismantled, (non)violence has little to say or do with addressing such culturally embedded violence within the U.S. Christian tradition. To fully engage such culturally embedded violence would mean to expose the material entitlements which come to members of the dominant culture, including advocates of (non)violence, as a result of the destruction of the earth.

Human Supremacism and the Myth of Progress

Attendant with human supremacism is the valuation of human progress. In the Christian worldview humanity stands at the apex of the Christian vision of salvation history, the history of the whole world. Christ comes as the premier and final divine-

195 In the field of practical theology, I found two sources which address this problem directly. McCann and Strain ask theologians to move “beyond excessive homocentrism.” “Many practical theologies have translated the necessary concern with normative models for human action into an exclusive concern with human destiny…” Polity and Praxis: A Program for American Practical Theology (Minneapolis: Winston Press, 1985): 141. David Tracy also writes that the “urgency of a theological return to cosmological interests seems clear,” in “Practical Theology in the Situation of Global Pluralism,” Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology. Lewis S. Mudge and James N. Poling, editors: 139-154 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987). Tracy also writes that the need to challenge the “anthropocentric” center of contemporary theology “is the new status quaestionis that must be understood before the new constructive theological work can be assessed” (146-147). Both of these brief sections in these works cite numerous sources within systematic theology that deal with the issue of anthropocentrism. However, the main interest of these two works in mentioning anthropocentrism is to note the urgency of the ecological crisis and nuclear holocaust as primarily as social problems, not based on the spiritual integrity and value of the natural world itself.
human to reaffirm the theological hierarchy as the victor over earth and time through his redemption of *all creation*. In the Christian tradition, (human) history moves along a linear trajectory in which all manner of things are progressing towards a triumphant end. For Jensen, the first part of the narrative in the book of Genesis establishes both human supremacism and the progress worldview: to be fruitful and multiply, to fill and subdue *all* the earth.

One of the central myths of this culture concerns the desirability of growth, a parasitic expansion to fill and consume its host. This was manifest from the beginning… In the Western Christian worldview, the world is forever moving towards a glorious end when all of creation will be redeemed. Progress is a premise so fundamental as to become invisible.\(^{196}\)

The entire presupposition of industrial capitalism is human progress, improvement, consumption and growth. The cultural justification for human wealth and progress at any cost results in the direct and structural violence and, according the Jensen, this progress worldview is fundamentally tied to a Western, Christian worldview.

The progress myth is deeply embedded within dominant U.S. social change history. Reflecting dominant culture sentiments, many interviewees indicated the notion that the inequalities of social arrangements are getting better, that we are progressing as a society and world, dismantling structural and cultural forms of violence, such as poverty, sexism, heterosexism and homophobia, racism. The question is: is that true? Historically speaking, how much has improved, and for whom? Umoja spoke about this in relation to historic U.S. slavery, racism and the election of President Obama. I include this quotation at length because I think that it runs so thoroughly counter to the myth of progress in the United States.

When our ancestors were brought here and were enslaved, [we] were not included in the republic when the republic was formed. … When our ancestors were emancipated, I think our people had a right to determine whether they could return back to Africa, whether they should be included into the American republic, or United States, or that they should have had the right to form their own state. In terms of just reparations, [we] should have had the opportunity to do that. We never had those choices. The 14th Amendment made us citizens but the consent wasn’t given. It wasn’t asked and it wasn’t given. So there’s always been amongst people of African descent, those who were descendants of slaves, a desire to be self-determining. Probably it’s lower now than at any point because of the Obama election and other things. After, we had Jim Crow and what they call second-class citizenship. You had the civil rights movement. After the civil rights movement you did have the Black Power movement that expressed sentiments of self-determination. You have to the right to vote. Now students can go to this university, whereas prior to 1964 there weren’t black people here. Even with all of that, in spite of Obama being elected president, given the incarceration rates, the unemployment rates, I think black people are still treated as a virtual colony of the United States. I still see the necessity of black people to be able to evaluate their relationships. I don’t really call myself an African-American. It’s not something that I feel any loyalty to. I know it doesn’t have any allegiance to me or my community or my people or anything of that nature. I think our citizenship is like a paper citizenship. There’s supposed to be some reciprocity. In other words, you pledge allegiance to a state and then that state is supposed to protect you. It’s supposed to fight for your interests. I really don’t feel that. In fact, I feel the state has violated our human rights time and time again. The relationships are institutionalized. They change somewhat. It’s not even the same as when I was a child. When I was a child, it was formal segregation in this country. I just don’t think those things have been resolved in spite of Obama being elected. I think Obama being elected is probably one of the greatest civil rights achievements that black people have had…. I told my son who was saying we need to check out this guy Barack Obama, “Son, there’ll never be a black president. Not in my lifetime.” So to see that, it was tremendous on one level, even though I’ve seen some of the stuff that’s happened since. Some of the things he’s done [have] increased repression… A friend of mine described Obama being president similar to during slavery. Like here in the state of Georgia a lot of people don’t know there were more black overseers than there were white overseers in the state of Georgia during slavery. So one friend of mine likened it to a black person being over the plantation. It’s still a plantation. You might get some better treatment with a black overseer. You might, you might not. Sometimes they beat you too … to me it’s akin to that.
This more complex view of social change challenges whether or not the social inequalities and structural violence underlying the framework of U.S. society have improved.

In *My American History*, Schulman wrote about when she took “a dramatic detour from this tidy myth” – “the old fashioned concept of progress – that things got better, and society became more free, over time.” This happened during feminist and gay movement organizing in the Reagan era, when liberals and progressives had to deal with the backlash from the new right against gains of previous movements. Schulman writes that dealing with the sexism and homophobia of former activists as progressive circles reengaged to organize against the right was disheartening – “to be stuck in rooms with men and straight women who had never noticed [the] changes” of “constructing lives outside of traditional female roles… including not allowing women’s lives to be made secondary to men’s lives.” The myth of progress serves the mechanisms of dominant culture’s denial and entitlement on both the right and left.

Christian, Cultural Substratum II: Individualism

What further extenuates an inability to see how Christian thinking and practice is implicated in the processes of structural violence is the problem of radical individualism. Galtung writes,

---


198 Ibid., 26-27.
In general it does not seems rash to assert that Christianity has been a 2,000 years’ long exercise in structural blindness…. To Christianity, society has been a set of individuals all equipped with free will and a soul to be saved, whether by Catholic or by Protestant means, and the world has been a series of nations, all free to set their goals; for instance to choose the Lord (and the more temporal lords serving by his grace), or to reject Him. That there should be structures of exploitation, fragmentation, and penetration tying individuals and nations together has not been apparent to Christianity. Christianity has focused on the individual actor, human being or nation, not on the structures tying them together.199

For example, Galtung writes, individual Christians object to the individual husband who beats his wife,200 but Christianity has never fully objected to its own theology, texts, and structure as the basis for violence – the subjugation and domination of women.201

Christian Individualism, Sin and Violence

Dear described that the U.S. cultural obsession on individual acts of “immorality” as sin serve precisely to distract the Christian and Christian churches from their complicity in direct and structural violence.

The empire, the culture of war, the first thing they do is they always want to co-opt the churches and the communities of faith. And it works. This is the story of the Roman Empire and what happened to Christianity with Constantine.202 They


200 Galtung writes here that “Christianity has always [italics mine] objected to the husband who beats his wife,” which is patently untrue.

201 Certainly there is a debate within Christian tradition, Christian feminism and Christian liberation theology about whether or not systems of hierarchy and patriarchy are co-extensive with Christianity itself or if they developed at a later time with the advent of Enlightenment thinking. Though it is impossible to identify a birthing point, I tend to agree with Galtung and radical feminists that the entirety of the Christian tradition is intertwined with systems of oppression. This does not mean that there are not liberationist strains and possibilities, but that they are limited.

202 Here Dear is referring to the fusing of the religious and political orders in the fourth century, when the Roman emperor Constantine was converted to Christianity and the Christian religion became the official religion of the empire, serving to bolster its political and military agenda with theological justifications.
tell us how to be church. They tell us what morality is, and they tell us about sin. “That person over there is in total sin. How dare, and you people should be…” distracting us from the fact that we just killed 1.4 million people in Iraq. As if that isn’t the definition of sin. This is an age-old thing and the church goes right along with the culture. And this is the church, and in the process they tell us about faith.

Dear commented further about the effects of the individualist construction of Christian sin.

You have to accept being a sinner and trying to be good but, meanwhile, we’re killing people. The people at Los Alamos all know they’re sinners and they’re seeking grace and they’re confessing their sins and they’re going for it, and meanwhile they’re building nuclear weapons! I mean if you are really going to deal with sin, and I say this as a Catholic priest in the sacrament of confession, which goes back 800 years…. Don’t come and talk about that personal experience you have. Tell me about how you are racist, sexist, supporting killing children in Iraq. That’s the sin. You’re part of the national sin, corporate sin, the global mass murder that’s happening around the planet. Then we’re getting somewhere. That’s the gospel language. Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me. That’s the measurement…. I don’t think we deal at all with social sin…. Maybe if you talk about social or national sin, that might help us.

The Christian individualistic view of sin, violence and punishment stands in contrast to an indigenous worldview articulated by Churchill. From an indigenous perspective, individual behavior, positive or negative, is construed with a construction of balance and harmony of the entire natural order that can sustain the next seven generations.

You can do anything you want as an individual, as a group, within that paradigm of understanding. As long as you don’t violate it. You can be as imaginative [and] creative as you want, so long as you don’t fundamentally disrupt the natural balance.

Churchill provided a real-life example of how violence was understood and mediated in an indigenous understanding in the late nineteenth century. On the Lakota Rosebud reservation, a man named Crow Dog killed a man named Spotted Tail. According the
Churchill, Spotted Tail was a pet of the government, which wanted to hang Crow Dog as “the civilized thing” to do. The Lakota applied a different principle of accountability for Crow Dog’s act of violence.

Crow Dog caused an imbalance. Spotted Tail had dependents and there’s an ecosystem called the Spotted Tail family. And he has seriously imbalanced it. Probably his nephews and his sons and such are raised by Crow Dog and they are apt to act the same way. So no Crow Dog male will carry a weapon for the next seven generations. Len Crow Dog was at Wounded Knee and disarmed the entire time. He’s the last generation, the seventh generation. Crow Dog personally and his descendants are responsible for ensuring the material well-being of Spotted Tail family. Disarmed, in the late 1880s on Rosebud? This is a serious piece of work here. Now I ask you, “which is the more civilized approach?”

In this view, violence works within a whole community to unbalance and rebalance.

Osage elder and scholar George “Tink” Tinker also described how violence and (non)violence from an individualist point of view makes no sense in an Osage worldview. Tinker’s reasoning is so unfamiliar to the Western, Christian mindset that I have included it here in its entirety so that its meaning and contrast to Western individualism and its connections to violence and (non)violence might be fully comprehended.

For American Indians, nonviolence immediately forces us to go into a discussion of our culture and our understanding of the world. Nonviolence is an impossibility. If we were to take absolute nonviolence seriously, we’d all die. ‘Cause we couldn’t eat. Because eating involves perpetrating an act of violence. One has to pick the corn, kill the buffalo, in order to eat. And those are genuine relatives of Indian people. My brother is a member of the wazhazhe udsethe (Osage Nation) of the thoka towanton, the Buffalo Bull clan. Their responsibility was always to maintain the relationship with our siblings in the

---

203 Author interview with George “Tink” Tinker, March 25, 2010, at the Penrose Library, University of Denver, Colorado, unpublished transcript. This interview fell outside of the scope of the formal interviews for this dissertation. Permission was granted by Tinker to share this portion of the informal interview in an email to the author on December 3, 2011.

204 Marjorie Suchocki is one of the few Christian theologians who articulate a notion like Tinker’s: “To live in world where the most basic fact of existence is that life requires life in order to live is to live in a world that is necessarily marked by violence.” (Fall to Violence, 107-108).
Buffalo nation. As a result, even though the Osages were relied on buffalo protein for our subsistence, the Thoka people were not permitted to eat buffalo. Except in a ceremonial context. That is true of Thokas yet today. So my brother and my oldest son is Thoka, is not able to eat buffalo. Because it would be for them an act of cannibalism. Because they maintain that close a relationship with the buffalo on behalf of the rest of the people. Now we have permission, the rest of the people, to hunt buffalo, but to do it in a particular way that absolutely shows respect for Buffalo Nation as a sibling nation at all times. One way we do that is to have a clan that helps us maintain that relationship. And of course, corn is one of the three sisters for many, many nations across the southern two-thirds of the U.S., along with beans and squash. Those are all considered relatives…. Even down in Mexico, even down to the Mayans, down into Central America, people are clear that corn is one of the mothers of human beings…. Corn is one of our relatives, too. In order to eat we have to do violence to the corn. So for American Indians, nonviolence is an impossible ideal. Instead we would rather talk about mitigating violence with ceremonial acts that restore harmony and balance to the world. So before hunting buffalo, there is a rather lengthy ceremony that the people must perform before the hunters can even leave the village. It might take twelve days to perform this ceremony. They would do it at least twice and maybe three times a year, for three hunts of the people. That’s one way of maintaining harmony and balance. Then when you kill the animals, there is a ceremony that has to be done on site, before and as you butcher the animals. Same for corn. When the women plant corn there’s a ceremony to prepare the ground before they plant it and a ceremony at the time when they harvest it.

Here we see certain aspects of an indigenous worldview that stand in contrast to a Western, Christian worldview. First, the members of the non-human world are equal to the members of the human world. Direct violence against the members of the non-human world is as serious as direct violence against the human. Further, whether against the human or non-human, no act of direct violence is understood in purely individualistic terms. Certain acts of violence are understood to be necessary to survival. All acts of violence are understood to affect the entire structure and culture of indigenous societies, which includes the non-human natural world.

As the above material from Dear, Churchill and Tinker demonstrates, a Christian cultural disposition to individualism keeps the focus of violence on direct, observable,
individual, interpersonal acts. As long as the cultural substratum of the Western, Christian worldview is individualism, structural and cultural violence will never be fully exposed or understood, and neither will direct violence be substantially abated.

Individualism, particularly in light of human exceptionalism and supremacism, is part and parcel of what creates the illusion that violence and (non)violence are essentially separate phenomena. Violence is one thing (direct acts of individual injurious force against another) and (non)violence its opposite (the repudiation of acts of force). Individuals may be predisposed either to individual acts of violence or (non)violence.

As Dear’s analysis suggests, individuals who do not engage in violent, interpersonal acts do not see themselves as violent. This reinforcement of the commonsense understanding of violence as primarily individual behavior absolves the individual from further self-examination who does not do (or thinks he does not do) violence. This is denial. Such a one and such a culture of individualism fails to engage the realities and broader concepts of structural and cultural violence in which all individuals participate in this country, as we have shown. Individualism contributes to the practice of denial and supports the entitlements born of unacknowledged structures of violence. The communalist, indigenous views understands violence at the heart of many acts of living and survival. It does not seeks to disavow these acts as violence, but to mitigate the injury or damage done to the community as a whole by the perpetration of such acts by seeking to restore harmony and balance, as Churchill and Tinker have described. A cultural disposition to individualism keeps the focus of (non)violence on individual behavior. We need to explore whether or not individual practices of
(non)violence, as important as they may be, serve to fundamentally expose and confront violence at the level of structures and culture.

Christian, Cultural Substratum III: Abstraction

As the foregoing analyses emphasize, (non)violence in thought and practice must be set within a broad understanding of violence within historical context and communities. While (non)violence in theology and practice may seek to counter or may perhaps reduce the pervasive existence and practices of violence at all levels, (non)violence does not, as such (negate) violence. To think, speak or act in (non)violent ways does not eradicate violence from the fabric of life.

The reason and tradition by which Christian (non)violence advocates suggest that (non)violence is something that, in fact, exists and exists in opposition and as separate from that which we refer to as “violence” is because theologizing itself serves as an abstraction from historical context. A main difference between Western Christian and indigenous traditions is that indigenous traditions are land-based. Being land-based means that individual and community ethics and morality relates to a specific places and events. This way of living and thinking contrasts with Christian ways of thinking, which have been abstracted from their original land-bases and universalized. As we have seen earlier, part of the cultural violence of Christianity is the imposition of ideals claimed to be Christian onto persons and circumstances regardless of context. Indigenous scholar Vine DeLoria, Jr. helps us clarify this point.
The question that so-called world religions have not satisfactorily resolved is whether or not religious experience can be distilled from its original cultural context and become an abstract principle that is applicable to all people in different places and at different times. The persistent emergence of religion movements and the zeal with which they are pursued would seem to suggest that cultural context, time and place are the major elements of revelation and the content is illusory. If not illusory, it is subject to so many qualifications that it is not suitable for transmission to other societies without doing severe damage to both the message of revelation and the society which receives it.\textsuperscript{205}

Under historical analysis, many Christian ideals have confused the Christian gospel with Euro-American cultural norms and values, resulting in the destruction of the cultures and values of marginalized and stigmatized others and reversing the perpetrators of violence in the name of God. Within the context of calls for (non)violence, Christian ideals of the peace and love of Jesus Christ have often demanded the repudiation of violence under any circumstances. The perpetrators of violence are reversed. Many times these calls for (non)violence have served or have been perceived to serve the purposes of the submission, repression or pacification of a purportedly “violent” threat to the white, Christian, economic order. When Christianity’s own history of direct, structural and cultural violence are reported, such reports are often discounted as distortions of the essence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. In such circumstances, the abstraction that there is a (non)violent Christian “essence” serves historical denial.

Jensen in particular decries (non)violence as a Christian principle and as a disembodied morality. He takes issue with a universalized ethic consisting “of commandments from a God whose home is not primarily of this Earth and whose adherents have committed uncountable atrocities,” and challenges his reader to develop a

morality that develops from a contextual, material realm which is imbued with the spirit of all living beings. He points out the hypocrisy of resorting to Christian ideals in the face of history. Appeals to abstraction appear as a form of denial that may serve to perpetuate of violence of all forms.

Christians… can point to a theoretical Christianity that does not attempt to express “dominion” over the earth and its inhabitants, that does not give other humans the choice of Christianity or death, that does not cause the hatred of women, children, life. … But we have to ask ourselves how these religions are expressed on the ground, in the real world – I mean both of these literally – how they play out in the lives of breathing human beings and others. What have been the effects of Christianity on the health of landbases? Has biodiversity thrived on the arrival of the cross? How has the arrival of Christianity affected the status of women? How has it affected indigenous peoples it has encountered?… Not how they play out theoretically, not how their rhetoric plays out, not how we wish they would play out, not how they could play out under some imaginary ideal circumstances, but how they have played out.

Jensen emphasizes that all morality and all effective action depends on a particular context. Jensen notes that when certain “ideals” are applied to contexts, the applications almost always favor members of the dominant culture and serve the status quo itself. This is particularly true when these ideals are written down, whether in the scriptures of religious tradition or in laws (derived from the same religious traditions). Here is one of his examples:

Writing gives a primacy to the written word. There’s a great line that Stanley Diamond quotes the Iroquois, saying “All scripture comes from the devil.”

---

206 Endgame I, 32.
207 Jensen, Endgame I, 288.
208 Jensen, Endgame I, 286.
209 Jensen makes reference to Stanley Diamond’s work, In Search of the Primitive: A Critique of Civilization (Somerset, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1993) in Endgame I. The following quotation from Diamond provides a sense of Jensen’s point about language and abstraction. “Writing was one of the original mysteries of civilization, and it reduced the complexities of experience to the written word.
has to do with everything we’re talking about, in terms of abstraction. If something’s written down it becomes more important than the actual experience. You see this all the time…. Just recently, a young woman killed her pimp and she just got life in prison, because “Thou shall not kill.” The law becomes more important than the circumstance. But it’s bullshit anyway, because the law is not really more important than the circumstance. The average sentence when a man beats a woman to death is seven years and the average sentence when a woman shoots the man who’s beating her is life. Or thirty years is the average. So it’s bullshit anyway. It would be better if they simply went according to the law. But in fact it’s written language as excuse for pre-existing bigotry.

Part of the examination of the context includes scrutiny of the social location of the individuals or the groups investigating and participating in the project of historical transformation. Míguez Bonino helps to deepen our understanding of this primary point.

[Political and theological options] are themselves partly conditioned by our “location” within social reality and they in turn condition our analysis. We cannot, therefore, avoid the question: Who are the Christians – or the Christian theologians – who confront this fact of political reflection and decision? Whence do they derive their knowledge? To whom are they accountable? What influences their method and the conditions of their work? The response to this question must begin with the recognition of a “double location”… One the one hand there is the theologian’s location within a theological discipline with its particular epistemological conditions and demands; on the other hand the theologian is also a social agent within a particular social formation.210

In matters of violence and (non)violence, theologians and actors must take social location into account with the utmost intention. Here social location includes the immediate historical context, the literal and material earthly location, and human identities. Action is critical and theology is a second step to interpreting the realities social struggles. Social location, individual and community experience (in concrete movements for liberation and

Moreover, writing provides the ruling classes with an ideological instrument of incalculable power. The word of God becomes an invincible law, mediated by priests… With the advent of writing, symbols become explicit; they lost a certain richness. Man’s word was no longer an endless exploration of reality, but a sign that could be used against him…. For writing splits consciousness in two ways – it becomes more authoritative than talking, thus degrading the meaning of speech and eroding oral tradition; and it makes it possible to use words for the political manipulation and control of others” (19).

210 Míguez Bonino, Toward a Christian Political Ethics, 42-43.
everyday life) predisposes us to certain views of both the morality, justification for and effectiveness of the use of violence and (non)violence by different actors. This includes Christian social location as it intersects with other identity markers. If someone’s social location primarily reflects the dominant culture, then it is very likely his or her own commitments are also reflective of a certain investment in the history and entitlements of the dominant status quo, and thus, in violence. Speaking out of his revolutionary context on the continent of Latin America in the 1970s, Míguez Bonino makes a statement that is germane for our times. Whether or not to “use” violence from a so-called neutral point of view is a false construction of reality.

The point scarcely needs to be made that in a continent where thousands perish daily, victims of diverse forms of violence, such a neutral situation does not exist. My violence is direct or indirect, institutional or insurrectional, conscious or unconscious. But it is violence; it objectively produces victims, whether I intend it subjectively or not…. A significant discussion of this issue can therefore be only a discussion on the violences and the conditions of violence in our concrete situation. It has to do with who inflicts these different violences and who suffers from them, with the purposes of these different violences are, and how these purposes are accomplished (or not) through their use. We must resist all hypostatization of la violencia, either to defend it or attack it. … Such sentences as “we are against violence, wherever it may come from” or “we reject all forms of violence” may be quite “seductive for human and Christian sensibility,” [but] they are only hypocritical self-justification or unconscious cooperation with existing oppressive violence. They can only make sense on the lips of people – who do not usually employ them – who are actively and dangerously involved in the removal of prevalent violence.211

Míguez Bonino points to the broad implications of direct, structural and cultural violence for all persons in U.S. society. White, middle-class U.S. Christian (non)violent activists

---

must be clear about the contradictions and inherent violences of their theological, economic and political interests and entitlements.

**Practical Theological Applications of Violence and (Non)violence**

The dominant culture’s tradition of Christianity has been fairly indicted by the foregoing analysis. Not one of the interviewees denied that Christianity has been a source of all forms of violence. Whether or not one considers a Christian worldview and theology fundamentally violent, as a matter of historical practices the Christian tradition and its dominant, white theology and practice in the United States has been predominantly violent.

But eight of the twelve interviewees who claimed some current or former relationship with the Christian tradition or Christian communities, did see within it a number of threads that provided for Christianity to be a much needed source of resistance to violence. Minority traditions within Christianity offer evidence for a potentially socially-transformative strain of Christian tradition, arising mainly from the margins of U.S. society. Further, they considered Christian (non)violence a possible source for exposing the denial of violence, reversing the social order, and undermining dominant cultural, psychological and material entitlements. From these sources there is possibility for a practical, theology of social change based in Christian (non)violence. Yet there may also be practices of organized, direct violence which effectively contribute to the transformation of violence in all its forms. The task is to imagine how these practices might inform a critical, practical theology of social change.
The next chapters investigate some of the following questions. Are there Christian (non)violent practices and theologies that engage the multiple levels and descriptions of violence, particularly identified cultural substrata of the Western, white Christian tradition itself: hierarchy, aggressive missionarism, singularism, universalizing, human supremacism and progress? What are (non)violent practices that undermine individualism and abstraction? Are there examples of practices of Christian (non)violence that fundamentally address structural and cultural violence? How do demands for (non)violence coming from Christian voices within the dominant culture sound like acts of domination and pacification in light of the history of all forms of Christian violence? How and why is Christian (non)violence perceived as a white, middle-class sensibility not to upset the economic and political order? How might advocates of (non)violence benefit from the entitlements of structural violence? Reflecting on these questions are the central practical theological tasks of the next chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: LOVING THE ENEMY

How This Theme Arose

Given that social change necessarily entails engagement among contending parties and interests, the different ways activists regard and engage the opposition in contexts of social struggle came up repeatedly. Interviewees used terms such as “adversaries” and “opponents,” as well as “enemies.” Across the spectrum of absolute (non)violence to “by any means necessary,” some made specific reference to the Christian scripture “love your enemies” itself, and other scriptures such as “turn the other cheek.” Both in terms of my own experience in (non)violent social activism and my familiarity with the scholarly tradition of Christian (non)violence, these various usages triggered “loving the enemy” as a possible normative concept within the tradition of Christian (non)violence.

White, liberal Christian scholars and activists commonly refer to this phrase and its surrounding passage in the New Testament text 212 as normative for both: 1) a theological basis for (non)violence, and; 2) certain kinds of (non)violent practices in relation to a perceived enemy. In this chapter I will use the interviewees’ varied descriptions of opponents in social struggle in order to deconstruct and reconstruct the notion of loving the enemy as a normative theological discourse and Christian, (non)violent practice. I establish the normative Christian understanding of the loving the

212 The entire relevant section from Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount is Matthew 5:38-48; see below.
enemy scriptural text by briefly describing the interpretations of two of the most well-known, paradigmatic white, liberal Christian scholars in this area: John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink. Their work is referred to so often in popular and academic (non)violent circles that I believe they currently represent the nucleus of the Christian (non)violent theological tradition.

Interviewee data surfaced several inter-related critiques of traditional notions about loving the enemy. These critiques demonstrate where loving the enemy falls prey to the three previously identified substrata of Western, Christian cultural violence: human supremacism, radical individualism and moral abstraction. These perspectives demonstrate the ways in which loving the enemy may serve as normative discourse with an ideological function: privileging and demanding certain actions while excluding others. Interviewee points of view require activists to clarify their motivations for (non)violence and to analyze the actual impact of the discourse and practice of (non)violence as loving the enemy on all three forms of violence – direct, structural and cultural. To be effective, loving the enemy as a discourse and practice of Christian (non)violence must also address denial, reversal, entitlement, abstraction, individualism, and human supremacism.
The Normative, Christian (Non)violent Theological Tradition

Representatives: John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink

John Howard Yoder and Walter Wink are to the modern scholarly, white, liberal, Christian theological and scriptural tradition of (non)violence what Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are to the modern, popular tradition of (non)violent activism. There is practically no discussion of Christian theological (non)violence in the academy without them. It is difficult to do justice to their perspectives in a brief fashion; however, this is what I attempt to do here. Their (non)violent readings of the New Testament center around two pivotal areas: Jesus’ teaching from certain passages from the Sermon on the Mount, paired with interpretations of Jesus’ actions during his arrest, trial and crucifixion.\textsuperscript{213} The relevant passage from the Sermon on the Mount is found in Matthew 5:38–48:\textsuperscript{214}

\begin{quote}
You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, Do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you. ‘You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be children of your Father in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers and sisters, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{213} Yoder also bases a Christian (non)violent ethic on the letters of Paul.

\textsuperscript{214} A parallel version is found in the gospel of Luke 6:27-36.
Loving the Enemy as Christ Did: Revolutionary Subordination

Yoder’s 1972 book *The Politics of Jesus* is a foundation for the white, liberal Christian tradition of (non)violence articulated by the theological academy since its publication. Within the Mennonite tradition of discipleship, Yoder’s project was to develop an understanding of Jesus’ “way” to follow. This way is the cross, a political alternative to violence which includes voluntary servanthood and suffering, and a rejection of the empire. Jesus subjected himself to the violence of the Roman Empire to demonstrate another way not conformed to the violence this world. Part of the witness of Jesus Christ’s (non)violent action was what he did not do in the face of his arrest, trial, persecution and crucifixion. The non-retaliatory speech and behavior of Jesus throughout these events is paired with the words attributed to him in the loving the enemy text to assert that Jesus’ way is (non)violence. The paradigm of the cross is the paradigm for loving the enemy. If the task for Christians is to be like Jesus, then Christians must follow his example of (non)violence. The particular practice of (non)violence in Jesus’ way is *non-retaliatory non-resistance* to violence.

---

215 Grounded in a reading of the New Testament, Yoder’s primary purpose in writing this text was to prove that Jesus was a political figure and that the text provides a sufficient basis for determining a contemporary political ethic for Christians. Yoder determined that Jesus was a political figure and that the basis of the Christian social ethic was (non)violence, that is, non-resistance. *The Politics of Jesus: Behold the Man! Our Victorious Lamb* (2nd rev. ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1994).

Yoder’s insight for modern disciples was that Jesus’ (non)violent way was “revolutionary subordination.” Reading both within and beyond the gospels of the New Testament, Yoder delineated various texts which suggest the apparent meaning and call to replicate hierarchical, patriarchal and slave-master structures really contain an element of subversion where “the subordinate person in the social order is addressed as a moral agent…. Here we have a faith that assigns personal moral responsibility to those who had no legal or moral status in their culture, and makes of them decision makers.”  

Furthermore, the individual in the dominant cultural and structural position in the relationship is called “to a kind of subordination in turn.” This is the potential seed for resisting through non-resistance and revolutionizing structures of violence by refusing to conform to their normative status in the world.

---


218 Ibid., 177.

219 Ibid., 187. Although the Constantinian co-optation of Christianity into the empire would turn the potential for agency into further reinforcement of the hierarchical structures of patriarchy and slavery, Yoder maintains that revolutionary potential remains in the text and in Christian communities. Neither then nor now is the ethic of revolutionary subordination intended for imposition on the world, but remains within the confines of the church so that it might serve as a witness to a non-dominant way (Yoder, *Politics of Jesus*, 149-153;185). Walter Wink takes Yoder’s analysis beyond the church community and into the world. However, Wink’s (non)violence in the world is still primarily meant to assert a recovered dignity and humanity within the *unchanged* conditions of the old order (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 183).

Yoder’s focus on the exemplary role of the (non)violent Christian community is reflected in the pacifist writings of white, Christian theological ethicist Stanley Hauerwas. For Hauerwas, “Peacemaking” is an “essential characteristic of [the church’s] nature” because of “the one who is our peace [Christ].” Peacemaking includes truthful, loving confrontation and is primarily a “disposition forming the self” among Christians and within the Christian community that serves as a model to the world. (Hauerwas, “Peacemaking: The Virtue of the Church,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, John Berkman and Michael Cartwright, eds. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press): 319. Peacemaking is also the central ethic internal to the church in Hauerwas’ *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983). While I affirm that the church at large should apply a (non)violent theological ethic to itself, this abstract analysis has little relevance in light of the Christian church’s history of violence (though perhaps Yoder’s Mennonite tradition is a counter-example to the mainstream Christian tradition).
Walter Wink depends upon Yoder’s analysis for Wink’s popular interpretation of the love your enemies passage to support a (non)violent ethic for Christians today. Wink is more well-known outside of the academy in white, liberal, Christian activist circles than Yoder. According to Wink’s exegesis of the Matthew text, the moment of non-retaliation towards a violent attacker is a moment of revolutionary subordination. Jesus tells persons who have no status within the ancient Roman Empire that they have the agency to turn the tables on the status of the violent offender by asserting their humanity. Each event Jesus describes is an encounter of power – slapping someone, suing someone, and conscripting someone to carry a pack – in which the non-retaliatory action of the offended party robs the oppressor of power. For example,

The person who turns the other cheek is saying, in effect, ‘Try again. Your first blow failed to achieve its intended effect. I deny you the power to humiliate me. I am a human being just like you. Your status does not alter that fact. You cannot demean me.’

Through the non-retaliatory assertion of humanity, loving the enemy unmasks the dehumanizing structural and cultural violence by which the system of domination operates. Wink claims that this affirmation forces the one in power to no longer see the oppressed as the other, (re)humanizing the one dehumanized by the violence of the empire. Wink and Yoder’s basic point is that loving your enemies by refusing to do them harm mutually affirms the human dignity of both the victim of violence and the

---


221 Ibid., 179.
victimizer. Wink, however, does not see non-retaliation as non-resistance, but as active resistance.

Loving the Enemy: Affirming Human Interconnectedness

Loving the enemy affirms the interconnectedness of life, affirming even the broken connection between the victims and perpetrators of violence in domination systems. Dear used the particular language of loving the enemy most repeatedly to make this affirmation.

The theology of it is the most political revolutionary teaching in the entire Bible. “You have heard it said love your neighbor and hate your country-men. But I say to you, love your enemies.” The second part of that is the most profound description of the nature of divinity…. You love your enemies because “God lets the sun shine on the good and the bad, the rain to fall on the just and the unjust.” We don’t want that. We don’t worship a God who lets the sun shine on the good and the bad. A God of universal love, who loves everyone. Jesus embodies this nonviolence…. If your spirituality is of nonviolence and the theology is of a God of nonviolence, then you’ll give your whole life for all your sisters and brothers around the planet.

Here Dear points to one of the most central tenets of loving the enemy, echoed by other interviewees. As Huerta shared, “we have a common humanity.” As humans created in the image of God, God is in all of us and loves all of us. Therefore we cannot do violence to any other beloved person in the family of God. As the Matthew text suggests, loving the enemy means perfecting oneself in loving all people, as God loves all people. Dear spoke about this elsewhere.

Nonviolence begins with the truth that we are all one. …Every human being on the planet is your sister and brother. We’re all united, we’re already reconciled, all one, all life is sacred. The gift of peace was given millennia ago. The nonviolent culture is already created. We’re actually one with creatures, and creation, and creator…. Nonviolence is remembering and recalling that, returning to the truth, every day, every morning in meditation. …Violence is just forgetting that.
Violence is forgetting or ignoring who we already are. Sons and daughters of the God of peace, one with all of humanity and all of creation.”

Staughton Lynd depicted his perspective on oneness as metaphysically Buddhist. He described an experience of enlightenment while walking upon a path one day when he was driving cows out to pasture after milking. He was thinking “heavy thoughts” when suddenly he came upon a newborn calf. He awakened to the awareness that he and the cow were all a part of one reality; that oneness was the nature of reality. He connected this understanding to scripture.

Something equally mysterious and unexplained but nevertheless experienced is what is said in Matthew 25. My favorite aspect of that is when the good guys, the sheep, show up. God says, “Welcome to a seat at my right hand from everlasting to everlasting.” And the sheep say, “Well, that’s cool but, how come?” And God says, “Because when I was hungry you fed me, and when I was in prison you visited me, and when I was naked you clothed me, and when I was a stranger you took me in, and when I was sick you cared for me.” The sheep say, “Well, the problem with that, God, is that we’ve never seen you before in our lives.” They say that! And God says, “Oh yes you have.” I think that’s the most profound statement in the Bible. I don’t understand it but I have experienced it.

When we see all creatures as imbued with the divine essence of life itself, we will treat all creatures as the divine. If the enemy, the “other,” an opponent in social struggle is understood as someone I am related to in the family of God, even God’s own very self incarnate, then I can do that person no harm. Interviewees expressed that the interconnectedness of life is the heart of all forms of religious (non)violence, including Christian.

Harding shared how he came to this understanding during his military training. Away from his home church and family for an extended period for the first time, he took

---

222 Dear said that he takes this perspective from Father Charlie McCarthy, whom he writes about in Disarming the Heart (Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1993): 36-39. In that book, Dear claims violence as sin, though in his interview he said he would move away from that language now.
time to read the Bible and think. He became drawn to the Jesus of the New Testament.

Soon he began to sense his connection to Jesus and that what Jesus taught about loving the enemy stood in contradiction to his training to kill the enemy.

In basic training I was learning how to fire a rifle at a bulls-eye. Through my life I enjoyed sports and outdoor stuff a great deal. I found myself enjoying myself out there in the dead winter of the cold Fort Dix New Jersey. And felt that someone was talking to me and essentially saying, “You enjoy this, huh? You think that the army is spending this money on you so that you can enjoy yourself? But no, you are being taught how to kill a man without him being able to see you. And what does this have to do with Jesus?...” The second thing was in that same period, and it was in some ways even sharper, learning how to use a bayonet. Because that was practice for really face-to-face engagement with another human being and learning how to rip his guts out in a very quick way. I found myself saying, “Well, Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world. And when they grow up, you’re going to kill them, if your government tells you to.”

**Loving the Enemy in the Christian Tradition: Critiques**

**Critique I: Human Supremacism**

The love of other as the basis for (non)violence assumes the interconnectedness of all life. Only those interviewees who did not speak from a specifically Christian faith perspective, including Staughton Lynd from a Buddhist perspective, noted the connectedness of the human and non-human animal. Yet even when Lynd referenced Christian scripture to illuminate his perspective, the subject reverted to human relatedness. As one of the substratum of Western culture, the Christian paradigm of “loving the enemy” appears invested in human supremacy. There is nothing in the scriptural framework of loving the human enemy that deals with the non-human natural world. As previous analysis demonstrates, even under a rubric of Christian care for the
earth, nature is objectified as fundamentally other. Loving the human enemy reinforces that violence against some beings, humans, counts more than violence against others.

If one of the deepest truths about loving the enemy is the truth of our interconnectedness, this relates intimately to the matter of who matters. In the Christian tradition, non-human life is considered not sentient in the same way that human life is. Non-human life is not connected to human life in the same way humans are connected to one another. The violence committed against the non-human natural world isn’t even considered violence in the paradigm of loving the enemy. Jensen writes, “The murder of whales is not really violence, nor indeed is the murder of oceans. The same is true for trees, forests, mountains, entire continents.” This means that within the concept of interconnectedness as it relates to the non-human natural world “all talk of accountability makes no sense: there’s nothing to be held accountable for.”223

The unacknowledged human supremacism at the heart of Christian (non)violence, particularly through the normative phraseology “love your enemies,” undermines (non)violence as a meaningful concept or practice. If loving the enemy’s fundamental power lies in its affirmation of interconnectedness, then somehow Christian practitioners must reckon with what appears to be a fundamentally insurmountable obstacle in its thought and practice: the hierarchical dualism of the human over non-human. It must also surmount the problem that an affirmation and practice of interrelatedness on an individual level, while important, still fails to rise to the challenge of transforming structures of violence.

223 Jensen, Endgame I, 146.
Critique II: Individualism

If We Just Love Enough

Jensen agreed to a certain extent with the sentiment of pacifists when they say, “If we just love enough then that'll solve all problems.” The problem is how love is individually applied, only demanded of the self and not the enemy, to humans and not to non-humans. Jensen said that he idea that “all I can do is try to make myself more and more perfect” by loving people who harm is based on the idea of emulating the perfect God in the Matthew text. This non-resistant, (non)violent perspective on love excludes a whole range of other coercive tactics (be they violent or (non)violent) for change, which might also fall under the idea of love.

Jensen urges broadening the understanding and scope of who we love, how we love, and who or what the enemy is. According to him, if humans loved their bodies and the earth, then they would not allow the destruction of the planet and the toxification of the environment that is killing everyone and everything. The individualistic insistence on loving the enemy and non-retaliation may serve structural violence by denying the thorough-going violence of systems. In practice, not retaliating against violent individuals and structures may amount to perpetuating their violence. Jensen asks, what does it mean to love our family members who are dying from a toxic environment? What does it mean to love our own bodies? What does it mean to love the salmon? The subsistence farmers in India? The landbases where we live? For Jensen, loving the oppressed, marginalized and destroyed of the earth means to privilege loving those who suffer over an
individualist love of the enemy. Furthermore, this love may or may not necessitate the use of more violent means of various forms.

Positive Anthropology and the Realities of Structural Violence

Wink’s optimistic view of (non)violence comes from an earlier part of his thesis where he describes that the “Powers that Be,” in their original state, were good. They are now fallen and must be awakened to their original goodness by liberating them from their delusional state.\(^{224}\) The underlying anthropological assumption of loving the enemy is that human beings are good and seek the good. As a human, the enemy can be convinced to do the right and just thing.\(^{225}\) Yet communities primarily identified with dominant culture in the United States have narrated a history by which their acts of violence are either denied or justified in the name of progress and the collective good. The functioning of the reversal of violence creates the false portrayal that the perpetrators of violence are also good. An insistence on an overly positive anthropology within the Christian tradition contributes to this denial and reversed portrayal.

\(^{224}\) Wink Engaging the Powers, 65-85. This entire section describes the nature of the powers as good, fallen, redeemable. Wink takes this directly from Yoder, The Politics of Jesus, 140-144. For Yoder, despite the appearance of domination of the powers, their sovereignty has been broken by Christ (144-145).

\(^{225}\) In Moral Man and Immoral Society (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1932) Reinhold Niebuhr addressed the tension between idealism and realism and the problem of individualism and moralism in pacifism’s appeal to love. Previously a pacifist, Niebuhr rejected that the resources of Christianity such as Christian love and self-suffering could be brought to bear significantly on larger socio-economic and political interests. Some individuals may have some capacity to consider needs other than their own, and may be morally persuaded to act outside of their own interests. This is practically impossible, however, for societies. Niebuhr criticized apologists for individualistic, notions of progress, “who imagine that the egoism of individuals is being progressively checked by the development of rationality or the growth of religiously inspired goodwill and that nothing but a continuance of this process is necessary to establish social harmony between all the human societies and collectives” (xii). These are fundamentally middle-class sentiments attached to white, middle-class, economic interests invested in achieving and maintaining its own entitlements by: universalizing its own values (117), affirming the notion of progress and contributing to the denial of historic and current structural violence. Niebuhr applied his critique of the liberal, Christian idealism by economically self-interested classes to moralistic demands for (non)violence in social conflict.
Contrasting interviewee perspectives displayed the ambiguity over whether human nature is violent or (non)violent. By far, of all the interviewees, Dear held the most positive view of human nature, stating that his “anthropology is that we were created to be nonviolent.”

I think God is nonviolent, and that God is nonviolence. To be a human being is to be nonviolent. We were actually created that way. I see that in the baby, I think the baby is nonviolent. I see that myth of Adam and Eve, which was a culture of nonviolence. Audiences all over the country always tell me, “Oh, John, that’s just ridiculous. You have a wrong anthropology. To be human is to be violent. We’re all violent, we always have been, we always will, this is not possible.”

Dear believes that both the essence of human nature and the essence of God have been so skewed by the culture and structures of violence, including Christian churches, that the essential nature of the Christian religion has been lost. He says, “This is the scandal of Christianity.”

Most interviewees believed that our human natures are a more complex mix of violent and (non)violent tendencies. Churchill said that in the first place “violence is a natural phenomena” that manifests differently even within the same being in different times. It is a real thing, which can be dealt with through a variety of social practices from football to war. Violence

Is an innate impulse with which the species as a whole is endowed, but which manifests probably most strongly in young males because of testosterone and aggression and all of that. It serves some kind of a function. It’s understanding what it is and how to deal with it.226

---

226 Churchill’s perspective is echoed in the work of Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki in Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology (New York: Continuum Publishing, 1994). Suchocki writes that a meaningful, modern understanding of violence in theology should not place violence in the realm of sinful pride and an exalted sense of self over God (as does traditional theology), but in our naturally aggressive tendencies as animal beings. For Suchocki, the location of violence within human nature provides a better starting point for dealing with the excesses of unnecessary violence at all levels (95).
Alice Lynd agreed there is something innate to the impulse to act out violently. She learned this as a young mother and sees this phenomenon in the prisoners whom she serves.

There would be certain things that a child would do that would make me so angry. Or that I would actually strike one of my own children. I had the feeling, you know, there are not very many people walking this earth who believe in nonviolence as much as I do, and what am I doing striking that child? Yet it just pops out. I think a number of the prisoners that we know have that in them that when something occurs they instinctively strike out. Then they think about it afterwards, “Oh, what did I do?” It just happens. And in a sense it’s beyond their control. ... But at some point a certain unpredictable set of circumstances will all come into play at the same time and “phsssh!” You know, the button is pressed, the reaction happens. I don’t know how we can avoid that.

Power spoke about the human biological state and human nature as “inevitably in contradiction, inevitably causing suffering,” and “imperfect.” She said, “Our need to survive is in a sense in contradiction to other beings’ need to survive.” She recalled watching a television show about how human beings evolved physically and psychologically in the African savannah,

…which has a wet season-dry season. Sometimes, not often but sometimes, in the dry season there is not enough. I saw this moment of the dominant male chimpanzee of this tribe getting the water that was dripping off a twig, at a seep. And that was all the water there was. In that moment, dominance was the truth. Without it, we would not be here. It is part of what we are. It has been true sometimes.

Power also noted the testosterone state in which humans have been trained as animals to dominate when threatened or there is scarcity. The “head-to-head” state affects human thinking, reducing the ability to interpret long-term effects. But Power also believes that the human animal that may be compelled to domination has also been created in its imperfection with an ability to enlarge its vision beyond the state of immediate need. The
human being has access to a “heart-to-heart” state, a condition of affinity, physical
closeness, cooperation, expansiveness, trust and longer term thinking. In our humanity
we have been given the possibility to discern the moments when and if dominance is the
truth.227

An overemphasis on a positive anthropology in the thought and practice of loving
the enemy masks the complexities of natural, human-animal instincts. Alice Lynd and
B♀ both saw that violent tendencies that may be rooted in biology are enflamed by the
pressures and deprivations of structural violence. Alice Lynd explained.

One thing [Romero] says is maybe justified although unfortunate because of the
consequences, is unplanned, spontaneous violence in self-defense or defense of
loved ones or neighbor or community. That he can understand and accept as being
inevitable although, you know then you have to deal with the harm that was done
as a result. I’m very sympathetic to that. It’s not that I would say that self-defense
is justified. But I do believe that self-defense is something that you have to expect
people to do.

B♀ said,

Every experiment they ever did, whether you put too many rats in a cage, they’ll
turn on each other. Whenever you create those kinds of conditions, that kind of
response will occur. You can only shit on people for so long, you know. There’s
been rebellion throughout the history of this world.

The impact of structural violence on human-animal instincts also creates a difficult mix
of factors, for which appeals to loving the enemy cannot account. Umoja described
instances in Mississippi and Los Angeles when spontaneous violence erupted. He said,
“When people have been oppressed so long, sometimes you have this rage.” It is very
difficult to stop this rage once it is triggered. Umoja noted that with the charismatic

227 Power’s evolutionary perspective also echoes Suchoki, who writes that along with recognizing
human biological tendencies towards aggression, we should also affirm that “Instincts towards bonding are
also primal within us, and self-transcendence through memory, empathy and imagination makes it possible
for bonding rather than aggressiveness to be our dominant mode of being” (The Fall to Violence, 95).
leadership of someone like Dr. King and others during civil rights, small groups of persons “could be disciplined to a certain degree. But if you’re just talking about people in general? Something liable to happen.” Umoja said that on one level it appears easy to condemn violence, but if a community is responding to being attacked, as a response to the brutal conditions of their oppression, “it’s dicey territory.” Traditional interpretations of the loving the enemy scriptural text fall back on individualism and the appeal to human goodness. When they do, none of these above factors are taken into account. They become abstractions.

For example, Wink uses a commonsense understanding of direct violence in interpreting the Matthew text. He focuses attention on the agent of violence and a victim. The occasions are discrete, interpersonal events of overt physical violence. The description of non-resistant action is set within interpersonal encounter. How an interpersonal act that appears to reinforce subordination actually exposes and disrupts the cycles of structural and cultural violence remains in the realm of the hopeful.228 The “powers that be” are overly spiritualized in Wink’s analysis. The enemy and the victim in his (non)violent interpretation of the text is an individual, whose ethical behavior transcends historic context. When Christian theology posits a positive anthropology, as most white, middle-class, liberal (non)violence does, it assumes that there is also a “basic

---

228 A recent doctoral dissertation attests to the ongoing influence of the interpretation of the ideal nature of (non)violence as individual, interpersonal, transformational encounter from a religious perspective. Admitting to a naiveté about political reality and human nature, John Charles Roedel uses the metaphor of “conversion” where opponents coming to terms with one another’s human sinfulness and lack through interpersonal encounters of love, wherein a purely positive anthropology is reaffirmed. Roedel, “Love is Not A Strategy: Reconsidering Principled Nonviolence,” Graduate Theological Union, Ph.D. dissertation, 2011.
minimum level of decency present in any society.” The pervasive existence of structural and cultural violence questions the legitimacy of that assumption. How one understands loving the enemy, what constitutes love, and who the enemy is, is shaped by individual and community experience. Participating in the “revolutionary subordination of Christ” may sound like historic oppression and the furtherance of structural economic inequality and different forms of cultural violence, such as racism and white supremacy. The discourse of loving the enemy appears to function ideologically; in other words, it may conceal as much as it reveals. It appears to contribute to historical denial and reversal. Furthermore, if the goodness of human nature implies a belief in and practice of (non)violence, then loving the enemy as (non)violence is also equated with human goodness. As interviewee data shows, there are limits to these beliefs and practices.

229 Vine DeLoria, Jr. “Non-violence in American Society,” Katallagete 5 (Winter 1974): 5. Gene Sharp notes that two of the nine most common misconceptions of nonviolent action are that nonviolence depends upon the idea that people are fundamentally good and that they therefore can be morally persuaded by nonviolent words, actions, and attitudes (Sharp, The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I, 70-71).

230 Writing in the context of black power in the late 1960s and early 1970s, James Cone was one of the first U.S. theologians to expose the ways in which (non)violence might be invested in the entitlements of dominant white culture and theology. The white tradition of (non)violent theology emerged from a nineteenth century liberalism which emphasized the goodness and worth of humanity, including the goodness of “the powers that be.” James Cone, A Black Theology of Liberation (20th anniv. ed.) (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990): 20. From an African-American historical perspective, Cone delegitimized a theological anthropology that took for granted the innate goodness of white people, emphasizing the vicious nature of white people’s historic oppression of blacks. Such a theological perspective, particularly when applied to power, legitimized the white status quo. It played a part in the denial of the historic direct, structural and cultural violence of the dominant white culture against the African-American community in the United States. In Martin and Malcolm in America: A Dream or a Nightmare? (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), Cone demonstrated how the tensions between a commitment to “loving the enemy” and “by any means necessary” within the black liberation movement partly reflected different socio-economic class locations within the black community itself out of which the civil rights and black power movements came, as represented by Martin Luther King and Malcolm X respectively. In his well-known biography of King, Bearing the Cross (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), David Garrow writes about King’s own description of the tension between his admitted socio-economic class privilege, his experience and understanding of the realities of racism, and Niebuhr’s Christian realism (42-47). In Malcolm X’s life experience and speeches, we hear the echoes of reversal and how loving the enemy might be perceived by oppressed communities as a further call to dehumanization and submission (Cone, Martin and Malcolm in America,151). With the King and X example, how we understand violence...
Individual Non-Resistance or Collective (Non)violence?

Wink and Yoder’s interpretation of the Matthew passage on loving the enemy circumscribes (non)violence to an individual not acting in retaliation when one is the victim of direct and structural violence. Even if Jesus did suggest non-retaliation as a practice of social struggle that has persuasive, moral power, it is important to mark the difference in potential for persuasion between individual, non-retaliatory non-resistance and collective non-resistance. There is historical evidence that non-retribution has played a part in persuading individual agents and structures of power to abate their violence. However, in the context of social struggle, these acts of non-retribution are most often collective and preceded by collective intention and training. Huerta said that she saw the individual and social transformation of “enemies” time and time again in the midst of the farm workers’ movement. Huerta described the following incident:

We were picketing down in Los Angeles at the produce market, and we had all these young women that were helping us out. Peace activists mainly came to help and (non)violence is shaped, though not determined, by our social locations. During the latter half of Martin and Malcolm in America, Cone demonstrates that King and Malcolm X’s positions seemed to moderate and have a mutual influence. King realized the limitations of (non)violence among poor, urban blacks in the North and a trip to Mecca gave Malcolm X a broader vision of racial solidarity for social transformation. Even within the shared structural and cultural violence experienced by one historically oppressed community, intersecting identities affect perceptions of (non)violence and loving the enemy.

Gloria Albrecht makes this critique of Stanley Hauerwas’ individualist view of (non)violence. Like Wink, Hauerwas writes that the virtue of peacemaking is far from passive, but rather requires the practice of politics. Yet for Hauerwas, these practices all fall within the confines of Christian community in which acts of justice are reduced to acts of personal care, monetary lending and acts of forgiveness. Albrecht writes, “The violence of continual participation in unjust social structures is called nonviolence. Participating with others in the risk of complex, often ambiguous, and limited acts toward creating and embodying social structures of justice is condemned as participation in the unfaithful and violence desire to control history.” Albrecht, The Character of Our Communities: Toward an Ethic of Liberation for the Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1995): 117-118.

Picketing grocery stores was a tactic of the farm worker grape boycott. For information in the grape boycott, see Ray Telles and Rick Tejada Flores, The Fight in the Fields: Cesar Chavez and the Farmworkers’ Struggle, DVD (New York: Cinema Guild, 2003) and Rachel Harding, Dolores Huerta:
us. We were picketing in front of these produce markets and [people] would come up with their dollies, iron dollies, and hit the women on the shins with the dollies, you know? [The young women] just stood firm. After a while they just couldn’t continue doing it. So I talk about the strength of it…

Notice that this situation has collective dimension: female peace activists, trained in (non)violence standing together against a group of perpetrators of violence. Huerta believes that enemies in social struggle will eventually be persuaded to stop perpetrating violence by the example of a victim’s willingness to not retaliate and to suffer.\(^{233}\) Huerta did not articulate the practical dimension directly, but every example she used demonstrated collective effort and public witness. The willingness of an oppressed community to publicly suffer and show love to a communal enemy, an entire structure of violence, is part of what persuades people within structures and a culture of violence to

---

\(^{233}\) Joan Bondurant outlines Gandhi’s concept of *tapasya* – self-suffering – in *Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988). It “is directed… towards the moral persuasion of one because of whom it is undertaken.” Of self-suffering as an essential element of (non)violent resistance, Gandhi said, “…in satyagraha there is not the remotest idea of injuring the opponent. Satyagraha postulates the conquest of the adversary by suffering in one’s own person.” (28) Bondurant notes that Gandhi knew there was a need for discrimination in inviting suffering and sacrifice, for *tapasya* was not meant to be a form of submission (29). Gandhi’s commitment to self-suffering also had a strong influence on Martin Luther King, Jr., who made this kind of thinking and acting related to non-retaliation and suffering paradigmatic in the civil rights movement and connected it to Christian faith. However, King’s notion of loving the enemy through self-suffering meant practice – primarily mass action on the part of an oppressed community. The enemy is not an individual and King’s language is almost always communal. King grounded his commitment in the example of Jesus’ love for enemies. God’s freeing power was disclosed in Jesus’ unmerited, (non)violent suffering for others’ sake, his redemptive act of love on the cross. The beloved Christian community would also be freed by acts of (non)violent, self-suffering love. James Cone describes the Christological center of King’s nonviolence in, *Martin and Malcolm in America*, 128. The title of Garrow’s biography of King, *Bearing the Cross*, bears witness to the centrality of King’s Christology on his communal, (non)violent theology and practice.
change. Individual witness also has power, but rarely enough power to challenge structures of violence.\textsuperscript{234}

Staughton Lynd was in the South during Mississippi Freedom summer while Alice was settling their children in their new community in New Haven. During this time, they were exposed to thinking about and acting within the context of mass, public (non)violence. Years later (non)violence opened itself back up to them when they learned about covert U.S. warfare in Nicaragua in the mid-1980s.\textsuperscript{235} They both recalled casually watching television one evening when they heard an interview with a Quaker woman who was working with the organization Witness for Peace in Nicaragua.\textsuperscript{236} Alice said, “I was over near the stove and I just stopped still and watched. I thought “This is what

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{234} In addition, feminists and womanists have mounted a serious critique from intersecting gendered locations against joining together individual suffering, redemptive suffering, violence and redemptive violence. See Cheryl Kirk-Duggan, \textit{Misbegotten Anguish: A Theology and Ethics of Violence} (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 2001) and Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Parker, \textit{Proverbs of Ashes: Violence, Redemptive Suffering and the Search for What Saves Us} (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001). In their book, Brock and Parker put into conversation the experience of women survivors of domestic violence with scriptural texts and anecdotes from religious leaders that encourage submission to male authority and self-suffering under abuse as faithful imitations of Christ on the cross. Parker makes the connection and challenge of this problem with a similar problem in such a theology of social change. “As a strategy to call oppressors and unjust systems to account, the practice of nonviolent resistance can be effective…. But the violence endured during the civil rights movement, including Dr. King’s assassination, is anguishing. I am troubled that ‘moral influence’ theology makes acceptance of violence a strategy to move perpetrators of violence to repentance. This theology assumes every violent perpetrator has the empathy and moral conscience to be moved by the suffering of others. And it makes every victim an agent of God’s call to repent and accept mercy. This makes the repentance of the perpetrator more important than the suffering of the victim” (41).
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{235} For more information, see Jack Nelson-Pallmeyer, \textit{War Against the Poor: Low-Intensity Conflict and the Christian Faith} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1989).
\end{flushright}

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{236} Witness for Peace (WFP) “is a politically independent, nationwide grassroots organization of people committed to nonviolence and led by faith and conscience. Witness for Peace’s mission is to support peace, justice and sustainable economies in the Americas by changing U.S. policies and corporate practices that contribute to poverty and oppression in Latin America and the Caribbean,” see \texttt{http://www.witnessforpeace.org/section.php?id=81}.
\end{flushright}
people have been talking about – a nonviolent army, to get between the fighting forces.

[I] was just dumbfounded.” Staughton continued,

I remember about the same time mid-80s reading an editorial in the New York Times of all places, which said the Nicaraguan revolutionaries are different at least in this way: they have treated the soldiers of the army of the government they overthrew in a new way. They quoted Tomas Borge, one of the older and more disciplined Sandinistas who had had the opportunity to confront the man who had tortured him in prison. [It could have been his wife, who was tortured, I’m not sure.] Borge said, “Well now it’s my turn. You punished me.” And he said, “I’m not going to touch a hair on your head.” He said, “I’m going to let you go.” And I thought, “Wow.”

At the level of public mass action and public consciousness-raising, such practices of loving the enemy take on a greater potential for conversion and exposure of who the structural perpetrators of violence are, and therefore greater potential for persuasion at a structural and cultural level. Galtung notes that (non)violence must be communicated “from group to group” until the pressures and demands on the structures reach the nucleus of power. 237 Then social change happens. This is different from the individual, interpersonally persuasive, non-resistant encounter typically described by the notion of loving the enemy typical of much Christian (non)violence. 238

Furthermore, within the context of historic social struggles, even as a collective practice non-retaliation has been only one dimension among many tactics and strategies of change. If loving the enemy as non-retaliation is granted as a form of (non)violent resistance, certainly it must be recognized as only one practice of (non)violence.


(Non)violence understood as a broader constellation of passive and coercive practices arose in the time of Gandhi. It is anachronistic to equate loving the enemy as non-retaliation with the breadth of possibilities within (non)violent practice and to project the vast breadth and depth of modern practices onto Jesus’ time. New Testament scholar Richard Horsley refutes Wink’s exegetical analysis of the Matthew text as indicating a universal ethic of (non)violence in a modern context. Horsley grants that in the first-century, local context in which Jesus spoke, individual non-retaliation towards an enemy is a more appropriate label than nonviolence.239

Critique III: Abstraction

Who or What Is the Enemy?

The demand for context and analysis of structural power and violence was evident throughout the interviews. This includes concretely determining who or what “the enemy” is. In some cases interviewees described the enemy as an individual with whom one had a personal conflict. But more often the identified opponent was specific to a community’s concrete struggle and was not an individual: local, state and national government entities and policy-makers, corporate interests and their executive officers, money-lenders. Generally, the enemy was perceived to have political-economic power that the community of struggle does not.

Often human enemies served a hierarchy, possessing the ability to perpetrate violence of all three forms—direct, structural, and cultural. For Umoja the opponent was the social group and its representatives that oppose a community’s economic and racial liberation and self-determination. For many interviewees these persons represent massive racial and corporate economic interests. B♀ used the language of enemy regularly to refer to any person or corporate interest that serves effectively to wage war on the poor of this country or another. They are the people who “control the food, they control the banks, they control the water, they control the electricity. You know, they control everything.” Kelly also used the language of perpetrators of economic warfare. Therefore, the United States as nation-state was described as the enemy: its foreign and domestic policies, laws and systems of enforcement from the courts to repressive police-state violence, and the military. The enemy was also described as an opponent in wartime; a nation-state and its people. Dear stated that in the original Greek of the New Testament, by enemy Jesus “clearly means ‘nation-states’: the people declared expendable by your nation.” Therefore, groups of people and states declared by the United States as enemies are those whom Christians are called to love.

Certainly as activists and scholars described the increasing complexity of socio-political, economic structures within the context of social struggles, the identification of concrete opponents grew more difficult. Schulman’s language “the powers that oppose you” was probably the best general, abstract definition for various terms used by the interviewees to describe the vast nature of certain enemies: systems of violence at large.

\[240\]

My comprehension of what Dear says here is not that he thinks Jesus employs a modern notion of the nation-state, but that Jesus implies a conception of enemies beyond the individual, that which the modern person might understand to be a nation-state.
(industrial capitalism, imperialism) or cultural violence of various kinds (racism, sexism, homophobia, anthropocentrism). The enemy was also the culture of denial of violence itself and anything that prevents people from acting for change within the culture: entitlements, comfort, apathy, indifference, fear. Power saw the enemy as any person or group that another individual or group sought to other – anyone put outside of being sacred, including individuals, the capitalist order, and the state itself.

Since the agents of violence are often obscured in structural violence, enemies often seem abstract. Yet the interviewees all described concrete practices by which concrete targets – individual and collective, organizational and institutional – within social action were identified and held accountable. The ability of these scholar/activists and their movements to connect certain persons to specific institutions within broader structures challenges Galtung’s insistence that the nature of structural violence makes it mostly impossible to identify its agents. In various ways, all interviewees noted: 1) the failure to research and identify concrete agents within structures, and that; 2) when such agents are identified, they are, with rare exception, members of dominant cultural groups, and; 3) rarely held accountable for their actions and oversight of pervasive acts and conditions of violence within their personal relationships, their organizations, or the public at large.

Schulman describes that ACT UP was successful in large part because of its “politics of accountability”:

If someone hurts you, you have the right to respond. Your response is the consequence of their violating action. Pharmaceutical executives, politicians who have pledged to represent and serve the American people, religious leaders who claim moral authority – anyone who interfered with progress for people with
AIDS was made to face a consequence for the pain they caused. To do this, ACT UP had to identify what needed to be changed, identify the individuals who were obstructing that change, clearly propose courses of action that were doable and justifiable, and then force the people with power – through the tactic of direct action – to do something different than what they wanted to do. Making people accountable is always in the interest of justice. The dominant, however, hate accountability. Vagueness, lack of delineation of how things work, the idea that people do not have to keep their promises – these tactics always serve the lying, the obstructive, the hypocritical.241

Schulman writes, “The true message of the AIDS crisis is that making people with power accountable works.”242 The problem is that the message of accountability is obscured, even falsified as reversal plays itself out in the claims of the dominant culture to being victimized and oppressed when they are asked to be held accountable.243

Analyzing who and what the so-called enemy is in the midst of social struggle is critical to figuring out what it means concretely to “love” that individual, group, or structure of violence. For example, if the enemies of fundamental economic transformation are the structures of capitalism, how are they to be loved? How are they to be persuaded to stop violence? These are not rhetorical questions. Violence is not always perpetrated by an individual directly present or even known to the victims. Normative interpretations of loving the enemy in the Matthew text incorporate few of these issues or how to deal with them. These are concrete challenges to the abstract notion that fundamental social change will come about universally through loving the enemy as the tradition of Christian (non)violence suggests.

241 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 51-52.
242 Ibid., 156.
243 Ibid., 129.
**Turn the Other Cheek and You Get Two Bruised Cheeks**

B♀ offered a different interpretation of the outcome of non-retaliation, which she derived from her experience growing up as working class poor. “I have to say I’m not too fond of ‘turn the other cheek.’ I think you just get two bruised cheeks. That’s my experience in life. And many other people.” She described how poor the families in her town were, and what it was like when they tried to unionize a timber plant in town where her father shoveled.

They had no union there. They had no nothing there. We had no insurance. We didn’t have shit. If they didn’t inoculate us in school we would never have been inoculated. Then the union came. There was bitter, bitter, bitter labor struggle around getting that union in there. My father would come home with a bump on his head or a black eye or whatever. This went on for quite some time. I was young, seven or eight years old. It was a physical battle. My parents always [said] they had a class consciousness even though it wasn’t in educated language. I knew that the bosses were the enemy. I knew that from my house. I knew that from my neighborhood. I knew that from my life.

This childhood experience taught her about the world and who the enemy is.

The thing that I know is rich people ain’t never going to give it up. That’s what I know. They’re never going to give you a raise. They don’t want to give me medical care. There was a whole polio thing went on and we couldn’t get shots. And clearly they didn’t care.

A similar dynamic existed in prison.

If you’re in prison you know that prison guards, you never trust them. There are some good ones but you never trust them completely. It’s the whole class thing. There are some good bosses but most of them, you don’t trust them. It’s that basic kind of thing.

From a concrete social location, B♀’s perspective challenges Wink’s abstract analysis. What causes someone to believe that when a victim of violence asserts his or her dignity by offering the other cheek this action will register with the offender and so
“create enormous difficulties for the striker?”244 Is it not just as likely, as B♀ suggests, that the one who turns the cheek (and is already considered less than human) will be struck again? This comes not as an abstraction, but from the social location of one who has experienced the structural and direct violence of poverty. Wink admits that a “nonviolent orientation is premised on a power seldom recognized by oppressor and oppressed alike.”245 It is a form of power that “those inured to violence cannot comprehend.”246 Yet Wink still hopes that a violent offender, who is backed by and benefits from a system of entitlements, will be awakened to the oppressive nature of the structure and the humanity of the one he violates. How does this happen? B♀ suggests that it does not. That the victim’s revolutionary subordination proves mutual human dignity to the enemy may or may not be true. Non-retaliation may do little more than reinforce the superiority of the one in power. The very structure is invested in preventing agents of violence from accepting its true nature.

(Non)violence and Moral Abstraction

In this contemporary context, loving the enemy as non-retaliation based in the example of Jesus’ teachings and crucifixion must not be equated with (non)violence in general terms. Furthermore, loving the enemy as non-retaliation must divorce itself from an insistence on equating (non)violence with a moral high ground. Preceding analysis has shown that traditional conceptions of Christian (non)violence ignore the complexities of

244 Wink, Engaging the Powers, 176.
245 Ibid., 127.
246 Ibid., 55.
history, power, and culture. The various forms of violence are rarely distinguished and dismissed under the discourse of moral-ethical, theological Christian imperatives.\textsuperscript{247}

Traditional notions of loving the enemy by doing him no harm equates all forms of violent retaliation as morally equivalent, and all agents of violence as morally the same. The commitment to loving the enemy and (non)violence amounts to a moral belief system.\textsuperscript{248} Wink serves again as an example because his perspective is so typical of white, Christian (non)violent theology. Wink writes that when we respond to domination with violence, we speak and act on the system’s terms. “We turn into the very thing we oppose.”\textsuperscript{249} Jesus offers a different way,


\textsuperscript{248} Even further, Terrence J. Rynne offers (non)violent action through the lens of Gandhi’s notion of \textit{satyagraha} as a new model of Christian salvation from domination, in \textit{Gandhi and Jesus: The Saving Power of Nonviolence} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008). Rynne suggests Gandhi’s \textit{satyagraha} and (non)violence as Jesus’ mode of salvation as a corrective to problematic theories of salvation by Jesus’ substitutionary atonement. While substitutionary atonement theories may need correctives, claiming Christian (non)violence as its own theory of salvation (and the co-optation of a term derived in another religious, cultural and linguistic historical context) is also extremely problematic.

\textsuperscript{249} Wink, \textit{Engaging the Powers}, 195.
A way to fight evil with all our power without being transformed into the very evil we fight. It is a way – the only way possible – of not becoming what we hate. ‘Do not counter evil in kind’ – this insight is the distilled essence, stated with sublime simplicity, of the experience of those Jews who had, in Jesus’ very lifetime, so courageously and effectively practiced nonviolent direct action against Rome.\(^{250}\)

Wink’s final argument is that Christians are unequivocally called to (non)violence. Based on his interpretation of Jesus’ words, Wink’s assessment is that (non)violence is always, without exception, the more moral, spiritual, freeing, creative, open and imaginative way to seek justice.\(^{251}\)

Though Wink occasionally offers an apologetic for the use of violence based on context,\(^{252}\) these statements ring hollow when the preponderance of his writing treats violence as “evil” and “what we hate.” This paradigm returns to Galtung’s analysis of good and evil within transcendent dualisms. If Jesus’ (non)violent example of loving the enemy is what is good and moral, and its opposite is evil, the dualistic paradigm reinforces the reversals whereby (non)violent Christians are good and violent actors are

\(^{250}\) Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, 189.

\(^{251}\) Ibid., 237-238. (Non)violence as a moral high ground is hardly exclusive to a Christian tradition. This is evident in secular chronicles of (non)violence, such as Mark Kurlansky’s *Nonviolence: The History of a Dangerous Idea* (New York: Modern Library, 2009) particularly in his conclusions. An interesting direction for future research would be an analysis of the relatedness of secular and Christian discourse of (non)violence in the United States.

\(^{252}\) Wink first published this Matthean exegesis in *Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa*. In that volume he offered a more nuanced presentation of violence. Writing within the historical context of apartheid South Africa, blacks justifiably rejected nonviolence as a “white” gospel of submission (5). Whites “must not raise a single finger in judgment of those who have despaired of nonviolent change and have turned to violence as a last resort” (28). In context, Wink refrained from equating all forms of violence as evil (66). In the preface to *Engaging the Powers*, Wink tells the reader that *Violence and Nonviolence* is really the first volume in the “Powers” trilogy, and “the book on South Africa provides what this one lacks: a practical case study of the relevance of nonviolent direct action applied to a concrete situation.” (Wink, *Engaging the Powers*, xiii). *Engaging the Powers* is far more widely read and referenced, while * Violence and Nonviolence in South Africa* is virtually unknown.
evil. Furthermore, if Jesus’ (non)violent example shows us “what is truly human,”253 then those who act with violence are not “truly human.”254 This portrayal reifies the reversal whereby the actions of (non)violent, Christian actors are seen as benign and neutral.

The problem for advocates of all means was when advocates of (non)violence put it on a morally higher plane. Christian activists reinforce a higher moral dimension by naming (non)violence as Jesus’ “way.” This moralist perspective regards all forms of violence as morally the same and excludes a comprehensive discussion of strategy that includes analysis of power and context. The oppressed cannot use violence because then they will become the oppressor and replicate their methods. The violence of the oppressed as a response to the structural and cultural violence (self-defense, spontaneous

253 This is Dear’s perspective in *The God of Peace*, 18.

254 By way of contrast, in *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York, NY: Grove Press, 1963), Frantz Fanon famously spoke of the revolutionary violence of the colonized in Algeria against France as a humanizing, freeing and “cleansing force” (94). Throughout the colonial relationship, settlers justify their violence by proclaiming the reversal of the perpetrators and declaring that force is the only language the violent native understands. Fanon uses this reversal against the colonial settler: violence will reverse the situation and portrayal of the colonized from inhuman to human. Rehumanization does not take place by loving the enemy, but by reversing the reversal of structural violence by destroying the colonizer altogether. Fanon describes the process of decolonization by making reference to the scripture, “The last shall be first and the first last.” He wrote, “Decolonization is the putting into practice of this sentence… For if the last shall be first, this will only come to pass after a murderous and decisive struggle between the two protagonists. That affirmed intention to place the last at the head of things… can only triumph if we use all means to turn the scale, including, of course that of violence” (37). Fanon’s text and analysis became well-known among oppressed and colonized communities during the global revolutions of the 1950s-1970s. His analysis stood in contrast to the language of (non)violence in the civil rights and Indian independence movements, in which both the oppressed and the enemy were intended to be humanized by non-retaliation and moral persuasion. Rehumanization through violence makes no appeal to the innately divine quality of the human being. The colonized have to come to a consciousness through only a complete break from the structures and cultures of violence. Debates over violence and (non)violence were prevalent throughout African decolonization and independence struggles. See, for example: Jeffrey S. Ahlman, “The Algerian Question in Nkrumah’s Ghana, 1958-1960: “Debating ‘Violence’ and ‘Nonviolence’ in African Decolonization,” in *africaTODAY* Winter 2010, 57(2): 67-84; Kenneth Kaunda, *The Riddle of Violence* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980); Gail M. Presbey, “Evaluating the Legacy of Nonviolence in South Africa,” in *Peace & Change* Vol. 31, No. 2, April 2006: 141-174; Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer, *Guns and Gandhi in Africa: Pan African Insights on Nonviolence, Armed Struggle and Liberation in Africa* (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 2000); Kwasi Wiredu, “The Question of Violence in Contemporary African Political Thought,” in *PRAXIS International* Issue 3 (1986): 373-381.
rebellion, armed struggle) is equated with the violence of the state. Churchill called this abstract argument “fruit of the poison tree.”

What if you actually use the same sorts of methods and such as the people who are doing this to you? You’ll end up in the same position as them. The woman who physically resists rape therefore become a rapist?... Fruit of the poison tree. Gandhi did say something to this effect. If you overthrow your oppressor using the same means that the oppressor uses to oppress you, you will end up being a replication of the state because it’s a moral defect. Inevitably you will end up being some sort of a totalitarian, ugly, evil, oppressive people in that domain as much as they were oppressed before. I’m not sure that’s quite true on the facts. You’ve had some really unfortunate outcomes of revolutions through resort of arms that were made. I don’t know of any of them that are worse than India. And that is the Gandhian revolution. You really want to put India up as a model of what you are trying to achieve? Which tree was it that poisoned that one?

Churchill counsels historical accuracy over abstraction, noting that not all persons who have employed the use of violence in self-defense or armed struggle have ended up becoming as violently oppressive as their oppressors. (Non)violent revolution has not always resulted in less oppression or structural violence. Not all violence is morally equivalent and (non)violence is not necessarily a more moral choice. (Non)violence is selectively preferred based on context.

Jensen draws attention to the situations where the benefits of abstractions are chosen over real, live beings. Real, material contexts and relationships should determine courses of action for justice and not abstract, moral ideals.

One of the things that really upsets me about dogmatic pacifism: it’s like, are you saying that it’s not acceptable for a woman to kill someone who is trying to rape her? If they say, “No, that’s acceptable.” Okay, great, you are not really a dogmatic pacifist. Because now we’re talking cases. That’s the conversation I’m really interested in having. When is it acceptable and when is not acceptable, personally and socially? My definition of violence, the definition I like best, is “any act that causes harm to another.” … If I eat a carrot I’m committing an act of violence against a carrot. The carrot was a living being. I pull it up and I’m harming the carrot. So most of us under most circumstances know that it’s
moral acceptable to commit an act of violence against a carrot. Most of us, under most circumstances, would not agree to commit an act of violence against a human being. So I’m interested in talking about where we draw those lines.

Jensen gave another example where there are nine men in a room and one woman. Eight of the men are raping a woman. He said to a dogmatic pacifist, “You are the ninth man. It’s not really going to help her very much for you to stand back and say “I will not participate. I’m going to stop this by my own non-participation.” The activist answered, “Yes it would, because that’s one less dog,” indicating he broke the cycle of violence by not sinking to the level of violence of the other men. Jensen responded, “No, that’s not particularly helpful. The response is for you to stop them.” The implications for this discussion of loving the enemy are as follows: if loving the enemy morally excludes forms of violent coercion thereby allowing the perpetuation of violence in all of its forms, then is it love? Can it reasonably be considered (non)violence? In such cases, loving the enemy cannot be equated absolutely with (non)violence.

Churchill also cautions advocates of dogmatic pacifism who accept the violence of the state as moral or justified while condemning violence on the part of the oppressed as immoral or unjustified. He presented a hypothetical circumstance where a violent criminal kicks down the door of an unarmed, (non)violent activist’s house. That person locks himself in a room with a phone. Churchill then asks,

Who you gonna call to help? You’re going to call the police. You don’t disbelieve in armed force? You just want to displace it on somebody else, preferably somebody you can say works for you. So much for your fucking moral principles.

Churchill points out the hypocrisy of absolute pacifists who support self-defense in the case of their own community, but not in the case of others. They say, “Well, that’s
different, of course I’d defend my family.’ Yeah, and you got a monopoly on how you define family.” It is easier to condemn the violence of others when one’s own family and community are not under attack.

The resort to arms in self-defense or organized armed struggle is not more morally pure or even more effective than (non)violence. All of the interviewees who affirmed “by any means necessary” acknowledged that there was no purity in either violence or (non)violence. Organized tactics of violent resistance have not always been effective to make meaningful small changes or to take state power. Churchill and Lynd both recognized that there have been unfortunate outcomes by many groups that have resorted to the force of arms. There may also be a devastating emotional impact of violence on individuals and communities who use it.255

Umoja pointed out that certain organized acts of violence, both in self-defense and as strategic attack, have caused him to question the morality and justifiability of certain kinds of violence, even when he understands the root cause. Certainly not all forms of violence serve the ends of justice, and violence often does contribute to ongoing cycles of all forms of violence.

It shouldn’t be that armed struggle is a principle or nonviolence is a principle. It should be that we’d do whatever was necessary. I’m not talking about anything that’s heinous…. In my studies there was this thing that happened that I thought was heinous. I don’t know how I feel about it. This incident happened in like

255 Lynd, Wobblies and Zapatistas, 92. Lynd writes that there are very few instances in history of revolutionary groups “taking state power” who do not “lose their way.” Barbara Deming also took up the problem of the “dizzying” impact of the actual use of violence on the one who uses it. She argues against Frantz Fanon’s case for revolutionary violence as a humanizing force in Wretched of the Earth. As a psychiatrist, Fanon himself described the debilitating toll that armed violence exacts on its practitioners, particularly when revolutionaries reflect on their human connectedness with those whose lives they have extinguished (Barbara Deming, “On Revolution and Equilibrium,” in Liberation (February 1968): 195-199). Deming doesn’t really deal with the length and depth of the dizzying cost to the ongoing victims of oppression, or the dizzying effect of state repressive violence on resisters.
1960 or 1961 in Mississippi. In a small town called Tylertown nightriders used to come through this community. The black community put the word out, “No, it shouldn’t be any more nightriders come through here or something’s going to happen.” So they did come in there and they captured one of the guys. Then they severed his head from his body and they put the head on the bridge that separated the black and white community. Some of the SNCC people I talked to said that they didn’t have to worry about nightriders coming into their community after that. Now that’s something extreme. My rational side tells me that doing stuff like that is just going to create this whole cycle that’s going to continue.

Clearly there are many good reasons not to use violence and to oppose it on a moral basis. A critique of Christian (non)violence is not meant to undermine its life-affirming, justice-seeking theological notions and practices. The critique urges context-based analysis over abstractions.

The portrayal of loving the enemy as equated with (non)violence as a moral position from within the Christian tradition fails to take into account that, when acting (non)violently, persons with dominant identities are still implicated in and by structures of violence. This is the reason for formulating (non)violence with parentheses. The practice of (non)violence does not negate the reality of violence in which (non)violent actors continue to be implicated, even as practitioners of (non)violence. Here is where (non)violence has the potential of becoming a form of denial in and of itself; when (non)violent actors claim absolution from the conditions of violence in which all members of the dominant participate and from which they benefit.256 Because the

256 Mary Wallace argues that it is impossible and dangerous to attain any real degree of moral certainty about the morality of any means of change. There will never be any moral framework for social struggle which can ever be universally agreed upon in “Confronting Wrongs, Affirming Difference: The Limits of Violence, the Power of Nonviolence, and the Case of Nonviolent Intervention in Sri Lanka,” Brown University, Ph.D. dissertation, 2010: 23. Wallace argues, however, that at the very least that “the adoption of nonviolent means in pursuit of [just] ends will mean that one is not implicated in the cycles of mutually reinforcing and legitimating violence that the adoption of violent means entails. Furthermore, because we can never completely escape uncertainty over the morality of our ends, the adoption of nonviolent means is the only way to ensure that we are not – even unwittingly – employing unjust
(non)violent activist from dominant culture may not participate in direct violence does not absolve that one of violence. Precisely because structural and cultural violence operates to obscure the agents of violence through abstraction, the (non)violent community coming out of membership in the dominant identity groups must assume that neither their discourse of (non)violence, nor the inferred morality of their action, overrides their participation in other forms of violence. This is particularly true of Christian (non)violent community. If Christianity is a substructure of violent domination in this country and world historically and currently, attaching a moral imperative to Christian (non)violence smacks of hypocrisy, if not denial.

Critique IV: When Loving the Enemy Privileges Power and Enables Violence

A practical theological critique of loving the enemy reveals not only what Christian activists think they are doing as their (non)violent practices express their belief. The critique also exposes what the impacts of the actual practices are, betraying what deeper beliefs may underlie these practices. Jensen suggests that moral calls for (non)violence may conceal deeper fears of what breaking up the existing structures of violence might really demand. This may be true no matter what one’s individual or community social location is. Traditional Christian (non)violence suggests that through a non-retaliatory assertion of humanity, loving the enemy unmasks the dehumanizing structural and cultural violence by which the system of domination operates. As B♀

violence” (38). What Wallace does not say is how the discourse of (non)violence, in its moral opposition and superiority to revolutionary violence, fails to integrate into its own discourse its own inherent practices of structural and cultural violence.
pointed out, this viewpoint and practice fails to consider just how self-interested the entitlements of structural inequality and religious, racial and class privilege may be.

Jensen said what “oppressors really want you to do is to believe that they are invincible” so that a “state of dependency is fostered in almost every way possible.” He likened the U.S. culture of violence to an abusive family dynamic. Abused women often do not leave their abusers because they have come to depend upon them for survival. Abused women say to themselves, “‘How will I eat and how will my children eat if I leave my husband?'” Women know they “are seven times more likely to get beaten when [they] try to leave.” These are the same kinds of things people from all social locations think and ask when considering whether or not to fight systems of cultural and structural violence. Both oppressed and privileged communities inevitably fear the ramifications of what changing the dynamics of the exploitative, abusive system might mean.

On the larger scale, systematically we are made dependent upon the system that’s killing us. Does your food come from a landbase or does your food come from the grocery store? Does your water come from a tap or does your water come from a river? How would we eat without the system?

Despite possessing adequate knowledge about the devastating effects of the economy on the earth and the poor, virtually all persons in the United States depend upon this way of life and the people who run its systems. To threaten the powerful means threatening the livelihoods and expectations of the good life for all members of this culture. The culture trains members of all social locations in aspiring to be members of the dominant culture and the American way of life. The culture has made desirable the

---

257 Gene Sharp also wrote that psychological identification with and emotional dependence on dominant classes is a reason for obedience to oppressive rule (Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I, 23).
material entitlements that destroy the planet and its inhabitants. To have those entitlements, we must deny the various forms of violence and that deny our entitlements are entitlements. There are social rewards for going along. Resistance means that one may not receive social rewards and may even be punished. Under these circumstances, loving the enemy means not fighting the system. Non-retaliation works to preserve social structures. There is no challenge to consider the sacrifices to the privileges and entitlements implied by directly and coercively confronting the enemy – individuals and systems – in concrete ways.

As in an abusive relationship, everything within the system of destruction is set up to protect and care for the oppressors within structures of violence. The culture of historical denial and its narrative rejects that the structures of the whole society are violently unequal. We are a land of equal opportunity. The culture is good. We are progressing as people and a nation. We are a light to the nations. That there would be any other system of government or economy is inconceivable. By privileging reverence for the human life of the oppressor over the oppressed, loving the enemy as non-retaliation may become part of the discourse of human and American progress, exceptionalism and denial. Schulman addresses this kind of myth of goodness and progress in relation to the depiction of the history of AIDS and its treatment in the United States. She describes a program on National Public Radio reporting on the way in which the American public eventually “came around” to accept people with AIDS and get them treatment; and that “naturally, normally things just happened to get better. That’s the way we nice
Americans naturally are. We *come around* when it’s the right thing to do.” The U.S. myth of goodness and progress destroys the history of the people in ACT UP who forced, through active, self-sacrificing (non)violent struggle, people in power in the United States to “come around.” It privileges the discourse and denial of the powerful.

Jensen often receives communications from individuals who question the need to fight back using violence if necessary. He said that it is always easier to have this conversation about fighting back with people who have already fought and survived an individual abuser or a system of abuse “because their identification with the system has been broken.” Privileged people who are invested in their entitlements with little experience of abuse, respond predictably with “If civilization crashes what will happen to the people?” Jensen always responds,

> Which people you talking about? Are you talking about the hammer-head shark people? You talking about the Coos salmon people? You talking about the polar bear people? You talking about the subsistence farmers in India?” I mean all those people are better off immediately. When people say “What’s going to happen to the people?” They are talking about the global elite, which are the only ones that matter in this equation because we’ve identified with them. If you truly identify with the Delta smelt, the Delta smelt are suffering right now. If you identify with the subsistence farmers, the subsistence farmers are suffering right now. They’re dying right now.

Particularly for privileged people from various intersections of dominant identities, it is difficult to consider confronting the enemy because she is us. As analysis of structural violence suggests, all U.S. citizens are implicated in the devastation of the environment and the human beings who are exploited and destroyed to maintain the U.S. lifestyle. Jensen remarks that if space aliens were destroying the planet, humans would easily fight back because they wouldn’t identify with them. If citizens of this country

---

were to confront the systems that destroy human and non-human life, they would have to confront themselves and their material entitlements.

Yet Jensen counsels that while all people must be accountable for their investment in the privileges of the system of violence from which they may benefit, most persons should not over-identify with the oppressor as the enemy. While members of the dominant culture benefit from systems of violence and environmental destruction, the enemy is not always “us.” Jensen wants the proper share of blame for environmental destruction, for example, to be placed at the feet of those who are most responsible for it. He uses the example of water.

We so often hear that the world is running out of water. People are dying from lack of water. Rivers are dewatered from lack of water. Because of this we need to take shorter showers…. Well, no. More than 90 percent of the water used by humans is used by agriculture and industry. The remaining 10 percent is split between municipalities and actual living breathing individual humans. Collectively, municipal golf courses use as much water as municipal human beings. People (both human people and fish people) are not dying because the world is running out of water. They’re dying because the water is being stolen.

Overly harsh self-criticism falls back on individualism and does not do an adequate job of identifying “the enemy” historically and currently – those who are primarily responsible as the agents of decision-making within economic and political hierarchies for causing the destruction of life. Everyone in the United States is implicated in violence. We are not all, however, the enemy. Churchill spoke of the importance to never compromise one’s commitment “to call things by their right names… [and] speak the truth as you see it.” It is critical to name violence accurately as what it is, and not to “look for ways to make it

comfortable to the perpetrators or the beneficiaries.” A part of speaking the truth and
calling things by their right names is “the need to “make distinctions between
perpetration and benefit.”

A Practical, Theological Reconstruction of Loving the Enemy

Christians are implicated by all the forms of violence that Christians perpetrate on
those they mark out as other. Though Christians may claim a God of peace who loves and
calls Christians to love all persons including enemies, Christian individual and
institutional practices reveal a theology that is, practically and theologically, violent. As
Dear states, “Trillions of dollars to kill everybody, now everybody thinks that normal.
That’s what God is, that’s God’s will, that’s the way the world is supposed to be, that’s
what it means to be human.” Dear calls for structures and practices of worship and living
in the world which reflect the loving God in Christ in whom Christians claim to
believe.  

The insights of practical theology may help us to bridge the gap between an
abstract, Christian claim to a God and theology of love for all humanity, set in contrast to
the historical practices of direct, structural and cultural violence of the Christian church.
A mere claim to the God of love or the command of Jesus to love the enemy does not
make such a claim reality, nor does it negate the realities of violence in any way. While
practices of (non)violence may point to and participate in a theology of God’s love for all


260 Dear described any number of these practices, from preparing for two years to take a vow of
nonviolence along with his other Jesuit priestly vows to a ritual of sackcloth and ashes at Los Alamos on
the anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima. His autobiography A Persistent Peace is full of such ritual
practices.

171
by not participating in actions of direct violence (retaliation), those practices do not negate violence in all of its forms. Loving the enemy as a theological abstraction does not equal a transformational (non)violent social change and constitutes a highly inadequate view. It is an abstraction to believe this is so, or to claim that the violent practices that have attended Christianity historically are somehow an aberration of the essence of Christianity. For as the critique of abstraction and the commitments of practical theology make clear, there is no essence of Christianity apart from historical practices.

Through more thorough structural analysis of a given context of social struggle, a more robust notion of what loving the enemy means in would better serve those who desire to remain committed to a transformational Christian (non)violence. Some aspects of loving the enemy within the tradition of liberal Christian (non)violence require more careful consideration and reconstruction. Three perspectives from the interviews aide the reconstruction of loving the enemy by confronting the problems of abstraction, individualism and human supremacism.

Reconstructing Loving the Enemy I: Practice over Abstraction

All of the interviewees stated in some way that it is easier hold rigid ideologies about both violence and (non)violence than to engage in the hard, slow work of practice, whatever that practice may be, and to accept the consequences of radical action.

Referring to the writing of Bill Ayers, a leader in the Weather Underground, 261 Staughton

Lynd wrote about the shift in the sixties in U.S. social movements from practice to ideology. In the early movements, activists experimented with tactics, allowing for new ideas about what was effective to emerge from experience. As that work became more difficult and slow to produce fundamental social change, Ayers wrote, “Ideology became an appealing alternative… Practice was uncertain and inexact; ideology cloaked itself in confidence. Practice was slow and ideology a smooth and efficient shortcut.”

In this same way, loving the enemy can serve as an ideology over a form of collective practice when it becomes a mere theological fallback, which serves as an inefficient shortcut to the slow, difficult work of contextual analysis and strategizing.

Radical and Christian liberationist perspectives critique loving the enemy, the abstract of concept of love itself, and de-contextualized, de-historicized applications of scriptural texts. Historical context demands definition of who or what the enemy is and what the enemy’s concrete actions are, in order to determine a meaningful response to various kinds of violence – direct, structural and cultural. Normative theological demands for (non)violence in social struggle often obscure distinctions between the different forms of violence discussed so far, and the operations of power and entitlement.

Most interviewees recognized the extent to which loving the enemy in (non)violent practice currently means little more than a certain set of familiar behaviors to which liberal activists have become attached. While they appear as active behaviors and resistant to structures of power, their impact on structural violence amounts mostly to passive non-resistance: protest actions, sign-holding, marches, and so on. This is not to

---

suggest these practices are useless or meaningless, only limited. Power said that these activities no longer “emerge from the chest” in the context of struggle.

Churchill writes that in the United States’ context of social change, there is an avowal of radical (non)violence with very little concrete engagement in such practices. He counsels advocates of absolute (non)violence to spend time in communities that are under direct, structural and cultural violent attack in order to truly grasp the nature of their own stated commitments. Individuals should engage in a direct confrontation with state power in their home context in order to grasp the real effects of confrontational action that seeks to transform social structures. Then activists should engage in a “period of independent and guided reflection upon their observations and experiences ‘in the real world.’” The outcome of this process is “a formal articulation of precisely how he/she sees his/her values coinciding with the demonstrable physical requirements of revolutionary social action.”

Similarly, liberationist Juan Luis Segundo wrote that a theologian who would like to know how the gospel of Christ, such as loving the enemy, might be applied in a revolutionary circumstance should not consult the gospel first. The application of a scriptural text first requires a context of struggle in which the activist-theologian is engaged, and out of which the text is interpreted and applied. The theologian

---


264 Ibid., 97-98.

265 Ibid., 99.

266 This is the common ground between practical and liberation theologies, first identified by Gustavo Gutiérrez: theology is always the “second step” after practice in *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1988): 9.
[R]e-examine[s] the gospel message from within revolutionary struggle. Instead, they often try to haggle over their participation in the struggle, making that dependent on a prior reading and interpretation of the gospel. We must keep in mind the fact that the revolutionary character of a given option does not lie in its content but rather in its real capacity to break up the existing structure.\textsuperscript{267}

That Jesus’ command to love concretely requires wholly gratuitous love for the neighbor or enemy regardless of the circumstance is only one view.\textsuperscript{268} Segundo’s own view is “efficacious love”: concrete love conditioned by the historical moment should be effective in the liberation of the poor. Liberation of the poor is not possible apart from transformation of social structures which cause poverty. The direction of our efforts to love should be directed towards the poor, the oppressed, and the suffering and not towards the enemy. The dynamics of Jesus’ commands to love, are not universal, but bent towards using “the least amount of violence compatible with truly effective love.”\textsuperscript{269} Some use of violence is implied. In this view, “efficacious love” includes the potential for violence as a form of love in the effective transformation of structures and cultures of violence. Love that is not effective in transforming structures implicitly privileges dominant culture and the maintenance of its structures of violence.

\textsuperscript{267} Segundo, \textit{The Liberation of Theology} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982): 99-100. Segundo developed a method of investigating interpretive scriptural claims emerging from dominant ideologies, “the hermeneutic circle.” This method has four factors. It starts with a human experience of a commonly held theology and consciously accepts that this idea is grounded in own personal experience and the experience of our own historical community or social location (13). The theologian accepts this knowledge with a commitment to change the world, and thus her own understanding (17). Next, the theorist applies an ideological suspicion (a social analysis not previously considered) to the whole superstructure of the knowledge that supports the idea, eventually coming to recognize that the “prevailing interpretation of the Bible has not taken important pieces of data into account” (9). The theologian commits to change her theology, and has a new way of interpreting scripture altogether because of new elements of information and analysis that are available to interpretation and theology. The hermeneutic of suspicion enables asking new questions and expanding alternatives for action.

\textsuperscript{268} Ibid., 155.

\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 166.
B♀ described how the George Jackson Brigade engaged in organized violence to seriously disrupt structures and institutions of violence, while attempting to avoid doing violence to humans. In all of their actions, B♀ described,

No one ever got hurt. We cased this bank for the longest time. Oh my God, forever. We got ready to do [it] and we realized that school started. There was a school down the street. We saw all these fucking kids. What did we do? We left. We never went back there again. We couldn’t do it. It wasn’t correct.

When she was asked to join the GJB, there had been a recent action where a bomb went off inside a bag of dog food in a grocery store. B♀ described that, as a result of the bombing,

There was a few minor damages, nothing serious. People got some cuts. But it was stupid, ‘cause you don’t do that. Take it to their power source. If you take that kind of step you have to be the most principled, the most careful, and the most determined to not hurt anybody, person in the world.

I asked B♀ if all of the deliberations in the GJB were made in consideration of protecting human life. She answered,

Yeah, absolutely. We even warned the police. They managed to disarm a bomb. We made a statement, “We suggest you guys not do that. It’s dangerous when you do that.” We understand that they’re the working class, too. They’re just the cannon fodder. Just like soldiers. That was always a discussion. How do we not harm citizens? Even during bank robberies. I was never in a bank more than five minutes. I would just say, ‘Let’s get this over with as quickly as possible. You don’t want to be here and I don’t want to be here. Let’s just do what we got to do and get the fuck on down the road.’

B♀ held together an interesting tension: an ability to identify and name the enemy on multiple fronts, to confront the enemy, to do material harm to the enemy, but not to destroy human life. For B♀, resistance and retaliation primarily in terms of destroying material property fell within the scope of dealing with the enemy. These actions were
also effective in giving her organization a platform from which to communicate publicly about structures and the culture of U.S. violence at home and abroad.

The purpose here is not to justify violence or its effectiveness in all cases. If loving the enemy can be reconstructed as a meaningful source for the theological tradition of Christian (non)violence, then it must be applied within a practice of social struggle in community. Both Churchill and Segundo referred to revolutionary contexts in which organized violence for self-defense and armed struggle may be required. A given context of struggle may not call for the use of violence. The point here is for Christian activists and their communities not to predetermine action from an abstract, moral, scriptural or theological point of view, but to engage struggle and structural analysis first. This is the only way for a claim to loving the enemy to have credibility.

Reconstructing Loving the Enemy II: Interconnectedness as a Practice

What makes a concept like loving the enemy potentially powerful is not only the belief but the practice of interconnectedness: recognizing the sacred, inter-related nature of life. As commonly and currently practiced, few routines of (non)violence get at the heart or potential power of loving the enemy as human. Harding said,

I don’t see nonviolence or Christianity or Marxism as in any way fully expressed through those names. That those names are simply indicators of our understanding of the struggle to become our best selves and to realize our deepest humanity.

For Harding, (non)violence is not an abstraction, but understood in the context of struggle, and within that struggle, whatever most recognizes and nurtures the human-divine within and between humans. Loving the enemy as interconnected requires a
concrete context of struggle in which living beings affirm interconnectedness by practicing it. Loving the enemy works against the disconnection of living beings, undermining individualism while it practices building community.

While attending a memorial service on the anniversary of the Greensboro Massacre, Harding talked about a moment when a Christian minister spoke to the audience during the program. The pastor came out of the pulpit and started to pray for the people gathered, some of whom were “still deeply embedded in the world of Marxist-communism.” Regardless of differences in belief, the pastor poured an oil all over the attendees, prayed for them and for Jesus to be with them. Of this experience, Harding said,

To me that’s what nonviolence is about, that wherever the stream of love comes from, you share it with whoever is there. If it’s your enemy, you share it with whoever is there. If it’s somebody who believes something totally different you share it because they are humans before they are anything else.

He went on to describe his definition of (non)violence, continuing to make reference to this event.

[Nonviolence] is the way of being that makes it most possible for you to accompany while hugging…and dancing, and loving, and sharing your best humanity. At our best, that’s what we have to offer to each other. Our best humanity. That sometimes may come out in books and sermons and articles and speeches, but it comes out at its deepest level in creative relationships that bring life. That for me is what nonviolent movement is all about: life-sharing, life-giving, life-affirming…. For me the deepest truth is the truth of our connectedness. The truth of our need for each other. The truth of our belonging to each other….So wherever you recognize or I recognize that deep desire to
acknowledge and to encourage and to live out that movement towards our best selves, then nonviolence is simply a way of negotiating how to hug, how to walk together, how to build together, and how to create together. It’s not a kind of a banner that says “this is the banner that you have to march under....” We don’t say that this is the only way, but this is what I have, and I’m so glad that we can be close enough so that I can touch you with it and that you can touch me with what you have. So nonviolence is clearly not an ideology. It is what I find to be a wonderful way of sharing the human experience and walking with each other. And massaging each other with healing oil.

Affirming the interconnectedness of all life, Power preferred the practice of non-othering to the language of (non)violence. She said that when people ask her “are you nonviolent?” she says, “It isn’t so much that I practice nonviolence. I practice non-enmity.” She continued, “I think what turns into violence is not the picking up of a gun. What turns into violence is the othering of the opposition. That’s the origin. That’s the first violent act.” Enmity, or hatred, is othering. “It’s placing this moment of this being-ness outside of what’s sacred. I think that’s the radical power of Jesus’ dictum to love your enemies.” In her experience, however right it may have felt viscerally to be an armed enforcer of a just order, it was not “the truth.” She said, “It’s just more true to be moving from a loving heart, even as you are witnessing horrors.” For Power, activists who claim (non)violence are as prone to othering as those who claim other means.

There’s a righteousness, a blind righteousness among even practitioners of nonviolence, or there can be. Having the philosophy of nonviolence and the practice of othering, it’s no guarantee. The philosophy of nonviolence is no guarantee that you won’t do violence, or that you won’t create enmity, that you won’t act without a blind spot....When people have a dogma of nonviolence, they hate violence. They hate the war. They hate still, in a way. I won’t say hate, because that doesn’t feel fair. They do other.
Regardless of our perspective “we’re called with the highest, to keep trying within the recognition of that impossibility, to expand what we hold in the vision of love…. So that we let go of the idea that anything we think has any absolute truth.”

With theological justification for its direct, structural and cultural violence, Christians from the dominant culture have historically identified marginalized others, destroying them to seek their own survival and dominance. The Christian political-institutional apparatus is unable to understand itself as racially and culturally situated, embracing its justifications for violence as religiously-based truths. The dominant Christian tradition has mostly failed in practice to extend its affirmation of the interconnectedness of Creator and creation beyond the individual. Yet the Christian tradition still contains an expansive and contradictory impulse and command to love. Power recognized it “has produced some really significant nonviolent moments right along with its attempt to seize state power…. Working against individualism, a reconstructed notion of loving the enemy as (non)violent practice would more intentionally seek to extend itself beyond moments of non-resistant, interpersonal

---

271 While she did not make reference to him, Power’s perspective on non-othering and the humility necessary to aggressive, (non)violent social transformation sounds very much like Mohandas Gandhi’s concept of satyagraha. Joan Bondurant’s review of satyagraha in Conquest of Violence: The Gandhian Philosophy of Conflict (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1988) distills the various ways Gandhi described the concept. In English, satyagraha is often translated as “truth force” or “soul force.” Satyagraha literally means “holding onto the truth.” “Satyagraha excludes the use of violence ‘because man is not capable of knowing the absolute truth and therefore not competent to punish’…. Gandhi never claimed to know truth in any absolute sense, and he repeatedly reminded others that man’s inability to know the truth required that he maintain an unceasingly open approach to those who differ with him.” (16-17) Holding fast to one’s truth in any given situation of conflict is inseparable from (non)violence, a humble acceptance that as firmly as one may hold to one’s truth, it is partial and may not be violently imposed upon another, who also has part of the truth within. “The testing of truth can be performed only by strict adherence to ahimsa – action based upon the refusal to do harm, or, more accurately, upon love. For truth, judged in terms of human needs, would be destroyed, on which side it lay, by the use of violence. Non-violence, or ahimsa, becomes the supreme value, the one cognizable standard by which true action can be determined” (25).
encounter. Affirming interconnectedness of all life, advocates of (non)violence would also accept the deep interconnectedness of all forms of violence\textsuperscript{272} and implicate themselves in collective practices of (non)violence that addresses not only direct violence, but structural and cultural violence, including human supremacism as well. In a similar vein, advocates of Christian (non)violence would recognize they have the same potential for imposing hardened “truths” as any other ideological, politicized form of Christianity.

Direct, structural and cultural violence depends upon othering. Structural violence requires denying the full humanity of individuals and whole groups who are marked out as different from the dominant culture. Reversal requires a false elevation of the dominant culture that relies upon debasing the marginalized as less than human. Once dehumanized, further violence can justifiably be carried out against them as threats to the entitlements held in place by the structural violence of the dominant status quo. If the U.S. Christian tradition is fundamentally violent, then practices of (non)violence would be constituted by practices by which others are rehumanized in this context. By refusing to other, both in theological principle and Christian practice, those whom the dominant culture has taught us to other serves the purpose of rehumanization.\textsuperscript{273} Through such practices, loving the enemy provides a potential starting point for reversing the false  

\textsuperscript{272} This is Marjorie Suchocki’s insight about the interconnectedness of all violence. “Through connectedness, every act of violence reverberates throughout the race,” \textit{Fall to Violence}, 105.

portrayal of the perpetrators of violence that is required by the system of violence. But as Churchill addressed, (non)violence as love means an actual practice of connectedness through actual proximity and relationship with those human and other beings that suffer the extremes of all forms of violence most profoundly, such that the impacts of both violence and the commitment to (non)violence might be better understood. The affirmation of interconnectedness in thought and practice allows for a deeper, renewed practice to emerge. When applied collectively, the potential for social transformation multiplies exponentially.

In their interview, the Lynds mentioned Barbara Deming’s model of (non)violence.274 The Lynds said that Deming’s notion of “the two hands” was even more profound than the insights of Martin Luther King into (non)violent confrontation that seeks to love the enemy. The Lynds described Deming’s “two-hands” approach as following:

*In any nonviolent situation, one hand says “You’re just going to have to go through me if you want to do that.” But the other hand reaches out to the person… what his interest is and what his concerns are, what his feelings are going to be…. Barbara’s “two hands,” I just think is so important. That one hand is saying, “Stop what you’re doing.” And the other hand is reaching out to the person. And that you’re doing both at once.*

Deming’s approach is an interesting way to conceive of loving the enemy and expands on Power’s insight on non-othering and interconnectedness in the context of structural

---

274 Deming was a feminist, lesbian, (non)violent activist and writer who confronted a number of social issues from racism to anti-war and anti-nukes throughout the 1960s to the 1980s. For more information on the life, work and writings of Barbara Deming, see *We Are All Part of One Another: A Barbara Deming Reader*, Jane Meyerding, ed. (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984). The Lynds cite Deming’s idea of the “two hands” in their introduction to *Nonviolence in America*, xxxiii-xxxiv.
violence more thoroughly. Activists establish their sense of connection to the adversary in struggle while resisting actively through obstruction, disruption, and confrontation.

Reconstructing Loving the Enemy III: Vision and Practice

The abstraction of loving the enemy has been less a practice of fundamental social transformation than a vision for the world. While Segundo’s concept of “efficacious love” showed that love may include the potential for violence, love of the enemy does not prefer any kind of violence. All of the interviewees indicated that (non)violence is, in fact, a meaningful ideal that serves the purpose of developing greater space for solidarity in the struggle for justice. (Non)violence creates greater possibilities among larger segments of the population for building a just society into the future. At the end of Pacifism as Pathology, Churchill wrote of (non)violence,

I would at last like to state the essential premise of this essay clearly: the desire for a nonviolent and cooperative world is the healthiest of all psychological manifestations. This is the overarching principle of liberation and revolution.275

Every radical and Christian liberationist encountered in this research supported (non)violence as a meaningful, positive, preferred option for social transformation.276

275 Churchill, Pacifism as Pathology, 103-104.

276 Even as he refused to rule out violence towards an enemy as a viable option in revolutionary contexts, José Míguez Bonino wrote that nonviolent action is appropriate to a socially transformational purpose in as far as it “respects the human person, makes room for an internalization of the project of the liberation in the masses and fosters the sense of solidarity in the construction of a new society,” Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation, 127. Revolutionary violence potentially “creates a number of very serious problems: the exacerbation of hate, resentment, and rivalries, the imposition of changes from a structure of power without a corresponding development of conscience, the acceptance of “the rules of the game” of the present oppressive system…” (127). Cone concluded that King’s (non)violence was more useful to the black community than a strategy of armed self-defense. For the larger African-American community, (non)violence was more of a strategy and survival tactic than an ideology. Yet the ideals of love and (non)violence, however passive they were perceived to be, nonetheless showed to a generation of black people “a way of living with dignity in a world that did not recognize them as human beings” (Martin
Liberationists do not counsel idealism but call for a utopian vision that envisions something new, that has enough substance to it to be both prophetic and to stimulate imagination about new possibilities. Part of the activity of loving the enemy as a vision for the world is to nurture the imagination about the possibilities of a different world.

Dear said, “Here in the United States historically we are the blindest of the blind. We really have no imagination for peace whatsoever.” Throughout U.S. history there have been agents of (non)violent imagination that we must emulate in our own practices without falling prey to simplistic idealism. Dear continued,

In this world of 35 wars, 25,000 nuclear weapons, a billion starving to death, global warming, violence at an unparalleled level, one of the first casualties is the loss of the imagination. Certainly in the United States it’s gone. The Western, privileged world has lost the imagination. If you walk down the street of New York and say, “Can you imagine the United States without an army?” They’re gonna lock you up. They may slug you. I mean, you just cannot imagine it. The heart of the work for peace and justice is to help people to reclaim their imagination for peace. My teacher is William Lloyd Garrison. He stands up, radically public, and he says, “Excuse me, United States, I am announcing the abolition of slavery.” They all laughed at him! Then they tried to kill him and burned his house. They said to him, “There has always been slavery. It’s in the Bible!” And he said, “No.” He lifted up the vision of a new world of equality. A new world is coming, we’re all going to be equal. He gave people vision. That’s what the movement does. Susan B. Anthony: “All women can vote.” Dr. King: “I Have a Dream.” The Berrigans: “We’re going to end the Vietnam War.” Helen Caldecott: “We’re going to abolish nuclear weapons.” What the movement should be saying is: “We are announcing the abolition of war, poverty, executions,

*and Malcolm*, 269). Furthermore, Cone wrote that history was on the side of King, who noted that even if nonviolence does not effectively transform the enemy into an ally (as King eventually realized that it did not), (non)violence still had humanizing power for the one who uses it. “Its power is primarily found in what it does “to the hearts and souls of those committed to it. It gives them new self-respect. It calls on resources of strength and courage that they did not know they had” (78).

For example, Míguez-Bonino critiques Reinhold Niebuhr’s Christian political realism for being so pragmatic as to serve the status quo. Niebuhr’s understanding of human nature and the nature of groups to be such that there is a certain amount of injustice to be expected, leaving out room for human agency and the ability of persons to imagine a new reality. See Míguez-Bonino’s understanding of utopianism in Chapter 7 on “Hope and Power” in *Towards a Christian Political Ethics*.

Dear attributed his thought here to author and activist Arundahti Roy.
racism, sexism, starvation, nuclear weapons, global destruction, and any form of violence.”

Huerta said part of the rationale behind the commitment to use (non)violence in the farm workers’ movement was establishing a totally new vision for relationships within the farm worker community. She recalled one meeting in which organizers returned from a picket line where they had been physically beaten up by a union that opposed their organizing efforts. The organizers said “It’s one thing to be nonviolent against the employers, but these Teamsters were coming up and beating us up in front of the workers…” Huerta continued, “So then César [Chavez] made it very clear that we were going to continue using nonviolence, and that we were not going to use violence because if we did then we would be using it against each other. He made everybody take a vow.” Chavez was as concerned about creating a new vision of the community through practice within the farm worker community as he was about loving the enemy.

Loving the enemy, refraining from the application of violent retaliation against injustice and its agents, has more transformational potential for creating a humane social outcome for individuals and societies. Harding describes this essential practice of visioning as knowing what we are for, not only what we are against. This mirrors Jensen’s constant refrain that the main reason activists are unsuccessful in their efforts is because we do not really know what we want and we don’t think strategically.279 Staughton Lynd writes, however, while there is a need to establish a vision,

---

I do not think ordinary persons bleed and die for a vision that they have not experienced. I think the vision must be rooted in daily life, and if it is not, nothing will happen. If the vision is the seed, daily life is the soil.  

Interviewees support the need for certain kinds of ideals and models in order to hold out a vision of the future that is different from the pervasive violence of the present. Loving the enemy as an ideal may serve as part of such a vision. Once again, however, a meaningful vision cannot emerge outside of the context and community of daily, lived practices. The creation of a (non)violent vision is a collective practice, not an abstraction, based in context, grounded in structural analysis aimed at structural and cultural transformation.

What constitutes a constellation of effective collective practices is the subject of the next chapter.

---

280 Lynd, Wobblies and Zapatistas, 99. In a letter to Howard Zinn during his involvement with the summer Freedom Schools in Mississippi in 1964, Lynd lamented the limited goals of getting federal protection in order to get the vote for black people. Lynd commented in the letter, “Several staff members said this week: I’m ready to die, but I need a program worth dying for. I know Ruby Doris feels this way. I don’t think either the vote or Federal protection is worth dying for unless one can see beyond them by just what steps the society will be changed…. There is a question as to how many people will continue to risk their lives for limited goals; and there is also a question as to whether, in fact, those limited goals can be achieved within present American society except in the context of more fundamental changes,” (From Here to There, 70-71). Lynd refers to Ruby Doris Smith Robinson, a young adult leader in the southern freedom movement. See her biography by Cynthia Griggs Fleming, Soon We Will Not Cry: The Liberation of Ruby Doris Smith Robinson (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000).
CHAPTER FIVE: FAITHFUL, NOT EFFECTIVE

How This Theme Arose

After full analysis of the interviews, a theme I broadly labeled “tactics” contained by far the most data of any other category. Whether supporting (non)violence alone or a variety of means to achieve change, the interviewees talked about the effectiveness of tactics repeatedly. Interviewee discussions of effectiveness triggered my own Christian activist memory of hearing the phrase “faithful, not effective” used time and time again to suggest that Christian social action did not necessarily need to strive for effectiveness.

This phrase did not appear directly in the interview data. But the attention on effectiveness in the data posed the question: if Christian social action does not strive for effectiveness, then how is it striving for social transformation?

Interviewees shared about effective and ineffective actions in their experience and knowledge of resistance and social movements. Their differing perspectives reveal the debate over whether organized violence or (non)violence, or a combination of both, is most effective for deep social transformation. They all affirmed that social change was achieved by the effective combination of multiple tactics, even within a tradition of (non)violence alone. The interviews underscored the conflict between the need for effectiveness and the reality that deep social transformation is often not tangibly achieved in a lifetime. It is hard to know in the short-term whether or not social change tactics and strategies are effective. Yet the interviewees demonstrated that effectiveness matters.
Though unique contexts necessitate different tactics, what has been effective can be known. Effective social change practices should be discerned with intention within any notion of Christian faithfulness.

In this chapter, I will outline briefly the normative, understanding of “faithful, not effective” from the point of view of a few prominent activists and scholars in the (non)violent Christian theological and activist tradition. I will bring those perspectives into conversation with the interviewees’ descriptions of effectiveness in order to question both the equation of (non)violence with faithfulness and the ideological function of this statement. “Faithful, not effective” surfaces tensions in the ways it may serve to reinforce certain elements of historic denial and privileged entitlements, reinforce structures of dominance, and the Western Christian substrata of abstraction and individualism. At the same time, “faithful, not effective” may provide important checks to Christian dominance. This chapter will delineate these tensions. In light of a need and a desire for effectiveness, and in the face of profound structural and cultural violence in dominant, U.S. society, I will consider what a critical, Christian practice of effective tactics might include. If an affirmation of Christian (non)violence as an expression of faithfulness is desirable, then Christians must construct a theological point of view and practice of (non)violence that is either “faithful and effective,” or a practice in which being “faithful” is not a hindrance to effectiveness.
“Faithful, Not Effective”: The Dominant View

While the phrase “faithful, not effective” did not appear in the interview data directly, Jensen made comment on the phrase in one of his books:

I recently saw an interview with longtime pacifist activist Philip Berrigan – one of the last before he died – in which he stated more or less proudly that spiritual-based pacifism is not meant to change things in the physical world, but relies on a Christian God to fix things. The interviewer had asked, “What do you say to critics of the Plowshares movement who claim that your actions have not produced tangible results?” Berrigan answered… God doesn’t require results. God requires faithfulness. You try to do an act of social justice, and do it lovingly. You don’t threaten anybody or hurt any military personnel during these actions. And you take the heat. You stand by and wait for the arrest.” I can’t speak for Berrigan, but I want to see results because the planet is being killed.281

One can find a similar but more nuanced view of “faithful, not effective” on the Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) website.282

There is a saying within the faith-based peacemaking community that we are called to be faithful, not effective. What this means is that people involved in direct action need to be careful not to measure their success in the world’s terms. A faith-based peacemaker is more concerned with being faithful to the gospel than with being politically successful …. While it is true that we are called to be faithful, not effective, it is also important to realize that this issue is often used as an excuse for not dealing with the very real concerns about how our actions are perceived by others. We cannot hide behind the cloak of faithfulness in order to escape the very tough issue of effectiveness… The issue of effectiveness is intimately connected to the issue of love. When faith-based peacemakers speak of effectiveness, they ask: “How can I best love God, myself and my neighbor?” The goal of biblical effectiveness is conversion…. We love [others] because, with the grace of God, it may lead to conversion – for them and for us. At the bedrock of


282 “Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) offers an organized, nonviolent alternative to war and other forms of lethal inter-group conflict. CPT provides organizational support to persons committed to faith-based nonviolent alternatives in situations where lethal conflict is an immediate reality or is supported by public policy. CPT seeks to enlist the response of the whole church in conscientious objection to war, and in the development of nonviolent institutions, skills and training for intervention in conflict situations.” (http://www.cpt.org/about/mission).
every nonviolent direct action is the belief in the capacity of people – even our opponents – to respond to the love of God at work in us.\textsuperscript{283}

While the CPT statement makes the important assertion that “we cannot hide behind the cloak of faithfulness in order to escape the very tough issues of effectiveness,” it is nonetheless “true” that Christians are called to privilege faithfulness over effectiveness. Furthermore, faithfulness is equated with (non)violence. Effectiveness is equated with persuasive love as (non)violence, affirming a positive anthropology regardless of the considerations of structural violence. The statement affirms the hierarchical dualism of “this world term’s” (violence and coercion) and God’s terms (love and conversion).

The dichotomy between the material and spiritual world is a hallmark of “faithful, not effective.” John Howard Yoder did not denounce effectiveness, but in the last chapter of \textit{The Politics of Jesus} excluded it as a prime motivator for Christian action.\textsuperscript{284} Christians cannot accept effectiveness as a goal.

Even if we could get a clear definition of the goal we are trying to reach and how to ascertain whether we had reached it – is there not in Christ’s teaching on meekness, or in the attitude of Jesus toward power and servanthood, a deeper question being raised about whether it is our business at all to guide our action by the course of history we wish to take?\textsuperscript{285}

\textsuperscript{283} Tom Cordaro, “Nonviolent Direct Action for Personal and Social Transformation,” see section on Effectiveness and Faithfulness, \url{http://www.cpt.org/resources/writings/cordaro}. Serving around the world in war zones, CPT is far from unfamiliar with the realities of power and global structural violence. Their narrative of faithful, not effective demonstrates the pervasive nature of this perspective.


\textsuperscript{285} Ibid., 230.
Yoder argued that the only appropriate guide to action “is not a relationship of cause and effect but one of cross and resurrection,”286 which demonstrates that faithfulness to God is (non)violence.

The choice that he made in rejecting the crown and accepting the cross was the commitment to such a degree of faithfulness to the character of divine love that he was willing for its sake to sacrifice ‘effectiveness’… [Jesus] excluded any normative concern for any capacity to make sure that things would turn out right.287

The future is God’s and so “the key to obedience of God’s people is not their effectiveness but their patience.”288

**Tensions Within the Dominant View**

Tension I: Abstraction and the Need for Structural-Cultural Analysis

“Faithful, not effective” is based primarily in Christian eschatology, the future orientation towards the Kingdom of God. Jesus’ life, death and resurrection began that reign, but it will not be complete until his second coming. Since the reign of God is here now but not yet, the Christian call is to be faithful, not effective, until Jesus comes again. The final fate of the Kingdom is in God’s intervening hands, not human hands. Christian eschatology depends upon linear, historical processes of salvation that lead to fulfillment.

---

286 Ibid., 232.

287 Ibid., 234.

288 Ibid., 232. Stanley Hauerwas’ pacifism thoroughly echoes Yoder’s perspective. “Christians cannot support ‘justice’ coming from the barrel of a gun, and we must be suspicious of that ‘justice’ that relies on manipulation of our less than worthy motives. For God does not rule creation through coercion, but through a cross. As Christians, therefore, we seek not so much to be effective as to be faithful…. We must be a people who have learned to be patient in the face of injustice. But it may be objected: Surely that is too easily said if you are not the ones who are suffering from injustice. Precisely, but that does not mean that we ought to legitimize the use of force to overcome injustice.” Hauerwas, “The Servant Community,” in *The Hauerwas Reader*, 380.
in an event outside of history. This perspective affirms the notion of human progress, which as discussed, may or may not be historically valid. Christian eschatology serves as an abstraction in light of the actual history of social change, particularly for those persons who have no investment in the Christian paradigm and for some communities that view progress differently.

Yoder wrote that historically King and Gandhi were able to hold together the unity of means and ends “without abandoning their claim to effectiveness,” but said nothing about what constituted effectiveness, except that it is “a fringe benefit thrown in with the deal when we affirm the unity of humanity.”\textsuperscript{289} Eschatological imperatives supply few indications for, practically speaking, what actually might constitute faithful Christian effectiveness and offer no information about what has actually been effective in social struggle over time. In this sense, “faithful, not effective” evades responsibility and accountability necessary to work for social change: to conduct structural analysis, to identify the enemy’s accountability, to implement actual social change strategy, and own and dismantle the entitlements perpetuated by a lack of effectiveness.

Schulman said understanding the context of struggle is critical to determining effective tactics. The contextual analysis of the historical moment, individual and corporate social location, the role of government, and the goals of the movement all contribute to effective tactical decision-making. She noted that a number of ACT UP

\textsuperscript{289} John Howard Yoder, “The ‘Power’ of ‘Non-violence,’” Unpublished paper, presented at the American Academy of Religion Section on Religion, Peace and War in Philadelphia, PA, November 18, 1995, \url{http://theology.nd.edu/people/research/yoder-john/documents/THE1.pdf}. Yoder footnotes himself on this statement by making reference to his book *The Original Revolution: Essays on Christian Pacifism* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1972), and commenting “This is like what Jesus was pointing out in saying that if his followers would ‘seek first God’s rule and righteousness (Mt 6:33)’ the other things they worry about would be thrown in.”
members had been members of other armed, revolutionary movements that advocated the use of violence in other contexts.

There are people in ACT UP who came from other movements that did use violence. Jeff Gates had been in the Nicaraguan revolution and died of AIDS. Ortez Alderson, who died of AIDS, had been in the Black Panthers. Marc Rubin had been in SDS, which wasn’t really violent but tried to be. But nobody was violent in ACT UP… They had been closeted in straight movements that had violent components, but in a gay context it just didn’t make any sense…. I just think it’s not a gay thing…. when I think about the people who founded the Lesbian Avengers, two of them had been Irish revolutionaries. One was in the Cuban revolution. So they both came from violent political histories. But they would never, ever suggest, [violence] was just totally inappropriate in a gay context.290

Despite the destruction of the gay community in New York.

ACT UP never committed an act of violence. Which is quite astounding considering that people literally died every day… We sustained death as a consequence of the other side’s behavior… and yet never was there one act of violence on the part of ACT UP…. It’s never been a violent movement, and it’s never been individuals who use violence against their oppressors, ever….Women hurt their children when they are oppressed. But gay people, we have never seen that…. “Why” is a very complicated question that I don’t know the answer to… But there is something deep there….. Especially considering how much death we sustained. It’s literally been life and death and yet even in that case, people who knew they were going to die still did not act violently…. It has something to do with the culture, or with the self-perception. I don’t know the answer. But it is something that I’ve thought about for a long time. There’s some alienation from certain kinds of dominant behavior….. People hurt each other, there’s domestic violence like in any relationship. But I mean in terms of the power that opposes you…

Given the sheer amount of death that the gay community sustained through AIDS as a result of government and family indifference, it would have been understandable if the movement resorted to violence. But there was something about the cultural and historical

---

290 For more information on: Ortez Alderson, see http://www.gihalloffame.org/index.pl?todo=view_item&item=1; Marc Rubin, see http://www.gaycenter.org/community/archive/collection/031; the Lesbian Avengers, see Part II of Schulman’s My American History: Lesbian and Gay Life During the Reagan/Bush Years (New York: Routledge, 1994).
context of the gay and lesbian community itself which ruled out organized violence as an effective tactic of resistance. Schulman’s examples demonstrate that the use of violence or (non)violence for social change depends upon multiple contextual factors. “Faithful, not effective” considers none of these factors.

Tension II: Historic Denial

The interviewees suggested a structural analysis of context was a part of determining effectiveness. This analysis includes the study of other historical contexts for effectiveness of means; as well as the differences, particularly in relation to the analysis of structural violence, between other historical contexts and today. Some interviewees pointed to particular instances of historical denial within the tradition and promotion of (non)violence, addressing the claim that (non)violence is always effective, whereas violence does not “work.” Others posed challenges to whether (non)violence alone, currently or historically, has the effective capacity to create deep social change.

Staughton Lynd, as committed as he is to (non)violence, said that as a historian he had to reckon with questions like “How could slavery have been done away with in the United States without violence? I’t’s not that I don’t want there to be an answer, but I don’t know what the answer is.”291 This historical analysis surfaces times and places that (non)violence has been effective and when it has not; when violence has been effective

and when it has not. Differences among interviewees over these matters point to the need for historical accuracy in evaluating effectiveness.\textsuperscript{292} 

The historians in the interviewee group recognized that in certain historic contexts, fundamental socio-structural change has come about as a result of the forces of violence and (non)violence working together effectively or as polarizing influences within social struggle. Churchill said Martin Luther King was anathema to the white power structure until black power became a more prominent threat to white supremacy. Then King became “a great alternative to these guys.”\textsuperscript{293} Churchill believed that even though King and Malcolm X had real philosophical disagreements over the use of violent and (non)violence, they were working together.\textsuperscript{294} In addition, 

Several of the nonviolent marches were secured by the Deacons for Self-Defense and Justice. Armed formations came. King knew it! He wasn’t necessarily happy about them being seen, so they sort of reached \textit{quid pro quo}: you guys remain out of sight, but the night-riders come, you intervene…. They also understood how to play one piece off against the other. You don’t want to listen to moral argument? Hey, I got an alternative for you you ain’t gonna like. Now you want to talk to [King] again? All of a sudden you’ve got the ’64 Civil Rights Act…. It’s coming in the context of, “you can do it the easy way, you can do it the hard way.” You’ve got some fairly smart people in [the government] saying “the hardliners have themselves not just tactics but an agenda that’s kind of scary to us, so how ‘bout we collaborate with King? How about we pass these [bills] and co-opt [blacks]? Give them some damn jobs or something. They’re burning the businesses right out from under us,” which was the context of this.

\textsuperscript{292} In \textit{Toward a Credible Pacifism: Violence and the Possibilities of Politics} (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), Dustin Ells Howes argues that in order for pacifism to be considered credible and a viable, effective political option it must come to terms with the notion that “all forms of action are roughly equivalent. Neither the assassination of a single individual nor the killing of thousands produce results more quickly than any other political method. Speeches, diplomacy, demonstrations, foreign aid, civil disobedience, the signing of treaties, the passing of laws, and physical violence all fail and all succeed, depending on the circumstances” (7).

\textsuperscript{293} James Cone refers to this as the “bogeyman” alternative, \textit{Martin & Malcolm in America}, 264.

\textsuperscript{294} As previously noted, the reciprocal influence of King and Malcolm X is the main subject of investigation in James Cone’s \textit{Martin and Malcolm in America}.
Similarly, Umoja didn’t dismiss the role of (non)violence and the federal government altogether, showed that resistance by multiple means created fundamental changes in the south and throughout the country. In Mississippi there was some (non)violent direct action on desegregation, but there primarily was “voter registration work and people just committed not to carry guns.” There was always “a strong self-defense component” against white supremacist violence, as well as boycotts that were effective at demonstrating the purchasing power of black people in communities. Change happened through black people’s agency in local movements using all the means at their disposal.

Churchill also described that Gandhi played the polarity of violent extremism in India to his strategic advantage during the struggle for Indian independence from the British Empire.

The vaunted career of Gandhi exhibits characteristics of a calculated strategy of nonviolence salvaged only by the existence of violent peripheral processes. While it is true that the great Indian leader never deviated from his stance of passive resistance to British colonization, and that in the end England found it cost-prohibitive to continue its effort to assert control in the face of his opposition, it is equally true that the Gandhian success must be viewed in the context of a general decline in British power brought about by two world wars within a thirty year period.  

Gandhi was proficient in firearms, served in the army as a medic (though condemned himself for his complicity in war-making), supported pacifists empowering themselves with firearms training, and did not oppose establishing military bases to fight the Japanese in World War II.  

---

295 Churchill, Pacifism as Pathology, 55.

296 Manfred B. Steger describes Gandhi’s complex relationship with and contradictory incarnations of the principle and practice of (non)violence in Gandhi’s Dilemma: Nonviolent Principles.
Churchill sees the absolutist refusal to accept the historic effectiveness of the polarity between violence and (non)violence as another demonstration of the U.S. culture and history of denial. The insistent claim that (non)violence works is “alchemy,” meaning that pacifists cannot point to any evidence “where nonviolence ever actually worked in the context of real violence, but it will. We’ll pretend that it did and we’ll go ahead with the expectation that it will.” Jensen said that there is a need to recognize a role in struggle for people who are committed to (non)violence. “But what they need to do is they need to recognize the role of militancy as well.”

The theological tradition and practice of white, Christian (non)violence has been a primary source for setting up, implicitly and explicitly, the absolute contradiction between violence and (non)violence theologically, and therefore historically. The dichotomous moral valuing of (non)violence over violence has subjugated the history of competing accounts of effective means. In our interview, I said to Harding that I sensed a contradiction between his own deep commitment to (non)violent practice and

---

297 Churchill is also concerned with the hypocrisy of white activists to insist on (non)violent resistance in the U.S. domestic context while supporting armed resistance abroad. He uses the Vietnam War as one example (*Pacifism as Pathology*, 77-82). This is one argument for the way in which (non)violence (as a form of racism) is used within the United States to protect the state, as argued by Peter Gelderloos in *How Nonviolence Protects the State* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007).

298 Chapter One noted the emphasis of early civil rights scholarship on (non)violence marginalized self-defense from the historical narrative, dichotomizing violence and nonviolence in the struggle for black liberation and denying the co-existence of self-defense with nonviolence. Leilah Danielson also challenges this dichotomizing in “The ‘Two-Ness’ of the Movement: James Farmer, Nonviolence, and Black Nationalism,” *Peace & Change* Vol. 29, No. 3&4 (July 2004): 431-452. Gail M. Presbey also notes a similar tendency of “some historians and nonviolence advocates” to oversimplify the anti-apartheid struggle in South Africa and “give the impression that the struggle was more nonviolent than it was.” “Evaluating the Legacy of Nonviolence in South Africa,” 141.
his historical writings about all forms of black resistance, violent and (non)violent. He responded, “In a deep sense for me, nonviolence in my connection to it was fundamentally a connection of struggle; learning how to carry out nonviolent struggle for justice and for a new society. And there’s no contradiction.” That Christian (non)violent activists are called to be “faithful, not effective” in practice often evades these historical complexities, setting up deeper levels of historical denial.

Tension III: Who Is In Control?

Part of the conviction behind the commitment to faithfulness over effectiveness is the traditional Christian belief that God is in control of history and not humans. When the time is right, as determined by God, God will intervene in human affairs to set the world right. Faithful, not effective privileges God’s time and action, undermining human action in history. Yet even Yoder counsels against the “misuse” of putting control exclusively in God’s hands: “What I have referred to as “doing without dominion” can, in the wrong hands, be twisted into an acceptance of evil systems on the grounds of the claim that God is in control…. Trusting providence can be twisted into passivity.”

Most interviewees were suspicious of dominant Christianity’s role within the culture reinforcing pacification and maintaining the order and status quo of the structures of violence by removing agency from the historical realm. “Faithful, not effective” is an example of a theme within Christian (non)violence which has the potential do just that. In an early book, Jensen mentions the notion of kairos: a time of destiny when a person or

culture’s life purpose is to be fulfilled. He wrote about the “fine line” between “waiting for the arrival of understanding – kairos – and the need for action.” With regards to the destruction of the environment, over time Jensen has more definitively stated that now is the time for communities to push or hasten this collapse with effective tactics. If not, Jensen contends, the eventual collapse of the planet will result in more violent, long-term consequences than the results of the use of violent tactics to hasten the end. Forcing change by any means is more faithful to the planet and its inhabitants than waiting for God to intervene. Faithfulness to the earth means humans taking control.

But certain interviewees were clear that deep social change cannot be forced. Schulman said that one of the lessons of politics and history is “you can’t force the zeitgeist.” There are always long periods of regression in between progressive periods in U.S. history. These periods of backlash exact an enormous personal price on a number of persons. “But you do know that the new period is going to come. But you can’t force

---

300 Jensen, Language Older Than Words, 322-324.

301 Though Jensen does not engage in a theological analysis of kairos, the term is widely used by liberationist Christians around the world to address the problem of structural violence in contexts of vicious oppression. The first “Kairos Document” was produced in 1985 in apartheid South Africa, and is a model for subsequent Kairos Documents: Central America (1988); Road to Damascus (1989 – including Namibia, Korea, Philippines, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala); Kenya (1991); Europe (1998); Zimbabwe (1998); India (2000); Palestine (2007). The original South African reflection on kairos described it as “the moment of truth” in dealing with the crisis of violence. It condemned state and church theology by which justification “Christians stand by and weakly plead for peace.” The Kairos Document: Challenge to the Church, A Theological Comment on the Political Crisis in South Africa (Rev. 2nd ed.) (Grand Rapids, MI: William Eerdmans Publishing, 1987): 2. For a complete list of all of the Kairos Documents (Palestine currently in process), see Gary Leonard, The Moment of Truth: The Kairos Documents (Scottsville, South Africa: Ujamaa Center for Biblical and Theological Community Development and Research, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2010), also available online.

302 In Chapter 14 of Deep Green Resistance, Jensen, McBay and Lierre run through a variety of scenarios and strategies that may precede environmental collapse from no resistance to limited resistance to all-out infrastructure attacks and decisive ecological warfare (425-474).

303 Zeitgeist is a German word, which generally means “the spirit of the times.”
it, no matter how much you want it or need it.” Even though you can’t force it, “in the meantime it is important to keep rigorous thought and small, accountable action alive.”

Power said that a higher, spiritual perspective helps dominant culture activists to act humbly by accepting that they are culturally situated and are not “the ultimate actor.” Power maintained that the use of violence to disrupt is a behavior that reflects the Western culture’s need to control. She said that for social transformation to be effective we have to “surrender the concept of ‘make it’ do anything.”

Prosperous Americans are accustomed to having a huge amount of control over the circumstances of their lives. It’s part of their identity. It’s part of our identity as a nation. We can end poverty. All of this dominating that we do all over the world. The perpetrators of that kind, they get away with it because it aligns with our sense of powerfulness is a birthright…. That’s part of the Western civilization, the hubris of Western civilization, is the hubris of modernism. We can make things right…. We have a habit of mind. We’ve inherited a sense of entitlement and power.

Power said “that for liberation theology to turn and say let the experiences of the oppressed be the source of our understanding… was a very important move.”

I asked Power if the experience of the oppressed leads them to the use of violence to overturn injustice, then should we be in solidarity with that violence? She replied that when she decided to employ the use of revolutionary violence she really believed it was in line with her understanding of and love for the oppressed. Yet in the complexity of the world situation, the violence that her group employed simply was not going to liberate the oppressed and make the revolution come. It was an attempt to exert more power and

304 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 164.

305 This is Sharon D Welch’s perspective on social change. Dominant culture actors must move from their need to control, “a construction of agency, responsibility, and goodness, which assumes that it is possible to guarantee the efficacy of one’s actions,” to an ethic of risk, in A Feminist Ethic of Risk, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000): 14.
dominance in context of power and dominance. Her group did not realize that they couldn’t “actually make that fantasy happen. We cannot ‘make’ the revolution.” Given the complexity of power and violence, there is no way that anyone can know that violence itself is going to effectively lead to a revolutionary situation which is free from the power and dominance that violence inevitably employs.

In contrast to Power, Jensen chastens interlocutors who suggest that the “desire to stop atrocities such as the extirpation of species is a manifestation of a “need to control.” While in agreement with Power’s claim that Western culture is motivated by control, Churchill believes that the use of organized violence is not necessarily about control, but the effective alleviation of structural and cultural violence. Furthermore, if violent means of effective structural (versus individual) transformation are about control and coercion, so are effective (non)violent means. Early U.S. Christian pacifists rejected Gandhi for this reason.

Power explained that while any social context may appear to have strong tendencies toward certain outcomes, there is no way of knowing when a system will shift

---


307 Gene Sharp wrote at length about the concept of nonviolent coercion and the factors influencing effective coercion (versus persuasion) for social change in Part III of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action: The Dynamics of Nonviolent Action*, 741-755.

308 Danielson, “‘In My Extremity I Turned to Gandhi’: American Pacifists, Christianity, and Gandhian Nonviolence, 1915-1941.” White, U.S. pacifists saw Gandhi’s means of (non)violence as violent precisely because they were coercive and not passive. Bondurant described that Gandhi’s method of *satyagraha* contained “a positive element of coercion… an element of compulsion which may effect a change on the part of an opponent which initially was contrary to his will – and he may suffer from the indirect results of these action.” Yet, Bondurant explained, “The difference between violent coercion in which deliberate injury is inflicted upon the opponent and non-violent coercion in which injury indirectly results is a difference of such great degree that it is almost a difference of kind.” (*Conquest of Violence*, 9) Bondurant also willingly admits that even the attempted conversion of an opponent through self-suffering may be injurious, but that is not the intent (11).
from an expected outcome to an unexpected outcome. Systems of dominance have fallen almost without warning, such as Soviet communism and the Berlin Wall. Such examples demonstrate that “dominance systems are not unchangeable.” They can fall and be transformed. Since there is no way of acting in a “definitive way” that will ensure certain outcomes, there is never a guarantee of effectiveness. “Faithful, not effective” (non)violence may keep the controlling nature of humans in check.

Interviewees stake out different positions over matters of coercion and control. Does effective action seize the moment of change or create it through force? Does “faithful, not effective” cultivate passivity by undermining human agency, thereby reinforcing privilege, in the face of injustice? Or does it keep patterns of dominance in check by challenging the instincts and needs of the members of the dominant culture to be in control? Is militant (non)violence necessarily less controlling and coercive than militant violence? Again, answering these questions is partly a matter of social location and context, including who the agents and communities acting for change are. An end-times vision and a dependence on a greater spiritual force may serve multiple purposes. There are no clear-cut answers to these questions. Yet the consistent refrain of the interviewees demanded contextual and structural analysis that nurtures human agency, creating the conditions for effective action, so that more radical action is possible when the time is ripe. Intentionally determining potentially effective social transformation trumps abstract demands for faithfulness as (non)violence, or passivity of almost any kind.
Tension IV: The Liberal-to-Radical Divide

A strong divide among interviewees over what constitutes concrete “effective” violent and (non)violent responses to violence appeared to fall within what Jensen and others describe as a liberal-versus-radical divide.\textsuperscript{309} Traditionally understood, liberal political and economic goals accept that the institutions of this society are good and can be redeemed by purely (non)violent means to serve the interests of all people and the earth. Radical goals imply the complete dissolution of the institutions as agents of violence, which may imply violence to be effective. According to Churchill, the test as to whether (non)violence is revolutionary (radical) instead of reformist (liberal), is whether its principles of practice

are capable of delivering the bottom-line transformation of state-dominated social relations which alone constitutes the revolutionary/liberatory process. Where they are found to be incapable of such delivery, the principles must be broadened or transcended altogether as a means of achieving an adequate praxis.\textsuperscript{310}

Yet the liberal-radical divide is not so clear-cut between choices of strategies of reform or revolution. Nor is it helpful to equate (non)violence with liberalism and violence with radicalism. Based on their own analysis of the contemporary U.S. situation, the interviewees basically agreed that the United States was not in a revolutionary period. Therefore, most of them thought that organized violence was not a particularly viable


\textsuperscript{310} Churchill, Pacifism as Pathology, 93.
radical option. Even if violence were justifiable, it would not be effective. There are a number of reasons for this. The general population simply is not prepared to understand it, prepare for it, or use it. Neither are most activists. But mostly the interviewees saw organized violence as ineffective because of the repressive violence of the state. Schulman said that she understood the need for violence in a revolutionary context. “It’s not like I have a “no violence” position,” she said, “…but in the American context, the state power is so, practically, you can’t really win. They can hurt you more than you can hurt them. So it’s not a practical strategy.” About those who decide to use violence as an organized strategy, Huerta said, “I think they’re naïve…. First of all, you’re outnumbered. You’re not going to win. It’s kind of a suicide.” The state kills and jails activists and destroys movements that it considers to be a violent threat, with the cultural justification of necessary violence to maintain the social order. In their opinions, the destruction of any radical element of an activist community at this time would not contribute to overall effectiveness.

If the United States were in a different period, organized violence might make more sense. In the meantime, Kelly admitted that she was not really tuned into the debates over violence and (non)violence any longer because she thinks, “We haven’t even explored the nonviolent tactics,” which include a broad range lifestyle change and political resistance in the context of radical, local alternative communities. She believes if communities of resistance engaged in both of these (non)violent aspects in a more...
committed and sacrificial fashion, it would have a major effect on positive social 
change.\textsuperscript{311} Activists must try such means before resorting to violence.\textsuperscript{312}

With clearly different emphases, all interviewees affirmed effective means of 
action across the liberal-to-radical spectrum, in order to create the conditions for when a 
radically transformational moment might be seized, the \textit{kairos} moment. Staughton Lynd 
writes about the difference in thinking through reforms that might be considered 
revolutionary or radical, and reforms that are not.\textsuperscript{313} About the various means of 
advocating for prisoners, Lynd wrote,

Our maximum program has always been, Shut [the prison] down. Our minimum 
program has been, Make it into a maximum security prison with a small 
supermaximum security section for prisoners who actually have committed 
serious acts of violence while in prison. We have accomplished the latter…. 
Presently we are taking up the demand for death-sentenced prisoners that they 
should have full contact visits throughout their time on Death Row…. This is a 
struggle we can win. We will conduct it both in the courtroom and on the streets, 
in the courtroom of public opinion. And if we do so effectively it will not only 
seek to achieve an immediate human objective, but to make the public more

\textsuperscript{311} Kelly echoed activist Barbara Deming, who argued that nonviolence has not been sufficiently 
(198). Deming did not doubt the claim that the tactics of nonviolence have not yielded sufficient justice in 
most cases. Yet instead of rejecting nonviolence as a consequence of its failures, she suggested that 
(non)violent activists ask themselves certain questions. “Have gains been slight because nonviolent tactics 
were the wrong tactics to employ – or did many of those leading the battle underestimate the difficulties of 
the terrain before them? Did they lack at the start a sufficiently radical vision? Can those who have now 
turned from reliance on nonviolence say surely that resort to violence over those same years would have 
brought greater gains (200)?” Deming believed that examining such questions will lead revolutionary 
activists to grasp that nonviolence has not been adequately tested (202). Deming counsels an approach that 
stands between mere moral persuasion and a resort to violent power (203) nonviolent political, social, 
psychological and physical force, confronting the antagonists with defiant bodies (205). “The challenge to 
those who believe in nonviolent struggle is to learn to be aggressive enough (219).” Taiaike Alfred calls 
this non-violent militancy (Wasâxe, 55).

\textsuperscript{312} Joseph Kip Kosek suggests that the U.S. Christian pacifists in the early days Fellowship of 
Reconciliation saw nonviolence precisely as a radical means of rejecting the liberal-revolutionary divide 
between passive non-resistance and the armed violence of Marxism, in \textit{Acts of Conscience: Christian 

\textsuperscript{313} Lynd, \textit{Wobblies and Zapatistas}, 95.
aware of death-sentenced prisoners as fellow human beings: the perception that may lead, over time, to the abolition of the death penalty. Thus this “reform” — that a person sentenced to death be able to touch and hug members of his family — while it may not be revolutionary, will draw on the efforts of prisoners and their relatives as well as the effort of lawyers, and has a horizon, a penumbra that suggests that a different kind of world is possible.\textsuperscript{314}

This idea of creating a different or new world within the context of the old, understood as a vision of working for transformation towards a (non)violent world within the context of the structures of violence, fits into the traditional framework of “faithful, not effective.” Yet the structures of violence “the old world” nonetheless demand intentional efforts towards meaningful, effective transformation in the now.

Embracing the liberal-to-radical spectrum works towards a goal of effectiveness by promoting the understanding that persons have varieties of experience with activism. Persons with different experiences in social change and from different social locations are going to exist at different levels of ability, knowledge, willingness and readiness to participate. For Alice Lynd, for example, effective social action always had to be something that was consonant with what she was able to do. During the early civil rights and Vietnam era this had practically to do with the fact that she was a mother.

My feeling was, yes, I’m willing to do this but as a live-in not as a sit-in. I didn’t want to be involved in things that involved getting arrested and civil disobedience and things of that nature. I was a mother of young children and it was fine by me to live on the college campus and to even to engage with white neighbors as I walked our son to kindergarten through the neighborhood. I was primarily a young mother rather than a civil rights activist. During the Vietnam War, early on, [friends] came to visit us, talking about how the Vietnamese women would go out at night to talk to soldiers and try to win them over to not fighting against the villagers. I had the feeling that I needed to find some equivalent, again as a mother of young children, that I could do that wasn’t going to be picketing out in front the induction center or something like that. But something that I could do

\textsuperscript{314} Ibid., 96-7.
consistently with being a mother and a teacher of young children as I was then, against the war. I discovered draft counseling.

Even as these scholars and activists primarily represent more radical visions and goals for social transformation, they recognized that their own capacity and desire to actively resist developed over time.

Particularly in light of the current era of non-revolutionary regression that the United States appears to be in, the development of a broader culture of resistance requires several other elements, which might be considered more liberal than radical. Schulman likened the gay liberation struggle now to its pre-revolutionary days of an earlier generation, “when so much newly preliminary and yet foundational work can be done.” Individuals and communities need to be prepared for the seizing of revolutionary opportunities when they arrive. Therefore, identification of these tactics and strategizing and implementation of multiple means across the liberal-to-radical divide make for effective social transformation over time.

**Collective Practices for Effectiveness**

Matters of effectiveness deal with how to meet people where they are, how to encourage them to push themselves to greater lengths of social change commitment, and how to hold persons accountable to making sacrifices to achieve the changes they claim to desire and seek. Whatever their opinions on the justifiability of violent or (non)violent

---

315 The research for this dissertation took place prior to the advent of the Occupy movement in the United States. It remains to be seen if the Occupy movement has real revolutionary potential and may plant the seeds of revolution over the long-term.

tactics, interviewees spoke about four areas in tactics and strategy that have potential as a constellation of practices for effective structural-transformational effect on systems of violence. Because neither the vast majority nor a committed minority is prepared for the demands of radical action in the United States today, collective practices must work to meet different audiences where they are, seeking to create communities of resistance, and preparing the ground for greater risk. These four areas include: 1) consciousness-raising among both oppressed communities and within privileged communities in the broader dominant culture; 2) organizing for people power; 3) building alternative communities and lifestyles to prefigure a shift in the political and economic power structures, and; 4) sustained, direct action by a critical mass. Every circumstance requires its own contextual analysis. Yet in general terms, holding the matter of the justifiability of violence and (non)violence in tension and suspension, I claim this overall portrayal, if it were collectively enacted within our identified communities of belonging, is faithful and effective to achieving a profound social transformational end. These practices intend to confront violence at multiple levels, working towards effectively dismantling denial, reversal, entitlement, individualism, abstraction and human supremacism.

Effectiveness I: Consciousness-Raising

Among many efforts, all of the interviewees were involved in consciousness-raising of many kinds: public lecturing, scholarly and popular writing, teaching, organizing educational forums. Since one of the critical elements of perpetuation of all forms of violence is the U.S. denial of its history, for the interviewees, breaking this
denial through consciousness-raising is a tactic of social transformation. There are different reasons for consciousness-raising, however, depending on the community.

**Consciousness-Raising in the Dominant Culture**

Kelly spends much time in the United States creating “some more heightened awareness either through virtue of speaking or writing of people who bear the brunt of our wars.” This critical dimension of change humanizes the war-time enemy. Through truth-telling and humanization, consciousness-raising exposes the falsity of the reversal of the so-called enemy (Iraqis, Afghans, Muslims, etc.) as a freedom-hating, violent threat and the perpetrator (the United States) as the benevolent, freedom-loving liberator.

Like Kelly, B♀ made it clear how consciousness-raising was a necessary addition to other more militant forms of action with a revolutionary purpose. The tactic of property destruction was meant to raise critical consciousness. It gave the George Jackson Brigade “a way to talk.” Sabotage created moments in which to raise the following primary point:

> We are at war. Most people don’t want to say that or recognize that, but we are. We have an internal war that goes on every day in this country…. The new statistic for California is one in four kids is hungry in this state. One in four. That’s the result of a war. A social war of the government against its citizens. So it lets the enemy know what we’re aware that it’s a war. It lets the people know, if you can write your information in such a way that it exposes those facts.... It lets us start talking about other things.

Consciousness-raising in the dominant culture intends to expose structural violence – how wealth and privilege depends upon the impoverishment of others. This awareness on
the part of the dominant culture is vehemently resisted, but profound social
transformation is impossible without raising this basic awareness.

Churchill said the notion that privileged persons will have their consciousness
changed by information, and to act on that basis “is to be extremely optimistic in a way.”
Yet he holds some optimism for the possibility that people can change. Here Churchill
noted that “tactical considerations” are not only about revolutionary, material, structural
shifts, but influencing “root-level apprehension” of the conditions and thought-structures
which have led to endemic structural and cultural violence.

For example, B♀, Schulman, Huerta and Jensen all spoke directly to the need to
raise consciousness about the nature of racism endemic to U.S. history within the
dominant culture. Consciousness-raising in the dominant culture may serve to address
white denial, racist reversals and white people’s sense of entitlement about their material
advantages. Social justice in the United States will never be achieved without dismantling
racism at this root level. Yet raising consciousness about racism in the dominant white
culture has not effectively eradicated it in its psychological and material effects. Jensen
states that there must be corresponding revolutions on the inside (perceiving, thinking,
being) and the outside (breaking down of current system structures). Consciousness-
raising lays a groundwork within dominant culture for future possibilities to disrupt and
transform structural and cultural violence.

---

Consciousness-Raising in Oppressed Communities

Schulman and Umoja stressed just because persons live in oppressed identity communities does not mean that they will have a political consciousness about the structural nature of oppression and violence. Therefore, political consciousness-raising in marginalized communities is also critical. Umoja emphasized that the primary obstacle to the liberation of oppressed communities is their acceptance of the terms of their own oppression: they do not believe they can be free. Speaking about a number of communities from blacks in the United States to Palestinians, Umoja said

People who are oppressed have to be ungovernable…. It’s not just a question of guns or weaponry or anything like that but how determined are the people to achieve whatever the political goal is. Look at struggles we see in Palestine. People are tremendously determined to assert their self-determination. Even if they don’t have guns, they’re throwing rocks. It appears that Palestine’s not going to die because in the minds of these people it is worth them sacrificing their lives for and putting their bodies and lives in jeopardy to disrupt this system they see is oppressing them. It’s really a question of “what is the will of the people?” Not just a small group but the majority of the people. Are they willing to accept oppression? What are they willing to do to disrupt it? They have to see that the system that oppresses them is illegitimate and they have to feel that they have the capacity to defeat it and they have the capacity to be in command of their own affairs.

Each community has to determine in each context what the means are necessary and effective to defeat the system that oppresses them. But in order to determine those means, there has to be a consciousness in the first place.

---

318 Schulman noted that many queer persons coming from different class positions, have a similar lack of consciousness about the nature of queer oppression and heteronormativity. Multiple conditions of consciousness and intersecting identities all have an impact on the ability to imagine “a more humane, truthful, open way of life….” *Gentrification of the Mind*, 11.

319 Umoja echoes Gene Sharp’s theory of nonviolent revolution where the tyrannized eventually refuse to cooperate with rulers on a mass level (*Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I*, 47).
People just have to have that type of insurgent consciousness.\textsuperscript{320} That’s lacking right now…. In the United States overall there’s a lack of insurgent consciousness. I look at my students today. Just the thought that there could potentially be a revolution is different from when I was a young man…. I thought we had more hope. Not just hope, but more feeling that there were radical alternatives and possibilities. Right now I don’t see that. That lack of imagination comes from just not seeing those possibilities. The world is different. The world I grew up in, you had Vietnam going on, you had these revolutions going on in Africa, Latin America. It wasn’t just the United States but all these places, you had all this insurgent activity. It’s not like that right now. Something similar has to be there for us to even think a revolution is possible. To think that significant social change is possible. That’s the most significant weapon we have right now, our own imaginations and minds.

Every interviewee saw that raising the critical, political consciousness of oppressed communities was crucial, particularly as socio-structural change does not emanate from the dominant culture of a society, but from and across the margins of society. Schulman explained.

Revolutionary movements are not born in suburbs. They’re born in different kinds of places where different kinds of people are living in front of each other…. Mostly change, and this is true for cultural change and aesthetic change, it starts in the margins. Then it moves to the center. Change does not start in the mainstream. The mainstream absorbs it from the margins. The most effective ways to make social change are from subcultures and counter-cultures. Then those ideas become mainstream ideas. New ideas are not produced in the mainstream in America. Because the mainstream is so homogenous and can’t conceptualize. That’s why we’re in so much trouble is because so many people can’t conceptualize.

ACT-UP was a highly successful aspect of the overall gay liberation movement because it spoke from the margins. By contrast, in her opinion Schulman said that the current gay liberation movement is so assimilated to the mainstream and conforming to middle-class

\textsuperscript{320} Umoja reflects Onkwehonwe activist and scholar Taiaike Alfred’s perspective that indigenous communities must fundamentally shift political and cultural consciousness, or else there is “no cultural base for mass action, nor is there a crucial mass of strong people to support actions and strategy that have any hope of challenging state power in any form” (\textit{Wasâsê}, 59-60). For example, Alfred suggests that the racism of white people against indigenous people “is the first and most important target of action” (60). But leaders and the people must believe that racism “\textit{can} be overcome,” which requires a reorientation of the conscious and subconscious mind and an acceptance of responsibility to act (61).
norms such as marriage, their strategies today fail to make fundamental structural changes. The most radical work for gay liberation is coming from transnational movements outside of the United States.321

Schulman believes that the most radical and important work in this country is taking place both in and across marginalized subcultures in the United States. For example, Schulman raises consciousness about Palestinian self-determination within the gay and lesbian subculture; who, like any other community in the United States, has no face for Palestine. “Most of the people who support the current regime only have received wisdom. They haven’t thought it through for themselves.”

On any issue there will always be hard core people who will never change their minds on anything. But you don’t have to persuade everybody, all you need is a critical mass. I think there are five communities in the United States that really want to move forward on Palestine and are looking for leadership: LGBT, secular Jews, African-Americans, academics, and artists. These are communities where, if credible leaders who they recognize, who are usually only subcultural, would give them permission to advance their thinking, they would. That’s my responsibility right now…. The job for someone like me who is a very low-level, subcultural organizer is just to make my community more aware. Other people are doing it in their community. When the moment that certain kinds of policy things come up, then there will be various subcultures that are sophisticated to those things.

B♀ also described that one of the keys to the revolutionary period in the early seventies when radical-subcultural groups (“a silent coalition of women”: feminists, lesbians, womyn, anti-war and prison activists) shared space and an underground press for self-publishing. The strength of consciousness-raising among sub-cultural communities

---

321 The homogenization of thinking and its effects on assimilationist strategies, particularly among the gay and lesbian community in the United States, is the topic of Chapter Five in Schulman’s Gentrification of the Mind. Staughton Lynd also notes that in terms of the struggle against neo-liberal globalization, “We in the imperialist heartland need to be humble. Others are now on the frontlines” (Lynd, Wobblies and Zapatistas, 93).
promotes both self-determination within particular identity groups and raises political awareness across oppressed identity groups.

Effectiveness II: Organizing for People Power

The need for information of all kinds is not only to serve as a corrective to denial, but to actually empower oppressed communities to engage in both critical understanding and to be empowered to act locally in ways that they have been denied historically. Schulman noted that story-telling and consciousness-raising are important, but are not a substitute for other means of social change. People need more than stories and awareness, they need tools and collective power. Huerta said,

We are a very uninformed society. Dangerously uninformed. The average person doesn’t know how things work. Our government, the political machinery. People don’t realize that they have the power to have an influence in government. This is one thing that we teach our people, that we can get our Board of Supervisors to give us some money that we need for the sidewalks, and the streetlights, and the swimming pool, and things of this nature. Once they can learn that, then they sense that they can make a difference, that they can be in the decision-making. The average person doesn’t have a clue.

To Huerta, poor and marginalized communities in particular don’t need abstractions. They need specific information and concrete tools by which they can act. “You’ve gotta be specific. You really have to educate people. To generalize, you are not really educating them.” Actually reversing the false portrayals of the oppressed will never be achieved without bringing people both critical awareness and tools by which marginalized persons can act together.

Consciousness-raising is not effective until it moves into collective action. Huerta showed that education and consciousness-raising serve a limited effect without the
parallel process of organizing people for political and economic power. When I asked
Huerta what she believed to be the (non)violent strategies that promote social change
most effectively today, she answered. “Just organizing. I think just organizing and
educating people.” Huerta comments that what constitutes organizing and education
today is the same as in earlier movements: raising money, hiring and training organizers,
going into the community and meeting with hundreds of people one-on-one, holding
house meetings, creating neighborhood organizations, learning direct democracy,
choosing and rotating leaders, teaching people how to plan, research, creating educational
forums.

In Huerta’s mind, educating and organizing are fundamentally about developing
leaders. Organizing always starts with education that gives people empowering
information and specific tools to become leaders in order to change their immediate
circumstances. There is a tension and a connection in severely marginalized and
exploited communities like the farm workers in central California, between
consciousness-raising and meeting basic community needs. She described varied small,
local organizing efforts effectively organizing to get sidewalks, curbs and streetlights in
rural areas, passing bond issues for a local gymnasium and swimming pool. These small
victories allowed for larger efforts to raise consciousness and work towards increasing
wages for all local farm workers. Financial literacy training led to matching programs and
micro-enterprise loan development, and to larger understandings of economic power.
Because dozens of local, smaller grassroots initiatives have been successful, the
organization as a whole has been able to mobilize on larger issues such as health care, by
implementing multiple strategies in one campaign: postcard and letter-writing to congresspersons, picketing their fundraisers, creating forums with other organizations, media strategies, story-telling, even fasting.

Most local, grassroots initiatives require small victories to keep momentum and to believe achieving political power is possible. Schulman saw this necessary psychological component within (non)violent social change. She said, “When you try a strategy, there has to be a chance that it can succeed. Because if you don’t have victories, you can’t have a movement. Human beings need victories, it’s a human thing. Even tiny victories.” The “faithful, not effective” approach fails to recognize that even small-scale effectiveness motivates commitment to a longer-term vision of change in addition to, if not apart from, a faith perspective.

Moving from consciousness to implementing action is incredibly challenging. Schulman discussed how difficult it is to organize communities that have been historically disempowered.

One of the problems of organizing powerless people or people who have been excluded from power is that they are not proactive. They don’t have the feeling or experience that they could have an idea and that idea could actually happen…. When you’re organizing people who are powerless, your job is to transform them into implementers so that they can actually take responsibility for having ideas and for following through and implementing. That’s possible by creating positive environments and communities where people depend on each other and a culture of accountability, real leadership can be there.

**Caution: Organizing versus Organizations**

Umoja agreed that for the black community this moment in history is “a period of time of building consciousness and institutions and organizing people.” Consciousness-
raising and organizing prepares communities to agitate on issues like police brutality, health care, education, and prisons. Given the intractable nature of economic power, Umoja noted that even significant reform-oriented solutions eventually require significant social movements to make real change. Movement-building is a serious issue in the social change environment today that is different from an earlier era.

Right now we have organizations, we don’t have a movement per se…. I remember when it was a movement. Everybody in my community knew what the Black Panther Party was. I can’t say that about my organization, that everybody in my neighborhood knows about [it]. It’s a different period. Everybody knew there was a significant anti-war movement. I remember we were even thinking when I was a teenager, “Man, should we register or not?” If you have a significant movement it puts it on everybody’s agenda.

Umoja points to some of the problems with community organizing which have developed since the movement era of the sixties and seventies.

I see a lot of good, young activists who might be interested in particular things. But because they have these jobs working for non-profits that becomes their agenda, whatever the non-profit’s agenda is. I think that’s part of the problem. These people in SNCC, they were working for pennies. I’m not saying people shouldn’t be compensated, if we had a capacity to pay people. But a lot of times I think they’re working around things that are disconnected from what people want and need and desire, folks who are struggling. Look at our educational system. Or people losing their houses right now. That’s not necessarily where the dollars for organizing people [are]. For non-profits, it’s not where the money is so we don’t have any activity around that.

Schulman concurs with Umoja, commenting that in the current era we have bureaucracies and not “real activism…. there are no structures in place radical enough to be able to mobilize people to respond effectively” to any issues such as “budget cuts, lack of jobs, lack of educational opportunities, foreclosures, etc.”

---

322 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 12.
Huerta also noted that organizing is different today than in more radical times. “Cesar never wanted the people who worked for the union to have more money than the workers. He wanted them to live at the same level of poverty, so to speak.... But that changed.” Since then, the non-profit sector started was organized in a different way. Union organizers were very well trained and began to receive “nice, big fat salaries” in other unions. In order to compete for the best organizers, the farm workers movement had to professionalize and offer salaries. Furthermore, Huerta noted, the economy has become so stratified that individuals can no longer make the same kind of commitments that they once might have been able to make.

The way that our country is now structured financially makes it very difficult for people to make a full-time commitment. Back in the day when we started, rents were forty dollars a month. Gas was 27 cents a gallon. People could afford to be committed. People hitchhiked everywhere. We have this whole fear ambience around our country now so that people are afraid to help each other out. People won’t talk to each other. Everything is so expensive. So people can’t hardly afford to be a full-time volunteer. People have to work two jobs to pay the bills. It’s just very expensive to fulfill your basic needs. So in the United States I think it’s very difficult for people to commit a lot of time.

Increasing levels of structural violence impacts the ability to organize.

Staughton Lynd had an even deeper critique of organizing, that there is an “implicit inequality” between the organizer and the organized.

---

323 Schulman makes a related point on professionalization and the gentrification of the gay liberation movement. The difference between the avant-garde, grassroots creative art community that existed before and during the ACT UP era (and which motivated and expressed the movement) and the artist community today is the professionalization of the creative arts into and out of academic programs (Gentrification of the Mind, 101). Within the political realm, “one of the key moments where we lost momentum of vision was when our leadership transitioned from organic to appointed. That is to say, when we shifted from leaders who rose naturally from within our communities to ones who were appointed by corporate media” (115).

324 Lynd expands on this idea in Here to There, 16; 215
I have come to the conclusion that everything we did in the 1960s presupposed a superficial and inaccurate conception of organizing. This was true of the labor movement, the Alinsky movement for community organizing, SNCC in the south, and SDS in the north. The idea was... you come into a situation, you sleep on the floor and eat peanut butter sandwiches. Or you take a room in the motel or whatever. Your conception is that you are not going to be there very long. You are just going to help people form their own organization with leaders that are responsible to the rank and file. Once you’ve brought that into being then your work is over. You leave. There are all kinds of statements from people to the effect that this is exactly what folks sought to do.

In the place of organizing by outsiders, Lynd counsels and lives an “intense localism.”

A given project should not be thought of

merely as a tool for social change, but as a community.... The spirit of a community, as opposed to an organization, is not, We are together to accomplish this or that end, but, We are together to face together whatever life brings.

For Lynd, organizations – both non-profits and labor unions – promote a “complex and restrictive institutional environment that stands in the way of creative and spontaneous action from below” and leaves prominent power dynamics in place, reinforcing the existing economic structures.

Organizing and consciousness-raising may be particularly effective in bringing people together around shared concerns and action in a non-revolutionary context. There is a greater possibility of bringing people into social change activism through such

---

325 Saul Alinsky is generally considered to be the founder of the contemporary, post-civil rights community organizing tradition in the United States. Lynd was one of the original faculty in Alinsky’s training school.

326 To illustrate localism, Lynd points to Henry David Thoreau and Gandhi’s practice of swadeshi in Here to There, 37.

327 Lynd, From Here to There, 94. Much more will be said of this from Lynd’s perspective in Chapter Five.

328 Lynd, Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change (forthcoming), unpublished manuscript, 2.

329 Ibid., 21; 25.
means, preparing and creating the understanding and conditions for later action. They may also provide those uninitiated to taking social action better critical tools to understand more radical actions, even if they do not take them. No matter the social location or length of experience of activists, organizing and consciousness-raising should be ongoing tactics aimed at radical social change, to deepen critical analysis at all levels of engagement and to renew veteran activist circles.

Effectiveness III: Alternative Communities

Radical transformation over time is rarely achieved by persons without a long-term investment in community-building. No matter what the interviewees believed about the use of violence or (non)violence for social transformation, all agreed that resistance to a culture of violence, particularly economic, could only be nurtured in community. While religious institutions are fraught with inconsistencies and hypocrisy over matters of violence, certain religious communities were viewed as some of the few examples where resistance to popular culture was made publicly manifest. Jensen affirmed that

We need to learn from egalitarian religious and especially extant indigenous groups must be on process: not on the creation of things and the accumulation of monetary or political power, but on the acknowledgement and maintenance of relationships, on both personal and grand scales.330

When I asked Kelly about where the particular sense of (non)violence began to be nurtured in her life, she described how the nuns in school and church showed her that

You could be reasonably happy and fulfilled without having the slightest interest in acquiring personal wealth. They shared everything in common, they wore the same outfits in common, they worked for no salary whatsoever, did good work and we always presumed they were doing more good work for people who were

330 Jensen, Language Older than Words, 262.
less well-off than we were elsewhere... They were pretty astonishing, educated women, given the resources available to them. That to me was a fairly heroic example of how a life could be organized with other people to try to accomplish certain, writ large, the works of mercy as opposed the works of war. So that part of Christianity as it was mediated to me is really important.

As much literature on Christian (non)violence raises, Kelly and Dear pointed out that a Christian tradition existed outside of the political and economic order prior to the adoption of Christianity by the Roman Empire. Kelly referenced early Christian communities’ “300 years of witness” and active consideration “of the risk to give in to the military.” There is scriptural evidence which suggests these early Christian communities shared economic resources across class boundaries. This usage of Christian historic origins as examples for counter-cultural, anti-institutional communities served as one of the strongest currents in defining the possibilities for an effective Christian (non)violence that offers real alternatives to structural violence.

Christian community provided Dear with a basis for making radical commitments. For five hundred years his Jesuit order has taken seriously preparing for life-long vows. During preparation for taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, Dear and three fellow ordinands decided to prepare an additional vow, modeling it on Gandhi’s vow of (non)violence. Dear described the years of practicing, praying and studying about (non)violence, experimenting on fellow Jesuits and at the Pentagon. In his many years of obeying the vow, he has been “scared to death and shaken,” beaten and mocked, and went to prison. He put himself in many of these positions.

---

331 Dear’s process of taking a vow of nonviolence is found in Disarming the Heart and A Persistent Peace.
In some very dark moments I did not respond with violence because I said ‘I professed a vow.’ So something happened to me… There’s a tradition in our Catholic, Christian, Western spirituality for two thousand years of taking these holy vows to God. In Christian language, there is a grace there….

Dear believed that the depth and length of such a process in Christian communities could have a greater transformational impact.₃³²

Harding put his growing interest in (non)violence into practice when he joined a faith community in the Chicago area, and became a part of its pastoral team.

It was in that context that my whole sense of the meaning of nonviolence began to grow. In ’58 some of us from that congregation began talking about what was going on in the South. And began asking ourselves whether or not the brotherhood and sisterhood across racial lines that we said we were so glad to be representing on the South Side of Chicago, we kept asking, “Well, what if we were in the South? What would it mean there?” The Mennonites have chosen this term of “discipleship” as a way of identifying their way of being, and we were asking – what would it mean to be disciples in the deep South? Some of us… said “why don’t we go and find out what it would mean?”…So five of us, three whites and two blacks got into a station wagon and promised that we would do our best to remain committed to our conviction that we were brothers and that no human laws could separate us.

This smaller group began to ask questions within a larger Mennonite community:

What does nonviolence and nonresistance do or say in the light of the struggle going on in the South that is committed to nonviolent action? What do nonviolent Christians have to say to that?

In other words, alternative communities are not meant for their own edification, but to impact the violence and (non)violence of others.

Though still Quakers, at the time of their interview the Lynds described the surprise with which they found themselves attending a number of primarily Christian groups for discussion about current issues of concern and action, as well as spiritual

₃³² In fact, the vow of nonviolence was developed for use by the organization Pax Christi. See http://paxchristiusa.org/resources/vow-of-nonviolence/. Dear lamented that it was not taken with the seriousness of commitment which he intended.
practice. Staughton Lynd tried to explain why they found themselves in such communities at this time.

After all these years of struggle and befriending this group and that group, we find ourselves going to three different sets of meetings with religious seekers. Now why are we doing that?… It’s as if you don’t pick these people. It’s that they are called to something that you are also called to…. The ardor, the sense of being devoted to something that is speaking through all of us.

Lynd said that it was difficult to know what the role of such entities is, particularly in a historical time when it is unclear if the nation is headed towards greater openness or fascism. As a historian he noted that in some of the longest periods of barbarism, Christian monasteries and desert communities “were indispensable to the human spirit.”

Neither he nor Alice had

the faintest idea of why it is that we’re meeting with these people… It has something to do with the fact that capitalism has destroyed Youngstown. … So under such circumstances, the different kinds of ‘Voice[s] that cryeth in the wilderness…. Make plain the way of the Lord’ are important.

People need concrete communities in which to resist and act against the structures of violence in the culture. These communities are meant to work against individualism, sustain voices against violence, and actively refuse to go along with the structures of economic violence that destroy communities. This happens through various practices of shared living, studying, spiritual rituals and direct confrontation.

Many alternative communities have a critique of the economic structures that are at the heart of their vision. The critique lives itself out in sharing economic resources. Huerta described the union headquarters at La Paz at the farm workers’ movement. It was formed on the basis of Gandhi’s concept of the ashram, where all things were held in common.
From day one of the organization, we discussed a lot about Gandhi, how [César] wanted to form the union. [Gandhi] had ashrams... That was the concept that began the headquarters of the union. We called it La Paz, peace. It was a community. Now looking back I don’t think we could have built the union any other way. No one took salaries. Like the ashram concept where people work and all of what they earned went to the organization. That’s pretty much the way that we lived. Whatever money we raised went towards the union, to build a union. At La Paz we had a community kitchen where everybody ate together.... We had several trainings and we would bring all the farm workers up there to live so that they could get trained. So everybody lived together and we had a community kitchen. It was that concept from the ashram concept that we did that. People lived off food stamps.

Kelly is committed to creating shared, community, nurtured outside of formal institutions, focused on just economic living as a form of (non)violence.

I want to be part of that effort within the peace movement that links change of lifestyle to the possibility of pacifism. ‘Cause I don’t think it is appropriate to talk about pacifism if we are not willing almost in the same breath to talk about simple living and sharing resources and preferring service to dominance, because if we don’t accomplish those changes, then I don’t see how we can have a pacifistic relationship to other people, because our lifestyles are so inherently violent in the American way of life.

Kelly posed a series of questions about learning to practice resistance to economic domination through communal living and lifestyle changes.

How am I going to travel?... Am I in the habit of tilting increasingly towards actions that carry small little slap on the wrist penalties rather than something that would really cause a change in my patterns and some measure of sacrifice? To what extent am I willing to say that I should be part of, at least have some agrarian component in my lifestyle, so that the hard work of planting and cultivating food is something I am familiar with.

Power concurred that resistance includes looking closely and candidly at our economic behavior.

To the extent that we can openly and honestly reflect on the inadequacy of our old tools, our given modes, to that extent that’s how much this can take hold and we can participate in it. The model in my life is again coming face-to-face with the fact of the outcome of violence and integrating that. Literally “paying the price” for it, acknowledging the harm and suffering we have caused. Instead of
righteously condemning everybody else, you are looking more clearly at your own effects. If we can do that really honestly and wisely, we are going to be more effective. People have said, “What can you do?” I say, “Well you know, here’s a really simple one. Take moral responsibility for every relationship that you are involved with by reason of economics.” Just do that. That will do it. That will become overwhelming, so choose one. I will not consume alienated products. Or fair trade. I will know the person who wove this cloth. Whatever. Find your answers to that. This is a creative process. We’re all in denial about what we’re stealing and who we’re murdering, human and other than human. We have to look at that.

To adequately claim (non)violence as a method of social transformation, Christian communities (institutions and alternative communities) must look clearly at their economic behaviors. Ultimately, the transformation of violence implies sacrificing the sense of entitlement around economic lifestyle that comes with the economic privileges and material advantages of structural violence. This kind of collective, anti-economic approach to (non)violence is rare, and rarely achieved outside of community.

Caution: Lifestyle Activism Does Not Equal Social Transformation

Most changes in lifestyle, even in community, offer little by way of actual challenge to structures of violence, and have a weak claim to being effectively (non)violent tactics; that is, addressing violence at its multiple levels. Staughton and Alice Lynd have a life-long commitment to living in community and creating community resistance to economic injustices locally. For Staughton Lynd, we need to experience what a new society might be like with “prefigurative experimentation, the construction and nurturing of new institutions… a horizontal network of self-governing local entities

[333] “Pre-figurative relations” is a term and practice popularly used within anarchist communities where a new society is built “within the shell of the old” (Lynd, Wobblies & Zapatistas, 49) by creating relationships, actions and community practices that reject hierarchy and affirm participatory democracy. The concept is associated with the Marxist Antonio Gramsci, who wrote that new forms of social relationships would be “prefigured” under capitalism that anticipated socialism.
comprising a “dual power” that begins to manage our common affairs in a new way.”

When and where these parallel institutions have been created currently in the United States, they have yet to be sustainable or to provide substantive alternatives to actual structures of power. He wrote,

"In the area of economics participatory democracy cannot provide a full alternative to established institutions except by capturing and transforming them…. Can we not agree that participatory democracy, understood as a movement building new institutions side-by-side with the old, cannot provide bread and land? Failure to face this problem realistically will result in the poor turning for help to those who can provide it at least in part, and the cooptation of protest movements by the Establishment."

SNCC’s radical efforts to organize black voters in the deep South reverted to democratic party politics, and resulted in the demise of SNCC itself partly for “ignoring the need for an economic program” to help blacks “find their way beyond desperate poverty and economic dependence.” One of the main problems of the “faithful, not effective” approach to social change is there is rarely a faithful provision or development by (non)violent Christian communities of what might constitute a truly alternative (non)violent political and economic strategy in any context. Lynd encourages

---

334 Lynd discusses different terms – parallel institutions, dual power, affective communities, warrens – and offers historical examples for the concept and practice of parallel institutions in _Here to There_, 88-92, 233; _Wobblies & Zapatistas_, 49-50, 78-83.

335 Lynd, _Wobblies & Zapatistas_, 68-69. Lynd writes that he sees the most hope for the longevity of such communities in models coming out of Latin American, such as the Zapatistas, 68-69.

336 Lynd, _Here to There_, 90; another reference to addressing “bread and land” is on 291.

337 Lynd, _Accompanying_, 75-76.

338 This lack of concrete strategizing is particularly true among theological academics. One notable exception to this statement is Glen Stassen. While many of his (non)violent theological claims are subject to all of the critiques of others white, liberal, U.S. Christian theologians throughout this dissertation (see his _Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context_ (Downer’s Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003), Stassen attempts to offer concrete and strategic proposals for his model of “just peacemaking.” See
alternative communities to actually think through the development of sustainable local institutions versus the current reality of alternative communities serving as opportunities for privileged people to change their lifestyles. Staughton Lynd cautioned against a kind of naïve optimism about what alternative living and “green” efforts really contribute in light of the barbarism of capitalism.

I am darned if I’m going to be a middle-class tree planter and market gardener and this sort of thing, as if that were any sort of any kind of real solution to kids growing up in the inner city. Which doesn’t mean that we don’t have a garden right about ten feet from where you’re sitting. But people who have put all their energies into such things and who, worse, conceptualize them as a real road to the future, I think are deceiving themselves.

Churchill and Jensen also mounted a substantial critique of “alternative” lifestyles. The inherent individualism of lifestyle activism bears little to no effect on structures of violence, and are often co-opted by the systems to which they are alternatives. Recycling is not a “bad thing,” Churchill said, but economic structures have turned it into a profit-making business. Many things that people recycle probably “ought not to have been used” in the first place. Riding a bicycle or getting your own wind generator, which presumes you could afford one, doesn’t alter the fundamental disparity and resource distribution and so forth that make the baseline expectation of what quality of life should be in this country any different.

In the dominant culture, lifestyle activism takes the current economic system and human supremacism for granted. Churchill noted how “green jobs” and “green

his edited volume, Just Peacemaking: Ten Practices for Abolishing War (Cleveland, OH: Pilgrim Press, 1998). All of the proposals in this volume, however, focus primarily on war as violence, take for granted the existence of current institutions (churches, the United Nations, military and police forces, etc.) as the loci for social transformation, and accepted modes of peacemaking (NATO, conflict resolution, democracy, NGOs, etc.). These proposals recognize but delve little into the problems of structural and cultural violence.
technology” is still a structurally violent point of view that “leaves the fundamental
genocidal equation in place,” as far as justifying the destruction of the earth and those mostly closely associated with it. There’s nothing in the green revolution

that suggests that somebody who’s already having so little impact that they happen to be the in the upper Amazon region in Venezuela shouldn’t be dispossessed and their land put to better use so that other people can continue to enjoy the level of affluence they happen to enjoy right now while having a lesser environmental impact.

Therefore, within the context of eradicating structures of violence, they are not actively, disruptively (non)violent. Overall consumption and the set of expectations that go into the nature of even a working class lifestyle in this country create incredible disequilibrium throughout the earth and world. From an indigenous perspective, the knowledge of environmental destruction calls for balance in all relations relation and to begin to bring things back. For Churchill, this is a fundamentally anti-economic, anti-growth point of view.

Jensen said that personal lifestyle change may be important, but it is not enough.

People forget that personal change is not social change. There are no personal solutions to social problems. If you put this in another context it becomes really obvious. I mean does anybody really think that composting would have stopped Hitler? It’s like, let’s all ride our bikes to work to stop capitalism. It’s just crazy.

The confusion about what real change looks like plagues environmentalism today and connects to his previous analysis of learned helplessness. He said,

There’s a lot of people end up stuck on this notion of “if I change myself that’ll change other people.” That has absolutely destroyed potential for social change the environmental movement may have ever had…. The notion of only personal change has so metastasized across social movements that a lot of people can’t even conceptualize the notion of organized political resistance. They think that recycling is environmental. They think that green consumerism is environmental. Vegetarianism’s going to save the world.
Alternative communities and lifestyles may appeal to a larger portion of the general population. They may provide the community in which actual resistance to structures of violence may be nurtured and sustained, and bread and land are offered in real ways. Currently these efforts have serious limits to seriously confronting and transforming violence, or offering real alternatives to the status quo. Alternative communities and lifestyle activism should not be a substitute for organized resistance, but sites for its development and enactment.

Effectiveness IV: Disruptive, Direct Action

At the level of activism where persons and communities are already involved in some level of social change, interviewees all affirmed that fundamental socio-structural change demands increasingly radical tactics that effectively and collectively resist and transform power. The central aspect of this effectiveness is to disrupt the control of the systems of cultural, structural and direct violence. A critical element of effective disruption by small groups is the collective ability to sustain it. Referencing something he heard from Daniel Berrigan, Dear said,

“In the end, positive social change happens when good people break bad laws and accept the consequences.” All the movements from the abolitionists, the suffragists, civil rights movement, labor movement, anti-war movement, were all hopeless throughout their whole life and then suddenly there was a breakthrough

---

339 Interviewees’ perspectives on disruption echo multiple aspects of Gene Sharp’s political theory of nonviolent action. Derived from Weber’s theory of political power, Sharp’s theory is that (political and economic) power relies fundamentally on the consent and obedience of the masses (The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I, “Power and Struggle,” 12). The operating principle of (non)violent change is that significant public consent must be withdrawn (30-31). “Noncooperation and disobedience must be widespread…” (32). With differing emphases, this is also Hannah Arendt’s view of consent and power in Part II of On Violence (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1970).
of hope. Why? Because ordinary people kept at it. They didn’t go away. There was no sign of change. There was no way they were going to get rid of slavery. There’s no way women would ever get the right to vote. There’s no way Jim Crow is coming down. The Vietnam War is going to end, or the Berlin Wall’s gonna fall, or apartheid’s going to end, or nuclear weapons are going to be dismantled, or women will be ordained. It’s hopeless and they work for it anyway. Thousands of people kept at it and that’s how change happens. Then if you go farther, in the end leaders, ordinary people, committed civil disobedience and suffered and suddenly there was a breakthrough. And you go, “Well, it was a miracle!” No, the miracle was that they kept at it and the challenge is to keep at it and some people have to really take risks…. If you are talking about social change, I find that exciting. Ordinary people, keeping at the day-to-day work, doing one or two things, for some area in the struggle. Not giving up even though there’s no sign of hope. And then some people also crossing the line and actually engaging the law, which upholds the structure of violence and oppression. You have to engage the law at some point. That’s how the change happens.

Elements of Collective, Disruptive Action I: Discipline, Persistence

Umoja said that (non)violence is an effective means of social transformation when it is disruptive and disciplined.

I don’t think I ever really believed that you could just create an army and just be able to seize power, but we used to say stuff like armed struggle would be the fundamental way that oppressed people would be able to gain power. It creates the type of image that you are going to have an army that’s going to come do this, an army of the people. But really an army is a disciplined formation. I think the major question [is] if you are actually going to have fundamental social change, because you’ve got interests that are not willing to give it up freely, that you are going to have a capacity to disrupt their control. And people have to be able to resist that through whatever means that they have. That might be that they’re not going to go to work. That might be that they’re not gonna purchase. It might be that they’re going to do stuff to make sure that the system’s capacity to do those things don’t take place. All that doesn’t involve somebody picking up a gun.

Umoja affirmed that the sacrifice, organization, discipline and training required by (non)violent, mass disruption impose extremely difficult demands.

Nonviolent direct action requires a tremendous amount of discipline. It requires a lot of commitment. I describe to my students the sit-ins. I said, “Think about this. Somebody’s cursing at you. Pouring something on you, pouring a milk or
whatever on you, spitting on you. You gotta maintain your discipline through all that. You can’t react. You can’t curse the person.” To a class of fifty I said, “There’s probably three people in here that could do that….” Practice over a period of time! So you got to get a massive amount of people to do that.

**Elements of Collective, Disruptive Action II: Research, Training and Organization**

The ability to disrupt systems in a sustained manner requires several other elements to be effective. Schulman remarked how ACT UP’s strategy was like that of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Basically [King’s strategy] was: you educate yourself so you are totally informed on your issue; you make proposals that are winnable, doable, and reasonable; and when the powers that oppose you refuse to act, you do self-purification, which in our case was nonviolent training or [civil disobedience] training; and then you do a direct action. Those are the five steps, he lays them right out. That’s exactly how we operated. There’s no point in making a demand that’s not winnable and doable. Your demands have to be reasonable. You have to be an adult and show how it can be done. That’s what we did. We were like: this is how you study this drug. This is how you develop this insurance policy. We did all the groundwork. For needle exchange, for housing for homeless people with AIDS, for everything. Then we presented everything to them, fait accompli. Then we did actions to make them do it. And then they did it. But that’s the winning strategy…. It always works. It works in life. If you are really clear and understand more than your opponent, ultimately, you have an advantage.

Schulman described the massive amount of education, training and administrative work that went into (non)violence as an effective group of tactics that supported disruption. Working across movements, women from the no-nukes peace movement provided (non)violence trainings for mass civil disobedience:

341 “people learned how to

---


341 In Chapter Three, Huerta also made reference to the presence, solidarity and impact of women and (non)violent practice on the farm worker movement. Pam McAllister documented women’s international (non)violent resistance up to the 1990s in a series of three books: *Reweaving the Web of Life: Feminism and Nonviolence* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1982); *You Can’t Kill the Spirit*
be carried away, how not to resist, how not to fight back, and all that kind of stuff.” In addition,

We had a hugely complex structural infrastructure because we had very sick people getting arrested. They had medications and they had all kinds of problems. We had a really great system where every person who was arrested was noted, and everyone was watched out for… but it took a lot of organization. There were people in ACT UP where that’s what they did. That was a very, very, very strong part of the whole thing. It had to be…. Especially when you had people whose health was so compromised.

Sometimes disruption occurs spontaneously. But interviewees agreed that disruption is most effective when it is disciplined and organized, supported with a structure and training.342

**Caution: Effective Disruption is Always Opposed By Power**

A community of struggle will know when a (non)violent witness has been effective when it is opposed by power. Staughton Lynd noted the difference between (non)violence as a moral witness and (non)violence as an effective disruptive tactic historically. Important (non)violent witnesses usually fail to produce any substantive structural change because they pose no real threat to systems of violence; for example, conscientious objection to war.343

---

342 Jensen’s *Deep Green Resistance* is a handbook of concrete strategy and structure for resisting environmental destruction, but is useful for thinking through concrete strategies in general terms. See especially Chapter 12 (pages 345-390).

343 Lynd writes about this at length in Chapter 24 of *From Here to There*, “Someday They’ll Have a War and Nobody Will Come,” 265-278. He also writes about it in *Accompanying*, 81-85.
The existing law of conscientious disobedience to military orders is framed for Quakers, members of the Church of the Brethren, Mennonites, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Amish. People who come from a pacifist background and who the powers that be know are never going to amount to anything than a hill of beans, numerically. So that it’s a perfect illustration of what Herbert Marcuse had called repressive tolerance. 344 “Oh, we’re broad-minded. This is the United States of America. We’re going to let you Quakers deal with bedpans in some hospital. We’re not going to force you to fight. We know that, that’s against your religious training and belief.”

This approach stands in contrast to the way the government deals with individual conscientious objectors who object to fighting in specific wars today (versus objection to war in general) on the basis of specific objections to the unjust nature of a particular war, or because of the nature of the crimes they have witnessed being committed by the U.S. military. These individuals “don’t get any kind of break” and pay a tremendous price for their disobedience. 345 The U.S. government cannot allow for such contextual objection, as any mass resistance to service would constitute an effective collective disruptive threat to the U.S. military.

344 The notion of repressive tolerance is described in Marcuse’s book A Critique of Pure Tolerance (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969). Schulman defines repressive tolerance in Gentrification of the Mind, “Communities become distorted and neutered by the dominant culture’s containment of their realities through the noose of ‘tolerance.’” The dominant culture doesn’t change how it views itself or how it operates, and power imbalances are not transformed. What happens instead is that the oppressed person’s expression is overwhelmed by the dominant person’s inflationary self-congratulation about how generous they are” (50). This was Churchill’s basic point about the world-wide protests at the onset of the Iraq War in 2003. While their appeared to be massive resistance and disapproval of U.S. action in Afghanistan and Iraq, million-person street protests actually constituted little disruptive threat to U.S. power, were tolerated by political power, and effected no change.

Significantly disruptive (non)violence is always opposed by power. When it is not a threat, it is tolerated. Lynd has written about why the (non)violent legal right of workers to strike has been attacked by economic elites; because worker strikes have the strong potential to disrupt economic systems. The government and labor unions have worked against the (non)violent right to strike in both legislative and collective bargaining processes. Union leaders wanted the economic advantages of contracts, to assure government and corporate interest they were not a threat, and to control the rank-and-file workers. So unions bargained away the right to strike in the life of given contracts, while various levels of government legislated against mass picketing and for replacement workers. Systems of structural violence effectively denied working-class people access to a disruptive, (non)violent tactic, precisely because it was effective. The withdrawal of an effective (non)violent tactic potentially results in increased violence.

The stage is set for working-class violence. A handful of strikers are expected to watch passively as carloads of strike replacements are escorted by the police into their place of work, to labor at their machines or desks, and take bread from the mouths of their children. When workers decline such institutionally choreographed masochism, they are discharged by their employer and hustled off to jail by the authorities. They may also be denigrated by middle-class supporters as “impatient” and “impulsive” persons, who “ill-advisedly” took matters into their own hands, rather than trusting their lawyers to produce victory through the Labor Board and the courts.

Caution: The Disruptive Power of Property Destruction?

If opposition by state power is some kind of indicator of potential effectiveness, then property destruction might be considered a form of effective disruption. Without a

---

346 Lynd discusses this in *Accompanying*, 42-43 and *From Here to There*, 190.
347 Lynd, From Here to There, 190.
doubt, those activists who employ and/or threaten property (destruction, trespass, occupation) as a means of resistance have met with more repressive violence and severe state punishment than any other community of resistance in the United States today. 

Many of the debates over violence and (non)violence in current social change activism in the U.S. center around the practice of property destruction.

The matter of property destruction has been a tense debate within (non)violent activist circles. Dear talked about a Plowshares action in which he trespassed on a military base in 1993 and hammered on a F-15 nuclear fighter bomber.

The government said I committed violence. All the movement, the churches, the country, the New York Times said I committed violence. Everybody who were for nonviolence said I’m a practitioner of violence…. I’m arguing that I was actually beginning to get rid of a weapon! Of dismantling it!... Is hammering on the nuclear weapon violence? No, I think you can knock over a table that is totally oppressing poor people.

Kelly recalled a (non)violent action from twenty years previous when there “was a big question about whether or not to pour blood” on a missile silo. She remembered a tremendous amount of questioning and anger around these contentious tactics. But Churchill questions why, when “the level of violence that is endemic to this system is so...

---


349 This is primarily so in the anti-globalization movement. In his ethnographic study of the movement, David Graeber notes that debates about the justifiability and effectiveness of property destruction are so inevitable that “it seems each time a major action rolls along, those newly brought into the movement have to work all these things out for themselves.” David Graeber, Direct Action: An Ethnography (Oakland, CA: AK Press, 2009).
monumental and continuous” that “we have debates about whether or not it’s violent to break a window at Starbucks in response?”

♀ identified that the reversals and entitlements of all forms of violence are always, in the end, about power and private property ownership. Sabotage and property destruction strikes at the heart of structural, economic violence. Jensen notes that the smashed window of a corporate enterprise belongs to the rich and the rock to the non-rich.\footnote{Jensen, \textit{Endgame I}, 80-81.} Ownership of property in the United States has been established by violent force: “the acquisition and maintenance of the property of the rich is the central motivating factor impelling nearly all state violence.”\footnote{Ibid., 196.} Property destruction intends to raise awareness of this denial of violence. Repressive state response indicates that such questioning cannot be tolerated at this level. There is much debate over whether or not tactics of property destruction are effective. Nonetheless, these tactics appear to have more of a disruptive effect on the state and economic power than much current (non)violent action does.

It seems appropriate that the Christian (non)violence community take a stronger role in analyzing structural violence and consider deeply the ways in which U.S. Christian theology undergirds the attitude toward the inviolable nature of private property ownership. As shared previously by B♀, there is a way to engage in organized violence for the disruption of power through attacks on infrastructure without intending to take a human life (recognizing that there is no way to control for the possibility that humans
may be killed through the destruction of property). Furthermore, the spectacle of property destruction gains public attention, which provides a platform for consciousness-raising about structures of violence. Nonetheless, property destruction as a tactic, like all forms of disruptive action, should be set within an analysis of structures and strategy of collective action. Property destruction may be effective, but activists must still ask: effective to do what?

Barriers to Effectiveness

Barriers to Effectiveness I: Habit and Embracing the Familiar

A fundamental problem with contemporary (non)violence as it is currently practiced is that it relies upon many of the same tactics of earlier protest movements.

---

Protests are coordinated. There is little element of disruption or surprise. Activists and the police are so accustomed to the traditional tactics of (non)violent protest, that they generally pose no real threat to the state and no substantial risk to participants. Umoja said, “Sometimes we get too committed. We think just by going there with signs and stuff, because that’s what we’re used to doing,” things will change. Power noted that (non)violent action today has become a construct of repeated actions. (Non)violence is “no longer a word that emerges from the center of the chest… It feels so morally superior, there’s a nice comfort in the protest action.” She contrasts this with the kinds of actions which emerge from an experience of being in solidarity with the dispossessed in society and acting on that basis. In terms of re-using tactics, Schulman said,

One of the problems is that people repeat losing strategies all the time because they embrace the familiarity. It feels comfortable to them. For five years I worked on the St. Patrick’s Day parade.353 …I was arrested five years in a row trying to march in that fucking parade. I dealt with Irish people a lot. I went to Ireland. Here’s the only white people that had ever been colonized. They’d been in this situation for 800 years. They have never found a strategy that could create change. They did the same thing over and over and over and over. This love of familiarity was greater than the desire for change. I kept saying to them, why do you want to do something that you know is not going to work? And they just couldn’t try something new. There are people who are like that, it’s a human trait…. There are certain kinds of people who get tied into certain kinds of repetitions, regardless of their consequences. There’s cultural passivities that are developed around repetitions. That’s why they never won. That’s why the situation has never changed. It’s so absurd. Because they just wouldn’t try anything that could win.

353 The New York City St. Patrick’s Day parade has historically excluded gay people from marching in it.
Barriers to Effectiveness II: Self-Interest (Entitlements)

Schulman described what made ACT UP effective in their actions was group willingness and ability to make the sacrifices necessary to carry on research and action over time.

It just has to be a zeitgeist where a critical mass of people are willing to make the stand and make the commitment for a period of time. It doesn’t have to be a majority. In this country, great change is made by very small numbers of people. Very small. But they have to be extremely committed. … [There] are hundreds of people in ACT UP who were doing nothing but ACT UP. They were at ACT UP five days a week. Everything, all their friends were in ACT UP. They quit their jobs to work in ACT UP. People in ACT UP did not know what each other did for a living, and they didn’t know each other’s last names….Of course you can’t do that forever. But you need a small group of people who can do it for a number of years, and then you can achieve huge social transformation. But if you don’t have that, nothing’s going to happen.

Schulman observed that the difference between the gay community of ACT UP and the queer community today in New York City, is

separated by the gulf of action fueled by suffering on one hand, and the threat of pacifying assimilation on the other. When the ACT UPers were in their twenties, they were dying. And the replacements for the dead, these young, were on the road to normalcy.354

Many people will not commit to radical action unless they understand their own self-interests are at stake.355 People at intersections of dominant social identities are less likely and less willing to understand the context of violence out of which other forms of violence grow and therefore may see little reason why their own self-interest may be


355 Gene Sharp helpfully defines self-interest as prestige, relative power position, and direct or indirect financial gain. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I Power and Struggle*, 22. The barriers of self-interest, habit and fear are three of the seven reasons Gene Sharp gives for why citizens obey rulers; in other words, why they do not participate in disruptive, mass action. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I Power and Struggle*, 16-25. The other four are a sense of moral obligation, indifference, absence of self-confidence, and psychological identification with the ruler (the latter delineated by Jensen in Chapter Four).
affected by violence. Without experience, knowledge, or self-interest in other communities, most persons in the dominant culture will do little to nothing to disrupt their current social identity and comfort level in order to take almost any kind of action, much less seriously disruptive action. Huerta describes the disconnect between organizing some of the most marginalized people in the United States to act, while persons with privilege can’t find time to make a phone call.

If we can get uneducated farm workers to get their congressperson to change their vote on healthcare, if we can get uneducated farm workers to knock on 2,000 doors on the census, my God, can’t we get our educated people to do some of this? … Or just pick up a phone call, send an email, pick up the phone and call your congressman. It takes five minutes! Responsibility! I call it responsibility. That’s what we teach our people. Nobody is going to do this for us. We have to do it for ourselves. If you don’t step up to the plate and write that letter, sign that postcard, make that phone call, send that email, it’s not going to happen. Like we always tell people, “The power of that you have is in your person.” This is the power that you have. This is all the power that you need.

As activists themselves, the interviewees critiqued the lack of risk-taking among already engaged activist communities – not only giving time and resources, but in particular their resistance to any kind of confrontative action. In many of his books and in the interview, Jensen describes a common response to his public lecture where he talks about the need to “fight back” against numerous forms of oppression, death, and environmental destruction.

When I talk about fighting back to people in different social locations their response was many times very predictable by social location. Middle class or upper middle class white people especially, but other people too, would often put up what I’ve taken to calling a ‘Gandhi shield.’ They say the names Martin Luther King, Dalai Lama and Gandhi again and again real fast to keep all evil thoughts at bay. It’s a position of privilege. Many other groups, many people of color, poor people, gang kids, prisoners, especially indigenous people, family farmers, survivors of domestic violence would not put up a “Gandhi shield.” Instead they would look at me like, “So tell us something we don’t know. Let’s go, bro.” It
didn’t take me very long to realize that the difference was for these latter groups violence is not some abstract philosophical, theoretical, theological question to be puzzled through. It’s a part of life and you deal with it. It doesn’t mean you participate and it doesn’t mean you don’t. But you deal with it.

Jensen clarifies this further in *Endgame I*:

The direct experience of violence, on the other hand, often brings questions closer to the people involved, so the people are not facing the questions as “activists” or “feminists” or “farmers” or “prisoners,” but rather as human beings – animals – struggling to survive. Having felt your father’s weight upon you in your bed; having stood in clear-cut and herbicided moonscape after moonscape, tears streaming down your face; having had your children taken from you, land stolen from that belonged to your ancestors since the land was formed, and your way of life destroyed; having sat at a kitchen table, foreclosure notice in front of you for land your parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents worked, shotgun across your knees as you try to decide whether or not to put the barrel in your mouth; feeling the sting of a guard’s baton or the jolt of a stun gun – to suffer this sort of violence directly in your body – is often to undergo some sort of deeply physical transformation. It is often to perceive and be in the world differently.¹⁵⁶

I believe Kelly would agree with the foregoing analysis by Jensen. Our responses to violence are conditioned by “where we stand.” But she lamented when accusations of privilege when it comes to a lack of social action. These indictments turn into one more justification for not acting for persons who may be disinclined to act in the first place.

When people are anxious about what falls into a level of inconvenience in terms of becoming more active, or for other reasons don’t really want to take steps, a good escape hatch¹⁵⁷ is provided, I think, by [other] people who say you are exercising your white privilege… We would have had a much higher student-youth resistance to the United States invasion of Iraq in 2003 had it not been for students who had been coached to feel anxiety and to feel “If I commit civil disobedience am I acting on the basis of white privilege.” …Over the years I’ve seen people not very much wanting to take that risk anyway. It is not really that much of a risk at all. Then finding the escape hatches created by people who would seem to be even further to the left… That should be critiqued: the

---


¹⁵⁷ Kelly describes how she got the language of “escape hatch” from minister, scholar and pacifist William Stringfellow in *Other Lands*, 18.
possibility that people who believe that they are espousing a more refined level of radicalism may be circumventing the opportunity for people to begin along that path in the first place.

There is a tension between how to get folks to act within their social location and encourage them to take greater and greater risks.

Barriers to Effectiveness III: Fear and Risk

Human fear of sacrifice and loss is at the heart of why folks do not enter social-transformative struggles. The same principle applies to the general population as to veteran activists. People within the dominant culture who desire social change may not desire to lose the material and psychological entitlements that come with the consequences of more disruptive action over the long-term, violent or (non)violent. Schulman wrote “That the fear and discomfort must be separated from the decision to act. Fear can be acknowledged, but fear cannot be the decisive factor. Fear must be separated from action in order for some reach towards justice to be maintained.” Jensen described the process of coming to terms with barriers to action, including fear:

I must be willing and prepared to deal with the effects of my actions. Related to this, there’s the fearful: I must be willing to cross barriers of fear, both tangible, real, present-day fears and conditioned fears that feel just as real and present but are not.


359 Jensen, *Endgame I*, 265. Jensen’s perspective echoes Gene Sharp’s in that the base fear of participating in disruptive action is the fear of physical sanctions (state violence) as much as much as economic or social losses. The threat of such sanctions may be as powerful as the sanctions themselves. *The Politics of Nonviolent Action, Part I Power and Struggle*, 19-20.
Jensen asks all potential social change agents to recognize their fears, and not to make a virtue of inaction or ineffective action. "Faithful, not effective” may serve to make this virtue out of fear.

For those already engaged in activism, Kelly presents a powerful example of taking risk. She measures what she believes is an adequate commitment to (non)violence by borrowing a phrase from Miguel D’Escoto: “to seriously look at nonviolent actions commensurate to the crimes being committed.” That means

upping the ante for me in terms of risk, and sown throughout any of that and indispensably so, relationship and community…. Then there was the question of trying to experiment with teams of people imposing on themselves the same risks required of soldiers.

Kelly learned to think about taking the same risks as soldiers as a peace activist being unarmed in a war zone, from Daniel Berrigan.

Berrigan said one of the reasons we don’t have peace is because the peace activists are only willing to give half a life or half a commitment, in contrast to soldiers who don’t get a chance to say “well, I would but,” I’m working on a career track or something. If [soldiers] are told to go, they go. We don’t have that sense within the peace movement. So I wanted very, very much to be part of some group that might be an arrow pointing to – what would it be like if we did have people giving the same equivalent as is required of soldiers, or that is in fact imposed on civilians who don’t have a chance to flee?

Much profound transformational change is prevented by a general unwillingness on the behalf of the general population to lose their comforts, much less to take major risks.

Dear said,

---


361 Kelly describes her meeting with Maryknoll member and Nicaraguan Foreign Minister D’Escoto in Other Lands, 18-19.

362 Kelly, Other Lands, 15.
People can’t hear or don’t want to hear it. We’re very, very comfortable in this culture. Even non-white, non-wealthy people are still very privileged in the United States, compared to Haiti and the Congo and what’s happening in Palestine and elsewhere. There’s great poverty and oppression here, but by-and-large we’re so comfortable, and we’re just like, “uh, we just don’t want to do any more.” Change only happens if you’re willing to struggle for it…. Being passive or thinking you can just vote your way into change, that’s just not how it’s worked historically. Change comes from grassroots movements of struggle.

B♀ echoed Dear’s point about how privileged people are in the United States.

We have American privilege. We can go out and we can march around and we can get tired and we can go home! We can eat. We can be warm. We can drive our car somewhere. There is that whole element of American exceptionalism. That’s just part of our struggle. I don’t think we can expect people in the rest of the world to make revolution and we don’t do shit. We have to do something. We have a responsibility.

Churchill’s critiques privilege persons within U.S. social movements who engage only those tactics that remain within their own comfort zone and maintain their personal safety. He used the example of the primarily white anti-Vietnam movement. When the U.S. took ground forces out of Vietnam, the draft as it was known ended. Even though the war continued, with the U.S. “bombing the living shit” out of Vietnam and Cambodia for years, the protests stopped. Churchill commented that “as soon as the personal jeopardy was out of the equation” (the threat of being drafted), the anti-war movement basically disappeared. Then Kent State happened.

You had four dead white kids! Four! Now that’s horrible for the four dead white kids and their families. [But] you are supposedly going into this struggle because you understand that there’s millions of people being turned into hamburger. But three of your guys get killed and…? The whole anti-war movement was based upon existence within a comfort zone…. It’s privileged white kids who are the ones in school trying to preserve their comfort and protection in adopting a moral posture that, as soon as they’re assured that their comfort zone will be extended without the effort, walk off and leave….
For Churchill, the comfort zone is being able to watch and protest the destruction of life “like it’s an action movie.” The comfort zone is staying safe within a certain realm of (non)violent action that fundamentally threatens little by way of one’s material or psychological comfort, and therefore does not fundamentally address violence in any significant way.

**Addressing Fear and Risk in the Christian Tradition: Saints and Martyrs**

A number of interviewees who currently or formerly identified as Christian talked about how the Christian tradition served as a resource to provide examples of sacrifice as paradigms to overcome fear, effectively engaging in (non)violent radical action while remaining faithful. They said people need examples of what it looks like to carry out a non-self-interested, innovative, counter-cultural, sacrificial witness. As Roman Catholics, Kelly, Dear and Huerta made reference to the tradition of saints and martyrs in Catholicism as relevant to transformative social change as examples of living counter-culturally and sacrificially. 363

Kelly recalled how saints, martyrs and the seasons of sacrifice throughout the Christian calendar disposed her to “a certain sense of presumed willingness to make a sacrifice as a part of my offering.” In her Mexican-American Catholic culture of New Mexico, Huerta shared there was tremendous reverence for St. Francis Xavier and St.

---

363 El Salvadoran liberation theologian Jon Sobrino wrote that the spiritual power of contemporary martyrs in the revolutionary context of Latin America was, among many things, the way in which their martyrdom exposed the structural causes of their persecution and death. The martyrs told the truth about injustice and violence and their martyrdom was therefore a source of understanding institutional violence. Chapter Five in Jon Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation: Toward Political Holiness* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985).
Francis of Assisi. The influence of Assisi’s commitment to peace and his willingness to give up everything “was very strong in my family, in my upbringing.” Huerta also noted that the martyrs of the farm worker movement\textsuperscript{364} were the inspiration to carry the movement forward, as were “the women that were force-fed to give women the right to vote, the young people that were killed” during civil rights.

In the Christian tradition, the paradigm for this is Jesus Christ, who laid down his life for others. Dear said,

Jesus wants somebody to follow him. Certainly nonviolence requires risk and sacrifice. In a world of total violence, just going around and being nice, I don’t think that’s nonviolence. Gandhi said it requires noncooperation with evil. [He] had this devastating quote, “Change never happens in the classroom or in the pulpit, it only happens on the witness stand and in the prison cell and on the gallows.” Social change is [giving] your life. We’re all still talking about the martyrs. We are the oppressive empire. We don’t like to hear this but around the world people are talking about this. We’re gonna get it anyway. This country’s going to collapse and we all have to grow up. My thought is, let’s just cut to the chaste. Let’s have an adult spirituality. Let’s deal with the meat of the gospel. Let’s deal with the crucifixion of Jesus and what it means politically. We’re all gonna die anyway, so let’s just get with the program. Start changing now.

From Jesus, to Gandhi, to Martin Luther King, Jr., to Archbishop Oscar Romero, Dear says we learn that justice making is “about giving your life… This methodology actually does unfortunately work.” As far as the interviewees had experience with the Christian tradition, they recognized that it does contain resources that encourage the risks, sacrifices, and overcoming the fears entailed by the consequences of social action, and encouraging such action, whether violent or (non)violent. If these Christian resources and traditions were more effectively engaged by ritual, educational, and sacrificial means as

\textsuperscript{364} The United Farmworkers hold five individuals as martyrs to their struggle: Nan Freeman, Nagi Daifallah, Juan De La Cruz, Rufino Contreras, and Rene Lopez. See: http://www.ufw.org/pdf/Martyrs.pdf.
collective (non)violent practices, Christians would have to more seriously question and dismantle their material entitlements.

**Faithful and Effective: Conclusion**

While recognizing an inability to determine outcomes in social change, I claim that the previous portrayal of diverse tactics – consciousness-raising, organizing, alternative communities, disruptive direct action – as effective and faithful towards the end of transformational social change. There is a real question in my mind whether or not Christian communities, much less Christian churches, might ever engage in a comprehensive way in the kind of faithful and effective analysis and action suggested by the foregoing chapters.

Neither an orthodox theology of Christian (non)violence or any one practice of either (non)violence or violence is adequate to deal with the vast complexities and all-encompassing, inter-related nature of direct, structural and cultural violence in any given context. There is a vast territory of what might be considered both faithful and effective, even only in terms of (non)violence. Staughton Lynd made the following point. “People oriented to nonviolence sometimes think of a circle with a very defined border.” For these people, certain things seem very clear-cut, such as

If you refuse to serve in any war, you’re still within the circle. If you transgress in this way or that way then you’re outside it. There are really two kinds of people.

---

365 McCann and Strain urge that contemporary practical theology must reject both orthodoxy (primarily affirmed in the dominant culture’s Christian tradition) and orthopraxis (primarily affirmed in liberationist Christian tradition). These are both liberal ideals. “Religious praxis” embraces the tension between the two (*Polity and Praxis*, 38-58).
There are the nonviolent people and the people who are into violence to some degree.

He went on to say,

I think that’s the wrong way to think about it. I think the circle is not precisely circumscribed. I think the circle is a center which radiates and that there’s all sorts of contested terrain further out. And so many things go with that, like not being so damned self-righteous.

International anti-globalization activists, particularly in the anarchist tradition, use the language of “diversity of tactics” to deal with the matter of “contested terrain” – differences of opinion and practice related to the use of violent and (non)violent tactics. The allowance for a diversity of both violent and (non)violent tactics primarily relates to practices by individuals and small groups that take place in the context of a particular protest. While a majority of persons are unlikely to engage in social transformation at the level of disruptive public action in the current U.S. context,

366 While not in support of this principle, noted (non)violent activist George Lakey defines the phrase: “’Diversity of tactics’ implies that some protesters may choose to do actions that will be interpreted by the majority of people as ‘violent,’ like property destruction, attacks on police vehicles, fighting back if provoked by the police, and so on, while other protesters are operating with clear nonviolent guidelines. Sometimes advocates of diversity of tactics propose outlining zones for different activities, so one style of action doesn't bring undue immediate risk to those pursuing another style.” “Diversity of Tactics and Democracy,” reprinted from Clamor Magazine (March-April 2002) on Lakey’s Training for Change website, http://www.trainingforchange.org/diversity_of_tactics.

367 For a comprehensive guide to the complex nature of contemporary direct action in the global justice movement, see Graeber’s Direct Action.

368 Furthermore, as April Carter points out in Direct Action and Democracy Today (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005), popular resistance such as direct action does not have to substitute as “an alternative to liberal politics” (67). For better or for worse, most revolutionary (non)violence and civil resistance is being used worldwide to achieve so-called liberal democracy, in which mass, disruptive direct action plays a crucial role in undermining the legitimacy of structures of violence. Timothy Garton Ash writes that (non)violent direct action for liberal democracy under colonialism and tyranny as well as under liberal democracy, is still relatively new, relatively under-theorized and under-strategized. In fact, he claims, it has redefined the notion of “revolution” altogether. Ash, “A Century of Civil Resistance: Some Lessons and Questions,” in Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to Present, Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009): 376.
nonetheless the spirit of the “diversity of tactics,” an openness to contestation and real
differences, is relevant and necessary to pursuing a theology of faithful and effective
tactics for social transformation.

It seems possible to faithfully claim, strategize and act within a paradigm of
Christian (non)violence while admitting that there may be an effective role for violence,
and a commitment to solidarity with communities of struggle across differences.
Certainly it is faithful to the historical narrative to recognize that violence has, for better
and for worse, been effective to create some change. Furthermore, there are many active
and committed groups working for peace, Christian and not Christian, historically and
currently, who have negotiated different ways of handling differences of belief and
practice around violence and (non)violence. 369

All of the interviewees suggested, in terms of (non)violence in particular, there
was a failure of imagination, a failure to strategize and a failure to risk bodies and
entitlements. For those desirous to continue to claim faithful (non)violence, there is
plenty more room in which to work towards effectiveness prior to condemning violence
as unfaithful, immoral, or ineffective. There is much within Christian scripture to address
matters of fear, risk, loss of life, loss of material possessions, disruption, counter-cultural
prophetic speech, transformation, and so on. Yet as the tradition of practical theology
itself demonstrates, apart from transformational practices, scriptural commands and
theology are hollow. Nonetheless, Christian community does provide one strength crucial
to the work of social transformation, a dimension of social change that is often difficult to

369 For example, see Mary Anna Culleton Colwell, “Do Peace Movement Groups Condone
create: the existence of an already organized, concrete community in which to encourage interconnectedness and vision and to work against individualism. Jensen notes, “There is a role for our spiritual longings and for the strength that a true spiritual practice can bring to social movements.” These practices must be nurtured within a collective process, with broader accountability and solidarity with different communities of struggle. We turn to the practice of solidarity in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX: SOLIDARITY

How This Theme Arose

A key question in my interview guide was, “In what ways is it possible, what factors make it possible, for allies from dominant groups to be involved in marginalized communities’ struggles for justice?” This is an important question for me personally. Throughout my research I have asked myself, how do I (can I?) hold a commitment to Christian (non)violence with conviction in the context of such deep and abiding violence? How do I act with integrity with persons who are most impacted by the structures of violence; whose oppression is a result of my own people’s perpetration of violence, and from which we continue to benefit? Questions of allyship are important questions for social change generally. All interviewees affirmed that any real measure of transformation of the structures of violence will only be accomplished collaboratively, across various kinds of difference: differences of identity, differences of cultural and material power, and differences in belief and practice about the legitimate means of change, violent and/or (non)violent.

Yet such alliances have been fraught with problems historically. In many cases, justice-seeking movements have replicated the very forms of violence, power and privilege they have claimed to oppose. In this chapter, I will consider the various answers that the interviewees gave in response to the question of the practice of being allies. The
language of solidarity was often used synonymously with allies. Ultimately, solidarity arose as more useful as a concept and practice to inform a critical, practical theology of social change, particularly when it comes to evaluating violence and (non)violence in the context of social transformation. In particular, Staughton Lynd’s idea of solidarity as (non)violence is instructive of multiple practices by which structural and cultural violence may be usefully addressed and dismantled.

Reinforcing Violence: Bringing Dominance into Movements

Commonly conceived, allies are persons with privileges and power emerging out of identities in the dominant culture who seek to align with persons and communities from oppressed identity groups to address grievances of an oppressed group. Whether it is men seeking to ally with women, white people with black people, or straight people with the gay community, the problem with allies and for allies is that they “often bring that dominance with them into the movement.”

Most interviewees agreed that there has been limited evidence of truly shared relationships between social justice change agents from primarily privileged identity groups and primarily oppressed identity groups. Structures of violence and inequality,


and patterns of denial, reversal, and entitlement replicate themselves in movements for social change. In relation to activists coming out of privileged identities, Churchill said,

There is this absolutely intractable compulsion to be in charge! We’re not working with anybody no matter what our interest is, if we have to concede that they might know something that we can’t tell them they knew.

In particular, women interviewees described many occasions of sexism and homophobia within and across their own movements. Huerta, Power, Schulman and B♀ all described ways in which women have been marginalized by male leadership in social struggle. Power said that in the 1960s and 1970s the Catholic and other religious anti-war left was so sexist that it “was no place for a self-respecting woman.” B♀ described the atmosphere of sexism in a large anti-imperialist, anti-war group called the Seattle Liberation Coalition. Male leaders would not say the word gay or lesbian or allow the words gay and lesbian to be included on the publicized list of coalition members. Lesbians in the group had to organize so that no woman would ever attend a meeting of the coalition by herself, because, B♀ said, “to participate in that shit, it was overwhelming. I’m telling you it was heavily male dominated.” Lesbians organized independently by creating a group of their own, “Leftist Lezzies.” Then they demanded group recognition within the coalition thus hopefully insuring equal participation, as well as listing their name of all flyers and other publicly circulated documents. They also realized their value as workers within the coalition and threatened to walk out if their demands were not respected.

imperialism in the anti-war movement, pacifist leaders were unable to bring self-criticism to their personal lives and political practice around white supremacy and patriarchy.

253
Schulman describes that the sheer trauma of the AIDS crisis, when gay “men became endangered and vulnerable,” temporarily righted the sexist imbalance of the period.

[Men] needed each other and women to intervene… They needed women’s political experience from the earlier feminist and lesbian movements, women’s analysis of power, and women’s emotional commitments to them. They needed women’s alienation from the state. As men became weak, they allowed themselves to acknowledge the real ways that women are strong, particularly recognizing our hard-won experiencing at political organizing…. As protease inhibitors normalized AIDS, this relationship shifted back. Men began to regain their collective health and with that their patriarchal imperatives.373

Schulman wrote that as gay men regained their health, they began to marginalize the women who made their existence possible. As the history of AIDS activism remains invisible, gay men have no context for recognizing the role of women in their lives. Now, gay men “again feel superior. Now that we need them to let us into the power system of representation that they control, there is no reciprocity.”374

**Undoing Dominance: Asking, Listening, Awareness of Social Location**

The common experience of oppressed groups is that persons coming out of dominant identities within U.S. culture come imposing their own ideas, dominant identity norms, and control. They tend to be largely unaware of these controlling behaviors and see their leadership and control as entitlements. These impositions reinforce structural and cultural violence. The interviewees, however, pointed to practices that in their experience helped to transform bringing dominance into movements.

373 Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind*, 157-158.

374 Ibid., 158.
In past movement experience in communities seeking group self-determination, certain interviewees vividly recalled occasions when members of the dominant culture actually asked them what they needed. Huerta recalled a farm workers’ march in Calexico, California that stood out in her mind. “Ted Kennedy was with us on that march. We had gotten some rooms in this motel down there and he walks in and he says, “Okay, tell me what you want me to do.” B♀ also recalled a critical instance. Not long after being released from prison the first time for petty crime, she attended a workshop at a community college about women in prison.

These lovely Quaker women were trying to have this workshop, you know just being so nice and lovely and doing their little do-gooder thing. Which was not a bad thing, but it irritated the fuck out of me. So I just got mad and said, “You don’t know what the fuck you’re talking about!” So they said, “Who are you?” I said this is who I am and this is my experience. They said, “Do you want to give this workshop?” I said yes, and that’s the first time I ever did a workshop. So, bless those lovely Quaker women.

Such instances of asking and invitation were memorable to activists coming out of marginalized identity groups because they were so rare.

On the other hand, Churchill expressed that when privileged persons constantly ask oppressed persons the same questions about what to do to rectify injustices, they often are not really seeking answers. Of his experience of public lecturing about indigenous issues, he said,

It’s always a white person that asks, “What can I do? What can we do?…. My response is, “Can you pick up a fucking board and hit me across the head?” They just look all bewildered and confused. I say, “Are you willing to? Are you capable? You know you are! So why are you asking me the question? There are an infinite realm of things you can do. But you’re not going to, are you? How did it become my responsibility to tell you what to do?” That, by the way, is a question that I am never asked when I am on people who have no education, no resources, outside this country and inside this country too.
Often times when privileged people ask the questions of what to do it appears to avoid the critical step of taking action. Deciding what to do, doing it and learning from the process of acting is more useful than constantly asking others what should be done. From a position of privilege, there is a tension between asking persons within marginalized communities what would be helpful as an ally and the ways such asking puts the burden of responsibility back on the oppressed to always provide the answers. Allies in struggle who find this problem both confusing and maddening must recognize that such tensions are also a product of the history and rationalizing mechanisms of direct, structural and cultural violence.

Despite the hard lessons and failures of allyship during previous movements, interviewees agreed that an inability to ask, to listen, and to be aware of the patterns of dominance one’s social location brings were still obstacles to being an ally today. The ongoing inability to ask and to listen to answers determined by oppressed communities reinforces within those communities the sense of entitlement to know and to lead that privileged allies bring as manifestations of structural and cultural violence into movements. The unawareness of this potential for dominance also reaffirms the perception that privileged actors continue to operate under the illusions of denial of the historic realities of these kinds of violence. To affirm (non)violence as a practice of social struggle and solidarity means to understand the practice of (non)violence not only as physical non-retaliation, but engaging all practices which undermine the various levels of violence discussed in previous chapters.
Jensen offered an example from his position in the dominant white, male culture. As the environment collapses, Jensen believes that violence towards marginalized groups will increase. Therefore, allies in the dominant culture desperately need to deconstruct their identities and to practice what it means to be an ally now.

Obviously the men are not doing the work of deconstructing patriarchy.... As civic society collapses, we will see more rapes. If you want to know what happens when a patriarchal civic society collapses, look at the Democratic Republic of Congo, where the rapes are more often and they’re more organized. So there are two things that people need to do to prepare for this. The things are: for women, I believe what Andrea Dworkin said, “my prayer for women in the twenty-first century is harden your hearts and learn to kill.” Women need to learn self-defense. What men need to do is we need to make our allegiance to women absolute. We need to make our tolerance for violence against women zero. We have to have zero tolerance policies for it. And the same is true for racism. As economic times get harder and harder, racism will become more overt and more obvious and more violent. People of color? Learn self-defense. White people? Make your allegiance to victims of white pattern violence absolute.

Men with a commitment to (non)violence must deconstruct their own sexism, listen to women and ask them what they want. He gave an example of doing a talk in Vancouver, where a woman came to the microphone and said

“I was raped by an activist and it’s actually somebody you know, and I want to talk about it.” She said who the activist was and I said, “Okay, first, I actually don’t know him. I interviewed him once. Second, I believe you. Third, he was supposed to be in a book of interviews I have coming out next spring and I’m pulling him from my book because I don’t want a rapist in my book. Fourth, if you want to tell me, I want to know what you want from men in your life. What do you want from your lover? What do you want from your father? What do you want from fellow activists? What do you want from me on stage when you say this?” So many women in the audience then talked about what they wanted. We need to have those conversations.

For Jensen, allyship means asking and listening, awareness and identity deconstruction, accountability, and taking action. Understanding one’s own social location within structures of violence is critical to engaging every one of these practices.
Jensen’s perspective on the possibilities of inter-species communication makes notions of being an ally – listening, awareness, accountability and action – even more challenging. There is the need to transform human consciousness to recognize that non-humans have an equality of being and sentience as do humans. That change of consciousness should be reflected in language. “A very small thing that [I do] whenever I’m writing; I say, ‘The tree who, the river who…’ I never say ‘The river that, the tree that…’ because they’re who’s. One of the things that we have to do is change discourse.” If language reflects an actual belief in non-human sentience, then the natural corollary would be as human allies to ask non-humans what to do to be in solidarity with them. “What would the rivers themselves want?” What do the salmon want? The redwood trees? The activist ally to the earth would ask, listen and act accordingly.

The practices of asking, listening and awareness on the part of privileged allies are part and parcel of deconstructing structural and cultural violence. Privileged people rely on their “ability to achieve distance” from suffering and violence in order to maintain the status quo and their material and psychological entitlements. These practices of solidarity seek to reduce the distance between privileged and oppressed communities working together in struggle. Asking, listening and awareness are early-stage requirements to begin to recognize the ways in which all beings are fundamentally

375 Jensen, Endgame I, 13.

376 This is Marjorie Suchocki’s notion, which is helpful language to think about understanding various levels of solidarity as doing ever-deeper levels of work to decrease the distance between privileged communities’ awareness and practice of privilege (Suchocki, The Fall to Violence, 102).
interconnected, including the ways they are interconnected in a web of violence.377 An awareness of social location and the possibilities for reinforcing violence that dominant social location may impose indicates the potential for understanding and acting against the mechanisms of denial, reversal and entitlement. Asking, listening and awareness provides the possibility for valuing the lives of those within the dominant culture that typically do not matter, undermining in practice the false portrayal and reversal of the privileged as having lives more valuable than others. Through asking, listening and awareness of location, privileged allies practice giving up the assumption of superior status, superior knowledge and control. These requirements for being an ally are not merely individual. They are communal commitments within and across differences of social location. Particularly within privileged identity groups, deconstructing privilege as a practice of asking, awareness and listening also serves the purpose of privileged persons holding themselves accountable within their own communities for the dominant behaviors that are part and parcel of structural violence.

**(Non)violence: Not Imposing From a Position of Dominance**

The same issues of power and privilege that plague social movements generally insinuate themselves in the conversations and practices of violence and (non)violence. As

377 This is Marjorie Suchocki’s view of solidarity, including with the non-human world, in *The Fall to Violence*. “Our existence as part of an interdependent world, where relations to all others are internal to the constitution of the self, creates a solidarity with the human race, and possibly with all species in descending degrees of intensity. We are, then, no matter how personally in control of our violent tendencies, surrounded by and invaded by a vast amount of violence. We have relationally internalized these events, even though the vast majority of them, if not all, are certainly far below the level of conscious experience” (109). Suchocki’s description of the deep and even unconscious influence of violence on our interconnectedness affirms the importance of bringing this impact into awareness.
the analysis of previous chapters has shown, in light of the history of all forms of Christian violence, appeals to (non)violence from Christian voices within the dominant culture potentially sound like acts of domination. Recall that Power said historically and theologically Christianity is shot through with a sense of dominance mission. (Non)violent demands from Christians are perceived as a white, middle-class sensibility not to upset the dominant economic and political order. They smack of a reversed self-portrayal and false Christian morality and appear to maintain the benefits of structural and cultural violence. The dynamic of dominance asserts itself and reinforces structural and cultural violence when members of dominant, white Christian identity groups come imposing (non)violence as normative belief and practice. From the perspective of most of the interviewees, white, Christian (non)violent activists continue to be largely unaware of the impact of their social location on the perception, if not the reality, of their dominance.

Churchill said he had never known any person engaged in armed struggle who expected that people who were not so engaged, should be so engaged. He said, “I will support virtually anyone in a given moment, when we have confluence, when we have common ground.” Ninety-five percent of his activist practice has been “within any reasonable set of definitional parameters” nonviolent. But since he won’t take a pledge of (non)violence, he is considered unreasonable by pacifists. In his experience, that kind of stance is “a pervasive practice and attitude,” among (non)violent activists, demonstrating that “…it’s not a reciprocal relation.”

---

378 Graeber writes that the debates and fractures over violence and (non)violence really come down to issues of solidarity in Direct Action, 225.
Dear, one of the most clamorous advocates of (non)violence, spoke of his own marginalization by (non)violent allies as a result of working with all people in struggle. Before and after the second Gulf War began, he supported one of the largest and best organized anti-war groups in the country. ANSWER,\(^{379}\) a communist pro-violence group, was accused of supporting terrorists and engaging in violent tactics in demonstrations and violent rhetoric during rallies and marches. Dear said of them,

They were doing the most, best organizing… A lot of my friends wouldn’t have anything to do with them. They invited me to speak at their rally just before the war started… I spoke to 300,000 people. People told me I was being violent by doing that but, I thought, well, they’re the ones doing the work, I mean… the churches, what are they [doing]…?

As vehement a supporter of (non)violence as Dear is, he demonstrates that it is possible to remain committed to (non)violence without excluding support for groups who may employ other means to reach similar ends. Jensen said that being an ally “doesn’t mean we have to agree. This is the same with pacifists. It doesn’t mean we have to agree on everything. It doesn’t mean we have to agree on very many things.” For Jensen, being an ally means being willing to take many things into consideration at one time, recognizing that all action is “context-based. It’s all particular.”

To deny that it is possible to work across differences in belief and practice in violence in (non)violence would be, once again, to deny history. Like the Deacons for Defense during the civil rights movement, Huerta mentioned the participation of the

\(^{379}\) Also known as the ANSWER coalition, ANSWER stands for Act Now to Stop War and End Racism. It is an umbrella group for various anti-war organizations.
Brown Berets in the farm workers struggle. The farm worker leadership welcomed the militant group’s support but made it clear that “they knew that we were a nonviolent force.” Jensen described an instance in which Quakers offered their largest meeting house in Philadelphia to the Black Panthers, who were being persecuted by local and national law enforcement when and where the Panthers were known to gather. When the Panthers met at the meeting house, the Quaker members “surrounded the place with their own bodies because they knew the cops wouldn’t kill a bunch of white Quakers.” Solidarity does not outright exclude the possibility of support and shared, if differentiated, actions based on common goals.

If part of violence is imposing one’s own cultural viewpoint from a position within the dominant culture, then being a privileged ally for social change from a position within the dominant culture would include not imposing a (non)violent view. In this way, (non)violence as a collective practice moves beyond understanding violence as only direct, physical violence by refraining from it, but engaging practices that address the deeper, underlying concepts of structural and cultural violence. Interviewees provided numerous examples of how they thought about this. Jensen said,

Being an ally means that I try to put down the white man’s burden. Because it’s not my job to tell [people] how to resist. I was doing a talk at an indigenous college one time and before the talk maybe ten or fifteen of us went to dinner. There was one white person besides me who was the other teacher and fourteen indigenous students or so. This one student was a little excited about my work and he starts asking me questions and the teacher turns to me and says, “If you tell him it’s okay to kill people, I will kill you.” And she’s kidding but she’s not kidding. We just sort of dropped it and made conversation. After dinner he and I talked. One of the things I said to him is, “It is not the place of any white person

---

380 The Brown Berets are a revolutionary group, which began in the late 1960s, that believes in Chicano nationalism, self-determination and self-defense. For history, documents, and the principles of the National Brown Berets, see: [http://nationalbrownberets.com/](http://nationalbrownberets.com/).
including me, including your teacher, to tell any indigenous person how to resist. So you can do whatever you want. But that teacher has no right to tell you as an indigenous person what is appropriate for you to do. Just as I have no right.” So I think being an ally is also not being paternalistic, which is what we can get with white man’s disease and white man’s burden.

This lesson can apply to attempting to undo any position of dominance within structures of violence. Within the African-American community during the civil rights movement in the South, Umoja described that SNCC’s internal shift away from a more absolute position around (non)violence meant organizers, from a higher education and socio-economic class position, tried not to impose their views upon the local people.

After a point, SNCC kind of took this policy, “we can’t really tell local people how to behave.” This is the way they’ve been surviving and really kind of following from an orientation they got from Ella Baker, who supported armed self-defense too, we have to support the development of the indigenous leadership. Indigenous people, [self-defense] is how the majority of them are surviving down here. So I think that played a role in SNCC changing its orientation. That’s what I mean by class orientation. How do you look to these people you’re working with? Who might not speak the King’s English? Who might not have college degree? They might not have a high school degree. What’s our relationship to them, even though we might have a college education? Are we here to serve these people or are we here to tell them what to do? I think that changes over a period of time; first to respecting the folk, but then actually learning from them, and then maybe applying some of the things that people are using in terms of survival there.

What (non)violent allyship from a dominant social location looks like is not telling people, whose identity and basic life experience you do not share or whose oppression results from your peoples’ own violence, what to do or how to think. Kelly shared that when she and her organization (Voices for Creative Nonviolence) are in another country,

---

381 Ella Baker was a leader in the black freedom struggle in the South and in New York City. She was employed by the Southern Christian Leadership Council during the time of Martin Luther King, Jr., helped to organize the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party and was primarily responsible for the formation of SNCC, and mentoring its youth leaders. See her biography by Barbara Ransby, Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision (University of North Carolina Press, 2005).
It sounds like we are trying to proselytize. The more appropriate thing when you are in somebody else’s country and they are the ones whose blood is being shed in the process of a war, to listen and to try to respectfully bring back from there what are the effects the U.S. warmaking. But not to be telling them, would you like us to teach you how to be nonviolent?... Yeah, that’s a pretty repugnant idea.

Dear was in Nicaragua and El Salvador in the 1980s during the U.S. Contra-wars. Among the Jesuit priests with whom he stayed they got into some debates over the use of revolutionary violence. It was a different conversation among very poor people, “with the whole U.S. government bearing down upon them. There was no need to lecture them or say anything to them. I was there to learn and to listen from them.” Similarly, in the context of prisoner advocacy, Alice Lynd said “we seldom would ever talk about nonviolence spelled out N-O-N and so forth.” In the prison context, prisoners observe everything you do, “How you conduct yourself. They’re very sensitive to things like that…Survival depends on being able to evaluate who’s doing what and where and what their next move is likely to be, and why.” Actions are what matters, not words or beliefs.

From her experience as a prisoner, B♀ concurred.

You have to build trust. That’s one thing I think you learn from prison. Everybody’s a number. Anybody can talk. Anybody can say all kinds of things. People spend all day lying. But what do they do when the shit hits the fan? People in prison see each other every day. They know what people do, and they know what people don’t do.

The only way to build solidarity and trust, in B♀’s experience, is “by practice.”

During the time of our interview, the Lynds were in relationship with prisoners in the Youngstown prison who were considering doing a hunger strike as a response to prison conditions.382 While in sympathy with the prisoners, Staughton Lynd also shared

---

382 Three men sentenced to death for murders that occurred during the Lucasville Riot were held in solitary confinement instead of on death row, which meant they had less privileges than death row inmates.
In this instance, if we had our druthers, they would not be bringing the hunger strike. But we are trying very hard not just to say but to mean and to do that we’re not telling somebody else what to do. … As to the particular tactic they’re choosing, I have serious doubts about it.

The Lynds knew that a hunger strike could not last indefinitely. On a rolling basis, it might last a month or two. When the Lynds suggested a lawsuit as an alternative to the hunger strike, the prisoner response was, “That takes too long.” The bottom line for Staughton Lynd was, “If that’s the thing that they’ve decided is the way they can act out their resistance to oppression, it’s good enough for me.” The Lynds consistently confront the common perception among advocates for prisoners that prisoners in high security prisons can’t do anything to advocate for themselves. Responding once to someone who expressed such a notion, Staughton Lynd responded,

“I don’t believe it. I haven’t been there myself. Don’t know all of the things that people might think of, but there’s no situation where human beings can’t do something.” …It’s not appropriate to call hunger striking a mistaken strategy when it’s almost the only form of self-activity that is left to people in that situation. That’s what it represents to them. Taking control of their own lives.  

Solidarity as (Non)violence

From Staughton Lynd’s point of view, we might understand (non)violence itself as the practice of solidarity. He writes that in movements of poor and working class people, “individual commitment to nonviolence as a matter of principle is rare.”

---

383 Lynd also describes this exchange briefly in Accompanying, 149.

384 Lynd, “Nonviolence as Solidarity,” From Here to There, 188.
Through analysis of working-class labor efforts and resistance movements in prison, Lynd demonstrates that

Solidarity can be built on the basis of practice, of action that is in the common interest, rather than on the basis of shared ideas. In the traditional culture of nonviolence, talk usually precedes action…. Practice follows principle, and practitioners of the traditional culture of nonviolence are careful to articulate why the action they undertake expresses concepts they have previously come to affirm. In the world of poor and working-class resistance, on the other hand, action often comes before talk… the experience of struggle gives rise to new understandings that may be put into words much later or never put into words at all.  

Staughton Lynd said that “people who are interested in nonviolence need to begin thinking about solidarity, to recognize solidarity as a form of nonviolence, and to realize the 1801 different dilemmas involved in the nurturing of solidarity.” These dilemmas have to do with the real differences in privilege and power among co-actors in social struggle. From the position of privileged social location, solidarity can be particularly sensitive and complicated. (Non)violence means not imposing beliefs and practice, not assuming knowledge, not replicating denial, not feeling entitled to lead. It means asking, awareness, and listening. This constellation of practices imply consciousness-raising and internal, dominant identity-group work that bears itself out in practice. These practices of solidarity should all seek to reduce privileged communities’ distance, both in awareness and in practice, from the realities of all forms of violence in which all persons are implicated. Solidarity as (non)violence includes deepening the practices by which this distance is breached. I identified seven interrelated practices in the interviews that imply increasing commitment to reducing the distance between the privileged and oppressed.

385 Ibid., 193.
Solidarity as (Non)violence: Showing Up

Despite isolating identity politics that resulted from the structures of privileged and repressive violence, veteran interviewees of 1960s and 1970s social movements saw those times galvanizing identity groups that worked together across many kinds of difference. Huerta said that “a kind of revolutionary mindset… was the temper of the times,” and within the problems and power of identity politics, many different groups were trying to figure out what it meant to struggle together against a common oppressor by showing up for one another. Huerta said that you rarely see that level of cross-group solidarity these days.

Our movements are much more segregated now than they were in the sixties. People came together more around the peace movement. Now our peace movement seems to be very separate. Or the immigrant rights movement, for instance…. The new civil rights movement has got to be about incarceration and what’s happening in our schools. But they seem very separate from each other. More segregated.

So while some of the tasks of solidarity require nuanced self, community and contextual analysis, other practices of solidarity are much more concrete. In very simple terms, when I asked the interviewees what solidarity meant in this era, all of them said it meant showing up for social struggle in and beyond one’s own community. Huerta described the days during the farm workers movement when the Teamsters Union came to violently oppose the farm workers’ boycotting grape growers and organizing a union. Up to that time, Huerta explained, the farm workers had not reached out to any other union. There was a tension between the need for local control and farm worker self-determination and the concrete need for support. They reached out to the heavily white-dominated AFL-CIO, which sent members of local, action-oriented unions to California
in cross-worker solidarity. Huerta recounted the presence of union Seafarers and United
Auto Workers as critical to thwarting the attack of the Teamsters Union, which was a
huge victory in the course of the whole movement.

Many efforts of the George Jackson Brigade were also aimed at worker solidarity.
Members of the GJB walked picket lines with striking city workers and stood with black
construction workers that were denied entrance to white unions. This solidarity implied
simply showing up.

When people are on strike, other people go and walk the picket line with them. You talk to them, they find out how you’re doing, how they’re doing. Do they need food, do they need coffee? Once they get to trust you they might just let you walk around while they take their kid to the doctor or something. That happened. A lot.

Due to the dominant behaviors of privileged groups in social movement, some separatist and nationalist movements rejected solidarity coming from dominant identity
groups. But Umoja no longer sees that as a predominant dynamic today. He said, “I know of few movements where people will say, ‘Well, we don’t need your help, thanks for the solidarity.” While rejecting the imposition of dominant culture values and practices on oppressed communities, Umoja still believes a critical element of solidarity is “to step up and support one another.” It is important for people not to just say they are conscious of an issue, but to show up: “for other people, who even if that’s not my issue, to try to do something to show that I support that.” Furthermore, Umoja thinks,

People take risks, or are more likely to take risks if they believe they’re going to be supported… that they’re not just going to be out there by themselves… and people are going to leave them. So that feeling of a collectivity and a connection is important, too.
Huerta said there was still “a lot of culturization that needs to happen,” particularly for white people to understand the nature of the experience of people of color. She understands that, on the one hand, it should not be the role of people of color to constantly educate white people about their racism. At the same time, she sees her own role as both showing up across movements and consciousness-raising in the dominant culture. Huerta described a number of instances in which she tried to make such connections. When she is invited to speak at events for the environmental movement, the participants are mostly all white people. So she speaks about toxic dump sites in communities of color, or immigration. “They’re not working across issues. They’re not reaching out.”

I don’t need to talk to them on the environment, because they’re there on the environment, right? They’re probably there on the gay issues also. I’m sure they are still sort of perplexed about the immigration issue. So I try to frame my talks depending on the audience. I spoke in Utah to a huge Mormon audience, and so my whole talk out there was about choice and gay marriage and immigration.

Most of the primarily white women’s organizations with which she works today are “going out of their way to involve women of color.” She said there are necessary spaces for self-determination and there are necessary spaces for collaboration. The harsh lessons of dominance and the resulting exclusionary identity politics of former movements have caused current movements to isolate themselves. Huerta understands this problem but believes it works against uniting a progressive agenda for social change. Her current commitment is to eldering and to “weaving movements together.”

---

386 Huerta (and Harding) is a founding member of the National Council of Elders, an “independent group of leaders from many of the defining American social justice movements of the 20th century. We wish to explore every possible, helpful way in which we can connect together the continuing flame of the
of the past in mind, it is critical to learn from the dominant patterns of the past, for
different actors from across identity groups to recommit to common struggle by simply,
consistently showing up.

Solidarity as (Non)Violence: Material Support

Huerta described how some militant Chicanos criticized the national farm workers
movement because there were too many outside religious white people involved in the
movement. Many believed the religious community compromised the farm worker
organizing effort’s willingness to move beyond (non)violence. Huerta did not see it that
way. She listed many names of priests who showed up as allies and walked alongside the
farm workers in struggle. In addition, churches provided critical material assistance to the
movement as one of the most important forms of being allies,

During the grape boycott we would stay at the seminaries and convents, these
were the places that farm workers went when we went on a grape boycott. They
gave us houses and shelter and places to stay and provided food, child care, and
whatever. We had a very, very close connection.

Churchill recognized that there were potentially meaningful roles for Christian
communities as allies. He said it would be pointless to
discard Christianity in the sense that it has nothing to offer. There are avenues
within it which could serve to alleviate some of the worst of its own effects.
Temper it. That goes to the tactical thing, slowing down.

democratizing movements of the 20th century with the powerful light of the emerging movements of the

387 See Huerta’s call (on her 80th birthday) for weaving movements together, see
It is important to “always make common cause with a narrow ground.” Churchill described an alliance in Denver, Colorado, to oppose the Columbus Day holiday and an annual parade which celebrates it. This protest draws a fair number of Christian allies, about which he said, “If you want to come out and oppose it, it’s the right thing to do. We can link arms, I’ll sing one of your songs, and you sing one of mine, okay? But there’s a lot beyond that.”

Showing up matters, but Churchill thinks of concrete solidarity from a position of privilege as sacrificing something more.

What I would consider reasonable practitioners who will be in concrete solidarity or support rather than just mouthing it and announcing themselves to be in solidarity with armed struggle happening half a planet away. They will render support and assistance to those who need it who are engaged in armed struggle. They do not fail to reciprocate…. there would be a basic solidarity based upon opposition to a common oppressor. I will shelter you. I will feed you. I will incur risk on your behalf. I won’t do what you do, but that doesn’t mean that I’m entitled to a risk-free environment. And that’s the comfort zone, which is the predominating thing; that, “No, I’m not obligated to incur any tangible risk or sacrifice in this process.”

Churchill challenges privileged allies to extend the limits of what most dominant people think of as an ally role – expressions of solidarity, showing up for protest, affirming militant struggle abroad but not at home. These practices mean little when they entail no risk, no actual threat to the privileges of dominant social location. They do nothing to actually reverse the reversals by in any way sacrificing entitlement. In particular, Christian individuals and institutions should not underestimate the material resources
they have to offer social movements – money, buildings, access to political power, and moral authority (whether legitimate or not). 388

Solidarity as (Non)violence: Turning over Privilege

Effectively dismantling privileges means not only sacrificing money and material advantages, but engaging in multiple practices that address the various levels of violence in community. Jensen says that if privileged allies want to have integrity among oppressed communities, “We who are relatively privileged need to ask ourselves what we are willing to give up, what amount of security we are willing to sacrifice to change the status quo.” 389 This is true for members of the dominant culture at whatever place of commitment, inaction or action they find themselves. Social change requires getting out of a privileged comfort zone. There are a number of practices that take privileged persons out of this comfort zone: giving up material resources, using privilege to gain access to and have influence on structures of power, using educational privilege to raise consciousness. Jensen said, “The point is that being privileged it is my responsibility to use that privilege to undercut its basis.” Jensen noted that he “never set out to be an ally to women. I never set out to be an ally to indigenous people. I just told the truth as I understood it to be. That has sort of turned me into the de facto one.” When oppressed communities witness privileged people showing up, telling the truth, accepting the


389 Jensen, Language Older Than Words, 206.
consequences and sacrifices of entitlement-denying practices, then privileged persons may be seen as allies.

Dear discussed the ways in which he has learned, over time, to continually turn over his privilege by sacrificing it.

I’m white, male, well-educated, a Catholic priest, Jesuit. If [Saint] Francis and Gandhi are right, everything is upside-down. I’m it. I’m the most awful oppressor on the planet. I should, before anybody else, be on a journey of downward mobility and should be in prison. I accept that. I’m trying to be on that journey. That’s partly why I’ve come to New Mexico and I’m not at Harvard or Berkeley or Georgetown. I’m trying to get out of the privilege. That’s why I did not get a doctorate, although I would have loved to have. That’s why I’m not teaching, although I would like to. Trying to be out there, an activist resister among the poor. I’m not doing a good job, but I’m trying. The layers of privilege are very, very deep. So I’m trying to use the gifts I have and turn that privilege over on behalf of the poor…

What primarily gives Dear credibility as an advocate of (non)violence among communities brutally violated by oppression is that he has taken the actions of which he speaks and has made significant sacrifices in the pursuit of peace. Everywhere he has travelled from Central America to Palestine, the Philippines to Columbia, regarding the debate between violence and (non)violence, “They’ve been very respectful for me because they know I have a prison record and they know that I’m not just talking about it.” People from abroad can’t fathom that a U.S. priest would be voluntarily in an out of jail. Dear described a time he visited Northern Ireland, where “there is a deep-seated hatred in the Catholic community and among some of the radicals that I was hanging out with” towards the Catholic Church because the vast majority of the priests in Northern Ireland didn’t do anything for the struggle for independence. He described having dinner
and dialogue for three hours with hard-core IRA, H-Block hunger strikers\(^{390}\) who had survived the brutal protest. These veterans of struggle were very interested in the tactic and tradition of militant (non)violence, for which they had little historical reference. Dear and the IRA members considered one another resisters. All of the interviewees have been considered reliable allies over time because of their practices and sacrifices, not because of their beliefs in the efficacy or justifiability of either violence or (non)violence. Until and unless oppressed communities witness these various practices and sacrifices over time, claims to solidarity by privileged people are held in question.

Solidarity as (Non)violence: Suffering Powerlessness With

The previously listed practices of solidarity may suggest that (non)violence is primarily a matter of giving something up from a position of privilege. This is certainly an aspect of understanding solidarity as possible practices of (non)violence that address inequalities. But from a traditional liberationist view, solidarity is more than merely giving things up on behalf of others. Solidarity with the poor reflects God’s own preference for the poor by becoming one with them. This was Dear’s perspective.

[On the matter of] Solidarity, really your question is, “what does it mean to be and practice nonviolence.” … Nonviolence certainly means solidarity with the poorest of the poor. That’s the question: how far do you want to be in solidarity with the poor? What does that mean? Simplifying your own life? Befriending actual poor people? Actually serving, not telling them what to do? Listening to them? Theologically I find God in the poor, and then I want to become one with the poor. Solidarity with the poor can take a billion different forms. But it does mean some kind of material poverty way beyond simple lifestyle. Active involvement

with people who are materially poor, and advocating for justice for them so that they’re no longer poor. Dorothy Day said, “I advocate poverty and I condemn poverty.” So solidarity is like that. But it means living your life with them, for them, in them, through them. For me, I go deep, I say “that’s where God is.”

For Dear, this literally means putting yourself geographically with the poor. Speaking of his decision to live permanently in New Mexico,

You want to be in solidarity with the poor, you have to go and be with them. Pack up and move to Mississippi. So for me, solidarity [is] just coming and living here. Not living in quite a rich place…. I was in India in very poor places, reflecting about New Mexico. If you are going to be in solidarity with the people of Africa and India, it seems to me that you have to be among the poor of your own country. So I’ve always tried to be working with the homeless, and prisoners, and immigrants. Coming here was a movement, to my mind, an effort to stay in closer to the poor. But it’s a lifelong journey and struggle.

For Dear, (non)violence means giving up the material advantages of a privileged position in the dominant culture, and aligning oneself with persons and communities who have been deprived of the same as a result of structural and cultural violence. As choices, such practices are still privileged ones. Yet the motivation for these choices intends to understand and dismantle all forms of violence by engaging increasingly deeper ways of sharing the experience of the oppressed.

Power said she learned in prison that “suffering the powerlessness with” others, both materially and psychologically, is critical to identifying the ways in which any person might learn to act and to be in solidarity:

Immersing yourself into the way that people in truly ground down situations continue to live as humans and transform moments and have what I think of as graceful survival. This is not grim survival. This is not fighting each other survival. This is sharing and taking care of each other survival with lots of love and generosity in it.
The more closely shared experience of suffering exposes that the resources for resisting violence are not merely the privileged putting their resources at the disposal of the poor and oppressed, nor giving them up for the sake of not participating in the structures of material violence. This more closely shared experience also reveals other non-material resources and practices of resistance that are available for struggle and survival in community where material resources are scarce.  

Solidarity as (Non)violence: Do Your Work With Your Own People

For privileged allies, the work of solidarity is doubly located. On the one hand there is the work on the spectrum of “showing up” as well as “suffering with” communities who are bearing the burdens of violence more directly. But solidarity also means a willingness to work precisely where one is. Staughton Lynd shared one of his favorite anecdotes about a Spanish anarchist leader

Who was way back in a noontime lunch line and somebody said to him, “Comrade, your work is so important that, come with me, I’ll help you get some lunch right away. After all, think of the revolution.” To which the anarchist leader, without moving an inch said, “This is the revolution.”

Though the extreme circumstances which led her to prison proved to be her learning ground, Power said that the ability to learn how to act in solidarity does not necessarily require being in any kind of special circumstances. Power said that wherever one is, it is critical to analyze the precise place where one finds oneself for the ways in which action is required.

---

391 By analyzing sources from women of color, Sharon Welch’s *Feminist Ethic of Risk* identifies resources such as courage, joy, interdependence, resilience, integrity, etc. that are available to communities of resistance.
One of the things that “be where you are and name what’s where you are” does, is, first of all it expands the base of activism. Everybody is somewhere. Everybody is called to this. People write to me. This one guy says, “I’m an investment banker. I don’t know why but I’m really profoundly moved by your story. What should I do?” I said, “I think you should be an investment banker. I think that you should encounter the contradictions of that. I think that you should look at how you’d resolve those contradictions. Be that, do that.” You know, withdraw and be pure? Well that’s one possibility. But the real transformation is in… seeing that the contradictions in any system are the moments for change, for transformation.

As Power indicates, through tangible, intentional encounter with our environment, transformation begins at the intersections of awareness of the contradictions between the various layers of privileged and oppressed identities and the active commitment to creating a more just and (non)violent world. It is important to note, however, that encountering and resolving such contradictions must be engaged both individually and collectively, both inside and outside of one’s own community.\(^\text{392}\)

When Dear was in El Salvador at the age of twenty-one, Jesuits were running a refugee camp. Most of the refugees and the Jesuits were very involved with the FMLN.\(^\text{393}\) Around the matter of Dear’s commitment to (non)violence,

The Jesuits theologians, Ellacuría who was killed and Jon Sobrino who is still alive…they totally dismissed me. All of the Jesuits still dismissed me. They knew me when I was a goofy kid, and I’m talking about Gandhi and King. They’re

\(^{392}\) Power echoes Beverly Harrison, but Harrison emphasizes the necessity to do this work collectively. “Awareness of contradictions is never the result of individual striving. It comes from a process of concrete engagement, an entering into struggle against oppressive conditions that also involved being draw into collective effort to overcome these conditions. Such consciousness takes hold only in concrete engagement; it’s through the struggle that we acquire more profound awareness of the range of social oppression and its interconnectedness. Each of us must learn to extend a critical analysis of the contradictions of our lives in an ever-widening circle, until it inclusively incorporates those whose situations differ from our own. This involves naming structures that create the social privilege we possess as well as understanding how we have been victims” (Harrison, Making the Connections, 236).

\(^{393}\) The FMLN is the Frente Farabundo Martí para la Liberación Nacional (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front), a coalition of guerrilla groups resisting political and economic oppression in El Salvador in the 1980s. It is now a legal, left-wing political party in the country.
smoking cigarettes and [saying], “Aw, gimme a break, kid.” But I’m watching them and their lives, and they’re getting ten death threats a day! We disagree. They do support just war for revolution. But their lives were by and large radically nonviolent. But I didn’t get into it too much because, they weren’t going to listen to me. I mean, it wasn’t my reality. The problem there started in the United States. They told me, “Well if you really believe in that, get your government to stop sending money and weapons here that are killing our people…. Your work is in the States, not here.” That was a transformative moment to hear them say that. They’re right!

North American solidarity means not only being with and for the poor, “but resisting the forces of destruction that are killing the poor around the world” within the United States power structures and dominant culture more broadly. After this trip, Dear began resisting the wars in Central America within privileged populations in the United States. He “thought of like ten different things to do, and I did them”: public speaking, recruiting speakers, showing films, and being arrested repeatedly in actions against aid to the Contras. Part and parcel of the practices and tactics suggested as effective and faithful in the previous chapter, (non)violent solidarity from a social location in the dominant culture means effectively raising consciousness within one’s community in addition to acts of collective disruption.

White, U.S. Christians have a particular role to play working with their own people within the structures of violence and power that are the Church. Through preaching and speaking on behalf of the gospel of nonviolence, Dear said,

I use talking about Jesus and God to help people to reveal to themselves what they are doing. We’re like a culture of Pharisees or self-righteous believers saying we believe in God. We don’t believe in God, we’re actually off killing and trying to make money.

Dear said that if Jesus was nonviolent, then he believes that

Anybody who claims to be a follower of Jesus has to stop all support of war and become a person of nonviolence. Well, that’s enough work for the rest of our lives. Because the eighty million Christians in the United States, I would say 99.9% of them are for violence and war. Christians are the problem. So I’m writing and speaking to them and trying to convert Christians to the gospel of Jesus.595 And myself. I’m not trying to convert poor people. I’m not trying to convert the people of El Salvador or Palestine.

Dear said that he memorized one sentence in the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* that has instructed him where to direct his primary efforts to preach the gospel of nonviolence:

“Let all sincere white people who care about nonviolence go and convert all other white people to practice nonviolence.” In response to that sentence, Dear thought,

“Okay, Malcolm, I’m trying to do that.” I could have gone to live in El Salvador like I wanted to, but the problems in the world are the rich white people in the world in the United States, church people, Christians, Catholics. They’re the ones, we’re the ones who need to be converted. So I’m trying to live that and to teach that.

For privileged allies, practicing (non)violence means doing so among the communities who are most responsible for violence in one’s own context.

---

595 Dear echoes the sentiment of liberationist theologian Robert McAfee Brown, who wrote that if white North American Christians want to impose (non)violence on someone, they should impose it on themselves. McAfee Brown wrote, “To be as direct as possible, I see no less exacting task for white churches than that of seeking, at whatever cost, to embody *revolutionary nonviolent love*. Anything else is no longer worth the bother and can be done quite adequately by other groups in our society. If we are going to talk about a *special role* for the Church – a role that might make a difference to the human family – then nothing short of the stance of revolutionary nonviolent love will do (McAfee Brown, *Religion and Violence*, 99). Galtung also makes a similar point: if (non)violence is going to destroy oppressive structures, it should be conducted by those who are the primary beneficiaries of violence (Galtung, *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine*, 20).
Solidarity as (Non)violence: Accompanying as Reciprocal Relationship

The preferential option for the poor serves as a necessary corrective to the behaviors of controlling knowledge and action of that has been the unfortunate and predominant history of privileged allied action in poor and oppressed communities. But Lynd critiques this essential insight of Latin American liberation theology as is limited because

The idea implicitly assumed that he or she who exercised that option was a middle-class religious personage or intellectual responding to the needs of the less fortunate. But if accompanier and accompanied are conceptualized, not as one person assisting another person in need, but as two experts, the intellectual universe is transformed. No longer do we have one kind of person helping a person of another kind. Instead we have two persons exploring the way forward together.  

Staughton Lynd said what it means to be a privileged person working within dominant culture power differences is to emphasize in practice the imperative to learn to work together on a more reciprocal basis. This includes all of the practices previously shared throughout this chapter, but has a fundamentally different orientation. The Lynds explained how a mutually shared commitment to change has worked on a very practical level in all of their activism, beginning with Alice’s counseling draft resisters during the Vietnam War.

What nonviolent revolution consists of is persons who have something to offer, some kind of training, some kind of expertise, going to live with or in the presence of oppressed people and each kind of person putting his or her form of expertise on the table. This is something Alice came to as a draft counselor. In draft counseling there were two experts. There was the person like Alice who

---

396 Lynd, Accompanying, 6.

397 "The counselee was an expert on his own life experience, on the predictable response of parents and significant others, and on how much risk the counselee was prepared to confront." Staughton Lynd,
knew the laws and the regulations and the practice of Selective Service boards. Then there were people who were struggling with these momentous life decisions. When we became lawyers… here were two upper-middle class persons who had no particular reason to pal around with Eastern European steel workers in Youngstown, Ohio, let alone the worst of the worst, prisoners sentenced to death. But because we had this skill, or this expertise, I can’t begin to tell you how quickly all of that evaporated. We became very close comrades and friends of just an unending series of rank-and-file workers and prisoners.

To which Alice added, “And really loving and respectful and appreciative, trusting relationships.” These relationships are more than just privileged allies helping oppressed people. Alice Lynd described the most meaningful of all of her work as “touching the life of an individual at a very deep level” and “the taking on of life together.” Learning to work on a reciprocal basis is the cornerstone for (non)violent revolution itself.

If oppressors truly cannot share in the knowledge and experience of those in the position of being oppressed, can they truly be held accountable for failing to honor the oppressed community’s perspectives? The liberationist commitment to the poor and oppressed continues to push the privileged to recognize that there is no neutral ground in their own commitments – the work of solidarity means concretely practicing the belief that God stands on the side of the oppressed over against oppression and its agents. Therefore, justice-seeking persons are called to stand on the side of the “victims of history,” seeking to know and act on the basis of oppressed communities’ own

unpublished manuscript of Accompanying: Pathways to Social Change (forthcoming). The “two experts” model is also described by Alice and Staughton Lynd in Stepping Stones, 84-87.

398 I am grateful to my colleague in the doctoral program Dave Scott for asking me this question.

399 Citing Gutiérrez, Chopp accuses the practical theological method of consistently “refusing to position itself for the oppressed” by appealing to the correlational method, which consistently values essences within the Christian theological tradition over the concrete circumstances of the “victims of history” (Chopp, “Practical Theology and Liberation,” 135).
knowledge of their experience and of what their own liberation consists. This does not
mean, however, that the oppressors’ identity, knowledge, experience, and even privilege
are of no value whatsoever.

Harding and the Lynds embrace the language of accompaniment coming out of
Latin American liberation struggles as the most helpful model for what it means to work
in solidarity. Staughton Lynd credits El Salvadoran Archbishop Oscar Romero as the first
person to use this term, “pastoral de acompañamiento (pastoral work of
accompanying).”400 Throughout Romero’s speeches, sermons and letters, there are
constant references to the Latin American liberation theology concept of “the preferential
option of the poor.” But Lynd says that Romero moved from a concept whereby the
“option” to be with and among the poor is “something different, more equal, more in the
nature of a joint undertaking” than “a choice made by Church personnel and middle-class
intellectuals who are not poor [taking] up a new way of life in the midst of the poverty
surrounding them.”401

In the accompanying model, the privileged person not only brings a message but
receives a message, listens more than talks, and gives way to an “ultimate vision of the
poor themselves taking responsibility for their own liberation.”402 Particularly for the
church, this final element of ceding the vision of justice to the poor serves the purpose of
“unmasking the root of false paternalism.”403 It is a serious difficulty but a crucial

400 Lynd, Accompanying, 91; 128.
401 Ibid., 133.
402 Ibid., 133-134.
403 Ibid., 135.
challenge for privileged allies to share in movements while unlearning their patterns of dominance and putting their entitlements at the service of social struggles and learning to struggle across differences in a truly reciprocal relationship.

In the context of the interviews, even my own question about allies elicited a criticism of the concept of being an ally altogether, suggesting that ally language may reinforce the differences of power and inequality between persons and groups. During our interview, when I asked Harding “What has been your own experience in struggle of the meaningful, helpful role of allies?” he answered,

I think we are at a stage where white allies are not what we most need…. In a sense the idea that the essence of this is a struggle that belongs to x, y, z and here come the allies along to help out. My feeling is that we are now at a point where we have got to claim the whole business as our struggle. We might have allies in Mexico, or Cuba, or Canada. But within America I think it is absolutely crucial to try to start thinking more and more of the struggle being all of our struggles. The ally formulation may be too much of a twentieth century formulation. That might mean that we must all be figuring out how to lay claim to all of it. Because in the GLBT situation I don’t want to be saying, “You guys go ahead and you take care, you work on this as best you can, because this is your struggle, and I want to be your ally as best I can.” That’s not inclusive enough for me.

My own language in the interview guide betrayed that I believe an ally has a “role” to play in social struggle; a cause in which “to be involved.” The idea of a role stands in contrast to having a mutual relationship with persons and communities in struggle. Ally language and practice may reinforce a dominant position, thereby reinforcing unjust socio-economic and political hierarchies that are the basis of all forms of violence.

Nonetheless, activists must realize there are existing inequalities of material and psychological power among movement participants. Solidarity means recognizing the power dynamics inherent in structural and cultural violence, resisting and acting against
dominant behaviors brought into movements from privileged social locations, while remaining committed to shared struggle across differences.

This relates to a point Schulman made about the collapse of the pro-choice movement. “Straight women were given entirely the burden of getting rights for themselves.” Men were so far behind in understanding the need for women to have control over their own bodies that they were not able to take up the abortion rights struggle as their own. Women had to leave “the male-female pairing that was the foundation of their emotional life” in order to engage the work.

Ultimately a lot of women realized that if they wanted to have an emotional life they couldn’t be in this women’s movement. And it fell apart. That’s why abortion rights are such a mess right now. They are barely available unless you have money.

In order for reproductive justice for women to succeed as a movement, men need to join the struggle as if it were their own.

As Schulman noted, there are issues of sexism in the queer liberation struggle. But a main difference is there is a “community of gay men and women that work together to win rights for each other and so your friends and your partners are in the same movement that you’re in.” To Schulman, the demands of being a straight ally, of taking up the struggle for gay and lesbian liberation as a shared struggle, demands a tremendous commitment. She gives a number of examples within a family.

If a gay person is not allowed to babysit a same-sex niece or nephew, then the straight people in the family should refuse to do so as well. The deprivation of resources will force the homophobes, in most cases, to reassess their behavior or be alienated…. If… homophobic Uncle Arthur organizes Christmas dinner around the schedules of the heterosexual couples in the family and the homosexual partner’s schedule is not considered, then no one should participate in Christmas dinner. Since the originating Arthur may decide that something is better than
nothing, the social consensus created by the other straight family members will force the homosexual partner’s needs to be fully and equally considered. Of course, for this to be organized currently depends on the gay members actively agitating for supportive action on the part of straights. But if there were a broad cultural agreement that heterosexual non-participation was the expected mode of behavior, the burden would be off the individual gay people in the family.  

Schulman’s example makes the risks inherent in practices of solidarity and turning over privilege in the struggle for justice evident. Schulman decries a false discourse of tolerance that suggests communities that have historically been violated and excluded can be “painlessly included without anyone else’s position having to be adjusted.” Once again, a mutually shared struggle requires privileged actors within dominant culture to give up their material and psychological advantages.

The basic idea of accompanying is walking alongside in the context of differences. Additionally, in the context of shared action in social struggle, Lynd defines accompanying as an umbrella term “that includes a family of related practices: equality; listening; seeking consensus; and exemplary action” in coalition among parties that experience different levels of impact.

The equality of participants is foundational…. An altogether different atmosphere comes into being if there is mutual recognition that no one has all the answers and that it is accordingly necessary to search together so that (in the Quaker phrase) “way may open.” Listening then becomes intense and may be prolonged. The desired place of arrival will be consensus. However, should consensus not emerge, instead of maneuvering to win a vote the next step is likely to be a time in which individuals or small groups act out perceived images of the road ahead. The process will be understood in the manner of sowing. We ourselves are the seed that is thrown onto various kinds of soil. Whether or not something grows and flourishes is not so much a test of our abilities as an experiment, the results of

---

404 Schulman, Ties the Bind, 49-50.

405 Schulman, Ties that Bind, 51.
which, whether good or ill, will contribute to the common store of understanding.\footnote{Lynd, Accompanying, 155.}

In Lynd’s experience, getting “thrown out of the history profession it made it possible for me to get to know workers and then prisoners as a lawyer in a way that I never, never could have done as an Ivy League historian.”

So the big news is, the headline is, to all the other [people like us], gotta get out of Cambridge, Massachusetts, Berkeley, California. It cannot be done just as a projection of the university campus or academic life. You want the United States to become one big Tea Party. You want our society to lurch toward fascism. Continue your present lifestyle. You want to do something about it, leave those enclaves of liberalism and find a way to take up life in the rest of the United States, that portion that extends from the Sierra Nevada mountains to the Appalachians where most of America lives. There has in the past been an American radicalism that flourished in those parts. A life like that of Eugene Debs, an event like the so-called Green Corn rebellion in Oklahoma during the first World War. I mean there’s nothing about radicalism that is incomprehensible or essentially alien to the spirit of middle America. But nothing is going to happen until people with radical ideas take up residence in those places. It really is as simple as that.

This will require academics on the left in the United States abandoning “preoccupation with a novel vocabulary, or a new organization,” but instead to “venture forth into relationships of companionship with ordinary people in places where there may be few fellow radicals.”\footnote{Jensen noted that radical consciousness among common people is “incendiary” when paired with the action of privileged persons with access to power, and constitutes a great threat to structures of violence.} Jensen noted that radical consciousness among common people is “incendiary” when paired with the action of privileged persons with access to power, and constitutes a great threat to structures of violence.
Solidarity as (Non)violence: Mutual Accountability Practices

Huerta and the Lynds both believed that most of the primary obstacles to successful social movements are internal accountability and interpersonal solidarity. In her own organization, Huerta said that one of the worst problems internal to organizing was *chisme* – gossip, in Spanish. Her foundation spends a tremendous amount of time on intra-organization training in communication, conflict resolution and accountability processes. Similarly, the Lynds said that in their experience they saw movements crushed by a lack of direct speaking – the unwillingness to engage problems and issues openly instead of engaging in power struggles behind the backs of comrades in social change.408

Based on the Lynd’s experience of watching good social movements and their organizations destroy themselves, Staughton Lynd writes,

> We need to proceed in a way that builds community. There must be certain ground rules. We should practice direct speaking: if something bothers you about another person, go speak to him or her and do not gossip to a third person. No one should be permitted to present themselves in caucuses that define a fixed position beforehand and are impervious to the exchange of experiences. We must allow spontaneity and experiment without fear of humiliation and disgrace. Not only our organizing but our conduct toward one another must be paradigmatic in engendering a sense of truly being brothers and sisters.409

---

408 Staughton Lynd writes about the dimensions of “the apparently limitless capacity of the Left for self-destruction and fratricide,” *From Here to There*, 215.

409 Lynd, *Wobblies and Zapatistas*, 114-115. Lynd writes about the need for community rules in social solidarity and movement work in *From Here to There* on pages 94 and 104.
Communities need articulated rules about behavior, not articulated rules for belief.\footnote{Lynd, From Here to There, 104. Lynd outlines the rules set by prisoners for the Pelican Bay “Prisoner Hunger Strike Rules” in Accompanying, 156. The Occupy movement is an interesting case-study in disparate groups working together to establish rules and consensus among competing claims to the justifiable use of violence and (non)violence. Many Occupy groups are using the St. Paul’s principles, which were developed by radical communities in their resistance efforts during the Republican National Convention in Minneapolis/St. Paul, Minnesota in 2008, see http://rnc08report.org/archive/224.shtml. See also Brian Dominick, “Pacifism and ‘Diversity of Tactics’: A Compromise Proposal,” in ZNet, November 12, 2011, http://www.zcommunications.org/pacifism-and-diversity-of-tactics-a-compromise-proposal-by-brian-dominick.} Four interviewees spoke about the need to establish rules for community that relate to solidarity. One of B♀’s primary organizational commitments is All Of Us Or None, an organization formed by former political prisoners. This group had to articulate very concrete rules that worked directly on holding different dimensions of dominance within the group in check.

I’m on this committee that’s the mediation committee. There’s about ten of us now. We have to have rules. You can’t bring your pistol to the fucking meeting. You can’t come loaded. You have to be respectful. You can’t be a sexist pig. You can’t be a racist pig. You can’t be a queer-hater, all that shit. We have to lay all that out in language that everybody can understand. What happens if people do that? How do we handle that? We have to police ourselves, for lack of a better word. So we’ve been working on that. That’s how we get to know each other. It’s by working together. And talking together and eating together and joking together.

Other interviewees proposed other rules. Jensen proposed that communities of resistance take on and enforce a code of defense that is something like the United Nations’ Responsibility to Protect (R2P). “Part of what being an ally means is we have an R2P, we have a responsibility to protect.” Concretely this might mean “if some man rapes a woman in some certain community, there have to be consequences.” The man might be kicked out of the community, or face other consequences based on the context and community decision-making structures and lines of accountability.
Schulman also spoke about setting out clearly when defensive intervention from outside the community is appropriate. She writes, “there is one case in which third-party intervention is the moral imperative” on behalf of gay people: “when the shunned, scapegoated and oppressed person asks you to intervene.”  

Defensive intervention on behalf of a violated person or community who asks creates a number of potentially positive outcomes: creating integrity for the intervener, even if the intervention is not successful, shows the victimized person the someone cares, gives perpetrators the knowledge that their behavior is offensive, may create accountability and consequences for the perpetrator, creates a zeitgeist in which other persons might be protected from suffering in the same way in the future. Schulman writes that intervention “reposition[s] one's self towards the acknowledgment that other people are real, even if they have less status and are more endangered.” Schulman’s language here recalls that (non)violent practices of solidarity are meant to concretely address and embody the necessary shifts in reversal and entitlement that are a part of the rationalizing of violence. All people in social struggle must be willing to be accountable for their behaviors. In particular, persons from privileged social locations should be open and humble to accepting responsibility for replicating dominance in social movements, and remain committed to changing those behaviors collectively.


412 Ibid., 98-99.

413 Schulman, *Gentrification of the Mind*, 72. On the other hand, Wallace notes that with any ally intervention “we risk complicity” in the old narrative of victim and savior (“Confronting Wrongs, Affirming Difference,” 5).
Yet both Jensen and Lynd said that solidarity and accountability to oppressed communities does not necessarily amount to doing or believing whatever oppressed groups tell you. Jensen said that solidarity “means listening. It doesn’t mean that you have to put up with shit… It doesn’t mean that all of us [privileged people] have to do” everything and meet every demand and request of individuals simply because of their oppressed social location. Occasionally criticized that his theory of solidarity “defers to whatever poor people are demanding at the moment,” Staughton Lynd writes that “accompaniment is not deference.” He cites Archbishop Oscar Romero who said the aim of the church in solidarity with the poor is to support them in their claims for justice, but equally so to denounce all injustice among the poor and oppressed, and to hold them accountable for wrong behaviors.

**Practical Theology and Social Change: Self-Critical Solidarity**

In his writing and work, Staughton Lynd has demonstrated that the most dramatic instances of solidarity across racial difference that he has seen have been in the labor movement, during wartime, and in prisons. Extreme circumstances of struggle against inhumane conditions in the Attica and Lucasville prison uprisings suggest a theory for social change today.

---


415 Ibid., 176.

416 See Lynd, “Overcoming Racism,” in *From Here to There*, 198-204.

The key at Attica and Lucasville was for members of each race first to organize separately, with whatever music, dress, and symbolism spoke to each group’s particular culture, and then unite and fight. Separation in the first stages of group activity was a necessary tactic…. But the strategy was racial solidarity on behalf of common goals. In Vietnam and in American prisons these bonds of “black and white together” formed under the hammer of common danger and oppression. It remains to be seen whether the same process can bring together African-Americans, Caucasians and Hispanics when they are in civilian life rather than in a war zone, or on the street instead of behind bars. I believe that whether we succeed in creating a new, interracial movement of poor and working people depends on first recognizing the need for this two-step process. The formation of identity groups of African-Americans, or Aryans, or women, or gays, or any other identifiable minority, is a stage and a tactic that must be followed by creation of a united movement. Sub-groups should feel free to gather by themselves as needed but the purpose of forming a new, united Movement must be recognized as paramount by all.418

Lynd’s delineation of a “two-step process” of separation and solidarity is helpful. This may not be a linear process, but a cycle of separation and collaboration among groups with differences of identity, tactics, and belief. Lynd’s previously shared metaphor of sowing seeds of actions, which may not be agreed to by everyone in struggle, is useful. It should be possible for individuals and small groups to act and strategize separately when consensus cannot be achieved. An ideology of unity should not preclude self-determined, self-activity in social struggle.

If separation of identity groups is necessary and desired, whatever those dominant groupings may be, some of the tasks to nurture solidarity for persons from primarily privileged identity groups appear clear in the work of dismantling dominance within movements. A particularly helpful term is individual and community “self-critical

---

418 Lynd, Accompanying, 75.
solidarity.” 419 Self-critical solidarity implies first and foremost critical, structural analysis of any given context of action. As the previous chapters have displayed, this analysis is useful to determine effective practices of social transformation. The second goal, for the purposes of solidarity in social struggle within an intentional stage of separate identity group formation and action, is the analysis of the operative structures of violence that are present are replicating themselves within the movement and movement participants. In relation to violence and (non)violence, this self-critical analysis includes thoughtful reflection by advocates of (non)violence on the various forms of violence, many of which many remain unknown or unidentified, in which almost all activists are likely to be implicated. Such violence includes the imposition of knowledge, the imperialism of cultural superiority (racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.), and the acceptance of state violence as justified to maintain order. This analysis of the impact of social locations within the movement, however, should turn into practices of nurturing (non)violent solidarity internal and external to a movement, many of which practices have been suggested throughout this chapter: asking, listening, awareness, intervention, and accountability. From a practical perspective, this would mean the development of conscious models of self-reflexive solidarity, which may include the formal articulation of rules, and which are subject to evaluation by different interests within the movement. 420

419 This phrase comes from Matthew Lamb in Solidarity with Victims: Toward a Theology of Social Transformation (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1982).

420 McCann and Strain write that Christian communities must invent and construct practical theologies that are “models of reality and for action (Polity and Praxis, 204),” which are “subject to evaluation” by a relevant, overlapping community of inquirers (34-35).
The creation of a practical theological model among Christians in Christian community that is engaged in social struggle and transformation within historical context appears critical to examining the particular role of Christianity in violence, domination and liberation. Heitink notes that this self-critical reflexivity of Christians should neither focus abstractly on “the church,” but instead on concrete people and moments within the church/es or other groups under consideration. Clearly the notion of self-criticism should not be limited by individualism.\footnote{Heitink, \textit{Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999). Referring to the work of Henning Luther, Heitink notes that “the church” as an abstract point of analysis is “a subject without subjects (264).” Heitink notes that practical theology “meets its boundary” in a practice of solidarity. “A critical subjectivity enables one, from a privileged position, to engage the needs of society” (265), but not to engage in true solidarity, “unless one is prepared to live among the poor and to share fully in their lives (264).”}

This chapter on solidarity shows that privileged allies need to internally and actively deconstruct their social location in the midst of their own community and in the midst of common social struggle. Solidarity as (non)violence includes commitments to individual and community self-examination and the development of group rules around asking, listening and awareness across the boundaries of various differences. These practices seek to concretely dismantle and sacrifice material privileges and a psychological sense of entitlement. Persons who benefit from the structures of violence must establish accountability practices that concretely address the denial, reversal, and entitlements endemic to all forms of violence. Doing this collective, self-critical, historical-analytical work from a Christian social location with a concrete situation of social struggle might constitute a practice of “true discipleship.”\footnote{Míguez Bonino, \textit{Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation}, xxvi.}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Heitink} Heitink, \textit{Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains} (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999). Referring to the work of Henning Luther, Heitink notes that “the church” as an abstract point of analysis is “a subject without subjects (264).” Heitink notes that practical theology “meets its boundary” in a practice of solidarity. “A critical subjectivity enables one, from a privileged position, to engage the needs of society” (265), but not to engage in true solidarity, “unless one is prepared to live among the poor and to share fully in their lives (264).”
\end{thebibliography}
That the idea of a solidarity as (non)violence intends an increasingly reciprocal relationship undermines the notion that poor and oppressed people can be the only source of knowledge and the only agents to determine the future directions for liberation. Individual and group identity is such a complicated mix that separating out privileged and marginalized experiences is extremely complicated. Additionally, that privileged allies may have no helpful resources, knowledge or ability to really understand the situation of violence means that real solidarity and mutually shared vision and action for a just world are truly impossible. Nonetheless, the concrete task of solidarity as (non)violence urges allies to the complicated and difficult work of undoing dominance in movements, through multiple practices, as essential aspects of social change.
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSION

A Critical, Practical, Theological Model of Social Change

The foregoing chapters have taken a practical theological approach to evaluating Christian (non)violence in light of conversation with twelve diverse interviewees about the means of social change and the relationship of these means to social location. There are two concurrent tasks for this conclusion in view of this evaluation. Practical theology reflects on practices in order to suggest new models for transformational practice. Therefore, I will summarize elements of a Christian practical, theological model for social change implied by my analysis of the qualitative data. At the same time, the qualitative method, the action of writing the dissertation and offering this model demands consideration of the adequacy of practical theology as a frame for this project. Alongside the model for thinking about (non)violent social change from a critical, Christian perspective, I offer some reflections on the practical theological method.

Element I: Critical – Structural Analysis and Transformative Historiography

One of the hallmarks of practical theology is its commitment to examining concrete practices in the context of the real world. Therefore, critical historiography is one of the unique practices of the practical theological method.\footnote{As in liberation theologies, according to McCann and Strain the critical tools used by practical theology are more formally akin to the social sciences and secular ideologies (Polity and Praxis, 25).} Chapters Two and
Three demonstrated that any evaluation of the transformative effect of a Christian theology or practice of social change must: 1) be set within an analysis of the historical and current contexts of struggle and violence; 2) seek to understand the complex nature of violence in its direct, structural and cultural forms, and; 3) remain committed to examining the role and participation of Christian individuals, institutions and theology in violence in all three forms. This analysis intends to identify how Christian (non)violence serves as an ideology that reinforces the dominant culture’s rationalization of violence through denial, reversal and entitlement.

But as José Míguez Bonino points out, “the identification of the ideology implicit in any given historical praxis does not as such disqualify it.”\textsuperscript{424} De-ideologizing Christian (non)violence sees analysis as an expanded practice of (non)violence itself. The identification of an ideological function implicit in Christian (non)violence proposes to self-implicate Christians in their own violence for the expressed purpose of meeting the goal of (non)violence: dismantling violence. Ignoring the complexity of violence is where the (non)violent thought and practice represented by white, liberal Christians has fallen short. A critical, practical theology of social change must pass through an analysis and awareness of violence at the intersections of history, the context of struggle, and any given individual or community’s social location. Without such broad-ranging critical analysis, the practice of (non)violence is incomplete. Critical analysis as (non)violent

\textsuperscript{424} Míguez-Bonino, \textit{Doing Theology in a Revolutionary Situation}, 94.
practice develops insights into the realities of history through which we seek new and renewed collective practices of transformation towards the creation of a new world.425

Critical analysis informs Christian (non)violence in a number of fruitful ways. An accurate portrayal of U.S. history displays the pervasive involvement of Christians and their theological and cultural traditions in the perpetration of all forms of violence in this country. Since all social change practices take place within the context of an ongoing legacy and context of violence, activists committed to Christian (non)violence have no credibility with oppressed communities without an awareness of this history. This awareness includes the ways in which, historically, practices of (non)violence may have been: limited in their effectiveness; played a role in pacification instead of liberation; supported the structurally violent status quo and its material and psychological benefits by failing to demand or force significant changes, and; worked in tension or tandem with organized violence. Additionally this knowledge would indicate when and how (non)violence has been effectively deployed, and what particular factors made it effective in context. To understand how violence and (non)violence have been effective for liberation and how they have not is to remove them from theological abstraction and refuse placing either of them on a false, moral high ground. A critical analysis that seeks to work for structural transformation must reject strictly dichotomizing violence and (non)violence in historical and current practices.

425 Feminist and womanist Christian liberationist theologians and ethicists have named this kind of critical historical and structural analysis as a part of a process of concrete liberation in various ways. In Mining the Motherlode: Methods in Womanist Ethics (Cleveland: Pilgrim Press, 2006) Stacey Floyd-Thomas traces the lineage of what she terms “emancipatory historiography”(153) from Beverly Harrison through Katie Cannon (82-90; 154-165).
Analysis within the context of actual struggle will seek to have a realistic grasp of the conditions of structural violence, and make every effort to determine who or what the opponent in social struggle is. Since the agents of violence are often obscured in structural violence, contextual analysis within social struggle means identifying concrete individual and collective, organizational and institutional targets of change. When such agents are identified, they are, with rare exception, members of dominant cultural groups and rarely held accountable for their actions and oversight of pervasive acts and conditions of violence within their personal relationships, their organizations, or the public at large. Therefore, investigation is crucial to determine the next steps of deciding how these agents will be held accountable. Structural analysis also takes seriously that everyone in the United States is implicated in violence. Therefore, analysis and awareness of one’s own social location in the context of struggle is also essential. For effective social change it is essential both to name and distinguish the perpetration of violence and its benefits to the dominant culture, then for people to be held responsible at the various, appropriate levels of accountability.

A critical analysis and understanding of violence and (non)violence must seek to undermine individualism at every turn. Systematic analysis seeks to expand the common conception of violence from only direct violence to structural and cultural violence. Individuals who do not engage in violent, interpersonal acts often do not see themselves as violent. This reinforcement of the commonsense understanding of violence as primarily individual, physical behavior absolves individuals from further self-examination of their role in violence. Individualism contributes to the practice of denial
and supports the entitlements born of unacknowledged structures of violence. An active practice Christian (non)violence should promote these broader understandings of structural and cultural violence as violence within the dominant society. In terms of effective action, the promotion of a broader understanding of violence expands the common conception of (non)violence typically implied by traditional Christian practice beyond the practice of physical, non-resistant non-retaliation.

Critical analysis should not a mere intellectual enterprise. If a privileged individual or community is committed to struggling against injustice, this analysis should be taking place in the context of action in and with the communities who are most impacted by the structures of violence.

If the oppressed are silent while theologians or other intellectuals speak, no empowerment occurs…. The test of the seriousness of our commitment is whether we welcome having those who were previously silent wrest our theory from us, altering and transforming it through their unique appropriation.  

In social action, critical analysis relates to solidarity.

**Critique**

A critique of the practical theological method, including this project, arises here. Practical theology aspires to create social transformation. Yet like all academic disciplines, it primarily belongs to academic elites within the church. Outside of a purely participatory action research method, I do not know how to overcome this problem.

---

426 Beverly Wildung Harrison, *Making the Connections*, 243-244.

427 Swinton and Mowat describe that, at heart, participatory research “assumes that the best people to research a given topic are those who have the most experience of it” as both the subjects of study and co-
How does the privileged practical theologian and Christian community deal with their distance from daily violence and oppression?

Throughout the interviews and the preparation required to do them, I gave myself my own U.S. history lesson about the conditions of oppression and genocide that have created the conditions for resistance and social transformation in this country in various eras. I began the critical analysis that this model proposes as a (non)violent practice. The fact that the most highly educated among us mostly do not know about the fundamentally violent history of our country reflects the deep problem of denial and mystification as functions that support structures of violence. We do not know for reasons of race and class privilege, and this is part of the problem of violence. Primarily privileged people have little idea what most people go through, struggle through, survive through, live through, and die through that motivates them to take serious and remarkable action for change, be it violent or (non)violent.

At a certain point during the interviews, I began to feel the difference between my experience as a person of relative privilege with a relative lack of bodily experience of oppression and repression, and the experiences of others were very real. How was I possibly to understand the depth of the nature of these issues? This was my own experience of distance despite my own involvement in social justice activism and the education this research has given me. Despite this project being more collaborative and

engaged with some level of activist reality, it was still primarily an individual, intellectual endeavor. What impact this research effort has on a larger community remains to be seen.

I bring this self-criticism in order to broaden the criticism to practitioners in the field of practical theology whose critical tools are perhaps irreconcilably distant from, while intimately related to, the conditions, experiences and knowledge of oppressed people themselves. How does this distance not replicate structural and cultural violence? Is this type of work really only relevant to the church and academy? How do scholars reckon with these problems in light of a stated commitment of practical theology to social transformation in the real world? Despite that even my interviewees were social change agents of relative privilege, this project strove to connect with real differences in diverse communities in the real world. Given the focus of typical practical theological projects on fairly homogeneous Christian ministry settings, I cannot help but think that by-and-large this field primarily fails to rise to its own declaration of socially transformational intent.

Element II: Practical – Contextual Experimentation with Diverse Modes of Action

Again and again during the interviews and throughout the course of the interview analysis, I was struck by the way in which these very experienced and knowledgeable scholars and activists spoke about the deep ambiguity and possibility for social transformation in this context of the United States in these times. Are we entering into a period of impending barbarism and fascism or are the possibilities of true democracy only beginning to be revealed? Are we in a reactionary, conservative phase of U.S. history or a pre-revolutionary phase? Will the structures of violence destroy the earth and
its inhabitants or will an impending crisis finally awaken humans to take radical action to
avoid environmental and economic collapse?

Harding said that we

…have a great capacity that we are not knowing at this stage how to nurture, how
to encourage, and I think it is both in terms of dreaming the possibilities of
America and imagining the varying kinds of ways in which we could bring
healing oil to the society.

Others expressed that the time for believing in America has come to an end. Yet the
current variety of socio-economic and environmental breakdowns all provide
opportunities for previously unimagined resistance. Lynd wrote that his structural
analysis has led him to the simple conclusion that “crises of capitalism will continue”;
such uncertainties mean that “Opportunities will endlessly present themselves to try to
change things for the better.”

Similarly, Schulman writes,

It’s a moment filled with opportunity for people who can think for themselves.
There are holes in the cultural fabric, and no one seems to be in tight control.
Even the horrifying lack of jobs means that the yuppie road that some were
blindly, socially obliged to follow is no longer a realistic option for many who
were once invited. This means having to piece together “a living” through an
eclectic combination of one’s abilities, dreams, relationships, visions, will and
skill. Not a great set-up for most, but very enriching for all if enough people can
take advantage of the moment to create new paths.

Whenever it looks like “there’s no way forward here, this is blinding, this is
destructive, this is stupid, this is not the truth,” Power said she asks herself questions that
seek newness.

What else is there? What else can I encounter? What can I allow to come into
being? What can I see from there? What’s available to me from there? What

---

428 Lynd, From Here to There, 285.
429 Schulman, Gentrification of the Mind, 19.
actions might I take right now to change the dynamic? How do we continue to be activists? How do we come up against this entrenched power with all that we know about the suffering that it’s causing?

These questions beg for new and renewed practices and not the same old set of practices, attitudes and limited frameworks that continue to replicate the “dominance modes’ definition of who we are and what the world is.” The interviewees suggested that as currently practiced in the U.S., (non)violence offers little that is new to recent struggles; nor has it influenced substantial reform or revolutionary change. There is a failure of imagination, a failure to strategize and a failure to risk bodies and entitlements. For those desirous to claim faithful (non)violence there is plenty more creative room. The difficult nature of the current period, Power said, “is kind of a command to expand rather than to contract in what we’re considering and where we’re looking for possibilities.”

The ambiguity of the historical moment in the United States suggests that it is a time that is ripe for experimentation of all kinds. Here we should recall that Mahatma Gandhi referred to (non)violence primarily as “experiments with truth.” (Non)violence advocates should focus on developing their own creative means and work towards shared effectiveness across difference instead of condemning violence as unfaithful, immoral, or ineffective. Jensen said that even just the exclusionary thought-pattern of (non)violence alone is “a framework that truncates actions that could otherwise be effective.”

Non-exclusionary, non-dogmatic thinking opens up space for creative thinking and action. The challenges which advocates of all means of social change charge to (non)violence should inspire advocates of (non)violence to reach beyond those limits. All types of action can be taken up by liberal-to-radical individuals and communities. The key for Jensen is for

---

all activists – be they assassins, lawyers, healers, therapists, writers, publishers, doctors, teachers, ministers – “to think like members of a resistance.” B♀ said a comprehensive, effective “movement with teeth” included all kinds of community discussion and action. She said that the nature of struggle is “not one thing. It’s a multi-faceted struggle. Because it’s a multi-faceted enemy.” The key to struggle, she said, is “never giving up.”

As the first element of this model suggests, analysis is one of the first practices necessary to creating social change. But analysis should move to strategizing, asking questions like: Who are we? What are our skills? What is our context? Who is the enemy? What do we want? What is our vision? How do we get there effectively? Who else do we need to join us in this struggle? The four practices suggested by Chapter Five – consciousness-raising, organizing, creating alternative communities, and sustained, disruptive action – are a constellation of practices that must be strategized. When they are practiced simultaneously and collectively (though perhaps with different emphases at different times), they increasingly work toward effective social transformation.

Within these four generalized tactics, it is important from the start not to dichotomize violence and (non)violence. There is a way of affirming that the goals we seek to achieve are a just, (non)violent world without imposing that vision in a morally normative way. Collective, practical experimentation intentionally seeks to live within the awareness and realities of the contradictions of violence and (non)violence at every level. An attitude of openness to a diversity of actors, belief, and tactics encourages the tensions within the so-called liberal-to-radical divide. A “diversity of tactics” approach to action supports the need for different people to work in different arenas in different
ways. Nonetheless, this model encourages action that always pushes towards the radical, collective, disruptive edge. This includes maintaining an open mind towards the use of property destruction. This collective, multi-faceted tactical model affirms a diversity of actors and action when there is no consensus. I affirm Staughton Lynd’s insight that communities that are differently socially located may need to engage in multiple stages of separation and collaboration while working towards shared ends of social transformation. Both within and across identity groups, the development of clear accountability structures and practices, including rules of interpersonal engagement, seems wise.

Why push the radical, collective, disruptive edge of practice? There are a few primary answers to this question that have recurred throughout this project. First, since the nature of all forms of violence is to individualize, individualist solutions to violence address none of the structural and cultural understandings of violence. Secondly, while a variety of practices and tactics are necessary to create the conditions by which social transformation might occur, ultimately structures and cultures of violence will not be changed without collective disruption. Finally, privileged persons in primarily comfortable circumstances have proven themselves consistently co-opted by their own normative vision of a pacifistic, idealistic, bourgeois existence. The pairing of Christian tradition with democracy under capitalism has resulted in notorious compromises and “third ways.”431 These bargains regularly concede radical demands to the order of the status quo, invariably keep the privileged in a material comfort zone, and result in

---

431 Recall that Walter Wink refers to (non)violence as “Jesus’ Third Way.” Liberationist Juan Luis Segundo has a particular analysis of the ideological function of “third ways” in *The Liberation of Theology*, 90-95.
sacrificing justice for unity and peace. Consistently pushing the edges of disruptive practice for social change is the best means by which (non)violent actors push themselves to disrupt their own comfort zones. Privileged actors who affirm social change activism must directly confront systems of domination and consistently resist their own temptations not to resist.

There are many other practices for privileged actors in social change meant to address both reversal and entitlement that constitute expanded practices of (non)violence. Practicing (non)violence means not only affirming the need to dismantle inequalities and false portrayals of the oppressed as violent, but actually dismantling the reversals through practicing non-dominant behaviors. This is going to require privileged persons in all of the myriad intersections of identity to consider, collectively, what they are going to do, what they can concretely bring to struggle, and what they are going to give up. In very tangible terms, economically privileged persons can bring their material resources to bear on movement organizing without imposing control. As disruption takes research, training, legal and medical work, and all manner of organization and administration, privileged persons with certain kinds of skills in these areas should offer them.

Those who understand their privilege will attempt not to impose but to undo their sense of entitlement and practices of dominance within one’s own immediate community and in the context of movement solidarity. These practices actively address inequalities by intentionally seeking to bridge material and cultural differences and reversing the normal cultural hierarchies by: asking, listening, awareness of one’s (community’s) social location, not imposing beliefs, showing up, material support, turning over privilege. The
practices intend to decrease if not reverse the actual distance between one’s privileged self and the oppressed in the context of actual struggle. Collective, disruptive action-taking often demands the practice of actively turning over privilege through making material sacrifices. Privileged people engaging in transformative practice will increasingly seek to dismantle their material and psychological entitlements by an increased willingness and practice that disrupts concrete systems and institutions of power and to accept the consequences of such action. The goal of solidarity is developing genuinely reciprocal relationships in the context of mutually shared struggle.

**Critique**

The emphasis of the practical-theological approach is ostensibly on practice. A practical theological Christian (non)violence asserts the need for effective practices determined in context over against any claims to (non)violence through appeals to theological abstractions such as love or faithfulness. Throughout the dissertation, I consistently struggled with the problem of correlating diverse thought and practice with Christian categories of meaning. I often felt the analysis was bound by the categories of Christian analysis themselves – love, faithfulness, concepts of God and Jesus, theological anthropology, sin. In this boundedness, I wondered how truly relevant a particularly Christian practice of (non)violence was to social transformation in this diverse world. Many times I wished for the interviewee data simply to speak on its own and not have to interact with these notions. I wondered if the categories of Christian analysis might be better left aside. Yet as a Christian theological project, it seemed to demand that I impose
these categories on the data. This was particularly true of the chapter “faithful, not effective.” As I deconstructed this phrase, the totality of the diverse interviewee data on effective practice made the idea of faithfulness seem altogether irrelevant. Yet my own Christian social location and commitment to (non)violence struggled against rejecting the idea of faithfulness as meaningful to social change. I had no remedy for this problem. As the previous chapter on solidarity demonstrates, the act of imposition from a position of dominance is an act of violence. I don’t believe that I have done violence to the perspectives of my diverse interviewees. Yet I think the interpretation of the depth and nuance of what they shared could not help but be limited by the imposition of Christian theological analysis, particularly when it came to interpreting practices.

Certainly the interviewee data opened up a meaningful critique and a renewal of some ways of thinking about and practicing (non)violence from a privileged, Christian social location. Both the critiques of and expansions on thought and practiced are helpful for my people – white, Christian, middle-to-upper-middle class U.S. Christians invested in progressive or revolutionary social change. Beyond this community, these critiques are useful to the understanding the practice of (non)violence in general terms. In this way, I reaffirm the minority trend within practical theology which seeks to reckon with how an engagement with differences of social location, experience with, opinions about, and practices of social transformation might affect Christian practice and theology. Yet a very real problem remains in the practice of practical theology, when real differences in practice and thought on the ground fundamentally challenge, in the case of this project, the usefulness of Christian categories and the legacy of Christian violence.
Element III: Theology – Disrupting a Unified Christian Discourse

If practical theology is truly committed to engaging differences in the real world, then it seems that the main task of practical theology would seek to disrupt the violence of a unified, Christian theological discourse. Seeking to undermine the imposition of Christian norms and beliefs as dominant cultural practices of violence, in this way, practical theology would be a practice of (non)violence itself. For example, while affirming the theological abstraction fundamental to Christian (non)violence that we are all “one,” interconnectedness as a practice betrays this abstraction as a lie. Interconnectedness understood in purely theological or existential terms should not obscure the very real differences of power that are at the heart of all forms of violence. These differences in power destroy interconnectedness and function to objectify the powerless, the exploited and oppressed human and non-human being. The abstract appeal a divine connectedness to reconnect all forms of life may serve as a theological background against which the reality of inequality and fundamental disconnectedness may be truthfully displayed. But the true differences in and between all forms of life should not be denigrated through a false claim to connection. Particularly when doing analysis beyond the Christian community, practical theology’s commitment to examining practices must resist reliance upon certain religious essences as a basis of common human experience. In as far as it represents a privileged perspective of the dominant culture, if Christian practical theology seeks to transform the world, it must also seek to be transformed by the world by privileging data outside of the Christian tradition.
For example, in the case of human supremacism it seems that the qualitative data has something very important to tell the normative, dominant Christian tradition about the nature of violence. This is the harsh realization that, based in Christian tradition, human supremacism in the Western, Christian tradition may be the foundation of all forms of violence. How does this impact the practice of the dominant tradition of Christian (non)violence? What would it mean for the dominant culture’s Christian tradition to take this critique, this true difference of experience and understanding into the center of the tradition and allow it to be transformed? In order for Christian (non)violence to have credibility in practice, it must allow for real differences to transform certain theological claims and practices at the heart of its tradition.

Therefore, (non)violent theologizing for social change must commit itself to certain (non)violent theological practices, such as breaking down the transcendent dualisms, such as the human and non-human, at the heart of traditional Christian theology, which are underlying mechanisms of the dominant culture’s violence. From a practical standpoint internal to the Christian tradition, (non)violence would entail a practice of eradicating these theological hierarchies from all worship and liturgy, rituals, scriptures, and even local church business practices. The transformation of these practices internal to Christian tradition themselves might be usefully considered as (non)violent “sites of struggle.”

---

Furthermore, Christian theologizing for social change rejects any singular vision of uniquely Christian salvation and recognizes proselytizing as inherently violent theology and practice. Christian theology should also reject notions of salvation history as linear, human-divine progress. Christian theology would also no longer align itself with institutions of structural violence. Its primary directives for ministry should be directed towards the most oppressed in society. Theological claims work towards the dismantling of individual and collective privileges, and thus are primarily prophetic against structural violence and seek to undergird Christian practices that disrupt the violent status quo, including Christian institutions and theology themselves. If justice is defined as the end of violence and the liberation of the oppressed, then social change is change for the sake of achieving a new order. The establishment of a just order will require a disruption of peace through collective practice, and therefore require disruption of theologies of pacification and subordination. Christian (non)violence brings to light the history of Christian individuals, institutions and theologies that have perpetrated all forms of violence in this country and in the world. Therefore, Christian practical theologizing for social change no longer claims for itself any kind of unique, moral high ground in the struggle for social transformation. Christian (non)violence should not be conceived of as a fixed, theological or ideological point or practice but, to use Staughton Lynd’s words, “a contested terrain of action.”
Element IV: Social Change – Communities of Creative, Counter-Cultural Resistance

Practices of social change must be collective. Christian communities already provide this as a built-in feature of their existence. I have expressed skepticism that Christian communities within the dominant culture will take on the constellation of practices that seek to dismantle all forms of violence. Such communities, should they exist, are likely to locate themselves outside of traditional Christian institutions. Yet I remain a Christian and am left to state and affirm with any number of the interviewees that without such alternative communities of resistance and solidarity, any attempts at social transformation are doomed.

If Christian (non)violence is vision for a renewed world without violence, then the vision must not amount to the reproduction of middle-class, U.S. Christian values that support the socio-political economic order. As the descriptions of direct, structural and cultural violence suggested, today violence of every kind and at every level today appears related to capitalism. Therefore, the practice of Christian (non)violence must embody a counter-cultural rejection of the culture and structures of capitalism. This rejection affirms the interconnectedness of all of life. This vision directs Christian practitioners of (non)violence to a direct self-examination of the entitlements implied by U.S. economic domination internal to churches, the country, in the world, and of the earth. This practice implies the creation of alternative, radical models of economic living. This practice

---

433 In line with the analysis of (non)violence as an ideological discourse that conceals and reveals, the rejection of capitalism as a center-point of revolutionary (non)violence is often downplayed or ignored in the histories of some of the most well-known figures of (non)violence, including Gandhi and King. Harding wrote that there is a “profound sense of national amnesia that has distorted so much of America’s approach to Martin Luther King” (Harding, Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996: vii). This is particularly true in relation to the last years of his life, where King focused on the interconnections between “the triple American evils of racism, militarism and materialism” (ix).
implies creative forms of collective disruption. This practice implies solidarity across differences among communities of difference who share these counter-cultural values and willingness to confront and disrupt power by any means.

There is meaningful language within Christian traditions and practices that can serve as resources to resistance, dissent and disruption of this vast culture of violence and its structures. In particular, the Christian tradition provides “counter-disciplines,” language if not practices that encourage: 1) the loss of material entitlements; 2) the work of reversing structural inequalities and cultural hierarchies; 3) the banishing of fear and the taking up of courage, and; 4) spiritual and practical, tactical preparation of individuals and communities for the strength necessary to make the voluntary sacrifices entailed by disruptive practice.

If privileged, Christian (non)violent activists want to continue to claim their Christian communal identity as essential to a Christian social change practice, then we have our internal work cut out for us. We must think in terms of creative, courageous, counter-cultural resistance. We must move beyond the commonly conceived limits of Christian (non)violence as it is traditionally, currently conceived. Dismantling behaviors of Christian domination in the context of social struggle in solidarity with those persons most impacted by the structures of violence is an essential part of this Christian (non)violent practice. Recognizing the practices and temptations which inevitably reappear to replicate dominance and the violent status quo, Christian communities that

---

434 The language of “counter-disciplines” comes from Daniel Bell in Chapter Four of Liberation Theology After the End of History: The Refusal to Cease Suffering (New York: Routledge, 2001). I like this concept and language, but unfortunately, Bell’s main counter-discipline to capitalism is the divine gift and therapy of forgiveness that he believes will interrupt cycles of violence and re-structure the rational logic of economics.
claim a (non)violent tradition will resist the claims to being exemplary human communities. Recognizing that our ways of knowing and acting have been and are limited and that we have participated in and perpetuated violence, we will understand ourselves as only one of many and diverse communities which imperfectly seek social transformation and justice.

Bell uses the language of Christians as “exemplary human communities” in the face of capitalism in Liberation Theology After the End of History, 86; 144. Sharon Welch rejects such cohesive communities as possible sites for resistance, as “the moral critique of structural forms of injustice emerges, rather, from the material interaction of different communities” (A Feminist Ethic of Risk, 124).
BIBLIOGRAPHY


———. “‘To Disrupt, Discredit and Destroy': The FBI's Secret War Against the Black Panther Party.” In *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party: A New


———. *Nonviolence and Israel/Palestine* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Institute for Peace, 1989).


APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

How do you describe your racial and/or ethnic-national identity?

What is your current occupation?

Did you identify with a particular religious tradition in your upbringing? If so, what?

Do you still identify with that tradition, or another, or none at all?

What are some of the social movements and social change organizations with which you have been identified/involved in the past? Today?

*****

In your own experience with these movements and organizations, have you been exposed to situations in which you and your colleagues had to deliberate over the use of what kinds of tactics to use in social change, violent or nonviolent? Can you give an example? Tell a story?

Where does your own deep connection to nonviolence come from?

What were/are some of the resources by which groups of persons engaged in these social movements/groups have made such deliberations? What factors contribute to how those decisions get made? Can you give an example?

What is your own viewpoint related to the use of organized violent and nonviolent tactics for social change in movements?

Do you see (your own, others) religious and theological perspectives shaping your/their views towards violence and nonviolence?

How do you/have you experience/d or understood white, Christian proposals for nonviolence in this country?

What role do you think social location (i.e., race, religion, nationality, gender) plays in a person’s commitment to organizing nonviolent and/or violent social change strategies?

In what ways is it possible, what factors make it possible for allies from dominant groups to be involved in marginalized communities struggles for justice?
In terms of the debate over the use of organized nonviolence and violence for social change, what is different about the context of social change in the 1960s and 1970s when compared to today?

How do you define violence? How do you define nonviolence?
In your mind, what do you mean by “justice”? What would “justice” look like?

Do you think nonviolence has revolutionary potential?

What strategies do you see actually promoting social change today?

How have your own opinions on the effectiveness of certain strategies for social change changed over time?

Anything else you would like to add?