Rethinking Pacifism through Rethinking Structural Violence Transformation

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The concept of structural violence enables us to conceptualise ways of identifying and transforming systemic inequalities that result from the otherwise smooth functioning of political and economic systems. Resistance targeting structural violence today has failed to overcome the ongoing march of global capitalism and, indeed, it often reinforces it by mobilizing capitalist mechanisms within another, more "progressive," or democratic frame, such as 'inclusive growth' or the democratisation of global financial institutions. However, some authors claim that our attachment to democracy functions as a blackmail against the transformation of global capitalism. Therefore effective structural transformation requires us to call into question the very standard of 'normality', the universal framework of liberal democratic capitalism. This paper seeks to rise to this challenge by rethinking the possibilities for structural transformation under the hegemony of global liberal democratic capitalism, and in doing so consequently rethinks pacifism. The concept of 'symbolic nonviolence' is offered as central to the necessary task of rethinking pacifism today.

Introduction

Structural violence is a term used to describe inequities in power, wealth, and overall life chances that are the result of the functioning of political and economic systems. Today, under the hegemony of global neoliberal capitalism, structural violence takes on the paradoxical form of, on the one hand, the construction of socio-economic walls that divide the haves from the have nots, and on the one hand, the explosion of boundaries by climate change and flows

of refugees. In addition to understanding structural violence as the outcomes of a global capitalist economy, it is critical that we also take into account the political dimension supporting neoliberal capitalism. It can be argued that we currently face a political crisis in which our national and international political systems have, at best, failed to prevent or address persistent ecological, social and economic crises and, at worst, have supported or exacerbated them. Indeed, while the world revolts against the election of Donald Trump we seem to disavow the fact that the structural violence we are facing today has emerged under the global hegemony *liberal democratic* capitalism. Many authors have argued that liberal democracy is the political supplement providing the ideological edifice for the domination of neoliberal capitalism (e.g. see Dean 2012; Vighi 2010; Zizek 2009a) and therefore the task of addressing structural violence today must also tackle the problem of liberal democracy. The task of addressing contemporary structural violence becomes more difficult when we consider how liberal democratic ideology not only supports neoliberal capitalism but also shapes our protest and resistance to it. In this way Slavoj Zizek (2007) argues that what today prevents the radical questioning of capitalism itself is *precisely the belief in the democratic form of the struggle against it*.

It is in this context that this paper seeks to rethink pacifism in a manner that might enable the transformation of the structural violence of contemporary liberal democratic capitalism. The first section reflects on mass anti-authoritarian (e.g., Colour Revolutions and Arab Spring) and anti-capitalism (e.g., anti-globalisation and Occupy movements) movements to examine the relationship between these movements and democracy. The second section examines the underlying theoretical presuppositions of contemporary anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist movements and the limitations they pose for structural transformation under liberal democratic capitalism. Drawing from the work of Walter Benjamin, section three seeks to

rethink violence and in doing so explicate the concept of 'symbolic nonviolence'. The final section considers how the notion of symbolic violence can help us rethink pacifism for transforming the structural violence of liberal democratic capitalism.

It's About Democracy Stupid!

During the height of the Arab Spring movement, Guardian journalist David Hirst (2011, p 1) wrote,

> "The world is yet to settle on an agreed term for the great events unfolding across the Middle East…[however] It is self-evidently democratic. Other factors, above all the socioeconomic, fuelled it, but the concentration on this single aspect, the virtual absence of other factional or ideological slogans, has been striking".

Indeed, most Western readings of the Arab Spring uprising were depicted as "people were rising up against their tyrant and portrayed as a democratic upwelling of the will to freedom" (rua Wall 2011, p. 13) or as "the natural, legitimate outcome of the riots in the Arab world under the rubric of 'victory of democracy'" (Badiou 2012, p. 52). In this way, "the only valid thing on offer...is the natural harmony between unbridled capitalism and imported democracy" (Badiou 2012, p. 40). Two important points emerge from these comments. Firstly, Hirst's reference to uncertainty, that the spectacles in the streets across the Middle East seemed (at least for a moment) to defy meaning and challenge our sense of what is normal. The second is the imposition of meaning, the 'self-evident' democratic nature of the events. The obvious questions that follow from this observation are how does one get from an undecidable event to 'self-evident' certainty? Is the self-evident nature of the events recognisable to everyone? Furthermore, and of central interest to this paper, if mass protest

movements are (or at least appear to be) self-evidently democratic, then what the implications for transforming the structural violence of liberal-democratic capitalism?

Two perspectives immediately present themselves to explain the apparent democratic self-evidence of protest movements: historical teleology and pre-figuration. The first is a teleological explanation one in which the protest movements are described as a continuation of the broader global teleology of liberal democracy (in the sense of Fukuyama's end of history or a continuation of the so-called third wave of democracy). An exemplary case of this line of thinking was provided by the Finance Minister from the Tunisian interim government at a conference in 2011, when he stated,

> So when the revolution started in Tunisia, in the first few days their demands were jobs and justice, but within 3 or 4 days they were very quickly turned into political change and political reforms because people realized that you cannot have economic development without political institutions that protect that economic development and especially protect against corruption.

In a similar manner, in an email from Marciej Bartkowski he argues that Sharp's theory only intended to focus on shifts in political power rather than ending all forms of structural violence. Nonetheless he adds,

> The sustenance of that transformation (or power shift) is then the key issue in the fight against structural violence. I think this in turn depends - as successful democratizations show - on the continued participation of the society; on the high level of disciplined rebellious mobilization that the society is able to summon after a

dictator/regime is gone with the purpose of fighting new or old ills that transpire during ongoing social and economic transformation.

In even stronger terms, Stephen Zunes claims that the establishment of a liberal democratic system is often *a necessary if not sufficient* means of bringing justice to the oppressed. In this way democracy is seen to be a necessary, evolutionary step in emancipation from structural violence. Or in other words, in order to address social and economic injustices that often fuel protest movements, we must first pass from a lower, non-democratic society into a higher, democratic society. It is from this perspective that "debates about the success or failure of mass uprisings often reflect a problematic obsessions with the question of whether protestors are 'ready for democracy'" (Morje and Walters 2015).

The second, and perhaps the most common explanation of the self-evident democratic nature of protest movements, is that the empirical actions of the protesters themselves pre-determine the democratic outcomes. For example, Chenoweth and Stephan's (2011) argument that nonviolent revolutions are more likely to lead to non-violent democratic outcomes when compared to violent movements is based upon the conclusion that broad based participation during nonviolent campaigns is important for reinforcing a 'peaceful' post-revolutionary liberal-democratic society. On the streets of Egypt the protestors claimed Tahrir Square "was really a mini-example of what democracy looks like" (Chabot and Sharifi 2013), while more than a decade earlier protestors in Seattle chanted 'This is what democracy looks like!' This emphasis on the democracy of the movement itself relates specifically to the way we construct the very problem that is the target of our dissent. For example, the anti-globalisation movement (AGM) is describes as rejecting,

the increasing power of corporations, the growing role of international financial institutions, and the neoliberal policies of trade liberalization and privatization propounded by the latter and from which the former benefit. These are seen to produce economic inequality, social and environmental destruction, and cultural hegemonisation. They are also accused of leaching power and self-determination away from people and governments – *of being anti-democratic* (Eschle 2004, p. 71, italics added).

Therefore, in response to the anti-democratic power of neoliberal capitalism, Eschle (2004, p. 69) argues "proponents of this postmodern-cum-anarchist politics are attempting to construct 'the anti-globalisation movement' in radically democratic, non-hierarchical and inclusive ways, in direct opposition to attempts to organize the movement more hierarchically through centralized, representative procedures". More recently, the Occupy Movement, recognized for its slogan 'We are the 99 percent', was an attempt to highlight the vast economic inequalities between the richest 1% in the United States (and the world) and the rest of the population. There are many similarities between the AGM and the Occupy movement, and indeed some argue (e.g. Heyduk 2012) for a direct relationship (even transition) between the two, with Occupy being a rearticulation of the AGM. A particular commonality between Occupy and the AGM is that both share a common discourse of participatory democratic methods of pre-figuration and horizontal structures. For example, in tracing the emergence of the Occupy movement within the World system of neoliberal capitalism, Macpherson and Smith (2013, p. 370) argue, "More broadly, general models of organization go beyond simply a set of protest tactics. These new democratic methods are increasingly cast as the basis for a new politics that is more participatory than parliamentary routines". Similarly, Kennelly

(2011) claims the Occupy Movement, "involves experiments in direct and radical democracy".

Such claims that the actions of protestors seek to pre-determine the outcomes are based upon the theoretical concept of pre-figuration. Simply put, pre-figuration is when the methods of action anticipate or replicate in advance the desired goal (Martin 2008). Therefore,

> "if the goal is a society without organized violence, nonviolent action has all these prefigurative advantages. It provides experiences in living without using violence; it reduces immediate violence in the here and now, even when campaigns fail; and it ensures that efforts are in a nonviolent direction" (Martin 2008, p. 5).

A number of social movement scholars argue that prefiguration is the most strategic and effective means for bringing about the transformation of capitalist society (e.g. Maekelbergh 2011; Springer 2015). A key aspect of pre-figurative politics is that it rejects the idea of a two-step process based on the removal of unjust power that then enables the space for the creation of a new society. For example, Maeckelbergh (2011) discusses how prefiguration captures the shift in the focus of social movements away from a conquering of the society towards the process of building something new. She argues that the aim of pre-figurative politics is to create more inclusive forms of democracy that directly challenge liberal-representative democracy (Maekelbergh 2011). Similarly, in contrast to the two-step approach advocated by Sharpian nonviolent political action Chabot and Sharifi (2013) argue that nonviolent movements should experiment in a Gandhian 'constructive programme' in order to create alternatives to neoliberal-capitalism.

However, a number of commentators have highlighted the failures of both anti-authoritarian and anti-capitalist movements to address the structural violence of capitalism. For example, Beehner (2011) argues that the Ukrainian people, "once the upstart darlings of pro-revolutionary visionaries the world over" just a decade later faced the same problems they struggled against, including corruption and socio-economic inequities. In 2011, less than ten years after the revolution, Freedom House downgraded the Ukraine from "Free" to "Partly Free". The "revolutions" in Georgia, Serbia, and Kyrgyzstan have had similar fates with corruption and socio-economic inequities persisting. Wahlberg (2011) claims that of the more than fifty countries that have received training from Otpor, "The only attributable 'successes' until Egypt were in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) – the so called colour revolutions, all of which have been a bitter disappointment". Indeed, to drive home this point, Wahlberg (2011) highlights that "as Egyptians massed in Tahrir Square, on 5 February 2011, 70,000 Serbs marched in Belgrade protesting unemployment and poverty".

Regarding the Arab Spring, Chabot and Sharifi (2013, p 1-2), in reflecting on their hope and excitement of the spectacular events of the Arab Spring, write, "We feared promising manifestations of nonviolence would end up reproducing various structures and forms of violence. Unfortunately we were mostly right in both cases". Four years after The Green Movement in Iran in 2009, "the people's demands have not been met while poverty, social suffering, and political divisions continue to grow" (Chabot and Sharifi 2013, p. 2). Prashad (2012) argues "the Egyptian people's demands for bread, dignity, social equality, and state accountability have still not been met, despite the billions of dollars in U.S. aid and IMF loans received by the new regime". Noting the differential outcomes of the two movements (in Iran Ahmadenajad remained, in Egypt Mubarak was toppled), Chabot & Sharifi (2013, p. 3) conclude, "Even the successful removal of a dictator has not significantly reduced the

myriad forms of violence suffered by the majority of Egyptian people, especially by the most oppressed among them".

Despite the myriad of anti-globalisation and anti-capitalist movements that have taken place around the world, one thing that is certain is that global neoliberal capitalism has simply marched on and on. One suggested explanation for this is that although appearing as anti-capitalist, such movements are often in fact more 'pro-democratization' within the existing global hegemonic coordinates (Thomas 2007). Or, at the very least, in seeking to transform the latter, these movements hedge their bets on the necessity for the movement to pre-figure the post-revolutionary society in a participatory, inclusive and democratic way. In this way, contemporary anti-capitalist movements may never be able to do more than tinker with the broad direction of inevitable change (Thomas 2007). Jodi Dean (2016, p. 4), in reflecting on her experiences of the Occupy New York movement, observed how "the individualism of its democratic, anarchistic, and horizontal ideological currents undermined the collective power the movement was building".

From Dictatorship to Democracy and Back Again

More than simply pointing out the limitations of these movement, the critiques outlined above demonstrate the difficulties of escaping liberal power and ideology today. As Chabot and Sharifi (2013, p. 21) lament, "Tragically, the majority of Egypt's population seems to have accepted that there is no alternative to neoliberal forms of freedom and democracy". Indeed, Vighi and Feldner (2010) show how Zizek's concept of ideology enables us to conceive how even in anti-capitalist struggles, we can remain attached to what is repudiated. Following Zizek, they argue that capitalism can be effectively attacked only by questioning its concealed anchoring point, that is liberal democracy, and therefore "holding on to the

latter functions as a blackmail against the implementation of radical political projects" (Vighi &Feldner 2010, p. 291). In other words, to return to an earlier point, what today prevents the radical transformation of structural violence is precisely the belief in the democratic form of the struggle against capitalism (Zizek 2007, p 8). Therefore, the first step for transforming structural violence today is the need rethink power and resistance in a way that detaches us from the democratic anchoring point.

Post-anarchist scholar Saul Newman undertakes an extensive rethinking of power and resistance across a series of articles (see Newman 2004a, 2004b, 2004c) in which he seeks to explicate a 'space beyond power' from which an emancipatory politics can be conceptualised. Newman's search for an emancipatory space beyond reciprocal relations of power and resistance ultimately leads him to Claude Lefort's (1988) notion of the empty place of power. For Newman (2004c, p. 150), "Unlike the Foucauldian idea of conflict which leads...to the dissolution of society (to eliminate the place entirely), Lefort's idea of conflict retains the idea of place, yet sees it as empty". Lefort (1988) claims that the liberal form of power underpinning modern democracy exists as an empty place of power. That is,

> The modern democratic symbolic order did not appear ex nihilo, but rather developed from the decline of the ancient regime. Similarly, the place of power did not just appear as empty, but rather remained as empty – it was emptied as the regime fell (Roess 2012: 180-81).

Thus from this perspective, power exists a-priori as an empty place that until the advent of democracy was occupied by some form of 'power holder'. The advent of democracy was therefore able to restore the empty place of power, and the ongoing task is to ensure that this

place of power remains free from illegitimate, and ultimately authoritarian appropriation. As Zizek (2008a, p. 267) explains,

> Lefort's fundamental thesis – which has today already acquired the status of a commonplace – is that with the advent of the 'democratic invention', the locus of Power becomes an empty place…In pre-democratic societies, there is always a legitimate pretender to the place of Power, somebody who is fully entitled to occupy it, and the one who violently overthrows him has simply the status of a usurper, whereas within the democratic horizon, everyone who occupies the locus of power is by definition a usurper.

The implication of this for resistance is the structural imperative for various political actors and identities to seek to 'fill' the empty place of power by claiming to represent the whole of society. Thus, similar to Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) "New Social Movements", Newman argues that rather than a politics of difference in which particular identities compete with each other, there is competition for hegemony over the partial fixing of the empty place of power. In seeking a practical politics to help explain his theoretical rethinking, Newman highlights the AGM, which he describes as a,

> "common struggle that is not determined in advance, but that is articulated in a contingent way during the struggle and that it now targets new sites of oppression and domination within the capitalist system: corporate power and greed, G-M products, workplace surveillance, environmental degradation, and so on".

One can also readily see in Lefort's concept of liberal power the precise logic of anti-authoritarian movements and their emphasis on the democratic shift of power. That is, that the overthrowing of a dictator empties the place of power thereby allowing for the legitimate exercise of power through participation in democratic institutions and processes such as free and fair elections. Subsequently, therefore, the task of civil resistance once the dictator falls is to protect this empty place of power from being illegitimately claimed in a manner that prevents freedom and autonomy (whether by a military dictator, a corrupt official or a greedy banker). It is in this way that we should read Braatz (2014: 7) assertion that, "A typical strategic nonviolence campaign is reformist – seeking to clean up the state and make government less corrupt and less repressive as well as more responsive to the needs of people". However, the critical point to emphasise here is that Lefort's empty place of power fails to take into consideration its own performative dimension. As Zizek's (2008a: 276) highlights,

> The fundamental operation of the 'democratic invention' is thus of a purely symbolic nature: it is misleading to say that the 'democratic invention' finds the locus of power empty – the point is rather that it constitutes, constructs it as empty.

The empty place of power is not a positively existing thing within society but is rather the presupposition which serves as a point of reference that mediates our actions and interactions with other individuals. Therefore, although we may not explicitly subscribe to liberal power, we nonetheless act in accordance with it. That is, it is the ideological fantasy accompanying the liberal empty place of power that guarantees that our experience of structural violence is never 'the system' as such, but always some authoritarian power that seeks to pervert or

corrupt global liberal-democratic capitalism. For example, in reflecting on the disappearance of the word 'capitalism' from public discourse, Zizek (2007) asks,

> But what about the upsurge of the anti-globalization movement in the last years? Does it not clearly contradict this diagnostic? No: a close look quickly shows how this movement also succumbs to "the temptation to transform a critique of capitalism itself (centered on economic mechanisms, forms of work organization, and profit extraction) into a critique of 'imperialism'." In this way, when one talks about "globalization and its agents," the enemy is externalized (usually in the form of vulgar anti-Americanism).

Ultimately, this means the *depoliticisation of structural violence transformation*, or in other words the political domain in which the struggle takes place has already been chosen. This depoliticisation also appears as its opposite, as a proper political gesture: liberal ideology's constant invocation of the threat of authoritarianism or totalitarianism which serves as 'bogeyman' threatening to rob us of our freedom and self-determination (Badiou 2012) means that the struggle that appears before us is one of defending liberal democracy against all other potential alternatives. Indeed, Zizek (2002) links this apparent threat to a more fundamental rejection of a transformative act itself. That is, liberal-democratic ideology directly links the fact that a properly transformative act comes with no guarantees to the threat of authoritarianism, and therefore serves as a as a blackmail against the implementation of radical political projects.

Therefore, liberal power and ideology provide the structure that recedes into the background, thereby enabling us to disavow the structural violence at the heart of liberal democracy itself.

Through engaging in resistance aimed at preventing the multitude of spectral authoritarian usurpers of the empty place of power, we take a distance from liberal democracy and disavow its role in supporting the ongoing violence of global neoliberal capitalism. Indeed, Vighi (2010, p. 113) argues that action aimed at undermining the threat of authority whilst necessary "is less and less sufficient, for the simple reason that the rejection or exposure of explicit forms of authority is one of the key conditions upon which capital thrives". Further, Paul Farmer (1997) argues that liberal multicultural politics has served to obscure structural violence. Whereas the initial aim of elaborating the concept of violence was to unmask other forms of indirect violence, the approach has, according to Farmer, once again covered over the source of indirect violence.

Violence or Nonviolence? Yes Please!

The task of rethinking resistance therefore remains critical if we are to find a form of politics that can effectively offer something towards transforming the structural violence of liberal democratic capitalism. Building on the previous discussion, two key components of this rethinking must concern the relationship between means and ends (that is, pre-figuration) as well as enabling us to step 'outside' of (or behind, beneath) liberal multicultural ideology. In his *Critique of Violence,* Walter Benjamin (1927) asks whether or not the nonviolent resolution of conflict is possible, or whether "there are no other than violent means for regulating the conflict of human interests" (Benjamin 1927, p. 287). In attempting to answer this question, he seeks to examine violence as a means in and of itself, as separate from the ends, whether just or otherwise, that it may serve. Benjamin argues that such a critique is excluded from what he terms 'natural law', in which violence can be legitimised if it serves just ends. Conversely, 'positive law' sees violence as a product of history, thereby only concerned with its means. Therefore, "Natural law attempts, by the justness of the ends, to

'justify' the means, positive law to 'guarantee' the justness of the ends through the justification of means." (Benjamin 1927, p. 278).   Violence used for natural law ends is characterised as a law making violence and a second function of violence is 'law preserving', leading to the conclusion that all violence *as means* is either law making or law preserving. This point leads to Benjamin's (1927) question about the possibility of the nonviolent resolution of conflict and subsequently to the claim that law itself is violent and hence why it is only in the relationships of private persons that the nonviolent resolution of conflict can be achieved.   He links such nonviolent relationships to values of courtesy, sympathy, peaceableness, and trust, or what he terms as the subjective preconditions of the nonviolent resolution of conflict. Nonetheless, Benjamin argues that 'pure means' in politics is analogous to those which govern peaceful intercourse between private persons. Through this concept of 'pure means' Benjamin's (1927) attempts to locate a standpoint outside both law making and law preserving violence in order to be able to critique violence. From such a standpoint,

> one might perhaps consider the surprising possibility that the law's interest in a monopoly of violence vis-a-vis individuals is not explained by the intention of preserving legal ends but, rather, by that of preserving the law itself; that violence, when not in the hands of the law, threatens it not by the ends that it may pursue *but by its mere existence outside the law* (Benjamin 1927, p. 281, italics added).

In other words, power is most threatened by that which remains excluded or 'outside of' its ideological socio-symbolic order. Benjamin (1927) makes reference Sorel's distinction between the general political strike and the proletarian strike to emphasise this point further. The general political strike seeks only concessions from the state, thereby strengthening state

power whereas the proletarian strike seeks to destroy state power. Benjamin therefore concludes that the former is violent in the law making sense in that it seeks only external modification of labour conditions, whereas the latter is 'pure means' *and therefore nonviolent*, for it aims at transformation of work, no longer enforced by the state (Benjamin 1927, p. 291-92).

Despite this reference to 'pure means' as being nonviolent, Benjamin (1927) argues that every solution to human problems remains impossible *if violence is totally excluded in principle*. This leads him to ask what other kinds of violence outside of legal violence exist. In order to identify such violence, Benjamin (1927, p. 293) argues that it must reject the claim "just ends can be attained by justified means, justified means used for just ends". This leads him to define two other forms of violence as mythical violence and divine violence. The former, similar to legal violence, is also 'law making' but rather than pursuing as its end what is to be established by law it instead constitutes power. That is, "Lawmaking is power making, and, to that extent, an immediate manifestation of violence" (Benjamin 1927, p. 295). In contrast, divine violence is *law-destroying and therefore nonviolent*, and for Benjamin (1927), the highest manifestation of pure or divine violence is revolutionary violence.

Benjamin's linking of nonviolence and divine (revolutionary) violence is not to be read the same manner as Chenoweth and Stephan's claim that 'nonviolence works'. His aim was to separate means and ends, so that we cannot assess violence or nonviolence by the ends it serves or creates. Rather, Benjamin's reference to nonviolence refers precisely to the suspension of the socio-symbolic order, to an act which does not produce an end (it is neither law making nor law preserving) but rather only an opening for (potentially) a new beginning.

Somewhat paradoxically then, for Benjamin it is only through divine violence that we are able to identify the possibility of the nonviolent resolution of conflict. The nonviolence of 'pure means' identified by Benjamin is a space 'outside of' power, or in other words, it is a moment in which power is suspended thereby opening the potential for revolutionary transformation. As Benjamin (1927) claims, all the eternal forms are open to pure divine violence, which myth bastardizes with law. Therefore Benjamin's critique offers the possibility of rethinking the 'nonviolence' at the heart of pacifism in a manner that can enable the effective theorising of the transformation of structural violence, particularly under the hegemony of liberal-democratic capitalism. That is, a form of nonviolence that is separated from means and that exists (or persists) as the momentary suspension of the hegemonic socio-symbolic order.

This brings us to consider yet another dimension of violence, that of symbolic violence. For Zizek (2009a, p. 1), symbolic violence has some elements that are similar to cultural violence (see Galtung 1990) that are "at work in the obvious –and extensively studied – case of incitement and of the relations of social domination reproduced in our habitual speech forms". However, more than this incitement through symbols and signs, symbolic violence involves a fundamental violence "that pertains to language as such, to its imposition of a certain universe of meaning" (Zizek 2009a, p. 1). Zizek (2008b, p. 2) argues that when we perceive something as violent, "we measure it by a presupposed standard of what the 'normal' nonviolent situation is – and the highest form of violence is the imposition of this standard…This is why language itself, the very medium of non-violence, of mutual recognition, involves unconditional violence". That is, symbolic violence imposes a 'sense making' upon us all, or, in the words of Frederic Jameson (1990), it provides us with 'cognitive mapping' through which to make sense of both our predicament and what to do

about it. Or in other words, a description of a social situation into which we seek to intervene already depends on the practical situation we propose (Zizek 2009a). For example, Zizek observes that "when workers protest their exploitation, they do not protest a simple reality, but an experience of their real predicament made meaningful through language" (Zizek 2008b, p. 2). In this way, there is "a direct link between the ontological violence and the texture of social violence (of sustaining relations of enforced domination) that pertains to language" (Zizek 2009a). That is, a direct link between symbolic and structural violence. Therefore effective structural transformation requires us to evacuate completely any socio-symbolic support for our actions, or in other words the only way to properly transform structural violence today is to call into question the very standard of 'normality', the universal framework of liberal democratic capitalism.

This emphasis on *symbolic* transformation as a means to affecting structural change finds resonance in peace theory. For example, despite the basic symmetries provided by Galtung's violence triangle, he nonetheless suggests that,

> Generally, a causal flow from cultural via structural to direct violence can be identified. The culture preaches, teaches, admonishes, eggs on, and dulls us into seeing exploitation and/or repression as normal and natural, or into not seeing them (particularly not exploitation) at all. Then come the eruptions, the efforts to use direct violence to get out of the structural iron cage (Galtung 1990, p. 295).

However, drawing on Benjamin's divine violence, Zizek (2009a) radicalises the relationship between symbolic violence and outbursts of direct physical violence (or following Lacan, what he refers to as the '*passage a l'acte'*). The latter, according to Zizek, is a blind acting

out, an impotent irruption of violence by those with no formal place in the socio-symbolic network (that is, of those excluded from society, the oppressed). Divine violence, Zizek (2009a, p. 170) argues, is the sign of injustice of the world and therefore is also an indication of impotence (of society), and "all that changes between divine violence and a blind passage a l'acte is the site of impotence". Or in other words, "When those outside the structured social field strike 'blindly', demanding and enacting immediate justice/vengeance, this is divine violence" (Zizek's 2009a, p. 171). Therefore, it is not simply that an act of divine violence produces symbolic nonviolence, but rather that they are two sides of the same coin.

A key point of difference in whether an act of protest will be one of an impotent outburst or of revolutionary potential is whether the outburst of the passage a l'acte stops at this moment or whether its transformative potential is politicised and taken 'to the end'. As Zizek (2002, p. 225) explains,

> The first reaction to an ideological double-bind has to be a 'blind' violent passage a l'acte, which can only later, in a subsequent move, be properly politicised. We simply have to accept the risk that a blind violent outburst will be followed by its proper politicisation.

Critically, there are no objective criteria in deciding whether violence is divine, as it is not determined by some presupposed ethical framework; rather the risk of reading and assuming it as divine is fully the subject's own (Zizek 2009a). It is in this context that Badiou describes four possible reactions to divine violence, or what he calls an event: (1) the faithful subject; (2) the reactive subject; (3) the obscure subject; and (4) resurrection. A reactive subject resists the potential for change in favour of the old order, while the obscure subject seeks to

erase the traces of the event through appealing to a Transcendent Power (e.g., fascism). The subject of resurrection seeks to reactivate the subject of an event in new and different contexts. Finally it is the faithful subject which "realises itself in the production of consequences" by remaining faithful to the potential created by the event (Badiou 2009 P 51), or in other words, the faithful subject is the one who politicises as act as being 'divine', thereby opening the space of symbolic nonviolence.

Therefore, by refusing outright all forms of violence, pacifism remains blind to opportunities for *symbolic nonviolence* which suspend the ideological efficiency of liberal democracy and therefore to possibilities for the transformation of structural violence. Furthermore, the moment we claim the revolutionary upheaval to be self-evidently democratic, whether from a teleological or pre-figurative perspective, we close off the space of symbolic nonviolence and subsequently opportunities for structural transformation. In this way, perhaps the problem with pacifism today is that it is not faithful enough to nonviolence.

Occupy, Resist, Produce!

Following from the above discussion, it is pertinent to ask what form of politics is consistent with the concepts of divine violence and symbolic nonviolence and whether it is in any way consistent with pacifism. Being open to violence obviously rubs against the grain of pacifism. Perhaps the first point to make is that none of the above means that pacifist's need to give up on their commitment to nonviolent tactics. An act of divine violence is not a-priori an act of violence at the level of our 'real-life' actions. From the position of symbolic nonviolence, whether the tactics of protestors are violent or nonviolent at the level of 'real life' actions is irrelevant. Rather, from the position of symbolic violence what must be fully endorsed are those actions that suspend or rupture the existing socio-symbolic order. This requires,

therefore, an acceptance of a minimal level violence, which is 'divine violence'. Therefore a commitment to symbolic nonviolence does not require giving up on a commitment to nonviolent tactics. However, what a commitment to symbolic nonviolence does challenge us to do is to accept that an act of divine violence *may* result from an act of violence at the level of 'real-life' actions. Therefore, we must also be attentive to when symbolic nonviolence emerges in a manner that is not of our doing. Wars, coups, natural disasters, elections and other unanticipated events can cause the suspension of the socio-symbolic order and power in ways the open the space of symbolic nonviolence through which revolutionary potential could emerge. It depends on the context. As anarchist scholar Simon Critchley (2010) describes,

> The point is that we are doubly bound, both to follow the plumb-line of the divine commandment [i.e., of nonviolence] and to accept responsibility for choosing not to follow it…we always find ourselves in a concrete socio-political-legal situation of violence and we have with a plumb-line of non-violence, of life's sanctity. There are no transcendental guarantees and no clean hands. We act, we invent.

Indeed, the recent election of Donald Trump can, and should, be approached in this way. That is, the violence of Trump's election laid bare the impotence of liberal democracy itself, and therefore opened the opportunity to transform the symbolic violence of liberal democracy. The point to emphasise here is the ability of seizing the 'right moment' for political transformation. It is in this context that Zizek rightly asserts that there are no neutral, objective conditions for revolution (for example, we cannot insist that the ripe moment is only when a nonviolent mass protest movement has done its work). However there is nonetheless a moment in which an intervention could exploit the presence of a short circuit or

rupture, steering it in favour of the direction of revolution. Following Lukacs, Zizek (2001, p. 117) describes this moment when, briefly, there is an opening for an act to intervene in a situation as "the art of seizing the right moment, of aggravating the conflict before the System can accommodate to our demand".

Therefore, accepting this minimum-level of divine violence as necessary for opening the space for symbolic nonviolence would be the first step towards re-thinking pacifism in a manner that may enable it to transform the structural violence of liberal-democratic capitalism. The second task would be to endorse the irreducible uncertainty of symbolic nonviolence and insist on it 'to the very end'. That is, this 'moment' of symbolic nonviolence in no way guarantees the outcome of our intervention. It is nothing more than an opening, an opportunity. This relates to Zizek's (2003, p. 135) emphasis on 'the day after', that the real hard work awaits us on the morning after when "we are confronted with the task of translating this explosion into a new Order of Things, of drawing the consequences from it, of remaining faithful to it". If there is no guaranteed outcome of revolutionary transformation, then what motivates our faith to symbolic nonviolence? The answer offered by a range of thinkers is a 'utopia' or an 'Idea' of justice. For example, in our contemporary closure of the socio-political imagination under liberal democratic capitalism (Johnston 2009) the very act of imagining alternatives is by definition 'utopian' (Jameson 2005). This is why for Zizek (2009b), utopia is that which is impossible within the framework of the existing socio-symbolic order and for Jameson (2005), utopias come to us as barely audible messages from a future that may never come into being.

This returns us to the question of the relationship between uncertainty and self-evidence. Following Hegel, Zizek (2014) emphasises how self-evident certainty emerges only

retroactively, or after the (f)act. For example, against a teleological reading of history in which each new historical epoch represents a progression to a higher order than the previous one, Zizek (2014) emphasises how the progress of history is punctuated by moments of contingent decision making in which people were forced to "invent new solutions and make unheard of moves without guarantees in 'general laws of historical development'". That is there is no plan for transformation, rather we're only thrown into a moment of chaos, of undecideability where we are nonetheless forced to make a choice. It is only afterwards that this moment of radical contingency comes to be seen as historical necessity, and which therefore occludes the fact that things could have been otherwise. This is what is meant by 'going to the end', or of remaining faithful to the opening of symbolic nonviolence until we reach the (retroactive) realisation that 'we did it!' It is in this manner that we can consider symbolic nonviolence as existing in between the old and the new, as a kind of 'vanishing mediator'. More than just a place, however, a vanishing mediator is,

> "a process from being just another possibility to becoming necessary. The forces which set in motion the disintegration of the old order and the introduction of the new. In between the not yet old and the not yet new we witness a kind of opening. The agent who initially triggered the process must become perceived as its main impediment" (Zizek 1992, p. 231).

Therefore, perhaps the role to be embraced by the pacifist today is that of occupying the 'place' of symbolic nonviolence in order to enable the process whereby acts of divine violence give rise to barely audible messages of utopia whose arrival would transform the symbolic and structural violence of liberal democratic capitalism. Before The Occupy Movement there was another 'occupy movement' in Latin America. Their slogan was

"Occupy, Resist, Produce". Perhaps this motto provides the framework for a reinvigorated pacifism today: Occupy the place of symbolic nonviolence, resist its (re)appropriation by counter-revolutionary forces, and remain faithful to the production of its utopian consequences.

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