

RETHINKING PACIFISM FOR REVOLUTION, SECURITY, AND POLITICS

Wednesday 22-24 November 2017. University of Otago, NZ.

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Note – below is ‘work-in-progress’; an outline of a draft of the paper I propose to present at the conference. Moreover, my presentation shall be in accordance with the administrative guidelines of the organisers, abridged to a 20 minute korero. The paper will be edited, emended. In its present form (below) its intention is to indicate to the conference participants a general idea, an overtone of my thesis.

TITLE: Peace, Violence and Existential Despair

PREAMBLE: The fundamental conceptual principles that constitute the core of my thesis are ‘power, powerlessness, ideology’. On these are founded my argumentation that explores ‘maintenance of quiescence and emergence of challenge’.

1. “If there is indeed a *meaning* to life, it has to be a people’s struggles to be free. The essence of human dignity is realised in the constant struggles for liberty.” (*Intifada*, Auckland University Students for Justice in Palestine, November 2002).
2. This conference sets out to explore *inter alia* questions regarding the effectiveness or the efficacy of ‘pacifism’. In its theoretical or philosophical connection to inequality and dispossession, colonialism and social injustice, oppression and ‘social closure’ (Durkheim), I propose to juxtapose ‘pacifism’ with ‘violence’.
3. My philosophical position is founded on the belief that ‘pacifism’, to put it rather simply, blunts the force of resistance, of ‘violence’, ultimately disempowering the oppressed, abandoning the dispossessed in a state of confusion and despair. Pacifism *appears* to require silence from the powerless – the very ones whose lives are compounded with endemic injustice and alienation. Violence, on the other hand, as a form of catharsis, purges the colonised mentality, is a stage or a journey ‘of therapy’ (as Frantz Fanon diagnosed).
4. But of course all this primarily depends of the definitions of these terms and concepts: what exactly do we understand by ‘violence’ and ‘peace’. The later is comparatively straightforward: peace is tranquillity, calm, stability, security, satisfaction of life’s needs and wants and so on. Violence, on the other hand is relatively complex. For a start the term violence can be applied in a wide range of conditions and circumstances. Here I do not talk about personal or individual forms of violent behavior.
5. My intention here, rather, is to explore ‘state violence’ *vis-a-vis* challenges from the citizens – political riot and rebellion, resistance and revolution; in other words, political violence engaged by the masses.
6. State violence is oppressive, perpetrated with the primary aim of exploitation of the masses (on the one hand) and perpetuating the privileged powerful positions of the elite, on the other. State violence can only be seen as unjust and must be resisted by the masses.
7. Peaceful means, no doubt, can be applied to fight state violence (eg. coercive forces of the state) in the form of protests, civil disobedience, industrial strikes and so on. Such, what is called, ‘non-violent’ means can be effective particularly when conducted on a massive nation-wide scale; or at least have the real potential of being successful in redressing the oppressive measures of the state.

8. Indeed I am encouraged to extend my belief in pacifism when I learn of the success of the non-violent BDS Movement – boycott, divestment, sanction led by the people of Palestine and supported, increasingly, by people and organizations worldwide. It's got to be a good thing – pacifism.
9. As Malcolm X remarked: "fight oppression and racism by any means necessary."
10. Nevertheless, I fear that pacifism is limited. Whilst its philosophical tenants are admirable, pacifism as a political strategy (to bring about justice and liberation and peace) is, in the final analysis, dependent, or perhaps rests on, the status quo which is explained as 'natural' through ideology that is all-pervasive; that is, the dominant ideology which is construed as practical application of 'hegemony'.
11. The limitation of pacifism is manifested in the necessary condition that this belief or philosophical political position be framed and formulated in terms and conditions that are laid out by the state – the same state that wields violence and is, in fact dependent on its command of violence for its very legitimacy. (Never mind about nice ideas regarding the state as 'social contract' *a la* Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau).
12. For pacifism to be effective, albeit limited, it has to constantly compromise and conform and apply itself in what might be described as 'reformist' strategies. In the end, however, unjust social, political and economic conditions remain essentially unchanged. Oppression continues under new 'fashionable' guises, and the state becomes, ironically, more sophisticated, more subtle in its policies and practices of exploitation and injustice.
13. The causes of injustice and oppression etc. remain largely intact, because the causes themselves are the core of the nation-state structure. These structural causes and conditions engender violence against the populace. Pacifism, it can be seen, would be (and is) impotent against 'structural violence'.
14. In other words, structural violence actually and in 'reality' lends legitimacy to state violence. Indeed, the two facets of violence, oppressive and endemic, have historically evolved into mutually beneficial, osmotic association.
15. With increasing politicisation in the form of 'conscientization' for example, mass mobilization is more likely; and the masses would understand that to bring about peace they need to fight structural violence which legitimises social injustice, for there cannot be peace without justice. Nor should there be; for, 'peace' without justice is nothing less than enslavement. And if there is no justice at the structural level of the nation-state, then clearly there is no possibility of peace.
16. History, both ancient and modern, abounds with such tragically unfair nation-state structuration. The quasi-military regime of Israel is a case in point. There will never be 'peace' for Palestine or for Israel as long as justice is denied to the people of Palestine or their Human Rights are violated by Israel. Indeed, a dispassionate view would allow one to see that it is not in the national interest of the Israeli regime to seek justice and peace with Palestine or with its MiddleEast neighbours. No matter how many peace processes are engaged in and how many peace road maps are drawn, peace is not conducive to the legitimacy of the Israeli state. Militarism generally and oppression of the people of Palestine more specifically are an inherent part of the structural components of what is known as Israeli state.
17. Because, tragically, structural violence is the very foundation of the state. To dismantle such core structures is to cause to dismantle the state itself.
18. And my point... it is this – pacifism can and do prescribe tactics and strategies, manners and methods to combat social injustice and oppression and exploitation, racism and discrimination, inequality and violation of Human Rights. However, pacifism as a 'resistance' method is proven to be largely inappropriate, inadequate, for state violence and structural violence remain intact, remain as aspects of the 'universally' accepted norm (dominant ideology, hegemony).
19. The revolutionary words from one of 20th century's greatest leaders Nelson Mandela ought to be heeded: "when injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty". And there is no doubting that to

end the repugnant system of apartheid Mandela first engaged with the apartheid regime of South Africa in non-violent and peaceful ways. He and his people got nowhere, other than 'pacifism' leading them to affirm (unwittingly?) the coercive forces of the state and bolster the ideological notions of the dominant 'culture', the beneficiary of the apartheid system.

20. Pacifism or political violence? It wasn't for Mandela a conundrum but a zugzwang: either choice was replete with painful problems.
21. Shakespeare – "whether 'tis nobler to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take up arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them?" Both options are 'violent'. In the end it was a concerted political effort of mass mobilization and armed struggles that helped bring about the demise of the oppressive apartheid system.
22. From a perspective of deconstruction, I am somewhat sceptical of the notion of pacifism – it may be practised as a theoretical enterprise, but can it be applied as an ideological and political practice and avoid being co-opted by the state (thus becoming 'part of the problem')?
23. Moreover, the official ideological mechanisms that effect 'social closure' and exclude (at almost all levels of meaningful social participation) 'categorised people' (ethnic, racial, indigenes, immigrants, for example) from systems of 'normality', creating 'Others' (a mechanism called 'othering' by Spivak) who, imprisoned within their colonised mentality, "articulate their experiences in the language of the oppressor" and parody and mimic (Baba) the dominant culture, hoping for recognition; hoping for the end of "invisibility."
24. For the people who find themselves in these unjust and oppressive societal conditions and circumstances, pacifism (articulated essentially by the generous and the enlightened but, nevertheless, who remain members (in some form or other) of the all-encompassing hegemony) primarily has the effect of disempowering the oppressed, has the effect of 'blaming the victim, silencing them' (Edward Said). The explications and 'road maps' and 'peace processes' confound the life and compound the daily struggles of the oppressed – for (regardless) they continue to experience discrimination and social injustice and state violence. Put another way, being at the bottom of the heap it is hard to see the niceties of 'state peace' and 'state pacifism'. Pacifism appears to conform and compromise with the conditions of structural violence and yet seem to promise peace and liberation from injustice. State violence and structural violence remain monolithic, and the unjust social conditions remain immutable.
25. In such a social quagmire I am reminded of the words from Leo Tolstoy: "I sit on a man's back, chocking him, and assure him and his lot that I would do everything in my power to ease his burden except by getting off his back."
26. Political violence awakens the mind (and the soul) to the prevailing oppressive social conditions of injustice. Pacifism, to put it rather nakedly, tends to provide reassurances and soothes the soul to help cope with the prevailing oppressive social conditions of injustice. The oppressed eventually become lethargic. The situation is not unlike what was encountered by Harriet Tubman, who mused: "I freed a thousand slaves; I could have freed a thousand more if only they knew they were slaves." She was referring to those who were suffering from what I would describe as existential despair.
27. Political violence, or force, as Marx commented, "is the mid-wife of an old society pregnant with a new one."
28. Thinking and rethinking pacifism has caused me to wonder if the normative principles that constitute the core of this philosophical notion can indeed mount substantive challenges to the 'powerful', critique and reveal the social conditions (structural violence) that help maintain quiescence.
29. Or is violence the strategy that would, in its mass-based revolutionary fervour, challenge the dominant ideology and thus help promote social and political conditions that would make liberation a possibility – a possibility for justice: for meaningful life and human dignity.

30. END NOTES: 1. Parihaka, 5 November, 1881.

2. Tuhoë, 15 October, 2007. (Ten years ago).

3. Al-Nakba, Palestine. Balfour Declaration, 2 November 1917 (100 years ago).

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