

PACIFIST APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN OVERVIEW OF PRAGMATIC PACIFISM

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Abstract

This article explores pragmatic pacifist approaches to conflict resolution, i.e. the aspects that justify pacifist norms based on its strategic effectiveness and not on actors' belief systems. The article initially proposes a conceptualisation of pacifism and non-violence, seeking to show how these concepts interrelate and how they integrate in the field of conflict resolution. From this conceptual basis, the article focuses on the examination of pragmatic pacifist approaches, highlighting their theoretical base, their techniques and methods of action, as well as the major future challenges of research agendas on the theme.

Keywords

Non-violence, Pragmatic pacifism, People power, Pacifist conflict resolution

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PACIFIST APPROACHES TO CONFLICT RESOLUTION: AN OVERVIEW OF PRAGMATIC PACIFISM¹

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Introduction

It can be said that pacifism is defined by an essential norm: *before inter-personal inter-community or inter-State antagonisms, adopt non-violent social behaviour*.² For a long time, academic interest in pacifist norm remained practically restricted to a small niche of Peace Studies. The recent spate of non-violent campaigns – such as the peaceful revolutions of the so-called "Arab spring" – has renewed interest in normative and theoretical bases and practices involved in these demonstrations of "people power"³. This has placed pacifism and non-violence in the spotlight of academics from different disciplinary fields such as Political Science, International Relations and Public Policy Studies (Hallward and Norman, 2015: 3-4). While this renewed interest brings positive consequences for the expansion of reflection and more productive involvement of students, academics, activists and policymakers with this particular type of peaceful mobilisation, several issues continue to challenge those who seek an understanding compatible with the complexity and nuances surrounding the theme, such as: how to conceptualise pacifism and non-violence? How do these two concepts interrelate? How are these concepts integrated into the field of conflict resolution? What is its theoretical basis, working logic, techniques and method of application? What are its possibilities and limitations?

The purpose of this article is to explore these issues of pacifism, seeking to justify non-violent action based on its strategic effectiveness and not on its spiritual and moral principles that shape the beliefs and convictions of actors. With this purpose in mind, the first section of this article examines pacifism within a broad spectrum of positions, ranging from a pole based on principles to a more pragmatic view, which will place pacifist approaches within the field of conflict resolution. Thereafter, the article focuses

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² For a more elaborate discussion of this pacifist norm from a sociological point of view, see Galtung (1959).

³ "People power", was the term originally used to describe the mass mobilisation of the civilian population in the process that led to the fall of the dictator Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines in 1986. Since then, this expression came to be generally used to label the activism of the civil population in non-violent political actions (Ackerman and Kruegler, 1994: i).



on the pragmatic pole of the spectrum by examining the theoretical background that supports pragmatic pacifism (second section), typifying the technique of non-violent action and the main methods by which it can be applied (third section). The paper will move on to examine the latest developments and key future challenges of this research agenda (fourth section).

The Pacifist Spectrum and Conflict Resolution: A Conceptual Delimitation

Pacifism, as mentioned above in Galtung's suggestions (1959), defines an essential norm: *before interpersonal, inter-community or inter-State antagonisms, adopt non-violent social behaviour*. From this perspective, non-violent social behaviour – or non-violence – constitutes the conceptual core of pacifism. But what does non-violence mean? Although the debate on non-violence produces a multitude of viewpoints, only some definitions are deployed here in order to reach a conceptual demarcation that serves the analytical purposes of this article. Gene Sharp, for example, advises against the use of the term "non-violence" because it is vague, ambiguous and carries a heavy passivity that does not sit well with the active nature of what he prefers to call non-violent "action" or "struggle". Accordingly, Sharp offers the following definition:

Non-violent action is a generic term that covers a variety of methods of protest, non-cooperation and intervention. In all of these methods, those placing themselves in a position of resistance leading to conflict, executing – or failing to perform – certain acts, using various means except physical violence. (...) In every form, the technique of non-violent action is passive. An action that is not violent. (Sharp, 2005: 39, 41)

Kurt Schock provides a definition with similar elements but emphasises the institutional character of non-violent action, arguing that it operates outside of the official institutionalised political channels (2003: 6). Other authors like Randle (1994), Stephan and Chenoweth (2008) and Roberts (2009), follow the same line of thought, articulating the concept of non-violent action with the concept of civil resistance to highlight its civilian (and thus non-institutional) nature. From this perspective, non-violent action is characterised as occurring outside of conventional political organisations and structures of the State (Randle, 1994: 9-10), as non-military or non-violent in character and centred on civil society in the coordination and conduct of actions (Stephan and Chenoweth, 2008: 7, 9; Roberts, 2009: 2). Similarly, Atack (2012: 7-8) notes that non-violent action acts as a collective political action conducted by ordinary citizens and organised directly through civil society groups or social movements.

What can be noted, on the basis of the work of these authors, that there is a clear effort to give conceptual autonomy to non-violence. They seek not only to emphasise the strategic-pragmatic character of non-violent action, but also unlink its particular perspectives from spiritual and moral bases of the so-called principled pacifism that characterises the movements of non-violent Christians and activism of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, which are its most iconic illustrations. There are authors,



however, who question these attempts to establish strict boundaries between non-violent action and pacifism, claiming that both terms belong to a single continuous spectrum of positions that range from that based on principles to more pragmatic ones. From this perspective, pacifism and non-violent action does not differ substantially and should be seen within the same tradition of thought. Cady (2010: 79-92), for example, believes that the pragmatic concern of non-violent action is one of the poles of the pacifist spectrum that offers valuable guidance for pacifist activism when it misses something: a clear vision of peace. From this point of view, instead of being attached to the negative pole of this spectrum, where ideological considerations keep pacifist activism stuck to the mere denial of war, pacifism must approach its positions more pragmatically and find more positive alternatives to military means and the use of force. A positive view of pacifism, according to Cady, "has to offer a general ideal to guide actions and goals and, at the same time, the particular methods through which ideals can be implemented" (2010: 83). In this way, continues Cady, the wide range of non-violent methods identified by Gene Sharp – all capable of being adopted by civil society and able to confront local, national and international instances of power – can make the abolition of war, oppression and the social injustices that feed the tradition of pacifism realistic.

An important consequence of this spectral vision of pacifism, according to Cady, is that it admits a plurality of positions. Therefore, if one can defend life as a supreme value and reject violence based on principles of right or wrong, the pacifist spectrum shows that it is also possible of making choices on a pragmatic basis, taking into account not what is absolutely right or wrong, but what is better or worse in certain circumstances (2010: 83-84). Howes presents a similar argument that considers the current success of the debate about non-violence instead of breaking with pacifism, offering an important way to revamp pacifism's pragmatic aspects in a way that takes into account a realistic understanding of the historical record of cases of non-violent action as an alternative to the use of military force and war (2013: 434-435).

The authors themselves, who prefer the term non-violence to pacifism, recognise some aspects that converge with the interpretations above. In their study of non-violence, Hallward and Norman (2015: 5) recognise that people engaging in non-violent action do not make their choices based exclusively on strategic reasons, but rather through blending principle and pragmatism, which makes it preferable to avoid reductionisms and adopt a comprehensive and diversified approach that considers non-violence within its various forms and contexts. Attack (2012: 8-10), while exploring non-violence in political theory, points out that the main icons of pacifism in the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King led their non-violent campaigns through pragmatic choices, even although they were heavily influenced by their spiritual and ethical traditions. If this overlap is found in pacifist activism, it must also occur among those trying to defend the autonomy of non-violent action. According to Attack (2012: 159), although Sharp emphasises the pragmatic character of non-violent action, seeking to keep away from the idealistic charge contained in pacifism, a "residual pacifism" remains present in his works that sustains a "moral preference" for non-violent political action. According to Attack, it is difficult to understand the commitment to non-violence and the centrality of this concern in pragmatic theorists' research agenda on non-violent action exclusively in terms of power relations, without also taking into account the underlying moral impetus of non-violence provided by pacifist



idealism. Attack's observation is important because it indicates that the research agenda on non-violence does not cease to be anchored in a normative preference derived from the pacifist tradition.

One can take from this discussion two important indicators for the conceptual delimitation sought in this section. The first is that, although there is a growing movement of conceptual independence of non-violence by unlinking it from the tradition of pacifism. There are also arguments that allow one to keep non-violent action under the general label of pacifism, accommodating more idealistic perspectives and more pragmatic ones in a continuum of positions that either approach, move away or overlap on a single conceptual spectrum. This implies recognising that, although pragmatic perspectives offer important insights into power relations involved in non-violent action, it does not cease to be part of a broader context where non-violence can be interpreted and practised for religious or ethical reasons, and, more importantly, for reasons that mix all these motivations. This line of argument allows for a more comprehensive, integrated and subtle shading between pacifism and non-violent action, which justifies the adoption of the expression "pacifist approaches" as a general label that integrates all the conceptual spectrum examined here.

The second important point in this discussion concerns the individualising of pacifist approaches within the field of conflict resolution. In this sense, the central issue is to understand how pacifist approaches differ from approaches traditionally associated with the field of conflict resolution. It is not just the character of non-violent pacifist approaches that matters; although this defining element is essential to differentiate pacifist approaches and approaches that admit the use of force, it is important to note that other approaches to conflict resolution also define themselves as non-violent. For example, the tools of conflict prevention and peacemaking in diplomatic alternatives – that are non-violent in nature – can resolve disputes (preventive diplomacy) and facilitate dialogue before they result in violence. This is done through mediation or intervention of third parties when conducting negotiations which can lead to peace agreements. Thus, although non-violence is a defining element of pacifist approaches, it is not enough for their individualising within the field of conflict resolution as a whole, as other approaches may also be defined as non-violent. We must therefore search in the above conceptual discussion for other elements that make it possible to refine this individualising.

Two aspects seem to be crucial in this regard. The first is the institutional character of the pacifist approaches. The tactics of pacifist approaches that demonstrate the previously examined definitions are born out of civil society and are conducted in the form of social movements that are outside of conventional policy and institutionalised channels of the State, distinguishing itself, therefore, from official or diplomatic procedures of conflict management. The second aspect has to do with the tensions and confrontations that characterise the "direct action" of pacifist approaches. As argued by McCarthy and Sharp (2010: 640), more traditional techniques and institutionalised conflict resolution, such as negotiation, mediation, the intervention of third-parties, as well as the methods that contribute to the effective functioning of these techniques, usually avoid confrontation, sanctions, pressures and direct action that characterise the activism of non-violent action. Although some specific pressures can be applied during official negotiation processes, traditional methods of conflict resolution, as a general rule, are oriented to the convergence and production of a peace agreement and not at



creating tensions, confrontations, demonstrations, blockades, non-cooperation and resistance that are part of the conflict resolution mechanisms defended by non-violent activism.

One could say, anyway, that the set of elements examined in this section – the activist commitment to non-violence and the abdication of the use of military force, the mobilisation of civil society, the non-institutional character, the use of non-conventional channels of political action and the logic of direct action as a mechanism for pressure and resistance – delimits the conceptual point of view of pacifist approach, giving them a distinctive character that allows their treatment inside a certain area of other conflict resolution approaches. When it comes to pacifist approaches to conflict resolution, however, one does not want to refer to a comprehensive debate on peace, institutional models and organisations for peacekeeping or structural mechanisms of peace-building and conflict prevention, but rather the particular type of approach derived from activism and the tradition thought of pacifism and non-violence.

Conceptual basis of Pragmatic Pacifism: The Theory of Consent

As argued in the previous section, pacifist approaches form a continuous spectrum of positions that admit not just absolute viewpoints, but also more nuanced, flexible and merged positions. Thus, while this article is structured around references and central issues of pragmatic traditions, this does not signify that the means advocated in each approach should be seen as isolated and independent. In fact, there is a porosity between principled pacifism and pragmatic pacifism, which means that techniques and conflict resolution methods are often overlapping or partially complementary. When discussing pragmatic approaches, the reasons evoked to justify the pacifist norm and strategies defended for its application alter. To characterise this differentiation, pragmatic approaches use political arguments and theory of power sources to understand the logic and effectiveness of non-violence.

Sharp (1973; 2005: 23-35) and other authors such as Boulding (1999), for example, depart from the fact that the consent of the people conditions the way power operates in societies. This challenges, according to Attack (2012: 109), the more traditional perspectives that view the heavy coercive power in the form of military force or institutionalised violence, and material power in the form of economic wealth or the accumulation of resources, as the maximum expression and single power that really matters. Even if one adopts a pluralist perspective, recognising that various forms of power operate in society, proponents of pragmatic non-violence think that the relationship of consent constitutes a significant base for popular power that is capable of challenging all other sources of power, whether they originated in the authority or legitimacy of the rulers, in human resources at the disposal of governments, in skills and knowledge, in intangible factors such as beliefs and norms, in material resources or in the coercive apparatus of the State (Sharp, 2005: 29-30).

In a similar sense, Boulding argued that power is complex and multidimensional, and may assume at least "three faces". The more conventional face is "threat power", which is the ability to apply coercion through the imposition of internal mechanisms of the law or of the military apparatus against external aggressions. The second takes the form of "economic power"; from this angle, power is a function of the distribution of wealth between rich and poor and is defined in terms of "production and trade". The third face,



which Boulding calls "integrative power", is the "power of persuasion, legitimacy, fairness, community, etc." (1999: 10-11). What seems particularly relevant to Boulding, converging in some way with Sharp's point of view, is that power cannot be considered solely based on violence and coercion or economic capabilities, but should be seen mainly as a function of the ability that people and social groups have to join and establish mutual ties of loyalty. From this perspective, argues the author, "threat power and economic power are difficult to exercise if they are not supported by integrative power, that is if they are not seen as legitimate" (1999: 11). What is important to understand, therefore, is that these three faces coexist and fall – although in different proportions – within a framework of forces that integrates and affects the operation of power systems in societies. Within this framework, threat power does not only depend on the force of the author of the threat, but also on the threatened subject's response, which can be expressed in several ways: submission, challenge, counter-threat or through what Boulding calls "disarming behaviour", i.e. the incorporation of the threat's author within the community of threatened subjects by undoing the relationship of enmity. This latter type of response is, according to the author, one of the key elements of the theory of non-violence as it opens an important avenue for the peaceful resolution of conflicts. Economic power also depends on the interaction between parties, being not only the function of the behaviour of the "seller" – as one can agree or refuse to sell – but also the response of the "buyer", who can also evaluate the benefits of buying or rejecting. Finally, integrative power can sustain the other forms of power or, in the opposite direction (and therein lies another crucial aspect to the theory of non-violence), cause the power system to break down by denying it loyalty, questioning its legitimacy or retracting support and cooperation (1999: 10-12).

What is crucial for these authors – constituting the basic political assumption of their perspectives on the peaceful resolution of conflicts, is the notion that the flow of sources of power can be restricted or blocked by the population (without needing to resort to violence) by denying opponents consent or cooperation. If oppressed groups repudiate the authority of the opponent, removing its support, refusing to cooperate and persisting in disobedience, it would represent a great challenge and a major blow to any authoritarian and oppressive social group or hierarchical system that depends on support, acceptance or the subjection of subordinate groups to survive (Sharp, 2005: 29, 40; Boulding, 1999: 11). In addition, it is important to note that this type of non-violent action tends to discourage violent reactions, causing the opponent to think twice about the consequences of repression that would use disproportionate coercion, especially the use of physical force. Stephan and Chenoweth (2008: 11-12) note that some dynamics favour this action's strategic logic. First, the repression of non-violent movements through the use of force usually backfires because it leads to a loss of popular support, as well as internal and external condemnation of those who resort to violence. This repression leads to changes in power relations as it increases domestic support and solidarity for the cause of the non-violent actors, creates dissent against violent opponents and increases external support for non-violent actors. Violent repression of non-violent groups demonstrates that physical force is not always the most efficient weapon for powerful groups. Stephan and Chenoweth (2008: 12) observe a second dynamic resulting from non-violent action: the opening of channels of negotiation. Although the pressures imposed by non-violent activism challenge opponents and question their source of power, the possible negative impact of a violent



reaction against civilians – when publicly taking on a non-violent behaviour – can discourage the use of force and show the opponent that negotiation offers the best alternative when seeking solutions to a conflict.

There is, in short, a pragmatic logic of peaceful conflict resolution that depends more on strategic interactions between social groups that coexist within a given power system than the principles that underlie its religious and moral beliefs. The key point for the pragmatic aspect of pacifist approaches, therefore, is the idea that the practice of non-violent action is possible and can be successful in resolving conflict between oppressors and the oppressed, not because their religious and ethical foundations are legitimised, but because the "operationalisation of this technique is compatible with the nature of political power and the vulnerability of all hierarchical systems" that depend ultimately on the consent and collaboration "of the people, groups and institutions subordinate to the supply of the necessary sources of power" (Sharp, 2005: 23). This means, in other words, that the effectiveness of non-violent action is the result of a relatively simple strategic logic: deny or block – without the use of physical violence – the necessary sources of an opponent's power in order to strengthen one's own position of power through peaceful groups of resistance.

Techniques and Methods of Pragmatic Approaches

Sharp classifies non-violent action as a technique that can be applied through a set of methods of protest, non-cooperation and intervention (2005: 49). Based on the comprehensive historical analysis, the author notes that this technique is not limited to internal conflicts and democratic contexts, and that its effectiveness does not depend on the "kindness" or "moderation" of opponents, which have already been widely used against powerful governments, despotic regimes, foreign occupations, empires, dictatorships and totalitarian regimes. Among the cases highlighted by Sharp are the Chinese boycott of Japanese goods in 1908, 1915 and 1919; non-violent German resistance against the French occupation of the Ruhr region and Belgium in 1923; non-violent resistance of the Indians under the leadership of Gandhi against the British Empire during the 1920s and 1930s; non-violent resistance against Nazi occupation between 1940 and 1945 in countries such as Norway, Denmark and the Netherlands; the overthrow of dictatorial regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala in 1944 through a brief non-violent campaign; non-violent campaigns of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States against racial segregation; the non-violent struggle and the refusal to cooperate with the Soviets in Czechoslovakia for eight months between 1968 and 1969 shortly after the invasion following the Warsaw Pact; the non-violent struggles for freedom between 1953 and 1991 led by dissidents in communist countries, such as East Germany, Poland, Hungary, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania; the Solidarity trade union strikes initiated in 1980 in Poland which resulted in the end of the Polish communist regime in 1989; non-violent protests and mass resistance movements between 1950 and 1990 that contributed to weaken the regime of apartheid in South Africa; the non-violent uprising of 1986 that overthrew the dictatorship of Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines; the non-violent struggles that led to the end of the communist dictatorships in Europe from 1989; symbolic student protests against corruption and oppression of the Chinese government in 1989 in hundreds of cities around the country (including Tiananmen Square in Beijing); several non-violent



campaigns and refusal to cooperate in the context of the wars in the Balkans throughout the 1990 (Sharp 2005, pp. 16-18). These cases clearly do not exhaust the examples of non-violent action of the last century and, as Sharp emphasises, still occur today. Enormous popular mobilisations, the discipline of non-violence, fearlessness and velocity of events of 2011 that put an end to the lengthy dictatorships in Tunisia and Egypt in what became known as the "Arab Spring", give a clear demonstration of the currentness of the theme, contributing to a renewed academic interest in the study of the techniques of non-violent action (Sharp, 2014).

Nevertheless, the techniques of non-violent action, as Sharp stipulates, should not be seen as "magic" (2005: 43). It depends on well-defined objectives and a well-delineated strategy for their results to be effective. Sharp argues that, although some non-violent mobilisations start spontaneously and are often conducted without a great identifiable leader, this does not mean that the actions do not require discipline and that groups, even without outstanding individual leaders, do not require any organisation. Good strategic planning can be decisive for the success of non-violent action. Reproducing the military lexicon, Sharp sees four levels in the planning of actions: the "grand strategy", which serves to coordinate and direct all resources towards achieving the broader goals of the non-violent action; the "strategy", which applies to more limited phases and the definition of specific objectives; "tactics", which refers to the conduct of actions and involves the choice of the most appropriate methods for the confrontation of opponents; and the "methods" itself, which refer to the procedures and specific forms of non-violent action. Sharp also emphasises the importance of logistical work aimed at supporting the conduct of non-violent action in terms of financial arrangements, transport, communications and supplies. According to the author, this set of concerns allows one to focus and direct actions towards desired goals, exploit and exacerbate the weaknesses of the opponent, strengthen practitioners of non-violent action, reduce victims and other costs and make the sacrifices involved in non-violent action serve the main objectives of the action (Sharp, 2005: 444-446). In other terms, strategic planning should be able to strengthen the weakest social groups, weakening the oppressor and, with this, build power relations that lead to a more balanced resolution to the conflict.

In order to achieve the best results in the application of the techniques of non-violent action, Sharp believes that the choice of methods should not be made *a priori*, but rather in the last stage of planning. For the author, each particular strategy requires specific methods that should be chosen and applied in a skillful manner and contribute to achieving the objectives set. Sharp identifies at least 198 specific methods that suit the techniques of non-violent action (2005: 51-64) that shall not be exhausted here. These methods are grouped by author in three main classes: protest and non-violent persuasion; non-cooperation; and non-violent intervention (see examples in table 1).



Table 1: Examples of methods used in the technique of non-violent action

Protest and persuasion	Non-cooperation	Non-violent intervention
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public speaking - Signed manifestos - Petitions - Slogans, cartoons, symbols - Banners, posters - Brochures, pamphlets, books - radio, television - Delegations - Pressure groups - Picketing - Act of undressing in public - Protest art - Protest songs - Offensive gestures - Haunting or ridiculing important people - Vigils - Satirical and theatrical representations - Marches and rallies - Political fight - Mock funerals - Withdraw from events in protest - Renouncing of titles and honors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social boycotts - Student strike - Civil disobedience - Search for asylum - Collective emigration - Consumer boycott - Non-payment of rent - Refusal to rent - International boycott - Workers' strike - General strike - Ineffective work⁴ - Withdrawal of bank deposits - Refusal to pay fees and taxes - Refusal to pay debts and interest - International trade embargo - Boycott elections - Boycott government jobs - Refusal to cooperate with agents of repression - Non-compliance of military recruitment - uprisings - Non-compliance with government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Self-exposure to the elements - Fasting - Hunger strike - Occupation of public places - Occupation of means of transport - Non-violent intervention - Non-violent obstruction - Oral intervention at events - Guerrilla theatre - Creation of alternative social institutions - Creation of alternative communication system - Reverse strike (excess production) - Occupation of land - Defiance of blockades - Creation of alternative markets - Creation of alternative transport - overloading of administrative systems - Disclosure of identities of undercover agents - Seek imprisonment - Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Source: Sharp (2005: 51-64)

On the basis of this synthesis of the strategic-pragmatic perspective of Sharp, it is noted that the methods of non-violent action do not differ substantially from the methods employed in Christian resistance movements and pacifist campaigns led by Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Although the effort of systematisation of Sharp should be considered relevant, it is not the methods themselves that distinguish their pragmatic approach but the concern with the strategic issues and the untraveling of non-violent action of the spiritual and moral bases that are heavily present in principled pacifism. Thus, if Gandhi and Martin Luther King remain the classical references and inspiration when one thinks of pacifist approaches to conflict resolution, it is important to note that the pragmatic concerns of Sharp and the growing efforts to give the non-violent action greater effectiveness through the study of its strategic principles are the aspects that have influenced more the current wave of interest in non-violence and presented the greatest challenges for the future development of this research agenda.

⁴ Type of strike where the employees work slowly.



Present State, Theoretical Challenges and Pathways to Future Developments

Within the pragmatic tradition, it is important to note that the work inaugurated by Sharp has been developed by a new generation of academics committed to the revival of the study of non-violent action from a more empirical and objective point of view. As Nepstad argues in the preface to his *Non-violent Struggle: Theories, Strategies and Dynamics* (2015), the style of strategic analysis of Sharp and the first generation of pragmatic non-violence scholars that followed was limited to documenting and describing successful historical cases of non-violent movements and typify the technique and methods of non-violent action. This work takes on, according to Nepstad, a certain proselytising bias that seeks to convince readers that non-violence works strategically in various historical cases without, however, worrying about the documentation of unsuccessful cases or theories of non-violence. The author observes, however, that developing comparative analyses, including successful and unsuccessful cases, has begun in the last three decades, which has allowed the critical factors involved in the results achieved by non-violent action to be identified.

In fact, a new generation of researchers has proposed the use of quantitative techniques combined with case studies in the study of non-violence, which tries to overcome not only the criticism usually directed to the idealism of the tradition based on principles and its inability to significantly influence political science, but also the proselytising character identified by Nepstad in the first generation of studies of non-violent action. In this context, Sharp has realised the limitations of pragmatic pacifism and called attention to the biggest challenges, which are to advance the empirical studies, analyses, planning and practice of techniques of non-violent action in extreme conditions. These conditions include severe inter-ethnic conflicts where it is difficult to find compromises between rival groups, in regimes established by coups d' état, in resistance to external aggression and prevention or resistance to genocide attempts (Sharp, 2014). Although Sharp finds several historical examples of non-violent action in situations like these, he believes that the successes were partial and often did not reach their more comprehensive goals, due to a lack of strategic planning and understanding of the power relations involved in the situation. Thus, the author considers the need for further empirical study on what are the most effective non-violent action in these situations to be crucial. Sharp does not always consider the application of the technique of non-violent action to be appropriate against acts of extreme repression. For the author, this technique should not be axiomatically assumed to be superior in all situations and the feasibility of its implementation must be strategically evaluated on a case-by-case basis, compared with the appropriateness of the use of force and the potential problems raised by resistance through violent means. Hence the final challenge presented by Sharp (2014): expand academic investigation and strategic analysis of non-violent action in order to examine and refine the applicability of these techniques in the conflicts generated by coups, civil defence in place of military means (within what has been called the civilian-based defence) and on other matters of national security.

With these concerns in mind, the pragmatic tradition has driven the study of pacifist approaches in the direction of a more consistent empirical re-assessment on the



theories of non-violence of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, as well as on new understandings about how power and civil society mobilisation can be converted into a tool of social and political change. This effort, as Howes highlights, provides "a new basis and a robust set of reasons for pacifism" that complements and goes beyond its traditional normative basis (2013: 438). To explore the explanatory dimension of non-violence, the pragmatic tradition brings expectations of pacifist morality, which are sometimes exaggerated, to a more realistic and compatible level that considers its possibilities and limitations. In addition, this new generation contributes to the construction and testing of theories of non-violent action from a more consistent empirical basis (Nepstad, 2015: preface). These concerns have become increasingly visible in the work of several authors, who have been fuelling the current research agenda on non-violence.

Among these authors, Ackerman and Kruegler (1994) are highlighted for their dialogue with the work of Sharp and trying to refine and test the hypothesis that adherence to a few key strategic principles (for example, the definition of clear objectives, the expansion of the repertoire of non-violent sanctions, the consolidation of the strategic control of actions, the maintenance of non-violent discipline and exploitation of the vulnerabilities of an opponent's power) strengthens the performance and impact of resistance groups, whatever the social and political context of the action (1994: 318). This type of comparative work on non-violent action in different contexts can also be observed in the work of other authors. Nepstad (2011, 2013), for example, compares several successful and unsuccessful cases of non-violent action, aiming to demonstrate not only the impact of strategic variables on the achieved results, but also the influence of structural variables beyond the direct control of the groups involved in non-violent action, like the autonomy or the economic dependence of opponent regimes, the degree of partisan institutionalisation and cohesion of elite rulers, alliances and connections of the international system, the level of benefits received by the military and security forces or perception that soldiers have about the strength or weakness of their regime. In his research, the author shows that although the choice of strategic non-violent action has a major impact on results, structural conditions also matter as they demonstrate, for example, the greater or lesser vulnerability of opponents to the blockades, embargoes and international sanctions, internal divisions or fidelity or mutiny of the military class (2011: 6-9; 2013). Following the same line of comparative analysis, Schock (2005) examines successful and unsuccessful cases of non-violent action in the production of political transformations in non-democratic countries. With this work, the author seeks to empirically support the argument that the characteristics of peaceful movements cannot be isolated from characteristics of political contexts, because the strategic choices and the contextual conditions interact to shape the results.

The joint work of Stephan and Chenoweth (2008, 2011) also fits in this area of comparative analyses of non-violent demonstrations and seeks to identify their successes and failures. They propose a comparison between the effectiveness of the strategic use of violence and non-violent action in conflicts between State and non-State actors, which is perhaps where their most original work resides. Through systematic analysis of a database of more than 300 conflicts between 1900 and 2006 where violent and non-violent resistance were observed, the authors seek to not only identify the causal mechanisms that lead to the achieved results, but also compare



their statistical conclusions with historical cases that have experienced periods of violent and non-violent resistance. Based on this comprehensive set of analyses, the authors conclude that non-violent action is a viable alternative to violent resistance against both democratic and non-democratic opponents, showing itself capable of challenging opponents and influence the resolution of conflicts in a way that favours the resistance groups in 53% of cases (compared with only 26% observed in cases of violent resistance). For Stephan and Chenoweth, this conclusion defies the common sense that violent resistance is the most effective way of challenging conventional adversaries and achieving higher political goals of oppressed groups (2008: 8-9, 42-43).

Véronique Dudouet (2008; 2015) thinks non-violent resistance to be a necessary component for the transformation of conflicts in situations where asymmetrical power relations are observed, especially in the early stages of latent conflicts rooted in structural violence. According to the author, due to its potential for popular "empowerment", for pressuring opponents and gaining the sympathy of third-parties, non-violent action can be a useful tool in the hands of marginalised and disadvantaged communities when searching for a stronger position from which the path to negotiations of concessions can become conducive (2008 : 19). Considering the ability of non-violent action to transform power relations and transform identities through persuasion, continues Dudouet, a combination of principles and pragmatic concerns can make peaceful approaches an important tool of political action, which is able to act through a dual process of dialogue and resistance: dialogue with the most powerful opponent in order to persuade them about justice and the legitimacy of the causes defended by the weaker parties (conversion through principles), and resistance to unjust power structures with the goal of pushing for social and political changes (a more strategic focus). While investigating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (2008: 14, 16-19) Dudouet notes, however, that conditions for the operation of this dialectical process tend to be hampered in the more advanced stages of the conflict or in situations which show a high degree of polarisation between opponents and non-negotiable aspects. In these extreme cases, the author considers that non-violent action alone may not be effective in the prevention of misunderstandings and overcoming of hatred between parties, and hypothetically suggests that there is a need to integrate non-violent action with a transformative strategy that includes multiple forms of intervention, such as negotiation, mediation, intervention of third-parties and other traditional techniques of peacemaking and peacebuilding. To test this hypothesis, the author considers additional empirical investigations to be important when identifying points of contact and favourable conditions for the combination of non-violent action with other traditional forms of intervention in asymmetric and sustained conflicts⁵, not only for parties in the conflict, but also for external parties interested in supporting or facilitating complementarity between these different approaches to conflict resolution (2008: 21).

⁵ Although the conceptualisation of asymmetric conflict is complex and feeds a growing agenda for research on the topic, one could say, in a simplified way, that the central defining element of this type of conflict is the significant power difference between the parties. As the editors of the journal *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* claim in its inaugural issue, traditional war balanced between organised military forces and state professionals has become rare, leading to asymmetric violence between State and non-State groups, which are becoming the predominant form of conflict in the world today. View: Editorial (2008) "Editors' welcome to the inaugural issue of *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 1 (1): 1-5.



What is critical to note from these indications is that a new horizon of research opens, taking the pacifist approaches of a certain type and inserting them within a broader framework, along with the approaches that traditionally have had greater visibility in the field of conflict resolution. However, this way is only the beginning; additional empirical investigations is required to allow for the examination of a wide range of issues. In addition to the previously highlighted aspect about the need to investigate the opportunities and favourable conditions for the combination of non-violent action with other traditional forms of intervention in asymmetric and prolonged conflicts, Dudouet (2008: 21) suggests new questions: to what extent does the technique and methods of non-violent action play a major role in post-conflict situations in the context of peacebuilding and democratic consolidation? To what extent can integration of negotiation techniques and traditional mechanisms of conflict resolution in preparatory training programmes for non-violent action contribute to prevent polarisation between parties and ensure that the achievements of non-violent action leading to the emergence of new versions of the structures of the old system? How are external actors able to inspire and encourage civil society to adopt non-violent action, without them being perceived as imposing foreign models or attempting to "pacify" local activists? As one can see through the challenges and the range of issues suggested in this section, pacifist approaches are far from reaching a point of exhaustion.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article is to present an overview of the pragmatic aspects of pacifist approaches. The efforts of conceptualisation and typification of non-violent action undertaken by the first generation debates on the topic – centred on the figure of Gene Sharp – were highlighted along with some developments and challenges faced by second generation authors, who are dedicated to refining and testing hypotheses about non-violence from a consistent empirical base. A clear shift of focus of the approaches based on principles to pragmatic approaches can be observed, and an effort to go beyond the assumption that non-violent action is superior in every situation and under any condition has also been highlighted. Thus, even when the researchers currently involved with the study of non-violence resort to classical references of principled pacifism like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, their concerns focus more on the question of the effectiveness of the authors' activism than the religious and moral principles that underlie their approaches. The current generation of authors involved with pragmatic pacifism derive techniques from Gandhi and Martin Luther King and the theory of power/consent of the first generation of pragmatic pacifism hypotheses that can be tested empirically. These recent developments reveal a currentness, a vitality and complexity for the research agenda of non-violence that can give a renewed practical and theoretical contribution to the field of conflict resolution that goes beyond the caricatures and stereotypes through which pacifist approaches have traditionally been seen.

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