Successful collective mobilisation is an art that can be learned. Take A Guided tour!

By Etienne Chomé (*)

(*) Author of the C-R-I-T-E-R-E method
for managing conflict more effectively
and founder of the International
School of CommunicActions,
whose 130 instructors disseminate
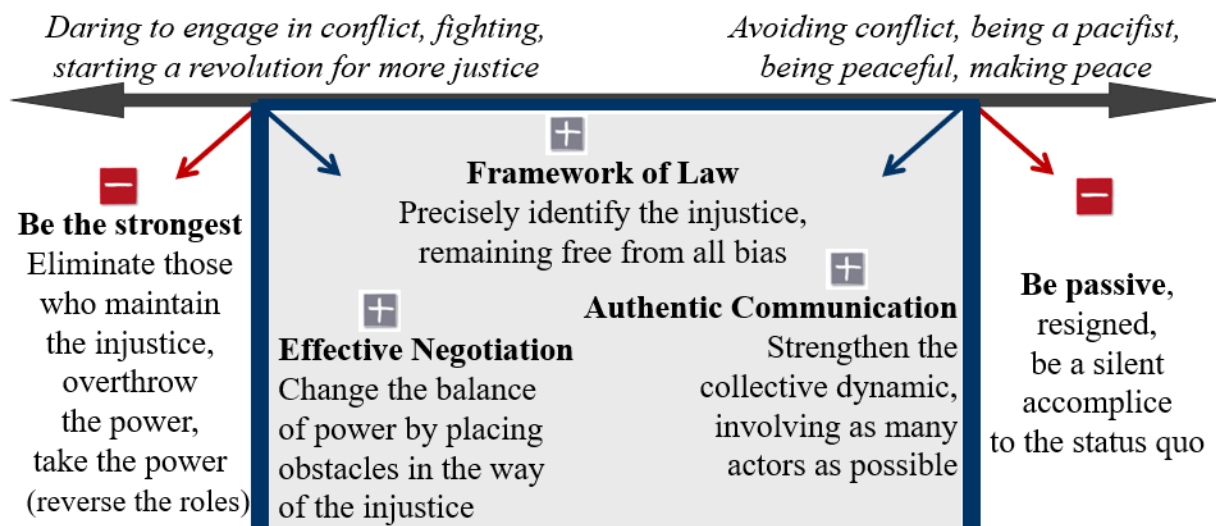the method throughout the world.

How can we mobilise the multitude of "people of goodwill" around collective action for greater social justice? This study seeks to draw valuable lessons from successful collective mobilisations in recent decades, with a particular focus on strategies that have made an explicit choice of "no to violence". This text is one of the chapters of my doctoral thesis, which I am completing at the University of Louvain (UCL, Belgium) after 20 years of involvement in the field, half of which was spent in the North and half in the South. My efforts at conceptualisation start from my practice and constantly return to it! Here, I draw mainly on my experience of a seminar entitled "How can we work together to overcome injustice", which I led in several countries in the South and in the North.

To organise a collective mobilisation, my work as a conflict management trainer has led me to identify three types of skills which I believe it is important to learn; first of all, how to distinguish, and then to rearticulate:

1) By "Authentic Communication", I mean the skill that manages the relational and communication process of a campaign of actions. It builds a collective force and organises its cohesion. It is the driving force behind the battle to win hearts and minds, to involve public opinion in the cause that is being defended.

2) By "Effective Negotiation", I mean the skill of organising the strategy to achieve the objective that has been set. It involves devising and implementing the political, economic and cultural pressure tactics that will give greater influence to those suffering injustice and make genuine negotiation possible.

3) The "Framework of Law" skill is needed to identify precisely where the injustice is, to analyse what it consists of, and to define what can replace it. This is the idea of the alternative programme: not just to challenge the injustice that we do not want, but to specify the justice we do want by already implementing it on a small scale.

I place these three skills at the heart of the following conceptual framework, which is designed to clarify the ingredients and challenges of an action campaign:

Daring to engage in conflict, fighting, starting a revolution for more justice

Avoiding conflict, being a pacifist, being peaceful, making peace

Framework of Law
Precisely identify the injustice, remaining free from all bias

Be the strongest
Eliminate those who maintain the injustice, overthrow the power, take the power (reverse the roles)

Effective Negotiation
Change the balance of power by placing obstacles in the way of the injustice

Authentic Communication
Strengthen the collective dynamic, involving as many actors as possible

Be passive, resigned, be a silent accomplice to the status quo

The horizontal line at the top of the diagram represents the tension between seeking justice and safeguarding peace. A revolutionary strategy is well to the left of this line as it justifies its violence ("the end justifies the means"). A strategy of gentle reform is well to the right of this line as it is complicit in maintaining injustices, compromising with the established powers. The solution is not to find a balance somewhere in the middle of the horizontal line because it is gangrenous with the power we exercise "over" them (on the left) or the power we suffer "under" them (on the right). Thinking along these lines traps the debate in truncated dilemmas between justice and peace. Instead, our strategies and our words benefit from being critically examined by the two vertical bars of the diagram.

The oblique arrows on the left   indicate the operation of extracting the truth and the error from the determined fight against inequality: purging from it the violent options of attacking those who profit from injustice, options by which, alas, the more change there is, the less real progress there is. The oblique arrows on the right extract the truth and the error from the desire for peace and social harmony: to eliminate the reflexes of passivity that are complicit in the domination of some over the silent majority who are the victims of injustice. There is no choice: EITHER justice OR peace. There are three levels to be distinguished and then articulated; there is a triple "AND" to be achieved: AND respect for the persons (Authentic Communication), AND respect for justice (Framework of Law), AND taking divergent interests seriously through a process that draws agreements from disagreements (Effective Negotiation). All action groups benefit from studying how it can replace its powers "over" the powerful (emptying the left-hand column **Be the strongest**, **DOM**ination) or "under" them (emptying the right-hand column **Be passive**, **PASS**ivity) with powers "for" greater justice (Framework of Law - Effective Negotiation) and "with" the maximum number of actors possible (Authentic Communication), by involving all those who understand that it is in their interest to engage in an action that results in an equitable society, as illustrated by the inner space of this conceptual framework.

The elements of this diagram provide the structure for the discussion in the following study: the first part presents, each in turn, the three competencies Authentic Communication, Effective Negotiation and Framework of Law. The second part attempts to mark out the path by which the groups manage, on the one hand to get out of the rut of passivity which rhymes with fatality and complicity (empting the PASS column), and on the other hand to avoid the pitfalls of a badly managed conflict which degenerates into violence (emptying the DOM column).

1) **Authentic Communication: Strengthening the collective dynamic of the movement to oppose injustice**

The first key to the success of a non-violent action is the organised strength of numbers. I will set out this principle by means of historical tables drawn from four continents, giving the floor to the actors involved. The number of quotations and the length of some of them is a choice motivated by the project of tracing where the paradigm shift comes from that revolves around "no to violence", as well as what it is and where it is going.

In Asia, Lao-tzu said 2,500 years ago: "In the universe, it is the gentlest which defeats the strongest. Nothing in the world is softer or weaker than water, and yet nothing surpasses it in destroying what is hard. No one in the world is unaware of this, but no one in the world applies this principle.[1] "Many authors have touched on this basic truth[2], but one person turned it into a practical political programme: Gandhi (1868-1948) in his fight for Indian independence. He had read one of the great historians of imperialism, John Seeley, who argued in 1883 that the United Kingdom conquered India less by brute force than by the attraction that Western civilisation exerted on the Indian potentates: "We are not really the conquerors of India, and we cannot rule as conquerors; if we sought to do so, it is not even necessary to ask whether we could succeed, for we would certainly be ruined by the mere fact of trying.[3]" Seeley emphasised the internal divisions in the Indian subcontinent, which the East India Company was able to exploit with few British troops and no budget from the Crown, to such an extent that he concluded: "it cannot really be argued that India has been

---

[1] Quoted by LE JEUNE Jacques, *Je ne tuerai pas. Plaidoyer d'un objecteur de conscience,* Bruxelles, La réconciliation, 1956, p. 231.

[2] Here is an anthology, starting with Spinoza in 1670: "Never have men relinquished their rights and transferred their power to the extent that they are no longer at all formidable to the very people who have acquired these rights and power. In reality, the State is threatened much more by citizens, even if they are deprived of their natural right, than by enemies. Suppose that men could be stripped of their rights, to the point where they no longer had any power without the consent of those who held the supreme right, with what violence would the latter not reign over their subjects! I do not believe that the accomplishment of such an extreme abuse could ever have been planned by anyone" (SPINOZA, Traité des autorités théologique et politique, chapter 17, in Œuvres complètes, Gallimard, Pléiade, 1967, pp. 842-843). The idea was clearly expressed at the beginning of the twentieth century: "A tyrannical government has only one justifier. It is the very people on whom it imposes itself; and the failure of this people to unite or to show the courage to get rid of it finds its punishment in the very maintenance of the tyrant who oppresses it" (DESPAGNET Frantz, Cours de droit international public, 3rd edn, Paris, Librairie de la société du recueil général des lois et des arrêts, 1905, p. 216). "While there is no doubt that revolts did exist, what clearly calls for an explanation is the fact that they were not more frequent" (WEBER Max, quoted in La joie de servir, Agone, Marseille, no. 37, September 2007). "The people have their weapons: numbers. In the factory, numbers can be seen, they can feel their strength. On a national scale, popular representation is more difficult to resist those who are privileged. The most concentrated force will prevail: the people, if they know how to unite. Numbers can conquer and abolish privilege", according to "the fable of the wolf and the lamb. The wolf grew old and the lamb had brothers" (VERRET Michel, La Violence, op. cit., 1967, p. 182-183).

[3] SEELEY John, The Expansion of England, [1883], Chicago U.P., 1971, p. 185. Cf. SCHELLING Thomas C., Some Questions on Civilian Defence, in ROBERTS Adam (ed.), The Strategy of Civilian Defence. Non-violent Resistance to Aggression, London, Faber & Faber, 1967, p. 302-308.Cf. also PERREAU-SAUSSINE Emile, Gandhi, théoricien de la servitude volontaire. Une philosophie de la décolonisation, Actes des journées internationales de Saint-Cyr Coëtquidan, Conférence d'éthique militaire, p. 133.

conquered by foreigners; rather, it has conquered itself[4]". Gandhi echoed Seeley: "In the true sense of the word, India is not a conquered country, but it has become British because the great majority of its people, from perhaps selfish motives, have accepted British rule[5]". "The British did not take India; we gave it to them.[6]" "I am absolutely convinced that no one loses his freedom except through his own weakness. It is not so much British guns that are responsible for our subjection as our voluntary co-operation. Government has no power apart from the voluntary or forced co-operation of the people. It is our people who give it its strength. Without our support, one hundred thousand Europeans could not hold even the seventh part of our villages.[...] The question before us is, therefore, do we oppose our will to that of the government or, in other words, do we withdraw our cooperation. If we are firm in our intention, the government will be forced to bend to our will or disappear.[...] In fact, a nation of 350 million people does not need the assassin's dagger, it does not need poison, it does not need the sword, the spear or the rifle. All it needs is a will of its own, the ability to say 'no', and today this nation is learning to say 'no'.[7]" That is why he had the audacity to say to the British rulers with unfailing determination: "You have great military forces. The power of your navy is unparalleled. If we wanted to fight you on your own ground, we would not be able to do so; but if you do not accept our demands, we will stop playing the governed. If it pleases you, you can cut us to pieces. You can crush us with the mouths of your cannons. If you act against our will, we won't help you, and without our help, we know you cannot move one step forward .[8]"

On the American continent, in his fight against racial discrimination in the United States, the Baptist pastor, Martin Luther King (1929-1968), also used this group force. For example, he organised a sit-in of a thousand people in front of a bar reserved for whites. Their gathering had the effect of blocking its entrance and drawing attention to the problems of discrimination. Or again, when a black man came to sit down at the bar counter, he was immediately arrested by white police officers but quickly replaced by another black man, and so on and so on, until there was no more space in the jails! They were full to bursting with proud, determined and morally strong blacks. The fact that Gandhi and Martin Luther King were assassinated in 1948 and 1968 did not stop the doctrine of non-violence from spreading. In South America, Archbishop Helder Camara dared to say: "If I stand alone against injustice, I will be crushed. If there are ten of us, or even a hundred, we will still be crushed. But if a whole people rises up, then the weapons of oppression become derisory. In concrete terms, "if a member of the Movement, acting in accordance with the principles and methods of peaceful violence, is put in prison, one of the strengths of the Movement would be to be able to gather dozens, hundreds, thousands of companions who would also agree to appear, at the same moment, at the prison gates, declaring their solidarity with the victimised brother. Clearly this would cause a sensation. And through the echo of newspapers, radio and television as well as press agencies, the movement would gain national and international recognition.[9]"

---

[4] SEELEY John, *op. cit.*, p. 161, Quoted by BAILY Christopher Alan, *Empire and information : intelligence gathering and social communication in India (1780-1870)*, Cambridge U.P., 1996.
[5] *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, New Delhi, vol. III, 1994 [1958], p. 383 (le texte date de 1903).
[6] GANDHI, *Hind Swaraj* [1909], Cambridge U.P., 1997, p. 39.
[7] *Tous les hommes sont frères*, Gallimard, coll. « Idées », p. 247 & GANDHI, *La jeune Inde*, Stock, 1948, p. 195.
[8] GANDHI, *Hind Swaraj*, p. 114.
[9] CAMARA Helder, *Spirale de violence*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1970, p. 38 et 39. Jacques Gaillot quites him in his *Lettre ouverte a ceux qui prêchent la guerre et la font faire aux autres*, Albin Michel, 1991,

In Africa, after a thirty-year struggle, the Afrikaner apartheid regime was forced, in the early 90s, to admit the need to negotiate a way out of the crisis with the African National Congress. During the talks, Nelson Mandela, who had been imprisoned for 27 years and 190 days, addressed the highest South African military officers as follows: "If you want war, I must honestly admit that we will not be able to face you on the battlefield. We don't have the means. The struggle will be long and bitter, many will die, the country could end up in ashes. But don't forget two things. You can't win because of our numbers: it's impossible to kill us all. And you can't win because of the international community. They will rally round us and support us. And the white South African journalist, Allister Sparks, who recounts this meeting in his book, "Tomorrow is Another Country", says that on this historic moment [10]: General Viljoen was forced to agree, the two men looked at each other, while facing up to the truth of their mutual dependence. The black South African writer, Ndebele Njabulo, echoed Allister Sparks: "This statement, accepted by all the participants at this meeting, sums up one of the major factors that led to the creation, in 1995, of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The basis of any compromise is the willingness of the conflicting parties to give up their irreconcilable objectives, and then to move towards an agreement that can bring substantial benefits to both sides. The apartheid government wanted to retain the reins of power, but was prepared to accept a broadening of black political participation. The ANC wanted the complete elimination of white power. None of these objectives seemed achievable without all-out war. It was in everyone's best interests to avoid confrontation. In exchange for its withdrawal from power, the beleaguered apartheid government demanded a general amnesty for all its agents, in particular the police and the army. […] In the end, agreement was reached on an amnesty with conditions[11]".

In Europe, 500 years ago, Erasmus (1469-1536) exclaimed: "I appeal to you all, without discrimination... All united in the same sentiments, conspire to bring about peace. Then show what weight is demonstrated by the union of the mass of citizens against the tyranny of the powerful[12]". Rabelais (1494-1553) agreed with him: oppression does not come primarily from the orders of the prince, but rather from the submission of the silent masses. Following in their footsteps was the young Etienne de La Boétie (1530-1563): "I only wish that someone could make me understand how it can be that so many men, so many cities, so many nations sometimes put up with everything from a single tyrant, who has only as much power as they give him, who has only as much power to harm them as they are willing to endure, and who could do them no harm if they only would not rather suffer all things from him than contradict him. [...] When the soldiers of a tyrant rampage through fields and villages, it is the people themselves who are enslaved, who cut their own throats. [...] If they are not obeyed, without fighting or striking, they remain naked and defeated and are nothing more than a root, and having no more spirit or nourishment, the root becomes dry and dead. [...] Do not take anything away from a tyrant, but rather, give him nothing. Resolve to serve no more, and you will be free. I don't want you to push him or shake him, just don't support him anymore, and

p. 141 and in conclusion : "As we have said, non-violence is a strategy, so we need strategists. » (p. 153).

[10] Cf. also SUANT Jacques, *Afrique du Sud. Du principe à la nécessité*, L'Harmattan, 1995, p. 101.

[11] NDEBELE Njabulo, *Afrique du Sud : Un compromis inédit*, dans *Le Courrier de l'UNESCO*, Décembre 1999, p. 22 ; URL : http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001182/118279f.pdf, which gives a balanced review of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

[12] ÉRASME, *La complainte de la paix*, cité par Général COT Jean, *Parier pour la paix*, Éditions-Diffusion Charles Léopold Mayer, 2006, p. 113.

you will see him, like a great colossus whose base has been stolen, he will crumble under his own weight and shatter. [...] Concerning reason, there is in each of us 'some natural seed' that education either nurtures or suffocates[13]."

In Eastern Europe, after the failure of the Prague Spring in the face of Soviet tanks in 1968, Václav Havel set Czechoslovakia on the road to a "velvet revolution", relying on the organisation of small teams to build a solid, civil society. "There is only wealth in men[14]". Faced with the ideological indoctrination of communist power, the "power of the powerless[15]", according to Havel, was to "live in truth", first and foremost by preserving and enriching a parallel culture. Faced with the totalitarian control of the state, which runs all businesses and schools, owns most property and bans the press and freedom of expression, he called on citizens to found small institutions that would develop the "independent life of society": music groups, sports associations, literary clubs, underground philosophical seminars in Prague, clandestine printing works, independent universities, solidly structured trade unions... Despite the lack of institutional support, the vitality of these associative networks contrasted with the shoddy civil society that the Soviet bloc regimes maintained with public funds for window-dressing. The people's weapon is to lead a normal and authentic life, as if the regime did not exist. One law, for example, required individuals to inform their police station of the presence of a guest. It became unenforceable as soon as enough citizens refused to apply it!

The military are well aware that "you don't fight an entire population, because you will lose. The danger of alienating public opinion is a danger for any counter-insurgent army[16]". Back in 1973, Gene Sharp was the first to theorise about non-violent action, based on this principle: "The ruler depends on the ruled[17]". There is strength in numbers.[18]

So this first skill, "Authentic Communication", refers to everything that helps to create social cohesion in a group as it resists a specific situation of injustice or "established disorder". It is the key resource for uniting the initial core group, federating goodwill and creating the greatest possible mobilisation within the population. These relational and communication skills, which win the support and involvement of as many actors as possible, are part of social intervention. The second skill we are now going to study is political action, because it provides the know-how to change the balance of power in a conflict.

---

[13] DE LA BOÉTIE Etienne, *Discours de la servitude volontaire*, Paris, Ed. Lobies, 1947, p. 19-26 ; Payot, 1976, p. 174-176, 183 (commentary by Pierre Clastres et Claude Lefort) ; Flammarion, 1983, p. 137-140.

[14] Selon l'aphorisme célèbre de Jean Bodin (1529-1596).

[15] HAVEL Václav, *Le pouvoir des sans pouvoirs* dans *Essais politiques*, Paris, Calmann-Levy, 1989, p. 65-158.

[16] Général BONNEMAISON Éric, *Toi, ce futur officier*, Economica, 2010, 2e éd., chapter 9.

[17] SHARP Gene, La guerre civilisée. La défense par actions civiles, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, 1995, p. 39-40. He identifies six "interactive" sources of political power: authority, human resources, knowledge and skills, intangible factors, material resources and sanctions. See Waging Nonviolent Struggle, op. cit. pp. 19-21, 31-35.

[18] Cheterian Vicken (ed.), From perestroika to rainbow revolutions. Reform and Revolution after Socialism, London, Hurst & Company, 2013, which paints a portrait of each of the states that experienced a "colored revolution", emphasizing the support of the popular masses. This support allowed "revolutionary movements with reformist objectives" to shake and then overthrow the regimes established in Serbia, Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyz.

2) **Effective Negotiation: Developing strategies to redress structural asymmetry[19]**

Communicating with the powerful and the wealthy who have the law on their side is usually not enough to convince them to put an end to their privilege, even less so when they make laws, that actually go against true justice. Change is also achieved through influencing the power balance. The ability to manage a showdown is also a skill that can be learned and practised. The strategy of the weak against the strong consists of activating and developing all the levers of power, by bypassing the usual factors of power. The strategist identifies his strengths and shifts the confrontation to the areas that are most favourable. The aim is to put obstacles in the way of the system that is causing the injustice, to the point where its operation ceases to be profitable for the privileged, or where its maintenance costs them more than its abolition. It will then be in their interest to negotiate!

That's how trade union activist César Chavez managed to improve the conditions of Mexican farm workers in California. Most of them were precarious seasonal workers who had previously been treated with profound disdain[20]: "We often think that non-violence boils down to an appeal to conscience, reason and human wisdom, when in reality it is first and foremost an action against the structures of social injustice. One of Chavez's collaborators, when asked whether non-violent action had been able to touch the hearts of his opponents, replied: "Certainly, we have been able to touch the hearts of the owners. Because their hearts are their wallets, and the boycott has indeed been able to touch the wallets of the owners[21]." The struggle waged by the social justice group sometimes involves demonstrations of force. The conflict can then "escalate in intensity"[22] until reaching the *momentum* of an apparent impasse, where no further progress can be made at an acceptable cost and risk.

By effectively mobilising these voiceless people of the Americas, Chavez brought about a new configuration of the power balance, which created the conditions for genuine negotiation, leading to an equitable solution. "We need to reverse the terms and not say that negotiation is a means of resolving conflict, but that conflict is a means of resolving negotiation. Manifest conflict is necessary to create the conditions in which dialogue and negotiation are possible[23]". "It is through conflict that everyone will be able to have their rights recognised by others. The function of conflict is to reveal injustice, to establish a contract, a pact between the adversaries that satisfies the respective rights of each, and thus to succeed in building

---

[19] I take this formula from DUDOUET Véronique, Nonviolent Resistance in Power Asymmetries, in AUSTIN Beatrix, FISCHER Martina & GIEßMANN Hans (eds.), Advancing Conflict Transformation. The Berghof Handbook II, Opladen & Farmington Hills, Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2011, p. 240 (237-264).

[20] Indifference for Chicanos has turned into deep contempt. Once they organized themselves, they were even assimilated to "guerrillas - Viet Cong", according to MATTHIESS Peter, Sal si puede: César Chavez and the New American Revolution, New York, Random House, 1970, p. 158-159.

[21] MULLER Jean-Marie & KALMAN Jean, César Chavez. A non-violent fight, Paris, Fayard, Le Cerf, 1977, p. 290. Cf. also OROSCO Jose-Antonio, Cesar Chavez and the Common Sense of Nonviolence, Albuquerque NM, University of New Mexico Press, 2008, which seeks to identify the specific and original contribution of César Chavez in the doctrine and actions not -violent. Its strength lies in a contextualized pragmatism, adjusted to the daily realities of the people it seeks to motivate.

[22] PRUITT Dean G. & KIM SUNG Hee, *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement*, New York, McGraw-Hill, 2004 (3ème éd.), p. 172-173.

[23] Levy Paul M.G., *op. cit.*, p. 120.

relations of equity and justice between individuals within the same community and between different communities[24]".

The non-violent strategy focuses on the objective of overcoming a specific injustice rather than an enemy, on putting an end to the latter without denying it, let alone suppressing it. "Etymologically, the word "strategy" means the leadership of an army (from the Greek *stratos*: army, and *agein*: to lead) in the various engagements that pit it against the enemy. In this sense, strategy is the art of warfare, which consists of designing, leading and coordinating the separate operations of armed forces with a view to achieving victory over the enemy in order to attain a specific political objective. Strategy refers to the design and conduct of a war as a whole, while tactics concerns the design and organisation of each of the different operations. Since the aim of non-violent combat is to find "functional equivalents" of war in order to achieve a political objective, we are justified in speaking of "the strategy of non-violent action", by transferring meaning through analogical substitution. To do so is not to militarise non-violence, but to demilitarise strategy[25]".

A basic strategic principle, just as true for the military as for non-violent activists, is to "do nothing until you have clear objectives[26]" (General Colin Powell) and to know precisely what you are fighting for. "It is on the basis of an analysis of the situation that we must choose the objective to be achieved. The choice of objective is an essential element in a campaign of action; on it alone does success or failure depend. It is a strategic necessity for the objective to be clear, precise, limited and possible[27]. To achieve this, we need to discern what is desirable and what is possible. Choosing an objective whose importance is disproportionate to the forces that can reasonably be expected to be mobilised to carry out the action is a recipe for failure. [...] Choose a precise point in the system that will allow you to have leverage on it, so that you can make it move and tip it over by taking action; like using a lever. This precise point will be your "hold" / "power-hold". You have to give yourself as many guarantees as possible that your power-hold is the right one. We can't let go of it and it can't let go of us[28]."
"Giving yourself the right objective is a difficult art, because it has to combine three characteristics:
- it must offer a power-hold by which the greatest number of people can put pressure
  on the opponent;
- and it must focus on a point where the opponent is vulnerable;
- it must represent a "value" that is sufficiently mobilising in order to catalyse dispersed wills[29]".

A bunch of grapes was the "power-hold" for Chavez and the 10,000 "Indians" from America who walked 25 days to the capital of California in March 1966. Their model: the East Indian, Gandhi, who 36 years earlier, in March 1930, walked 25 days to reach the ocean. His power-

---

[24] Muller Jean-Marie, *Dictionnaire de la non-violence*, 2005, Les Éditions du Relié, p. 353.

[25] *Idem*, p. 356.

[26] POWELL Colin, *Un enfant du Bronx*, Paris, Odile Jacob, 1995, p. 372.

[27] Muller Jean-Marie, *Stratégie de l'action non-violente*, Paris, Seuil, 1981, p.118.

[28] *L'action non-violente. Guide théorique et pratique*, in Les dossiers de non-violence politique, no. 3, 1985, p. 50. For a recent application of this strategic principle, see REFALO Alain, *La contestation anti-CPE : l'émergence d'une nouvelle radicalité, in Alternatives Non Violentes*, no. 139, 2nd quarter 2006: "The strength of the social movement that has generated non-violent direct action throughout the country is that it remains focused on a clear, precise, limited and possible objective".

[29] MELLON Christian & SEMELIN Jacques, *La non-violence*, *op. cit*., p. 51.

hold? Bending over to pick up a handful of salt from the beach was the gesture that Gandhi used to attack the existing colonial tax on salt. And this gesture was proceeded by the long "salt march", which was joined, village after village, by an ever-growing and determined crowd of people. This symbolic action, 17 years before India gained its independence, seemed totally incongruous to other Indian leaders who also wanted to put an end to colonial rule. Yet it proved to be a decisive step in the conquest of independence. Gandhi then succeeded in organising a boycott of English products by setting an example: alongside his wife, he spun his own clothes. In this way, the Indians learned, little by little, to stop being taxpayers feeding the Empire's coffers, to stop being workers conforming to its economic system, or civil servants devoted to its colonial Administration, etc. Gandhi won without arms, going from "power-hold" to "power-hold", going from strength to strength in an ever more massive non-cooperation and civil disobedience which, from contested law to contested law, and from level to level, hemmed in, and then suffocated, the colonial institutions. Organising armed groups to attack the British occupying authority would have been far less effective than the coercion exerted by a people increasingly united in their refusal to submit to the domination of another people.

The "power-hold" on which blacks in the United States, led by Martin Luther King, were to destabilise racist laws was their bus boycott in 1956: a very simple act of refusal, accessible to everyone, which paralysed the unjust system and crystallised a mass movement.

On the European side, the Frenchman Joseph Pyronnet understood, in 1959, the strategic importance of "dealing with the Algerian war of independence through a specific thing and not as a general problem. This is what Lanza del Vasto called a power-hold". Jo chose to take action on French soil, against the arbitrary internment camps for thousands of Algerians simply because they were "suspects". With thirty volunteers, he asked to be interned in one of these camps.[30]

At the end of the 1980s, dissident groups in Communist countries realised that the best way to get a grip on power was to give itself a façade of popular sovereignty. This need for appearances led it to organise elections which it also rigged. In East Germany, for example, it was fraud in the municipal elections of May 1989 that led to the fall of the Communist regime and the Berlin Wall. The same was true of the other "colour revolutions" in Poland, Ukraine and elsewhere. Gene Sharp talks about "political jiu-jitsu", in which the violence of the opponent is ultimately turned against him[31]. The aikido technique is applied collectively: instead of producing force against the aggressor, the very force of the aggression is exploited in order to neutralise it.

---

[30] Cf. His *Lettre ouverte à M. le Ministre de l'Intérieur du 9 juillet 1959* & *Les premiers pas de l'ACNV (Action civique non-violente), 1957-1960*, 20 janvier 2009 ; URL : www.refractairesnonviolentsalgerie1959a63.org/ ; QUEMENEUR Tramor, *L'ACNV (Action civique non-violente) et la lutte contre les camps*, dans *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps, n° 92, 4/2008*, p. 57-63.

[31] SHARP Gene, *The Politics of nonviolent action*, Boston, Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973, p. 405-406.

3) Framework of Law: Using the power of law to undermine the rights of the strongest

The non-violent strategy therefore involves the precise identification of a vulnerable cog in the system of oppression and attacking it until it is paralysed. The M.I.R. (Mouvement International de la Réconciliation – a branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR)), and in particular Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayer in their non-violence training seminars,[32] propose a 6-step process:

1) Define the injustice precisely: go back to its root, which must be named clearly and objectively.

2) Rigorously document the problem, building a complete case.

3) Analyse the injustice: identify the pillars of injustice.

4) Prepare the action: to achieve the general objective (putting an end to the injustice through a WIN-WIN change), set clear, precise, limited and possible specific objectives, and prioritise them.

5) Make the defined strategy operational; implement the dialogues, widening the circles of support for the cause.

6) Support the dialogue with operations that put obstacles in the way of injustice, until the players with power come to the "negotiating" table.

For mnemonic purposes, I refer to this process by the acronym D-I-A-P-O-S, which provides a method of collective mobilisation against a specific injustice. In my training courses, I propose D-I-A-P-O-S as a second step: after the participants have acquired the C-R-I-T-E-R-E method to better manage their small everyday conflicts in their interpersonal relationships.

§ 1: D to define injustice precisely and unravel its roots

Identifying injustice requires an arduous search for the "objective truth of the situation", because injustice never presents itself in a pure state. A group of citizens taking part in a training seminar will begin with a critical analysis of social structures. You can spot an iceberg and get close to it by looking at the visible part, but you have to dive underwater to study the 9/10ths of it that are submerged. So it is with the hidden mechanisms that keep people in social alienation: we start with acts of overt, direct violence (anger, vandalism in the suburbs, popular riots after a rise in the price of bread, etc.) and work our way down to their operating base, invisible on the surface: institutional violence - of which, the well-oiled, silent workings usually go unnoticed.

At the end of the 1960s, in, *Spirale de violence*, Dom Helder Câmara (1909-1999), the Brazilian archbishop, suggested that we identify the sequence of the following three types of violence: "You will see, everywhere, that injustice is violence. We can, and we must say, that everywhere it is the first of all forms of violence: violence No. 1"[33]. "This entrenched violence, violence no. 1, solicits violence no. 2"[34] from the victims of injustice when they revolt. And "when violence no. 2 tries to confront violence no. 1, the authorities feel obliged to save public order, or re-establish it, even if it means using strong means: this is violence no.

---

[32] Cf. GOSS Jean & Hildegard, *Une autre révolution, violence des non-violents*, Paris, Le Cerf, 1969 ; BOUR Alfred, *Oser la non-violence active, une force au service de la paix*, Butare (Rwanda), Ed. SAT, 1998 ; GODDING Jean-Pierre, *Un chemin de paix, introduction à la non-violence*, Bruxelles, Commission Justice et Paix, 1997. Cf. also the sessions of MAN (Mouvement pour une Alternative Non-violente).

[33] CAMARA Helder, *Spirale de violence*, Desclée de Brouwer, 1970, p. 16.

[34] *Idem*, p. 17.

3"[35], legitimised in the name of "national security"[36]. Situations of injustice are the mother of all other violence; it is the source of the "counter-violence[37]" of the oppressed in their liberation movements, and of the violence justified by the powers-that-be to "maintain order", in fact to maintain "established disorder[38]", in the service of peace for the wealthy. Between the fundamental violence that is entrenched but hidden, and the established violence of repression, there is often a flagrant expression of No. 2. In political terms, oppression by the ruling classes gives rise to the violence of insurrection by the disenfranchised, which in turn provokes counter-revolutionary violence.[39]

Socio-political analysis therefore begins by naming violence n°1, n°2 and n°3, and then understanding how they link together, with a view to channelling energies towards the source of the fire, rather than attacking the smoke. Mobilising against injustice is not without conflict and the risk of violence, but the most dangerous scenario in any society is conflict avoided and postponed, tensions that are built up until the last straw, the event that triggers an uncontrollable explosion. It is therefore salutary to dare to engage in conflict before violence!

---

[35] *Idem*, p. 22.

[36] *Idem*, p. 25.

[37] FANON Franz, *L'idéologue de la décolonisation* seems to be the first to have used the expression « counter-violence » which was a big success in non-violent circles. Cf. le chapitre « De la violence » dans FANON Frantz, *Les damnés de la terre*, [1961], from which the following extract is taken: "In capitalist countries, a multitude of moral teachers, advisers and 'disorientators' stand between the exploited and those in power. In colonial regions, on the other hand, the gendarme and the soldier, by their immediate presence, their direct and frequent interventions, maintain contact with the colonised and advise him, with the stick or the napalm, not to move. As we can see, the intermediary of power uses a language of pure violence" (Gallimard, 1991, p. 68-69). See also FANON Frantz, Great Ideas concerning Violence, Penguin, 2008.

[38] Words and writings of Dom Helder Camara, in LEFEUVRE François, Guy-Marie Riobé - *Helder Camara : Ruptures et fidélité d'hier et d'aujourd'hui,*, Karthala, 2011, p. 241. Camara takes the formula from Emmanuel Mounier who wrote in 1932 *Confrontation: rupture between the Christian order and the established disorder*, Special Issue of **L'Esprit**. He sees the "established disorder" in the liberal, capitalist and individualist society of the bourgeois and the gentrified. By established disorder he means the subversion of humanist values inherited from Greek reason, Judaism and Christianity; values which he intends to revive through a "personalist and community" revolution, without falling into the impasses of fascist or communist totalitarianism.

[39] Pierre Mertens, then Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Sociology at the Free University of Brussels, describes them as follows: "institutional" violence, "democratic" violence and repression; cf. MERTENS Pierre, *Violence "institutionnelle", violence "démocratique" et répression*, in *La violence et ses causes,* UNESCO, 1980, p. 245. Cf. GOLDMAN Emma, Psychology Of Political Violence, Kessinger Publishing, 2004, which studies how the violence of the desperate has been repressed since time immemorial without questioning the wrongs that provoke it.

The difficulty of tackling structural violence in three points

1) Those who benefit from violence that has been in place for several generations, and is therefore often institutionalised in national laws, they forget that it is unjust; they even take it for granted. In Africa, families who inherit land from slave-owning colonists now have full legal ownership rights. For example, 85% of land was still in Afrikaner hands when the South African apartheid system was officially ended. The figures are similar in Zimbabwe. At a seminar I ran in Mauritius, the participants took as their starting point the news that angry squatters had stoned cars and caused bailiffs and police officers to retreat, who had come to enforce a court eviction order. Such violence is clearly dangerous for the respect of *Law and Order*. We then studied Bertold Brecht's thought: we always criticise the violence of the river, but we forget the violence of the banks of the river, the hidden and established violence. The ability to see the rebel slaves who had escaped clandestinely to the island of yesterday, not just as "bloodthirsty barbarians but as people who were ultimately seeking nothing more than their stolen freedom[40]" led the group to realise that in a century's time, their children would probably no longer see the legal point of view of the owners, which is obvious today, but above all, the squatters' right to have a little living space of their own.

2) Structural violence demobilises us. For example, if we witness a man sexually abusing a child, we are directly challenged and we feel a responsibility to react. On the other hand, unfortunately, we are resigned to the structural violence of prostitution networks, because the evil seems to be beyond us.

3) We don't know how or where to attack structural violence. We can personally help an asylum seeker. But how can we attack the structural violence that is exerted through North-South trade? Structural violence is all the more unassailable because it is impersonal: no one seems to be the initiator, no one is directly responsible.

§ 2: I to rigorously document the problem and build a complete case

Once we have identified and formulated a "root injustice", we set out to gather as much information as possible about it. Study it from every angle: its social, political and economic issues, the weight of the cultural traditions that surround it, its historical context, its legal framework, etc. We need to read existing analyses, consult competent people, carry out meticulous surveys in the field to verify the facts put forward and establish quantified data. It's a good idea to have recourse to illuminating points of comparison (from other times or events). Putting together this dossier helps us to get beyond the surface of impressions and rumours, and the interference caused by fears fed by imagination. We are gradually moving away from approximations, partisan caricatures and generalisations. We depolarise the analysis by knowing the whole of reality, by shedding light on its different sides. It reveals the truth of those who challenge the established order and those who are satisfied with it. In this way, we can identify each person's biases, the "pair of glasses" through which they look at the world. All this allows one to get as accurate a picture of the situation as possible. This is what Jean and Hildegard Goss mean by the "truth of the situation".

---

[40] Cf. l'historien mauricien et vicaire général du Diocèse de Port-Louis : NAGAPEN Amédée, *Le marronnage à l'Isle de France-Ile Maurice*, présenté dans *La Vie Catholique*, 1-3 déc. 2000, p. 18.

§ 3: A for Analysing injustice and Attacking the pillars that support it

Injustice is represented by a pyramid that stands on its tip as long as it is supported by pillars. It will fall if we remove them, one by one, choosing first those that are the most fragile. We begin by naming the various pillars that support the three lateral faces:
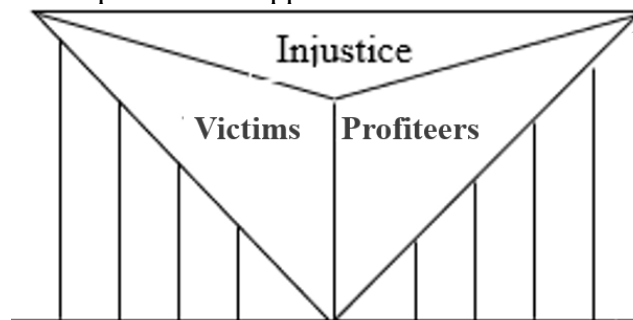
1) those who suffer injustice (mindsets, beliefs, resignation, fatalism, silence, fear, chronic complaining, hatred, inability to speak and to listen, ignorance of their rights, disunity, etc.),
2) those who profit from injustice (blindness, amnesia, closed minds and blockage, self-interest, profit, justifying arguments, means of coercion, support and dependency, etc.),
3) third parties (refusal to intervene by intermediary groups, omissions and failure to report what is witnessed, failure to assist people in danger, role of the media, religious authorities, local, national and international public opinion, groups abroad, etc.) and the context (legacies of the past, political regime, international context, etc.).

The analysis seeks to identify the most fragile pillars. These are the ones that need to be taken down first. From objective to objective, we succeed in destabilising the pyramid. This marks the start of the elaboration stage, followed by the strategic coordination of the planning and implementation.

§ 4: P-O-S for Prepare the actions, Operate and Support the negotiation

Without going into detail about the arsenal of methods for challenging and mobilising public opinion, as well as direct and indirect intervention techniques[41], I have retained a few useful elements for the remainder of this study.

The rest of this article (14 pages) is not yet translated.
Original text in French available here: https://etiennechome.site/df/

---

[41] Cf. SHARP Gene, *The Politics of nonviolent action*, *op. cit.*, p. 49-65, 397-404.