Interconnections between environment, violence and nonviolence

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Abstract. This paper presents an hypertext, accessible on the web, with a research on the environmental impact of military activities and wars, and with some suggestions for interdisciplinary activities in educational contexts, drawn from the nonviolent culture and perspective.
Keywords. War; violence; nonviolence; environment

Perspective: Educational vision

Fields: Earth life support systems

Issues: Social processes in the globalized world

1. Research on conflict and peace

Johan Galtung is one of the fathers of Peace research (or Peace studies). In 1959 he founded the International Peace Research Institute (PRIO); in 1993 he was a founding member of TRANSCEND International, the global nonprofit network for Peace, Development and the Environment. Since 2000, he is Rector of TRANSCEND Peace University, the world's first online Peace Studies University.

Galtung is not only a theoretical scholar, but he has been involved many times in processes of nonviolent conflict transformation. His work offers also many 'case-studies' to help understanding the deep interconnections between means and ends in the search for peace.

In a book published in 1996, "Peace by peaceful means", Galtung provides a broad overview of the ideas, theories and assumptions underpinning peace studies, and he offers a theory of Peace, Conflict, Development and Civilization. According to Galtung, a basic formula for promoting and achieving peace implies empathetic attitudes, nonviolent behavior and creativity in order to overcome contradictions between values and goals at the heart of conflict (Galtung et al., 2000).

Most of the books written by Galtung offer useful diagrams and schemes that may help readers to organize their ideas on the vast and still so little investigated issue of the relationship between violence and nonviolence.

The following table was created by putting together key ideas from the readings of Galtung, and it provides a summary of the different forms of violence he identified.

		NEEDS				
		SURVIVAL (Denial leads to death)	WELL-BEING (Denial leads to poverty and illness)	IDENTITY (Denial is alienation)	FREEDOM (Denial is repression)	ECOLOGICAL BALANCE
MICRO AND MESO LEVEL	DIRECT VIOLENCE	Murder	Mutilation, siege, sanctions, poverty	De-socialization, Re-socialization, second class citizens	Repression, imprisonment, expulsion	Destruction, plunder
MACRO AND MEGA LEVEL		Extermination, holocaust, genocide	Silent holocaust	Spiritual death	Gulag	Ecocide
MICRO AND MESO LEVEL	STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE	Intensive exploitation (A)	Weak exploitation (B)	Penetration, segmentation	Marginalization, fragmentation	Pollution, unequal use of resources
MACRO AND MEGA LEVEL		Blocks and sanctions		Desocialization of own culture, resocialization in another's	Imprisonment / deportation	Climatic change, oceans acidification
MICRO AND MESO LEVEL	CULTURAL VIOLENCE	Devaluation	Marginalization	Denying the chance of Non Violent conflict transformation	Denying the right of each person to develop and express his/her talents	Denying the relationship of dependence of mankind from nature
MACRO AND MEGA LEVEL			Denying the right to non hazardous jobs	Racism	Denying the right to commons (air, water, land...)	Denying the biophysical limits of our planet

2. Environmental violence

More recently, in 2013, Rob Nixon published a book titled "Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor". Even more recent is the book by Bruce E. Johansen, "Eco-Hustle! Global Warming, Greenwashing, and Sustainability" (2015).

These two authors focus on aspects and expressions of violence occurring within environmental contexts: the denial of environmental justice, and the environmental un-sustainability of corporate enterprises. Their insights can be located in the last set of rows and columns to the right in the above table.

Slow violence… Eco-hustle… Unusual terms, which help us to reflect on the hidden forms of violence, which do not occur in an explosive way, such as murders or bombing raids, but they affect human communities and natural systems that host them in an equally destructive way, spreading over and expanding on often unexpected temporal and spatial scales.

Thanks to Galtung and many other scholars who were inspired by him - Peace Studies have spread and have become specific lines of research at international level in many universities. However, a well-defined field of study addressing in a systematic way the violence towards natural systems and the impacts on the lives of the communities (human and non-human) that depend on those systems is still lacking. This field of study may engage researchers trained in different disciplines to come together: from experts in natural sciences to jurists, from epidemiologists to economists and artists.

In turn, teachers and educators should take responsibility for the development of students' awareness of the interdependence of all life on Earth and of the biophysical limits of our planet. Moreover they could help young people to develop the skills and competences to recognize the different forms of violence (often indirect and hidden), and to act in order to build peace: positive peace explores the tension towards a more equitable society, and nonviolent peace is aimed at overcoming – by peaceful means - violence against people and against nature.

3. Suggestions for educational pathways

In Italian schools and universities (with few exceptions) the story of nonviolence and peace building are not present as subjects of study and research. Many teachers - while themselves pleading for a more 'peaceful' society – struggle with the design and implementation of activities in classroom settings (or in university courses) that include environmental conflicts and approaches to peace. With a view to support them with some hints, we have developed a book which is published as hypertext and it is accessible from the web, that offer the nonviolent perspective as an alternative to the dominant view (Camino et.al. 2015).
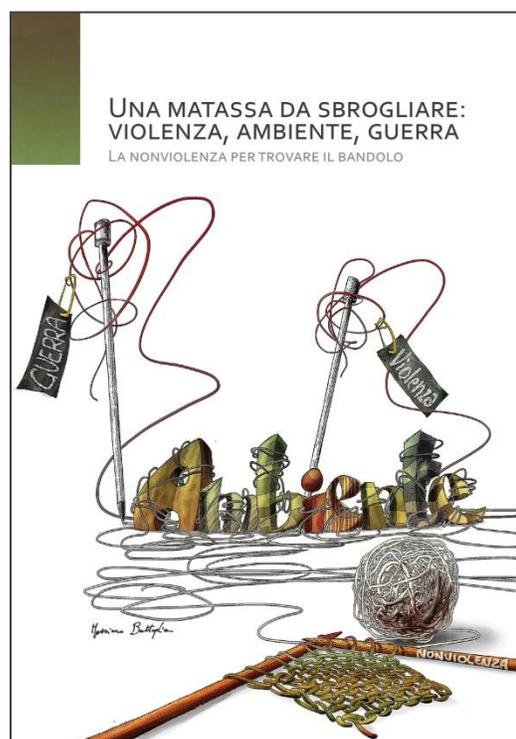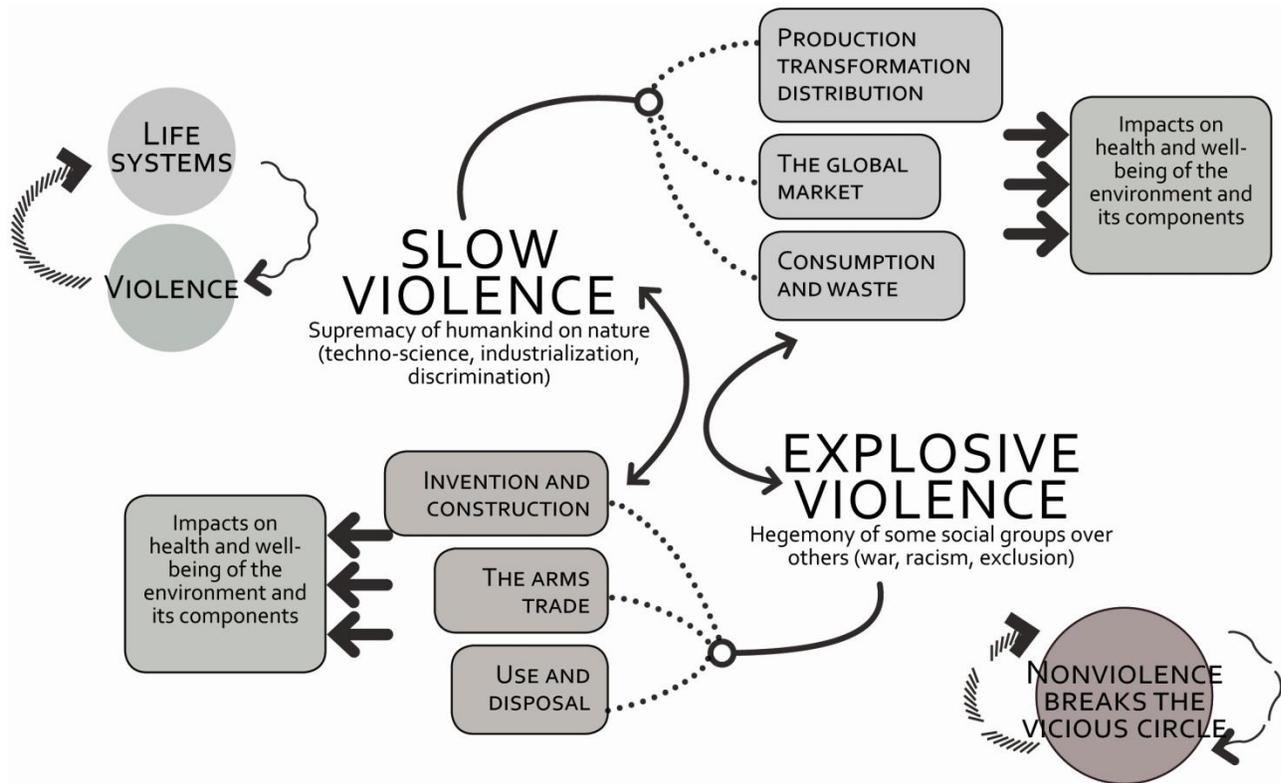
The conceptual map shown here illustrates some of the main issues addressed.

In the first part, the hypertext presents an introduction to the concepts and studies of peace and nonviolence, followed by the results of a research on 'Environment and war'. Next, some constructive perspectives are proposed about inventing and building peace. The book includes an extensive bibliography and links to useful websites (more than 450 voices).

In the second part of the hypertext, we present some proposals for interdisciplinary pathways, along with methodological suggestions, conceptual maps and pictures. Some of titles include: "The ecological footprint of war", "Chemical weapons", "Climate changes"; "Socio-environmental conflicts in India"; "The century of uranium".

The first version of the hypertext was completed in June 2015. Given the extreme relevance and topical interest of the issues dealt with, we are planning to publish regular updates. Moreover, in the hope of involving many educators, and create a small community of teachers and researchers engaged in these issues, we aim to host comments, summaries of experiences, suggestions that arise from those who have tried to test some of the proposed paths.

One of the best ways to arrive [to peace] is through dialogue, or rather, not just one dialogue, but thousands, at every level of society, repeated over and over again, coming up with as many ideas, and actions, for peace as possible. What is then needed is to act, and to keep acting, building, working, to empower

ourselves, our communities, and the world, for the promotion of peace by peaceful means, refusing to surrender to the logic of violence, to accept violence, or to practice violence against others. A struggle in which peace is both the goal and the way (Galtung et al, 2000).

Inventing peace is a method, a technique to redefine the way we see others and ourselves. Inventing peace means inventing the ethical ways to imagine the world differently (Wenders & Zournazi, 2013).

Readings

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