

Militarism and patriarchy are deeply rooted in Turkish culture. Currently, war in the 'south-east' is based on ethnic discrimination against Kurds, although it is officially described as a 'war against terrorism'. Any attempt to question militarism is called 'treason'. The people most affected by the negative consequences of violence are primarily women, children, the elderly, and religious, ethnic, and political minorities. Violence is so internalised in Turkish society that alternative perspectives have become almost unthinkable, even among those who normally question hierarchy and promote freedom and equality.

The influence of the military can be seen in the following examples:

- Only after having done military service is a man regarded as a 'real' man.
- The National Security Council (including the chiefs of staff) as recently as 1997 prevented the winners of the elections from forming a government ("the post-modern coup").
- Economic power: the Turkish army's financial services company OYAK is one of the most powerful investors in Turkey.
- Opinion polls show that the military is the institution most trusted by the people.

The army under Mustafa Kemal established the Turkish republic in 1923, after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire; Kemalist principles remain fundamental to the state, reflected in the criminal code, the maintenance of a powerful army, and the belief in the 'indivisibility of the nation'. These generate repressive attitudes. Few people see male domination of women as an issue, and physical violence is widely accepted against subordinates, prisoners, and within the family.

Beginnings

The term nonviolence was used for the first time in the principles of the Izmir War Resisters' Association (IWRA) in 1992. Within the Association, nonviolence was always a discussion point, especially how to find practical ways of living nonviolently in a violent culture. We first used nonviolence training to prepare ourselves for prison visits when a group member, Osman Murat Ülke, was imprisoned for conscientious objection. Initially nobody from outside approached us to discuss nonviolence. However, now there is more interest, although the War Resisters' Association itself closed in 2001 because of the burn-out of members.

IWRA's commitment to nonviolence put us in sharp contrast with other leftist groups who did not take our approach seriously and regarded nonviolence as weak and ineffective. We mainly involved antimilitarist, anarchist, and feminist activists. Perhaps the biggest welcome for nonviolence came from the Lesbian, Gay, Bi, and Trans-sexual (LGBT) community, which was just in the process of becoming structured and taking up nonviolent methods.

In political alliances, our most fruitful interaction was with the women's movement. When we first began, we formed a feminist and antimilitarist women's group called 'Antimilitarist Feminists', trying to reach out to women's groups. Despite some initial disappointment, we reached many independent women and began to hold trainings with women's organisations. This change in attitude was related to changes/transformation within the women's movement, in particular a desire to do things their own way rather than on traditional leftist lines. Questioning violence became a priority for women, and nonviolence seemed to offer a response. As more women sought personal empowerment, our cooperation with women and women's groups strengthened.

The closest political group was the conscientious objection movement because it was built by the efforts of activists working to promote nonviolence. Although this partnership continues, an individualistic streak in the movement, we believe, makes discussion of nonviolence less effective. Although most Turkish conscientious objectors are total resisters (that is, rejecting both military service and alternative civilian service), the movement's attitude towards nonviolence is equivocal at times, especially because of support for

conscientious objectors from the Kurdish movement and leftist groups.

Izmir nonviolent trainers initiative

The Izmir Nonviolent Trainers Initiative (INTI) was first formed as part of the IWRA with additional support from others. Our work was supported and improved in quality thanks to cooperation with German trainers, including training courses at Kurve Wustrow in Germany, an international training for trainers organised in Foca, Turkey, in April 1996, and the accompaniment of two German trainers who lived in Izmir from 1998 until 2001. When IWRA closed in December 2001, the trainers' initiative continued, organising workshops in Izmir and anywhere in the country we are invited, including in Diyarbakir in the south-east 'crisis' region. Today five trainers—four female and one male—mostly work on a voluntary basis, only receiving travel expenses, although sometimes we have money to pay a part-time coordinator. In June 2006 we began a course of training for trainers with 20 participants from all over the country.

The aim of INTI is to enhance and establish nonviolent principles and structures as an alternative to militarism, nationalism, hierarchy, and patriarchy. Our public activities began with organising demonstrations and seminars on nonviolence and conscientious objection, publishing pamphlets (although police confiscated a number of our works from printers), and looking for international cooperation. In the field of training we worked with activists from extra-parliamentary groups, from human rights, women's, and LGBT groups, and from political parties. Additionally, the group co-operated with the Human Rights Centre of the Izmir Lawyers' Association to train lawyers and police about human rights issues. In general, issues covered in our trainings include creating non-hierarchical structures for grassroots and oppositional political work, consensus decision-making, discussion of militaristic structures within society (starting from the family), and nonviolent alternatives. The individual behaviours and actions of participants are always the basic and central point of our workshops. We reflect on theoretical analyses and practical experiences of nonviolence and nonviolent actions (starting with Henry David Thoreau and Mohandas Gandhi and leading to today's examples). We include reflections on anarchistic approaches to nonviolence, on Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and Gene Sharp's strategies of nonviolence.

Our group believes that it is possible to eliminate all kinds of inequalities, discrimination, and thus violence and to develop nonviolent actions and methods for social and political change. Therefore, with the principle that 'nonviolence is not an aspiration to be achieved in the future, but the very means to achieve such a goal', our group started questioning everyday life practices that may seem to be 'neutral'. For over 10 years our group has been learning, practising, and teaching the means and methods of nonviolence, an attitude towards life that we are now developing as a life principle.

First, we offer 'introductory' one-day trainings for diverse organisations and for individual activists who question violence within their agendas. Second, we offer 'issue-based trainings' on particular topics requested by groups based on their needs; these have included prejudice, conflict resolution, communication, and sexism. Third, we are working to offer a one-week intensive 'training for trainers' session with individuals who have taken part in the first two training sessions and who want to become trainers; this was in response to a constantly increasing demand for such a module. Since 2002, we have conducted the first and second parts of trainings with diverse groups—working with women, the LGBT community, and human rights, ecology, peace, and antimilitarist groups in Izmir, Ankara, Antalya, Adana, and Diyarbakır.

Individuals who participated in our first two trainings and wanted to be trainers had already started questioning violence and had been trying to integrate nonviolent methods in their institutions and their individual practices. However, they felt they lacked information and experience about 'nonviolent action'. For example, in Diyarbakır we identified a need to learn about developing nonviolent solutions for fundamental activities (like 'honour' killings, and general violence against women). Participants needed empowerment for their work and an enhanced capacity to use nonviolence to create new solutions to ongoing problems.

We are aware that it is impossible to cover all principles of nonviolence in a one-week training. One of the solutions we found is to continue dialogue and to seek possibilities for future meetings of supervision and feedback. Furthermore, during our third training, we plan to form a network between trainers from all over Turkey and will establish operational principles for such a network. This 'network of trainers' approach will ensure that our dialogue is sustainable and allow us to continue sharing knowledge and experience among nonviolence trainers and to collaboratively disseminate nonviolence training both at local and national levels.

Our aims

We aim to improve and strengthen the culture of democracy and human rights by introducing the concept of nonviolence, to question the culture of violence (which has a militaristic and patriarchal character in Turkey) in order to sow seeds of a culture of nonviolence, and to raise awareness of and struggle with discrimination in all walks of life. Training trainers will allow them to work for these ends by gaining practical experience and increasing their capacity to facilitate their own training groups.

Nonviolent campaigns

Looking at examples of nonviolent campaigns in Turkey, we can say that these activities have not been organised in an entirely nonviolent way. While nonviolence was one of the fundamental principles, some organisations lacked some of the qualities of a truly nonviolent action, such as preparing for the event with nonviolence trainings. One of the longest campaigns in this regard was the Militourism Festival. This festival, held annually on 15 May (International Conscientious Objectors' Day), consisted of visiting prominent militarist symbols in various cities, organising alternative events, and publicising declarations of conscientious objections. Another was the 'We Are Facing It' Campaign, aimed at coming to terms with the war going on in Turkey. It was spread over an entire year, with major actions held every three months. The aim was to prevent people from ignoring this war by the use of nonviolent means such as street theatre. Another nonviolent action was the 'Rice Day', held in Ankara, the centre of official administration, and specifically in front of a military barracks. We gathered there to say 'we exist, we are here'. As antimilitarists who subverted societal roles in our activities, we used the symbol of Rice Day to enhance group solidarity and end our invisibility. Apart from these major activities, smaller organisations and actions mobilised for short-term political intervention purposes.

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