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There are many responses to different forms of violence, and these can be grouped broadly under the terms "resistance" and "constructive programme". Often, these two approaches to social change are kept quite separate from each other; groups repeatedly fall back on familiar strategies or techniques (or mistakenly believe there is only 'one way' to achieve their aims), don't have a broad structural or systemic analysis of the issue they are hoping to take action on, or simply lack the time or energy to expand their form of action.

In fact, they need to be thought of as essentially and completely interlinked, and our movements would be stronger if they were more regularly and actively brought together. Some of the most vibrant, radical, and creative social movements in the world don't rely on one form of action or the other but have brought together the two together into a strong and effective means of challenging violence and oppression in its many forms.

2.1 Resistance: saying "no!"

The means of nonviolent resistance are probably the first thing that come to mind when you think of "social change" or "activism": images of thousands of people marching against a new law, a silent vigil outside a military base, or a few hardy folk climbing the chimney of a coal-fired power plant.

Resistance can be thought of as the means of saying "no", of confronting a decision, policy or action by those we oppose. The tools and methods are well developed and used by social movements all over the world, for specific "single issue" campaigns against particular forms of violence, exploitation or destruction, to attempts to overthrow whole governments. Occupations, boycotts, blockades, protests, petitions, strikes, street theatre and leafleting, are just a few of the examples.

The 'resistance' side of our coin means thinking about the violent and destructive parts of our world; we can't ignore them, and activists spend a lot of time acting against them. We may find a great deal of sustenance, inspiration and motivation from being involved in this form of social change, but it also could be said, even if we're successful, we are left with a gap – the absence of a great evil like nuclear weapons, the arms trade, or a major fossil fuel company would be fantastic, and will be achieved through direct action and putting pressure on decision makers with nonviolent campaigns, 'but what next? What approaches to foreign policy and trade do we need to replace war and the arms trade? What kinds of energy sources do we need to foster to fill the gap left by fossil fuels? And how do we want these new systems and structures to work? Who will own and control them?

2.2 Constructive programme: saying "yes!"

If resistance is the art of saying "no", then constructive programme is a way of saying "yes", of affirming something different and imagining a different future by actively creating a new way of living and relating to each other, society, and the planet. Constructive programme occurs when we start building the world as we would like it to be, even if it's only in miniature or for a brief amount of time. It is a practical and pragmatic response to a direct need, practiced in a way that refuses to mirror the systemic and cultural violences of the mainstream. Constructive programmes try to find more nonviolent, life-affirming, empowering ways of living and working.

We can define constructive programme as: "... a programme of community efforts for transforming society by building a set of alternative and parallel institutions or practices that embody values and principles of nonviolent social empowerment (see below), which are interwoven with resistance to those social institutions or practices that uphold the injustices in contemporary society such as environmental and human exploitation, lack of democracy and culture of violence. Constructive programmes will vary in many ways,

depending on their context and what established institutions or practices they try to replace, the degree to which they embody the alternative and parallel values and principles, and finally - to what degree they integrate resistance.”

Our constructive programmes will be – inherently – flawed. A constructive programme is *not* a simple wishy-washy utopian pipe dream. They are built by humans, living within the confines of a wider capitalist, patriarchal and racist, society, with all of the baggage and brokenness that comes with that. We will need to learn new ways of relating to ourselves, each other, and our planet, and we will regularly fall short of our ideals.

For Gandhi, constructive programmes were essential preparation for more active, confrontational forms of resistance, as well as providing for the logistical and infrastructural needs for post-independence/revolution. He saw a need to empower and mobilise in a way that established his nonviolent vision deeply into politics, economics, and culture, and allowed communities to develop self-reliance, draining power from the authoritarian colonialist state (see sidebox text in bold below.)

We have seen many examples of revolutions – both nonviolent and violent – being usurped or manipulated to the interests of elites (including in post-independence India, and more recently in South Africa and Egypt). New dictators or powerful elite institutions have been able to retake or maintain political power. One explanation for this is that the focus of movements was too heavily on establishing state power, rather than (or additionally) transforming society. These revolutions were unable to transform the deeper structures of the state and society, and only replaced its leadership. The “pillars of power” that originally held the powerful elites in place in the first place had not been undermined, and quickly regrouped around structures of power have heavily resembled the original status quo.

While constructive programme remains illusive and under used, it is possible to see forms of constructive programme being used by movements all over the world, with groups large and small practising forms of organising and action that illustrate what a new world might look like. Some examples include:

- In Brazil, [*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais Sem Terra*](#), (or MST, the Landless Workers Movement) is a movement of rural workers, occupying the land of large estates and returning it otherwise landless farmers;
- In the United States of America, the [Community Land Trust programme](#) provides affordable housing, community gardens and other infrastructure, and emerged from the Civil Rights movement, when Bob Swann and Slater King (cousin of Martin Luther King) acted to create “long-term opportunities for economic and residential independence for African Americans in the rural south”;
- The Catholic Worker movement, which develops communities of “hospitality and resistance”, by setting up houses of hospitality to the homeless and others in need, while also taking nonviolent direct action against war and its causes. The Catholic Worker has had a long association the Ploughshares movement, an informal network of activists committed to active, nonviolent disarmament of nuclear and 'conventional' weapons;
- In Spain, [the village of Marinelda used direct action to occupy and eventually reclaim land from local land lords](#), organise worker own cooperatives, and continues to take direct action against austerity economics (the villages mayor famously publicly shoplifted to redistribute food to the poor);

- Mendha-Lekha – a village in India - adopted [*Swaraj*](#), the principle of decision-making by consensus. The villagers do not allow any government agency or politician to take decisions on their behalf, nor may a village or tribal chief do so without full consultation;
- In the United Kingdom, [the 'Radical Routes' housing cooperative network](#) enables small housing cooperative schemes to get access to funds, provide moral and practical support, and focuses on housing people engaged in some form of social change;
- In Israel/Palestine, [a small organisation called 'The Holy Land Trust'](#) invite international volunteers to rebuild homes of Palestinians destroyed by the Israeli military, and help to collect olive harvests otherwise inaccessible to farmers;
- In West Papua, members of the Malind Anim community, in protest at the MIFEE extractivist project, blocked access roads to the to the company responsible, [turning them into food gardens instead](#);
- The global Occupy movement created encampments – in some cases housing and feeding thousands – as they talked, planned actions, and imagined a new world.

As early as 1830, Britain had passed laws that protected British-milled cloth, which led to the destruction of the Indian cotton industry; Indian grown cotton was being sent to Britain to be woven into cloth, which was then being exported back to India, which meant [“the British control of India was rooted in control of indigenous industries”](#). Gandhi called for a boycott of the British cloth that was driving [so many Indian spinners out of work](#), and made the spinning of cloth a central part of his anti-colonial struggle.

All over India, people reverted to hand spun cloth, and Gandhi himself wore cloths made from cotton he had spun himself. As well as being a political statement against the structural violence of the British empire, this 'cottage industry' demonstrated the self-reliance and empowerment that are essential components of a constructive programme. Brian Wilson describes Gandhi's use of the spinning wheel as “both a symbol and a literal appropriate technology promising to liberate the people from dependence upon British textiles through creation of their own local industries” with the aim of [“withdrawing support from the political state while building economically self-reliant communities from below”](#).

Gandhi recognised the structural violence that was being perpetrated against his people, and found a form of practical action that was rich with meaning. In other contexts, spinning cloth may not be the best way of undermining such violence; access to housing or education, producing sustainable energy, use of organic or indigenous seeds, the distribution of land, democracy in the workplace, or any number of issues may be a way of illustrating and undermining deep structural or cultural violences, that can be confronted with a form of constructive programme. A constructive programme needs to build on an analysis of the context and how forms of violence deprive people of their needs and aspirations, and experiment with new structures, processes and relationships that both undermine and weaken this violence, and produce new, alternative, life-sustaining models of interaction.

2.2.1 Breaking out of the silos...

A characteristic of modern activism is the 'single issue campaign'. Campaigns – especially those run by professional advocacy groups - have clear, specific and realistic demands, that deal with a reified “issue”, and

campaigns are strategic with nuanced media-friendly messaging. It makes sense that our movements use their limited resources efficiently, going after 'wins' that are achievable and improve the lives of as many people as possible. A risk of this form of campaigning is that the ways single issues are embedded in systems of structural and cultural is ignored. An impact of this is that it's easy for campaigns to end up "siloeed", not sharing common goals or resources, and without a deeper analysis; even when campaigns are successful, achieving their main goals, different movements don't share in a victory, and elites remain powerful brokers of decisions. Fundamentally, power remains in the hands of the same people, and we continue to feel isolated and weak.

Constructive programmes can be an antidote to this. Constructive programme's don't appeal to the power of elites; instead they aim to shift power down, into the hands of those most directly effected by decisions, and to those who have otherwise very little power in society. They do this not by replicating authoritarian power structures, but by establishing new, inclusive, nonviolent forms of decision-making, and trying to include in their analysis a multiplicity of "issues" into a coherent narrative. Though they are likely to still be responding to a specific injustice (equitable access to housing, for example), constructive programmes act as a platform for action on a range of multiple "issues" simultaneously, illustrating how different violences are interconnected. It is impossible to completely untangle one form of structural violence from another, and constructive programme's are often working on multiple fronts at the same time, in different ways.

If we take the example of a campaign addressing housing needs, the primary concern is who has access to housing, but certain parts of a community will be impacted by other violences, compounded by this primary issue. We might ask;

- How is property owned? Is it held in common by the community? Are residents reliant on the charity of others to continue the scheme, or do they have genuine control? (**Challenging traditional power/ownership structures**)
- Does the project address the needs of people without access to secure, long-term and good quality housing? (**Housing security, class, gender, power, equality**)
- What are the financial structures of the project? How is capital gained? Can individuals profit from the construction or purchase of houses? (**Corporate interests, power, community finances, ownership**)
- How are decisions made about construction or development? Are vested interests – especially those motivated primarily by profit – mitigated? Are decisions made by those most effected by them? Are the democratic structures clear and accessible? (**Democracy, empowerment, community ownership**)
- Are new houses built to address environmental concerns? Are there systems for alleviating the environmental impact of older buildings? (**Climate change, environment**)
- Are spaces for community – schools, gardens, libraries – integrated into the planning? Who owns and has access to these spaces? (**Community ownership, education, health**)
- Does the project allow for people to invest time in community work or acts of resistance by relieving them of the financial demands of expensive rented or privately owned property? Does the community act collectively on certain issues? (**Resistance, democracy, direct action**)

So resistance and constructive programme are symbiotic. They are mutually supportive, with one acting as a more reactionary “no!”, and the other as a longer, deeper “yes!” for the world we want to see. We will now look at three key elements that will help us to understand in greater depth what constructive programme's are trying to counter, and what it is they are trying to achieve. These three elements are: violence, power, and prefiguration.

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