1-1-2014

# Beyond Madness: Ways To Foster Nonviolence In Human Systems

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*Positioned as an epilogue to the themed edition of Social Alternatives on the nature and politics of madness in contemporary Australian society, this article has been inspired by the narratives and analyses of the contributors to this edition. It aims to go beyond madness to explore strategies of resistance to the violence of marginalisation, humiliation and incarceration which often comes before and after a diagnosis of madness. Proposed strategies for resistance include studying up and speaking back to the oppressors; improving the capacity of bystanders to intervene; holding a structural analysis of power and resistance to support social change work; and affirming the value of non-violence and dialogical processes. In this article, resistance to violence is viewed as inevitable, desirable and an act of optimism.*

## Introduction

Trained as a social worker in the 1970s, I entered practice buoyed with optimism, thinking my colleagues and I would be part of implementing a generous, fair, and inclusive social contract. Differences based on gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, so-called *abilities* and ethnicity would cease to matter in this evolving society. The sacking of the Australian Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam in 1975, and the continuing reign of Joh Bjelke-Peterson's conservative National Party Government in Queensland indicated the struggle wasn't over, but the launch of the journal *Social Alternatives* in 1977, the maintenance of Medicare, legal aid and free tertiary education, even under a national Liberal government, augured well. How wrong we were. The 1990s intervened and as Australia moved further to the political Right, we witnessed either a reluctant tolerance or overt backlash to feminism, Aboriginal land rights, ecological care, economic fairness and respect for the values we held dear. At the heart of these values was an objection to violence, to assaults on the physical and psychological self at a personal, organisational, structural or cultural level. These values were pejoratively labelled naïve, old fashioned, bleeding heart and black armband. The new way would be the old way with power in the hands of hardline economic and social conservatives, most, but not all of whom, would be white and male.

## Violence and Resistance

The power of this edition of *Social Alternatives* has been to place and keep a gaze on the doers of violence. Violence, like all forms of power, is enacted through relationships in all social spheres; like all forms of power, it can take many different forms. Rees has placed his definition of violence in the context of Australia's history and in doing so, has made the point that we live in a violence-prone culture:

An historical momentum of violence has continued in different contexts: as a means of exerting control in families, in the acceptance of violent competition in some sports, and as part of the fascination with war and other forms of violence in the media. This momentum careers along in the administration of justice and slightly more subtly, in the day-to-day transactions in bureaucracies, whether these are schools, universities, church organisations, hospitals or other institutions (1994: 362).

In this collection of articles, violence has been identified as labelling and stigmatising, manipulating to create dependency, delivering excessive amounts of medication and electro convulsive shocks, and authorising seclusion and restraint. The events and encounters of violence which have been written about are examples of Rees' everyday and commonplace transactions, so embedded within hegemonic discourses of power and control that they are often invisible and unspoken of *as violence*. In a similar way, Freire defines everyday acts of oppression as violence:

Any situation in which A objectively exploits B or hinders his/her pursuit of self-affirmation as a responsible person is one of oppression. Such a situation in itself constitutes violence … because it interferes with human's ontological and historical vocation to be more fully human (1972: 31).

The epilogue draws the collection of articles in this special issue to a close by defining resistance to violence and considering its strategic use. For Wade 'whenever persons are badly treated, they resist. That is, alongside each history of violence and oppression, there runs a parallel history of prudent, creative and determined

resistance' (1997: 23). These acts of resistance may not be obvious and Wade goes on to suggest that 'any attempt to imagine or establish a life based on respect and equality, on behalf of one's self or others … represents a de facto form of resistance' (1997: 25). Offering more detail, Routledge uses the term resistance:

> ... to refer to any action, imbued with intent, that attempts to challenge, change, or retain particular circumstances relating to societal relations, processes, and/or institutions. These circumstances may involve domination, exploitation, subjection at the material, symbolic or psychological level … Resistances are assembled out of the materials and practices of everyday life, and imply some form of contestation, some juxtaposition of forces … These actions may be open and confrontational, or hidden (see Scott 1985, 1990) and range from the individual to the collective (1997: 69).

Similarly, Bar On defines resistance as 'practices that respond to oppression and show that the socially marginalized [sic] subjects are not powerless, that they can set limits on or subvert the oppressive forces, and that they can be creative and go beyond the boundaries set for them by their oppression' (1993: 93). Resistance to violence is an act of optimism: Why resist if you don't see the possibility of change? Douzinas notes:

> I plead guilty to the indictment of avowed optimism. We have entered an age of resistance. New forms, strategies and subjects of resistance and insurrection appear regularly without knowledge of or guidance from Badiou, Zizek or Negri (2014: n.p.).

In the epilogue to this edition of *Social Alternatives,* I consider four strategies from a myriad available to us for resisting the maddening effects of violence masquerading as rationality in institutions and organisations. The first is claiming the *enunciative* spaces of *critical writing* and *studying up*. The second is promoting and modelling bystander intervention where there is violence. The third strategy is to maintain a macro system analysis of social change so not to lose heart. The final strategy is recognising the role of dialogue and nonviolence in resisting violence.

### The Place for Optimism and Some Ways Forward

As contributors to *Social Alternatives*, we have claimed our enunciative space by identifying everyday violences as overt abuses of power and recognising that the speaking/writing/publishing of them here constitutes an act of resistance. This is not a radical strategy. *Talking back* or *talking smart* is a well-documented strategy of resistance used by women living with domestic violence (hooks 1989: 9; Palmer 2005: 121). As contributors to this journal we have sought to write back or write smart in this same tradition.

Singer (1992: 469) notes that 'part of the tradition of critical writing that postmodernism and feminism inherit ... is a tradition of writing as a form of resistance, writing which works not to confirm cohesion, but rather to disrupt, destabilize, denaturalize'. For Richardson, the value of 'nurturing our own voices' is that it 'releases the censorious hold of "science writing" on our consciousness, as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche. Writing is validated as a method of knowing' (2000: 929). Such has been the writing in this issue: where this enunciative space of inter-subjectivity (between the writer and the reader) operates to unsettle meanings and create new ones; a space for staking our claim to our own voice. It is a profound strategy of resistance which requires the time and space to write, along with creativity in locating sites for publication, from formal journals to personal blogs.

Nader (1972) noted how academics have overlooked research as a form of resistance to violence and oppression by continuing to *study down*, studying people with mental illness, those living in poverty and those deemed wayward or delinquent. She advocated an academic equivalent of talking back, that is *studying up* and placing the gaze on those who perpetrate violence. It is no easy task to study the people who have expert medical and/or academic credentials and authority. People who have power and privilege have a range of mechanisms for protecting themselves from scrutiny and accusations of being violent/mad and irrational (Gusterson 1997: 115). Embracing the strategy of *studying up* is an optimistic beginning point for dialogue with powerful people acting in violent ways, notwithstanding the methodological difficulties and the power (and intent) of the powerful to deliberately opt out of dialogue (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 130).

The second strategy of resistance explored here is the naming and facilitating of bystander intervention where there is violence. In this section we identify what this means and suggest that organisations adopt bystander training (Scully and Rowe 2009). Bloom and Reichert provide a definition of bystanders, noting that:

> Bystanders are the audience. They are all those present at the scene of an incident who provide or deny support for a behaviour. The victim and perpetrator form a linked figure and the bystanders form the ground against which the perpetration is carried out or prevented. It is useful to note that among acts of perpetration which have been studied, it is the behaviour of the bystanders that determines how far the perpetrator will go in carrying out the act of violence (2014: 88).

People become bystanders to violence either through their own direct observation of events (as witnesses)

or through others' disclosures about events to them. Whistleblowers are a particular kind of witness/bystander, and the term refers to those who disclose corruption in organisations, usually by going to a higher authority in the organisation or through a recognised third party (De Maria 1996). Like all bystanders who intervene, whistleblowers make a decision to act based on their personal ethics, and their morally informed view that what they have witnessed, or are party to, constitutes a crime, fraud or corruption of some kind.

One of the ways violence is sustained in organisations is through the silencing of witnesses and bystanders, often with threats or actions of reprisal (Alford 2001). However, real or threatened retaliation aside, bystanders can also be discouraged from taking action when, like perpetrators and victims of violence, they use minimisation, denial and rationalisation to convince themselves that things are not 'that bad' or that the person actually deserves what is happening to them (Bloom and Reichert 2014: 89). Similarly, Scully and Rowe have noted that:

> Many factors contribute to making some bystanders passive in their workplaces: fear of losing friendships, fear of loss of privacy, fear of 'bad consequences', fear of getting too involved. Bystanders may believe that nothing good will happen if they speak up. They may fear retaliation or be concerned about embarrassing their work-group, or a colleague, or their superior (2009: 3).

Bystander intervention and training was explored in a special 2009 issue of the *Journal of the International Ombudsman Association*. Training bystanders to be active rather than passive members of organisations is identified as a strategy for encouraging a positive workplace culture where standards of professional practice are openly discussed. It can also discourage a workplace culture of intimidation, silences and practices which are at best poor and at worst, dangerous:

> A premise of training is not just that individuals become more able to be active bystanders but that the accumulation of many active bystander interventions positively shapes a workplace climate … In a culture where many or all people have experienced bystander training, there may be more support for bystanders (other bystanders who are present might help) and less anti-bystander backlash (Scully and Rowe 2009: 6).

Human service organisations responding to the needs of vulnerable people operating institutions such as care homes, schools and hospitals are well placed also to provide training to consumers and their families or carers, where the organisational culture is explained and the idea of professional practice standards explored. In this way consumers become allies in the process of creating healthy workplace cultures as active bystanders rather than passive witnesses. It is naïve of organisations to assume that codes of conduct and complaints processes are enough. Clearly from the narrative accounts in this issue of *Social Alternatives* they are not.

A third possible strategy of resistance to organisational violence is for workers and consumers to draw on critical theory to guide, strengthen and sustain activities which challenge the mainstream. Critical theory is a collection of emancipatory theories guiding action by exposing oppressive elements within structures and institutions in society (such as in medicine, education, politics, religion and the media) which restrict and constrain the human subject. The critique extends to the way human needs and desires are manufactured through the mass media and marketing for the purpose of increasing consumption and thereby profit. Critical theory informs a radical analysis of social problems focusing on the economic and social environments which contribute to poverty, mental illness, homelessness, and other problems of daily living. This contrasts with mainstream analyses which blame the individual for their problems, isolating, punishing and stigmatising the vulnerable and disadvantaged for their situation (Mullaly 2002: 16).

Jackson et al. (1989: 71) developed a 'community development continuum' to illustrate how people living with hardship or violence can be supported in their recovery and healing through involvement in social change movements informed by critical theory. They note that this 'might be through participation in the women's liberation movement, the ecology movement, orthodox political parties or just perhaps the new public health movement'. Further, they claim:

> When people with whom we work become passionately involved with others to change social structures they begin to believe in having some measure of power over their own lives. In other words, they are involved in taking control over those things which affect their lives. This ultimately improves their own health and well-being as well as that of others with whom they associate (Jackson et al. 1989: 72).

There is no shortage of social change and intellectual movements which identify the need for the rapidly globalising Western culture to undergo a transformation away from a society which has 'consistently favoured the yang over the yin – rational knowledge over intuitive wisdom, science over religion, competition over cooperation, exploitation of natural resources over conservation, and so on' (Capra 1982: 22).

This new paradigm of a *rising culture*, to use Capra's language, grew out of the social movements in the West in the 1960s and 1970s which opposed the war in Vietnam and supported civil rights, the feminisms, Indigenous land rights and other forms of anti-oppressive practices

and institutions. However, as noted at the beginning of this article, conservative ideologies regained ground in the 1990s and coupled with the rise of a nihilistic postmodernism slowed much movement towards change. Should we be surprised? Capra reminded us over thirty years ago that this is an evolutionary process and so we shouldn't expect it to happen quickly:

> While the transformation is taking place the declining culture refuses to change, clinging ever more rigidly to its outdated ideas; nor will the dominant social institutions hand over their leading roles to the new cultural forces. But they will inevitably go on to decline and disintegrate while the rising culture will continue to rise and eventually will assume its leading role. As the turning point approaches the realization that evolutionary changes of this magnitude cannot be prevented by short-term political activities provides our strongest hope for the future (1982: 466).

A key element of this 'hope for the future' is non-violence, the fourth and final suggested strategy of resistance to violence. Non-violence literacy includes demonstrating empathy and assertiveness and learning how to engage in a dialogue; to stake a claim to be heard at the same time offering a commitment to hear the voice of the other. Where there is a dialogue there is a generosity in regard to the other and a willingness to shift position (Ross 2002).

Rees (2003: 268) outlines two versions of sovereignty, one which is 'dialogue oriented and peace-based' and another which is 'security oriented and fear-based'. The former describes a society concerned with justice, advocating human rights, inclusive of progressive social movements and responding to fear through dialogue with strangers and assumed enemies. The latter describes a society which uses self-justifying logic, focused on national security, locating power with alliances of the elite and responding to fear with more controls. It is not difficult to see the kind of society we are building in Australia in 2014.

We will need Australia to become dialogue oriented and peace-based if we are going to resist violence at the level of our national sovereignty as well as in communities, organisations and families. Lest we think this is too ambitious, Rees (2003: 180) provides an example of how it can be done. He describes the community responses to two child murders, one in Liverpool England and the other in Trondheim Norway. The defence lawyer who represented the children who killed James Bolger in Liverpool travelled to Norway to study the community's reaction to the death of Cecilia Rodegaard, who had been similarly killed by other children.

He implied that the Trondheim community, including the media, reacted in a thoughtful, reflective and non-violent way. By contrast the response in Liverpool and from sections of the media across Britain was violent ... There was no obvious attempt to reconcile with the past, no evidence of an understanding that refusal to understand or forgive would continue to fracture community relations. A culture of violence and an illiteracy about non-violence was maintained [in Liverpool] (Rees 2003: 180).

Speaking and writing about violences when we experience or witness them is an important step towards building a non-violent, dialogue oriented and peace-based society. As an act of resistance it is enough. However, there are other ways we can resist violence and oppression once we have decided this is something worth doing. Locating spaces where there can be genuine dialogue is the tricky bit, precisely because violence occurs in relationships where one party has deliberately opted out of dialogue.

Refusal of dialogue – an insistence that only one view of the world is possible and that one is already in possession of it – has a particular, and potentially destructive, significance in a world which precisely depends more and more upon it (Giddens and Pierson 1998: 130).

The antidote to violence is non-violence and so our task is to build dialogical spaces where non-violence can be practised. The opportunities to do this are endless because spaces for dialogue need building and rebuilding constantly in families, schools, hospitals, churches, clubs and other human systems and organisations. Our task is to seek out examples of compassion, cooperation, negotiation, advocacy and dialogue at the same time as our practice becomes those examples.

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**Men and women of the jury**

Asked by Constable Washburn why a search of my client's jeans

had revealed two of the deceased's toes wrapped in plastic

the defendant answered 'Satan's toes & Martha's wash'.

I ask you, haven't we all said things better left unsaid?

Dismiss, if you wish, Satan's toes & Martha's wash but

don't dismiss my client's statement to Constable Washbone

'I killed one man to save millions. One for millions'.

Men & women of the jury, take care, please take care.

One for all. Dismiss that & you dismiss all Christendom.

In mitigating circumstances & with reduced responsibility

my client was re-enacting the sad death of John the Baptist.

Yes, Your Honour. Certainly, certainly. I'll soon be done.

Men & women of the jury, find this Guilty man Not guilty.

I'm booked on tomorrow's jumbo to Calvary, correction, Cairo.

Yes, Your Honour, John & Martha & I will be on our way.

In St Peter's Square John the Baptist will baptise &

Martha & I will wash (& dry) Constable Wishbone's toes.

My heart will pump Kuwaiti oil up the Valley of the Kings

as the Gang of Four Headless Horsemen of the Apocalypse

dismount horses & mount their committee towards Mecca.

*GRAHAM ROWLANDS*
*ADELAIDE, SA*