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► **To cite this version:**

Nathanaël Wallenhorst, Christoph Wulf. Violence and Peace. Springer-Nature. Handbook of the Anthropocene, pp.1465-1469, 2023. halshs-04251740

**HAL Id: halshs-04251740**

**<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04251740>**

Submitted on 26 Oct 2023

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# Section VI

## Violence and Peace

Nathanaël Wallenhorst and Christoph Wulf

Many articles in this handbook examine the tension between violence and peace – peace in the sense of the absence of or reduction of violence. Where it is not explicitly defined as being the subject, “violence” forms the background, overwritten as in a palimpsest, against which issues in the different articles are discussed. The articles in this next section of the handbook are about violence or the reduction of violence, although they do not claim to deal with the subject in an exhaustive way. In other sections of the handbook too, there are articles which tackle the question of violence. The same goes for the articles which investigate ways and opportunities to reduce violence. The explicit or implicit ideas and concepts of violence and peace differ depending on the historical and cultural context.

The amount of violence used by human beings against the world, other people and themselves is a characteristic of the Anthropocene. Actions and behaviour patterns that affect people, animals, plants and objects and cause harm to them can be termed violent. The World Health Organisation defines violence as “the intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, which either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, maldevelopment, or deprivation” (Krug et al., 2002). This definition omits nature as an object of violence.

Looking at violence differently we could say that there are three broad categories of violence, (1) self-directed violence, (2) interpersonal violence, (3) collective violence. The first category includes the forms of violence that people inflict upon themselves, the second the forms of violence that arise between people, and the

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third the forms of collective violence that are enacted by groups, communities, or societies. Of particular significance here is war, where two or several societies engage in actions of collective violence. The objective is mostly asserting one's own interests in finding a solution to territorial or other conflicts. Ideological, religious, ethnic, economic, or revolutionary reasons usually play a central role in these clashes.

Violence can be seen in the illegitimate use of force and is implemented by power, that is ultimately the power over the lives or deaths of other people.

A characteristic of human beings is that they can injure other people and are themselves also vulnerable. Violence is a central dynamic in our socialization. It is a possibility of human action that can always be used. "The power to kill and the powerlessness of the victim are latent or manifest determinants of the structure of social coexistence" (Popitz, 1986, 82 f.). If we accept this view, then we must accept the terrifying realisation that violence has universal characteristics that are part of our human make-up. This destructive potential is thus part of the *conditio humana*. It can be seen in the fact that humans are the only primates "who engage in killing others of their species on a large scale and in a planned and enthusiastic way. War is one of their greatest inventions" (Enzensberger, 1996, 9). Many disciplines research the various forms of violence and their specific conditions in the Anthropocene (Porchon, 2021; Wallenhorst, 2020, 2021, 2022; Wulf, 2013, 2022a, b). In peace and conflict research a distinction is drawn, for example, between manifest structural violence (Galtung, 1969, 1982, 1990; Scheper-Hughes & Bourgois, 2005) and symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1998). In ethnology a differentiation is made between an 'etic' and an 'emic' form of violence research. In the case of 'etic' research, the norms, and values of the western system of science are the reference points of ethnography. In 'emic' approaches, violence is studied and interpreted in the context of the culture in which it takes place, using its own values and concepts to do so (Elwert, 2002). Looking at the concept of violence presents many difficulties, and this is seen in many research studies in the Anthropocene, where it is difficult to determine the normative frame of reference.

In the Anthropocene the collective, violent actions of humans towards nature and towards other people have such negative effects that they endanger the basis of human existence and the whole of life on this planet. For a long time, few people were aware of this. Although there is underlying violence in many actions and modes of behaviour, it is only when it spreads and becomes intensified collectively that it becomes dangerous. Well-known examples are climate change, biodiversity, the biogeochemical cycles, the acidification of the oceans, environmental pollution, and the consumption of non-renewable energies. Negative effects are also brought about by modern ways of working the soil, the huge number of materials that are produced through chemical syntheses, breeding and genetic engineering, dumping in lakes, rivers, seas, etc. Violence towards other people in the form of slavery, colonialism and racism have a negative effect on human co-existence. Wars and atomic disasters as well as environmental destruction and man-made catastrophes are a threat to the future of life on our planet (Gil & Wulf, 2015; Kamper & Wulf, 1989, 1994). Many cultures have knowledge of apocalyptic situations. Are these references to avoidable

dangers or to the unavoidable fate of humanity? There have been many different attempts to identify these menacing developments, for example by the Club of Rome and the Brundtland Commission. Intensive efforts have been made to try and initiate global developments to improve the situation. The reduction of violence is the goal in many of these efforts. It is also hoped that this goal can be achieved by successfully developing actions and behaviour patterns that will significantly reduce violence. In this process education plays an important role (Hétier & Wallenhorst, 2021, 2022a, b, c; Heitmeyer & Hagan, 2002; Wulf, 1973a, b, 1974; Oibrillant et al., 2017).

Peace denotes people living together calmly and safely within a nation or with people of other nations (Gießmann & Rinke, 2019), and also the state of harmony and calm through security in God (Kueng, 2001). There is no doubt that a central condition of peace is the absence of violence. When societies are not caught up in conflicts of war, then quite rightly that is called peace. From a historical perspective, war and violence always present a danger to living in peace. Our hope that there can be a “nuclear peace”, in other words peace achieved through human beings arming themselves with nuclear weapons, has become less likely since the war in Ukraine. The assumption that atomic war can be ruled out because it endangers the survival of humans has become questionable. When we consider the destruction of peaceful ways of life through uprisings, civil wars, and wars, we realise that it is a huge and almost impossible task to preserve even those ways of life that are not impacted by manifest violence.

Within a state, peace is protected by the state monopoly on the use of violence, which means that only the state and state institutions are permitted to threaten violence or to use it to maintain non-violent situations. Admittedly the state monopoly on the use of violence is only legitimised in constitutional states, where there is a separation of powers, and laws that are founded in a constitution. One of the state’s most important tasks is to see that social conflicts within different levels of society and groups are resolved in a non-violent way, thus ensuring “social peace”. If this is the goal then the negative concept of peace will be broadened, becoming a positive concept of peace, containing the idea of social justice.

To create and maintain peace, territorial, economic and social conflicts must be resolved without the use of violence. This is also the case where there are cultural and ideological differences, i.e. differences in conceptions of nature, the world, human beings and society (Senghaas, 1995, 1997, 2007). Differences in religious beliefs also result in conflicts being resolved by violence. Hans Kueng saw this and proposed four theses to deal with this situation: “No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without global ethical standards. No survival of our globe without a global ethic, a world ethic” (Kueng, 2001).

There is no doubt that peace is a utopia that can only be achieved gradually. Since humans are dependent on creating themselves by their own actions, they need visions and goals to help them focus their actions. The reduction of violence against nature, against other people and oneself is a goal that, from an ethical point of view, can be justified and is essential. Therefore, peace is a necessary utopia, an aspiration

that needs to be reflected upon critically, so that the much desired peace does not turn into the exact opposite, as was warned by Horkheimer and Adorno with regard to the Enlightenment (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1972).

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**Part XX**  
**The Risk of Violence**