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Conflict Resolution, Provocation or Transformation? Ask Gandhi¹

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Gandhi is to conflict what Einstein and Newton are to physics.

-- Johan Galtung

... Our opposition makes us feel that we are not completely victims of the circumstances. It allows us to prove our strength consciously and only thus gives vitality and reciprocity to conditions from which, without such corrective, we would withdraw at any cost.

-- Georg Simmel

The Mahatma Gandhi most of us know is Ben Kingsley acting as Gandhi, who in one memorable scene tells the American reporter joining him on the Salt March, "The function of a civil resister is to provoke response." Moreover, he adds, "we will continue to provoke until they respond, or they change the law. They are not in control – we are. That is the strength of civil resistance."² This view of conflict seems

¹ Copyright 2011 Lester Kurtz lkurtz@gmu.edu Unpublished paper delivered at the American Sociological Association, August, 2011.

² Whether Gandhi himself put it that way we cannot confirm, although we have usually found that when Gandhi is speaking in Attenborough's film, the words are taken directly from Gandhi, although not always in the exact historical scene being depicted. The quote is from the screenplay (Briley 1982: 133). In doing a

quite the opposite of one we often encounter in professional conflict study circles, the most prominent form of which is conflict *resolution*.

John Jay Lederach (2003: 3) tells the story of his arriving in Central America in the 1980s with a vocabulary "filled with the usual terminology of conflict resolution and management." His colleagues there had "questions, even suspicions, about what was meant by such concepts," he reports. "For them, *resolution* carried with it a danger of co-optation, an attempt to get rid of conflict when people were raising important and legitimate issues." Moreover, "It was not clear that *resolution* left room for advocacy. In their experience, quick solutions to deep social-political problems usually meant lots of good words but no real change."

A veritable explosion of literature on "conflict transformation" in recent years, in a sense catching up with the twentieth century ideas of Mahatma Gandhi and Georg Simmel, the founding Bapus of modern conflict studies. According to Louis Kriesberg (2008: 401), the concept

generally refers to a fundamental and enduring change away from a protracted, destructive struggle between adversaries toward a constructive accommodation between them. That changed relationship may be a mutually satisfactory resolution of their conflict and lead to reconciliation between them, or may be embodied in an ongoing conflict but one that is conducted more constructively. Conflict transformation refers to the process of change and also to the relationship resulting from that process. At various points during the transformation process, a conflict may be regarded as having become transformed, although groups may differ about the designation.

search of Gandhi's *Collected Works* online, the term "provoke" is usually used by the Mahatma in a negative sense and we were unable to find this direct quote.

In this discussion, we expand the concept even further to emphasize not only the conflict *per se*, but also the transformation of the context, relationships, and social structures and processes within which the conflict occurs. Kriesberg rightly points out that conflict restoration does not refer to the escalation of a conflict into violence (*ibid.*) but whereas he restricts the term to “a particular kind of conflict de-escalation” we would include escalations of conflict that are carried out in a nonviolent way in order to address fundamental imbalances of power and grievances that precipitated the conflict in the first place.

Although it is often crucial to find a way to resolve conflicts before they escalate into destructive social environments or even deadly violence, it is sometimes important to provoke them. Whereas Lederach moved from conflict resolution to conflict transformation, we move from the study of Gandhian nonviolent civil resistance – a kind of conflict provocation – toward the conflict resolution literature, which we admire and find helpful for my own understanding of conflict, but we end up feeling at more at home in the conflict transformation camp.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the difference between resolving and transforming conflict is to understand its place as a natural part of human life – and sometimes an opportunity – rather than something that needs to be resolved. Georg Simmel (1972: 75), a Jewish scholar living on the margins of academia at the turn of the twentieth century in Berlin said it best, “Opposition is often the only means for making life with actually unbearable people at least possible.”

In the pages that follow, we will outline a systematic template for conflict transformation. We will show how Mahatma Gandhi creatively transformed each component of the struggle for Indian Independence in order to achieve a profound change not only in India, but also to some extent the geopolitics of the entire planet, as the movement jumpstarted the process of dismantling the entire colonialist order. The perspective is fashioned out of years of study of

Gandhi’s legacies (see, e.g., Kurtz 2008a, 2008b, 2006 and Zunes et al. 1999 and Turpin and Kurtz 1997) that included a year of interviews and participant observation in India. At the core of Gandhi’s experiments in nonviolent conflict is his challenge of mainstream understandings of human conflict. As we have noted elsewhere (Kurtz 2008: 838), whereas conventional wisdom assumes that power grows out of the barrel of a gun, or is given to those who steer a course down the mainstream, Gandhi’s success lies in not accepting dominant paradigms but in challenging them.

Gandhi’s *Satyagrahic* conflict suggests a series of paradoxes embedded in the process of transforming conflict:

- 1) Conflict itself is a window, not a problem
- 2) The enemy is not the enemy
- 3) Fight like the warrior and the pacifist
- 4) The expert does not have the answers
- 5) Narrowing the focus may help management, but not transformation
- 6) Conflict transformation is a scientific art
- 7) Nonviolent struggle is strategically superior to violence

Conflict as a window

Although Simmel (1972) lays out the theory for understanding the importance of conflict as a natural part of human life, John Jay Lederach (2003) provides the most instructive metaphor for understanding why conflict itself is not the problem – it may, in fact be an opportunity: Lederach suggests that conflict is a *window*. A conflict becomes a way of seeing – its frame pulls our attention to a problem in our environment, and its transparency enables us to see what needs to be changed.

For Simmel, conflict is a central form of sociation – it is a way of relating people, and in fact is “designed to resolve dualities;” it does so by empowering, testing and creating

boundaries, transforming them, and so forth, in a dynamic process. To eliminate conflict – perhaps even a conflict – is as impossible for human life as eliminating breath. It is simply part of our nature and can be empowering. Conflict makes us feel, Simmel reminds us, that we are not just victims of the circumstances in which we find ourselves – “the resistance to be eliminated is what gives our powers the possibility of proving themselves,” he notes (Simmel 1972: 75).

So, we should not even try to eliminate conflict – in fact, sometimes we may want to pursue it, even in the interests of peace and justice. What we can do however, is change the way in which we carry out our struggles, shifting them from the violent to the nonviolent end of the spectrum of possibilities.

The enemy is not the enemy

At the core of Gandhi’s transformation of conflict is the notion of separating the deed from the doer, so that one attacks behavior and systems rather than individuals as people.

When Simmel explores a social form such as conflict, he points us to such variables as the amount of self-involved, the distance between the parties to the conflict, and the valence of the relationship between them – is it positive or negative? Violence requires a heightening of social and interpersonal boundaries, an embellishment of differences and a dehumanization of the adversary, in order to avoid sanctioning ourselves for harming or killing others, something we know is morally wrong under most circumstances. We must, as Albert Bandura (1999) puts it, “morally disengage,” before we harm others, a process that involves such psychological tricks as dehumanization, euphemistic language, advantageous comparison (if we don’t do this, something worse will happen), minimization of consequences, and so forth.

Gandhi’s strategic decision to show respect for his opponents did not deter them from fighting with him, but did change the dynamics of the conflict, and has become a bedrock of “fair fighting” advice from counselors and psychologists dealing with domestic disputes. “‘Hate the sin and not the sinner’ is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced, and that is why the poison of hatred spreads in the world” (Gandhi 1967: 124). Attacking an individual personally rather than her or his behavior simply escalates the conflict and shifts its focus from the disputed grievances to the personality of the disputants, which seldom has positive consequences for the trajectory of the conflict. It is in this act of discernment that the power of nonviolence is unleashed not simply as a moral principle, but as a strategic decision that Gandhi believes “can confound all the tricks put together of violence” (*ibid.*, 125).

One final aspect of this paradox worth noting is that it is particularly relevant to asymmetrical conflicts, i.e., those in which conflict transformation might be required in order to achieve any resolution. To treat one’s opponent with respect is to demonstrate fearlessness in the midst of conflict and can be empowering for someone who holds fewer resources in terms of physical or military power, financial resources, and so forth.

The warrior - pacifist contradiction can be transcended

The two major motifs in the world’s religious and ethical traditions regarding the use of force in conflict are the warrior and the pacifist (see Kurtz 2006, 2008). The warrior believes he or she has a sacred duty to fight for a just cause, whereas the pacifist holds a similar sense of duty not to harm or kill others. Neither of these motifs is fully satisfying for the potential warrior or pacifist – the former knows that it is morally wrong to harm others, so experiences a psychological dissonance that often results in Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The pacifist may feel good about choosing not to fight, but has a sense of guilt for standing

on the sidelines while others fight or a cause even he or she may believe in morally and wish to champion.

Gandhi's *Satyagrahi*, nonviolent activist fights like the warrior but like the pacifist avoids harming. He or she uses nonviolent civil resistance to disarm the cause of injustice being inflicted and opens up space for a transformation of the structures and relationships that are causing the grievances. Many of the standard tools of the conflict resolution analyst are brought to bear, but are made possible because of a shift in power relations created by the struggle.

The expert does not have the answers

When Gandhi returned to India and was pressed to participate in the Indian Freedom Movement, he first spent a year traveling around the country and listening, observing, and discerning the needs of the people. This was a crucial part of his strategic plan for Indian independence – along with his own experience of racial oppression in South Africa, where he first developed his conflict strategies. He later berated the Congress leadership, a wealthy elite, some of them English-educated, for thinking that they represented India. When he traveled from village to village, mobilizing the movement, he would stay with “the people,” often with a poor “untouchable” family living in the most humble abode. He did not sweep in to tell them what to do, but investigated and listened, then formulated a strategy. He analyzed the pillars of power sustaining the British Empires hold on his country, identified the genuine grievances of his people, and developed a way of challenging Britain's’ might.

A contemporary external conflict analyst might suggest a variety of measures to resolve the conflict between the Indian National Congress and the British Raj – negotiation, mediation, and various compromises. Instead, Gandhi chose to fight – but he recognized the impossibility of challenging the Raj militarily because of its vast superiority.

Gandhi also framed his message in a way that addressed his multiple audiences. He not only studied the various Indian cultures, but also the British, based on his intimate understanding of his own culture and its many variants, but also his understanding of the British and their legal system, because of his time spent studying law in London. He was not an outsider in Indian culture (he even went to great pains to understand Indian Islam) and not unfamiliar with the British either.

Gandhi's central strategies – the cloth boycott and the Salt March – involved engaging in conflict in order to resolve it. They went straight to the core of the colonial relationship between India and the Empire, but resisted it in concrete terms that made sense to and mobilized the masses. We will pick up on this process in more detail in a moment.

Narrowing the focus may help management, but not transformation

Let it be borne in mind that I do not regard politics as something different in kind from other national activities. The root meaning of politics is the science of citizenship and it has also remote connection with polished manners and since the boundaries of citizenship have been extended to cover continents, the science of politics includes attainment of advancement of humanity along all lines, social, moral, economic and political, using the word ‘political’ here in the narrow sense in which we are accustomed to use it.

-- Gandhi CWMG vol. 65 p. 266 *STATEMENT TO THE PRESS October 30, 1934; The Hindu, 31-10-1934*

Conflict resolution – or conflict management as it is sometimes called, often works through a process of reductionism, breaking down the conflict into manageable parts so that adversaries can focus on those elements of the conflict where there is some mutual potential for agreement. In

many situations, this is admirable and workable – using such strategies as Roger Fisher’s *Getting to Yes* some conflicts are transformed as its parties see that there really are areas of agreement and mutually beneficial outcomes.

In situations of gross injustice and power asymmetries, such formulas do not always work until a shift in the power arrangements has taken place. This was the case with the British Raj in South Asia, where neither British officials or Indian independence fighters saw a benefit to compromising with their adversaries until the cost of colonization was increased by enlarging the focus of the conflict.

Conflict Transformation is a Scientific Art

Gandhi insisted that *Ahimsa*, nonharmfulness, “is a science,” which consists of “Experiments in Truth.” Although conflict transformation requires the creativity of the artist, it is also, from Gandhi’s perspective, a matter of developing propositions – almost hypotheses – and then testing them. One important implication of framing the conflict in this way is that “The word ‘failure’ has no place in the vocabulary of science. Failure to obtain the expected result is often the precursor to further discoveries” (Gandhi 1967: 123).

Nonviolent struggle is strategically superior to violence

In a culture of violence people immediately assume, when a profound social problem rears its head, that an earnest solution will, in the end, require violence. Gandhi (1967: 113) insists, however, that “Non-violence is the law of the human race and is infinitely greater than and superior to brute force.” Although his primary reason for advocating nonviolence may be its ethical superiority, he also considers it strategically superior. Whereas violence may appear to provide a solution, it is usually temporary and precipitates further conflict.

ii. Systematic Analysis

The next step is to locate the lessons of those Gandhian paradoxes in the various causes and dimensions of the Indian Freedom Movement. The purpose of my proposed paradigm of conflict transformation analysis (See Table 1) is simply to leave no proverbial stone unturned in the search for windows of opportunity for transformation. This process was inspired by Aristotle’s theory of the four causes, my own developing understanding of the dimensions of conflict (see Kurtz , and a fine article by Richard Wendell Fogg (1985) who recommends varying the who, what, when, where, why and how of a conflict in order to develop a “repertoire of creative, peaceful approaches.”

The idea is that when the causes and dimensions of a conflict are cross-tabulated, we can look for moments of opportunity in each cell where they intersect. Each of those intersections will be more salient in some conflicts than in others, but we should analyze each one – the consequences of transforming each component may be multiplicative rather than merely cumulative, and it may be possible that starting at one point in the conflict that is more amenable to change may open up opportunities elsewhere.

In short, the dimensions of the conflict are the reciprocal, at the social psychological level, second, the institutional, and finally the ritual or symbolic aspect. All of these dimensions are interrelated, but have their own characteristics, and intersect with each of the causes or elements of a conflict.

CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION GRID
 (shift creatively from violent to nonviolent strategies in each cell)

	What	How	When	Why	Who
Causes → Dimensions	CONTENTS of conflicts (Material)	FORMS of conflict (Formal)	Conflict TRIGGERS (Efficient)	PURPOSES of Conflicts (Final)	Classes & Status Groups Identity Groups (e.g.,race,gender,faiths) Political parties
↓ Reciprocal					
Institutional					
Ritual					

Dimensions of Conflicts

We can analyze each of three dimensions – the reciprocal or social psychological, institutional, and ritual or symbolic – along the spectrum of “causes,” in Aristotle’s term, so that we get a systematic look into the many aspects of the conference that can be transformed.

The *reciprocal dimension* involves the process of exchanges among actors, with a number of social psychological dynamics that are present in most relationships, regardless of the content of the conflict between parties. Reciprocity is a fundamental building block of social life that apparently exists universally in human (and many other) societies. It is an exchange that has common characteristics no matter what the content of what is being exchanged – whether money, love, power, goods, political status, or whatever.

The *institutional dimension* refers to the social organizational context of a conflict, from the informal networks of friendship and family to formal organizations and bureaucracies in every sphere of social life. Because most conflicts take place within an institutional context – usually a formal one – the organizational culture where it occurs shapes the repertoire drawn on by adversaries, the power relations that are an key part of the fight, and the trajectory it takes over time.

Finally, the symbolic aspects of the conflict, the ritual patterns that are drawn upon by its parties and the deep symbolic underpinnings that inform its tone and drama, intensity, and direction. Habitual behaviors with symbolic meaning are reenacted by participants drawing upon sometimes ancient formulas for carrying out disagreements and focusing on conflict symbols that act like lightening rods for emotions and propel action forward in given directions.

Opportunities for conflict transformation may appear in any of those dimensions or, perhaps more likely, at their intersections, and the mobilization of new dynamics is part

of the genius of Gandhi’s transformative action. We can see this more clearly as we move through the various causes of the conflict where, again, we might find windows of opportunity.

Causes of Conflict

It is the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1952:271) who launches our understanding of the causes of conflict (or anything else for that matter). He suggests that there are four basic causes – material, formal, efficient, and final:

- (1) That out of which a thing comes to be and which persists, ... e.g., the bronze of the statue...[the material cause];
- (2) The form or the archetype, i.e., the statement of the essence and its genera [the formal cause];
- (3) ... the primary source of the change [the efficient cause];
- (4) in the sense of end or ‘that for which the sake of which’ a thing is done, e.g., health is the cause of walking about [the final cause].

If we add to Aristotle’s list the sociological issue of *who* is involved in the conflict, we have the journalists’ questions of the “who, what, when, why and how” of a conflict. We might also ask where, of course, because it is sometimes significant, but will subsume that part of the analysis under the other causes for simplicity (e.g., a change in who is involved in a conflict often involves an expansion of its geographical boundaries). The task now is to examine each of these causes along all three dimensions – the social psychological, institutional, and symbolic. In order to demonstrate how this analysis might help facilitate conflict transformation, we will apply it to Gandhi and the Indian Freedom Movement as a case of nonviolent civil resistance.

Who

Gandhi's transformation of *who* was involved in the conflict between the Indian freedom fighters and the British Raj operated at several levels. He first transformed the arena in which it took place, expanding it from a struggle between elites by mobilizing the people from all walks of life, reaching out not only to the Indian population, but also calling upon the support of the British people – even the textile workers who were personally affected by his boycott of British cloth. In an asymmetrical conflict, the key to shifting the balance of power is often a transformation of who is involved.

The primary aim of changing the parties to the conflict was to undermine British control of India by empowering Indians themselves to resist British rule. The enemy was not the British themselves, however, but the system. Not only did he go to great pains to show respect to his adversaries as people, but also he declared, "I am not anti-English; I am not anti-British; I am not anti-any Government" (Gandhi 1967: 322). In separating the deed from the doer, he attacked not people but behavior and systems of injustice: "I am anti-untruth, anti-humbug, and anti-injustice," he goes on to say. "So long as the Government spells injustice, it may regard me as its enemy, implacable enemy."

As the locus of the conflict shifted from a battle between elites to a battle between a small British minority and the overwhelming population of the Indian millions, the power balance between the conflicting parties changed as well. Gandhi's theory of power provides a radically new frame for viewing issues of domination and rebellion. His approach analyzes how conventional power works; it also presents an understanding of an alternative form of power, i.e., the power of nonviolent civil resistance. The most important theme in alternative theories of power, as various feminists theorists observed later in this century, is a shift from a focus on domination to looking at power as being associated

with ability, capacity, and competence - in short, "power to" (empowerment) rather than "power over" (domination). From this perspective, power is clearly distinguished from force, coercion, authority and violence, and can be possessed simultaneously and equally by all parties involved in an interaction. This distinction has been made in the theoretical discussions of Hobbes, Parsons, and even Machiavelli. One significant result of this redefinition is that power is no longer viewed in the context of a "zero-sum" interaction. The traditionally accepted view of a "one up, one down" dynamic in power interactions gives way to the assumption that power is not increased by denying it to others, but rather expands and is regenerated when it is shared.

At the institutional level, Gandhi also changed the parties to the conflict. Like the Enlightenment theorists of the West, Gandhi wishes to replace old power structures with new ones. He began constructing a large-scale grassroots organization out of the Indian National Congress that diffused to the village level across India. This was part of his two-fold strategy to resist the existing oppressive system and simultaneously build the new one that would replace it. Moreover, this process of institution-resistance, on the one hand, and institution-building, on the other, shifted the power dynamics of the struggle. In contrast to Western thinkers, however, he also wishes to transform the very nature of power and our conceptions of it. His definition of power involves three basic principles: 1) respect one's opponents as persons; 2) refuse to cooperate with unjust power; and 3) create alternative systems of power through nonviolent direct action.

As Bimal Prasad notes, "Contrary to the general impression of his being primarily a saint, completely indifferent to holding power Gandhi's success in the organisational field was partly due to his mastery of the nuances of power...." He certainly did not shy away from holding power in general, but he did eschew the authority of government office and his approach to obtaining and wielding power was

far from conventional. Moreover, he believed that "power was also subject to many self-denying ordinances, as to many parallel and balancing institutions," as J. D. Sethi puts it. "Essentially, power had to go along with the purpose of service. The power elite had to live at the level of the masses to justify and legitimize the holding of power."

Gandhi's paradigm of conflict builds on these principles. It derives from a variety of religious traditions, Thoreau, Tolstoy, and elsewhere, and becomes the basis for conflict resolution and nonviolent struggle as it emerges in the twentieth century. It is based on a conflict paradigm that differs radically from mainstream perspectives of so-called "realism" and centers on a commitment to ahimsa or non-harmfulness of one's opponent. This notion in turn is based upon several religious assumptions about the nature of humanity and reality in general as well as some ideas regarding sources and forms of power that deliberately contradict much of what people believe about reality and power.

What

The basic material source of the conflict, of course, was the set of material resources available to the British as a result of colonial rule. It was initiated with the British East India Company, which ostensibly came to trade, but ended up extracting resources instead, a practice consolidated by the Raj, although trade itself was part of the process. From India, the British obtained the raw materials to feed its industrial machine, a development that had global consequences for years to come, exacerbating a transnational divide between the rich and the poor. As Vandana Shiva (1995) points out,

The poor are not those who have been "left behind"; they are the ones who have been robbed. The wealth accumulated by Europe and North America is largely based on riches taken from Asia, Africa and Latin America. Without the destruction of India's rich textile industry, without the takeover of the spice trade, without the genocide of the Native American

tribes, without African slavery, the Industrial Revolution would not have resulted in new riches for Europe or North America. It was this violent takeover of Third World resources and markets that created wealth in the North and poverty in the South.

Gandhi's boycott of British cloth and mobilization of spinning and weaving homespun clothing attacked the very core of the British colonial system. His Salt March and populist manufacturing of salt from the Indian Ocean in violation of British law highlighted the economic sources of British colonialism. These two tactics allowed the Indian freedom movement to seize the power of economic production and benefit from the British, transferring it to indigenous institutions constructed to benefit the movement and the people rather than the ruling colonizers.

How

At the core of Gandhi's conflict paradigm is a two-fold strategy: nonviolent noncooperation with the existing regime, on the one hand, and the construction of the system based on self-determination (*Swaraj*) to replace the oppressive system, on the other. He was convinced that nonviolent noncooperation was the most powerful means of struggle.

Even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent of the governed, which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone. (31)

	Who	What	How	When	Why
Causes → Dimensions	Classes & Status Groups Identity Groups (e.g., race, gender, faiths) Political parties	CONTENTS of conflicts (Material)	FORMS of conflict (Formal)	Conflict TRIGGERS (Efficient)	PURPOSES of Conflicts (Final)
↓ Reciprocal	* Raj vs. Indian elite --> mass mobilization, world opinion * cross-caste/class * inter-faith/communal *	Political control of S. Asia --> broader set * econ'c dependency--> independence * political independence --> independence Economic resources - raw materials - labor	British: military occupation, cooptation INC: noncooperation, civil disobedience, cloth boycott & spinning, demonstrations, making salt Negotiation	Colonial conquest Quit India Mvmt and boycotts launched Amritsar Massacre Salt March	*End subordination & exploitation * Mutual respect & dignity * British: Empire maintenance & financial gain
Institutional	* British Raj & Indian National Congress --> Independent Indian government, British Commonwealth * Indian civil servants in the Raj * Grassroots Gandhian organizations	* Political & economic structures of imperialism * INC civil disobedience of British laws	INC: parallel institutions British: repression, arrests, jailing Roundtable talks	Military conquest, Amritsar shooting INC infrastructure	Raj: Sustain the Empire INC: Swaraj
Ritual	Spinning Marching Salt-making	Ancient rituals transformed: * Fasting * Processions	Military rule Satyagraha	Response to oppressive events Memorialization	Mobilization, protest

"The English have not taken India; we have given it to them" (Gandhi 1997: 39). Civil disobedience and civil resistance have their costs, of course, but nonviolent resistance could not be defeated in the end, Gandhi insisted. "The moment the slave resolves that he will no longer be a slave, his fetters fall. He frees himself and shows the way to others" (Gandhi 1967: 31).

Gandhi's innovative approach to conflict grows out of his understanding of power and its multiple bases, as well as his religious convictions and belief in the efficacious and moral superiority of nonviolent rather than violent means for engaging in struggle. His determination to engage in conflict as a way of confronting injustice and untruths in the structures around him collided with his firm conviction in the Hindu principle of ahimsa, or nonharmfulness. He was committed to avoiding violence as defined in the broadest manner, including not only physical violence but also harmful thoughts toward another person. Gandhi was, however, neither a pacifist, as he is sometimes perceived in popular culture, nor a peacemaker in the sense of wanting to prevent or avoid conflict or struggle. On the contrary, his life viewed from one angle appears as a series of conflicts, many of which he deliberately provoked. As J. D. Sethi contends, "Gandhi was a man of conflict and not of consensus and as such his approach was revolutionary."

Gandhi believed that it is not so much the resolution, but the transformation of the means by which the conflict is carried out that is essential. Moreover, it should be carried out in such a way that the outcome is creative and not viewed as a zero-sum process in which one of the adversaries loses, while the other wins. He consistently provoked conflict rather than shunning it, preferring even violence to cowardice. The focus of Gandhi's conflict theory is not on winning or resolving a conflict, but on facilitating "the Truth," which is shared by both parties to a conflict (including even Gandhi's own opponent). The strategy is to

provoke conflict when it seems necessary, but to distinguish between the adversary as a person and the allegedly reprehensible activities in which he or she is engaged.

It is this aspect of Gandhi's theories of conflict management, which addresses the self-perpetuating dynamics of conflict. Conflicts, including violent ones, take on a life of their own, and escalate beyond the control of the participants (see Coleman 1957). As conflicts are abstracted, the stakes are also raised, so that each party considers itself to be fighting for a righteous cause, rather than for their own personal gain. Gandhian efforts to break the spiral of escalation involve an identification of the needs and aspirations of all involved, even if one risks "losing" the conflict.

There are always risks in conflict, whether violent or nonviolent. One may, however, have more to lose in being sensitive to the opponents' point of view if one is clearly the stronger adversary. That is why Gandhi insisted on the "nonviolence of the brave," rather than operating from a position of weakness. For him, nonviolence was not a strategy of last resort for those without weapons and resources, but a way of life--and of conflict--that is appropriate for all people at all times.

Most importantly, Gandhi's approach to conflict is a long-run strategy designed not so much for short-term gain as for long-term security. This is an obvious limitation of the perspective, because psychologically it is difficult to make evaluations, especially in the heat of a battle, in terms of eventual, as opposed to immediate, gains.

Gandhi and his interpreters have formulated the principles of his conflict paradigm in a variety of ways, we will emphasize four primary elements:

1. Separate the doer from the deed
2. Do not cooperate with unjust systems
3. Build new (parallel) structures at the same time that one is opposing the old
4. View conflict as a natural form of human activity that may be either constructive or destructive

Doer vs. Deed: The core of Gandhi's approach to conflict lies in his insistence on the separation between the deed and the doer, which are for him two distinct things. Attacks in nonviolent conflict thus target behavior, systems and structures rather than individuals and involve the denunciation of actions and patterns of action rather than their agents: "Whereas a good deed should call forth approbation and a wicked deed disapprobation, the doer of the deed, whether good or wicked, always deserves respect or pity as the case may be. "This perception of conflict is for Gandhi both a religious principle and a pragmatic strategy. It goes to the heart of the processes of reciprocity that fuel upward spirals in conflicts at all levels from the interpersonal to the international and has become the bedrock of contemporary techniques of conflict resolution.

For Gandhi ahimsa is the natural response of a deep spiritual commitment, but it has a practical dimension as well, in a number of ways. First, on a sociological level, the practice of ahimsa serves to contain the escalation of conflict. In the nuclear age, humans have no choice but to do so, especially at the international level. If carried to its extreme, violent conflict could result in annihilation. If adversaries treat each other with respect and try to avoid harming one another, the likelihood of conflict resolution may be greater because both participants gain. Otherwise, adversaries are caught up in the escalation spiral; the longer it persists, the more each party has to lose, so the less willing they are to capitulate.

Second, at the psychological level ahimsa is a strategy for throwing the adversary off guard. As Gene Sharp (1973:110) puts it, participants in nonviolent actions "will ... be able to apply something like jiu-jitsu to their opponent, throwing him off balance politically, causing his repression to rebounded against his position, and weakening his power. Furthermore, by remaining nonviolent while continuing the struggle, the actionists will help to improve their own power position in several ways." This is a subtle psychological insight incorporated into the teachings of

many religious leaders (e.g., Jesus and the Buddha), but seldom practiced in international relations.

Finally, ahimsa as an element of conflict strategies reduces both personal and collective motivations for harmful reciprocity (see Kurtz 1989:57ff.). By addressing root causes of problems rather than their symptoms, and by not feeding into the built-in escalation that is endemic to most conflicts, Gandhi's approach helps to sustain the focus of the conflicting parties on the issues rather than denigrating into ad homonym attacks on opponents.

The second element of Gandhi's conflict paradigm is noncooperation. He posits multiple bases of power, but is convinced that every system of domination rests ultimately on the cooperation of subordinates with elites. When that cooperation is withdrawn, the pillars of the system begin to crumble. Gandhi tested this hypothesis about the nature of social structures --including the colonial system -- in the Noncooperation movement (dates) in which Indians ceased to cooperate with various key elements of British colonial rule. It is simply impossible, he contends, for elites to sustain a system in which people are refusing to cooperate. He is not so naive as to assume that noncooperation will be without cost -- in fact, the willingness to accept suffering is as much a part of the nonviolent arsenal as it is the military's -- but he is convinced that it will, in the end, topple the system.

Noncooperation by itself is a necessary but not sufficient element of Gandhi's conflict paradigm. In addition to attacking the existing undesirable system, one begins at the same time to build parallel structures, thus constructing the social order one wishes to replace the status quo. The classic example in Gandhi's experiments was the two-fold strategy of the boycott of British cloth, on the one hand, and the revitalization of spinning, on the other. Although we will discuss this strategy in more detail later, it is important to note here that this development was not only a powerful symbol of resistance to the British Raj but involved the construction of a grassroots economic infrastruc-

ture that paralleled the textile industry that was such a central part of the British Empire and a key link between the colonizer and the Indian colonized.

Finally, an assumption of Gandhi's conflict paradigm that underlies the first three elements, is his conviction that conflict is not inherently good or evil, but a natural form of human interaction that can be used for either good or ill. The key to constructive conflict that yields positive results is the means, by which it is conducted; that which is carried out according to the principles of nonviolence will produce positive results; violence will simply engender further violence. Gandhi insisted, "There is no wall of separation between the means and the end. Indeed, the Creator has given us control (and that, too, very limited) over means, none over the end. Realization of the goal is in exact proportion to that of the means. This is a proposition that admits of no exception."

In developing this approach to conflict, Gandhi addressed a fundamental dilemma in human ethics, that is the decision as to whether one should fight or flee when faced with evil. We shall argue that he did so by identifying the bases for both positions and then reformulating the ethical basis for engaging in struggle.

Gandhi assumes that domination is something that is not absolute but socially constructed in the dialectical relationship between superordinates and subordinates. The Satyagrahi's understanding of this principle, Gandhi claims, is what makes it possible for him or her to challenge existing power structures with the confidence that it can be done. The lack of violence in the Satyagraha is the source of an untapped power available to all victims of injustice:

Non-violence ... does not mean meek submission to the will of the evildoer, but it means the pitting of one's whole soul against the will of the tyrant. Working under this law of our being, it is possible for a single individual to defy the whole might of an unjust empire to save his honour, his re-

ligion, his soul and lay the foundation for that empire's fall or its regeneration.³

Obviously noncooperation has its price -- those who refuse to bow down to the tyrant may well lose their lives -- and the Satyagrahi must expect to suffer when doing so. Paradoxically, however, that very suffering is a sign of victory if accepted without violence, rather than an element of defeat as it is with struggle. Gandhi readily admits that although "non-violence being the mightiest force in the world and also the most elusive in its working, it demands the greatest exercise of faith."⁴ It was not only an article of faith, however, but also a conclusion of his experience. He was convinced also that human history was filled with non-violence from the very beginning of the species.⁵ The only barrier to the use of nonviolence according to Gandhi is that in the human misperception that violence is somehow stronger. "The difficulty one experiences in meeting himsa arises from weakness of mind."⁶

Humans are basically good: Although Gandhi was certainly not so naive as to assume that humans were incapable of evil behavior, the Satyagrahi must always draw out the best in his or her adversary in struggle. This element of the strategy is linked to Gandhi's insistence on separating the doer from the deed. All people have engaged in evil-doing; that does not make one's opponents evil. Rather, it means that both you and your opponent are capable of evil.

This assumption, like the others, has both a spiritual and a practical political side, a corollary of the Thomas Theorem: "That which is defined as real is real in its consequences."⁷ By treating people as if they were good, Gandhi often forced them to act as if they were, thus rendering the ontological question somewhat irrelevant. A number of major consequences for the conduct of conflict flow from this

³ Gandhi [1945]1967:121; *Young India* 1-8-1920:3.

⁴ Gandhi [1945]1967:123; *Harijan* 7-1-1939:417.

⁵ Gandhi [1945]1967:271; *Young India* 17-3-1927:86.

⁶ Gandhi [1945]1967:123; *Harijan* 1-6-1947:172

⁷ See Merton ([1949] 1968:475ff.).

assumption. Perhaps the most important is that one not only could but also should associate on a friendly basis with an adversary, a violation of one of the most common tenets of the violent paradigm of conflict, which requires a certain dehumanization of the opponent.

The second, and related consequence of treating an adversary with respect, is the opening of channels of communication and the creation of a space for a resolution of the conflict that benefits all parties to it and does not leave in its wake grievances that set the stage for the next round of battle. "It is the acid test of non-violence," Gandhi writes, "that, in a non-violent conflict there is no rancour left behind, and in the end the enemies are converted into friends. That was my experience in South Africa, with General Smuts. He started with being my bitterest opponent and critic. Today he is my warmest friend."⁸

Act with Fearlessness: The kind of courage required by nonviolent resistance discussed above grows out of the "friendly universe" assumption that Gandhi teaches those who would engage in Satyagraha. Whereas fear breeds violence, fearlessness enables one to take on entire systems single-handedly and without violence. One thus acts out of courage even when deliberately breaking the law in acts of civil disobedience. The significance of fearlessness in Gandhi's approach to struggle cannot be overemphasized and must be understood in the context of the colonial system, established by force and ratified by violence.

This attitude was rooted, of course, in Gandhi's spiritual convictions, but was not dependent upon a religious legitimation. As Paul Power puts it, civil disobedience "was not so much a call to 'obey God rather than man' but rather a 'dharmic' appeal to his people to restore their integrity and to fulfill their duty. The validating source of disobedience is found in a horizontal rather than a vertical relationship."⁹

⁸ Gandhi [1945]1967:124; *Harijan* 12-11-1938:327.

⁹ Power (1987:79). Power goes on to note that "Gandhi stipulated that true followers should be theists. yet strict adherence to

Thus, Gandhi's mobilization strategies were designed not only to address the structure and policies of the government but also even so "to bring about a change in the attitude of the people at large. It is their conversion that really mattered."¹⁰

Finally, however, they were also directed at himself; ultimately it was not his effect on the masses or neither the impact of Satyagraha on the system nor any concrete consequences of his action that provide the crucial test of Satyagraha. What matters is if one is true to oneself; if his inner voice told him he had to stand alone, that is what he felt he must do: "You have to stare the world in the face, although the world may look at you with bloodshot eyes. Do not fear. Trust that little thing, which resides in the heart, it says, "Forsake friends, wife, and all; but testify to that for which you have lived, and for which you have to die."¹¹

Experiments with Truth: As the title of Gandhi's autobiography emphasizes,¹² Gandhi's approach was characterized not by simplistic citations of dogmas -- although his profound convictions inspired his theories, he insisted that nonviolence be experimented with rather than simply expounded. "Ahimsa is a science," he insisted. "The word 'failure' has no place in the vocabulary of science. Failure to obtain the expected result is often the precursor to further discoveries."¹³

Satyagraha thus involves a process of systematic trial and error, of learning from one's mistakes while remaining firm in one's convictions. It requires, in other words, the kind of synthesis of certainty and humility that Gandhi saw

this requisite would exclude Jawaharlal Nehru from the circle of resisters behaving in concert with satyagraha."

¹⁰ Prasad (1985:23).

¹¹ quoted in *ibid.*:62.

¹² check & cite this; apparently the original was merely titled *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, whereas the Beacon edition makes the original title a subtitle to "An Autobiography."

¹³ Gandhi [1945]1967:123; *Harijan* 6-5-1939:113.

in the image of the scientist. This practical emphasis of Gandhi's appears repeatedly and was the base of much of his support. As Gene Sharp contends, even his followers were adherents to nonviolence not so much out of conviction but as a consequence in its demonstrated effectiveness. "So long as they were able to remain convinced of the practicality of his policy," Sharp notes, "they continued to support it. But when other problems ... arose in which Gandhi still believed his nonviolent technique was relevant but which he offered only generalizations and not comparable detailed courses of action which could be seen to be practicable, his political colleagues went their own way...."¹⁴

When

The chronology of the conflict between the British and Indians is a complicated one; it began, of course, with the institution of colonial rule, which did not happen all at once. In fact, the British Raj as an institution was formalized after the 1857 uprising against British East India Company's rule, which resulted not in Indian independence, but the transfer of rule from the trading company to the British crown. In 1877, Queen Victoria was made Empress of India, and the British government, through its military force, tightened its grip on the subcontinent.

Gandhi's intense involvement in the Indian Freedom Movement came after his return to India in 1915, but not immediately. He deliberately set aside a period of research and rediscovery of his homeland after many years' absence in South Africa (and before that his time studying the law in England). Each of his campaigns was prefaced with a period of investigation and reflection (literally prayerful meditation) on appropriate strategies.

Sensing the pulse of the independence spirit, in April of 1919 Gandhi inaugurates an all-India Satyagraha move-

ment calling for a countrywide *hartal*, a general strike that also called upon people to shut down schools, businesses and shops, offices, and so forth, bringing the nation to a standstill. It was in that context, on 13 April 1919, the British troops opened fire on unarmed civilians gathered to protest British rule in the Jallianwala Bagh in Amritsar.

The genius of Gandhi's use of timing was to use the anniversary of the Amritsar massacre as a rallying point for his Salt March, which ended at Dandi on the Indian Ocean after 32 days of marching across India, picking up salt and calling upon his fellow citizens to join him in acts of civil disobedience against the British salt law. His use of a memorial of the massacre was a transformation of time, making an historical event a present reality, to demonstrate the brutality and injustice of British rule.

Why

Although the immediate goal of Gandhi's movement was Indian independence, the final purpose of his struggle was much broader and deeper. "My ambition is much higher than independence," he wrote (Gandhi 1967: 316). "Through the deliverance of India I seek to deliver the so-called weaker races of the earth from the crushing heels of Western exploitation...." but he did not stop even there. He was determined to construct an India that was free not only from British rule but also from the slavery of gender, class, communal, and caste discrimination, and ultimately even from violence itself.

His goal was "*swaraj*," self-rule, in its deepest sense.¹⁵ "I am not interested in freeing India merely from the English yoke. I am bent upon freeing India from any yoke whatsoever" (*ibid.*: 317). That will be achieved "not by the

¹⁵ "The word Swaraj is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence often means" (Gandhi 1967: 317).

¹⁴ Sharp (1987:51-52).

acquisition of authority by a few," he insists, 'but by the acquisition of the capacity by all to resist authority when it is abuse. In other words, Swaraj is to be attained by educating the masses to a sense of their capacity to regulate and control authority."

Transformation, Resolution or Provocation?

Gandhi's answer to our query is, of course, yes. Although appearing simple on the surface, Gandhi's thought and praxis had a complexity of Weberian proportions.

His approach, although rooted in the mystic and ethical, is strategic, experimental, and sequential. There is no one answer, even to a single conflict. His approach to conflict analysis is not only multidimensional and holistic exploration of micro, macro, and symbolic aspects but also asking the range of the Aristotelian-journalistic questions of who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Gandhi is a public sociologist who fuses the theoretical and the practical – we contrast him (and rank him) with Thomas Hobbes, who helped to shape the modern social sciences and constructed new paradigms of inquiry. He systematically examines the structures and opportunities for agency, the institutional and the social psychological, as well as the impact of the symbolic and cultural on the practical. He recognizes the social construction of a seemingly invulnerable empire and the weaknesses of its pillars of support. In the end, his analysis and his action move to push actors and systems along what Martin Luther King, Jr. saw as the long arc of history bending toward justice.

The conflict analysis and practitioner alike might, like Gandhi, leave no analytical stone unturned in order to leave them un-thrown.

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