

# Now More Than Ever: Making Non-violent Change in a Globalised World

by T. Steve Wright on 22 November 2007. Posted in Peaceful Coexistence

## Abstract

It is a dangerous thing telling truth to power. It is even more dangerous to live a life based on non-violent values. Yet human bridges between truth and power are vital if we are to evolve our collective human values to a higher level. An artificial split has been created between two civilizations - essentially Christian versus Islamic - which reinforces false images of the other, as other than human. Many biased commentators who reinforce emergent Islamophobia, are largely ignorant of Islamic culture, or deliberately distort it to fit false stereotypes. Such ignorance needs to be both challenged and exposed. The Gülen movement has started to redress the balance, showing the world that Islam in action, is more about initiating peace and reconciliation, than war. Quite different approaches to non-violence exist between East and West, yet both can learn from each other. Conflicts are easier to start than avoid. Islam is the world's fastest growing faith, so there is much to learn from the Gülen emphasis on interfaith sharing based on spiritual awareness rather than social, political or economic gain. But this very role may be seen as a threat by others who do not share that humanitarian agenda. The paper argues that in the midst of their spiritual and practical teaching, the Gülen community should take inspiration from Western groups who apply peaceful non-violent action for social change in the face of repression. This series of Gülen conferences, evidences a clear awareness that mutual learning and self respect are essential if we are to move on together from these days. That willingness to move across boundaries, to discuss important issues with similar members and organizations of good will, is needed now more than ever.

## 1. Introduction

It is a dangerous thing to tell truth to power. It is even more dangerous attempting to live a life based on non-violent values, especially in turbulent times. Yet without key groups of peace-minded people willing to communicate their values, by living them out, we all risk losing our humanity.

An artificial split has been created of two civilisations: essentially Christian versus Islam, which is in itself divisive, polarizing and ultimately destructive in reinforcing false images of the other as other than human. Many commentators reinforcing emergent Islamophobia are largely ignorant of Islamic culture and often deliberately distort it to fit false stereotypes. Such ignorance both within the West as well as within those who seek to pervert the teachings of the Qu'ran to justify terrorism, need to be both challenged and exposed. In that regard, the Gülen movement has rather a unique place. it

has a community and a set of inspirational teachers and practices, which are transparent, firmly rooted in Anatolian Islam, which can show the world that Islam in action, properly understood, is about initiating peace and reconciliation rather than war.

Visionary peace researchers, such as Professor Johan Galtung have expressed profound concerns over the way that the relationships between Christians and Muslims are developing. Galtung has highlighted the fact that a largely Christian Europe could soon face an Islamic Union "stretching from Casablanca to Mindanao" - and one which does not necessarily recognize the state borders defined by previous Christian wars of aggression. Galtung is at pains to stress that this should be seen as an opportunity for co-operative partnership and not a threat. (Galtung, 2005) In that regard, the Gülen community offers a potentially vital bridge to such sharing, largely because of the transparency, tolerance and core values for future evolution of spiritual wellbeing advocated by Fethullah Gülen himself. (Gülen 2006) This presentation seeks to explore some of those issues, together with the wider context both of the challenges presented both by the geographical location of the Gülen movement in Turkey, the political complications of Turkey being the neighbour of Iran and a future Kurdistan and the military threats to all peace movements in the Middle East if America follows through a game plan to launch an all out attack on Iran.

Different approaches to non-violence exist between the East and the West and both can learn from each other. And yet conflict is easier to start than avoid especially given the social economic and political contexts within which the Gülen movement and communities undertake their work. Given that the Muslim community is the fastest growing faith on earth, there is much to learn from the Gülen emphasis of interfaith sharing based on spiritual awareness rather than social political or economic gain. And yet this very role may be seen as a threat by others who do not share that humanitarian agenda. The paper argues that in the midst of their spiritual and practical teaching, the Gülen community should be encouraged to learn more about the practical implementation of Western peaceful non-violent action for social change, and vice versa. This conference and the others organised by the Gülen community are evidence of the group's awareness that mutual learning and self respect are essential if we are to move on together from these days. That willingness to move across boundaries to discuss important issues with similar members and organizations of good will, is needed now more than ever.

## **2. Peace by Peace?**

We are living in dangerous times. We can anticipate further polarization between Islam and the West, as the official line becomes increasingly focused on achieving military solutions to what are essentially political and cultural issues. The situation in regard to the Fethullah Gülen community is complicated by both national and geo-politics. For example more than one publication called the July 22nd. Elections , 'the battle for Turkey's soul'. (Finkel, 2007) The military in Turkey are paranoid about a perceived Islamist agenda and the associated rafts of constitutional issues which could flow from any significant change from the status quo.

Dan Plesch and Martin Butcher in a recent report have made a comprehensive analysis of US plans to attack Iraq as part of an ongoing war game plan after Iraq which includes Lebanon and Syria.

They provide the official scenarios using both conventional and nuclear strategies. If this came to pass, they conclude that it would destabilize the middle east but conversely the impact of setting up an autonomous Kurdish state on the border of Iran and Turkey would have impacts which would be difficult to over estimate. (Plesch & Butcher,2007) Given these contexts, we should not be surprised if our peace building and conflict reconciliation skills are required as people respond to changing events, misconceptions and paranoia about the role of any peace organization, seeking peace by peace, including that of the Gülen movement. If I am right then I would anticipate that even the role, function and activities of these recent Gülen conferences will have been misunderstood or spun out as part of some hypothetical set of conspiracies, the more ridiculous, the better. Please let us discuss some of the examples which are emerging . My presumption is that they reveal not truth but a smear agenda which attempts to dis-empower the work of the Gülen movement .

So why have I decided focus on the role of non-violence in presenting this paper to such a timely conference? Well, a short answer is that Fethullah Gülen is unusual in providing a distinctly Islamic voice to the call for a non-violent approach to conflict resolution. But how well do Gülen's teachings on non-violence lead to peaceful transformation on the ground? Is his a static and passive approach bounded by dogma, or are we witnessing an innovative, active and self aware spirit of transformation which really can lead to a new way of defining Islam in action?

The presentation attempts to explore these questions via a comparison with Western writers such as Johan Galtung and Paul Smoker who have deconstructed positive and negative peace and recognized that structural violence is as important as direct violence, both of which need to be eliminated to establish new cultures of peace. Is the teaching capable of being translated via techniques which can action a non-violent belief in change and social justice, in the way that Gene Sharpe has used Gandhi's teaching to formulate an arsenal of non-violent tactics and strategies to challenge injustice and create peaceful transformation? Are Fethullah Gülen's teaching most appropriate for spiritual salvation in the hereafter or are they sufficiently integrated to be used now in a similar way in which Sharp's work was utilized to create a non-violent peaceful revolutions in Romania and the Ukraine?<sup>[1]</sup>

For sure, Gülen's approach is to work within an Islamic framework and apply the principles of the Qur'an to create positive change based on mutual respect. How does this differ to more Western approaches that share similar outcomes? It is important for this conference to hear something of past voices that share the vision of peace through peace and their similar experiences in telling truth to power. A key question is the extent to which these different approaches converge or diverge and the extent to which learning can be mutual. This goal is particularly pertinent in a time of terror when extant counter-insurgency models incorporating organized violence against innocents can easily provoke responses used to justify even more violent repression. A crucial issue is whether or not Fethullah Gülen's teachings on non-violence, can inspire a new non- violent praxis towards peaceful social change?

The notion of peace by peace has a rich western tradition from Tolstoy to Martin Luther King. In the East, the non-violent tradition is much more ancient. Emperor Asoka, presiding over India the Third

century B.C. slaughtered more than a hundred thousand before experiencing a Buddhist conversion which led him to proselytizing non-violence, from a distinctly spiritual and pragmatic perspective.<sup>[2]</sup>

Middle Eastern spiritual leaders teaching non-violence have had an enormous significance in the West, but it is a truism that there has been much less of a "connect" between spiritual theory and earthly praxis. 2000 years of Christianity has not led to a reduction of violence, far from it since Christians have slaughtered each other for much of that period and most other races as well. And yet the diversity and complexity of the Christian community, as one of the reviewers perceptively highlighted, can not be so easily dismissed in terms of their differing dimensions of tradition, time and space.

We know that many Christian communities, inspired by their faith have successfully attempted to translate their spiritual ethics and a belief in non-violence into a practical set of transformative actions. For example Pax Christi and the Quakers teach peace through service at community, national and international levels. It is not an exaggeration to say for example in the UK, that nearly all the most significant groupings for social change and space have benefited from the funding of Quaker groups like the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, without which a tremendous set of changes for the good would simply not have happened. However, at a state level, despite the non-violent message of their founder, the practical messages have been much more mixed.

And this is my point: believability is the extent to which teaching and practice are one. This is what is so attractive about the Gülen movement to external observers since even to an outsider the motivation is to unify outward behaviour, with a spiritual credo. And then there is transparency of the Gülen movement's teaching which is absolutely essential

Peace is of course central to Islamic teaching, the Qu'ran refers to it being one of God's names (59:23). Islamic scholars have cogently argued that the *sunnah* or Prophet's way, can be understood as a deliberate choosing of the path of non-violence - a distinctly Islamic approach to non-violence based on *dawah* or peaceful struggle for the propagation of Islam.<sup>[3]</sup>

It is in his sense that Fethullah Gülen's contribution might be best understood through the lens of western practices of non-violent action for social change. This remains a slow process of recognition since it is only in recent years that the larger peace research networks have begun to recognize and assimilate the thoughts of Islamic scholars on non violence and that this form of non-violence is active and transformative. Of course within Islam, Arab elders have used such principles for centuries to resolve family and community disputes and there is a continuum of practice for scholars willing to research it as such. (Abu-Nimmar M., 2003)

Historically, the East has provided us with some of our most inspirational teachers, translating their spiritual beliefs into a philosophy of both peace cultures and peace through non-violent direct action. All of us active in peace movements today will acknowledge their debt to Mahatma Gandhi. His quest was seen as a process of transformation, of tackling the violent injustices of the largest empire ever assembled. He rejected violence as a tactic because in the long term it was counter productive. "I object to violence because when it appears to do good, the good is only temporary; the evil it does

is permanent"<sup>[4]</sup> For Gandhi, "Victory attained by violence is tantamount to a defeat, for it is momentary".<sup>[5]</sup>

There are certain similarities between Gandhi's deeply practical spiritual teaching and sayings and those of Fethullah Gülen. For example Gandhi's persistent concern with the world of inner spiritual responsibility, crystallized in his often quoted remark: 'As human beings our greatness lies not so much in being able to remake the world ... as in being able to remake ourselves.'<sup>[6]</sup> Yet for Western peace activists, the power of Gandhi's contribution is that it incorporates dimensions of technique which can be replicated elsewhere. This is the framework that pioneer peace researcher Theodore Lentz once called a "Science and Technology of Peace".<sup>[7]</sup>

Both Gandhi and Gülen stress the importance of truthfulness and this is an important test for any movement towards peaceful change, does it work in practice. The quest for "testing truth" occupied not only the earliest philosophers but also the earliest scientists. The English 17<sup>th</sup> century natural philosopher, Francis Bacon, once said, "Truth is so hard to tell, it sometimes needs fiction to make it plausible". But he went on to conceptualise a founding notion of scientific practice, namely that of falsifiability. "Truth emerges more readily from error than from confusion."<sup>[8]</sup> In other words, all notions of truth should be open to question and testability.

This was an approach which put Copernicus and Galileo into conflict with the Church of Rome, because their astronomical observations and resultant hypotheses contradicted biblical doctrine. The result was a classic story of paradigm challenge and shift<sup>[9]</sup>. Bacon himself was aware of the dangers of telling truth to power: " Truth is a good dog; but always beware of barking too close to the heels of an error, lest you get your brains kicked out." And yet Francis Bacon's abiding conclusion was that "Truth is the daughter of time, not of authority." Why is this relevant to any comparative discussion of modern notions of "non-violence" especially in regard to Turkey?

Well Gülen's approach to non-violence is totally rooted in Anatolian Islamic belief systems, which to an outsider are based on the timeless wisdom of the Qur'an which is viewed as immutable holy writ. A closer reading however reveals that Gülen sees the inspiration of his faith as a work in progress rather than being 'set in concrete'. He values interfaith dialogue and ongoing cultural exchange as evidenced by his role as honorary chair of the "Journalists and Writers Foundation." But Gülen also emphasizes inner peace, social harmony, truthfulness which are shared by many other spiritual belief systems. At core, Gülen in his written works can be seen as a change agent based on ethics in action. He sets out an evolutionary antidote to the negative impacts of globalization in his book 'Love and Tolerance, (Gülen, 2004) which is essentially based on spiritual practice. In this work, Gülen specifically addresses the issues of jihad, terrorism and human rights, asking: "How could a religion that associates such a high importance upon human rights neglect the human rights of even one person?" On Jihad, he is equally clear:

Even in an atmosphere in which two armies have fought against each other and blood has been spilled, if the enemy forgoes fighting and want to make a treaty, then the Muslims are commanded not to react emotionally, but to make a treaty, putting their trust in God. Thus a universal principle regarding this subject has been established. Consequently, to talk about fighting or conflict is

completely contrary to the basic spirit of a religion that enjoins treaties and reconciliation, not only in time of peace but even during wartime.

Gülen concludes that real Muslims can not be terrorists and he strongly condemns both Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden for creating a contaminated image of Islam which for Gülen might have been prevented by education. The present author wonders about this and the way we define education for there are many forms of learning. It may be possible to learn how to swim by reading a book on swimming but it would be unusual, usually the process of experiential learning is heuristic and quite literally in the case of swimming, demands immersion.

At the time of writing, such contradictions have been vividly illustrated by events in Burma. Paradoxically both the 500,000 plus monks and the more than 500,000 plus soldiers are Buddhists. And yet the army have killed, maimed, beaten and tortured monks despite the religious teaching. Nevertheless, the monks have courageously told truth to power but their training in spiritual practice is not the same as training to avoid coercive crowd control management. All the while, the Peace Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi, who has always advocated non-violence, remains under house arrest whilst being blamed for the monk versus military showdown.

By contrast, alternative approaches to non-violence theory such as Gene Sharp's tactics and theories of civil disobedience<sup>[10]</sup>, or Brian Martin's work on 'backfire techniques' are essentially heuristic. They are about learning by doing and anticipate that violence by the authorities might be unjustly directed against peace advocates, Sharp lists 198 methods of what are essentially techniques used as part of a political rather than a spiritual process of non-violent direct action. These include (i) protest and persuasion; (ii) social, economic and political non-cooperation as well as (iii) non-violent intervention. (See Vol II)

Similarly, Brian Martin's work is a study of the dynamics of state power in facing down resistance and how certain tactic of non-violence can use Gene Sharp's techniques as a form of political jui-jitsu which has the power to make the weak stronger by making repressive policies of the authorities "backfire". Does that mean that Gülen's work on non-violence is ossified by comparison? No, on the contrary, he is open to the scientific process and sees science and religion as complimentary as long as there is a social responsibility amongst the scientists.

What it does mean is that there may be limits on the extent to which the different processes of nonviolence in action can cross fertilize. Is such a conclusion deterministic? Again the answer is no, since at the core of Gülen's teachings, is the importance of education. His perspectives on technological innovation are instructive since Gülen emphasizes the importance of society understanding what else is innovated when new technologies are constructed.

In coming to any conclusions about the relevance of such differing paradigms of non-violence in practice and in faith, it is worth being humble. Most authors in this field have to admit to some level of ignorance of one path, or the other or both. The current author is no exception. I am sure that I have only a crude grasp of the writings of Fethullah Gülen, neither may I do justice to key nonviolence theorists such as Gandhi or Sharp.

Nevertheless, I think the exercise of comparison is worthwhile. Western voices have stereotyped Islam to a dangerous extent, as a violent, backward system of beliefs which breed a medieval approach to justice and a terrorist approach to world politics. Gülen is aware of these stereotypes which he has addressed in his typical thoughtful way. In the sense that he offers a powerful approach to spiritual change in Turkey and the wider world which is based on a non-violent understanding of core Islamic values, we should listen. However, there are lessons learned from Western non-violent peace activists and theorists that have verisimilitude and their truth content should be shared.

In that humble spirit, the brief analysis of non-violence and peace cultures which follows is compared with some of the teachings of Fethullah Gülen. My hope is that discussion at conference will enable us to better understand the similarities, the differences and the limits that all such non-violent approaches face, in making any difference in a time of terror.

Gülen has written widely on the Sufi notion of *Safa* (purity) and the challenge of ridding human hearts from the things that contaminate it, jealousy, hatred, feelings of vengeance and suspicion. His antidote from the Qu'ran is mercy, tolerance and forgiveness. Gülen's philosophy is beginning to be understood by non-Islamic scholars as offering a bridge between worlds. It is an inspirational philosophy whose essence is education in action, teaching love, tolerance and mutual cultural respect.<sup>[11]</sup>

In many senses the Gülen movement is a practical global networking effort for peace and understanding. And yet paradoxically in Turkey is where its essence has been most widely understood and misunderstood. On the one hand by all accounts the moral teaching in Gülen schools offers an exemplary moral and practical training for young people. And yet there are sectors in the military who distrust any pro-Islamic movement of whatever description because of the threat they perceive to Turkey's avowed secular identity. Fethullah Gülen himself has made it abundantly clear that the movement has no interest in seizing economic, political or cultural power either inside or outside of the country. In an interview with Turkish newspaper *Zaman* he has reiterated his spiritual credo of serving humankind by self-sacrifice:

As in the past, I am currently maintaining the same distance to all political parties. Even if power, not only in Turkey, but that of the entire world, were to be presented to me as a gift, I have been long determined to reject it with contempt.<sup>[12]</sup>

Although we might take this at face value, perceptions are often just or even more important than realities. And this is possibly the missing link between our different cultural perspectives on nonviolence. It is not enough to simply withdraw from future political challenges to a spiritual movement toward peace, even though that might be necessary, it is not sufficient.

Gülen's expressed philosophy does not falter when it comes to characterizing the unacceptability of terrorism. For him, terrorism is against the very fabric of Islam. On the basis of his erudite understanding of the Qu'ran: No Muslim can be a terrorist, no terrorist a Muslim. Western commentators lack the scholarly authority within Muslim communities that Gülen brings when he

concludes that suicide bombing, whatever, wherever, whenever is absolutely forbidden in Islam and for those that commit such crimes, the logical prospect is eternal banishment. It is important that such debates over interpretation are had within the Muslim community and that powerful voices are heard that can with full knowledge declare can make an extremely articulate attack on those who would attempt to use religious justification to commit atrocities. "Islam never approves of any kind of terrorism."

There is no ambiguity there. And yet there is a need for caution. It is possible that a willingness to clearly define position according to faith whilst absolutely necessary may still be insufficient. Those building new communities in turbulent times also need to better understand the dynamics of nonviolent action in order to preserve their integrity, even in the face of those who seek to either undermine or destroy it. My hope is that participants at this conference might consider this bridge between different but complementary approaches to no-violent progress, one that is worth crossing.

### **3. Cultures of Peace**

Under the auspices of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), considerable analytical work has been done on what constitutes a true culture of peace. It is worth reflecting on these elements before moving to the specific question of comparative approaches to non-violence. One of the foremost minds conceptualizing the nature of cultures of peace is former IPRA Director, Professor Paul Smoker, who with his wife Dr Linda Groff, articulated the necessary steps to creating such cultures.

Smoker and Groff emphasize the micro and macro aspects of creating cultures of peace. They identify a "tire" approach to the peace concept:

Figure 1: Culture: Visible and Hidden Dimension

### **4. Evolution of Tire Peace Concept-Especially in Western Peace Research: Six Stages**

The approach of Smoker and Groff towards cultures of peace is unusual, comprehensive and apt since they are explicitly identifying dimensions that Gülen's identifies as important, namely relationships with others, relationships with nature and relationships with God. Their view is holistic



and assumes an inner-outerworld relationship towards peace. They explore different levels of the evolution of the peace concept in the west. These can be summarized as follows:

### **Peace as an absence of War**

Many people and politicians still take this rather primitive view. Nevertheless, an absence of war has to be a precursor for making progress on the other dimensions of non-violent peace building

### **Peace as Negative Peace (No War) and Positive Peace (No Structural Violence)**

The Norwegian Peace Researcher, Professor Johan Galtung articulated the notion of structural violence in his paper of 1969.<sup>[13]</sup> That is even when there is an absence of overt conflict, the system is still structurally violent if people starve when there is food available, people don't get medical treatment when the society has hospitals to treat them, women and men of equal rank do not enjoy promotion because of gender or ethnic prejudices and so on. Negative Peace is when there is still structural violence: positive peace is the absence of both overt and structural violence. Such notions may have particular bearing within an Islamic context if matters of faith preclude equal opportunities

### **Feminist Peace: Macro and Micro Levels of Peace**

To quote Smoker and Groff (1994)

During the 1970s and 80s, a fourth perspective was ushered in by feminist peace researchers, who extended both negative peace and positive peace to include violence and structural violence down to the individual level. The new definition of peace then included not only the abolition of macro level organized violence, such as war, but also doing away with micro level unorganized violence, such as rape in war or in the home. In addition, the concept of structural violence was similarly expanded to include personal, micro and macro-level structures that harm or discriminate against particular individuals or groups. This feminist peace model came to include all types of violence, broadly defined, against people, from the individual to the global level, arguing that this is a necessary condition for a peaceful planet.

### **Holistic Gaia-Peace: Peace With the Environment**

Smoker and Groff compare non-western cultures emphasis on harmony with nature and the western consumer approach that passes certain economic costs on to the environment, endangering the health of future generations and precipitating extinction events for some species. Smoker and Groff conclude:

It would be a positive development in the environmental area if we could combine the Eastern value of living in harmony with nature with the Western democratic value of taking responsibility for one's own actions based on an internalized value of the need for all of us to be caretakers of planet earth.

### **Holistic Inner and Outer Peace**

Smoker and Groff emphasize the importance of this dimension. They argue that both outer peace making (more emphasized in the West) has to be complemented by holistic inner peace (more practiced in the East).

Either perspective alone makes it more difficult to achieve the other perspective. For example, if one tries to achieve outer peace in the world only, but does not deal with inner peace, then one's inner conflicts can be projected out onto the world, making it difficult to achieve outer peace--the supposed goal. Likewise, if one tries to achieve inner peace only, but does not pay attention to creating outer peace in the world, then the social injustices and structural violence in the world will make it more difficult for most people experiencing those conditions to be able to find inner peace--the supposed goal. Thus the achievement of either inner or outer peace helps create the conditions necessary for the creation of the other type of peace.

This is a crucial part of Gülen's teaching. Smoker and Groff suggest that multi-cultural visions of peace are required and formally made such an analysis to the UN over a decade ago<sup>[14]</sup>. Conferences such as this can begin to bring these different visions together.

## **5. Sharp's Tactics & Politics of Non-violence**

Vision is one aspect, transformation is another. This author's concern is about how different approaches to Non-Violence can be operationalised at a rate that can make a difference and in a way that is self-reflective, so that new more effective ways of non-violent change can evolve. Gandhi's work on civil disobedience has been a magisterial influence on what has so far emerged in the West and probably the key exponent of tactics of non-violent action is the American Gene Sharp. In his first volume on non violent action (Sharpe 1973) questions why there is such an inertia amongst populations who put up with cultures of violence and repression when they could enjoy a vastly different system if only they could collectively engage. It is worth quoting some extracts from Volume 1 Sharp's views on why this is the case?

- Habit: In my opinion habit is the main reason people do not question the actions their "superiors" expect of them. Habitual obedience is embedded in all cultures. After all, isn't that what culture is- habitual behavior?
- Fear of sanctions: It is the fear of sanctions, rather than the sanctions themselves, that is most effective in enforcing obedience.
- Moral obligation: This "inner constraining power" is the product of cultural programming and deliberate indoctrination by the state, church and media.
- Self interest: The potential for financial gain and enhanced prestige can entice people to obey.
- Psychological identification with the ruler: People may feel an emotional tie with the leader or the system, experiencing its victories and defeats as their own. The most common manifestations of this are patriotism and nationalism.
- Zones of indifference: People often obey commands without consciously questioning their legitimacy.

- Absence of self-confidence: Some people prefer to hand control of their lives over to the ruling class. They may feel inadequate to make their own decisions. (Sharpe 1973)

Some of these lessons are pertinent to the Gülen movement as are the lessons Sharpe elaborated on why a non-violent approach has not been recognized in the mainstream as a legitimate means of struggle for justice and a better world. Sharpe concluded that there is in fact an invisible history and there are a number of reasons why such nonviolent philosophies have failed to enter the national psyche:

- Rarely have nonviolent actionists been romanticized as heroes. Rather, warriors and terrorists and their dramatic acts of heroism are mythologized for future generations.
- Historians have accepted the dominant culture's view that violence is the only legitimate form of combat.
- Historians conspire with the ruling class to keep the people ignorant of their own power.
- Western civilization is "biased toward violence."
- It requires a "new way of viewing the world" It is a paradigm whose time has not yet come.
- Nonviolence has never been seen as a coherent conceptual system. Consequently, historical examples of nonviolent action are viewed as isolated events rather than as different aspects of the same technique of struggle.
- Nonviolence is unfairly compared to violence. Nonviolence is often used when violence has no chance of success. When nonviolence fails, the method is condemned. But when violence fails, strategy or tactics are blamed-not violence as a method. Nonviolence successes are written off as flukes. Partial successes are seen as total failures.

## **6. Brian Martin & The Dynamics of Backfire**

In Volume 3 of Sharp's first book, he examines the dynamics of non-violent action as a means of understanding what works and why. Such analyses are crucial if non-violent processes are to become living heuristic realities rather than dry scholastic or monastic theories. Sharp teaches how the power imbalance between groups can be used to the advantage of the weak by a process of political jiu-jitsu and how these tactics can succeed even in the face of quite brutal repression. This was one of the first efforts to understand how non-violence can disperse power through communities, bringing increased self esteem and personal development - a phenomena also being reported in the emergent Gülen communities. Such healing and empowering processes lie in sharp distinction to the use of violence, which creates feelings of callousness and dehumanization which affects victims and victors alike.

The Australian researcher Professor Brian Martin, has taken some of these analyses and techniques further in a theory which he calls backfire. (Martin, 2007) Typically, non-violent activists exposing injustices by the authorities against a weaker group, can precipitate righteous indignation or outrage. Martin examines the dynamics of these processes in order to empower those who would use nonviolent action but then face official retribution. He concludes that perpetrators typically use five main methods to inhibit outrage and prevent backfires (Martin, 2007), namely:

- covering up the event;
- devaluing the target;
- reinterpreting what happened;
- using official channels to give the appearance of justice; and
- intimidating and bribing the people involved.

He also examines the propaganda and black or grey media operations which typically accompany any official cover up. These have the aim of creating public outrage against the target of the operation, and can be analysed using the same framework. To be effective, a black operation uses deception to foster an interpretation that the victim was actually responsible. The (black) attack is not covered up - it has to be open in order to backfire - but responsibility for it is hidden.

Martin provides invaluable information for countering such attacks, including

- expose responsibility for the event;
- validate the target of the operation (the falsely alleged perpetrator);
- interpret the operation as unfair and underhanded;
- avoid or discredit official investigations, at least when they seem likely to dampen public outrage; and
- resist intimidation and bribery.

Such behaviour has spontaneously evolved by many non-violent groups wishing to sustain behaviour consistent with their beliefs. In fact I would argue that the behaviour of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi is a case in point. Nursi used his spiritual insights to follow similar tactics albeit at a substantial personal cost to his health. (Markham and Ozdemir, 2005)

Such response and counter responses can become quite complex. According to Martin and Gray),

In a conflict between a powerful and a weak side - for example between a group of police and a single suspect, or between a government and a small group of opponents - the powerful side holds many advantages. If the weak side mounts an attack, this can provide the pretext for the powerful group to use its superior resources. The exception is when the powerful side is exposed in a gross abuse, for example when police seriously assault a suspect or troops gun down protesters and this abuse is exposed to a wide audience, leading to a change in public opinion. These are instances of backfire, such as the beating of Rodney King by Los Angeles police and the shooting of peaceful protesters in Dili, East Timor, by Indonesian troops, both in 1991. They are white backfires, because the perpetrators made no attempt to attribute their own actions to their opponents.

Given this dynamic, it is not surprising that powerful groups sometimes use black operations to give themselves the benefit of public outrage. They want their own actions to be seen as an outrage-generating attack by their opponents, as when police use agents provocateurs to encourage protesters to be violent. These sorts of black operations involve promoting

actions that will backfire on their opponents, in what can be called black backfires. (Martin & Gray, 2007)

Despite the fact that Fethullah Gülen has adopted an inspirational spiritual rather than a politically instrumental approach toward implementing non-violent pathways to peace, many of these negative techniques have been used against both him and his followers.<sup>[15]</sup> So much so that Gülen now lives in exile in the United States. In the sections which follow, the question is put, to what extent do the nonviolent philosophies of Gülen match with more Western Implementation and instrumentalist strategies outlined above and can useful bridges be built between these two worlds?

## **7. Gülen's Non-Violent Spiritual Paths & Practices**

Attempting any reasoned comparison of Gülen's non-violent philosophy with those of more western practitioners is fraught with difficulties, not least because of the way that Gülen's life and work has been molded by the very specific cultural roots of Anatolian Islam and the specific writings of Said Nursi, though it would be a mistake to think that Gülen's approach is merely a next generation of Nursi's approaches. A more accurate description of the relationship would be that of mentor. And yet there are, some interesting overlaps. Nursi used the tactic of silent withdrawal and non-co-operation in many of his struggles towards resolving conflict without bloodshed. In many ways the maltreatment and imprisonment of Nursi is a classic case of backfire since his repeated representation of the evidence to different tribunals and his unjust punishment actually served as a recruitment engine for his movement and brought about the exact opposite outcome of that desired by the authorities.

The Gülen movement, from an outsider's perspective, can be considered to have an explicit ambition of eroding structural violence - for example through providing education and shelter to youngsters. But any Western non-violence theorist, taking a purist approach, could find certain elements within the organization that from a superficial perspective might not square with classic non-hierarchic theories of peaceful cultures. Such criticisms could be seen as nonsense by the Gülen community.

From a Western point of view, the centralization of power via any hierarchy might be seen as evidence of an unequal distribution of power. Then again, most large faith groups operate on some form of hierarchy - the Quakers being some kind of exception but even then there is an elders structure, which is interpreted as simply experienced sets of hands to mentor the process of listening. The büyük abiler could be considered by some in the Gülen movement to fulfil a similar role. The important strength of the Gülen movement is its transparency - and those who manufacture conspiracy theories around the Gülen movement might be less than forthcoming in being as transparent about their own motives and connections.

Many of these confusions will be influenced by cultural differences especially in regard to the traditional role of women in Turkish society and the central and unquestionable bedrock of the Qur'an which cannot be questioned in any way, without attracting counter criticism. Western peace movements adopting non-violent strategies regard them all as a work in progress and not very much is so sacrosanct that it is beyond review.

There are also difficulties in wedding all the prescriptions of the Shari'a to a philosophy of complete non-violence. This is a contradiction which is not unique to Islam - Christian and Judaic views on punishment: turn the other cheek versus an eye for an eye, are cases in point. Even the great Emperor Asoka, whose life's work became the promulgation of Buddhist scripture, refused to revoke the death penalty for reason of public order, despite this view being an outright contradiction of the teachings. (Seneviratana, A., 1994).

In many senses, Gülen is following the holistic, spiritual and cultural approaches to peace identified by Smoker and Groff above. It is now a global faith based movement with schools in more than one hundred countries including Kazakhstan, Kenya, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Indonesia, Brazil and Bosnia.

We are informed that today there are more than 300 private high schools and seven universities affiliated with the Gülen community, with over 150 schools in Turkey alone.<sup>[16]</sup> It is a sign of the health of the Gülen movement that today, that number is undoubtedly far greater.

Why should this matter? Well Gülen's teaching instrumentalizes the teaching of the Qur'an towards performing daily acts of service based peaceful social change. Such an approach in a time of terror can make a difference through interfaith dialogue. To my mind, Gülen's Abant platform for dialogue is akin to the Pugwash movement when it first began it's work to prevent nuclear war in the fifties.

Pugwash allowed a backchannel for diplomats and scientists to keep talking even during the difficult days of the cold war and led to the processes which not only ended the Vietnam War but the Cold war too. One of the reviewers of this paper said the analogy was pregnant with possibilities.

Such inter-faith dialogue is more important now than ever. The Western stereotypes of Islam need to be constructively challenged by Muslims as well as pundits in the West. Gülen's active compassion for peaceful change based on a precise reading of the Qur'an, can act as a powerful palliative to those who would smear Islam with the label of terrorism. Such work can only be achieved through making a critical mass of thinkers and doers who will engage in peace in the wider world and that characterises the Fethullah Gülen movement today.

## **8. Conclusions**

And yet it is wise to be cautious given the turbulent political changes occurring both within Turkey and on its borders with Kurdistan; Iran; Bulgaria; Georgia; Greece; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Iraq and Syria. It could be argued that the Gülen approach to peaceful change from a truly enlightened Islamic perspective is necessary but not yet truly sufficient. It continues to be a work in progress

The very success of the Gülen movement could be misinterpreted by those with alternative agendas and alliances in the Middle East, during this time of rapid change and potential instability. In some senses this very conference is an act of wisdom by the Gülen community in taking the initiative to broaden the worldwide base of associates who are sympathetic to the credos of the movement and wish its work well. The challenge to us all is to find ways of future collaboration that do not

undermine our strengths and differences but complement the project and processes with which we are broadly in tune with.

Some authors welcoming such kinetic Islam see the process of change wedding Islamic activism into a process of "regulated improvisation."<sup>[17]</sup> The wisdom of this according to commentators like Hendrick, is that it enables Islam to be wedded without contradiction to processes of modernity that do not contradict any secular governmental line within Turkey. This process of regulated improvisation can be further developed to anticipate and survive any future political turbulence but it will need deep meditation and creativity, especially if the US Pentagon military globalisation is implemented with the utter lack of cultural sensitivities that we have witnessed from this administration to-date.

Just as in previous times, wise authorities made provision for famine and flood when there were no signs that these were inevitable so in this time, it is wise to think through future peaceful responses to challenges which may or may not come. For example, the extent to which the Gülen movement can once again respond to state repression using non-violent means may become the test of the integrity of the movement. Many techniques evolved by non-violent activists elsewhere in the world could then come to be of use and significance to the Gülen movement. This is especially important given the emphasis on self-awareness and wisdom in perusing a pacifist approach without compromising beliefs. The Gülen community is a proselytizing movement in the positive sense in that it is not keeping its beliefs hidden but is actively engaged in widening the base of its activities and is actively engaged in communications with more secular communities of which this conference is just one small but important part.

Inevitably, any new and expanding faith-based movement will draw attention. I am sure that the proceedings of these conferences will be widely reported and misreported in Turkey and beyond. The conference organisers should expect critical flak if they have done their jobs well as I am sure they have. This is especially so when that movement has the potential to influence other Muslims overseas, as well as change the wider perception of what it is to implement the teachings of the Qur'an. In future times such a role may require new notions of non-violence and civil disobedience within its heart. So far, the movement has steered an intentional course away from confrontation with the authorities. But this very success may bring about future confrontation as the popularity, educational, business activities and economic independence of the movement grows. Fortunately, at its core is a leadership who values ethics and wisdom and truthfulness above all.

I feel sure that the many teachers, thinkers and proponents encompassed by this movement will already be meditating on how they should behave to ensure future progress towards new cultures of peace on Earth. A central purpose of this conference is dialogue and a useful outcome of our exchanges is to share all the organized knowledge that comes from all our communities to truly bring about peaceful change, despite the current difficulties. We have compatible but different learning visions and resources to share.

[1] For a detailed discussion and resource pack on these strategies, see the writings and presentations contained in the '[Force More Powerful](#)' initiative.

- [2] For an extensive elaboration, see Seneviratana, A., (ed.) (1994) King Asoka and Buddhism - Historical and Literary Studies, Buddhist publication Society, Kandy, Sri Lanka [http://urbandharma.org/pdf/king\\_asoka.pdf](http://urbandharma.org/pdf/king_asoka.pdf) (checked 29 June 2007)
- [3] Points made by Maulana Wahiduddin Khan in an undated paper on "Non-Violence and Islam" presented at the Symposium on Islam and Peace sponsored by Non-Violence International and The Mohammed Said Farsi Chair of Islamic Peace at the American University Washington D.C.
- [4] Gandhi, M (1925) YI, 21-5-1925, p. 178
- [5] Gandhi, M. (1919), 'Satyagraha Leaflet No. 13, May 19
- [6] Recently quoted for example when Leeds Metropolitan's Great Hall was renamed the Gandhi Hall by the great Indian actor, Amitabh Bachchan, in June 2007.
- [7] For a discussion of Lentz work on peace technology and peace action, see Eckhardt, W. (1971) Symbiosis between Peace Research and Peace Action , Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 8, No. 1, pp. 67-70
- [8] Originally from Francis Bacon's aphorisms in Novum Organum (1620) Quoted in Ed. J. Spedding, R. L. Ellis, & D. D. Heath (1896), The Works of Francis Bacon, (New York, p.210
- [9] Kuhn T., S. (1962) The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, University of Chicago Press.
- [10] Sharp, G. (1973) The Politics of Non-Violent Action, Sargent, Boston, Massachusetts, (Available in 3 paperback Vols only: Power & Struggle, The Methods of Non-Violent Action and the Dynamics of Non-Violent Action).
- [11] For an insight into how some scholars have responded and been deeply inspired by the to the Gülen community, see Carol, J.
- [12] Quoted in Dr Serif Ali Tekalan' article "[A Movement of Volunteers](#)".
- [13] Galtung, Johan. (1969) "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" in Journal of Peace Research, No. 3.
- [14] Smoker, Paul, and Groff, Linda (1995). "Spirituality, Religion, and Peace: Exploring the Foundations for Inner-Outer Peace in the 21st Century." Conference Proceedings, Second UNESCO Conference on "Contributions of Religions to a Culture of Peace," Barcelona, (Conference was Dec. 1994)
- [15] That is not to say that Gülen's followers have not taken an instrumental approach in structuring and expanding the process of formal teaching. The point here is that the focus of that work has been spiritual rather than political change.
- [16] Quoted from Gulay, 2007.
- [17] Hendrick J.D, The Regulated potential of Kinetic Islam:Antitheses in Global Islamic Activism. In Hunt & Aslandogan 2007

## **T. Steve Wright (PhD on 'New Police Technologies and Sub-State Conflict Control', Lancaster University)**

Senior Lecturer in the School of Applied Global Ethics and an Associate Director of the Praxis Centre, Leeds Metropolitan University. For almost thirty years, Dr Wright has lectured extensively across five continents on the social implications of new internal security tactics and technologies. His most recent work covers new border control technologies and the climate change crisis. Concerned that the US 'War on Terror' may be masking new and unsustainable global security agendas, his ambition is to evolve human security programmes based on mutual respect which put the well-being



of people first. This is an updated version of the paper presented in the Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement Conference, House of Lords, SOAS and LSE, 25-27 October 2007.