

A Window into Peace Studies

Three Windows and Critical Peace/Nonviolence Research

Chaiwat Satha-Anand

**Professor of Political Science, Thammasat University
Director, Peace Information Center, Thammasat University**

Introduction: window

Have you ever wondered what the word “window” means?

When asked to write “A Window into Peace Studies” article for *Hiroshima Peace Research Journal*, the assignment led me to look up the etymological root, not of the word “peace” but “window,” a word seemingly common but does conceal something profound. Here is what I found: the word ‘window’ comes from an Old c.1200 Norse word “vindauga” which is a combination of “vindr” or ‘wind’ and “auga”: “eye”, or “to see.” Literally, it is “eye-hole” or “eye-door”. In Old Frisian ‘window’ literally means “breath-door.”¹ Put another way, window allows us to breathe through and to see something outside our confinement and beyond.

In my academic life as a peace/nonviolence researcher, I have been touched by extraordinary people whose teachings enable me to breathe and see the world in a particular way. They are my “windows into peace/nonviolence studies.” Through these windows, I have come to believe that peace studies without seriously taking account of nonviolence theory and practices leave much to be desired in a world presently consumed by deadly and destructive conflicts.

What follows is a brief discussion of three “teachers” whose ideas constitute the three “windows” through which my understanding of peace/nonviolence has been formed. The paper then ends with a note on an example of how understanding “windows” as a portal to breathe and to see influenced my peace/nonviolence research.

First Window: Glenn D. Paige (1929–2017)

In August 1977, I was only 22 years old when I left Thailand to pursue my graduate study with the East-West Center scholarship at the Department of Political Science, University

of Hawai'i at Manoa. A year earlier my university in Bangkok was the site of perhaps the most brutal attack against peaceful protesters ever occurred in Thai society commonly known as the "October 6, 1976 incident." At dawn of that fateful day, Thammasat University was viciously attacked by paramilitary groups and government forces. Many who peacefully protested inside the university were burned alive, some dead bodies mutilated while bystanders watched as though they were watching a play, not the gruesome killing of human beings. Thousands of protesters were arrested. A coup d'état followed and a most right-wing government with extremely authoritarian control was installed.²

With the bloody episode still in the back of my mind, I took Glenn Paige's course titled: "Nonviolent Political Alternatives." Paige introduced me to literature I had never known before. They included Johan Galtung's classic essay "Violence, Peace and Peace Research" (1969), Ruth Leger Sivard's wonderfully informative *World Military and Social Expenditures* (1978), Gene Sharp's magnum opus *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973), Robert Cooney and Helen Michalowski's colorful *The Power of the People: Active Non-violence in the United States* (1977), and Gopinath Dhawan's profound *The Political Philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi* (1957). Through these readings, among many others drawn both from social sciences and the humanities, and Paige's teaching, I learned that peace is not merely an absence of war, but also for people to live free of injustice or structural violence such as poverty; that global resources wasted on military expenditures robbed the world of opportunities to peacefully better human lives through social expenditures; that Gandhi's thought was much more sophisticated upon philosophical reflection; that his was not the only example of nonviolent actions, but there have been so many successful examples of people from various cultures including in the US who chose nonviolent action grounded in a radical understanding of a consent theory of power to fight against different forms of oppression.

I still remember the feeling which resulted from taking Paige's course. It was a mixture of amazement and joy to learn that there were indeed nonviolent alternatives to fight against violent oppression and massacre; and that they were not ideal but had been put into practices by real people in history; that great though they are, Gandhi and King are not the only ones, there have been many others. Some were lesser-known names to me at the time such as Danilo Dolci, Cesar Chavez, Dom Helder Camara, or Kenneth David Kaunda.³ Importantly, most who took part in nonviolent movements, both men and women, have been nameless heroes.

Moreover, these alternatives could be understood from solid theories while the possibilities of getting rid of/getting out of violence for humans are supported by ground-

breaking empirical and scientific knowledge. Paige's teaching served as my peace studies educational foundation that gave me a knowledge-based hope necessary to free myself from the heavy chain of violence that had earlier trapped me in despair.⁴

At the defense of my Ph.D. dissertation in December 1981, Paige asked me a question: as a Muslim what would I say to violence carried out by Muslims in the name of Islam around the world? My first research work once I returned home in 1982 was to look into how Muslim separatists in Southern Thailand use Islam to justify their violent action.⁵ Five years later, Paige challenged me again with an invitation to contribute a paper on Islam and nonviolence to the UN first ever conference on that subject he organized and held in Bali. Paige's critical questions including his nonkilling turn have influenced my peace/nonviolence research during the next three decades.⁶

Paige's teachings constitute a large window that allows me to see that there are indeed nonviolent alternatives to violence, that these alternatives are based on solid social sciences and humanities, and that one should dare to raise critical and at times hurtful questions in undertaking a journey as a peace/nonviolence researcher.

Second Window: Johan Galtung (1930–)

The experience of being in a class taught by the legendary Johan Galtung, the person considered the father of modern peace research by many, was unlike anything else. The fact that he is ambidextrous, and that he could write all kinds of formulae on several boards with incredible speed could make one feel a little dizzy at times. On questioning him how he managed it, he alerted me to the world of mathematics. This is perhaps what has informed the mathematician Galtung's numerous conceptual contributions to peace research.

I have found Galtung's concept of violence and analytical framework useful for my research. It began with a seemingly simple formulation that peace is the absence of violence. But violence is a complicated concept which can be distinguished as direct, structural and cultural. To work towards peace is to get rid of violence in all three forms. In analyzing the phenomenon of violence, Galtung's formulation could be understood in terms of layers of variables. The first layer, easily visible, is that of agency which could be construed with agency-related theories such as theory of action. Then the second layer, less visible, is that of structures and institutions which includes laws, education, and economics which serve as sources of violence. The third layer, invisible and near pertinent, is the cultural layer which legitimizes the other two. It is the complex domain of belief systems that include religions, ideology, language, art, and science.⁷ For example, at the time of this writing,

Kazakhstan just abolished capital punishment from its legal system.⁸ But the success or failure of death penalty abolition will ultimately depend on to what degree that society's culture supports the new structure, namely punishment law for murder cases. If people in that society believe strongly in retributive justice, sanctioned by some forms of religious or folk belief, then it will be very difficult for the change to succeed because cultural variables are the hardest to change.

Galtung's analytical framework is so important, especially for those working on religions and violence/nonviolence such as myself because it puts to rest once and for all the false question of whether a religion such as Islam causes violence. Instead, Islam or any other religion including the most pacific Buddhism can be used to justify violence.⁹ This is because religions reside within the cultural layer which works as justification, not causation, of violence.

Third Window: Gene Sharp (1928–2018)

In 1980 at a Yokohama regional meeting of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), a question was raised as to whether it would be possible for IPRA to take up the subject of “nonviolence” as part of its work. A distinguished colleague from Europe responded that IPRA should not be associated with “pacifism” since it would “discredit peace research.”¹⁰ It is interesting to note that the European colleague equated “pacifism” with “nonviolence,” and that in his view “nonviolence” or “pacifism” was not an academic subject worthy of peace research.

At about the same time, Gene Sharp who wrote the now world-famous *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*¹¹ was a visiting scholar at Harvard University's Center for International Affairs, and just published an award winning essay discussing the implications of civilian-based defense: *Making the Abolition of War a Realistic Goal*.¹² In the same year, Sharp published *Social Power and Political Freedom* arguing that in order to effectively tackle grave political problems namely: dictatorship, genocide, war, and social oppression, there is a need to rethink politics. The obvious must be questioned because “We usually take the familiar for granted, and do not really ‘see’ it. We often fail to ponder that which is unmistakably before us, to give it our close attention, and to ask simple but fundamental questions about it, as we would if it appeared before us for the first time.”¹³

Studying nonviolent action from Sharp's *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* is to learn

to question the obvious in politics, namely the way power works. In addition, it is to understand the theory behind nonviolent action, the numerous historical cases supporting the world famous 198 methods, and how they work to alter the conflict dynamics. Apart from these, while serving as a translator of his *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* into Thai, I have also learned how Sharp was so careful with language choice for his book as we struggled for the appropriate translation of the term “nonviolent action.”

Precision of the terms used in nonviolence studies/research is so very significant to Sharp that he would sometimes chastise me for using the term “nonviolence” loosely in my works because it broadly covers nonviolent direct action, love of all humanity, passivity and surrender, among others. For him, using “nonviolence” in one’s research is “often highly ambiguous, contradictory, and even moralistic—all quite unsuited for description and analysis of conflicts.”¹⁴ Therefore the term “nonviolence” “should not be used as a synonym for the technique of nonviolent action, because nonviolent action is often practiced for pragmatic reasons and is not necessarily tied to a general belief in abstention from all violence.”¹⁵ Those who use nonviolent action may not be pacifists who may support or oppose the use of nonviolent action. In fact, pacifists who oppose nonviolent action do so because for them “some methods of nonviolent action may be too conflictual, coercive, or provocative of violent responses.”¹⁶

Sharp’s belief about precision is with Tocqueville whose quote he used as epigraph to his *Sharp’s Dictionary*’s introduction: ‘An abstract term is like a box with a false bottom, you may put in it what ideas you please, and take them out again without being observed.’¹⁷ His first two sentences in the book clearly reveal his intention. They read: “Every field of study and thought requires clear concepts, terms, and understood meaning. Without them, description, analysis, communication and the transfer of knowledge are impaired, if not impossible.”¹⁸ For Sharp, such precision is needed for the advent of non-violent struggles studies/research to help the world cope with deadly threats from genocide to dictatorship and other forms of tyranny.

Conclusion: a note on “windows” and critical peace/nonviolence research

Looking through the three fantastic windows, and though there are others in my life, these have helped me see the familiar with the unfamiliar eyes so that new questions can be raised. Critical peace research framework enables me to place variables in appropriate layers that help elucidate how different faces of violence work to trap humans in its deadly

space. Then nonviolent action grounded in knowledge from diverse fields of study in both social sciences and humanities continue to kindle my hope in critical peace/nonviolence research as knowledge-based alternatives that could help foster a more peaceful world.

Since I began this article with a peculiar understanding of “window,” let me end by showing how this understanding of “window” as something that helps one “breathes” and “sees” can connect with peace/nonviolence research/studies.

On July 8, 2013, in Lampedusa, a small Italian island some 70 miles from Tunisia known as North Africa’s “gateway to Europe” where so many migrants have died crossing from Africa, Pope Francis raised the question: “Has anyone of us grieved for the death of these brothers and sisters?” Rephrasing the Pope’s question to underscore the pain it delicately suggests, I am curious about why when seeing the sights of human suffering, in this case the migrants’, one does not or cannot grieve.¹⁹

In meditating on why this is so very difficult, I have argued that the difficulty arises from a profound sense of human failure to realize how one’s life is connected to others’, and that to be able to do so-to *see* their sufferings and to hear the cries of the oppressed, there is a need to call into question the dominant role of “thinking” as the defining quality of being human. Beyond the critique of “thinking,” breathing is then proposed as an alternative epistemic ground necessary for peace/nonviolence in the twenty-first century.²⁰ In this sense, “windows” could serve as portals to “see” and “breathe” the world one lives, both as a peace/nonviolence researcher and a human being.

References

- ¹ (<https://www.etymonline.com/word/window>, accessed December 30, 2020).
- ² Thongchai Winichakul, *Moments of Silence: The Unforgetting of the October 6, 1976 Massacre in Bangkok* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2020).
- ³ Marjorie Hope and James Young, *The Struggle for Humanity: Agents of Nonviolent Change in a Violent World* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Book, 1979).
- ⁴ For an elaborate treatment of Paige’s influence on educating me as a peace/nonviolence researcher, see Chaiwat Satha-Anand, “Teacher Glenn: how a political scientist educated a peace researcher,” *Journal of Peace Education* Vol.15 Issue 3 (2018), 255-266.
- ⁵ Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Islam and Violence: A Case Study of Violent Events in the Four Southern Provinces, Thailand, 1976-1981* (Tampa, Florida: University of South Florida Monographs on Religion and Public Policy, 1987).
- ⁶ See Glenn D. Paige, Chaiwat Satha-Anand and Sarah Gilliatt (eds.) *Islam and Nonviolence* (Honolulu: Center for Global Nonviolence Planning Project, Spark M.Matsunaga Institute for Peace, University of Hawai’I, 1993). Throughout my academic life, I have worked on the subject of Islam

and nonviolence, see also Chaiwat Satha-Anand, *Nonviolence and Islamic Imperatives* (Sparnas, Sweden: Irene Publishing, 2017).

⁷ Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (London, Thousand Oaks, Delhi: SAGE, 1996), 201-207.

⁸ *The Astana Times*, January 5, 2021.

⁹ See Chaiwat Satha-Anand, “Red Mosques’: Mitigating Violence Against Sacred Spaces in Thailand and Beyond,” in Ken Miichi and Omar Farouk (eds.) *Southeast Asian Muslims in the Era of Globalization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 197-220. See also Michael K. Jerryson, *Buddhist Fury: Religion and Violence in Southern Thailand* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

¹⁰ Glenn D. Paige, “To Leap Beyond Yet Nearer Bring: From War to Peace to Nonviolence to Nonkilling,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* Vol.2 No.1 (January 1997), 97.

¹¹ (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1973).

¹² (Winner of the Ira D. and Miriam G. Wallach 1979-1980 Awards, sponsored by the Institute for World Order in New York.)

¹³ (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1980), 13.

¹⁴ Gene Sharp, *Sharp’s Dictionary of Power and Struggle: Language of Civil Resistance in Conflict* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), xiii.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 193. But elsewhere I have argued that Sharp’s distinction is too restrictive. See Chaiwat Satha-Anand, “Overcoming Illusory Division: Between Nonviolence as a Pragmatic Strategy and a Principled Way of Life,” in Kurt Schock (ed.), *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2015), 289-301.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 211.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* The epigraph is from Alexis De Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America* (1889), Vol.2, 63.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, xi.

¹⁹ See a philosophical discussion of “grievability” in relation to “equality” of lives in Judith Butler, *The Philosophy of Non-Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 28.

²⁰ Chaiwat Satha-Anand, “Breathing the others, Seeing the lives: A Reflection on Twenty-first-century Nonviolence,” in Joseph Camilleri and Deborah Guess (eds.) *Towards a Just and Ecologically Sustainable Peace: Navigating the Great Transition* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 228-248.