# Non-violent Consumption[1]

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## Abstract

Non-violent right action is proposed as the most promising method of moving beyond capitalism and a consumer culture to a more humane society. After exposing the violence inherent within the consumer culture and the global marketplace (due to structural violence), this paper explains the main principles of non-violence (especially satyagraha, right actions, and the Truth), and then reframes consumption through a non-violent lens. *Offering the satyagraha* (drawing on an inner power reserve of self-Truth) is tendered as a progressive way for people to view themselves as consumers, thereby enabling them to engage in *right actions* in the marketplace. Non-violence is offered as a way to deal with the inequities of the global consumer marketplace and the infringements on the human condition, other species, and the Earth.

## Introduction

A consumer culture is not peaceful. It is characterized by alienation, dissatisfaction, disenchantment, misplaced self-identity, and false relationships (McGregor, 2010). Taken together, these features and those of the neoliberal marketplace, contribute to violence, which must be mitigated for the sake of the human condition, and the sanctity of Earth and other species. Non-violent action is the most promising method of moving beyond capitalism and a consumer culture to a more humane society (Martin, 2001). After exposing the violence inherent within the consumer culture and the global marketplace, this paper explains the main principles of non-

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[1] A different version of this paper was included as a Chapter 10 in my book titled *Consumer Moral Leadership* (Sense Publishers 2010).

violence, and then reframes consumption as non-violent.

## Characteristics of a Consumer Culture

First, the consumer culture reflects a highly individualized order that is devoid of communal values. It is driven by self-interests and material pursuits such that it has intensified people's sense of loss and alienation (Goldman, 2005; Schor, 2007; Slater, 1997). Alienation makes it easier to see other human beings as *the other*; hence, they are not within one's realm of responsibility. People have become too removed from the origins of the goods and services they consume. Geographical and mental distance compromises people's abilities to establish trust relationships, gain and apply knowledge of ethical and moral principles, respect a sense of community and solidarity, and believe that they can make a difference (Klintmann & Boström, 2006).

Second, the consumer culture promises everything, but never fully delivers. People are permanently disappointed. Dissatisfaction is always one step ahead of satisfaction, with the cycle perpetuating itself. People end up feeling responsible for just themselves (Goldman, 2005;  International Network of Engaged Buddhists, 2016; McCracken, 1988; McGregor, 2010; Sassatelli, 2007). Third, a consumer culture co-opts people's humanity and spirituality. Instead of being socialized to be caring, loving and compassionate, people learn that purchasing things brings a sense of belonging. They end up disenchanted and disillusioned, longing for a sense of identity (Goodwin, Nelson, Ackerman, & Weisskopf, 2006; McGregor, 2010; Ritzer, 1999).

Fourth, in a consumer culture, people create a sense of identity (self) through consuming more and more, and accumulating different, material objects. This behavior generates a misplaced identity, and narrow connotations of responsibility for whom and what (Goldman, 2005; McCracken, 1988; McKibben, 1999; Sassatelli, 2007). Finally, in a consumer culture, people relentlessly seek self-fulfillment and self-identity through what they consume instead of through relationships with others. But this misguided behavior creates false relationships by rejecting the relationships between the individual and the collective, meaning people end up paying little attention to others' working conditions or the environment. They are responsible only to themselves, often at the expense of others (Harris, 1997; Kasser, 2003; McGregor, 2010).

## Violent Consumer Infrastructure

The consumer culture creates a context within which consumer activities inadvertently become deep sources of violence, mainly because the consumer society and the consumerism ideology are sources of structural violence (McGregor, 2010). Whereas direct violence and war are very visible, indirect, structural violence is almost invisible. It is embedded in ubiquitous social structures, and is normalized by stable institutions and

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by regular experiences. The results are unequal power, and unequal life chances. Structural violence can also occur in a society if institutions and policies are designed in ways that build barriers into society. The results can be lack of adequate food, housing, health, safe and just working conditions, education, economic security, clothing, and family relationships. Unequal access to resources, political power, or legal standing are all forms of structural violence (Galtung, 1969; Winter & Leighton, 2001).

Because these inequities are longstanding, they usually seem ordinary, the way things are done, and always have been. Still worse, the people who are victims of structural violence often do not see the systematic ways in which their plight is choreographed by unequal and unfair distribution of society's resources and power, or due to human constraint caused by economic and political structures (Galtung,1969; Winter & Leighton, 2001). People affected by structural violence tend to live a life of oppression, exclusion, exploitation, marginalization, collective humiliation, stigmatization, repression, inequities, and they face a lack of opportunities due to no fault of their own, per se. Those most affected by structural violence are women, children, elders and those from ethnic, racial, and religious groups, and sexual orientations that differ from the mainstream (Winter & Leighton, 2001).

Because they, and others, may not *see* the origin of the conflict and violence, people negatively affected by invisible structural violence often feel they are to blame, or are blamed, for their own life conditions (Freire, 2007). This perception is readily escalated because people's normal perceptual and cognitive processes tend to divide people into in-groups and out-groups. Those outside *our group* lie outside our scope of interest and justice. They are invisible. Injustice that would be instantaneously confronted if it occurred to someone in *our group* is barely noticed if it occurs to strangers or those who are invisible and irrelevant. It is easy to morally exclude those who fall outside *our group* (Winter & Leighton, 2001). This exclusion leads to *the others* becoming demeaned or invisible, meaning people do not have to acknowledge the injustices others suffer, even if they are the cause (see Klintmann & Boström, 2006). Such is the case with consumption.

Indeed, the entire *consumer infrastructure* is a key source of structural violence, meaning people are harmed somehow due to no cause of their own. Consumers enable this violence by  embracing the ideology of consumerism, knowingly or not (McGregor, 2007, 2008a, 2010). A consumer society teaches people about the merits of capitalistic consumerism but little to nothing about the lives of the workers who make the goods and deliver the services. Consumers are often blind to how animals and other species suffer to create these products, and they are inadequately informed of the environmental and societal impact (although this is changing). And, they seldom realize that all of these situations are inextricably linked (Wells, 2000).

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Rivola (2005) shares the story of a simple t-shirt to illustrate the complex connections inherent in the global marketplace, and the violence inherent in such benign purchases. The conflicted consumer culture legitimizes violence as a way to deal with conflict, which manifests as structural violence, and even direct violence, against each other (e.g., children killing each other for brand name clothing). Hurtful and harmful actions (intentional or not) become so entrenched that the violence permeates everything, leading to extreme resistance to change when the consumerism veil is lifted (Galtung, 1998; McGregor, 2008b, 2010; Sankofa, 2003).

Also, unless informed by corporate social responsibility (CSR) principles, current modes of production are predicated on classical economic theory, and the ideologies of capitalism and neoliberalism (i.e., individualism, deregulation, decentralization, and privatization) (McGregor, 2008a). The result is a market system that, intentionally or not, creates huge systems of injustice; infringements on human, labour, and environmental rights; gendered inequities; threats to peace, human security, and freedoms; and, massive encroachments on the human condition, and the commons.

This violent marketplace and consumer infrastructure emerged out of the tensions of perceived scarcity, one of the main determinants of conflict (Homer-Dixon, 1991). More specifically, the ideologies of capitalism, top-down globalization, and neo-liberalism are predicated on the notion of scarcity, rather than abundance. With perceived scarcity comes competition for resources (land, water, labour, money, time), leading to winners and losers. Ironically, scarcity is not necessarily the problem; instead, it is often the uneven *distribution of resources* that is the problem (an injustice). There *is* enough to go around; however, situations of unfair access to political, economic, and other resources, because of involuntary membership in marginalized groups (structural violence), leads to exploitation, repression, and alienation as well as denial of basic needs (Galtung, 1969; Homer-Dixon, 1991).

As a consequence, so-called affluent people in a consumer society live a relatively comfortable life at the expense of impoverished labourers and fragile ecosystems, often in other countries. The veil of consumerism enables consumers to overlook the connections between consumerism and oppressive regimes (e.g., governments, world financial institutions, and transnational corporations) that violate human rights and increase drug trade, human slavery, and military spending (Klintmann & Boström, 2006; Sankofa, 2003). This disregard is possible because consumerism accentuates and accelerates human fragmentation, isolation and exclusion for the profit of the few, contributing significantly to violence (Board of the Commission of the Churches on International Affairs, 1994).

A consumer society values this new form of slavery, and the resultant disposable people. It also ignores the implications of Northern consumption decisions on Majority

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World[1] citizens, the next generation, and those not yet born (Sankofa, 2003). Many Northern consumers justify their consumer behaviour with the argument that their purchases ensure Majority World citizens have a job and an income, preventing them from starving; that is, the oppressors view themselves as liberators of the oppressed. However, Northern consumers often do not appreciate that the working conditions are not safe; the salaries are insufficient; and, the children working to supplement adult incomes cannot attend school. Also, human dignity and self-esteem are negatively affected, setting people up for future failure and other stark realities evident in the examples of structural violence committed by consumerist lifestyles (McGregor, 2008a, 2010).

A counter argument is that many Northern consumers believe that people in Majority World countries deserve what they get. If they would just work harder to produce goods and deliver services for Northern consumption, they would be able to raise themselves up and out of poverty and despair. Unless they work harder, they are not deserving of liberation, and they deserve to be oppressed. This position smacks of Social Darwinism and the neo-liberal principle of individualism, that is, everyone out for themselves (McGregor, 2010).

From still another perspective, McGregor (2010) suggests that consumerism is also a form of slavery to those *doing* the consuming. People behave as they do in a consumer society because they are *so* indoctrinated into the logic of the market that they cannot *see* anything wrong with what they are doing; they are wearing blinders. Because they do not critically challenge the neo-liberal market ideology, and what it means to live in a consumer society, they actually contribute to their *own* oppression, becoming slaves of the market and capitalism. This enslavement happens at the same time their consumption decisions oppress others who make the goods and deliver the services.

In fact, such strong and unsustainable consumption patterns have developed over time and have gone unchallenged that consumerism and structural violence represent dominant forces in human social interaction, especially in the marketplace. These forces are transforming human life in powerfully destructive ways (Santi Pracha Dhamma Institute, 2001). They need to be addressed with non-violence (Martin, 2001), which is the philosophical awareness that each human being is significant, valuable, and powerful in a good sense (UNESCO, 2009).

## Principles of Non-violence

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[1] The term *developing country* refers to an economy that is still in the developing stages (likely agricultural) relative to more advanced industrial, service and/or information based economies. It has taken on negative connotations because people assume that the whole country is developing when in fact languages, cultures and the like may be strong and thriving as judged by contextual and indigenous standards. Peoples of developing countries have begun to self-identify as *Majority World* citizens. They comprise nearly 90% of the world's population, compared to the Privileged North, the Minority World (Alam, 2009).

The principles of non-violence are now offered as a way to challenge the harm caused by untenable consumer behaviour. When people demand non-violence relative to consumption, they are expressing their humanity (UNESCO, 2009). In 2007, the Nobel Peace Prize laureates presented the United Nations with a 13-principle *Charter of a World Without Violence*. Principle eight focuses on "encourag[ing] people to adjust their consumption on the basis of resource availability and real human needs" (Permanent Secretariat of Nobel Peace Laureates, 2007, p. 3). People living a non-violent way of life adhere to a collection of guiding principles: no harm, cooperation, respect, focus on process, humanization, resistance, conversion, inclusiveness, perseverance, fellowship, sharing, mutuality, sustainability, trust, honesty and, above all, Truth. Table 1 compares these to the principles and assumptions of violence. The following text elaborates on the fundamental tenets of non-violence.

Table 1. Comparing non-violent and violent assumptions and principles

| Non-violence Principles | Violence Principles |
|---|---|
| "Let us grow and move ahead together," a positive sum game | "I win, you lose," a zero-sum game |
| See people as *humans* and honor them (meaning you always have to humanize the situation) | See people as *the enemy,* then label and treat them as such (enemy is Latin *inimicus,* "not friend"); enables dehumanization (degrading and debasing) |
| Oppose and resist *the action*, program, or agenda, not the person; resist the sin while affirming the opponent's integrity, capacity for growth, and their ability to examine their values and beliefs; value their Truth | Oppressor opposes *the person* and resists the sinner by demoralizing, demeaning, and marginalizing them; opponent does not value the oppressed's Truth, their capacity for growth, or their values and beliefs |
| Respect the person and *do not harm* (softens anger); this approach evokes respect (rather than relies on respect) | Harm others (and their property) with no respect for the person (hardens anger) |
| Positive feelings stem from belief that we are *all connected* | Negative feelings stem from belief that we are *all separate* and disconnected |
| *Never* sacrifice principles of freedom, truth, justice, dignity, peace and honor, but *do* adapt strategies and techniques | Take a strategic approach in order to win, dismissing overarching principles; do whatever it takes to win |
| Set in *motion* forces that lead to a new equation and a new situation | Set in *place* forces that seize, crush, break, and beat down the opponent |

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|---|---|
| In the end, people are liberated but friends (*fellowship*) | In the end, people are dominated and they are not friends (enemies and adversaries) |
| *Mutual learning process* for *change*; see life as a co-evolution toward a loving community in which everyone thrives; power is shared for the common good | *Power struggle*; see life as a clash of egos where victors make material and symbolic gains (symbolic means a visible symbol for something abstract, like reputation); oppressor resists change, striving for the status quo, which keeps them in power |
| *Success* is "We moved ahead together" (and did so by undermining the opponent's sources of power, creating new webs of shared power) | Success is "I won "(by imposing power over others while maintaining separateness); oppressors gloat, brag, and boast *a victory* |
| Success is when *you overcame yourself;* it is an *inner victory* over self, a personal gain that no one can take away (successful inner struggle and learned discipline leading to satyagraha) | Success is when you *beat someone;* it is an *external victory*, expressed as "I won, you lost"; however, this gain can be taken away with more force and more violence |
| Heal yourself *at the same time* that you are trying to get oppressor off of your back and heal them too (i.e., open their minds so they can open their hearts) | Win the battle or the war, and *then* deal with each person (if at all); perhaps heal physical wounds but usually not spiritual or personal wounds |
| You *and* me against an unjust situation | You against me |
| Focus on eliciting *right* action and behaviour | Focus on the wrongs |

### Positive Force, Satyagraha

Both violence and non-violence are construed as strong forces. Violence is a force externally exerted on someone else. Non-violence is a force created within someone. Violence is power over people while non-violence is power from within. Non-violence is "a positive force generated by self-sacrifice in the cause of the Truth" (Nagler, 1999, p. 5). This positive force is not physical power (as it is with violence); rather, it is inner power, a mental power and strength that is gained from the inner struggles to overcome negative emotions and reactions (mainly fear, anger, frustration, greed, and alienation).

When people have learned non-violence, they know how to control their negative reactions, then store this energy and power. Their minds and emotions are always active, always generating a positive force that is stored. This power, called *satyagraha*, is often referred to as

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soul-force or Truth-force (Nagler, 1999). The word literally means clinging firmly to the Truth (satya), with *graha* meaning hanging on against immorality and injustice. Satyagraha can also mean universal well-being. Humans are linked through contemporary world interdependencies. The fate and fortunes of individuals, families, nations, and ecologies have become interlocked (Naidu, 1996). Naidu (1996) proposes that "if *satya* (truth) ... is enlightenment that liberates the human spirit from the darkness of ignorance, then pursuit of *satya* is the most meaningful search for humanity. Human beings should continually struggle to seek and hold on to truth" (p. 153).

**Self-sacrifice and Self-discipline**

The act of 'hanging in there' against injustice, the process of satyagraha, takes incredible self-discipline, and sometimes self-sacrifice. The latter is defined as the willingness to always engage in an inner struggle to harness the positive force and release it in constructive ways toward other people. People learn how to master their impulse to either fight *the other* out of anger, or flee *the other* out of fear. Instead, they face, control, and convert this energy and it becomes a reservoir of inner strength. In effect, they learn to conserve their anger and fear for peacemaking actions (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996).

The assumption is that, as people discipline themselves to harness their emotions, creating a stockpile of positive, inner energy, they build up steadfast resistance and cultivate relentless persistence. When they draw on this energy to resist oppression and fight injustices, the action is called *offering the satyagraha* (drawing from inner power). The person taking the action is called a *satyagrahi*. It takes years to prepare for this, but the self-discipline can hold and be employed throughout life. Non-violent satyagraha is a way of life, a means of resisting injustice with a vision toward peace, harmony, participation, solidarity, and well-being (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996).

Mishra (2007, pp. 2-3) offers a compelling account of people offering satyagraha during the years-long fight to save the Yamuna river in India. For the first time in history of the Delhi government assembly, someone dared to stand up and shout from the viewer's gallery, speaking for the people's cause:

> It resulted in a pin drop silence in the hall... Everyone was shocked and in a state of disbelief as if wakened up from a deep sleep. Soon they realized what has happened, Marshals ran to Sunil Prabhakar, got hold of him he kept shouting while marshals were dragging him out of the house. Before anyone could understood another satyagrahi Kapil Mishra raised his voice... . Kapil has got time [to speak], as marshals were busy with Sunil. Again pin drop silence in house, before marshal could come, kapil mishra stopped and walked to marshal. History was repeated, this time a bit differently, hot debate on Yamuna stated in the house, the job was done. Govt. initially threatened these satyagrahis that they would be sent to tihar but in next couple of hours they realized that these two have the

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power of truth with them, by evening both were released.

## Gandhian Notion of Truth

The non-violent notion of Truth stems from Gandhi, who held a wider connotation of Truth than does the English language. For Gandhi, truth was not only factual and logical, but also moral and metaphysical (Ostergaard, 1974). "In its moral sense, Truth for Gandhi approximates to the concept of Justice in the natural law tradition of Western thought. But in its fullest sense Truth is more than Justice; it is truth in the realm of knowledge and righteousness in the realm of conduct, as well as justice in social relations" (p. 5).

To view the world from the Gandhian notion of Truth, people have to have an open mind, be empathetic of other people's concepts of Truth, be willing to accept convincing new proof, and have a readiness to change their existing view, all without ill will, prejudice, intolerance or violence (Naidu, 1996; Ostergaard, 1974). This notion of Truth assumes that each person has an inner struggle to endure so that he or she can overcome their inner negative feelings. Truth is determined by observation. Truth is always partial and incomplete because reality (what people observe) is always partial and incomplete. Because people see things differently, they have a different reality, meaning they have a different Truth. From a non-violent perspective, people even listen to the people they detest and hate, just so they can catch some remarks about Truth that they would have otherwise missed (Nagler, 1999).

## Do No Harm

From a non-violent perspective, it is unconscionable to harm or take another person's life. To do so deprives the rest of us of their contribution - once they are gone, they are gone, and so is their piece of the Truth. Nonviolence (from Sanskrit *ahimsā,* 'lack of desire to harm or kill') is the personal practice of being harmless to self and others under every condition. It is underpinned by the belief that hurting people, animals, or the environment is unnecessary to achieve an outcome. Instead, it embraces the general philosophy of abstention from violence based on moral, religious, or spiritual principles (Sharp, 2012). Rather than killing or harming *the other*, people would learn to strive for the Truth (respecting the principle of non-injury), hopefully leading to the opening of hearts of *others*, who are also oppressed (Nagler, 1999).

Ostergaard (1974) explains that acts like not striking back, turning the other cheek, and accepting injury without retaliating serve to sharply pull up the opponent in their tracks, shocking them. This dramatic step of 'do not harm' "constitutes a way of reaching the opponent's heart when appeals to his head (rational argument) have failed" (p. 7). Such brave and courageous actions by the satyagrahi demonstrate their seriousness of purpose, and their fearlessness. "In this way, the opponent is reluctantly compelled to respect the person" (p. 7).

## Open the Opponent's Heart

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The non-violent approach to life assumes that when the oppressor sees that the oppressed is not afraid to suffer for what he or she believes in, the oppressor's mind can begin to change, and *then* their heart can begin to change, to soften toward the oppressed. This stance assumes a positive view of *the other*. It assumes that conducting oneself in the non-violent spirit of respect and goodwill can appeal to the opponent's humanity and conscience. What is always needed is the fullest possible development of people's humanity, their potential as human beings (Vellacott, 2000).

This appeal to humanity can lead to a change of heart for two reasons. First, the opponent's view may be converted to the oppressed party's point of view, meaning the former adopts the latter's position; in effect, the oppressed's Truth (position) is more accepted as right. Second, if the opponent can be convinced to participate in a joint problem solving effort, both parties can search for the Truth, appreciating that the opponent's position may be nearer to the Truth (Ryan, 1997). If successful, the *violent party* will lose their balance when confronted with non-violent opposition. In this place of disequilibrium, a chance for new perspectives emerges. If people are not ready to accept that they may be wrong and their opponent right, they are not ready for a non-violent perspective (Burgess & Burgess, 1998; Ostergaard, 1974).
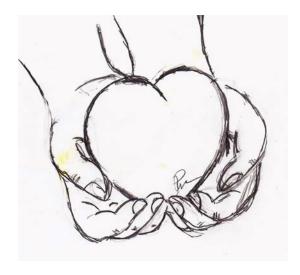
Personal suffering works when it *moves the heart* of the oppressor (who is also seen as oppressed). Figure 1 represents a hardened heart, grasped firmly by an angry and fearful fist. The strength of the fist stems from: worries, anxieties and fears; blind spots, biases and anxieties; discrimination and prejudice; the belief that we are all separate and disconnected; guilt and bad illusions; mindless automation; and, compulsions and greed. This fist represents suppression (to choke, stifle, smother and quench), repression (to hold back or hold down), and oppression (to prosecute, wrong, cause suffering, sorrow, distress or grief) (Vellacott, 2000).

Figure 1. Representation of a hardened heart (art work by Peter D. D. McGregor)



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If one were to peel back the fingers of the fist, dealing with each of these strong emotions and ideological underpinnings of anger and fear, one could create a softened heart, firmly but gently cradled in cupped hands (see Figure 2). Cradles act as frameworks that can support a non-violent approach to conflict. Cradles represent connections between people. They serve to catch people as they are cut away from their familiar, violence-driven world views. Also, cradles are a good metaphor for care, trust, nurturance, love, support, compassion, and they offer safe havens (inspired by Vellacott, 2000).

Figure 2. Representation of a softened heart (art work by Peter D. D. McGregor)

## Free Reasoning (Connectedness)

Although the intent of non-violence is to gain access to the positive force, human conditioning has stifled the expression of this force by propagating the idea of disconnectedness. The latter sets up the dynamic of separateness and isolation, enabling people to dismiss, even fear, the invisible *other*. To counter this reasoning, people must *unlearn their instincts* to fight against the other person, to see the bad in them, to assume the worst. Accessing their positive inner force enables people to free human reasoning from its inertia (people resisting change). Non-violence understands reasoning to be an *awareness that all people are connected* rather than separate, fragmented beings. Having access to this reason (awareness of connectedness) allows people to regain control of their baser emotions, be it hate, jealousy, greed, fear, frustration, or anger. Instead, they learn to convert, store and then release the positive energy under self-discipline to maximum effect (Nagler, 1999).

## Hold to Principles, Change Strategies

Acting with tenacity, conviction, and determination, those offering the Satyagraha never compromise on principles but they are very creative in finding new strategies and tactics if they are unsuccessful in their cause. Resilience and resistance are the core of non-violence (Nagler, 1999). To resist means to withstand pressure, strive against, oppose, and take a stand. Gene Sharp (1973) developed 198 non-violent methods of resistance, see www.peacemagazine.org/198.htm. These can take two forms. First, people can rally together in *symbolic* action, engaging in marches, pickets, sits ins and fasting, often (but not always) while wearing ribbons, pins, carrying posters, or handing out pamphlets.

Second, people can also take *concrete actions*, which entail moving forward together by (a) cooperating with the good that the oppressor is doing; (b) not cooperating with their bad (by striking, disobeying curfews, refusing orders, entering illegally); (c) not cooperating as something is happening, often by obstruction and blocking power; and, (d) being constructive when possible yet still eroding the oppressor's power. The latter includes community gardens, newsletters and websites, social media, blogs, and volunteering (Sharp, 1973).

To further organize the 198 methods of resistance, Sharp (1973) created six categories of non-violent right actions: protest and persuasion, social non-cooperation, economic non-cooperation (buycotts and strikes), political non-corporation, and non-violent interventions. The person's view of the opponent determines their overall intent for resisting. Holding a negative view of the opponent (which is not the Gandhian take on non-violence advocated in this paper) involves using force or threats to coerce opponents by persuading them to do something against their will. If the satyagrahi holds a positive view of their opponents, they can try to convert them by persuading them to join their side of justice (the satyagrahi's notion of Truth). Or, they can strive to win the opponent's participation in a joint problem solving effort (by jointly searching for the Truth).

## See People as Humans

Non-violence highly values the principle of seeing people as humans. Reconciliation and healing cannot happen if people *dehumanize* the situation and see the other as the enemy rather than another human being. The word enemy is Latin *inimicus,* meaning not a friend. Such labeling enables dehumanization, degradation, and debasing. To act non-violently depends totally on being able to continue viewing *the other* as a person. Even calling someone 'an unreasonable person' means they are still seen to be a person (Nagler, 1999).

Rector (2014) explains that when people objectify someone (dehumanize them), they tend to see only the surfaces, and then assume that this superficial understanding of the person represents the truth of their existence. "Seeing life this way distorts the deeper truth of ourselves and others, making it possible for us to perpetrate evil [and harm] ... not only on our fellow human beings but upon the planet as a whole" (p. 3). *Rehumanizing* starts when others are seen as human beings again. Non-violence gradually works on the heart of oppressors so that they

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slowly change from within, and come to humanize the oppressed. Instead of seeing people as inhuman objects (i.e., objectifying them, often by calling them animals), humanizing means entering into a relationship with them as a fellow human (Nagler, 1999).

**Success Is Victory over Self**

From a non-violent perspective, success is defined as victory over self rather than a victory over another. Victory of oneself is evident when one's inner spirit forgives, shows compassion, and seeks healing and reconciliation. Nagler (1999) explains that someone who has hated but subsequently learned not to hate is living non-violence, but not so the person who has hated and not learned to forgive. When practicing non-violence, people strive to overcome many negative emotions, which all humans face on a daily basis. Victory over self translates to someone overcoming hatred, greed, vanity, fear, apathy, indulgence, excess, envy, and other negative virtues or vices, even under great provocation. When people learn life lessons and gain new self-insights, they are said to have succeeded because they have transfigured themselves. Even admitting one's errors and failings is a victory within self (Nagler, 1999).

There are no losers in the non-violent process. Indeed, a non-violent practitioner would have failed if she, he, they strived to make someone else lose. The intent is for all to learn, and move forward together (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996). Gandhi viewed non-violence as a second skin that is perpetually renewed but never worn out or cast off. Ongoing victory over self (success) serves to renew this skin so it can be worn in all relationships, not just selected ones (Ostergaard, 1974). This success within self, this learned discipline, sustains people in future satyagraha.

**Abhorrence of Violence**

The abhorrence of violence is another tenet of non-violence. Violence leads to more violence; however, conflicts resolved non-violently stay resolved for good; there are no future flare ups. Henry David Thoreau believed that "what is once well done is done forever" (cited in Nagler, 1999, p. 21). This finality is assured by viewing the satyagraha as a mutual learning process for change rather than accepting life as power struggles over ego clashes. Non-violence brings into play forces that bring about a better situation for *all* concerned. Indeed, the objective is not to *win*, but to *change the situation* itself. The new society or situation that emerges must include those who were perceived as the oppressors, because all voices are needed to find the Truth (satya) (Nagler, 1999; Naidu, 1996; Ostergaard, 1974).

Satyagraha is always practiced with opponents, not against them. "No victory is sought over the opponent, but rather a resolution of the conflict will be of real benefit to both sides" (Ostergaard, 1974, p. 9). Problem and conflict resolutions generated using non-violence are more sustainable than when violence is used, because non-violence is grounded in the Truth. "With truth as its lodestar, [satyagraha] never fails; it is creative nonviolence leading to a constructive

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transforming of relationships... ensuring a basic restructuring of the situation which led to the conflict" (Ostergaard, 1974, p.10). Truth-oriented resolutions work better than power-oriented resolutions because those involved have been mindful of the Truth, privileging it rather than power. Power can be usurped, but Truth is authentic and genuine, worthy of joint respect and preservation (Ostergaard, 1974).

## Non-violence Awareness

In a final interesting twist, Nagler (1999) suggests it is non-violence that is real, positing that violence happens when people lose their awareness of non-violence. This is a compelling philosophical position because the normal assumption is that violence and conflict are natural aspects of people's daily reality, with non-violence being a rare exception to the rule. To reiterate, non-violence is "a positive force generated by self-sacrifice in the cause of the Truth" (p. 5). Non-violence always works to restore justice and improve relationships because of its respect for all humans and life forms, and its tenet to *do no harm*. Nagler (1999) predicts that people will gradually correct the unconscious biases toward violence as more stories come to light of persistent resistance to injustices in society, the core of non-violence. The final section of the paper now applies the tenets of non-violence to reframe consumption.

## Reframing Consumption Through a Non-violence Lens

The violence of the contemporary consumer infrastructure is reflected in humans' negative impact on the natural world, the breakdown of interdependent relationships, and the injustices of global industrial capitalism (via sweatshop, child, and prison labour) (McGregor, 2007). The fallout of the neoliberal capitalistic production mode and complicit consumer behaviour manifests as massive infringements of the principles of non-violence: exploitation, dehumanization, lack of respect, social and economic injustice, harm to others, impoverishment leading to oppression, stressed human relationships, exclusion from power, lack of opportunities, and ecological disharmony. This paper proposes that consumers' perceptions of the marketplace and their role within it would change if viewed from a non-violent perspective. The rest of the paper reframes consumption using a non-violent lens.

Because the consumer society may not be able to contain the violent resentments that it generates (Goldman, 2005), it is imperative that a non-violent perspective is brought to bear. Non-violence is a way to construct harmony among/between human beings, creating self-esteem and a profound respect for other humans and life forms. Once learned, non-violence principles enable individuals to become autonomous beings who can assert their points of view, and take initiatives in conjunction with others. Passing on, and awakening in others, such values as tolerance, solidarity, and peace empowers people to face up to conflict within a consumer society in a positive manner, and then work to transform it, even transcend it (Galtung, 1998; UNESCO, 2009).

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This is a daunting prospect. In the age of top-down, corporate led globalization, neoliberalism, capitalism, and consumerism, it is difficult to find anyone whose consumer choices have not, at one time or another, oppressed another individual in the global web of international trade and consumption. This paper frames billions of consumers as oppressors who are creating and sustaining violence. From a hopeful perspective, the author asserts that bringing a non-violent perspective to bear on consumption can aid in the process of conscientization. Achieving an in-depth understanding of the world allows consumers to perceive and expose social and political contradictions, as well as internal contradictions. Conscientization also includes taking action against the oppressive elements in one's life that are illuminated with these in-depth understandings (Freire, 2007).

Exposing Northern consumers to the notion of non-violence could enlighten them to the world that surrounds them, and the impact that a consumer society has in shaping a shared world. Indeed, non-violence does not speak just to the oppressor (the Northern consumer); it speaks to the humane in everyone. Although people tend to lose touch with humanity as they age in a consumer society, the notion of non-violence brings hope that this situation can be reversed, or at least mitigated. Hope is a connection to the future (Freire, 2007). If the principles of non-violence can sensitize Northern consumers to the oppression they cause, or have the potential to cause, an opportunity is created to find and build empathy. The ability to feel, then show, empathy means people are getting closer to the Truth (Weber & Burrowes, 1990).

This newfound empathy can inform and exponentially multiply people's awareness of the injustices in the world that are created by consuming within a market infrastructure fretted with structural violence. From a non-violent perspective, people can learn that there are other ways of perceiving reality aside from that informed by neoliberalism and capitalism. There are other Truths. The world is a place where others' experiences are just as valid as those of the privileged North. Northern consumers have to learn to trust in the oppressed's knowledge of their lived experiences, and their notion of Truth (Weber & Burrowes, 1990).

Non-violence assumes that people are in process, unfinished, and able to change. From a position of non-violence, Northern consumers would learn to view themselves as the oppressors with a new conscience, accepting that people can change the consumer world together. With the aid of non-violent principles, Northern consumers would learn to name and own their oppressive consumer actions, and then relate differently to those they currently oppress. Rather than viewing the latter as the distant other, outside the realm of care and compassion, Northern consumers would see them as fellow citizens worthy of love and support. With this profound insight, the oppressors (Northern consumers) would continue to educate themselves and transform their behaviours so they would not become, or continue to be, an accomplice to other oppressors. They would learn to acknowledge their privilege, and side with the oppressed, in solidarity.

As Northern consumers become conscious of those who suffer under oppressive social, economic, and political conditions, due to the violence inherent in a consumer society, they

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would join in the struggle to right the injustices. They would engage in disciplined inner struggles against the angst of the consumer society (i.e., alienation, identity loss, fractured relationships and the like). They would build up (accumulate) a positive inner force that could be directed toward relieving oppression, marginalization, and exploitation. They would strive to find the Truth in the context of deeply entrenched structural violence.

This conscientization is deeply valuable *and* possible from a non-violent perspective. It allows Northern consumers to recognize themselves, to help them take their heads out of the proverbial sand, and see to their own emancipation from the oppressive forces of the neoliberal agenda. This new freedom from violent forces would lead to newly found energy to free others from their oppression. In the process, the Truth is served. As soon as Northern consumers become conscious of those who suffer oppression due to Northern consumers' decisions, they could join *the others* in their struggle, striving to move ahead together. Northern consumers would have succeeded if they witnessed a change in their inner self. Citizens in the Majority world would have had their Truth respected and heard. Consumption behaviour could change.

Non-violence is a positive force generated by self-sacrifice in the cause of the Truth. To achieve the best of goals, the path of non-violence calls for a great amount of courage on the part of the person practicing it. It calls for guts and self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice is the personal willingness to give deeply of oneself for a cause, idea or principle; in this case, the moral imperative of non-violent consumption. Theoretically, the oppressed are expected to endure self-pain and sacrifice to move out from under an oppressive situation. This non-violent principle can also be used to sensitize Northern consumers to the notion of self-sacrifice. They could be socialized to become open to deliberately following a course of action that has a high personal risk or certainty of suffering or death (which could otherwise be avoided).

From a non-violent perspective, Northern consumers would be further sensitized to appreciate the fundamental goodness of humans. In the fight for what is right and good, including freedom, morality, justice, and equality, violence would be evaded, meaning consumption practices and attendant value sets would have to change. The human penchant to flee or fight (due to fear and anger) would lessen, making way for consumers to find their identity and relationships in ways other than accumulating material goods.

This perspective enables society to assume that humankind must awaken and understand that the world of consumer violence can blow up in people's faces at any time (pun intended). For the sake of humanity, people need to recognize the futility of indulging in violent consumption. To that end, the principles of non-violence can offer humanity a release from the ills of a consumer society and the injustices of a structurally violent global marketplace. Non-violence seeks to defeat injustices, not people. Through the lens of non-violence, the Truth of what it means to be human would become evident to consumers.

Once Northern consumers realized they were oppressed by the market ideology, they

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would be able to liberate themselves and transform the global situation by critically inserting themselves into the search for the Truth. Their culture of silence and endless consumption would be breached, leading to cooperation, no harm, fellowship, sustainability, humanization, mutuality, inclusiveness and above all, a new Truth of consumption with fellow humans. Overcoming themselves is a massive task for Northern consumers, but the process of *offering the satyagraha* leads to healing; honour; a mutual, co-evolving learning process; and, ultimately, the *right* behaviour (Weber & Burrowes, 1990).

In the non-violent context, *right* stems from Sanskrit *samyañc*, denoting completion, togetherness, wisdom, coherence, and ideal (Allan, 2016). Non-violence aims to attain the Truth through love and *right action*, which requires the elimination of violence from the self, and from the social, political and economic environments. Suffering and offering the satyagraha can educate, enlighten, and transform people (Sharp, 2012). Table 2 posits examples of *right consumption action* using non-violent principles (see Table 1), illustrating how people's perspectives would be profoundly transformed if they strived for *right action* while consuming.

Table 2. Examples of non-violent consumption-talk

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|---|
| • When observing other people consuming in the violent infrastructure, people could take issue with these violent consuming *actions*, but never judge the ethics or morals of the person. |
| • Northern consumers could try to see Majority World labourers as their friends who need to be liberated from oppression. |
| • Northern consumers could envision their consumer decisions as respecting and honoring Majority World labourers, thereby humanizing consumption. |
| • Do not call Majority World labourers *the others*; rather, call them fellow citizens and friends. Together, they become 'you and me against an unjust and violent situation.' |
| • Northern consumers could view consumption as a mutual learning process leading to global change and co-evolution toward a common, loving community. |
| • Northern consumers could try to view owners of trans-national corporations (TNCs) as oppressed by the neo-liberal ideology, and appreciate that they are needed in order to find the Truth. |
| • Each time Northern consumers are about to consume, they could look inside to see what needs to be healed; to succeed when consuming from a non-violent perspective, people have to overcome a negative virtue (e.g., greed, apathy, irresponsibility, indulgence, self-gratification, vanity, excess, envy, laziness, selfishness). Each time they do this, they gain satyagraha (self-Truth), a power they can draw on later to resist oppression and liberate themselves and others. |
| • Try not to say *the* TNC; instead, say *the people* in the TNC, thereby humanizing the situation. Otherwise, it is far too easy to dehumanize (deprive of any positive human qualities), paving the way for relentless aggression, adversity, and conflict. |

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- Northern consumers could strive to work with *the people* in TNCs (rather than calling them the enemy) so all can grow inside and move ahead together; everyone has a piece of the Truth, so every voice is needed.
- People could view consumption as a positive sum game rather than a zero-sum game; they would assume that their *right* actions in the marketplace will achieve wholeness, exhibit wisdom, and ensure togetherness.
- People could take issue with the neo-liberal *agenda* rather than the Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) who live by its principles; that is, strive to reveal the truths behind the ideology, the agenda. Try to see the CEO as a person (fellow human) in need of liberation from an oppressive ideology.
- When consuming, people could let go of their ego (i.e., inner power struggle that instigates external power struggles) and replace it with a sense of connectedness; what happens to one person affects everyone else, mitigating or moderating *wrong* actions.

## Conclusion

Violence prevents the fulfillment of human potential because it blocks an appreciation of shared humanity (Weber & Burrowes, 1990). Non-violence is one way to deal with the inequities of the global consumer marketplace, and the infringements on the human condition. In a consumer society, individuals become numb from their fleeting pleasures of consumption and exploitation by the neo-liberal, capitalistic system. They become so inured to their plight that they lose the ability to have human concern for others who are being run over by the consumerism machine, the violent system. In a consumer society, many people are all-to-willing to sacrifice the well-being and livelihood of others instead of giving up their own indulgences and impulses. Greed-based capitalism and fear-and anger-driven consumerism lead people to overlook the injustices that go hand-in-hand with their consumption decisions.

The principles of non-violence offer preventive hope that, if applied now, they can mitigate untenable human and environmental crises in the future. Consumer structural violence should be fought through non-violent satyagraha, which aims at long-range transformation of human beings, systems, and societies, even while dealing with short-range crises. When non-violence prevails, both the opponent and the sufferer are transformed. The oppressors are compelled to confront their own views on the Truth of the situation, which may lead to conversion. The oppressed may be morally enriched by not compromising fundamental principles (Weber & Burrowes, 1990).

Satyagraha creates and integrates liberty, equality, and fraternity (principles) through the non-violent struggle of the soul-force or Truth-force (Naidu, 1996). When people refuse to consume in a way that is repugnant to their conscience, they are using soul-force (see Tables 1 and 2). With this Truth-force at play, the consumer world can change. At its best, non-violence

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indicates an open mind, the essence of finding the Truth. If nothing else, non-violence can make the violence in the consumerist system more visible so it can be dealt within a constructive manner (Whiting & Drake, 2016). Martin (2001) believes that non-violent right action is the most promising method of moving beyond capitalism and a consumer culture to a more humane society. Wilson (1990) claims that a worldwide nonviolent revolution of consciousness is the only hope left for our species, and the earth.

These sentiments especially ring true for the hope of non-violent consumption. To stem the daunting nature of this vision, people can draw inspiration from Gandhi's belief that in the early stages of a satyagraha, it is not the number of people involved that matters. What matters is that even a few people acting with "clarity, consistency, courage, and dedication" (Nagler, 1999, p. 20) can create and sustain momentum in the spirit of Truth.

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