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Kurt Schock (ed.), Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle

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The efficacy of nonviolence as a political tool has been pondered over for centuries. The long history of writings on nonviolence and nonviolent struggle/civil resistance took a quantum leap with the campaigns of Mahatma Gandhi and the investigation of those who not only described campaigns but also attempted to analyse them in order to distil lessons that explained why at times mass political movements succeeded and at other times they failed. The noteworthy authors, such as Richard B. Gregg (*The Power of Nonviolence*), Krishnalal Shridharani (*War Without Violence*), Joan Bondurant (*Conquest of Violence*) and, most significantly, Gene Sharp (*The Politics of Nonviolent Action* and *Waging Nonviolent*

Struggle), penned ground-breaking works, but, the concept of nonviolent struggle remained marginalised and did not make it into the mainstream of political science. Then, in the last few decades, the world witnessed "People Power", the fall of the Berlin Wall, the various Colour Revolutions and, most recently, the Arab Spring. Nonviolent struggle could no longer be ignored, and a new spate of important and scholarly writings on the topic appeared.

In fact, in the last twenty or so years it has been difficult to keep up with all the new offerings. Some of them gave accounts of various struggles (for example Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall's *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*), others attempted to draw out the lessons from the examples generally written about in order to provide strategic principles for enhancing the likelihood of success in nonviolent campaigns (for example Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler's *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*). More recently the literature on nonviolent struggle/civil resistance has provided a more in-depth analysis of nonviolent political movements. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan (*Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*) demonstrated that nonviolent mass political movements succeed more often than violent ones, and Kurt Schock (*Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies*) examined the factors that increased the resilience of protesters and assisted them in challenging the state's power base. He also made an attempt to tease out the factors that promoted regime change in some countries and examined why they did not manage to do so in others. Most recently we have seen the publication of edited books that recovered early nonviolent histories that have been overshadowed by nationalist and at times mythical narratives of violent resistance (Maciej Bartkowski ed., *Recovering Nonviolent History: Civil Resistance in Liberation Struggles*), and more recent civil resistance campaigns where factors such as power, economic conditions and external intervention have been taken into account (Adam Roberts and Timothy Garton Ash eds., *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non-violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*). The latest offering in this category, one that delves into the less obvious and under researched aspects of nonviolent struggle, even further is *Civil Resistance: Comparative Perspectives on Nonviolent Struggle*, edited by Kurt Schock.

The book aims to explore the practice and dynamics of civil resistance. It points out that nonviolent action is something other than politics as usual, that it cannot be located on a gradual continuum that goes from conventional politics to violence. Civil resistance can be summarised by noting that economic dependence exists since, the resources of a state must be constantly replenished. If workers withdraw their labor, citizens refuse to pay taxes, or third parties such as allies or important international trading partners withdraw support, end relations, or impose sanctions, then state power may be undermined. The book states "thus, governments depend on the cooperation of their own citizens, but also on other states and increasingly on nonstate transnational entities" (p.18). However, the essays in this book investigate subtler dimensions of this more or less standard definition of civil resistance.

Schock, in his introductory essay, makes the point that to understand civil resistance there are four central dynamics: widespread mobilisation, weathering repression, severing the opponent from its sources of power, and constructing alternatives. Varying essays in this collection tackle different aspects of this dynamic, with several of them drawing not only on the literature of civil resistance, but also that of social movements and revolution. We are presented with a view of nonviolence that takes local and personal realities into account in ways that are only just now making an appearance in the literature on nonviolence.

The first half of the book explores the dynamics of civil resistance, sometimes through case studies and at other times by drawing together instances from several sources. The first paper, by Julie Norman, tackles on the issue of the ways in which nonviolence can be framed by examining the Palestinian struggle. While the first Palestinian Intifada was extensively written about in terms of nonviolence, the nonviolent resistance that was continued under the admittedly more violent Second Intifada has been all but overlooked. Norman investigates the reasons why popular mobilisation has been limited in the more recent struggle even though the scope of grievances has expanded and intensified, and why nonviolent activities became mainly restricted to protest, persuasion and advocacy instead of direct intervention or civil disobedience. She notes that, in particular for the youth who had no memory of the use of nonviolent resistance in the First Intifada, the effect of the Oslo

Peace Accords resulted in redefining nonviolence in a way that distanced it from active resistance. Nonviolence became synonymous with coexistence and this meant that it could be seen as a way of advocating normalisation of relations with Israel and therefore the acceptance of occupation. In other words, "the concept of nonviolence was reframed under Oslo from one of struggle and resistance to one of accommodation and pacification' (p.41). Or even, given the preponderance of Western nonviolence trainers and donors who portrayed nonviolence as dialogue and peace building, nonviolence came to be seen as a Western construct designed to subdue Palestinians rather than bolster their resistance. She concludes that "Perhaps the most important challenge for activists is to reframe nonviolence as a form of strategic resistance, not a form on normalization or passivity" (p.51).

Janjira Sombatpoonsiri makes the point that while there is now quite a broad literature on nonviolence and humour, it must be remembered that one size does not fit all, that the tactical use of humour is contingent on the context of the resistance. Humour, as a form of communication with the wider public may be useful for the mobilisation of a resistance movement, and also to counter opponent's oppression, but, activists need to take into account cultural senses of appropriateness. Using the Otpor movement, which led campaigns to overthrow the Serbian dictator Slobodan Milosevic, as an example, the author demonstrates that in this case the "advantages of humour in nonviolent resistance campaigns are contingent on different natures of local politics in Serbia" (p.60). While there were towns where activists saw humorous actions as benefitting their local campaigns, in other towns they avoided staging humorous actions because they deemed them to be counterproductive. As Sombatpoonsiri notes, "Without the substantial cooperation and support of opposition parties, independent media, and NGOs, humorous protest actions proved counterproductive because they exposed Otpor activists to the risk of harsh repression" (p. 74), or because such protests were deemed by the locals to be culturally inappropriate and thus did not garner support. In these cases, activists could employ other tactics that were deemed more appropriate by the targeted communities. In other words, familiarity with the way of life of the local community means that activists understand cultural boundaries, which ensures that lines are not

crossed in ways that would resonate negatively with the local community. This insider knowledge ensures appropriate "common sense" in addition to rationalised plans and strategic calculations.

Examining youth mobilisation in the Orange Revolution in the Ukraine, Olena Nikolayenko demonstrates how a lack of nonviolent discipline and tactical innovation can damage a resistance campaign. For example, the breach of nonviolent discipline in 2000-2001crippled the protest movement against the incumbent president, while a commitment to nonviolence increased the level of youth mobilisation against the regime in 2004. Here we have an example of strategic learning being put to use from one campaign to the next.

The topic of regime counterstrategies to outmanoeuvre resisters is surveyed by Sharon Erickson Nepstad in her examination of the civil resistance movements in Panama and Kenya. In Panama, General Noriega at first attempted to use force to break the growing nonviolent resistance movement. When this failed he focussed on fomenting tensions within the opposition movement and ensuring that his troops stayed loyal by making sure that they grew wealthy under his regime. The dictator in Kenya, Daniel arap Moi, engaged in a ruthless elimination of enemies, and guaranteed his own political survival by neutralising international sanctions by holding reasonably fair elections. An election may appear to be clean on election day but could be organised in a way that obstructed opposition pre-election efforts. Bribes, threats, harassment of opposition, and the passing of legislation that limited the chances of opposition victory at the poles were actions that were not evident at polling stations where observers saw citizens casting their ballots with few hindrances. From these cases Nepstad concludes that "a good strategy that withdraws multiple forms of citizen-based power from a regime is not always enough to achieve one's goal" (p.133). In short, rulers have more tools than blatant repression to ensure that they remain in power. Their countermeasures can be far subtler than arrests and assaults, and perhaps more effective.

Nepstad's analysis sets the scene for Brian Martin's following chapter. Martin has written a great deal about the dynamics of nonviolent action, on how violent repression can backfire by undermining the legitimacy of authorities and mobilising support for the challengers, and also

how the authorities can choose tactics to inhibit a backfire. Martin has examined Gregg's "moral jiu-jitsu" and Sharp's "political jiu-jitsu", where the tables are turned on the oppressor, and has come up with a more comprehensive model he terms "backfire". For example, in East Timor following the Indonesian massacre of peaceful protesters rather than merely terrorising them into submission, the killings helped to create an international movement in support of East Timorese independence. The violence had backfired on the government and benefitted the protesters. Here Martin summarises the five types of tactics that governments such as that of Indonesia can use to reduce observer outrage: cover up the action; devalue the target; reinterpret what happened through lying, minimizing, blaming and framing; using official channels to give an appearance of justice; and intimidating or rewarding the people involved. These were all attempted by the regime. However, there are also activist responses that can be used to prevent the reduction of outrage: expose the actions (and this was the key in this case through video evidence of the massacre), validate the target, interpret events as injustice, avoid or discredit official channels, mobilise support, and resist intimidation and rewards.

Veonique Dudouet adds to the literature concerning third party interventions in nonviolent struggles for human rights and democracy (mostly concerned with protective accompaniment, for example by Peace Brigades International or Christian Peacemaker teams, and interposition, for example by Witness for Peace or the Gulf Peace Team) to include the direct and indirect role of symbolic, financial, or technical support by state, interstate and nonstate actors. She concludes that successful civil resistance "must be homegrown and developed over the course of several years, and the role of outside assistance in these victories can only be marginal and secondary" because "only local movements possess sufficient knowledge about their own context to secure their own paths towards liberation, but may need external actors to support them along the way" (p.194). In short, third-party support is useful but, such support must not impose on local struggles, and undermine their autonomy.

The second part of the book is more philosophical, and examines the frontiers of civil resistance. In this section definitions and assumptions are investigated and possible further avenues of study is suggested.

Regardless of this, Dustin Ells Howes' chapter on the defence of freedom with civil resistance in the early Roman Republic may have found a better home in a journal of political philosophy. It will probably prove a little too esoteric for most of the readers of a text concerned with lessons that can be learned from recent nonviolent struggles to help refine the art. After a detailed examination of a series of successful civil resistance campaigns by Roman plebeians in the fifth century BCE, he criticises the currently popular political position concerning the need to defend "freedom" through military violence.

Sean Chabot's paper, "Making Sense of Civil Resistance: From Theories and Techniques to Social Movement *Phronesis*", makes the point that while much of the writing on nonviolent action, for example that of Gene Sharp, may provide various theories of power, list many methods of activism, and examine the dynamics involved in civil resistance, it ignores the "practical wisdom that activists develop and employ in their immediate social contexts" (p.227). He notes that such wisdom and intelligent context-recognising action involves "more than awareness of basic principles, facts, theories, and techniques" (p. 236). While Sharp may "appeal to the heads" of nonviolent activists, their "the heart" must also be considered. Chabot asks theorists to find a deeper understanding of how social movement activist develop their moral visions, situational ethics, and practical wisdom. Here an invitation is extended for analysts to look at the pros and cons of careful planning versus the engagement in spontaneous actions.

In the penultimate, and a substantive chapter, Stellan Vinthagen examines the degree to which the knowledge of nonviolent action held by scholars is relevant or of practical use to nonviolent activists. His call is to develop "more practical, more creative, and more effective nonviolent action campaigns in the future" (p. 260), harking back to a Gandhian position which places heavy emphasis on ethics and morals rather than just techniques. To achieve this, he asks for a better utilisation of the literature related to studies of social movements and revolution. Vinthagen suggests three forms of nonviolent action beside the commonly examined instrumental ones that offer a method for altering the distribution of power and attaining specified goals. He also sees nonviolent

action as a normative action (the building up of new personal habits and social institutions as seen, for example, in Gandhi's "constructive program"), self-expressive articulation (the countering of dehumanising enemy images in ways that allow for the demonstration of dignity, common humanity, solidarity, and possibly, again in Gandhian terms, the use of voluntary suffering in order to reach the "heart" of the opponent), and communicative rationality (the finding of forms of meetings, the exchange of views, arguments and opinions that creatively develop ways of communicating and the building of trust). Vinthagen claims that all four dimensions "need to be applied simultaneously in order to develop an effective nonviolent action campaign" (p. 281), and he calls for further research to explore this model of nonviolent action. Harking back to Chabot's paper, it would be interesting to see how this suggested spontaneous approach, taking cognisance of subjective realities, will square with the generally accepted position that in order to achieve maximum effectiveness nonviolent action must be carefully planned.

In the final substantive paper, Chaiwat Satha-Anand revisits the definitions of nonviolence, coming to the conclusion that rather than there being a division between principled and pragmatic nonviolence, the division may be illusory or at least that the line between them is blurry, and that we should try "to regain the sight of connectedness lost" (p. 298).

As already mentioned above, several of these chapters link in with the observations and arguments of other chapters. For example, Chabot's chapter ties in with the chapters by Sombatpoonsiri and Dudouet. They all discuss the importance of insider knowledge to help understand the motivations for various approaches taken by activists and this allows for some deeper understanding of the dynamics that play such an important part in the success or otherwise of civil resistance action against repressive regimes. It also links with the examination of subjective perspectives of nonviolent activists as examined in Vinthagen's chapter. In a similar way, Martin's chapter, in its highlighting of official channels as a means of reducing outrage over injustices, ties in with Norman's observations concerning the Oslo accords and Nepstad's analysis of the Kenyan elections. While the editor has pointed out some of these links through notations in brackets, the book may have been even more cohesive if the

contributors had been able to read each other's drafts beforehand and were encouraged to make their own connections. But this is merely a quibble.

For those who want to probe more deeply into the analysis provided in some of these chapters, it should be pointed out that several of them are in fact useful summaries of arguments dealt with in greater detail elsewhere. For this reason, it may be instructive to look up Brian Martin's book *Justice Ignited: The Dynamics of Backfire*, Janjira Sombatpoonsiri's book *Humor and Nonviolent Struggle in Serbia*, and Stellan Vinthagen's book *A Theory of Nonviolent Action: How Civil Resistance Works*.

In his summarising final chapter, Schock expresses his hope that *Civil Resistance* has moved the debates concerning nonviolent activism "beyond some of the limitations of the existing theory and approach to civil resistance" and has managed to "open up the possibilities of integration or dialectical synthesis" to include insights from the broader social science literature and to open further avenues of research (p. 314), and this valuable new addition to the growing field of literature concerning nonviolent struggle has done both. While it points to areas that require further study as our insight into the dynamics of nonviolence increases, it also provides a re-reminder that those who still do not take this literature seriously ignore it at their own cost.

Thomas Weber