

The People Shall Govern: The Importance of Nonviolence in the Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa

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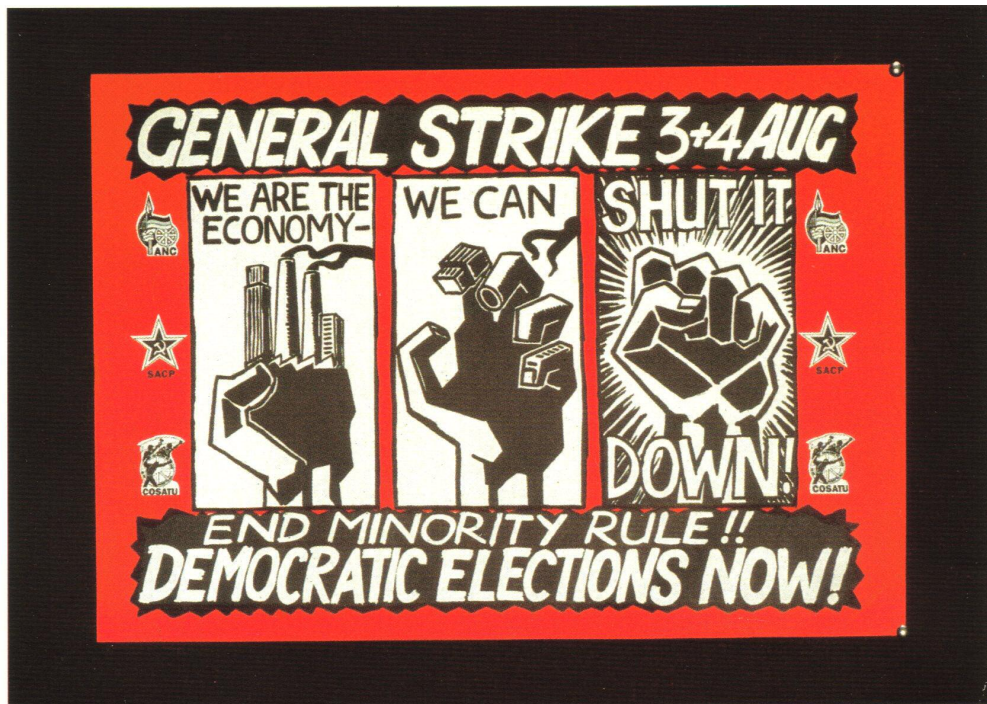
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Boston College
College of Arts and Sciences
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The People Shall Govern: The Importance of Nonviolence in the Struggle against Apartheid in South Africa



A Senior Thesis by

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Abstract

The institution of apartheid (or official segregation), implemented in South Africa in 1948, drew immediate and prolonged opposition. For decades, groups within South Africa and in countries around the world protested government policies and repression. Many anti-apartheid activists expressed their objections to the system of apartheid through expressly nonviolent actions, including strikes, boycotts, demonstrations, and the formation of alternative institutions. Opponents of apartheid also garnered support from the international community to pressure the South African government with sanctions and embargoes. At the same time, several groups of anti-apartheid activists chose to resort to violent means to protest the government. These acts of violence included sabotage and, occasionally, the deaths of government officials or collaborators.

This paper examines historical and contemporary theories of the morality and effectiveness of nonviolent action. After studying the history of the struggle against apartheid and the use of nonviolent action in South Africa, the argument is made that the consistent and prolonged use of nonviolent actions played the most crucial role in the downfall of the apartheid system.

Cover illustration: Postcard depicting a poster printed by the African National Congress and the South African Communist Party.

Dedication

This thesis is written with gratitude to my parents, for always encouraging my independence, but never letting me get too far away from them, and for instilling in me the ideals they've always held, from their time as SDS activists up to now, and to my brother, who I know will continue to carry these ideals with him;

to Professor Charles Derber, always the most supportive and encouraging advisor I could have had, for teaching me how to strengthen my arguments but never telling me exactly what to do;

and to my roommates and friends, for being the most fun group of people I know, for putting up with all my antics and random spurts of energy, for allowing me to enjoy their company every day; and to Sam, for being a computer genius and saving this thesis when it appeared on the brink of electronic demise;

and most especially to my roommate Amaris, for being my best friend over the past four years, for listening to my rants and always enriching me with her insightful wisdom, for encouraging me to think more deeply about things, and for dragging me to Late Night to get a chocolate chip cookie when she sees that it's necessary.

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Introduction

This thesis was born out of a feeling that I cannot shake: a feeling that there must be a way to be and act and react and deal with problems in the world that does not involve harming or taking the lives of other humans. This feeling is deeply spiritual. As I've grown estranged from many ideas of organized religion I have come to embrace a notion of spiritual interconnectedness – the idea that we are all somehow part of a larger whole, which means that we are part of each other. What happens to one person in some way can and does affect others far removed. I believe that a fundamental humanity connects us all. This means that there is a responsibility among us to respect and cherish all beings.

I become very upset when I read the news or learn about conflicts around the world and discover a multitude of ways in which human beings harm one another. I oppose the use of violence on both moral and practical grounds. Morally, I see great hypocrisy in the use of violence to succeed in a certain conflict or struggle. The taking of another life in some way, I believe, robs an individual of some of their own humanity. It simply makes sense to me, inherently, that we should do all we can do to avoid loss of life. Practically speaking, also, I believe there is little benefit from the use of violence. When this strategy is used to bring about change, I see no way that violence will then be eradicated from the “new” or “improved” society. Simplistically, violence begets violence.

I spent one semester studying abroad in Cape Town, South Africa, and, as many before and after me who have traveled to Africa, I became enthralled with the culture and history of this diverse continent. Specifically, I was continuously amazed at the progress

that South Africa had made in the ten years after the end of apartheid. I was very impressed with the officially recognized equality of races and attempts to better the lives of the many who suffered during apartheid. South Africa still has a long way to go before everyone in the country has shelter, enough to eat, and access to education and health care, but we must remember apartheid ended only one decade ago. Institutionalized segregation ended in the United States four decades ago, and I would argue our country still has massive improvements to make in the provision of basic social services to all members of our population.

In South Africa, I learned that the struggle to end apartheid, while largely nonviolent, had included some very violent actions as well. I was shocked to learn that Nelson Mandela himself had helped to form the militant wing of the African National Congress, and for some time supported the use of sabotage and violence in the struggle against apartheid. Something inside of me did not sit right: I couldn't equate the beauty of the country that I knew with the ugliness of using violence as a means to achieve an end. I knew that nonviolence had played a crucial role in the downfall of apartheid, and I wanted to know what that role was. I was partly motivated, I must admit, by a stubborn, rather non-academic impulse: I *wanted* to believe that nonviolence was responsible for bringing apartheid to an end. However, I knew that I needed to support this with facts, and I set out to do so. The result of this endeavor is the thesis found below.

I. Nonviolence Theory

At the heart of nonviolence theory, as described by many leaders and scholars, is the undeniable fact that nonviolence is morally right. I do not doubt that even the most

decorated military generals would concede that to not inflict harm or death upon other people is the morally correct thing to do (although many would probably argue that in an imperfect world, we cannot always be morally perfect). Plato, Buddha, Jesus, Thoreau, King, Gandhi, Day – all people who have preached the morality of nonviolence. A contemporary scholar writes

The argument of nonviolent resistance is that the people, with only their bare hands, have a monopoly of moral force, even though the governing power has a monopoly of weapons of suppression. Moral force is enhanced by a movement which relies on the power of love rather than the power to kill.¹

Indeed, were humans to consistently live as we believe to be morally correct, nonviolence would be the only way to handle conflicts and problems. However, as we can clearly see with the war and violence in our society, this is not the case. The problem, I believe, is that most people may see nonviolence as favorable, but ineffective. Therefore, people turn to other means to achieve their ends.

This problem of efficacy is one that I believe is addressed in many of the writings of the most influential advocates of nonviolence. After all, these nonviolent leaders would not have chosen to use nonviolence when struggling for social change if it was not deemed to be effective. Whether it be a refusal to pay taxes or a determination to retain a majority of moral force, many influential leaders and academics believe in the efficacy of nonviolence.

Henry David Thoreau's frustrations at the actions of the United States government in the early 19th century prompted him to write about his interpretation of civil disobedience, an active form of nonviolent resistance. Thoreau understood that by

¹ South Africa: Challenge and Hope. Revised edition. Ed. Lyle Tatum, American Friends Service Committee. USA: Hill and Wang, 1987. P. 158.

paying taxes to the government, he was directly contributing to the government's policies of slavery and a war in Mexico. He thus decided to stop paying taxes altogether, so as to ensure that he played no part in the enslavement or deaths of other people. Thoreau civilly disobeyed the laws of his country, laws that he considered to be unjust – in this instance, because the laws forced him to be complicit in the violence perpetrated by the government. He wrote, “If [a law] is of such a nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law. Let your life be a counter friction to stop the machine.”² Thoreau saw the power in withdrawing one's economic compliance with a disfavorable system. He explains

If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood. This is, in fact, the definition of a peaceable revolution, if any such is possible.³

In this way, Thoreau saw economic defiance as the most effective way to enact change in 19th century American society.

Mahatma Gandhi's commitment to the practice of nonviolence was rooted in the belief that all peoples and creatures are made out of the same material and are inherently interconnected, and therefore one should not commit violence of any kind against another. This Hindu belief is known as *ahimsa*. When fighting an oppressor, therefore, one should not employ violence, but rather accept and recognize the humanity of the oppressors. Even humans acting immorally are still humans. Gandhi wrote, “Destruction is not the law of humans. Man lives freely by his readiness to die, if need be, at the hands

² Thoreau, Henry David. “Civil Disobedience.” In *Nonviolence: A Reader in the Ethics of Action*. Eds. Doris A. Hunter and Krishna Mallick. Maryland: University Press of American, 1990. P. 68.

³ Thoreau, p. 68.

of his brother, never by killing him.”⁴ In this way, the oppressed will command and demand respect for their position, and likely gain sympathizers in their struggle, whether they be moderates or the governing body itself.

Gandhi had a word for his particular idea of an active nonviolence: *satyagraha*. This word combines the Hindu for “truth” (*sat*) and “firmness” (*agraha*), and was created so as to distinguish this concept from “passive resistance”, which Gandhi was afraid was too often construed as a “weapon of the weak”. *Satyagraha*, rather, involves the very real practice of threatening a ruling power’s legitimacy through the non-cooperation of the people. In this way, *satyagraha* means not simply a suffering on the part of the oppressed, but also a challenge to the rulers.⁵

Gandhi saw this type of active nonviolence as being the most effective tactic in his struggle against the British colonial rule in India in the 20th century. He believed that the best way to convince the government to repeal unfavorable laws was to “not obey the law and accept the penalty for its breach”.⁶ He called this – nonviolent action - the “moral equivalent to war”.⁷ One of the most famous demonstrations during India’s struggle for independence was the Salt March. In April of 1930, Gandhi led thousands of people in a march to the sea in protest of the British government’s salt tax, imposed on all of India’s citizens, from the wealthiest to the poorest. The notion was that poor Indians who could not afford the salt tax would bypass the government and directly get salt for themselves. This action called the world’s attention to India’s struggle, and was one of the most important factors in gaining India’s independence in 1947.

⁴ Gandhi, Mahatma. “Ahimsa or The Way of Nonviolence.” In *Nonviolence: A Reader in the Ethics of Action*. Eds. Doris A. Hunter and Krishna Mallick. Maryland: University Press of America, 1990. P. 82.

⁵ Public Broadcasting System. “A Force More Powerful.” 2000. Online at <http://www.pbs.org/weta/forcemorepowerful/india/satyagraha.html>.

Martin Luther King, Jr., drew extensively on Mahatma Gandhi's theories of nonviolence for his own leadership in the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s in the United States. King saw the hypocrisy of trying to create a harmonious society through the use of violent force. Because of this, he preached nonviolence to those involved in the civil rights struggle. King was a very charismatic leader, dedicated to nonviolence, and many followed his lead. For King, the goal of nonviolent direct action was to create such a crisis and tension so as to force the governing body to engage in negotiations.⁸ King envisioned this benefiting the civil rights movement because the more force the government used against purposely nonviolent protestors, the more legitimacy the government lost. Activists in the civil rights movement grew consistently in numbers and strength. By the end of the civil rights struggle the government saw that it was futile to attempt to maintain power over, and issue laws to control, a huge portion of the population that disagreed with governmental policies. When a large part of a population refuses to cooperate with the laws and rules of a governing body, that body becomes virtually obsolete.

For King, also, nonviolence was a part of a strong religious faith. He believed that to practice nonviolence was to act in the image of God, and therefore prepare one to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He warned that there would be suffering and pain ahead, but that it was all for the greater glory of God. In 1965, he preached to a crowd in Selma,

⁶ Gandhi, p. 85.

⁷ Gandhi, p. 86.

⁸ King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Letter From a Birmingham Jail." In Nonviolence: A Reader in the Ethics of Action. Eds. Doris A. Hunter and Krishna Mallick. Maryland: University Press of America, 1990. P. 104.

Alabama, “Continue to work with the faith that unearned suffering is redemptive.”⁹ This resonated well in a time when many of King’s followers subscribed to the Christian faith.

Another influential nonviolent activist in 20th century America was the founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day. Day’s belief in and commitment to nonviolence was firmly rooted in her devotion to the Catholic faith. She joined the Catholic Church as a young adult, and her writings and teachings from that point on greatly refer to the Bible and the life of Jesus Christ. Day believed that all Catholics were obligated to look for Christ in every other person, since it was taught that everyone was made in the image of God. If Christians were to truly do this, it would be impossible to do violence or harm towards another person. The cornerstone of her belief of nonviolence was the Sermon on the Mount, the passage of the Bible where one finds the verse, “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” All humans, in Day’s belief, are members of the same body – the body of Christ– and therefore what hurts one person hurts all. Day opposed state-sponsored capitalism as being an instrument of violence toward the poor, and she advocated an adoption of “voluntary poverty” in order to remove oneself from the capitalist system. She warned, “Whatever you buy is taxed, so that you are, in effect, helping to support the state’s preparations for war exactly to the extent of your attachment to worldly things of whatever kind.”¹⁰ To offer oneself up for suffering, so as not to inflict suffering on other people, was the truest form of loving God.¹¹

⁹ Quoted in Egan, Eileen. Peace Be With You: Justified Warfare or The Way of Nonviolence. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999. P. 204.

¹⁰Chernus, Ira. American Nonviolence: The History of An Idea. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004. P. 156.

¹¹ Chernus, p. 146-160 in passim.

Nonviolence for Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day was not simply a strategy used to achieve a certain ends, but a theology or way of life. For each of these leaders, nonviolence stemmed from a religious belief. Gandhi's belief in nonviolence was a part of his Hindu faith; Martin Luther King, Jr., and Dorothy Day believed in nonviolence from a Christian standpoint. These three leaders used nonviolence to guide their everyday actions. Their belief in nonviolence was not something that could be placed aside for a more effective substitute. Some scholars argue that in order to successfully carry out an effective nonviolent campaign, there must be leaders who believe in a theology of nonviolence, rather than simply believing in the efficacy of nonviolence as merely a tactic or strategy. Others, however, do not.

One of the leading scholars of nonviolence from a secular standpoint is American Barbara Deming. Deming sought to convince people that nonviolence was “intellectually plausible” and pragmatically effective.¹² Her ideas of nonviolence were based not on a religious belief but on the practical belief that all people, based solely on their humanity, are deserving of respect. She, like many of the other influential scholars of nonviolence, did not see this as a passive exercise, but rather a forceful one – nonviolence, to her, is a “justified use of force”.¹³ Rather than fight fire with fire, by using nonviolence, “We can put *more* pressure on the antagonist for whom we show human concern.”¹⁴

Deming outlined four steps of nonviolent action that lead to its effectiveness. The first is for nonviolent activists to gain control of the situation. Violence, when used against a violent oppressor, is a means that contradicts the ends. If the end (what a movement is fighting for) is a society wherein citizens are respected and human rights are

¹² Chernus, p. 182.

¹³ Chernus, p. 184.

protected, violence will not lead there. Deming writes, “If [activists] try to create...change by killing people, they deny the inalienable rights to life and liberty they are trying to secure.”¹⁵ Nonviolent activists must also demonstrate their power to make lasting change by convincing their oppressors to change their minds, rather than forcing them out of the way. The third successful step of nonviolent action is that it is able to gain allies among the wider public. It also does not allow for any justified repression from the oppressor:

Nonviolence prevents the opponents from gaining public sympathy, as they might if they were victims of violence. And the opponents’ violence against unarmed people can eventually get their allies and supporters to stop giving support. Nonviolence is the best way to cultivate a positive public image.¹⁶

The last thing that nonviolent activists must do is change themselves so as to reflect the type of future they are trying to create – mainly, a society that respects people and human rights. Deming also offers this important advice to activists:

Because economic pressures are often the most effective [activities], nonviolent activists should be especially creative in devising an alternative economic system, so that the existing system and all its injustices can be shut down simply by being ignored.¹⁷

Many other scholars and theorists of nonviolence refer to the efficacy of economic pressure. This practical tactic has been used in many social movement struggles.

Another scholar of nonviolence, political scientist Gene Sharp, author of the comprehensive Politics of Nonviolent Action, also distinguishes between moral (theological or religious) beliefs of nonviolence and nonviolence as an effective secular means of action. In his three-part volume, he focuses on the latter of these two. One of

¹⁴ Chernus, p. 185.

¹⁵ Chernus, p. 186.

¹⁶ Chernus, p. 189.

Sharp's most important contributions to the body of scholarly literature regarding nonviolence is his definition and discussion of political power. The political power held by governments and rulers is inherently dependent upon the consent and support of the civilian population. Sharp writes, "governments depend on people...power is pluralistic, and...political power is fragile because it depends on many groups for reinforcement of its power sources".¹⁸ Sharp outlines the sources of political power (authority, human resources, skills and knowledge, intangible factors, material resources, and sanctions) and insists that "a closer examination of [these] sources of the ruler's power will indicate that they depend intimately upon the obedience and cooperation of the subjects".¹⁹ The crucial conclusion to draw from this is that should this "obedience and cooperation" be withdrawn, the ruler's power would in effect be undermined, or even negated. Sharp describes this:

When people refuse their cooperation, withhold their help, and persist in their disobedience and defiance, they are denying their opponent the basic human assistance and cooperation which any government or hierarchical system requires. If they do this in sufficient numbers for long enough, that government or hierarchical system will no longer have power.²⁰

The most effective way to undermine or negate a ruler's power, Sharp argues, is through nonviolent action. This is sharply distinguished from "passive resistance", in that nonviolent action is just that – active. It means taking decisive action in a push for change. Sharp classifies three types of nonviolent methods: nonviolent protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention.²¹ Nonviolent protest and persuasion may include such actions as marches and demonstrations. Noncooperation is a

¹⁷ Chernus, p. 190.

¹⁸ Sharp, Gene. The Politics of Nonviolent Action. Boston: P.Sargent Publisers, 1973. P. 8.

¹⁹ Sharp, p. 12.

²⁰ Sharp, p. 64.

form of civil disobedience, and nonviolent intervention includes such actions as sit-ins and alternative institutions. Out of these types of nonviolent action, there are three ways to produce change, according to Sharp. These are conversion (in which a ruler or government eventually changes its mind and agrees with the activists), accommodation (when a ruling body may not agree but will make the necessary changes to appease the activists), and nonviolent coercion (meaning that a ruling power is forced, without the use of actual physical force, to accept the activists' demands).²²

Sharp maintains that nonviolent action is a favorable form of social action, as opposed to violence. One of the main reasons for this is that it is easier for nonviolent activists to gain support for their cause than it is for violent activists. This support may come from others who feel oppressed or have specific grievances *or* from members of the opposition or third parties.²³ Sharp believes that this is true simply due to the nature of nonviolent action and the fact that it is less likely to alienate possible supporters than violence as a method of action.

In effect, nonviolence works to the degree that it is able to delegitimize a ruling power. Because political power is dependent upon the consent of the population, it is necessary to withdraw this consent in order to undermine the claim on political power.

Sharp writes,

Nonviolent action is a technique of struggle in which the participants are able to advance their cause in proportion to the degree that the opponent's desire and ability to maintain the objectionable policy are weakened, and that the nonviolent group is able to generate the will and power to give it the internal strength to effect the change.²⁴

²¹ Sharp, p. 68-69.

²² Sharp, p. 69.

²³ Sharp, p. 69.

²⁴ Sharp, p. 471.

All these theorists will agree that nonviolent action necessarily requires an acceptance of the possibility of personal suffering. Practitioners of nonviolent action could very well end up in jail or prison, or facing violence by police on the streets. An acceptance of this violence perpetrated against oneself is necessary to the strength and power of nonviolence. For Martin Luther King, Jr. (“unearned suffering is redemptive”), Gandhi, and Dorothy Day, this was a moral issue. Day wrote, “It is better to suffer oneself than to inflict suffering on others.”²⁵ For Deming and Sharp, it was a practical one. Deming believed that when nonviolent activists endured the violence doled out by the oppressors, sympathy and support were gained.²⁶ Sharp wrote, “Defiance without retaliation may enable the nonviolent actionists to remove the policy or regime to which they object and to make the repression impotent.”²⁷ It is no question that to endure suffering or violence at the hands of a ruling power, while actively practicing nonviolence, is a difficult (some would argue impossible) thing to do. However, these theorists and others believe that it is a necessary and effective component of nonviolent action.

Conclusion

Nonviolence is a morally correct mode of operation. Many scholars argue for the use of nonviolence from a religious or theological standpoint, whether that be Abrahamic or Eastern traditions. These scholars usually focus on the benefits of nonviolence from a rather abstract, although perfectly justifiable, point of view. This could include such

²⁵ Chernus, p. 159.

²⁶ Chernus, p. 189.

²⁷ Sharp, p. 548.

arguments as the idea that to use nonviolent action necessitates and proves a respect for all persons' humanity, even when those people are oppressors. In this way, nonviolence as a means correlates with the ends: a society in which all people are respected and all human rights are honored.

Other scholars argue for nonviolence from a secular standpoint. Arguments in this vein may focus on the efficacy of targeting an opponent economically, since in today's world money holds much power. Another strong argument for nonviolence is that as a movement tactic it is much more inclusive and democratic than violence, thereby ensuring a movement more support and sympathy. Either way, most of the existing literature on nonviolence argues that it is preferable to violence.

II. The Struggle Against Apartheid in South Africa

Brief Historical Overview of the Movement

As the original inhabitants in a colonized territory, indigenous South Africans have, throughout history, consistently struggled against hostile coercion or force. The Dutch were the first Europeans to settle in South Africa, beginning in 1652, and soon began to trade with the native South Africans, as well as hold them as slaves. Over the next couple of centuries, white European settlers and black native South Africans engaged in several wars, the largest of which were known as the Xhosa Wars, stemming from disagreements over land and livestock ownership. In the early 19th century, British settlers, awarded control South Africa by the Congress of Vienna, began to overpower the Dutch rule in the country. These tensions came to a head in 1899, with the

commencement of the Boer (Dutch) War. The British won in 1902 and commanded control of the country.

After about a decade of close Dutch-British relationships, Louis Botha, a descendent of the Dutch settlers (known as Afrikaaners), won the seat of Prime Minister. Several decades of Dutch rule followed, eventually leading to the formation of the Afrikaaner-oriented National Party. This was the political party that in 1948, after winning “nation-wide”, all-white elections, instituted the policy of “apartheid” – official, state-sanctioned racial segregation.

Black South Africans, along with other minority groups such as Indians and “coloureds” (descendents of the relations between white European settlers and black indigenous South Africans) immediately opposed this policy. One of the most influential opponents of apartheid was the African National Congress (ANC), which had been founded in 1912 as a nonviolent group working to protect the civil rights of non-white South Africans. The ANC began policies of civil disobedience, strikes, boycotts, and other nonviolent actions. In 1952, the ANC began its well-known Defiance Campaign. The purpose of this campaign was to call for the repeal of “unjust laws”, such as the Group Areas Act, the Pass Laws, and the Suppression of Communism Act. If the government refused to repeal these laws by a specified date, the ANC and its partner in the Campaign, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) pledged “to take recourse to mass action for the defiance of the unjust laws.” One of the ways in which this would happen was “to hold mass demonstrations throughout the country... firstly to register a protest against 300 years of oppression and exploitation, and secondly as a prelude to the

launching of the campaign.”²⁸ This Campaign was to remain strictly nonviolent, as directed by the ANC.

In 1955, several groups issued the declaration of the Freedom Charter. This document was accepted at the Congress of the People on June 26, 1955. This gathering brought together many different groups struggling against apartheid, including the ANC, the SAIC, the South African Colored People’s Organization, and the South African Congress of Democrats. The Freedom Charter listed the hopes of these groups for the future of South Africa, declaring such demands as “All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country”; “The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, color or sex”; and “No government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people”.²⁹ The white government of South African immediately branded this a “communist” document, and since communism had been banned in 1950, the leaders of these major anti-apartheid groups were put on trial. The infamous Treason Trial lasted for several years, but ended in the acquittal of all 156 of the accused.

Mass demonstrations and protests, as well as actions such as strikes and boycotts, continued in the spirit of the Freedom Charter. These actions sometimes had unfavorable results. One of the most well-known anti-apartheid demonstrations took place in 1960. In the township of Sharpeville, in the Transvaal region of South Africa, hundreds of demonstrators gathered to oppose the Pass Laws of the apartheid government. These laws required non-white South Africans to carry a pass (much like a passport) with them at all

²⁸ “Congress of the People.” African National Congress website. 2001. Online at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/campaigns/cop/>.

²⁹ ANC website.

times in order to travel outside their townships. The demonstrators at Sharpeville defied this law by burning their passes in a mass demonstration. Police opened fire on the crowd, killing 70 people and injuring almost two hundred others.

After the Sharpeville massacre, the apartheid government attempted to tighten its grip by further restricting the actions of anti-apartheid leaders and organizations. Shortly after Sharpeville, the ANC, the Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC), and other opposition groups were banned, meaning they could not operate freely within the country. If members were caught organizing or meeting with others in the banned organizations, they would be imprisoned or sent into exile. These groups were forced underground and essentially dismantled, since they could no longer meet and organize in public, or in large groups.

Because of this push underground, opposition groups began to examine new ways of struggling against apartheid. Many felt that the government left them no choice but to turn to violence. Since mass demonstrations, actions, and even meetings were deemed illegal, it was felt that nonviolent actions (necessarily dependent on large groups of people in order to be most effective) would be impossible to organize. Thus, in 1961, members of the ANC formed Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK), the military wing of the organization, with Nelson Mandela as the head. This group organized in small numbers underground to plan out sabotage attacks, targeting mostly government or military buildings and strongholds. Loss of life was to be avoided as much as possible, although it was accepted as an unfortunate side-effect of the sabotage attacks.

From the start, the government knew of the MK, and looked for a way to dismantle this underground organization. They got their chance in 1963, when a raid on

the Lilliesleaf Farm in Rivonia turned up documents and papers outlining the planning of sabotage attacks and a possible guerilla warfare strategy. In the Rivonia Trial of 1963, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu (secretary-general of the ANC), and six other influential leaders in the anti-apartheid movement were tried for sabotage and conspiracy to overthrow the government. All eight were convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment. This began the three decades that Nelson Mandela spent in prison, including almost twenty years spent on Robben Island.

Throughout the next few decades, the struggle against apartheid remained fairly disconnected and unorganized. With all its major leaders in prison and all its major organizations banned, building a strong, cohesive movement remained nearly impossible. When new leaders attempted to organize, they were promptly banned or imprisoned. Many actions and demonstrations were organized on small, local levels, meaning that there was no widespread agreement on tactics such as the use of force *or* nonviolence. Each community had its own way of opposing apartheid, and thus violence was necessarily a part of some movements.

The struggle became more energized after the 1976 Soweto protest that resulted in the deaths of over 600 people, many of whom were teenagers. Students in the South West Township (Soweto) were protesting the ruling National Party's policy of using the Afrikaaner (white South Africans of Dutch descent) language in all schools. Most students preferred to be taught in their own Bantu languages. At this demonstration, police opened fire on the crowd and killed hundreds, many in the back while they were running away. This single event galvanized the anti-apartheid movement in a way that

had not happened in years. Opponents of apartheid saw this as the “final straw” and knew that something had to be done.

Throughout the late 1970s and into the 1980s the struggle against apartheid grew and strengthened in new ways. Larger communities began to organize, with new leaders who had been children during the early years of apartheid stepping to the front of the movement. Opponents of apartheid began to recognize the power in their hands, as they saw that the government’s power rested solely on their own consent. Therefore, they began to withdraw this consent, through strikes, consumer boycotts, non-cooperation (including forming alternative structures such as schools and hospitals), and beginning again to demonstrate in mass numbers. The pressure from these groups, as well as the feeling among many white South Africans that perhaps apartheid had run its course and a new way was possible, became so strong that by 1989, president F.W. de Klerk began to negotiate an end to apartheid. By 1991, the major anti-apartheid organizations, including the ANC, had been unbanned, and the government’s apartheid laws had been repealed. In 1994, South Africa held its first non-racial elections, which the ANC won, and Nelson Mandela became the first non-white president of South Africa.

Tactics and Methods of the Struggle against Apartheid

The decades-long movement against apartheid took various forms in different times and places. After 1960 there was a continuous disagreement among activists regarding the use of violence. Several leaders advocated for the use of minimal violence in carefully selected instances while others held fast to a theory of nonviolence. This disagreement resulted in a disorganization of the movement for many years. In the 1980s,

amid the sporadic use of violence on the part of individuals, many of the main leaders seemed to once again agree on a strategy of nonviolence to achieve their goals. Here we will examine the different strategies and tactics used by members of the anti-apartheid struggle.

As mentioned previously, the 1952 Defiance Campaign, launched by the African National Congress, held strictly to a nonviolent plan of action. The main tactic was non-cooperation; that is, for South Africans to refuse to cooperate with laws that were believed to be unjust. This non-cooperation meant that South Africans would civilly disobey the government by, for example, refusing to carry a pass with them at all times, or refusing to stay within the artificial boundaries of the “Group Areas”.³⁰ These original laws of the apartheid system created a society in which a majority of South African peoples (that is, all those who were not white) were not allowed to travel freely within their own land, and could be punished severely for doing so. Whites and non-whites were strictly segregated, and non-whites had no political power with which to try to change the system.

The Defiance Campaign had several important outcomes that were beneficial to the movement. Firstly, it generated support for the ANC. The actions of the Defiance Campaign were easy for large groups of people to join, and non-white South Africans could feel as if they were successfully fighting against the apartheid regime. The leadership of the ANC, many of whom were older adults who had been involved in the ANC since the early 20th century, recognized the power and energy of the youth leaders and began to take them seriously. The Campaign also brought together many different

³⁰ “Defiance Campaign.” African National Congress website. 2001. Online at <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/struggles/defiance.html>.

groups, leading to more joint actions later on. Of these, one of the most important was the 1955 Congress of the People, resulting in the ratification of the Freedom Charter. This declaration served as a basis for many of the nonviolent actions that took place afterwards.³¹

Throughout this time of the Defiance Campaign and the Freedom Charter, the nonviolent actions undertaken by many participants in the movement were varied and diverse. Workers organized strikes and communities organized boycotts. South Africans burned their passes and refused to obey the laws of segregation. Activists organized marches and demonstrations to show the strength and power of the movement. Many times the apartheid regime responded with violence by police officers or the military, but the movement as a whole remained committed to nonviolence. This changed after the devastating massacre at Sharpeville in 1960.

By the early 1960s, it was obvious to many that the government was not going to give in to the anti-apartheid movement anytime soon. All the major organizations and leaders in the struggle against apartheid had been banned or imprisoned, and the government had proven that they would resort to using force against demonstrators and activists, even those who were demonstrating peacefully. After Sharpeville, the time had come, many believed, to take the struggle to a new level – to introduce the selective use of violence in the form of sabotage. Several leaders of the African National Congress met secretly to plan and organize the ANC's new militant wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), headed by Nelson Mandela.

³¹The Struggle for South Africa: A Reference Guide to Movements, Organizations, and Institutions. Eds. Rob Davies, Dan O'Meara, and Sipho Dlamini. Vol. 2. London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1984. P. 286.

The argument of these leaders was fairly simple: the government had shown that they would and could use force against nonviolent demonstrators, and by banning organizations and leaders, had left the movement virtually no choice but to fight back violently. Nelson Mandela, in his defense of the formation of the MK, wrote

I planned sabotage, not in a spirit of recklessness, nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation, and oppression of my people by the whites.³²

Mandela states two reasons for the implementation of selective violence. First, violence had become virtually inevitable due to government policy. Violence was bound to erupt due to the frustration and desperation of the South African people – to organize and plan this violence would lead to fewer deaths. Secondly, there was no other way to succeed against the white supremacy of the government. The regime had demonstrated its willingness to use force and didn't seem to be inclined to negotiate at all. The anti-apartheid movement had struggled nonviolently for 50 years (since the founding of the ANC in 1912) and many deemed it to no longer be effective. In the Manifesto of the MK, the leaders wrote that "Refusal [by protestors] to resort to force has been interpreted by the government as an invitation to use armed force against the people without any fear of reprisals."³³ Mandela argues that "a government which uses force to maintain its rule teaches the oppressed to use force to oppose it".³⁴ Oliver Tambo, deputy president of the ANC and Mandela's law partner, also supported the use of violence in the struggle and

³² Quoted in McCuen, Gary E. The Apartheid Reader. Wisconsin: Gary E. McCuen Publications, Inc., 1986. P. 77.

³³ Mandela, Nelson. Long Walk to Freedom. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1995. P. 123.

³⁴ McCuen, p. 81.

argued that although some white people may die as a result of the new militancy of the struggle, the government had already killed far more innocent people.³⁵

Mandela outlined four possible uses of violence when fighting an oppressor: sabotage, guerilla warfare, terrorism, and open revolution.³⁶ The violence that was to be used consisted of mostly sabotage attacks. This was to avoid the loss of life whenever possible yet still make a strong statement regarding the strength of the movement. In a speech to the Conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa held in Addis Ababa in 1962, Mandela said

planned acts of sabotage against government installations introduce a new phase in the political situation and are a demonstration of the people's unshakeable determination to win freedom whatever the cost may be.³⁷

For the next couple of decades, the ANC maintained a system of military training outside of South Africa, in order to train members of the movement in the ways of violent struggle. This training included education of acts of sabotage as well as guerilla warfare. While the goal of the MK's actions was not the killing of other people, it was accepted that occasionally, deaths would occur, and these were the unfortunate consequences of the position in which the government had placed anti-apartheid activists. Throughout this time, the ANC maintained an official position of nonviolence, but "did not condemn" the actions of the MK.³⁸

Even after the decision was made to introduce the use of selective violent actions, many of the original leaders and participants in the struggle against apartheid still favored the continued use of nonviolence. Chief Albert Luthuli, president-general of the ANC

³⁵ McCuen, pp. 77-82, in passim.

³⁶ McCuen, p. 82.

³⁷ Mandela, p. 131-132.

from 1952 until his death in 1967, continuously reiterated the importance of a sustained nonviolent campaign. In his autobiography, Let My People Go, he stressed this point, declaring

We do not struggle with guns and violence, and the Supremacist's array of weapons is powerless against the spirit. The struggle goes on as much in [jail] as out of it, and every time cruel men injure or kill defenseless ones, they lose ground...[this is a battle of] right against wrong, good against evil, the espousal of what is twisted, distorted and maimed against the yearning for health.³⁹

Chief Luthuli was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1960, the first black African to win the prize, for his continued advocacy of nonviolence in the apartheid struggle.

Throughout the ban on the ANC and his own ban (meaning he could not travel outside a certain area and could only have contact with certain people) he remained president-general of the ANC. He no doubt would have continued to espouse nonviolence had he not been killed by a train near his house in 1967.

Another key figure in the movement against apartheid who steadfastly held to the principle of nonviolence was Desmond Tutu, who became Archbishop of South Africa. Tutu's commitment to nonviolence was rooted in the Christian tradition, and for him it was very much a moral issue. He was frustrated with the violence that he saw being carried out by anti-apartheid activists, asking "Why must we discredit our fathers by using methods, which, if they were used against us, we would oppose?"⁴⁰ He often spoke to anti-apartheid activists about the need to remain nonviolent, and attempted to bring the Church into the struggle to assist with this cause. Throughout the struggle against

³⁸ Motlhabi, Mokgethi. Challenge to Apartheid: Toward a Moral National Resistance. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, Co., 1988. P. 73.

³⁹ Luthuli, Albert. Let My People Go. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, Inc., 1962. P. 229.

⁴⁰ "South Africa: Freedom in our Lifetime." Force More Powerful. Public Broadcasting System. (video) Dir. Steve York. Narr. Ben Kingsley. York Zimmerman, Inc. and WETA. Washington, D.C. 2000.

apartheid, Archbishop Tutu recognized the importance of intervention of the Western countries. In the 1980s, Tutu actively called for international sanctions to be placed on South Africa, knowing that external economic pressure would force the apartheid regime to rethink its policies. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1984 for his continued commitment to nonviolence. He threatened his fellow anti-apartheid activists who had turned to violence: “If the violence continues, I will pack my bags, collect my family, and leave this beautiful country that I love so passionately and so deeply...I deplore all forms of violence.”⁴¹ In 1989, Tutu led one of the largest marches against apartheid, a gathering of 30,000 people in Cape Town, which set in motion numerous other marches across the country. For decades he has remained one of the world’s leading advocates of nonviolent action.^{42,43}

The Black Consciousness (BC) movement emerged in the early 1970s, out of the same sentiments that had formed the Pan-Africanist Congress a decade earlier. The BC movement was concerned with reclaiming the dignity and pride of the black African people. For too long, members of this movement believed, black Africans had lived as slaves to white people, whether physically enslaved or in a slavery of the mind in which they were taught implicitly and explicitly that they were not as worthy as whites. BC activists felt that the first step to overcoming the apartheid regime was to break free from these ideas and come to recognize the power and beauty of the black African people. The young leader of this movement was a man named Steve Biko.

⁴¹The Purple Shall Govern: A South African A to Z of Nonviolent Action. Eds. Dene Smuts and Shauna Westcott. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, Centre for Intergroup Studies, 1991. P. 68.

⁴² McCuen, p. 80-85 in passim.

⁴³ Smuts and Westcott, p. 68-70 in passim.

The strategy of the Black Consciousness (BC) movement represents an interesting approach to the tactic of nonviolence. The BC movement believed that blacks must “liberate themselves psychologically and shed the slave mentality induced both by institutionalized racism and white liberalism”.⁴⁴ To do this, blacks must harness “the collective energies of all blacks in ‘solidarity-in-action’”.⁴⁵ That is, blacks would liberate themselves, but not through any joint effort with whites. The first and most important order of business was to raise an awareness, a consciousness, among black South Africans of the importance of their own solidarity. This dynamic of the movement, while certainly by its nature not being inclusive, was also not violent. Writing in 1979, two years after BC leader Steve Biko’s death, Charles C. Walker recalls that Biko “still held open the possibility of militant action short of armed struggle”.⁴⁶ Unfortunately, the BC movement was banned in 1977, the same year Biko died in police custody, and whatever potential for nonviolent leadership may have existed was extinguished.

The Black Consciousness movement in South Africa is often paralleled to the Black Panther group in the United States during the civil rights movement. However, while these two groups are based on the same consciousness-raising premise, the fundamental difference is that South Africa’s BC movement did not advocate the use of violence. Biko instead advocated *no* direct interaction with white South Africans, violent or nonviolent. This movement “regarded whites as irrelevant. Therefore there was no need for any attempt at direct confrontation with the government.”⁴⁷ This movement

⁴⁴ Davies, et. al., p. 203.

⁴⁵ Davies, et. al., p. 203.

⁴⁶ Quoted in Nonviolent Action and Social Change. Eds. Severyn T. Bruyn and Paula M. Rayman. New York: Irvington Publishers, Inc., 1979. P. 189.

⁴⁷ Motlhabi, p. 27.

continued in small and sporadic ways after Biko's death, but was never as strong as it was under his leadership.

In the mid-1980s, a new energy came to the apartheid struggle. After several decades of oppression and forceful retaliation by the government, not to mention the bans on most of the anti-apartheid leaders and organizations, new leaders stepped to the front. Many of these were small children during the beginning of apartheid, and now, in their late 20s or early 30s, were ready to take on leadership positions to bring an end to the only social system they had ever known. These young leaders focused much of their energy on the economic pressures that could be placed on the apartheid regime. They called for international sanctions from other countries, for the withdrawal of Western corporations with interests in South Africa, for strikes and stay-at-homes, and for boycotts to show the apartheid government the strength of the movement.

Several new large organizations were formed, acting as umbrella organizations for the myriad groups opposing apartheid. Two of the most influential of these were the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and the United Democratic Front (UDF). These two brought together groups and leaders to take the place of those who had been banned in the 1960s. MDM and UDF organized marches and demonstrations and defied the government's restrictions on meetings and gatherings.

One of the most influential leaders in this revived movement of the 1980s was a young man named Mkhuseleli Jack, from the city of Port Elizabeth, on the coast of South Africa. In Jack's mind, the struggle against apartheid would end when white South Africans joined. He knew that the apartheid struggle had succeeded in making black townships ungovernable, but that this was not directly affecting either the government or

white South Africans. Something more needed to be done. Jack decided that the black South Africans in Port Elizabeth would bring the struggle to the whites, in order to convince them of the importance of their involvement. The tactic to do so would be a consumer boycott of all *white* businesses in Port Elizabeth.⁴⁸

Jack's boycott was to begin in July of 1985, with the purpose of putting pressure on the white community to oppose apartheid. Black businesses knew of the boycott ahead of time and were able to prepare accordingly for the expected increase in customers, as black South Africans in Port Elizabeth made a commitment to not buy from white businesses, even if the alternative was more expensive. The boycott began with virtually unanimous support from the black South Africans in the area, and immediately the white businesses fell quiet. The striking nature of this large boycott did not go unnoticed, and in August of 1985, President P.W. Botha declared a state of emergency – the first state of emergency declared since 1961. Leaders of the boycott, including Jack, were arrested and imprisoned as the government attempted to put an end to the action. The government failed to do so, however, and the boycott continued. More importantly, Botha's declaration of a state of emergency (the first in 24 years) made it clear to many that the government was panicking. Anti-apartheid activists were re-energized, as they strongly believed that the government knew that apartheid was in a crisis situation.⁴⁹

The Port Elizabeth boycott continued for one year. Seven months into the boycott, white business-owners in Port Elizabeth began to ask for Mkhuseleli Jack's return. He had been in prison since August of 1985. However, without Jack and the other leaders of the boycott, negotiations with the government to end the action were nearly impossible. In

⁴⁸ PBS video, 2000.

⁴⁹ PBS video, 2000.

March, the government released Jack with promises to negotiate an end to the boycott, but proceeded to ban him again soon afterward. This angered many in the Port Elizabeth community and elsewhere. U.S. President Ronald Reagan derided the South African government, calling it a “sham”,⁵⁰ to claim to be willing to negotiate and then ban opposition leaders. Internal and international pressure on the apartheid government began to mount.

At the same time as the Port Elizabeth consumer boycott in the mid-1980s, many other communities were organizing actions and demonstrations to oppose apartheid as well. In the Vaal Triangle in August of 1984, residents decided to embark upon a rent boycott, which lasted for several years. The rents imposed on residents of the townships were deemed unjust. By the end of 1988, over 186 million rand was owed in back rent by the members of the community. By the end of 1989, at which point it was virtually inconceivable to attempt to collect the enormous amount of back rent, the government was ready to begin negotiations to end the boycott.⁵¹

Other communities engaged in strikes. In the 1980s, several major strikes occurred, including a strike of 340,000 mineworkers for three weeks, and 20,000 railway workers for over two months. In 1985, 1,000 workers at the Sarmcol rubber factory in the Natal district went on strike to demand wage increases. The management proceeded to fire many of the workers, but these workers continued to strike outside the factory, gaining much media attention. Out of this strike was formed the Sarmcol Workers’ Cooperative, which was a new way for workers to organize as well as provide services

⁵⁰ PBS video, 2000.

⁵¹ Smuts and Westcott, p. 26.

they were lacking as a result of having no job. This co-op helped to “gain nation-wide moral and financial support for the strikers”.⁵²

Students also went on strike in protest against government and educational policies. In 1976, led by members of the Soweto Students’ Representative Council, students in Soweto and Cape Town went on strike. When urged to go back to school, students refused, demanding, among other things, “release of detained scholars...police to stay out of schools...re-establishment of communications between the students and government authorities...real changes in the educational system”.⁵³ Pressure on the governments from students was thus very apparent.

One of the most creative ways in which anti-apartheid activists defied the legitimacy of the government of South Africa was to develop alternative institutions. These institutions (schools, hospitals, social service providers) served non-white citizens of South Africa, while the “official” institutions developed by the government were ignored. The National Education Crisis Committee was a group that provided alternatives to the government-sponsored schools in South Africa. The Organization for Appropriate Social Services, founded in the Transvaal, provided medical and psychological help to those who had suffered at the hands of the state.⁵⁴ These and other organizations like them defied the apartheid government by essentially proving that non-white South Africans could survive and create communities and societies completely separate from the apartheid regime.

⁵² Smuts and Westcott, p. 128-129.

⁵³ Hirson, Baruch. Year of Fire, Year of Ash: The Soweto Revolt: Roots of a Revolution: London, Zed Books Press, 1979. P. 247.

⁵⁴ Smuts and Westcott, p. 18.

Another action in 1984 took place when the government was readying the country (and specifically white voters and the few representatives of non-white South Africans) for elections of the new tricameral parliament. This parliament consisted of three Houses – one for coloreds, one for blacks, and the largest one for whites (who were approximately only 10% of the population). Each House would have proportional (to the size of the House) representation, and a President's Council would have power to step in to any legislative debate. Of course, this left 90% of the population (the non-white demographic) with very little voice in the national government. Many disagreed with the formation of the parliament and organized an election boycott. When election day rolled around, 80% of registered voters abstained, making the vote, and therefore the government, illegitimate in many people's eyes.

As a result of these movements in the mid- to late-1980s, it became clear that the apartheid system was on its last legs. Leaders and organizations defied banning orders, marched with or without permits, and virtually ignored the authority of the government. It became clear that the apartheid government's political power, as Gene Sharp defines it, was quickly fading. Without the support and compliance of a majority of the South African population (almost all non-whites and some whites as well), it became a dead-end route for the government to continue its attempt to control the populace.

Conclusion

The South African struggle against oppression has been very long, and certainly did not start with the apartheid system. Africans have long fought against European colonialists for the right to be free in their own land. After the institution of apartheid

began, this fight in South Africa was essentially nonviolent. Early leaders of the ANC and other anti-apartheid groups focused on actions such as civil disobedience and non-cooperation. Once it became obvious that the government was not ready to negotiate anytime soon, however, many leaders decided that violence would need to be introduced to the movement.

While several leaders advocated for violence, several others maintained a commitment to nonviolence. The struggle went on for several decades. In the 1980s, a new leadership and momentum came to the forefront, and many of the actions implemented in this decade were nonviolent. These actions included strikes, boycotts, marches and demonstrations, and the creation of alternative institutions. These actions, in conjunction with external economic forces, put intense pressure on the apartheid government, and eventually led to its downfall.

III. Efficacy of Nonviolence in South Africa

I believe that nonviolence was the driving force behind the end of the apartheid era in South Africa. The conditions in South Africa were friendlier to nonviolence than violence. The violent actions that did take place were often few and far between, not to mention unorganized and oftentimes unplanned. The nonviolent actions, on the other hand, were cohesive and sustained and targeted the apartheid regime in such a way so as to convince the government that the time of apartheid was over. In this third chapter, I will flesh out this argument and attempt to elucidate the crucial role of nonviolence in the struggle against apartheid.

The violent actions undertaken by certain members of the struggle against apartheid hurt the movement far more than they helped it. The conditions in South Africa at the time were not favorable to a violent struggle. For one thing, the government had far more force and power at its disposal than the anti-apartheid movement could ever hope to match. At the time, the South African military was one of the world's largest militaries, even having nuclear capabilities starting in 1979 (South Africa has since voluntarily given up all nuclear power – the first country to ever have done so). This meant that when violent protestors or actions antagonized the government, the response would be swift, powerful, and very destructive. The situation would have been quite different if the South African government had a small, weak military. Also, the South African government and military were unique in that they were fighting for what they believed to be their own homeland. During other independence struggles of the time, the whites living in other African countries looked to European countries as their “homes”, places they could return to should the struggles not turn out in their favor. Whites living in Mozambique were Portuguese colonialists; settlers in Malawi could call Britain “home”. Many white South Africans, however

had lived in their land for many generations – most Afrikaners traced their ancestry back at least two and a half centuries – and would have nowhere to go. In the face of a violent liberation movement, they would probably have fought to the bitter end.⁵⁵

In the case of the white Afrikaners, there was no colonial power directing actions within South Africa who could suggest either an intensification of force or a complete withdrawal. This meant that the Afrikaners living within South Africa were making all

⁵⁵ Zunes, Stephen. “The Role of Nonviolent Action in the Downfall of Apartheid.” *The Journal of Modern African Studies*. 37, 1(1999), p. 143.

these decisions themselves, based on their desire to not lose their homeland. This definitely intensified their efforts and worked against the anti-apartheid movement.⁵⁶

Another condition unfavorable to the use of violence in South Africa is that the anti-apartheid movement suffered a crisis of leadership in the early 1960s. In order to successfully carry out a campaign of violent action, organization and communication is essential, so as to properly plan and carry out attacks. In South Africa, the importance of leaders in the struggle was made especially clear once those leaders were not available any more. Whereas violence depends solely on the activities of a few select leaders, nonviolence can involve many more people, and the organization required is of a very different (more democratic) sort. The apartheid government clamped down on the movement's organizations and leaders, banning the African National Congress, the South African Communist Party, the Pan-Africanist Congress, and other organizations. Important leaders such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, and others were banned, and many were imprisoned as part of the Rivonia Trial of 1963, or other legal proceedings. The apartheid regime also had no hesitations about killing certain leaders when they became too powerful. For example, although no one has ever been accused of or prosecuted for the death of Black Consciousness leader Steve Biko in 1977, his death in police custody led many to believe that he had been murdered. As soon as new leaders began to emerge in these decades following the Rivonia Trial, the government was quick to ban or imprison them. Anti-apartheid organizations, then, were forced to try to organize quietly, underground, so as not to attract attention. They were also careful about

⁵⁶ Zunes, p. 144.

the tactics they used, since many of the bans on the organizations prohibited gatherings of more than a handful of people.

Many of the leaders of the anti-apartheid movement used the increased government repression as an excuse to introduce violence into the movement, claiming that there were no other options left. Nelson Mandela himself was the head of the ANC's militant wing, the Umkhonto we Sizwe. Many of the leaders were banned or imprisoned, however, which created a crisis in leadership also meant that the movement did not have a strong focus on violence *or* nonviolence. Activists, demonstrators, or angry citizens had no guidelines or philosophy to follow, so some chose to use violence while others didn't. It would take several decades for another strong, nonviolent leadership to emerge.

Turning to violence without a defined, above-ground leadership may have caused more harm than good. During the 1950s, before this crisis of leadership occurred, people involved in the struggle against apartheid accepted the movement as inherently nonviolent. They participated in large numbers in actions such as the Defiance Campaign of 1952 and numerous marches and demonstrations. When the leaders didn't use violence, no one did. However, after the leadership was sharply censored and limited, and violence was introduced as an acceptable tactic in the movement, people began to see that it was admissible to use violence to oppose the regime. If the (banned) leaders of the movement permitted and supported the use of violence, it opened the door for many other people in the movement to use violence as well. Without a strong and organized above-ground leadership guiding the path of the struggle, this was a recipe for disaster. No one could control how and when members of the anti-apartheid movement would use violence, nor did a leadership exist who may have at some point been able to

communicate and even negotiate with the government, which may have prevented much of the state repression that resulted from the violence in the movement.

The use of violence sanctioned by influential organizations in the struggle against apartheid had a number of negative effects on the movement as a whole. Perhaps most importantly, the government immediately used violence by the movement as justification for increasingly harsh force. As Richard Gibson explains, “Umkhonto’s sporadic sabotage attacks failed to have any effect except to justify the Government’s tightening of repression”.⁵⁷ Stephen Zunes agrees, saying “the bombing campaign by the ANC’s armed wing... seriously weakened simultaneous non-violent campaigns, since the government was able to link them in the eyes of the public and justify their repression”.⁵⁸ Thomas Karis also documents that the government responded to the violent efforts of the MK with targeted attacks on international ANC centers and the assassinations of several ANC leaders.⁵⁹ Gandhi would likely agree with the argument here, as he believed that “suffering in non-cooperation”⁶⁰ was the best way to open the eyes and ears of opponents. The violence used by anti-apartheid organizations seems to have closed the eyes and ears of the government and instead invited more force and repression.

The violence used in the struggle against apartheid also served to alienate many possible supporters and sympathizers, white and black, both within South Africa and abroad. Many opponents of apartheid who preferred to use nonviolent means to achieve their goals were dismayed by the use of violence and thus less likely to support those organizations that employed it. Organizations or individuals who may have wanted to

⁵⁷ Gibson, Richard. African Liberation Movements: Contemporary Struggles Against White Minority Rule. London: Oxford University Press, Institute of Race Relations, 1972. P. 60.

⁵⁸ Zunes, p. 140.

remain nonviolent would probably have felt as if their actions had no bearing, or that they were being overshadowed by the violent actions of other organizations. The potency of nonviolence is revealed when it is practiced by many people on a widespread and cohesive level. With “competing” organizations grabbing media and social attention, due to the dramatic nature of their actions, nonviolent organizations may very well have felt alienated from the movement as a whole. This is the case in many instances of social movements in which violence was used, Zunes explains, saying, “There has been a tendency for non-violent movements to maintain a more democratic and inclusive character than armed movements.”⁶¹ This disagreement over tactics caused a major schism within the movement that prevented true organization and solidarity, which may have caused the struggle to continue for many years longer than necessary.

The fact of the matter is that to use violence as a political action necessarily leads to the use of violence in retaliation. That is, when several anti-apartheid activists decided to use violence to oppose the apartheid regime, the government then had not only the motivation but also the excuse to use violence in response to all anti apartheid activists, not only the violent ones. Thus, even activists and organizations who were committed to nonviolence were targeted by the government with violence, and the government believed itself to have proper justification. The use of violence inescapably ended up being detrimental for the anti-apartheid movement, as it was struggling against a foe with a much larger, stronger, and better-equipped fighting force. Also, there is not much sympathy for violent anti-apartheid activists when the government uses violence against

⁵⁹ Karis, Thomas G. “Black Politics: The Road to Revolution.” *Apartheid in Crisis*. Ed. Mark A. Uhlig. New York: Vintage Books, 1986. P. 123.

⁶⁰ Gandhi, p. 84.

⁶¹ Zunes, p. 146.

them. When peaceful, nonviolent demonstrators are attacked and shot, there arises a moral outrage, even among moderates or opposition, because inherently human beings do not want to see violence being used against other (peaceful) human beings.

In the end, the conditions within South Africa were more ripe for nonviolence than for violence, especially in the 1980s when a new leadership stepped to the forefront. According to Gene Sharp's theory of political power and the potential of nonviolent action, the timing was perfect. The government of South Africa retained very little, if any, legitimacy after years of maintaining the apartheid system. This is evidenced in the alternative institutions built and used by members of the anti-apartheid movement, and the election boycotts wherein a tiny fraction of the population actually voted in nationwide elections. These forms of non-cooperation serve to further de-legitimize a regime. When a governing power loses legitimacy at this level, opposition forces can easily use nonviolence to bring about reform. Sharp prescribes that

If a ruler's power is to be controlled by withdrawing help and obedience, noncooperation and disobedience must be widespread and must be maintained in the face of repression aimed at forcing a resumption of submission... Several political theorists have...argued that the withdrawal of obedience, cooperation, and submission by subjects, if sustained, will produce a crisis for the ruler, threatening the very existence of the regime.⁶²

The new leadership of the 1980s used this idea very practically in its actions and opposition to the apartheid regime.

It is important to once more summarize the types of nonviolent actions and tactics that were used by the people of South Africa. These actions include demonstrations and marches in which thousands of people participated at once, non-cooperation with certain

⁶² Sharp, p. 32-34.

laws and regulations of the apartheid regime, and boycotts and strikes that directly targeted the economy of the nation. These actions all necessitate either a great deal of planning (to organize a large march through the nation's capital, for example) or a commitment to a prolonged campaign (agreeing to boycott white businesses until the government agrees to negotiate, for example). Planning and prolongation were often not characteristics of the numerous violent actions that also took place in South Africa. Once the door to violent actions was opened by the formation of the MK, people then began to take it upon themselves to commit violence, which was often unorganized (due to the crisis of leadership) and had potentially disastrous consequences (including retaliation by the government). This idea is important to keep in mind as we explore why nonviolence was the most effective strategy against apartheid.

Several factors facilitated the use of nonviolence in South Africa. One of the most interesting, physically, is the formation of townships, designed by the government for black South Africans to live in, most often forcibly. The close proximity within which these South Africans ended up living, as well as the system of small township governments made up of blacks, helped people to organize and plan, often under the radar of the federal government. Within these townships and other small black South African communities, many people could meet and organize, as well as recruit others to the struggle. This was important because nonviolence often necessitates the participation of many people. Townships became a convenient mobilizing structure for this cause, demonstrating one way the government's apartheid policies ended up working against them. Because so many people were involved in the major actions and demonstrations (eg: boycotts, marches, strikes), it would be nearly impossible for the government to

arrest and imprison all the participants. Thus, while some people necessarily ended up in jail or prison as a result of nonviolent action, which is a consequence that one must be prepared to face when making a commitment to nonviolence, there were always still other participants who remained free to continue the struggle.

Leaders of movements in the 1980s also saw the benefits of nonviolence that had previously been used to justify nonviolent action in the early days of the anti-apartheid movement. When nonviolence was used as a strategy, the police forces of the government had no justification for violent repression, and when they inevitably chose to enforce such repression anyway, outrage was incited among many people within South Africa and abroad. The movement leaders of the 1980s had seen the repercussions of decades of violence by the government, and were ready to intensify the fight against apartheid in a way that would not include as much violence and multiple deaths. Mass organization and planning in the townships and other black communities led to plans for boycotts, strikes, marches, and demonstrations, all of which were to remain nonviolent.

We can see the gains of nonviolent action most clearly during this time, at which point the movement gained more solidarity and momentum to oppose the apartheid government. In our earlier discussion we saw the various forms of nonviolent action that leaders and groups employed, including the 1984-85 Port Elizabeth consumer boycott, led by Mkhuseleli Jack, and the 1984 election boycott. These and other strong and organized movements within South Africa were buoyed by a phenomenon that had not play a very large role in the previous decades of the anti-apartheid struggle: mass media.

The mass media has always been important for its role in informing and educating the public about events of the world. News corporations have the money and resources to

send journalists around the world to obtain interviews, video footage, and other news, and bring this home to viewers. In recent times, with the increased globalization of the world, the media has become so powerful it can actually become very involved in political interactions between countries and leaders. During the TWA Flight 847 hostage crisis of 1985, for example, the media acted as the most influential diplomats between the terrorists and the government of the United States.⁶³ The power wielded by the media was crucial in informing the world of the reality of the apartheid system. In Germany, a 1981 Special Committee against Apartheid emphasized the importance of the media, stating

The media must publicize the legitimacy of the struggle against apartheid waged by the national liberation movements. The media must make the world aware of the inhumanity of apartheid...The media must investigate, publicize, and expose the sustenance of the apartheid regime by certain Western Powers and transnational corporations.⁶⁴

The western media took up this challenge and played a very important role in building up international support for the anti-apartheid movement.

By the 1980s, during the time of intensified struggle and nonviolent actions, television and other forms of mass media were large and powerful, and delivered news more quickly and to more people than the news organizations of the 1950s or 1960s. At this point in time, news stations such as CNN and NBC were able to broadcast events from all around the world, 24 hours a day, right into the homes of millions of viewers, mostly in the United States. Whereas the South African events and incidents of the 1960s may not have been publicized very much, with the possible exception of Sharpeville, the

⁶³ Seaver, Brenda. "The Public Dimension of Foreign Policy." *Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics*. Winter 1998, vol. 3, issue 1. Pp. 65-86.

events of the 1980s were well-known to many. This greatly helped garner support for the anti-apartheid movement, as citizens of other countries worked in different ways to oppose the apartheid regime, and these citizens in turn pressured their governments and transnational corporations to not be complicit with the apartheid regime.

The role of the international media in this struggle is not to be underestimated. Were it not for the international media, other countries would not be aware, or would not be very well-informed, of the dire circumstances within South Africa. The expansion of the media in these decades greatly benefited the anti-apartheid movement as support was built up internationally which then came to bear pressure on the apartheid government. E.S. Reddy, in a paper presented to the Seminar on the Role of the Latin American and Caribbean Media in the International Campaign against Apartheid, wrote

The coverage of police violence against peaceful demonstrators on the television networks in the West has provoked outrage by millions of people...and has helped promote international action which, in turn, has encouraged the movement in South Africa.⁶⁵

Meg Voorhes also recognizes the importance of the media, saying, “Grassroots divestment activism, and media attention to it, helped to persuade major US corporations to reduce their involvement in the South African economy.”⁶⁶ Voorhes essentially places equal importance on the actions of anti-apartheid organizations and the coverage of these actions in the downfall of apartheid.

The economic and political actions of the international community ended up playing a very influential role in bringing about the end of apartheid. Many citizens urged

⁶⁴ Reddy, E.S. “Media and Southern Africa Struggle.” Paper presented to the Seminar on the Role of the Latin American and Caribbean Media in the International Campaign against Apartheid, Lima, Peru, March 1998. Online at <http://www.anc.org.za/un/reddy/media.html>.

⁶⁵ Reddy, 1998.

⁶⁶ Voorhes, Meg. “The US Divestment Movement.” In *How Sanctions Work*. Eds. Neta. C. Crawford and Audie Klotz. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. P. 142.

their governments or corporations from their country to not do business with South Africa as a way of opposing the apartheid regime. Also at this time, the international community began a series of boycotts against South Africa, both economically and culturally. These cultural boycotts meant that many artists, entertainers, and sports clubs would not travel to South Africa or perform there without the acceptance of the democratic movement.⁶⁷ The international community created a “Register of Artists, Actors, and Others who have performed in SA” and “Register of Sports Contact” to keep track of which artists and sports stars had traveled to South Africa. This essentially created a “blacklist”⁶⁸ of these individuals, and other countries refused to host them afterwards. Culturally, this was an important way of showing distaste for the apartheid government.

The international community also targeted the South African government economically during this time. A divestment movement had been active on many college campuses in the United States for a number of years. Students pressured their universities to divest in corporations that did business in, and therefore profited from, South Africa. This movement expanded rapidly during the 1984/85 academic year, “in response to South Africa’s state of emergency imposed in 1985”.⁶⁹ During this time, as we’ve seen, there was “increased turmoil in South Africa that was covered extensively by US and international media”.⁷⁰ Proponents of divestment wished to send a “clear message” to corporations that their shareholders (in this case, major universities with millions of dollars invested) did not approve of profits being gained under the apartheid regime in

⁶⁷ Smuts, p. 24.

⁶⁸ Smuts, p. 24.

⁶⁹ Voorhes, p. 129.

South Africa. This divestment movement in the US grew rapidly until, by 1989, 25 of the top 100 colleges and universities (by size of endowment) had total divestment policies, meaning that they would not invest endowment funds in corporations that did business in South Africa.⁷¹

This divestment campaign in the US drew support for the anti-apartheid movement within the United States, and it also caught the attention of activists within South Africa. This increased the strength and power of these movements in both countries. The South African government was effectively targeted by activists in the United States and South Africa, as well as other countries that joined in the opposition. As Meg Voorhes acknowledges, “the divestment campaign is most noteworthy for its ability to signal international rejection of apartheid and to warn of the likelihood of more stringent economic measures on the horizon”.⁷²

One of the other most important ways in which the international community put pressure on the apartheid regime to reform was through economic sanctions and embargoes. In 1986, the US House of Representatives voted in favor of a comprehensive sanctions bill against South Africa. This bill included such restrictions as bans on flights between the US and South Africa, a commitment to not provide any new loans or investments to South Africa, and a ban on importing South African uranium.⁷³ The purpose of these, and other sanctions, was to demonstrate to the South African apartheid regime that the international community did not approve of the apartheid system, as well as attempt to create financial and business difficulties for the regime. Many scholars

⁷⁰ Voorhes, p. 133.

⁷¹ Voorhes, p. 135.

⁷² Voorhes, p. 138.

⁷³ Smuts and Westcott, p. 119.

argue that this indeed was the case. Because of the difficulties faced as a result of decreased international business in South Africa, “economic restrictions forced the government to bargain with international bankers over the elimination of apartheid”.⁷⁴

The interesting thing about these sanctions placed by other countries on South Africa is that the original supporters of this type of action were black South Africans themselves. Opponents of sanctions often argue that the people who would be most negatively affected, who would suffer the most as a result of the imposition of sanctions, would be the lower-class, or working-class, of a society. In this case, however, “the initial call for the isolation of South Africa came from inside South Africa itself”.⁷⁵ Anti-apartheid groups such as the UDF, ANC, and COSATU all supported the implementation of sanctions. By the late 1980s, during a newly intensified anti-apartheid struggle, “blacks were...more prepared to suffer personally as long as they contributed toward overthrowing the apartheid government”.⁷⁶ We can see here that the movements within South Africa worked in conjunction with those internationally to gain support for the anti-apartheid movement and put pressure on the apartheid government.

The arms embargo placed on South Africa was another method for the international community to economically oppose the apartheid regime. The UN issued Resolution 558 in 1984, which “requested all states to refrain from importing South African produced arms, ammunition, and military vehicles”.⁷⁷ Two years later, this was expanded to include “spare parts and police equipment”. Individual countries also placed

⁷⁴ Klotz, Audie. “Making Sanctions Work: Comparative Lessons.” In How Sanctions Work. Eds. Neta. C. Crawford and Audie Klotz. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. P. 268.

⁷⁵ Maloka, Tshidiso. “‘Sanctions Hurt but Apartheid Kills!’: The Sanctions Campaign and Black Workers.” In How Sanctions Work. Eds. Neta. C. Crawford and Audie Klotz. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999. P. 178.

⁷⁶ Maloka, p. 185.

arms embargoes, which could be much more restrictive than the UN's resolution. These embargoes were effective because the South African government had almost no means of producing arms and military equipment within its country, and thus was forced to import mostly all of these items. The government needed these arms and equipment not only to continue its forceful repression within South Africa, but also to continue its regional activities, which included occupying Namibia and parts of southern Angola.⁷⁸ When access to imports of these supplies from other countries was cut off, the government was forced to attempt to find alternate sources of arms, or develop arms within its borders. This proved to be very costly, adding to already-existing economic difficulties. Also, the arms embargoes limited the government's ability to apply force within the country, a result which necessarily benefited anti-apartheid activists.

The prolonged focus here on economic pressures and actions is important to take into account. The apartheid regime, repressive as it was, was free to carry on its actions as long as it remained recognized and accepted globally. Although the government was constantly attempting to crush the movements within South Africa, it still maintained economic and political ties to many other countries and its existence was thus legitimated. When the international community withdrew its support, however, the government realized the crisis situation it was in. In this global capitalist society, the most effective, and I would argue persuasive, way for the international community to withdraw its support was economically. When foreign governments went as far as to place sanctions and embargoes on South Africa during the 1980s, it was clear to the apartheid

⁷⁷ Crawford, Neta C. "How Arms Embargoes Work." In How Sanctions Work. Eds. Neta. C. Crawford and Audie Klotz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. P. 52.

⁷⁸ Crawford, p. 61.

government that something must drastically change. The US Library of Congress documents this, saying

International pressure in the form of economic and political sanctions, including diplomatic pressure by the United States, helped force the Afrikaner establishment--faced with a threat to its own economic well-being--to embark on a process that would ultimately result in sharing power, authority, and resources with the disenfranchised black majority.⁷⁹

This focus on economic pressure is nothing new to nonviolent theory. In the mid-19th century, Henry David Thoreau recognized the power of money, and the threat of its withdrawal, as a catalyst for change when he wrote of the responsibility of citizens to not pay taxes when their tax money would support unfavorable or unethical government actions. In 1936, Dorothy Day referred to the influence of money when she issued the call that “American bankers must not lend money to nations at war”.⁸⁰ James Farmer, quoted in Gene Sharp’s The Politics of Nonviolent Action, described “the withdrawal of financial support from any discriminatory activity as the most powerful weapon available to the federal government”.⁸¹ Martin Luther King, Jr., employed the use of economic pressure in the struggle for civil rights in the United States through boycotts and sit-ins. Describing several of the sit-ins by students, which discouraged many white shoppers and diners from patronizing certain establishments (and thus costing these establishments much of their business), King wrote, “Amid this type of pressure, it is not hard to get people to agree to change.”⁸² Barbara Deming wrote

Because economic pressures are often the most effective kind, nonviolent activists should be especially creative in devising an alternative economic

⁷⁹ United States Library of Congress. “Country Studies: South Africa.” 2004. Online at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/frd/cs/zatoc.html>.

⁸⁰ Quoted in The Power of Nonviolence: Writings by Advocates of Peace. Intro. Howard Zinn. Boston: Beacon Press, 2002. P. 48.

⁸¹ Sharp, p. 240.

⁸² In Hunter and Mallick, p. 131.

system, so that the existing system and all its injustices can be shut down simply by being ignored.⁸³

We can see that threats to an establishment, in this case the South African apartheid government, with economic forces and actions become very effective ways to pressure for change.

It is questionable whether or not the pressure on the government by South African anti-apartheid activists, in the form of economic pressure or civil non-cooperation, would have, on its own, been enough to bring apartheid to an end. If these activists had been working without the support of any international players, the struggle may have been much longer, or even not successful. The economic actions taken by the anti-apartheid movement, whether they were strikes or boycotts, were often times more symbolic than actually harmful to the regime. The apartheid government had plenty of money and arms at its disposal, thanks in large part to its extensive economic relationships with countries around the world. Strikes or boycotts by certain communities and groups within South Africa certainly clearly demonstrated displeasure and disagreement with the apartheid regime, but overall probably did not manage to directly effect the economy of the country as a whole. Boycotting white businesses to gain support from white South Africans, such as in Port Elizabeth, was probably as close as these groups got to directly targeting the government. Therefore, it is questionable to what extent these internal pressures alone would have been able to bring about large-scale change.

The increasingly globalized world, however, and South Africa's economic relationships within it, meant that the government was also very dependent on members of the international community:

⁸³ In Chernus, p. 190.

By the 1980s, capital goods comprised over 40 percent of imports. Any growth in the domestic economy, therefore, increased the demand for foreign exchange, which the country could acquire either from exports or inflows of foreign investment. Thus, for South Africa, like many newly industrializing countries, sustained economic growth hinged on a healthy balance of payments.⁸⁴

Because of South Africa's role in the global economic system, it was crucial that the anti-apartheid movement gain support from within the international community. It was a combination of obvious dissatisfaction within South Africa, and pointed disagreement with the apartheid system from outside South Africa, that managed to put enough pressure on the government to convince it to change. Without the nature of the globalized world in the 1980s the anti-apartheid regime may not have been as successful.

Aside from the international pressures, we can still recognize the importance of nonviolent actions within South Africa. Many South Africans committed themselves to nonviolent actions, oftentimes making personal sacrifices. In some of these instances, an entire community supported nonviolent action, such as in the consumer boycott of white businesses in Port Elizabeth. This is unusual, however. 100% of a population is not necessary in order to bring about change. One source cites a critical mass of 10-15% of a population, and this number can vary in different settings and contexts.⁸⁵ In many of the other South African nonviolent actions, smaller percentages of the community became involved, but nonviolence was still effective. In many instances of strikes and boycotts, roughly 20% of the population took part. With the development of alternative institutions, it can be estimated that an even smaller number of citizens were involved. Yet, these

⁸⁴ Carim, Xavier, Audie Klotz, and Olivier Lebleu. "The Political Economy of Financial Sanctions." In How Sanctions Work. Eds. Neta. C. Crawford and Audie Klotz. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999. P. 160.

⁸⁵ Nonviolence Works: Popularizing and Promoting the Power of Nonviolence. 2003. Online at <http://www.nonviolenceworks.net>.

nonviolent actions were nevertheless successful as a part of the movement as a whole in bringing down the apartheid system.

The fact that tens of thousands of South Africans were joining together to participate in boycotts, such as the consumer boycott in Port Elizabeth, or marches, such as the 1989 march of 30,000 people in Cape Town, “put peaceful protest firmly back on South Africa’s political agenda”.⁸⁶ Alternative institutions created by non-white South Africans also threatened the regime. As Gene Sharp wrote, “When their [alternative institutions’] creation and growth produces a challenge to the previous institutions, the new ones constitute nonviolent intervention.”⁸⁷ These and other nonviolent actions signaled to the government, which was quickly becoming exhausted due to internal and external pressures, that the non-white South African population was strong and determined, and not going away anytime soon. The pressure of all these actions combined led to the government’s willingness to negotiate an end to apartheid.

IV. Conclusion

At this point we can refer back to our earlier discussion of theorists of nonviolence, and draw parallels between their beliefs and the reality of the situation in South Africa. Gene Sharp’s theories of nonviolent action are particularly pertinent to the situation in South Africa, and we can see a lot of his theory played out in practice. Activists in South Africa employed all three types of nonviolent action, as described by Sharp: nonviolent protest and persuasion (eg: the 1989 march of 30,000 people in Cape Town), noncooperation (eg: movements to defy Pass Laws), and intervention (eg:

⁸⁶ Smuts and Westcott, p. 82.

⁸⁷ Sharp, p. 398.

alternative structures). Sharp's underlying argument, that political power is based on the consent and cooperation of the population and therefore can be withdrawn *by* the population, is clearly proven in the South African case.

Nonviolence, as used in South Africa, also demonstrated the belief by many theorists that nonviolence, by its nature, is a more inclusive form of social activism. Many of the theorists that we examined earlier argued this point. Members of non-white communities in South Africa, as well as members of white communities, were more likely to be drawn to the anti-apartheid movement when violence was not a prevalent form of action. This benefited the movement not only by gaining more participants, but by building up support, even among members of the opposition.

Sharp and many scholars of this topic will argue that the apartheid regime was brought to an end once it was delegitimated. That is, it was clear to observers within and outside South Africa that the government did not have the support necessary to consider itself a legitimate ruler of the country. 90% of the population, all non-white South Africans, were opposed to the minority regime, and by the late 1980s, many white South Africans had also withdrawn their support. These whites either felt the economic pressure from actions such as boycotts and sanctions, or opposed the regime for moral reasons.

Of the three ways that nonviolent action can produce change (conversion, accommodation, and nonviolent coercion), Gene Sharp would most likely argue that in South Africa, change was brought about through accommodation. Certainly the apartheid regime was not "converted" – this is evidenced by the fact that the National Party was an active political party until just recently.⁸⁸ Nor were they necessarily nonviolently

⁸⁸ British Broadcasting Company. "SA apartheid party set to disband." 10 April 2005. Online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4429307.stm>.

“coerced”. While the anti-apartheid movement certainly, as we have seen, put an enormous amount of pressure on the regime, the government eventually agreed to negotiate an end to the apartheid era. They were not forced out of office – rather, the apartheid government and the anti-apartheid movement worked together to bring about change. In fact, Nelson Mandela and F.W. de Klerk were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1994 for their work in ending apartheid. The apartheid system was thus changed through a process of accommodation, meaning that the ruling party did not necessarily change their beliefs yet agreed to work to bring about change. Many whites in South Africa probably still agreed with the idea of apartheid – this is clear when one studies the geography of most major South African cities. When apartheid ended, many white South Africans fled to the suburbs, and proceeded to erect fences and security systems, in effect creating “gated communities” to keep non-whites out.⁸⁹ However, it was made clear by the actions of anti-apartheid activists and the international community that something needed to change, and therefore the government (perhaps begrudgingly) agreed to negotiate an end to apartheid.

Non-white South Africans, of course, had never approved of the apartheid government. Since its installation in 1948, the anti-apartheid movement had carried out civil disobedience (in the form of pass burnings, for example), marches, sit-ins, worker and student strikes, consumer boycotts, and had successfully convinced the international community to place sanctions on South Africa. The apartheid government was able to maintain a sense of control over its citizens only through the use of force, which in turn angered many observers, both within South Africa and elsewhere.

⁸⁹ British Broadcasting Company. “Gated communities ‘fuel SA divisions’.” 15 March 2005. Online at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4337357.stm>.

Citizens of South Africa effectively withdrew consent of the apartheid government, as outlined by Sharp. An editorial in a South African newspaper in 1989 describes this, saying

...such acquiescence [eg: of banned individuals]...depended also on a pervasive respect for the authority and essential respectability of the law to which political dissidents so often turned – and still turn – for relief from oppression. Now, in more desperate political times, the intimidatory powers of the state have waned...Inevitably, that meek acquiescence of yesteryear has evaporated and SA is now witnessing an open, deliberate and organized campaign of defiance.⁹⁰

Through the use of nonviolence, the anti-apartheid movement retained some “moral correctness”. As the above-mentioned theorists believe, killing, even in the name of a “just cause”, is never justified. Gandhi would laud the nonviolent anti apartheid activists for their respect of *ahimsa*, the belief that all peoples are interconnected and so to do harm against one is to harm all. King would describe the South Africans’ actions as redemptive – that is, suffering unjustly is a form of redemption.⁹¹ Day and others would certainly agree.

Practically speaking, it is also true that government repression against nonviolent activists is never as easy as it is against violent activists. Many began to rethink government policies of using force against nonviolent protestors. There is proof of this dilemma from the 1984-85 consumer boycott in Port Elizabeth. The colonel in charge of police forces in Port Elizabeth at the time, the now retired Col. Lourens Du Plessis, exclaimed, “What do you do? You can’t shoot all these people!”⁹² Scholars would agree that this is one of the most important advantages of nonviolent action.

⁹⁰ Smuts and Westcott, p. 37.

⁹¹ In Egan, p. 204.

⁹² PBS video.

In the end, the combined pressure from South African anti-apartheid activists and from the international community, a combination that finally fused in the 1980s, led to the downfall of apartheid. It is my belief that this would not have happened in such a relatively peaceful way had the South African activists developed to a movement based on violence. By using nonviolence, activists were still showing their respect for the humanity of all peoples, even their unjust oppressors. This respect is what led the government and the activists to the negotiating table instead of the battlefield. Stephen Zunes concurs, writing

[The struggle in South Africa] demonstrated that even where so many had given up on non-violence, key elements of the resistance movement would recognize its power, and utilize unarmed resistance in the successful liberation of their people.⁹³

The PBS video, “South Africa: Freedom in Our Lifetime”, interviews a number of South Africans who agree also with this. The above-mentioned Col. Lourens Du Plessis stated, “The armed struggle came to nothing as far as I am concerned. The people brought it [the end of apartheid] about, and pressure from overseas – that is what really, in the end, made it clear.” Professor Janet Cherry said, “It was in fact the activities of the UDF, in mass organization, which brought about the change in South Africa.” And my personal favorite of those quoted in the video, Desmond Tutu, eloquently states

I suppose that human beings looking at it would say that arms are the most dangerous things that a dictator, a tyrant, needs to fear. But in fact, no. It is when people decide they want to be free. Once they have made up their minds to that, there’s nothing that will stop them.⁹⁴

⁹³ Zunes, p. 168.

⁹⁴ PBS video.

V. Further Considerations

The downfall of apartheid in South Africa provides us with an example of the efficacy of nonviolence in struggles against oppressors. The effectiveness of nonviolence is, I believe, not limited to any specific time or place. Rather, nonviolence could be implemented in virtually any struggle and, when used correctly, could be as effective as it was in South Africa. This is so due to the underlying basis of nonviolence: that it is the most moral way to attempt to enact change, and more so, is the most logical strategy to use when attempting to create a more just and harmonious society.

The case of Palestinian resistance against the government of Israel presents a very vital and important instance in which nonviolence could be used, in my opinion, with a great deal of success. The parameters of the struggle are of course much different than the South African case, yet many similarities do exist between the two. Palestinians, like the activists in the anti-apartheid movement, are up against a fierce military force. Israel currently has the world's fourth largest army, and receives approximately \$3 billion in aid from the United States government each year. Palestinians also, like opponents of apartheid, have the support of much of the international community, with the notable exception, of course, of the US government. As in the South African case, many Palestinians and members of the international community consider the Israeli government's actions to be illegal, especially the settlements in the West Bank. The most important parallel is that both movements (the anti-apartheid movement and the Palestinian resistance) struggled, or continue to struggle, against a government, or governmental action, which is deemed by many to be illegitimate.

Many Palestinians view the Israeli government as artificial and unlawful. With the official creation of the Israeli state in 1948, much of the Palestinian land on which families had lived for generations became a new country overnight. Jewish settlers see the creation of Israel as a righteous accomplishment, returning the “Promised Land” to its original inhabitants, and giving the world’s Jews a place to call home after the Holocaust. Palestinians view the creation of Israel as a seizure and an occupation of land that belonged to a specific, rich, Arab culture, and have struggled against the Israeli state ever since.

Probably the most well-known component of this Palestinian resistance is, of course, suicide bombings, which we hear about almost daily in the news media. These suicide bombings are most often covered in the media (the US media, particularly) in a way that portrays them as justification for further Israeli repression, rather than as a reaction to existing Israeli oppression.⁹⁵ This coverage, and of course the act of suicide bombings themselves, results in a lack of support for the Palestinian cause. When outsiders see violence being used in a struggle, sympathy is much harder to garner.

However, many other actions and methods of resistance take place, also on a daily basis. Many of these are nonviolent. Groups such as the International Solidarity Movement frequently work with Palestinian communities to nonviolently protest the checkpoints set up by Israel and the enforced separation of Palestinians from their mainstay crops of olives and citrus. This group also sends delegates to travel with Palestinian ambulances and other essential social service providers to ensure that Israeli soldiers do not restrict these movements. The presence of internationals in these

⁹⁵ Peace, Propaganda, and the Promised Land. Writ. & dir. Sut Jhally and Bathsheba Ratzkoff. Prod. Bathsheba Ratzkoff. DVD [videorecording]. Media Education Foundation, 2004.

situations is for the benefit of the Palestinians, as it is believed that Israeli soldiers will be less likely to use force when people from outside the country are present.⁹⁶

Groups from within Palestine are also actively promoting the practice of nonviolent action in the prolonged struggle against Israeli occupation. Activist Lucy Nusseibeh gave a lecture at Boston College on 13 April 2005 outlining various efforts by Palestinians to advance the use of nonviolence. Ms. Nusseibeh stated, in agreement with many of the aforementioned theorists on nonviolence, that the only way to achieve a nonviolent society is to use nonviolence to create it. A group called Middle East Nonviolence and Democracy (MEND) works within Palestinian schools to empower Palestinian children and teach them about the effectiveness of nonviolent action. In this way, an attempt is made to steer children clear of the path of anger and resentment that frequently leads toward violence, especially among young people. MEND actively uses the media to advocate for nonviolence in the form of children's programming, such as Sesame Street, and a soap opera that promotes nonviolence. This group works within the scope of a broad goal, which is to convince Palestinians not to dwell in a psychology of victimization, but to empower themselves and take decisive, nonviolent action against their oppressor. These actions may include (and occasionally have included) strikes by citrus workers, protests at checkpoints, and artistic expression.⁹⁷

Ms. Nusseibeh spoke at length about the appropriate context in which to use nonviolence. She spoke of the importance of a democratic community in order to implement nonviolence – a democratic community which, she says, is already in place within the Palestinian culture. She also discussed the crucial point of identifying where

⁹⁶ The International Solidarity Movement. 2005. Online at <http://www.palsolidarity.org>.

the power lies (in this case, with the Israeli government) and targeting it. Another important aspect of this movement is the need to recognize people's psychology, which in this case may be very bitter and resentful towards Israelis, and to work with this, not deny it. Ms. Nusseibeh is one of many activists in Palestine who believe that nonviolence is the means with which to achieve their desired ends, and she is actively involved in pursuing this tactic.⁹⁸

It is very possible that the proponents of nonviolence in Palestine will not be able to convince every single Palestinian to commit to nonviolence. What is needed is, then, is to draw attention away from the violent actions by using innovative, creative, and attention-grabbing nonviolent actions. An example of this sort of action in South Africa that appealed to the media was a demonstration in Cape Town in 1989 in which the government used spray cannons against peaceful demonstrators, many holding signs that read "The People Shall Govern". The water in the spray cannons happened to be colored with purple dye, so as to mark the demonstrators who were to be arrested, and act as a deterrent. As a result, the demonstrators were all turned a bright purple color. The anti-apartheid movement seized this event as a media spectacle, and the phrase "The Purple Shall Govern" became part of the dynamic movement rhetoric.

Obviously, in this case, the demonstrators probably did not plan on being dyed purple, and possibly did not care to be, but the genius of the movement was to grab hold of this event and creatively spin it in such a way as to gain support. Palestinians could do the same. By creating new, innovative nonviolent campaigns and actions, media attention

⁹⁷ Nusseibeh, Lucy. "Democracy and Nonviolence in Palestine." Lecture at Boston College. Presented by the International Studies Program. 13 April 2005.

⁹⁸ Nusseibeh, 13 April 2005.

would eventually turn from the repetitive suicide bombings to something more “news-worthy”. If Israel and the world were to pay more attention to the nonviolent actions of Palestinians than the violent ones, pressure for an end to the occupation would no doubt be forthcoming.

We can recall Nelson Mandela’s words: “a government which uses force to maintain its rule teaches the oppressed to use force to oppose it”. I would agree with Mr. Mandela, yet expand upon this to argue that a movement that uses force to create a new society teaches its citizens that force is acceptable. Nonviolent action is the only way to successfully create a peaceful society. In the Palestinian case, as in all other struggles that are considering the use of violence, this is a very important idea to keep in mind.

Afterword

At one point during the writing of this thesis, I e-mailed my advisor regarding several of my frustrations with this project. Professor Derber e-mailed me back and said that these frustrations were “a sign of your growing sophistication as a scholar of nonviolence”. Those words struck me as I realized that he’s absolutely right.

I believe very strongly in the power of nonviolence, as a tactic in a political struggle and also as a way of life. Yet there are many obstacles to face when choosing to promote a nonviolent path. One of my greatest frustrations was the realization that it is often not feasible to expect to convince people to commit to nonviolence based solely on moral grounds. I often find myself living in a bit of fantasy world wherein people eventually choose nonviolence because they see the harm caused to the entire human race when harm is done to one human. When I first set out writing this thesis, I was planning

on including one chapter entirely devoted to the morality of nonviolence – that is, why people *should* choose nonviolence, simply because it is the right thing to do. I quickly found that, for the most part, people agree – nonviolence is a favorable way to handle conflicts. Yet many people turn away from it because of its perceived ineffectiveness. I realized that in order to convince people of the rightness of nonviolence, I would have to convince them that it can be a practical, pragmatic, effective choice.

As I set out to do this, I was surprised to realize how much of the practicality of nonviolence is based on the power of money. That is, many of the scholars and nonviolent leaders that I studied recognized the power that a threat to money or funding can have upon a disagreeable government. I found myself resisting this notion, for the exact reason listed above – I did not want nonviolence to be effective because of its economic implications, but because of its morality. I was frustrated that so much of our global society is based on economics, and that the most powerful (and some would argue effective) way to enact change is to “hit ‘em where it hurts” – the wallet. I began the process of convincing myself that economic pressure, as a form of nonviolence, can be just as moral as nonviolence based on a respect for common humanity. I must say, however, that this process has just begun and I believe it will continue for some time.

Throughout the writing of this paper, and for as long as I’ve strongly believed in the power of nonviolence, I have struggled to see how I fit into the picture. I realize the hypocrisy of my adamant belief in nonviolence: When have I ever been in a position to really choose? I have never lived under a violently repressive regime, or had to make a choice regarding using violence or not. I am very privileged in many ways. Does my privilege afford me the right to recommend how others should handle their struggles? I

am very conscious of appearing self-righteous. I know that to many, my opinion doesn't count because I've never "been there".

This is something that I continuously work through. I am attempting a balance of respect for other people's positions and choices, and a firm belief that nonviolence can and will work. I know that the personal struggles that I face regarding my belief in nonviolence are healthy and helpful. This is an issue to which I am firmly committed, and while I am still learning and growing as a "scholar of nonviolence", I will continue to advocate for its use and try to implement it in my everyday life.

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