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# 1 Conceptualization and Debates

Collective civilian-based campaigns and movements to promote group rights and social justice have occurred throughout history. When these challenges are waged outside of conventional political channels and without violence or the threat of violence, they fall within the realm of *civil resistance*. From the eighteenth century onward the frequency of civil resistance increased and propelled waves of democratization and struggles for labor rights, national liberation, and racial equality. Profound political transformations in the last quarter century were driven in part by civil resistance such as the demise of Communist Party rule in Eastern Europe in 1989–91, the end of the Cold War, and the Color Revolutions in the early twenty-first century. Along with these more recent challenges, such as the Arab Spring and widespread protests against austerity programs, privatization, corruption, land alienation, and increasing inequalities have generated widespread interest in civil resistance. Although the impact of civil resistance on domestic and international politics across the globe is often pivotal, we know relatively little about the dynamics of nonviolent struggle. This is due in part to the great attention paid by scholars and the media to violent resistance, terrorism, and war, as well as hegemonic ideas and myths about the power and utility of violence. In the introductory chapter civil resistance is defined and major questions and debates are introduced. In subsequent chapters various

campaigns and movements implementing civil resistance and dynamics of civil resistance are explored.

## What is Civil Resistance?

Civil resistance is *resistance* in the sense that it involves widespread activities that challenge a particular power, regime, or policy, and it is *civil* in the sense that it is implemented by groups whose goals are widely shared throughout civil society and involves nonviolent action rather than violent (uncivil) action (Roberts 2009: 2). Civil resistance avoids any systematic recourse to violence and it is *collective action* as opposed to individual dissent (Randle 1994: 10). Civil resistance, while abstaining from violence, involves *full engagement* in resisting oppression or injustice (Dudouet 2008: 3). Civil resistance is carried out by *civilians* rather than by armed groups, although members of the state's armed forces and security apparatus may engage in civil resistance by disobeying orders of superiors and refusing to use their arms. Civil resistance is a form of *asymmetric conflict* in the sense that there is a large power disparity between opponents (Arreguin-Toft 2005; Mack 1975). In the case of civil resistance the asymmetry is between marginalized or oppressed challenging groups and authorities that may use violence to maintain their privilege and power (Dudouet 2008: 4). Civil resistance is sustained when it occurs over a period of time as opposed to one-off events or occasional protest. Sustained collective action implies organization and leadership, although the form they take varies considerably from centralized organization and leadership to decentralized networks with no identifiable leaders.

*Civil resistance* may be defined as the use of methods of nonviolent action by civil society actors engaged in asymmetric conflicts with authorities not averse to using violence to defend their interests. *Civil resistance* has gained popularity as a term because of the moral and religious implications and misconceptions often associated with the term "nonviolence" and because the term "nonviolence" may be misleading when

there is no explicit commitment to refrain from using violence, when violence is avoided solely for pragmatic reasons, and when property destruction occurs. Here the term "nonviolence" (as a noun) is used only where it is specifically appropriate. The terms *civil resistance*, *nonviolent resistance*, and *nonviolent struggle* are used interchangeably.

The core attribute of civil resistance is the collective implementation of methods of *nonviolent action*. Campaigns against oppression and injustice, of course, may be composed of diverse groups and networks, with diverse ideologies and goals that implement both routine and non-routine as well as violent and nonviolent action. Nevertheless in order to understand and explain dynamics of civil resistance, and of conflict more generally, it is useful to make conceptual distinctions between routine and non-routine politics as well as between violent and nonviolent action while recognizing that in acute conflicts resistance is rarely entirely violent or nonviolent.

Routine or conventional political action occurs within institutionally prescribed political and legal spheres and dialogical channels. By contrast, non-routine action (nonviolent or violent) occurs outside of political, legal, and dialogical channels controlled by authorities and elites. Of course, what is routine or conventional varies over time and across contexts.

Nonviolent action refers to non-routine and extra-institutional political acts that do not involve violence or the threat of violence. Nonviolent action may occur through acts of omission, whereby people refuse to perform acts expected by norms, custom, law, or decree, or acts of commission, whereby people perform acts which they do not usually perform, are not expected by norms or customs to perform, or are forbidden by law or decree to perform (Sharp 1973: 68, 2005: 41). Thus, nonviolent action may be legal or illegal. Civil disobedience, for example, involves open, deliberate and nonviolent violation of laws and policies perceived as unjust. Implementing nonviolent action does not mean that opponents, third parties, or bystanders will not be inconvenienced, distressed, or nonviolently coerced, or that they will not respond with violence, but it is clear

that nonviolent action does not threaten or directly result in people being forcefully detained against their will, injured, violated, or killed.

On the surface the distinction between violent and nonviolent action is obvious. Violence entails intentional, direct, and unwanted physical interference with the bodies of others (Keane 2004: 35–6).[1] Violent action, such as detaining someone against their will, unwanted bodily injuries or violations, or killing, is intended to alter people's behavior through its use or threatened use. Violence may alter the behavior of people to whom it is applied or by setting an example that alters the calculations and behaviors of others. Although the application of violence is straightforward, the threat of violence or the perception of implied threats of violence or motivations to use violence attributed to actors may be less clear. Moreover, authorities typically label any sort of non-routine political action (whether violent or nonviolent), especially illegal or disruptive action, as "violent" and media coverage is biased in favor of a "law and order" perspective – in democracies as well as in authoritarian regimes. When police attack unarmed demonstrators, for example, it is often reported in the media as "violent protest."

Both violent and nonviolent action are non-routine and they share some commonalities relative to conventional politics. By occurring outside of institutionally prescribed channels where authorities have inherent advantages, violent and nonviolent action represent direct threats to the status quo. Since both violent and nonviolent actions are often met with violent repression, they are higher risk actions than are conventional political actions. Both nonviolent and violent action are unilaterally initiated and do not require the consent or cooperation of the opposing party. Conflicts prosecuted through violent or nonviolent action are indeterminate in the sense that the contest is not regulated by codified agreements and rules about what action is acceptable or how conflicts are prosecuted and resolved. Instead, outcomes of contests depend on factors related to the strategic and bargaining interaction between parties to the conflict (Bond 1994). It is possible that moral preferences may also impact outcomes.

While violent and nonviolent action are both direct action, they operate through different mechanisms. Violent action works through physical and coercive force and the fear of detainment, bodily harm, or death. Nonviolent action, by contrast, instead of physically coercing, violating, disabling, or eliminating the opponent, works through social power and the human mind by use of appeals, manipulation, and nonviolent coercion. It is used to change relationships rather than to destroy opponents (Bond 1994). Moreover, Todd May (2015) suggests that nonviolent resistance embodies "equality" and "dignity" in sharp contrast to violent resistance.

Another difference concerns the reversibility of the consequences. The results of violent actions such as bombings and armed attacks that result in injury or death cannot be reversed, nor can time lost from being imprisoned be recuperated; but the consequences of strikes or boycotts, for example, can be easily reversed through the reestablishment of cooperative relations.[2] Thus, as opposed to violent action, nonviolent action is characterized by a "principle of reversibility" (Galtung 1996: 271–3). And since humans are fallible, the ability to reverse the consequences of one's actions is important. Moreover, some have suggested that civil resistance is a self-limiting style of struggle, characterized by mechanisms for inhibiting violent extremism and unbridled escalation, and keeping the conflict within acceptable bounds (Wehr 1979: 55–122). Similarly, struggles waged through nonviolent action are less likely to contribute to humiliation, intolerance, hatred, and desire for revenge, which may form the basis of future conflicts (Randle 1994: 113).

Moreover, nonviolent action is much more targeted and discriminating than is violent action. For example, one might participate in a boycott and picket of a local jewelry store that sells "blood diamonds," but still cooperate with the storeowner in the local bocce ball league and at the annual public library book sale. The boycott and picket target the specific role of storeowner engaged in a specific practice; her other social roles and practices are left intact. Compare the nonviolent boycott and picket with a violent drone strike that kills not only a person who is allegedly plotting with people labeled

as terrorists, but also the person's roles and practices as father, caregiver to the elderly, donor to the needy, and organizer at his place of worship, as well as all of the positive roles of innocent civilians who are killed as well (see Johansen 2007: 144). According to the logic of military violence, the killing of innocent civilians is mere "collateral damage." Moreover, hundreds of billions of dollars are spent by governments every year on military research, development and production, yet no military weapon has been developed that can effectively differentiate between the various social roles and practices of a target, as can the weapons of nonviolent resistance.

Violent and nonviolent action may also be differentiated in terms of their relation to a third construct, power. Scholars have traditionally emphasized *power over* and equate violence with power. However, others emphasize *power to* or *power with* and differentiate violence from power. The twentieth-century political theorist Hannah Arendt, for example, suggests that rather than being an extreme manifestation of power, violence is the antithesis of power. Violence, she argues, may destroy power, but cannot create it. From this perspective, the use of violence indicates a lack of power, while voluntary, cooperative, nonviolent action is an essential indicator of power (Arendt 1970).

Thus, even though violent and nonviolent action may be used in tandem within campaigns, they are quite different phenomena with different dynamics and consequences. As early twentieth-century sociologist Max Weber stated, "the conceptual separation of peaceful (from violent) conflict is justified by the quality of the means normal to it and the peculiar sociological consequences of its occurrence" (Weber 1978 [1922]: 38).[3] Rather than assuming that nonviolent action occupies an intermediary position on a gradual continuum from conventional politics to violence, it may be more useful to assume that nonviolent action represents a distinct break from both. Not only does implementing violent and/or nonviolent action have consequences for the dynamics, outcomes, and consequences of resistance, but also the clear differentiation and operationalization of these forms of action have consequences for how scholars view, understand, and explain conflict.

According to Gene Sharp (1973: Part II, 2005: 49–64), methods of nonviolent action fall into three broad descriptive classes: protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Protest and persuasion are symbolic expressions with communicative content that may persuade the opponent, expose the opponent's illegitimacy, provide social visibility to unjust relations, illustrate the extent of dissatisfaction, educate the public and third parties, and catalyze their support. These methods are often the crucibles in which fear and acquiescence are overcome, frames are elaborated and disseminated, solidarity is forged, and people are recruited or motivated to participate in additional actions. These methods do not consist of the use of reason, discussion, or persuasion solely within officially prescribed dialogical channels or *exclusive of* direct contentious action. They include actions such as protest demonstrations, marches, rallies, public speeches, symbolic public acts, vigils, and more.

Noncooperation involves the deliberate withdrawal, restriction, or defiance of expected participation, cooperation, or obedience. Although these methods may have symbolic significance, they may also disrupt the status quo and undermine or sever the opponent from its sources of power, resources, and legitimacy. Social noncooperation involves the refusal to carry out normal social relations, such as through social boycotts, social ostracism, student strikes, and stay-aways. Economic noncooperation involves the suspension of existing economic relationships or the refusal to initiate new ones, such as through labor strikes or slowdowns, economic boycotts, refusal to pay rent, debts, interest, or taxes, and the collective withdrawal of bank deposits. Political noncooperation involves the refusal to continue usual forms of political participation or obedience, such as disobeying authorities or boycotting elections.

Nonviolent interventions are acts of interposition intended to directly disrupt social relations or develop alternative social relations. Examples range from sit-ins, pickets, nonviolent obstructions, nonviolent sabotage, land occupations, paralyzing transportation to developing alternative markets, and creating parallel institutions during the course of a

struggle. Methods of intervention may operate negatively, in the sense that they disrupt established behaviors, policies, relations, or institutions; or they may operate positively, by establishing new behavior patterns, policies, relationships or institutions (Sharp 1973: 357; referred to as *disruptive* and *creative* interventions by Burrowes 1996: 98). Creative nonviolent interventions are significant, because in struggles against oppression and injustice not only is it necessary to withdraw participation from oppressive and unjust relations; it is also necessary to engage in positive action to build democratic and just alternatives. Disruptive and creative nonviolent intervention are mutually supporting and reinforcing; while disruptive nonviolent intervention (and noncooperation) drains power from the opponent, creative nonviolent intervention generates power among the challengers.[4]

While Sharp's classification is descriptive of methods incorporated in past campaigns, Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack (1975: 37–54) classify methods of nonviolent action based on their strategic function: symbolic, denial, and undermining. Boserup and Mack's classification was formulated in the context of civil defense against foreign occupation; nevertheless, their typology has broader applications. Symbolic actions demonstrate unity and strength, define the challengers as a moral community, and force the uncommitted to take a stand. In the lexicon of social movements, symbolic actions express worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment (WUNC), which Charles Tilly maintains (Tilly 2006: 53–4; see also Tilly & Wood 2013: 5) are essential elements of social movements. These actions are a form of communication that go beyond words and signal that change is desirable and possible and there is a demonstrated commitment and determination to achieve it.

Denial actions deprive the opponent of what is taken through coercion or accumulated through exploitative or illegitimate exchange relations. An opponent's claim may be denied temporarily through obstruction or sabotage, and perhaps more completely through noncooperation. The withdrawal of labor through slowdowns, working to rule, or strikes, for example, deprive the exploiter the fruits of labor.

Refusal to pay onerous debts, for example, denies the usurer the fruits of usury. Refusal to cooperate with foreign occupiers or military coup leaders severely limits their legitimacy and ability to attain their objectives.

Undermining actions attempt to exacerbate or exploit divisions among opponents and inhibit the cooperation of third parties with opponents. Examples may include methods to undermine the willingness of state security forces or occupying forces to follow orders (see the discussion of state–challenger interactions in chapter 5), methods to cultivate support from abroad (see chapter 6 on transnational relations and intervention), methods to cultivate support from among the uncommitted or to sever allies from the opponent (see the *spectrum of allies* analytical tool in chapter 7), and methods to cultivate support of intermediaries that concatenate the oppressors and the oppressed (see chapter 6 as well as the discussion of social distance in chapter 7). Although social movement scholarship has paid considerable attention to social movement bases and symbolic actions, the main concerns of civil resistance scholarship are denial and undermining actions, which give teeth to campaigns of civil resistance.

Despite the distinctions between various forms of nonviolent action and between nonviolent action, violent action, and conventional politics, gray areas exist. One gray area is the frontier between covert and overt resistance. Even where there is apparent acquiescence and acceptance of the status quo, covert forms of insubordination and resistance may be widespread. In his examination of peasant resistance, James C. Scott (1990) identifies the infrapolitics of the less powerful, whereby cultures of resistance percolate through the hidden transcripts of ideological insubordination of speech acts, such as rumors, gossip, character assassination, folktales, songs, gestures, jokes, and theater, as well as practices to thwart exploitation, such as poaching, foot-dragging, pilfering, clandestine tax evasion, intentionally shabby work, dissimulation, and flight. Under certain circumstances hidden transcripts are made public and covert action is transformed into overt resistance and rebellion.

One form of covert resistance has been dubbed Svejkism (or Schweikism) after the protagonist in Jaroslav Hašek's (2000 [1923]) novel *The Good Soldier Švejk*, set during World War I. In the novel, Josef Švejk (or Schweik), after being conscripted into the Austro-Hungarian military, combines apparent cooperation with an apparent inability to comprehend instructions properly or to carry them out effectively. Through incompetence, non-sequiturs, and his inability to comprehend the "justness" and "righteousness" of war, he succeeds in maddening every authority figure he comes into contact with. His advice to a new fellow inmate in the garrison jail is "The best thing you can do now is to pretend to be an idiot" (Hašek 2000 [1923]: 385). Like Henry David Thoreau's (1996 [1849]) open civil disobedience, Švejk's simple demeanor and feigned ignorance[5] act as "counter-friction" to slow down the "machine."

Other gray areas concern sabotage, the destruction of property, and violence to self. Sabotage and property destruction may or may not be considered a form of nonviolent action depending upon the context and likelihood that human injury or death will result. Members of the Plowshares Movement, for example, engage in nonviolent resistance through symbolic and actual destruction of military instruments and weapons of mass destruction. Other examples include destroying genetically modified crops as a form of protest against genetically modified organisms (GMOs) and large agribusiness carried out by groups such as the Landless Rural Workers Movement (*Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra*; or MST) in Brazil and the *Karnataka Raja Rota Sangh* (Karnataka State Farmers' Association, KRRS) in India. Finally, self-suffering in the extreme may take the form of self-immolation, which some may regard as an act of violence rather than nonviolence.

## Situating the Study of Civil Resistance

The study of civil resistance overlaps to some degree with peace and conflict studies and the study of social movements

and revolution, but there are also tensions and dissimilar points of emphasis that differentiate these areas of study. Three prominent areas and objectives in peace and conflict research are the elimination of international armed conflict, the management of violence, and conflict resolution. As the study of peace and conflict developed during the Cold War foci on arms control, especially nuclear arms, and the prevention of international war was appropriate given the potential catastrophe of nuclear war. A second area that has received emphasis in the post-Cold War era is the frequency, use, management, and control of violence, especially in "peripheral" areas or the "non-integrating gap." Why do scholars of peace and conflict focus overwhelmingly on violence and war relative to nonviolent resistance? First, the prevention of international war and the management of violence are often viewed as the most urgent and pressing problems. Second, nonviolent action is more difficult to measure empirically than is violent political action, since violence is more likely to generate tangible residues such as lifeless bodies and media reports, which facilitate data collection. Third, there are numerous misconceptions about nonviolent action that may inhibit scholars from viewing it as a serious and powerful method for waging struggle or influencing world politics (Chenoweth & Cunningham 2013; Schock 2003; 2005: 6–12). Thus, over the years researchers have devoted substantial time and resources documenting and cataloging political violence, and state funds for researching non-state terrorism have mushroomed following the attacks on September 11, 2001, but similar efforts have not been carried out with regard to nonviolent action and similar funds have not been made available for such research (but see Chenoweth 2008; Chenoweth & Lewis 2013).

A third area of emphasis in peace and conflict studies is conflict resolution, which refers to ending conflicts peacefully – from the interpersonal to the international – through methods such as negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, or peace building. Most methods of conflict resolution emphasize dialogue and problem solving designed to address and meet at least some of the needs of all parties. However, techniques

of conflict resolution are not always appropriate for situations of latent conflict where structural and cultural violence exist in the absence of overt violence, nor or they always appropriate for asymmetric conflicts where one party comes to the negotiating table with a distinct disadvantage in power (Dudouet 2008: 4–5).

Conflicts are transformed from latent to manifest when all parties are made aware of conflicting and overlapping interests and are provoked to respond to the actions of antagonists. Progress is made when conflict becomes overt and confrontational (Curle 1971). Thus civil resistance is a method for transforming latent conflicts into manifest ones, as well as a method for waging or prosecuting a struggle, and increasing the leverage of marginalized groups. From the perspective of practitioners of civil resistance, conflict is not to be avoided; instead, open conflict is viewed in a positive light. Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr., among others, viewed conflict as an opportunity to transform society, the opponent, and the self.

The study of civil resistance also overlaps with the study of social movements and revolution. Social movements are "collectivities acting with some degree of organization and continuity, partly outside institutional or organizational channels, for the purpose of challenging extant systems of authority, or resisting change in some systems, in the organization, society, culture, or world system in which they are embedded" (Snow & Soule 2010: 6–7). Given this definition, civil resistance may (or may not) be one of many activities undertaken by social movements. Thus, scholars of social movements tend to focus on a much broader array of activities than do scholars who focus more specifically on civil resistance. In addition to the sustained implementation of acts of protest or resistance and the context in which they occur, scholars of social movements also study social movement bases to a much greater degree, which include social movement networks, organizations and the accumulated cultural artifacts, memories, and traditions of a movement (Tilly & Tarrow 2007: 114).

Another difference is that the social movements literature has traditionally focused on challenges in developed

democratic contexts, whereas the civil resistance literature has tended to focus on struggles in authoritarian and less developed contexts. In this way, the literatures on revolution and civil resistance overlap, as they are both concerned with maximalist challenges, such as regime change, national liberation, and secession. According to Jack A. Goldstone (2001), a revolution is "an effort to transform the political institutions and the justifications for political authority in a society, accompanied by formal or informal mass mobilization and noninstitutionalized actions that undermine existing authorities" (p. 142). Compare Goldstone's more recent definition of revolution with one from a generation ago by Samuel P. Huntington: "A revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies" (Huntington 1968: 264). Why does Huntington's definition of revolution contain reference to violent change, whereas Goldstone's does not? Perhaps it is because between 1968 and 2001 a number of unexpected and profound political transformations occurred that were driven by civil resistance rather than violent resistance and the power of nonviolent resistance became increasingly apparent to scholars of political conflict.

Campaigns of civil resistance may be reformist or revolutionary in their demands and consequences; and they may be parts of social movements or revolutions. Even though there is overlap, the literatures on social movements and revolution have developed somewhat separately from the literature on civil resistance, and differences in their assumptions will be elaborated on in chapter 2.

## Questions and Debates

In this section some major questions and debates concerning civil resistance are introduced including: Can civil resistance be effective in extremely repressive contexts? Is structure or agency more relevant for explaining the emergence and

trajectories of civil resistance? Is civil resistance justified in democracies where there are institutionalized means to promote change? Can civil resistance successfully promote social and economic justice in addition to human rights and democracy? Is the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence useful, divisive, blurry, or illusory? What is the relationship between violent resistance and civil resistance?

### *Can Civil Resistance be Effective in Extremely Repressive Contexts?*

On the surface it appears that nonviolent resistance has little or no chance of success when the opponent is willing and able to respond with violent repression. However, in many cases campaigns of civil resistance have succeeded despite being met with violent repression, so how can we explain this apparent paradox? A long tradition of political theory going back to the sixteenth-century French philosopher Étienne de la Boétie emphasizes the social roots of political power and the potential consequences of disobedience and noncooperation. Boétie states, "resolve to serve no more, and you are at once freed. I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces" (1997 [1550s]: 52–3). Similarly Max Weber writes, "if the state is to exist, the dominated must obey the authority claimed by the powers that be" (1946: 78), and Hannah Arendt, states "when we say of somebody that he is 'in power' we actually refer to his being empowered by a certain number of people to act in their name" (1970: 44).

Drawing from this lineage of political thought, Gene Sharp (1973: Part I) specified a *consent theory of power*, which assumes that the power of authorities is based on obedience and cooperation of the subjects. Sharp states, "The most single quality of any government, without which it would not exist,

must be obedience and submission of its subjects. Obedience is the heart of political power" (Sharp 1973: 16). This view maintains that power is derived from sources within society, in contrast to a monolithic theory of power, which assumes that power is imposed on people from above due to the state's ability to enforce sanctions and apply repression. Moreover, since the power of governments is not ultimately based on violence, but rather on obedience and cooperation, if a sufficient number of people disobey or refuse to cooperate for a sufficient amount of time, then no government will be able to rule, regardless of its coerciveness, repressiveness, or brutality. Thus, the essence of effective civil resistance is organized and sustained withdrawal of consent through protest, disobedience, and noncooperation that drains or severs opponents of their power.

Elaborating on the consent theory of power, Ralph Summy (1994) argues that the crucial variable in determining outcomes of campaigns of civil resistance is not violent repression, but rather the presence or absence of dependence relations between the oppressor and the oppressed that can be leveraged by challengers. If such dependence relations exist, and can be used to deny or undermine the opponent's power, then a challenge may be able to succeed regardless of the regime's capacity or propensity for violent repression.

A striking example of an extremely repressive regime that was toppled largely through civil resistance was the overthrow of the Shah of Iran in 1979. The Shah ruled with an iron fist through the state security apparatus and the full backing of its ally the US government. Nevertheless, sustained civil resistance against the regime emerged in 1978 and continued through 1979 despite being met with violent repression. Rather than subduing the challenge, however, the killing and injuring of unarmed protesters outraged the public and contributed to more widespread mobilization. The regime's legitimacy was drained and it was ultimately toppled after workers in the oil industry went on strike and members of the armed forces deserted the regime.

In this case two key processes that will be elaborated on later were apparent: *backfire* and *leveraging dependence*

*relations*. Backfire occurred when the violent repression of unarmed protestors generated widespread public outrage, which in turn decreased the regime's political legitimacy and increased challenger mobilization. The regime's dependence relations were leveraged by draining the regime of its power through channels upon which it depended – the oil industry and the military. Even though the eventual consolidation of rule by the Ayatollahs involved considerable violence and coercion, the revolutionary transfer of power was a remarkable display of predominantly nonviolent resistance succeeding against an extremely repressive regime.

Another vivid example of an extremely repressive regime toppled through nonviolent resistance occurred in East Germany in 1989. Led by Erich Honecker, East Germany was considered the most repressive and hard line of the Soviet-backed one-party communist regimes in Eastern Europe. Unlike the communist regimes in Poland and Hungary, the East German government was unwilling to initiate reform. Nevertheless, in the summer of 1989 and into the fall, protest intensified in East Germany. By October huge demonstrations erupted in East Berlin, Dresden, Leipzig and elsewhere. Increasingly large protest demonstrations occurred after each Monday "prayer for peace" at St. Nicholas Church in Leipzig. On October 9, 1989 over 50,000 people demonstrated after the Monday service. Since violent repression was feared organizers redoubled efforts to maintain nonviolent discipline. Later it was revealed that Erich Honecker issued orders to use violence to disperse the crowds; however, local commanders maintained that due to the nonviolent discipline of the crowds violent repression was unnecessary. Unexpectedly, on October 18, 1989 Honecker resigned and was replaced by Egon Krenz. Nevertheless, protests continued and by November hundreds of thousands were protesting in the streets of Leipzig and East Berlin and the Berlin Wall was festively dismantled (Maier 2009).

In this case two key processes that will be elaborated on later were apparent: *diffusion of protest* and *maintenance of nonviolent discipline*. With the nearly decade-long Solidarity

movement in Poland culminating in a democratic transition, the legitimacy of one-party communist rule in Eastern Europe evaporated. Nonviolent resistance diffused from Poland to Hungary, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, Bulgaria, and the Baltics. How did diffusion occur? In the case of the diffusion of protest from Poland to East Germany, it occurred mainly through a demonstration effect. The protests in Poland set a precedent that was emulated elsewhere. As we will see in chapter 6, the diffusion of protest may occur through direct or indirect pathways.

Nonviolent discipline among protestors was crucial in East Germany where the capacity and propensity to violently repress was high and where a few months earlier in June 1989 state officials congratulated their comrades in China for effectively snuffing out protest at Tiananmen Square. Yet violent repression was not used against the protestors in East Germany despite orders to do so at least in part due the highly disciplined maintenance of nonviolence. Moreover, given the widespread support for the protestors and their nonviolent discipline even in the face of provocation, it is likely that violent repression would have backfired.

The consent theory of power provides a reasonable starting point for understanding how nonviolent resistance can succeed in the face of violent repression, but it also has limitations. First, it overlooks the multifarious constraints that inhibit the collective withdrawal of consent through protest, disobedience, and noncooperation. Second, it assumes that state power is derived primarily from its own citizens and does not consider other sources of power such as relations with other states and foreign capital. Third, it is less useful for explaining resistance to economic exploitation and systemic inequalities than it is for explaining conflict where there is a relatively clear and direct dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed, as is typically the case in challenges to dictators, attempts to thwart military coups d'état, and struggles for national liberation. We will address these limitations in subsequent chapters.

### *Are Activist Skills or Structural Conditions More Relevant for Explaining Civil Resistance?*

A perennial question in the social sciences concerns the relative impact of structure versus agency in explaining social and political change. For example, did the 1989 democratic transition in East Germany described above result from an eruption of political protest or was it the result of larger structural processes such as a stagnant and declining economy and political opportunities that arose from the *glasnost* and *perestroika* reforms implemented by Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev? Most likely it was due to a combination of structure *and* agency, but scholars tend to prioritize structure *or* agency in their explanations.

On the one hand, some scholars prioritize structural factors, such as technological development, economic development, demographic dynamics, alterations in class structure, and shifts in political alignments as driving the emergence and trajectory of mass-based collective action. Collective action is viewed as an epiphenomenon of deep-rooted structural change. On the other hand, some scholars prioritize the choices and actions of groups and collectivities. This school of thought is exemplified by an assertion attributed to cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

More specifically, with regard to explaining the outcomes of campaigns of civil resistance, there is a debate over the relative importance of skills and conditions. Are there certain conditions that inhibit the emergence or likelihood of success of campaigns of civil resistance, such as a strong and repressive regime, illiteracy, cultural passivity, racial, ethnic and religious divisions, rudimentary civil society, and lack of economic development and a middle class? Are there certain skills that promote nonviolent mobilization and social change, such as adroit leadership, appropriate organizational forms, thoughtful strategic planning, devising and implementing a wide variety of nonviolent actions, and maintaining nonviolent

discipline? And what is the relative importance of conditions that inhibit resistance compared to the skills that may overcome structural constraints?

With important exceptions scholars of social movements and revolution have traditionally prioritized structural conditions in their explanations, while scholars of civil resistance have tended to prioritize strategic collective action (as will be discussed more fully in the next chapter). Some suggest that the skills involved in waging nonviolent resistance can overcome structural conditions that are assumed to be insurmountable, because the actual act of collective resistance can unfreeze unfavorable conditions and generate political space, and the skillful implementation of methods of nonviolent action can erase decades of fear and apathy and empower a populace (Ackerman 2007). Related to the previous question, "can civil resistance succeed in extremely repressive regimes?", acts of disobedience and protest actually begin to create political space and reduce the fear of repression. Conditions or structures, in other words, begin to change when collective protest occurs.

Campaigns of civil resistance are composed of intentional collective actions involving contestations between challengers and authorities. Yet it is obvious that choices, actions, and actors are materially, psychologically, culturally, and socially constrained, and actions may have unintended consequences. A more complete understanding of collective action needs to recognize both sets of factors and the interplay between skills and conditions. Perhaps the most important work that needs to be done on civil resistance is to elaborate on the interrelation between structure and agency or skills and conditions.

### *Is Civil Resistance Justified in Democracies?*

As noted in our discussion of nonviolent action above, methods of nonviolent action may be legal or illegal and they may promote change through conversion or nonviolent coercion. Thus the questions arise: Is illegal protest justified in a

democratic context when there are legal methods for promoting political change? Is nonviolent coercion necessary in a democratic context when opponents can be persuaded through constitutionally protected speech?

Following independence and after the assassination of Mohandas Gandhi in 1948, a split emerged in the Gandhian-inspired movement in India. Some of Gandhi's followers maintained that because the country was democratic and independent from the British raj, civil disobedience was no longer needed or justified. The Gandhian leader Vinoba Bhave, who led the Bhoodan movement in the 1950s, which persuaded large landowners to donate land to the landless, expressed this view. Vinoba argued that if a *satyāgraha* campaign is to be undertaken in a democracy, it must be gentle and rely on changing the heart of the opponent rather than pressuring or coercing the opponent. However, other Gandhians maintained that civil disobedience was just as necessary to fight exploitation and social injustice within India as it was to struggle for independence from foreign rule. This view was promoted by the Gandhian leader Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) who called for *total revolution* through noncooperation and disobedience during struggles against emergency rule and corruption in Bihar in 1974. Moreover, contemporary Gandhians such as Vandana Shiva and Rajagopal P.V. call for civil resistance against the penetration of foreign capital, industrial agriculture, and land grabbing in democratic India. To this day there are Gandhians in India who argue for one position or the other.

As illustrated by Gandhians in India, there are two very different stances that have been taken regarding these questions. Political philosophers have also argued for and against the justifiability or right of civil resistance in democracies, especially civil disobedience. Some maintain that civil disobedience is rarely justified in liberal democracies because it promotes social divisiveness, encourages disrespect for the law, and it may potentially lead to the widespread law breaking to achieve policy change (e.g., Raz 1979). Others view civil disobedience in liberal democracies as justifiable if it is undertaken as a last resort, in defense of justice, and in coordination with other minority groups (Rawls 1971).

Democracies are characterized by constitutional limits on state power and constitutional rights of citizens, checks and balances, and the periodic transfer of power through elections. Nevertheless, despite democratic safeguards various forces can undermine democracy, such as apathy, propaganda, corruption, and the concentration of wealth. Unjust laws may be passed or laws that were once considered just may no longer be just under changing social conditions. Moreover, it is not uncommon for governments to invoke "national security" or a "war on terror" to justify draconian overstepping of constitutional boundaries. In democracies, no less than authoritarian regimes, laws can be passed and courts can make rulings that unduly privilege the powerful few, unduly discriminate against entire categories of people, or violate basic freedoms of the populace. Thus under certain conditions, civil resistance is clearly justifiable in democracies. Nevertheless, while civil resistance may sometimes be justified in democracies, there must be a clear and legitimate reason for its use.

Taking a long-term view, civil disobedience, and more broadly civil resistance, rather than being a threat to democracy, is a promoter of democracy. As discussed in chapter 2, democracy and modern civil resistance emerged in tandem and the expansion of democracy often depends on civil resistance. In the US, for example, civil resistance was used in the movement to abolish slavery, the movement to extend the right to vote to women, the movement for the right of labor to organize, challenges to racial segregation in the South, and challenges to end the US War in Vietnam. Clearly, the US, as well as most other democracies, would be much less democratic without campaigns of civil resistance that may engage in illegal actions and promote change through nonviolent coercion.

### *Can Civil Resistance Promote Social and Economic Justice?*

The focus of the civil resistance literature on pro-democracy movements is understandable as civil resistance is almost always a component of democratic transitions and scores of

democratic transitions have occurred since the early 1970s. The percentage of democratic countries in the world increased from 29 percent in 1972 to 46 percent in 2012 (Freedom House 2013) and most of the democratic transitions were driven at least in part by mass-based civil resistance. One study found that of the 67 democratic transitions between 1972 and 2005, nearly 75 percent were driven by mass-based civil resistance (Karatnycky & Ackerman 2005). However, crosscutting the trend toward more democratic polities has been increasing economic inequality, both within and between countries, in the era of neoliberal globalization from the 1980s onward (Wade 2004).

Although the overwhelming focus by scholars on pro-democracy struggles is understandable given recent trends in democratization, it is also somewhat paradoxical given Gandhi's emphasis on social and economic justice. Gandhi's campaigns to end British rule were part of a broader struggle to promote equality and justice, and Gandhi maintained that upon independence India should avert the substitution of rule by the British elite with rule by an Indian elite. The greater part of Gandhi's work was to renew India's economy and he envisioned the central government devolving much of its power to the local level. Gandhi's larger struggle, in other words, was against *structural violence*; i.e., diffuse or systemic injustices and inequalities imbedded in institutions or social relations that prevent people from meeting basic human needs (Galtung 1969). Some have emphasized the potential of nonviolent struggle in combating structural relations, such as militarism, capitalism, and imperialism (Burrowes 1996; Ligt 1989 [1937]; Martin 2001; Rocker 2004 [1938]), but it seems as if the surface has been barely scratched in this regard.

Some critics suggest that while civil resistance may be able to succeed where there is a clear dichotomy between oppressor and oppressed and most segments of society have been alienated by the regime or external occupier, as is the case for many struggles for democracy and national liberation, it is potentially less effective in challenging exploitation and structured inequalities where multiplex ties connect people within

a system legitimated by a hegemonic ideology. In particular, some Marxists have argued that violent class struggle is necessary to challenge economic inequality and exploitation.

In the global South national liberation struggles against formal European imperialism have run their course, but a variety of new struggles have emerged against neo-imperialism, unequal exchange, land grabbing, and accumulation by dispossession. Movements prioritizing social and economic justice have been mobilized to oppose the construction of large dams, environmental degradation, land inequality, transnational agribusiness, privatization of public utilities, patenting nature and indigenous knowledge, and much more (e.g., Schock 2009). Economic threats associated with neoliberal globalization, such as rising food and fuel prices, privatization, loss of access to social services, and welfare state retrenchment, have provoked defensive mobilizations (Almeida 2010, 2014). Moreover, some challenges with economic grievances, especially in Latin America, have clearly gone on the offensive through nonviolent struggle, such as the *horizontalidad* in Argentina, which have taken over factories from capitalists and made them productive through cooperative organization, and the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Rurais sem Terra* in Brazil, which has done the same with idle land of large landowners. Many of these struggles are motivated by visions of participatory democracy, sustainable development, and a more equitable distribution of resources.

Similarly increasing inequalities in developed countries have also provoked mass mobilizations, such as anti-austerity protests in Europe and Occupy Wall Street protests in the US. Although social movements concerned with identities and post-materialist values have been prominent in the West in the post-World War II era, increasing inequalities and economic threats suggest that economic issues are again gaining salience. There is a long history of working-class struggle and anarcho-syndicalism in the West that may provide insights into how economic exploitation and social injustice may be successfully challenged through nonviolent resistance. Thus, while nonviolent resistance has

been considered a "bourgeois" or "middle-class" method of struggle only suitable for extending liberal democracy and "free market" relations, it is potentially much more revolutionary as Gandhi and others have suggested (Chabot & Sharifi 2013).

### *Is the Distinction Between Pragmatic and Principled Nonviolence Useful, Divisive, Blurry, or Illusory?*

Nonviolence as it relates to political action is complex and multidimensional. Gene Sharp (1959), for example, identifies nine manifestations of "generic non-violence," including non-resistance, active reconciliation, moral resistance, selective nonviolence, passive resistance, peaceful resistance, nonviolent direct action, *satyāgraha*, and nonviolent revolution.[6] Bishwa B. Chatterjee and Shyam S. Bhattacharjee (1971) reduced these to four fundamental dimensions: an absolutist stand toward moral-ethical commitment to nonviolence, particularistic nonviolent activism, active principles striving toward total transformation, and nonviolence as an expedient strategy. Although nonviolence as it applies to political action does not necessarily have to be dichotomized, numerous scholars as well as activists have differentiated between two broad types: *pragmatic nonviolence*, also referred to as tactical, strategic, selective, or qualified nonviolence, and *principled nonviolence*, also referred to as ethical, comprehensive, or unqualified nonviolence (e.g., Atack 2012: 6–34; Boserup & Mack 1975; Burrowes 1996; Dudouet 2008; Gan 2013; Steihm 1968; Summy 2009; Teixera 1999; Weber 2003). Gandhi referred to "nonviolence for the weak" (i.e., the pragmatic use of nonviolent political techniques) and "nonviolence for the strong" (i.e., principled nonviolent lifestyle and struggle). Table 1.1 summarizes distinctions that have commonly been made between the two approaches.

The pragmatic approach is often associated with the scholarship of Gene Sharp. Pragmatic nonviolence emphasizes the use of methods of nonviolent action as a technique or strategy for prosecuting a conflict. Nonviolent resistance is viewed as

**Table 1.1.** Common Distinctions between Pragmatic and Principled Nonviolence

| Pragmatic nonviolence | Principled nonviolence |
|---|---|
| A pragmatic technique or strategy | A creed or way of life |
| Violence is rejected on strategic grounds | Violence is rejected on moral grounds |
| Nonviolent resistance is an effective strategy | Nonviolent resistance is the ethically best strategy |
| Conflict may involve incompatible interests between opponents | Conflict is a shared problem among partners |
| Change may involve nonviolent coercion of the opponent | Change involves converting the view of the opponent or finding a common truth |
| Reducing psychological violence and purifying the mind are not necessarily recognized or central to a campaign | Reducing psychological violence and purifying the mind are prioritized |
| Strategic politics | Spiritual politics |

the most effective strategy for prosecuting acute conflicts and violence is rejected on strategic grounds, because it typically plays to the strengths of authorities and is likely to undermine broad-based support and participation. Since conflict may involve incompatible interests between opponents, if the opponent's views cannot be converted or accommodations cannot be reached, then change may necessitate nonviolent coercion. Pragmatic nonviolence falls within the realm of strategic politics as the main concern is undermining the opponent's power and legitimacy and shifting the balance of power.

The principled approach to nonviolence is often associated with Mohandas Gandhi, the ideology of pacifism, and some

religions' traditions. Principled nonviolence is linked with a creed or way of life in which violence is eliminated as much as possible. Those with a principled approach to nonviolent resistance reject violence on moral grounds since violence is considered to be immoral and inhumane. Therefore, nonviolent methods of struggle are viewed as the ethically best strategy for prosecuting a conflict. According to this approach conflict is a shared problem among adversaries and the opponent is viewed as a partner in conflict transformation. Change involves converting the view of opponents or finding common truth – or at least a common ground – with the opponent.

Those adopting principled nonviolence, of course, engage in instrumental action (just as those adopting pragmatic nonviolence engage in principled action), but the commitment to nonviolence as a lifestyle is as important, if not more so, as is attaining political objectives. Outcomes of campaigns are not measured solely in terms of objective criteria such as attaining political goals, but also in terms of spiritual development and advances in the search for truth. Moreover, a principled approach may be as concerned with reducing psychological violence in one's own mind and purifying one's mind as with attaining a political objective. This approach might be considered a form of spiritual politics in that it transcends materialism.

Thus to return to our question: is the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence useful, divisive, blurry, or illusory? In empirical cases of civil resistance there is probably a mix of people motivated by moral or pragmatic bases, but most participants are probably not morally committed to nonviolence, but rather view it as a more effective method of waging struggle. Véronique Dudouet (2008: 8) argues that the two approaches should be viewed as *complementary* in that they provide a framework to guide the efforts of those struggling against injustice in a way that is likely to result in satisfactory conflict transformation.

The two approaches may be also viewed as *points on a continuum* rather than dichotomous. Practitioners are not necessarily at either end of the continuum and practitioners positioned at different points on the continuum may work together in a campaign. Moreover, commitment to principled

or pragmatic nonviolence may be contingent as individuals and groups may move to different points on the continuum in response to the situation.

The divisions become blurry and perhaps illusory, however, since those who are motivated by spirituality and morality often argue and act in highly strategic or utilitarian terms as well (and vice versa). Although Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. are often associated with principled nonviolence, they both used principled and pragmatic arguments in their campaigns and they were pragmatic and strategic as much as moral and spiritual. Moreover, Gene Sharp, who epitomizes pragmatic nonviolence to many, maintained that sabotage and violence must not be used in tandem with nonviolent action, that nonviolent discipline is necessary, and that those participating in nonviolent struggle should refrain from hatred and hostility. Thus, Chaiwat Satha-Anand (2015) maintains that the distinctions between principled and pragmatic nonviolence are *illusory*.

Moreover, Robert Kezer (2013) suggests that there are simply different types of principled nonviolence. He criticizes the pragmatic/principled distinction, which assumes that if nonviolence is not embraced as a way of life or for spiritual reasons, then nonviolent action must be pragmatic. Instead we should identify various principles, spiritual or otherwise, that people use to support their commitment to nonviolent discipline and struggle in the face of coercion, physical harm, and death.

### *What is the Relationship Between Coercion, Violence, and Civil Resistance?*

In the discussion above, we have made conceptual distinctions between violence and nonviolence for analytical purposes. Needless to say, empirically instances often involve a mix of violent and nonviolent actions. And in some instances coercion or violence are used within a community to enforce participation in civil resistance campaigns. In nineteenth-century rural Ireland, for example, coercion was

used to enforce rent boycotts of land agents. Tenants who violated rent boycotts were likely to find their cow with a severed Achilles tendon, which necessitated the tenant to take the injured cow's life (Scott 1990: 27). During the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, some boycotts were enforced through force and regime collaborators were viciously murdered through "necklacing," whereby an automobile tire was placed around a collaborator and set aflame. These examples suggest in some cases coercion is used to enforce participation in campaigns, but coercion is not inherent to civil resistance. Scholars should attempt to identify the contextual factors that influence whether or not coercive mass mobilization occurs, such as the tactic being implemented, the solidarity of the community, and whether or not members of the community are aware that a mass campaign has been called for, rather than assuming that coercion is an inherent component of mass mobilization into nonviolent campaigns (Schock 2003).

Adam Roberts (2009) suggests that there is a rich web of connections between civil resistance and state force, which is ultimately based on violence. In many cases, such as the US Civil Rights movement, nonviolent resistance was used to compel armed agents of the state to intervene between activists and their opponents. Moreover, in some instances, civil resistance played an unintentional part in the emergence of campaigns of violence, such as in Northern Ireland and South Africa.

A common assumption is that nonviolent resistance is not powerful enough to promote change without the use or threatened use of violence or a "radical flank." A *positive radical flank* effect occurs when the leverage of "moderate" challengers is strengthened by the presence of a so-called "radical" wing, which has more extreme goals or incorporates violent actions. The presence of a radical wing makes the moderate's strategies or demands appear more reasonable, and a radical flank may create crises that are resolved to the moderate's advantage. However, a *negative radical flank* effect may occur when the activities of a radical wing undermine the leverage of moderates, as the existence of

radicals threatens the ability of moderates to invoke third-party support and discredits the entire movement's activities and goals (Haines 1984). Although recognizing that radical flank effects may be positive or negative, the dynamic is almost always used to describe an alleged positive radical flank effect. Some, for example, have argued that the communist armed insurgency in the Philippines in the 1980s increased the leverage of the People Power movement and that the actions of the armed wing of the African National Congress in the 1980s increased the leverage of the urban-based campaigns of mass defiance of the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa. Nevertheless, the presence of a positive radical flank effect across a large number of cases has yet to be proven empirically and is not necessary for a nonviolent challenge to succeed. Needless to say, the relationship between coercion, violent resistance and nonviolent resistance is variable and complex and is an issue that researchers have not yet adequately deciphered.

## Conclusion

In this chapter we defined civil resistance as the use of methods of nonviolent action by civil society actors engaged in asymmetric conflicts with authorities not averse to using violence to defend their interests. We defined nonviolent action as non-routine and extra-institutional political acts that do not involve violence or the threat of violence and suggested that it is useful to make analytical distinctions between different forms of political action even though there is empirical overlap in struggles, since not only does implementing violent and/or nonviolent action have consequences for the dynamics, outcomes, and consequences of conflicts, but also the clear differentiation, conceptualization, and operationalization of these forms of action have consequences for how scholars view, understand, and explain conflict.

We noted that the study of civil resistance overlaps to some degree with peace and conflict studies and the study of social movements and revolution, but there are also tensions and

dissimilar points of emphasis that differentiate these areas of study. Peace and conflict studies have been characterized by a focus on international and civil war and conflict resolution. By contrast, the civil resistance literature focuses on the dynamics of nonviolent struggle and conflict transformation. The social movements literature is rooted in the study of reform movements in liberal democracies while the civil resistance literature is rooted in the study of challenges to authoritarian regimes. However, both literatures have expanded their foci in recent years. The literature on revolutions has also been centered on challenges in authoritarian regimes yet the role of civil resistance in revolutionary transformations has often been overlooked in favor of a focus on violence.

We also addressed some of the issues and debates that surround nonviolent resistance, including: Can civil resistance be effective in extremely repressive contexts? Is structure or agency more relevant for explaining the emergence and trajectories of civil resistance campaigns? Is civil resistance justified in democracies where there are institutionalized means to promote change? Can civil resistance successfully promote social and economic justice in addition to human rights and democracy? Is the distinction between principled and pragmatic nonviolence useful, divisive, blurry, or illusory? What is the relationship between violent resistance and civil resistance? In the following chapter we will examine the development of modern civil resistance and literatures that address civil resistance.