



University for Peace



NONVIOLENT TRANSFORMATION OF CONFLICT—AFRICA

# 'BITE NOT ONE ANOTHER'

## Selected Accounts of Nonviolent Struggle in Africa

Desmond George-Williams



'Bi Nka Bi'





University for Peace



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University for Peace, Africa Programme  
PO Box 2794, code 1250  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: +251-11-6180991  
Fax: +251-11-6180993  
Email: [africaprogramme@upeace.org](mailto:africaprogramme@upeace.org)  
Website: [www.africa.upeace.org](http://www.africa.upeace.org)

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Selected Accounts of  
Nonviolent Struggle in Africa

Desmond George-Williams

Mary E. King  
Series Editor



University for Peace, Africa Programme  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Cover image: African symbols known as *adinkra*, named after a legendary king, are widespread in Ghana and are used on fabrics, walls, pottery, ceramics, and logos. The adinkra symbol for harmony is 'Bi Nka Bi', meaning 'bite not one another'. The image, which is based on two fish biting each other's tails, is a symbol of peace. It visually cautions against backbiting, provocation, and strife; instead, it urges a community spirit of sharing, a message of group cooperation, justice, fair play, and forgiveness. Africa Brazilians call it 'Oni Nka Bi', suggesting African survivals in the Americas.

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We have never used AK-47 rifles to demonstrate against the junta because we believe in the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr. by using nonviolent means for our voices to be heard by the whole world.

—National Union of Sierra Leone Students, press release, 10 October 1997



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## Preface

The contemporary history of Africa is replete with heroic instances of nonviolent struggles by individuals, nations, subnational groups, and grassroots social movements that have effected fundamental social and political change. This aspect of political development and the struggle for justice on the continent is, however, markedly under-researched and poorly documented. Nonviolent conflict transformation is often globally associated with charismatic personalities, such as Mohandas K. Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. Many consider nonviolent struggle to be synonymous with Western liberal democracies, in particular with civil society organisations and movements in the form of trade unions, antiglobalisation mobilisations, antiwar movements, and environmental campaigns that serve as bulwarks against overweening state powers and unjust global power structures. Few, therefore, look to Africa as a source of inspiration or for positive examples of nonviolent conflict transformation.

Desmond George-Williams's study of the tried and tested tradition of nonviolent conflict transformation in Africa arrives as a welcomed and meaningful contribution to the knowledge, literature, and global understanding of the field of nonviolent conflict transformation. This timely study is important for several reasons. George-Williams's selected accounts illuminate nonviolent struggle as a global phenomenon rather than the particular preserve or privileged tradition of any group of people or states. From the Velvet Revolution of the Czechs and Slovaks to the Orange Revolution in Ukraine to the Soft Revolution in Madagascar, the story remains the same—the struggle of ordinary people to transform unjust power relations and create the conditions for consent and participation between the ruled and the rulers, the governed and the governors. George-Williams's study brings alive the fundamental philosophical underpinning of nonviolent conflict trans-

formation—that nonviolent struggle is about substantive notions of peace, justice, freedom, human rights, and development.

This work is the first serious analysis and documentation of the rich and varied tradition of nonviolent conflict transformation in Africa spanning the colonial and postcolonial periods. It provides the reader, in a single volume, a broad and specific account of the commonalities and differences in the types, methods, and strategies used in Africa to effect fundamental social and political change. Written by an African academician, this study will serve as a teaching resource for faculties and a learning tool for students, and in the process, make a small but valuable contribution in response to the ‘book famine’ in Africa.

I am delighted and privileged to be associated with this seminal study. The UPEACE Africa Programme should be commended for its commissioning. It represents a significant contribution to capacity building and education for peace in twenty-first century Africa.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Francis', written in a cursive style.

Dr. David J. Francis  
University of Bradford  
United Kingdom

## Introduction: 'As Old as the Hills'

One often hears in Africa the argument that what is taken by violence must be retained by violence. This ranks as one of the more unfortunate philosophies ever espoused. 'No doubt, "violence pays," but the trouble is that it pays indiscriminately. . . . [T]he danger of violence . . . will always be that the means overwhelm the end. . . . The practice of violence, like all action, changes the world, but the most probable change is to a more violent world.'<sup>1</sup> This fundamental insight reveals an inherent link between the methods used to overcome an injustice and what results in the aftermath.

In alleviating grievances and hardships or achieving political and social objectives, one cannot rely on a naïve faith in the power of Love or the romantic notion that all discord can be permanently resolved. Proponents of nonviolent struggle recognise that it is not possible for all strife to be resolved by mediation or arbitration. Conciliation may be one of the tools of the trade for the prepared nonviolent activist, but some conflicts require full engagement, because of the profundity of the beliefs of parties to the dispute or the seriousness of the injustice involved. Political, economic, and social conflicts are not going to disappear, so groups and societies must learn to deal with conflict in a way that leads to durable rearrangement of the basic elements of a dispute and does not exacerbate an already bad situation. When individuals and groups thirst for retaliation for their losses, particularly if involving cruelly inflicted actions or bloodshed, the situation cannot be addressed simply by pleading for no violence. For an aggrieved people to reject violence and armed insurrection as the preferred solution to their problems, discussion of principles and ethics may have little effect. Belief in revolutionary violence is a powerful philosophy. Countering desires for retribution requires providing political tools as a clear, effective, and alternative method for fighting for justice.

For centuries, people have used nonviolent struggle—involving methods such as marches, demonstrations, boycotts, and strikes—as an effective means of achieving justice. Today, in spite of daunting odds, nonviolent movements on every continent continue to find success against totalitarian bureaucracies, despotic regimes, and foreign aggressors. Their endeavours start with the assumption that nonviolent action as a method alters power relationships in a way that makes social change possible without compulsion, violence, or bloodshed. Nonviolent action should not be equated with or confused with pacifism. Its application must be systematic and pragmatic if it is to work. Nonviolent action rests upon the timeless idea that no ruler can govern without the cooperation of the governed and that their acquiescence can be withdrawn. While living in South Africa, Gandhi wrote, ‘Even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent of the governed, which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone.’<sup>2</sup>

In Africa, accounts of popular dissent and the idea that cooperation can be withdrawn often go undocumented. Many individuals, therefore, fail to grasp or recognise how nonviolent struggle can and has led to accomplishing significant goals; lessons from such campaigns are not taught in schools. Some important victories secured through nonviolent struggle have simply been lost to the record. Nonetheless, Africa’s powerful tradition of oral history means that within each people or nation, there still reside revealing narratives of successful nonviolent practices and events and of specially anointed arbitrators, knowledge of whom is passed from one generation to another as part of lore. The time has come to gather and spread some of these accounts.

There is nothing intuitive about nonviolent action, which is more complex in strategy than conventional military warfare because it seeks to elicit change from within the adversary. The technique of nonvio-

lent struggle often goes against instinctive reactions, because humans often must be taught not to react to violence with more violence. Individuals and societies make decisions regarding the future based on an understanding of the past. Examining chronicles of nonviolent struggle is an essential exercise for grasping how this technique has been used to secure significant, constructive change. Case studies and other chronicles are valuable aides in the teaching of nonviolent action. News reporters, who are said to write the first draft of history, have a responsibility to recognise and accurately record the impact and role of the technique of nonviolent strategic action. Yet, civil disobedience is regrettably the only method from the huge repertoire of nonviolent action that they seem able to readily identify. Thus it remains a matter of urgency to study and document the dynamics, mechanisms, techniques, and strategies of nonviolent struggles. Better understanding of nonviolent struggle's theoretical and practical underpinnings can help to 'mainstream' its use in addressing strife.

Nonviolent strategic action not only offers the possibility of achieving short-term political objectives, but it can also lead to more stable and equitable long-term results benefiting all parties to a conflict. It can improve the chances of reaching negotiations, transform a conflict into a manageable situation without destructive discord, and lay the groundwork for reconciliation. Its ability to do so rests upon the theory that a direct connexion exists between means and ends. Gandhi, who while living in South Africa was influenced by struggles taking place in Russia and China as well as in South Africa, rejected the assumption that good ends can justify bloody means.<sup>3</sup> He believed instead that in seeking a certain condition, the process must embody the ends.

Nonviolent struggle is a realistic alternative to armed struggle, yet its use may be even more pertinent in democratic systems where laws themselves may enshrine injustice. When legal and parliamentary measures persist in ignoring the rights of minorities or fail to bring about

even-handedness in representative government, it may be necessary to turn to extra-legal or extra-parliamentary theories and methods of resistance. This is the purview of nonviolent direct action. In liberal democratic systems, threats to liberal democratic principles elicit petitions, delegations, picketing, strikes, civil disobedience, and tax resistance. Such techniques of protest and pressure are not exclusive to any ideology or political position. They work in all systems.

Some of the foundations of peace and conflict studies derive from the still older field of nonviolent action. For example, the necessity of separating the antagonist from the antagonism—that is, to struggle against the injustice or grievance, not the person or persons committing it—follows from Gandhi’s experiments during his twenty-one years in South Africa and later in India. ‘I have nothing new to teach the world’, Gandhi claimed. ‘Truth and nonviolence are as old as the hills’.<sup>4</sup>

The turn to nonviolent struggle is increasing around the world as evidenced by the various mobilisations that have through its use secured independence (East Timor), obtained human rights (the indigenous Mayan people of Guatemala), reformed political systems (Poland’s Solidarity movement), prevented military coups d’état (the Baltic states in the early 1990s), resisted military occupations (the Danes against Hitler), and created new democracies (the East German Pastors’ Movement against communist rule) or preserved older ones (the struggle under way in Zimbabwe). Some would argue that a difference exists between ‘principled’ nonviolent struggle (as adopted by the U.S. civil rights movement, for example) and ‘practical’ nonviolent action (as practiced by trade union movements, for example), but such a division is superfluous. Peace and human rights are impossible without justice. Is not this insight principled as well as practical?

As the study of popular dissent and the redress of grievances without bloodshed continues to expand, it remains paramount that potentially

confusing concepts be clearly understood. Most elusive among them is the term *nonviolence* itself. Placing a premium on nonviolence as a value—a quality considered worthwhile and desirable that guides behaviour—does not mean being passive in the face of tyranny, dictatorship, unjust laws, indifferent governance, or bureaucratic inertia. Values are normative in that norms act as the rules that direct behaviour based on values. Although it is important to consider nonviolence as a value in the normative context, that is not the purpose here. Rather, using accounts from Africa, it is to respond to the need for the study and documentation of how nonviolent strategic action has secured justice.

The difference between *non-violent* and *nonviolent* involves more than the whimsical use of a hyphen. One of the problems facing nonvi-



Institutionalised political actions, such as elections, are often accompanied by non-institutionalised nonviolent actions, including picketing or demonstrations. On 19 October 2005 in Malawi, peaceful demonstrators protested the May 2005 elections in which president Bingu wa Mutharika was declared the winner. Some citizens, including those here, believed the elections to be unfair. Nonviolent action can be used to protect democracy. Photo: Edson Chagara/Reuters.

olence as a field of study is that many people misconstrue it as meaning only the negation of violence. It is not, however, the antithesis of violent struggle. The non-hyphenated *nonviolence* is 'whole', no longer the mere opposite of violence through the use of a prefix. In this form, it becomes a positive assertion. Belligerence, whether direct, structural, or cultural, is inherently negative in that it terminates life or curtails its potentialities in some form. The expression 'nonviolent transformation of conflict' conveys the ability of nonviolent action as a technique to demonstrate the possibility of interrupting the cycle of vengeful violence while achieving positive social change with transformative possibilities. *'Bite Not One Another'*, as part of a series so named, will have succeeded if it helps to spark the growth of a literature on African nonviolent transformation of conflict.

## An Example from Namibia

African history is rich in nonviolent struggles. Africans have long had reason to nonviolently register their disapproval of practices, laws, decrees, or other legislation harmful to the citizenry. They have often used nonviolent methods to address issues of workers' rights, land usage, and communal disputes.

In the case of the 1971–1972 labourers' strike in Namibia, solidarity and unity in nonviolent resistance successfully led to consideration of the demands of exploited workers. The Ovambos, the largest ethnic group in Namibia, at the time governed by South Africa and called South West Africa, had been working under harsh conditions. The contract labour system for miners, farm hands, and house servants paid them according to categories based on physical fitness and age and assigned them to their employers for a period of six months to a year. The workers lived in designated, overcrowded townships and were separated from their families, whom they could visit only when their

employers met their travel expenses. This arrangement and accommodations in the townships led to rampant prostitution and alcoholism.

In June 1971, the International Court of Justice ruled against South Africa's involvement in Namibia. Jan de Wet, the commissioner general for the Northern Native Territories, nonetheless endorsed the contract system and pointed to the acquiescence of the Ovambos to it. The first reports of a pending strike went out on 10 December 1971. On 13 December, the strike began in Windhoek, with a reported 5,200 residents abandoning their jobs. Through letters to other parts of the country, the action spread throughout the territory encouraging the involvement of trash collectors, porters, and hotel and airport workers. Food boycotts constituted part of the strike action, with strikers refusing to consume the food produced for them, opting instead to buy their food elsewhere. With the strike under way, the workers began repatriating to their homelands. The government's initial attempt to replace them failed because of the sheer number of striking workers, which rose from 13,000 during the first month of the action to between 20,000 and 22,000. The action forced the government to negotiate with the striking workers, who had formed a committee charged with representing them and presenting their demands. The government stepped up repressive measures in response to the workers' unified insistence. Their tactics included an increased police presence, the prohibition of meetings of striking workers, and the eventual imposition of a state of emergency.

Talks between Ovambo chiefs, headmen, and the South West Africa Native Labour Association (the recruiting body) resulted in the abolition of the contract labour system and the disbandment of the association—a precondition of the striking workers for a return to work. Though most of the workers' demands had been met, including improved living conditions, they were still forbidden to travel to their work locations with their spouses. Calls by the chair of the strike com-

mittee for the labourers to return to work went unheeded. The strike action continued, as did the government's repressive measures. Confrontations between security forces and striking workers resulted in a rising death toll. Despite international support for the workers—as demonstrated by the visit of UN secretary-general Kurt Waldheim in March 1972 and the endorsement of their cause by the United Nations Council for Namibia—they did not succeed in having all their demands met. They had, however, amply demonstrated that united, nonviolent action could force government authorities to the negotiating table.

See Gene Sharp, 'The African Laborers Strike, Namibia, 1971–1972' in *Waging Nonviolent Struggle: 20th Century Practice and 21st Century Potential*, ed. Gene Sharp (Boston, Albert Einstein Institution, 2005), pp. 205–16.

## The Nature of Nonviolent Struggle

Although the vast majority of the countries in Africa achieved their independence through largely nonviolent means, those involving armed struggles have been afforded prominence. Perhaps it is possible to begin reversing that record here. As a method for pursuing social justice, nonviolent struggle relies on political interventions and actions designed to avoid physical violence or harm to the life or limb of the opponent. By 1973, the Boston-based scholar Gene Sharp had identified 198 methods of nonviolent action, after which he stopped counting because every campaign, in addition to using well-known methods, also produces its own techniques. The varying actions fall into three broad categories: protest and persuasion, noncooperation, and nonviolent intervention. Within these categories fall six subcategories: (1) protest and persuasion, including leaflets, flags, vigils, symbolic funerals, emblematic use of lights or candles, protest painting, parades, and marches; (2) social

noncooperation, including sanctuary, withdrawal from the social system, and protest emigration (*hijra*); (3) economic boycotts, consumer boycotts, withdrawal of bank deposits, and a policy of austerity; (4) economic noncooperation, including resignations from jobs, slowdowns, and prisoners' strikes; (5) political noncooperation, including literature advocating nonviolent resistance, civil disobedience, stalling, and obstruction; (6) nonviolent interventions, such as hunger strikes, alternative social systems, and dual sovereignty.<sup>5</sup> Actions range from petitions to public speeches to dual sovereignty and parallel government.<sup>6</sup>

Scholars have identified four mechanisms through which nonviolent struggle works: conversion, accommodation, nonviolent coercion, and disintegration. In conversion, the target group changes its perspective, deciding on its own volition to make concessions to the nonviolent protagonists. Conversion happens only rarely. Accommodation occurs when economic and political cooperation is denied the opponent, who must then accept a compromise or cut its losses. This is the most common way in which social change occurs through nonviolent struggle. Nonviolent coercion ensues in instances where the opponent's ability to persist is considerably weakened and no alternative exists other than to concede. Disintegration results when a ruler or regime crumbles as a result of massive defiance and withdrawal of cooperation.

As the accounts in this study reveal, nonviolent struggles do not always succeed. Repression can be powerful and used to crush nonviolent resistance. Such is the case of the Ogoni struggle, which in 1995 led to the judicial murder of celebrated environmentalist Ken Saro-Wiwa, who had led peaceful protests against the ecological damage caused by Shell Oil. For the Ogoni and other movements, although objectives might not be met, the nonviolent struggle has the potential to lay the foundation for future strategies, generate sympathy among the target group, raise the profile of the cause, or weaken the adversary's position.

In *Towards Peaceful Protest in South Africa*, Philip B. Heymann argues

that most struggles involve three parties—the nonviolent activists, the target group, and the security forces or government officials. Without proper preparation, planning, and training on the part of the nonviolent protagonists, harsh reprisals by the opponent can result in counter-violence by uninitiated nonviolent activists. Part of the work of the nonviolent campaign is to make clear its goals, objectives, purposes, hopes, or grievances in order to minimise obstacles or disruption by the other parties. Examples of brutal responses to peaceful demonstrations include those of colonial administrators to the former service members' march to Government House at Christianbourg Castle in Ghana and the actions against pro-Ravolomanana supporters in Madagascar. In the face of violent retaliation, the nonviolent protagonists must always insist on and maintain their nonviolent posture.

## **Methodology**

This volume makes use of chronicles from a variety of regions to illustrate instances of nonviolent struggle in Africa. The choice of countries is only suggestive and in some cases dependent upon the material available. Geographic coverage also played a role. Chapter one provides an overview of types of nonviolent actions used in Africa during the colonial period. Chapter two examines nonviolent struggles for independence in Ghana and South Africa. Chapter three reviews postindependence nonviolent struggle in Sierra Leone against the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council, in Nigeria by the Ogoni people, and in Madagascar's Soft Revolution. Chapter four looks at the role that women have played in nonviolent struggle in Africa, with particular attention paid to the Aba women's revolt in Nigeria and the Pare women's uprisings in Tanzania. It also includes contributions from Iyenemi Wokoma and DeEtte Wald Beghtol. Chapter five assesses the record of nonviolent

struggle in Africa (despite the all-too-familiar stories of violence), notes some victories, and looks at the way forward. These readings offer valuable lessons for Africans as well as for non-Africans.



# 1

## Nonviolent Struggles in Africa: The Colonial Period

Some leaders have possessed the intelligence, insight, and skills that others only later comprehended as essential for successful nonviolent struggle. For example, nonviolent strategic action requires clear communication. It is unlikely that opponents will address the protagonists' fundamental grievance unless they understand it and the changes desired. Research, study, and documentation of the grievance are the first stage of effective nonviolent mobilisations. Mokhachane, biological father of the legendary King Moshoeshoe in southern Africa, greatly appreciated the importance of communication. Like his counterparts in other areas of Africa, Mokhachane, 'strongly believed that encouraging discussion with strangers led to greater knowledge than fighting against them'.<sup>7</sup>

Forced labour, land alienation, racial discrimination, and colonial taxation characterised the colonial period in Africa. In many instances, citizens responded to injustice with nonviolent resistance. Miners and port workers held trade union and labour movement strikes in South Africa and in West and East Africa. Farmers denied colonial representatives access to their land and labour. In the 1930s, farmers in Mali succeeded in denying European colonists control over the production of cotton. The imposition of various forms of taxation—including land taxes, hut (or housing) taxes, and even a salt tax similar to that imposed by the British in India that led Gandhi to launch the Salt March as part of a national civil disobedience campaign in 1931—represented another major source of conflict. Taxes on natural resources and shelter were an unnecessary burden on Africans.

Traditional religious leaders led violent as well as nonviolent opposition to colonial rule. Resistance movements in which traditional religious leaders played leading roles were known as *chimurenga*, meaning 'uprising' in the Shona language. In Zimbabwe, the Shona and Ndebele people in 1896–1897 staged such armed uprisings following the establishment of a colony in the early 1890s by the British South African

Company, founded in 1889 by Cecil Rhodes. The colonists brutally suppressed native populations.<sup>8</sup> The Maji Maji uprising of 1905 in south-eastern Tanganyika posed the most serious challenge to early colonial rule in East Africa. The religious prophet Kinjikitile Ngwale called on the people to resist the forced labour and oppressive tax policies imposed by German colonists and promised his followers that the holy water, or *maji*, that he provided would resist bullets if applied to their bodies. The uprising generated considerable local support before German soldiers brutally crushed it. Nonviolent opposition similar to that of the Maji Maji would continue throughout the twentieth century.

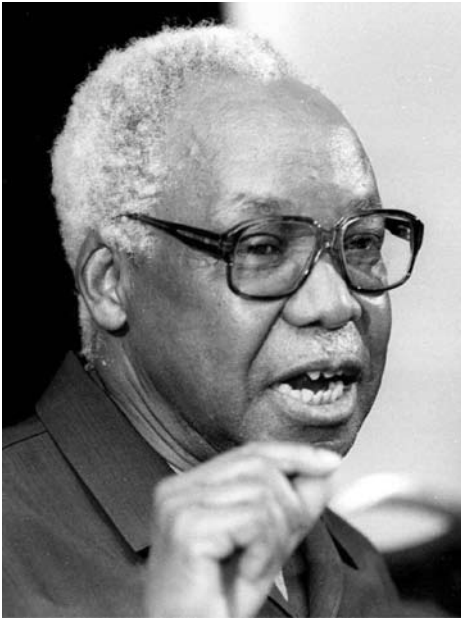
## Transition to Independence

The period between the two world wars in Africa is often spoken of as being 'quiet', largely because opposition to colonial rule had assumed nonviolent forms. During this period, some of Africa's educated élites began to take the lead in demanding equal opportunity and political inclusion. The African National Congresses established in southern, central, and eastern Africa and the National Congress of British West Africa are examples of such organising although they were generally limited in membership, as opposed to being mass movements.

Nonviolent struggles for independence gained prominence after World War II, inspired by the participation of African troops in the war and the ideals of the Atlantic Charter, negotiated by British prime minister Winston Churchill and U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt and issued as a joint declaration on 14 August 1941. The charter proffered a vision for the postwar period and asserted eight points, including that the United States and the United Kingdom would not seek territorial gains and that any territorial adjustments made consider the peoples affected. It also asserted that the Allies would 'respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live'.

African countries began to gain independence in the 1950s, beginning with Libya in 1951 and Egypt in 1952, followed by Ghana (then the Gold Coast) in 1957. The vast majority of the other African countries would achieve independence during the 1960s. After the initial waves of independence, only six nations remained under colonial rule, most of them in southern African, where large numbers of European settler communities had been established.<sup>9</sup>

Other forces were also at work. The independence movement in



Tanzania's late president Julius Nyerere led his country to independence from British colonial rule in 1961 and served as the nation's president from 1962 until 1985, when he became one of Africa's first postcolonial leaders to step down from office voluntarily. Nyerere sought to maintain a visible nonviolent stance while in government and is pictured here speaking to the media when mediating peace talks among warring Burundi factions in 1996. Photo: George Mulala/Reuters.

India and the prominent role played by Mohandas K. Gandhi proved to be influential, helping to spark the wave of decolonisation at mid-century. Gandhi's insistence on nonviolent action as the most practical and effective option for achieving political goals, and which resulted in Indian independence in 1947, inspired African leaders to choose nonviolent struggle as the method for securing their own independence. Gandhi formulated the fundamental bases and theoretical structures of his theories on nonviolence during his twenty-one years working in South Africa, where he penned his major work, *Hind Swaraj*, in 1909.

Leaders including Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kenneth Kaunda

of Zambia, Albert Luthuli of South Africa, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana often expressed their indebtedness to Gandhi. Upon receiving the Gandhi Peace Prize in New Dehli on 27 January 1996, Nyerere stated, 'Gandhi's uniqueness is in his life and in the strategies he advocated and adopted as matters of principle'.<sup>10</sup> Kaunda acknowledged Gandhi's influence in his life, calling Gandhi an ideal that 'brought perfection to all qualities. I was struggling to develop self-discipline, austerity . . . and practical wisdom . . . So it was according to the principles of nonviolence on the Gandhi model that the final stages of the freedom struggle in Zambia were conducted'.<sup>11</sup> Paul F. Power suggests that African behaviour may have influenced Gandhi as well, citing as an example his urging Indians in South Africa to disobey the 1907 law requiring the re-registration of Asians in the Transvaal region. The measure was perceived as a move toward prohibiting immigration from India. Power quotes Gandhi as encouraging civil disobedience: 'Even the half castes and the Kaffirs, who are less advanced than we have resisted the Government. The pass laws apply to them as well, but they do not take out passes'.<sup>12</sup>

## **Tax Protests**

As early as the 1890s, Africans protested and demonstrated against colonialism and imperial authorities in opposing taxation, lack of representation, labour conditions, and land policies. Such demonstrations were hugely popular. Kings, chiefs, the educated, the local press, and persons from all walks of life supported them. Their carefully planned dissent took the form of marches, petitions, boycotts, and disputations.<sup>13</sup>

In West Africa, the hut, or house, tax required residents to pay the British government for shelter that they owned.<sup>14</sup> In Sierra Leone and Ghana, this levy resulted in eventual rebellions following prolonged protest and negotiation. In Sierra Leone, for example, Governor Frederic

Cardew passed the tax on 14 December 1896. Three days later, the tribal chiefs of the Temne people wrote to the district commissioner, Captain William Sharpe, appealing to him to ask the governor not to ‘make war to us’.<sup>15</sup> All the chiefs had unanimously decided not to pay the tax. This act of civil disobedience is usually downplayed in historical chronicles. Of greater interest to historians is the armed rebellion, the Hut Tax War—led by Bai Bureh, one of the Temne chiefs—which occurred in 1898, fully two years after the imposition of the tax and subsequent to attempts to seek redress through civil disobedience.

In Ghana, the women of Accra on 1 December 1896 demonstrated against the imposition of a house tax by marching to the seat of power to demand an interview with the colonial administrator, a Governor Maxwell. Their numbers grew, and when they were prevented from going to the official Government House, they remained around the building making a great din. After the governor’s refusal to see them, they sent a petition to the secretary of state registering their discontent with the house tax.<sup>16</sup> Although this rally and demonstration failed, it resulted in King Tackie leading the kings of Accra and their peoples in opposing the tax.<sup>17</sup>

Historians have tended to minimise or neglect entirely the largely peaceful and nonviolent methods of protest and persuasion that have frequently preceded violent uprisings. Instead they prefer to focus on the eventual defeat, incarceration, or exile of ‘rebel leaders’. This oversight is anything but insignificant, as it demonstrates that indifferent colonial officials had opportunities to change policies in response to the people’s restrained and disciplined efforts to communicate their grievances, but chose not to do so. The Europeans appeared to be interested only in suppressing popular dissent as a means of maintaining and exerting their control. For example, according to Francis Agbodeka, kings who had gone to visit the British governor Arnold Hodgson ‘for discussions’ in the Kumasi Fort in April 1900 were held hostage and prevented from

returning to their subjects on the advice of the Ashante cook Kwame Tuah. The British consistently denied persistent pleas on the part of the kings to leave.<sup>18</sup>

## Mass Migration

Some Africans, particularly those in French colonies, used mass emigration as a method of nonviolent resistance during the period of early contact with Europeans. This method of withdrawing cooperation, or severing relationships, has far-flung roots. During Gandhi's day on the subcontinent, this technique was called *hizrat*. The term *hizrat* derives from *hijra*, the name given to the Prophet Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina in 622.<sup>19</sup> Self-imposed exile, whether permanent or temporary, can represent a nonviolent yet severe indictment of an existing political power. The Fulani in the suburbs of the French colonies in Saint Louis, in northern Senegal, faced inhumane and humiliating treatment by the French colonists, and therefore migrated en masse to Ahmadu's Empire between 1882 and 1889. An estimated 20,000 persons emigrated, making their migration an act of political noncooperation with French jurisdiction. Similar mass emigration and noncooperation occurred in 1916–17, when an estimated 12,000 persons withdrew from the Ivory Coast to the Gold Coast. Other examples of *hijra* include Senegalese leaving for the Gambia, persons from Upper Volta departing for the Gold Coast, and emigration from Dahomey (now Togo) to Nigeria to withdraw obedience and cooperation from undesirable control and colonial oppression.<sup>20</sup>

## Labour Strikes and Boycotts

In addition to employing basic methods of protest and persuasion—such as using newspapers to register discontent and protest and sub-

mitting petitions to colonial authorities in Africa and in European capitals—Africans also made use of economic noncooperation. Recognising that a major part of colonial rule depended on the transportation of vital raw materials, such as mineral and agricultural resources, from the colonies, they initiated strike actions and boycotts as nonviolent economic sabotage to demand redress for their grievances.

The earliest reported strike may have been in 1890 among railway workers on the Dakar–Saint Louis line, in West Africa. Women from Dahomey who were employed in Cameroon went on strike in 1891. Strike actions also took place in Dahomey itself. The historian Basil Davidson describes a labourers' strike in Lagos in 1897 as 'the first major colonial strike'.<sup>21</sup> The policies and practices of an overenthusiastic governor, Henry McCallum, precipitated the action when he decided to reorganise the workforce and cut wages. According to historian A. G. Hopkins, 'McCallum was a soldier and engineer by training who had served the Empire for over twenty years in the Far East before coming to West Africa. He was an energetic administrator, but his energy sprang in part from a conviction that he knew the answers to problems, which, as subsequent events showed, he had failed to study fully'.<sup>22</sup> His insistence had caused what might be called a policy mutiny, with some 3,000 workers from the department of public works going on strike on 9 August 1897. The Lagos strike of 1897 proved to be a success, as McCallum, in the face of a determined workforce, reversed the policies he had introduced in a case of accommodation.<sup>23</sup>

The educated élites, predominantly in the urban areas, also spearheaded nonviolent direct action. Members of this class were often seen as serious threats to colonial rule. Through professional associations, they organised concrete actions of protest and persuasion on land issues and presented bids for representative governance to colonial authorities. The Aborigines Rights Protection Society (ARPS), established in the Gold Coast in 1897, was one of the earliest and most vibrant of

the professional groupings. In 1898 the society sent a delegation to London to meet with the secretary of state for the colonies to protest the 1896 bill conceding to colonial authorities control over all waste and unoccupied lands. So successful was the delegation that their protest led to the bill being withdrawn, a major victory for African nonviolent strategic action.

For more than a half-century, Africans had pressed for the lifting of colonial rule largely through nonviolent resistance using a wide and innovative variety of action methods. These ranged from the most basic petitions, to demonstrations and marches, to sophisticated forms of economic noncooperation, such as boycotts and strikes, and *hijra*. Although the response from European capitals varied, conservatively speaking it was not one amenable to popular dissent. Although withdrawal of consent did not have an immediate effect in distant capital cities, the colonial master could be fierce. In the case of tax resistance, colonial governments would often initially delay decisions, but eventually, as in the case of Sierra Leone and Ghana, through the use of armed military force, they would impose the tax. Yet Africans persisted with nonviolent direct action and most would experience independence and self-rule in the post-World War II period.



# 2

## The Nonviolent Struggle for Independence

The independence struggles in Africa took various forms, depending on local traditions and conditions, the colonial authorities and their reaction to the petitioning for independence, and the determination and willpower of Africans themselves. In British West Africa, the struggle was largely nonviolent and involved petitions, mass rallies, media campaigns, strikes, boycotts, and appeals to the international community. Within two decades of the end of World War II, all the British colonies had gained their independence, beginning on 6 March 1957 with Ghana, which was declared a republic in 1960, the year that sixteen more African nations would achieve independence. As in the case of Ghana, in Kenya and Zambia the nationalist clamour for independence expressed itself through mostly nonviolent movements seeking self-rule and free elections. The struggle in South Africa differed and took longer.

## Ghana: A First for Black Africa

Colonialism and the consolidation of British rule in the Gold Coast initially met with fierce opposition. Sir Garnet Wolseley, leader of the British troops, had subdued the Ashanti area and established control with the peace treaty of Fomena in 1874.<sup>24</sup> The Ashanti live in the central forest region of Ghana. Following a string of wars in the nineteenth century, the British finally defeated them and sent their leader, Ashantehene Premreh I, into exile.

A proliferation of organised campaigns pressured colonial authorities for independence between the two world wars. According to Jean Suret-Canale and A. Adu Boahen, by that time the British had accepted the principle of self-government as the 'inevitable end of all colonies'.<sup>25</sup> It would, however, take years before most Africans achieved self-governance. Some of the delay may be attributed to the lack of cohesion among the actors agitating for an end to colonial rule. The

opposition to imperialism by the numerous youth leagues, social and political movements, trade union congresses, and other groups was not coordinated. Political rivalry and jealousy sometimes hindered presenting a unified front,<sup>26</sup> and the educated élite that sometimes led political organisations could be cautious in their 'requests' for self-rule. One slogan, 'Self Government in the Shortest Time Possible', demonstrates one such tempered approach. The aspirations of a wide range of groups would be unified and appeals presented more forcefully with the emergence of Kwame Nkrumah on the scene and his advocacy of nonviolent struggle, which he called 'positive action'. Nkrumah would become Ghana's first prime minister.

### **Petitions, Protests, and Delegations**

Participation in World War II by soldiers from West Africa (particularly the Gold Coast) and the formulation and broadcast of the Atlantic Charter asserting the right to self-determination had greatly increased political awareness (and popular dissent) in the British colonies. Opposition to colonial rule in the prewar period came mainly from European-educated Africans who felt themselves as qualified to administer their countries as those in power. To counter these well-traveled and well-read Africans, the British turned to the traditional rulers and chiefs, whom they supported in a strategy of divide and rule. The effort to present a united front in the fight for independence eventually led to moves by the intelligentsia to form alliances with the chiefs.<sup>27</sup>

Two notable fronts emerged in the struggle for self-rule that consciously employed nonviolent strategies. Provincial councils, introduced in 1926, sought to look into and make suggestions on government policies in alliance with the educated élites on the one hand and the more established Aborigines Rights Protection Society on the other. The ARPS was created to protest the colonial government's 1897

Concessions Bills and sought to deal with land ownership and usage issues. Kings, chiefs, and ordinary people from the Gold Coast comprised the ARPS, with the primary goal of preventing the spoliation of their land by the government.<sup>28</sup> The activities of these two bodies laid the groundwork for future nonviolent challenges to colonialism.

### **Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne II and the Anti-Inflationary Boycott Campaign of 1948**

In the years following World War II, the people of the Gold Coast endured general economic hardships that resulted in resentment toward the mainly European and Syrian merchants doing business in the country. A charismatic figure in the person of Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne II of Ga decided to take up the issue of economic hardship with the government. Writing to the secretary of the Accra Chamber of Commerce, he proposed that a review list of prices be published for a large number of imported goods, failing which a national boycott of imported items and foreign-owned shops would begin on 24 January 1948. As is customary and desirable in nonviolent struggle, the chief laid out the grievance and indicated what would happen in the absence of change. The items to be boycotted included 'cotton prints, tinned meat, flour biscuits, spirits [and] a wide range of imported goods'.<sup>29</sup> The nonviolent protagonists established the Anti-Inflation Campaign Committee in Accra and smaller committees in other parts of the colony to coordinate a nationwide boycott if necessary.<sup>30</sup> When a reply to the chief's letter failed to appear, the national boycott began as planned and lasted for a month. The boycott of European goods and the resulting closure of shops proved to be so successful that a meeting was arranged between the campaign committee and the Chamber of Commerce in Accra at which firms agreed to reduce their profit margins. Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne II and the members of his organisation committed to ending

the boycott on 28 February 1948, with the introduction of the reduced price list.<sup>31</sup>

### **Ex-Servicemen Union's March to Christianbourg Castle**

In February 1948, former service members who had returned home after fighting for the British in World War II organised a demonstration to present a list of grievances to the governor at Christianbourg Castle, the seat of power in Ghana. The members and their supporters marching to the castle numbered approximately 2,000.<sup>32</sup> The grievances of the Ex-Servicemen's Union included the lack of jobs, minimal educational opportunities, and exclusion from the political and economic affairs of the nation.<sup>33</sup> The former soldiers had widespread support, especially given the anti-colonial atmosphere generated by the success of the general boycott organised by Nii Kwabene Bonne II. As the unarmed protesters approached the castle, a senior white police officer ordered his subordinates to open fire. The riflemen disobeyed the order, after which the officer grabbed a rifle from one of his men and began shooting into the crowd of petitioners, killing three men. Riots and widespread looting of European businesses erupted in Accra and across the country.

The events at Christianbourg Castle fueled popular anti-colonial feelings and in that respect may have hastened the end of European imperialism in Africa. 'The shooting was the cause of the looting' became a popular slogan during this period. Thus Chief Nii Kwabene Bonne II's boycott campaign of 1926 and the former service members' march to Christianbourg Castle in 1948, both of which resonated throughout the nation, are early examples of nonviolent resistance in post-World War II Africa and would provide auspicious conditions upon which Kwame Nkrumah could build.

## **Nkrumah and Ghanaian Independence**

Kwame Nkrumah—who had studied at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, received a master’s degree in philosophy from the University of Pennsylvania, and later studied in the United Kingdom—had been active in the West African Students Union and various Pan-African mobilisations. The Pan-African movement played an important role in fostering a worldwide consciousness among blacks of their common plight as an oppressed people.<sup>34</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, the African American political philosopher, became a leading figure in the movement, organising Pan-African Congresses in Paris, London, and Brussels in 1919 and the early 1920s. By far, the congress held in Manchester, England, in 1945 was the most significant of these gatherings in terms of persons who attended and their roles in the future independence movements of Africa. Among those present were Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Obafemi Awolowo of Nigeria, Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, and Hastings Banda of Malawi, all of whom would eventually figure prominently in bringing independence to their countries.

The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was established in 1947 as the first nationalist movement aimed at achieving self-government; it invited Nkrumah to become its general secretary. Well before his return home from Britain in 1947, Nkrumah had seen the need for the nationalist groups to close ranks and form a united front against imperialism. He wrote letters urging nationalist leaders to work together. Because of this galvanizing role, when in June 1949 Nkrumah broke away from the UGCC to head the Convention Peoples Party (CPP), an organisation comprised mainly of young political professionals, he already commanded a large following of former service members, journalists, elementary school teachers, and semi-educated and uneducated industrial workers.<sup>35</sup> This constituency, largely ignored by members of the elitist UGCC, was determined to secure self-government with

Nkrumah. According to Suret-Canale and Boahen, compared to political parties in other areas of Africa, there was 'none that was better organized, more dynamic and radical and enjoyed more charismatic and demagogic leadership than that of the CPP'.<sup>36</sup>

Nkrumah launched a campaign of 'positive action' to involve workers and persons from all walks of life in nationwide boycotts and strikes. In the pamphlet 'What I Mean by Positive Action', Nkrumah describes positive action as 'a civil disobedience campaign of agitation, propaganda and as a last resort the constitutional application of strikes, boycotts, and non-cooperation based on the principles of absolute non-violence'.<sup>37</sup> The aim was, among other pursuits, to force the colonial government to summon a constituent assembly that would eventually lead to full self-government for the country. When Nkrumah announced 5 January 1950 as the start of positive action, the populace had by that time been prepared for it through newspapers and public meetings and rallies. Nkrumah's drive for independence was consistent with conclusions reached by the Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester in 1945 on the use of mass popular dissent in colonial struggles, including strikes, boycotts, and civil disobedience.

The positive action campaign began with a boycott of all British goods. In addition, widespread strikes and work slowdowns took place across Gold Coast commerce and industry. In response, colonial authorities imposed a state of emergency and a strict curfew. Despite warnings against violence, some incidents did occur, resulting in the deaths of two policemen. Under intense pressure from the strike actions, the British arrested Nkrumah and other leaders of the CPP. While in prison, elections were held in which Nkrumah and his party won a resounding victory. A committee formed to investigate the disturbances in Accra and other cities in 1948 had recommended the drafting of a new constitution to increase African participation in government. The so-called Coussey Constitution of 1951, however, stopped

short of granting self-rule. Nkrumah and his CPP party won the election for the legislative council in February 1951.

After winning seats in the legislative council, Nkrumah and his colleagues were freed from prison. Within twenty-four hours of his release, Nkrumah accepted an invitation from the British governor, Sir Charles Arden-Clarke, to form a government and become leader of government business, a position almost equivalent to prime minister. Africans comprised the majority in the colonial government, but this did not appease Nkrumah, who wanted nothing short of self-rule. Even after assuming the premiership, created in 1952, Nkrumah wanted more. He thus focused on replacing the 1951 constitution while continuing to inspire the people. He eventually succeeded, with a new constitution in November 1956 and Ghanaian independence in March 1957 with himself at the helm. The British government had promised to declare Ghana independent if a majority of the members elected to a new legislative council in pending elections demanded it. When Nkrumah's party won 57 percent of the vote in 1956, the British kept their word. The disposition of the British colonial government may best be captured in the words of Governor Arden-Clarke: 'Without Nkrumah, the Constitution would be stillborn, and if nothing came of all the hopes, aspirations and concrete proposals for a greater measure of self-government there would not be any faith in the good intentions of the British Government. . . . [T]he Gold Coast would be plunged into disorder, violence and blood shed'.<sup>38</sup>

It must be acknowledged that Nkrumah, although a hero of nonviolent struggle during Ghana's transition to independence, subsequently became an authoritarian leader, instituting one-party rule and declaring himself president for life. According to Peter Calvocoressi, 'The personal leadership of Nkrumah turned into a febrile autocracy, which passed step by step beyond a struggle to maintain unity of the new state and modernize it and became perverted into a struggle to assert

the authority of Nkrumah himself.<sup>39</sup>

The attainment of political independence for Ghana may be regarded as a success for nonviolent positive action, resting as it did on the groundwork laid by the economic boycott organised by Chief Nii Kwabena Bonne II of Ga and revealing the determination of the peoples of Ghana to come together to boycott European and Syrian goods and shops. The boycott would end only after prices were dropped, in line with the compromise reached after the meeting of the Anti-Inflationary Campaign Committee and the Chamber of Commerce in 1948. The eventual granting of independence to Ghana in March 1957 illustrates the mechanism of nonviolent coercion, in which 'demands are achieved against the will of the opponents because effective control of the situation has been taken away from them by widespread non-cooperation



Ghana, which was among the first African nations to win independence, supported subsequent anti-colonial and pan-African efforts. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana's first president, was a strong advocate of nonviolent struggle, which he called 'positive action'. Nkrumah, whose leadership of Ghana's nonviolent movement for independence also brought free elections to his country, was photographed here in 1961 as he conversed with Dr. Ralph J. Bunche (right), an acclaimed African American diplomat who gave distinguished service as UN undersecretary for Special Political Affairs. Photo: UN Photos.

and defiance.<sup>40</sup> With the benefit of hindsight, it can be seen that Nkrumah's positive action worked because of widespread noncooperation and defiance, resulting in the decision of the British to release him from prison after his party's resounding victory in elections. The persistence of Nkrumah and nonviolent mobilisation by the Ghanaian people won the day.

## South Africa: Protracted Nonviolent Struggle, 1912–1960

As noted, Gandhi had tried and tested his experimental approaches to nonviolent struggle during the twenty-one years he spent in South Africa. By 1912, when the African National Congress (ANC) was founded, the influence of a number of Gandhian struggles had become pervasive. For more than sixty years, disciplined nonviolent resistance would be the method used to fight for the end of apartheid.

### **Nonviolent Resistance: 'The Bonfires Began to Grow'**

After some 125 years of intermittent struggle beginning in the late 1780s, the British and Boer settlers eventually managed to subdue the Africans with the use of violence. In the South African struggle for independence, the ANC initially encouraged nonviolent protests in the form of petitions, protests, demonstrations, and conference resolutions.<sup>41</sup> Their earlier history of brutal repression and armed protests may have influenced the decision to take such an approach. In nonviolent struggle, one seeks to bring about change through the most basic methods of protest and persuasion, if possible. Because human beings constitute the "resource" of nonviolent action, it is wise to protect human assets and to seek results without squandering that energy. The choice of nonviolent struggle would result in a few political gains

for the Africans and the ANC, raising hopes that the cries of Africans would be heard and their plight redressed. For a time, they enjoyed 'freedom of assembly, of speech, of organisation and freedom of movement and freedom of the press'.<sup>42</sup>

The labour force had always been in the vanguard of opposition to the repressive legislation and policies of various South African regimes, using the classic time-tested methods of nonviolent action to express its displeasure. Mine workers and other labourers pressed for justice, but most often, their restraint met with ruthless suppression. For example, in 1946 mine workers in Johannesburg went on strike against oppressive conditions. Several Africans died from the authorities' harsh reprisals. Reacting to government brutality and a lack of progress, the Natives' Representative Council—a token body created 'to advise the government on matters affecting Africans'—adjourned indefinitely.<sup>43</sup> Two years later, in 1948, the Boer-led Nationalist Party of Daniel Francois Malan came to power.

The Boer, or Afrikaners, are the descendants of northwestern European settlers and religious refugees—Dutch Calvinist, French Huguenot, German Protestant, Frisian, Flemish, and Walloon immigrants—who settled in southern Africa in the seventeenth century. The word *boer* means 'farmer' in the Afrikaans language. (Many Afrikaners now consider *boer* a derogatory term.) The Boer had settled in and around the Cape of Good Hope during the period of administration by the Dutch East India Company (1652–1795) and subsequent British rule. The Dutch first settled the Cape colony in 1652. The arrival in 1688 of a small group of French Huguenots fleeing religious persecution in France expanded the settler colonies.

In 1948 electoral victory by Malan and the Nationalists ushered in a period of acute repression.<sup>44</sup> Despite the defeat of fascism in World War II, a new type of fascism took hold in South Africa in the form of *apartheid*, meaning 'separateness' or 'apartness' in Afrikaans. Apartheid

as a system of racial segregation became official in 1948, after the Malan-led government took power. The government officially denied black persons voting rights within 'white South Africa', but allowed them the vote in their black 'homelands', although many of them did not actually live in such areas. Despite the power welded by the practitioners of this new form of fascism, the ANC adhered to nonviolent direct action as its mode of operation and resistance. With the deteriorating circumstances of black Africans after the war, the ANC opted to use civil disobedience, a more advanced form of nonviolent resistance from the category of political noncooperation. In contrast to its earlier use of nonviolent methods, the movement attempted to employ nonviolent direct action in a more organised manner. At its conference in 1949, the ANC developed a plan for widespread civil disobedience. Zulu chief, teacher, and Christian religious leader Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli—president of the ANC from 1952 to 1960 and the first African to receive the Nobel Prize for Peace, in 1960 for his leadership of nonviolent struggle to end racial discrimination—effectively articulated the ANC spirit in April 1959: 'We of the ANC have no desire to dominate others by virtue of our numerical superiority. We are working for a corporate multi-racial society. We are opposed to the outlook that the colour of one's skin should determine one's politics. We are prepared to extend the hand of friendship to white South Africans who are our brothers and sisters'.<sup>45</sup>

On 26 June 1952, the ANC joined the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) in launching the nationwide defiance campaign against unjust laws. Some 8,500 men and women voluntarily accepted imprisonment for their actions rather than paying fines, taking their cue from ANC leaders arrested for deliberately ignoring apartheid regulations.<sup>46</sup> In 1956 the state charged Luthuli and 155 others with high treason. A lengthy trial failed to prove any of the charges against Luthuli, and in 1957 he was released. The widespread arrests and Luthuli's imprison-

ment attracted allies for the African cause in South Africa and abroad and focused the attention of significant sectors of the international community on the South African struggle.<sup>47</sup> Without resorting to armed insurrection and violence, and by adhering to disciplined nonviolent resistance based on withdrawal of cooperation, African nonviolent protagonists made it impossible for the apartheid government to achieve its goal.<sup>48</sup>

Young radical ANC members formed the Pan-African Congress (PAC) in April 1959 following on the success of the defiance campaign and disillusionment with cooperation with the Congress Alliance, a union between the ANC, Indians, white liberals, and coloureds (people of mixed race) that they regarded as lacking a clear commitment to majority rule. The PAC planned what they called a 'positive decisive campaign against the Pass Laws' that required black Africans to carry passes with them wherever they went.<sup>49</sup> Members taking part in the campaign left their passes at home and surrendered to arrest.<sup>50</sup> The campaign took place on 21 March 1960 in different areas throughout South Africa. In Sharpeville and Langa, white policemen opened fire on peaceful demonstrators, resulting in what would become known as the Sharpeville massacre. Thirty-eight years later, the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa concluded the following:

[P]olice opened fire on an unarmed crowd that had gathered peacefully at Sharpeville on 21 March 1960 to protest against the pass laws. . . . [T]he South Africa Police failed to give the crowd an order to disperse before they began firing and that they continued to fire upon the fleeing crowd, resulting in hundreds of people being shot in the back. As a result of the excessive force used, sixty-nine people were killed and more than 300 injured. . . . [T]he police failed to facilitate access to medical and/or other assistance to those who were wounded immediately after the march.

The commission finds that many of the participants in the march were apolitical women and unarmed, and had attended the march because they were opposed to the pass laws. The commission finds, therefore, that many of the people fired upon and injured in the march were not politicised members of any political party, but merely persons opposed to carrying a pass. . . .

The commission finds the former state and the minister of police directly responsible for the commission of gross human rights violations in that excessive force was unnecessarily used to stop a gathering of unarmed people. Police failed to give an order to disperse and/or adequate time to disperse, relied on live ammunition rather than alternative methods of crowd dispersal and fired in a sustained manner into the back of the crowd.<sup>51</sup>

The Sharpeville massacre had far-reaching consequences, bringing condemnation upon the South African government from around the world. It led indirectly to the withdrawal of South Africa from the British Commonwealth and caused the United Nations to ask member countries to break diplomatic ties with Pretoria and to boycott South African products. Pressure began to build against apartheid.

The South African government blamed the victim and decried the events in Sharpeville as communist inspired. It banned the ANC and PAC, preventing them from carrying out activities in the country. Luthuli, as leader of the PAC's rival, the ANC, had initially disapproved of the defiance campaign, preferring instead to take a more cautious approach. After the events at Sharpeville, however, he was among the first to protest the actions of the police, calling on all Africans to participate in a work stoppage by staying at home for a day. In solidarity with the campaign, he publicly burned his Reference Book, which contained all his documents (or passes), thus borrowing the destruction of one's own property from the nonviolence repertoire. 'We did not desire to leave our shackles at home', Luthuli wrote. 'We desired to be rid of them. I burned my Reference Book, others burned theirs, and the bonfires began to grow in number'.<sup>52</sup> This symbolic action had played a



The United Democratic Front, launched 20 August 1983, opposed the South African government's constitutional proposals to legitimise apartheid rule. Meeting here in Johannesburg in 1985, the UDF believed that disciplined nonviolent action would be more likely to dislodge apartheid than would violence. The UDF created purposely decentralised structures to make it difficult for the state to repress it. The front channeled the energies of youths enraged by apartheid into creative nonviolent resistance designed to build autonomous institutions to survive despite reprisals. The UDF subsequently brought together 565 local nonviolent struggles throughout the country, including youth and student groups, trade unions, women's organisations, religious societies, and professional associations. At its peak, the UDF coordinated some 700 organisations employing nonviolent action steps to end apartheid, including the action methods of rent and consumer boycotts, methods of economic noncooperation meant to suspend economic relations. The principle of noncooperation is central to the field of nonviolent struggle. Photo: UN Photos.

prominent role in the Gandhian struggles in South Africa earlier in the century. An announcement by the commissioner of police temporarily suspending the arrests of those violating the pass laws resulted in large numbers of people also burning Reference Books.

The Sharpeville massacre also produced other effects. After the ban-

ning of the ANC and the PAC, opposition to apartheid in South Africa increasingly included violence, although peaceful demonstrations and strike actions continued to increase as well. In 1961 the nonviolent movement went underground, where parts of it, such as Umkonto we Sizwe, or Spear of the Nation, mobilised for armed struggle rather than extending more than sixty years of disciplined nonviolent resistance.<sup>53</sup> Until this time, the resistance to apartheid had almost been a textbook example of nonviolent resistance.

The ANC also changed its position, but its shift in strategy did not come about easily. Nelson Mandela, Luthuli's successor, advocated modifying the organisation's disciplined nonviolent strategies. He would later explain that ANC members were losing confidence in the group and its approach, noting that more than a half century of nonviolent action had not resulted in decisive change: 'At the beginning of June 1961 . . . I and some of my colleagues, came to the conclusion that as violence in this country was inevitable, it would be wrong and unrealistic for African leaders to continue preaching peace and nonviolence at a time when the government met our demands with force. . . . For a long time the people had been talking of violence . . . and we, the leaders of the ANC, had nevertheless always prevailed upon them to avoid violence and pursue peaceful methods'.<sup>54</sup> Violence in reaction to the government's intransigence had resulted in the adoption of guerilla tactics in Bizana, the capital of Pondoland, following a peaceful demonstration of 50,000 persons.<sup>55</sup> Rather than allowing uncontrolled violence to continue, the ANC leaders opted for a 'controlled' violent resistance led by themselves.<sup>56</sup> In the meantime, the South African government adopted more brutal forms of repression. Violence proved to be no more successful than nonviolent resistance. It did, however, lead to more repression and casualties.

In 1986 a student-led citywide boycott of downtown businesses in Port Elizabeth, South Africa, proved to be highly successful. It is now



When the South African apartheid government imposed a nationwide state of emergency in 1986 to clamp down on the growing use of the nonviolent action methods of noncooperation, it became illegal to take part in boycotts or strikes. Mass demonstrations thus disappeared from the scene, and resistance shifted to other methods. Funerals, however, provided occasions for mass processional mourning by thousands, an effective nonviolent action method of protest and persuasion. Photo: David Turnley/Corbis/Specter.

widely acknowledged that the boycott, a staple of nonviolent resistance, sparked the application of the international third-party sanctions that would eventually bring the South African government to negotiate with anti-apartheid movements and move to free elections in 1994. (See the following contribution by Susan Collin Marks.) The sequence of events eventually included the release in 1990 of Nelson Mandela after some twenty-seven years in prison. The ANC swept the elections, and Mandela became the first black African president of the Republic of South Africa. South Africa at last was independent.



# Reading

## Nonviolent Direct Action in South Africa

By Susan Collin Marks

Only a dozen years ago, South Africa seemed headed for a blood bath. No 'reasonable' person saw any prospects for a negotiated settlement. The ANC and other forces in the African community were escalating the internal struggle against apartheid, the international community was applying economic sanctions with increasing vigor, and South Africa had become a pariah nation. Cornered, the white security apparatus was hitting out savagely, imprisoning children and killing activists.

Few people who look back at those dark days recall that militant nonviolence was the key tool in the struggle against apartheid and, in the end, precipitated a negotiated revolution instead of the widely anticipated carnage. The scope and creativity of methods employed by anti-apartheid activists in the 1980s amounted to what the theologian Walter Wink describes as 'probably the largest grassroots eruption of diverse nonviolent strategies in a single struggle in human history'.

Hunger strikes ended the mass use of detention without trial, and protests against beach apartheid showed up the injustice of segregation and the unacceptability of police action. Gandhi's legacy loomed large as economic boycotts of white businesses, court actions that challenged apartheid laws, rent boycotts, demonstrations, and marches proliferated.

From the government perspective, as the 1980s advanced, the options were increasingly bleak: maintain the system with escalating

Susan Collin Marks is the executive vice president of Search for Common Ground, an international conflict resolution and management organisation based in Washington, D.C. A South African, she participated in the South African peace process and is the author of *Watching the Wind* (Washington, D.C., United States Institute of Peace Press, 2000), which chronicles the grass-roots conflict resolution movement in South Africa that helped foster a peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy.

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brutality or be overrun by the *swart gevaar*, the black danger. The dilemma was at its starkest in the psyches of the Afrikaners. They had built the apartheid system on humiliating memories of their 1902 defeat by the British in the Anglo-Boer War, and their subsequent poverty, deprivation, and lack of recognition as second-class citizens under British rule. The purpose of apartheid was to achieve socio-political and economic dominance for the Afrikaners as a group, whatever the cost to British South Africans—or blacks, who they considered inferior to whites.

When their Nationalist Party was elected to power in 1948, the Afrikaners lost no time in implementing grand apartheid with its brutal, inhumane, and crushing agenda. In 1961, they finally turned their backs on the British and declared South Africa an independent republic. The dream of Afrikanerdom as a white, independent nation had been secured.

It lasted less than 30 years. Built on oppression and maintained by force, apartheid was unsustainable. As the 1980s wore on, the collision course between the nonviolent actions of the anti-apartheid movement and the violent reactions of the government reached cataclysmic proportions.

And then, something extraordinary happened. In February 1990, President F. W. de Klerk astounded the world by unbanning the ANC, releasing Nelson Mandela, and opening the way for negotiations about the future of South Africa. Roelf Meyer, then minister of the constitution and chief negotiator for the apartheid government, says that it was a pragmatic decision, and that ‘de Klerk’s pragmatism also enabled him to see that international sanctions were beginning to exact a heavy toll and that black protests would not go away, rather they would grow stronger and more strident’.

Many years earlier, in his Letter from Birmingham Jail, Martin Luther King had explained this dynamic exactly: ‘Why direct action? Why sit-

ins, marches, and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path? Indeed this is the very purpose of direct action (which) seeks to create a crisis and foster such tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront this issue'. De Klerk's decision generated four years of negotiations, during which his government grew to understand that majority rule was inevitable and, in Meyer's words, made a shift to a paradigm of 'trust instead of paranoia, of ownership and risk, of a different kind of leadership'. (See Roelf Meyer, *Leadership in South Africa: From Dogma to Transformation, an Account of Paradigm Shift* [Amman, United Nations University / International Leadership Institute, 2001].)

So why did the opponents of apartheid choose a nonviolent approach? Certainly, the ANC was born as a mass movement through nonviolent action—yet Mandela served 27 years in prison for espousing armed struggle. These two strands lived in a tension that was somewhat relieved by the practicality that as there was no possibility of winning the war against apartheid by force, violence was not a viable option anyway.

But nonviolence was also a moral choice, with deep roots in Ubuntu, the African humanism that Desmond Tutu says is about 'the essence of being human. We believe a person is a person through another person, that my humanity is caught up inextricably in yours. When I dehumanize you, I inexorably dehumanize myself'. Ubuntu acknowledges the dignity of every human being, and the primacy of respectful relationships. Within this framework, black South Africans were committed to ending the injustices and indignities of apartheid, and their 'weapon' of choice was nonviolence.

This spiritual dimension is perhaps the X factor in the South African equation. 'Any social scientist would expect 98% of blacks to hate whites and wish retribution, and yet the reality is the reverse,' said University of Cape Town political scientist Robert Schrire after the

peaceful 1994 election. 'And since we cannot explain it rationally, we will have to regard it as one of the great miracles of the South African dilemma'.

People often refer to 'the miracle' of South Africa. If courageous leadership, committed citizens, a willingness to embrace forgiveness and reconciliation, to find solutions even when it seems impossible, and to take a leap of faith into the unknown make a miracle, then, surely, that's what it was.



# 3

## Postindependence Nonviolent Struggles

**A** national mobilisation of refusal to cooperate with a junta in Sierra Leone in 1997 led to reinstatement of the democratically elected government and an end to military rule. The struggle of the Ogoni people in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria continues, but is nonetheless instructional in how nonviolent action can raise the international profile of a cause. This case also provides insight into the significance of charismatic leadership and strategically minded individuals to mounting nonviolent challenges against seemingly overwhelming opponents but also reveals the problem of relying too heavily on such an individual. During the Soft Revolution in Madagascar, the people's resilience eventually led to an end to ten years of one-party rule. As with past political changes in that country, however, violent and nonviolent resistance became entangled. In this particular manifestation of nonviolent struggle, however, the country's military forces remained neutral, effectively eliminating themselves from the conflict and thereby limiting the type of devastation that had accompanied such confrontations in the past.

Many other instances of nonviolent struggle in the post-independence period in Africa could have been selected for this chapter, including, for example, movements against the authoritarian regime in Mali throughout the 1980s and early 1990s; nationwide strikes against the regime in Benin in 1989; uprisings in Kenya in 1989 and 2005; student protests in Malawi in 1992; protests against the Compaoré regime in Burkina Faso between 1996 and 1998; a largely nonviolent movement in Senegal from 1999 to 2003; and nonviolent uprisings in Sudan in 1964, 1972 to 1973, and 1985. Any one of these experiences warrants a book of its own, and further study of these cases would be a welcomed addition to the literature. The following cases represent overviews of significant nonviolent struggles that will hopefully inspire other scholars and practitioners to continue to record and to share such events.

## Noncooperation and Junta Rule in Sierra Leone, 1997

After gaining independence in April 1964, Sierra Leone experienced recurring political violence, beginning with a coup d'état in 1967 and the outbreak of civil war in March 1991. Just fourteen months after the country's first multiparty elections, in May 1997, a group of young military officers successfully mounted the nation's fifth successful coup. The junta, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), toppled the one-party rule of the All Peoples Congress Party (APC) that had ruled Sierra Leone for more than two decades. Its usurpation of power dashed the hopes of many Sierra Leoneans for a transition to a period of peace and democratic rule. In addition, the 'quality' of the junta members—low-ranking military personnel with minimal education—concerned the majority of the citizenry. The soldiers consisted mostly of 'uprooted and criminally disposed youths' according to a respected Sierra Leonean scholar, who referred to them as 'lumpens'—'unemployed and unemployable youths mostly male, who live by their wits or have one foot in what is generally referred to as the informal or underground economy'.<sup>57</sup> Major Johnny Paul Koroma, for example, who became leader of the AFRC, was an overambitious officer with personal connexions to the former government. He had been imprisoned for an alleged coup attempt in August 1996 but 'released' after the AFRC seized control of the government.

The military overthrow drew almost instant international condemnation, particularly from African heads of state. Sierra Leoneans viewed the takeover as another attempt by young military personnel to enrich themselves. The excesses of the previous military government remained fresh in the minds of citizens, who felt that a repeat of that performance would be intolerable. Nonviolent resistance against the coup took immediate and extensive root.

## Anarchy

Young, lacking experience, training, and discipline, the AFRC unleashed a rash of unbridled violence against the general population. Arson and looting spread across Freetown, with the Ministerial Building—housing most of the government ministries, including the Ministry of Finance—being gutted by fire along with the central bank. Still stinging from civil war, such violence had become part of everyday life for many Sierra Leoneans. An AFRC invitation extended to the paramilitary Revolutionary United Front (RUF) distressed the majority of the citizens more than anything and bolstered their determination to resist. The RUF rebels, who had started the civil war in 1991 but could never enter the capital, were now being welcomed by the ‘leaders’ of the country allegedly in order to achieve ‘peace’.

To no one’s surprise, this unholy alliance between the AFRC and the RUF ushered in a reign of terror. The RUF soon overwhelmed the AFRC and became the de facto leadership of the ongoing political upheaval, with Major Koroma, the AFRC leader, taking orders from the RUF’s second-in-command, General Sam ‘Mosquito’ Bockarie.<sup>58</sup> According to Lansana Gberie, ‘[T]hey [the RUF rebels] took what amounted to full control of everything.’<sup>59</sup>

Olu Gordon, a Sierra Leonean journalist, wrote, ‘[T]he rebellious soldiers then embarked on an orgy of looting. They also targeted banks, foreign exchange bureaus and private houses in search of easy money.’<sup>60</sup> Looting became the order of the day, with marauding armed men breaking into shops and other businesses. So rampant had this practice become that the military established an Anti-Looting Squad with orders to shoot suspected perpetrators on sight. The Freetown-based *Standard Times* reported that traders at the central market had lost up to 400 million leones (about \$US160,000) in goods.<sup>61</sup> Civilian residences also came under frequent attack, and residents were brutally executed.

## Civilian Resistance

The coup d'état had taken place on 25 May, a Sunday. Churches did not hold services that day throughout Freetown, and local newspapers could not publish although one of the stated reasons behind the coup was the draconian press bill passed by the overthrown government. Of the few newspapers in circulation, the *Standard Times* ran a headline announcing its pending shutdown because of numerous threats to the lives of its staff.

Immediately following the chaos surrounding the coup, the streets throughout major cities and towns became unsafe. Determined to turn rampant fear into obvious disapproval of the junta, two days after the coup the Sierra Leone Labour Congress told workers to stay at home. Civil servants and other unorganised employees refused to go to work as well, withholding their services because of the lack of safety. A general labour boycott spread across the country. The chief secretary of state, Captain S. A. J. Musa of the AFRC, circulated a memo to the heads of government departments requesting that workers sign a document committing them to working with the junta. This effort proved to be fruitless. Despite attempts at making the country appear to be safer, people continued to stay at home, resisting threats from the AFRC and refusing to cooperate. Most of government offices were therefore staffed by AFRC-RUF supporters generally referred to as 'collaborators'.

All major financial institutions remained closed, as most had been looted during the coup or in its aftermath. As currency virtually disappeared, foreign exchange bureaus and other privately owned business suffered greatly. Approximately 15,000 businessmen reportedly left the country, and those remaining auctioned what was left of their goods.<sup>62</sup> In total, some 400,000 people emigrated, including former heads of government offices and institutions, with most heading for neighbouring Guinea and the Gambia.<sup>63</sup>

## The Vanguard of Nonviolent Resistance

By far, nationwide school boycotts delivered the most severe blow to the legitimacy of the junta. Whereas the AFRC-RUF were able to 'recruit' sympathisers to occupy enough offices to create a semblance of normalcy, they could not do the same with the schools. Parents proved to be unwilling to risk the lives of their children by sending them to schools in such a chaotic environment, and teachers refused to cooperate with the military. The Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU) urged a return to democratic rule and became one of the first national associations to condemn the coup. On 24 July, the *Herald Guardian* reported SLTU president Edward Minah's denunciation of the coup. Minah had also called on all teachers to stay at home. Attempts to establish a parallel organisation run by AFRC-RUF collaborators and several other initiatives proved futile. The SLTU held several meetings over the following months during which it reaffirmed its position that schooling would not resume until the restoration of the democratically elected government.

Students formed the most vocal opposition to the military rule of the AFRC-RUF. In addition to condemning the coup and the junta, students issued the same demands as the SLTU, vowing not to return to their campuses until the reinstatement of the previous government. They displayed their determination and disapproval of the junta with help from the 'illegal' Radio Democracy, FM 98.1, run by pro-democracy activists. Through the station, the National Union of Sierra Leone Students (NUSS) announced a mass, nationwide nonviolent demonstration, eventually held on 18 August amid unprecedented AFRC-RUF brutality. The march disintegrated into a 'cat-and-mouse' affair with armed men descending on any area where students were mobilizing. Three people were reported killed and hundreds more arrested or wounded. Student union leaders, fearing for their lives, went into hiding. The brute force

used against the students further isolated the AFRC-RUF.

Responding to claims by the AFRC-RUF that demonstrating students were armed, Maclean Thomas, acting president and chief justice of NUSS, said, 'We have never used AK-47 rifles to demonstrate against the junta because we believe in the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr. by using nonviolent means for our voices to be heard by the whole world.'<sup>64</sup> Despite the nonviolent nature of the protests, government forces unyieldingly attacked gatherings of suspected students. The National School of Nursing in Freetown was the only institution of learning operating in the country, and naturally it became the centre for student activities. The junta easily targeted it, and routes to be used by demonstrators regularly had heavily armed personnel stationed with AK-47 rifles, submachine guns, their 'trademark' rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), brand new machetes, and whips. The junta disrupted demonstrations in many parts of the country, but one protest in Lungi, the area of the international airport occupied by the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), remained undisturbed. ECOMOG, comprised mainly of soldiers from neighbouring West African countries under the leadership of Nigeria, deployed in February 1998 to bring peace to the country.

### **Role of the Press**

The majority of newspapers throughout the country expressed dissatisfaction with the coup as articulated most prominently through the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ).<sup>65</sup> In the mayhem following the overthrow of the government, most newspapers ceased publication, more from fear for personal safety than from any challenge from the junta. Once the first newspaper resumed publishing in early June 1997, others began reporting on the atrocities being committed by the AFRC-RUF. Photographs augmented graphic descriptions of the

terror. *For Di People*, for example, detailed the cold-blooded murder of a girl found listening to FM 98.1.<sup>66</sup>

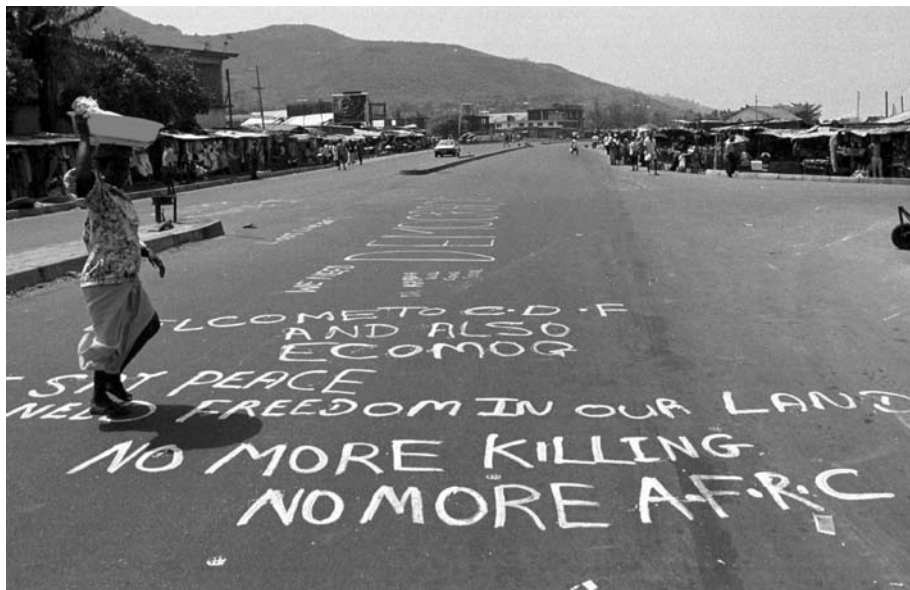
The number of dailies fell from more than fifty to less than ten, but together with the one clandestine radio station, sustained a spirit of nonviolent resistance. Their perseverance, however, had consequences. One journalist, who had been shot in the leg, was forced to go underground, and most newspaper outlets had their offices ransacked. 'Guerrilla journalism' developed as a result, with newspapers having to repeatedly move offices to evade harassment.

## **Conclusion**

Aiming to restore the democratically elected government, nonviolent protagonist opposed to the AFRC regime in Sierra Leone initiated academic and economic boycotts, peaceful demonstrations, widespread stay-at-homes, and mass migration. The general populace proved largely successful in denying the junta many of the sources of power necessary not only for running the government but also for maintaining a functioning society on a daily basis. The mass exodus from the country by doctors, lawyers, engineers, academics, and a large section of the security forces depleted significant human resources and desperately needed skills and knowledge. The widespread stay-away actions and education boycott brought the country almost to a standstill. With financial resources nonexistent, the sources of production ceased. Industries and factories, including the Sierra Leone Brewery and Aureol Tobacco Company, were looted and destroyed. Financial institutions, banks, and foreign exchange bureaus closed.

Determined action by the people ultimately denied the AFRC-RUF regime the authority and legitimacy required to rule, ensuring its failure. The reign of terror unleashed and the brutality of the regime in face of civil protest made the people more resilient. The heavy handedness

of the security forces against unarmed students and the general population also led to condemnation by the international community and eventually the imposition of trade and travel embargoes on members of the AFRC. The junta was left with no legs on which to stand. Although students, workers, and members of the media all contributed to the nonviolent struggle that virtually rendered the country ungovernable, AFRC-RUF rule was not brought to an end until February 1998, with the deployment of ECOMOG, which included military operations as well as an economic blockade. The eventual entry into Freetown of peace-keeping soldiers formally dislodged the AFRC regime, but the junta had basically disintegrated by that time. The combination of military forces alongside nonviolent struggle is a unique occurrence that in the case of Sierra Leone cooperatively ended military rule.



In February 1998, residents of Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, daubed messages on public roads about their desire for freedom and an end to killings as Nigerian-led West African ECOMOG peacekeepers took control and stemmed looting and revenge killings. Clear communication of grievances is a fundamental aspect of nonviolent struggle. Photo: Reuters.

## The Ogoni Struggle

The Ogoni people of Nigeria have been described as a 'minority within a minority'.<sup>67</sup> Inhabiting a region of approximately 650 square kilometers and numbering about 500,000,<sup>68</sup> Ogonis are a small group in a country with more than 250 ethnic groups and a total population of slightly less than 100 million. Through the dynamism of Ken Saro-Wiwa, however, they challenged two giants—the multinational oil conglomerate Royal Dutch Shell and the Nigerian federal government. Channeled primarily through the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Ogoni demands have yet to be met, but a carefully planned nonviolent campaign has attracted global attention to the injustices they have suffered.

### **Garnering Widespread Support**

The Ogoni are primarily farmers and fishers, and their land is relatively fertile.<sup>69</sup> Royal Dutch Shell first discovered oil under Ogoni land in 1958, during the colonial period.<sup>70</sup> The company continued its explorations and caused environmental degradation, which eventually led to demands for redress among the local population. MOSOP arose as a result and insisted on more of a say for the Ogoni in the area of oil exploration, and more fundamentally, local autonomy. Their demands for greater autonomy and self-determination date as far back as 1914 and the efforts of such organisations as the Ogoni Central Union, the Ogoni State Representative Assembly, and KAGOTE.<sup>71</sup> Their efforts did not succeed primarily because these organisations, although attempting to empower the people, were mainly elitist and lacked the support of the masses.

MOSOP elevated the struggle when it arrived on the scene in 1992. Kenule Beeson Saro-Wiwa, a writer and political activist, was the mas-

termind behind MOSOP, an umbrella group of nine Ogoni associations.<sup>72</sup> Renowned personalities within the Ogoni community supported him and his efforts, including Chief Edward Nna Kobani, a political strategist, and Garrick Barle Lenton, an academician and former federal minister of education. The success of MOSOP in mobilizing a people who had become disillusioned and apathetic towards their plight can be attributed to the dynamism of these founders. An alliance secured with traditional chiefs and other Ogoni elites made their task somewhat easier. As the movement gained international recognition, support for MOSOP similarly grew, along with respect for "Ken" Saro-Wiwa, who became the spokesperson of the Ogoni people.

In 1992 MOSOP drafted the Ogoni Bill of Rights, which served as a set of guiding principles and demands. The organisation sent the document, overwhelmingly supported by the Ogoni people, to the Nigerian head of state, General Ibrahim Babangida, and to Shell and Chevron, the two oil companies doing business on Ogoni land. The Bill of Rights demanded that the federal government grant local autonomy for Ogonis and provide \$10 billion for damage to the environment and as royalties for Shell and Chevron's oil production.<sup>73</sup> The bill garnered widespread newspaper coverage. The following statement encapsulates the commitment of the Ogoni to securing their demands through non-violent means: '[T]he Ogoni abjure violence in their struggle for their rights within the Federal Republic of Nigeria but will, through every lawful means, and for as long as is necessary, fight for social justice and equity for themselves and their progeny'.<sup>74</sup>

MOSOP leaders conducted a series of meetings throughout the nine villages of Ogoni and moved to sensitise the people and to bring greater numbers on board for a prolonged struggle. With the youths from the National Youth Council of Ogoni People (NYCOP), they toured the villages of Ogoni land, soliciting support and forging a highly motivated people ready to face the challenges ahead. While mobilizing the

Ogoni during these tours, Saro-Wiwa conducted seminars on community leadership to prepare the people to participate in eventual self-government. In 1992 MOSOP gained membership in the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples' Organisation (UNPO), which led to more attention for the movement.<sup>75</sup> UNPO is a democratic membership organisation open to peoples or nations that lack representation in major world organisations, such as the United Nations. Saro-Wiwa also brought the plight of the Ogoni people to the attention of the United Nations Working Group for Indigenous People.<sup>76</sup> Having adequately galvanised the Ogoni people, MOSOP was ready to launch a series of mass demonstrations of protest and persuasion.

### **Expanding the Repertoire of Symbolic Methods**

MOSOP chose 4 January 1993—the beginning of the United Nations International Decade of the World's Indigenous Peoples—as the date for the first demonstration.<sup>77</sup> Approximately 300,000 Ogoni men, women, and children participated in the mass rally to register their discontent and mark a turning point in the history of the Ogoni people.<sup>78</sup> This demonstration was not, however, a one-off event, as MOSOP organised various activities to maintain the morale of the Ogoni people and the spirit of protest. Such activities included regular Sunday mass rallies across Ogoni land. The Ogoni focused on international reports and the excesses of Shell, the leading oil company in the region. Night vigils to pray for the continued success of the struggle became another mainstay, particularly when the conflict appeared to be experiencing difficulties, as during periods of interethnic attacks. To raise funds for the struggle, MOSOP established the One Naira Ogoni Survival Fund (ONOSUF), to which many contributed as an indication of the people's commitment to the cause. Such measures succeeded in creating a sense of belonging and popular ownership of the cause.

## **The Outbreak of Violence: The ‘Willbros Shootings’**

The solidarity of the Ogoni for their cause troubled Shell and the Nigerian government. The determination of the government and Shell to continue oil exploration in the region further fueled Ogoni confidence. When Shell contracted Willbros, an American corporation, to lay pipelines, local farmers protested the bulldozing of their crops in the designated construction area. In April 1993, as some 100,000 peaceful, unarmed demonstrators occupied the site, Nigerian troops opened fire on the crowd. The ‘Willbros shootings’, the first major use of military force against the Ogoni, resulted in one death and a woman losing her arm.<sup>79</sup> Despite the casualties, the protesters succeeded in driving out Willbros. For the work to continue, Shell and their partner were forced to offer compensation of one million naira (about \$US14,000 at that time) to the families of the victims of the shootings. MOSOP president G. B. Leton and other officials accepted the payment, which Saro-Wiwa later rejected as an insult to the Ogoni people.<sup>80</sup> This encounter demonstrated that the Ogoni could confront their opponents as a united body. Two months later, another nonviolent campaign by the Ogoni marked their steadfastness.

## **1993 Presidential Election Boycott**

With the euphoria that had greeted the military coup d’état in August 1985 dissipating, the military government scheduled presidential elections for June 1993. The regime hoped that they would ameliorate mass discontent. The Ogoni people’s decision to boycott the balloting proved to be a successful strategy. It ironically, however, sounded the death knell of Ogoni solidarity that the leaders had so patiently cultivated, as divisions in the MOSOP leadership came to a head during discussions leading up to the boycott. MOSOP president Leton and other top-

ranking members of the MOSOP Steering Committee also held prominent positions in the two political parties created by the Nigerian military regime. While they favoured participating in the elections, Saro-Wiwa and members of organisations such as the Federation of Ogoni Women's Association and the National Youth Council of Ogoni People favoured a boycott. At a meeting of the steering committee, the pro-boycott vote won by eleven votes to seven.<sup>81</sup> The decision led to the resignation of the president, vice president, and other prominent members of the movement.<sup>82</sup>

The Ogoni people registered their protest loud and clear: They would not sanction any government under a constitution that did not respect minority rights.<sup>83</sup> NYCOP ensured the effectiveness of the boycott by seeing that no polling took place in Ogoni land.<sup>84</sup> The success of the Ogoni boycott embarrassed the military government. After the annulment of the elections of 12 June 1993, the government arrested Saro-Wiwa and other MOSOP leaders. Following the arrests, many Ogonis took to the streets, demanding the release of Saro-Wiwa and the others. The government sent troops to quell the unrest, and indiscriminate beatings and arrests ensued as the Ogoni demonstrations continued. Saro-Wiwa regained his freedom on 22 July, but the largely nonviolent struggle had piqued. Between July 1993 and April 1994, the people of Ogoni land suffered from a spate of ethnic attacks from their neighbours that the Nigerian government allegedly sponsored.

### **Oil Workers' Strike**

By July 1994, a series of oil workers' strikes had begun, increasing the discomfort of the government and causing financial hiccups for the oil-extracting companies. NUPENG and PENGASSAN, unions of junior and senior staff workers, went on strike on 4 and 12 July, respectively. The workers' demands ranged from government dialogue with communities in

which oil was produced to the installation of the winner of the annulled 1993 elections.<sup>85</sup> The economic impact of the strike on the oil-industry became evident with the announcements by three major companies of a loss of more than \$200 million in 1993.<sup>86</sup> The events that followed, however, transformed Ogoni land into a militarised zone.<sup>87</sup>

The interethnic disturbances, especially between the Ogoni and their Andoni neighbours, raised the level of violence in the region. Rumours circulated of a conspiracy between Shell and the security forces and snowballed with the leaking of security documents, notably those of Lt. Col. Paul Okuntimo of the Rivers State Internal Security Task Force about 'wasting' the Ogoni people.<sup>88</sup> This atmosphere of terror, intimidation, and subterfuge provided the backdrop for the interethnic clashes and killing of former MOSOP leaders in Gokana Kingdom.

After their defeat over the decision to boycott the 1993 presidential elections, the embittered former leaders of MOSOP had become entrenched in their opposition to Saro-Wiwa. They had planned a meeting in Giokoo in May 1994, the ancestral headquarters of the Gokana Kingdom of Ogoni, at which they were to sign the Giokoo Accord, a document requiring the people of Gokana Kingdom to leave MOSOP. Saro-Wiwa was to address a meeting at the same place. When rumours spread that Saro-Wiwa had been arrested, his supporters assumed his former allies, now his enemies, to be responsible. Saro-Wiwa backers attacked the former MOSOP leaders, killing Chief Kobani, A. T. Badey, Chief Sam Orage, and Theophilus Orage.<sup>90</sup> This incident gave the military justification to arrest Saro-Wiwa on 22 May 1995. He was tried in a civil disturbances tribunal along with ten other MOSOP leaders, all of whom but one were sentenced to death, despite widespread international condemnation. Most commentators agree that the truth surrounding these incidents are yet to be known, but the subsequent execution of Saro-Wiwa and others marked the end of an eventful period in the history of the Ogoni peoples demand for self-determination.



The writer and environmental and human rights activist Ken Saro-Wiwa, shown here at an Ogoni Day demonstration in Nigeria in January 1993, led a nonviolent movement seeking economic justice for the communities of the Niger Delta. Despite the enormous wealth generated by oil production in the Niger Delta, most of the area's communities lacked basic necessities and resources. Saro-Wiwa was unambiguous in his advocacy of Nigerians fighting through nonviolent action for the equitable and fair distribution of oil profits. He understood the connexion between nonviolent struggle and conflict transformation—the inherent link between means and ends—and that achieving a goal of equity is incompatible with the use of armed resistance. In 1995 authorities hanged Saro-Wiwa, alongside eight other activists, in part because of his advocacy of nonviolent action to rectify the environmental damage being done to the delta by oil extraction. Photo: ©Amnesty International, all rights reserved.

## Conclusion

The use of strategic planning is evident in the nonviolent struggle of the Ogoni people. The formation of MOSOP and the publication of the Ogoni Bill of Rights indicate initial assessment and analysis as well as a degree of strategic development. Bringing together various organisations and individuals, such as chiefs, women, and youths, under the umbrella of MOSOP demonstrated Saro-Wiwa's solid comprehension of the situation. The gradual sensitisation of the people, education for eventual self-determination, and campaign of mass nonviolent action also underscore intentional strategic planning.

Despite such a careful approach, the nonviolent struggle of the Ogonis met with only limited success in that they are still in pursuit of their objectives. Nevertheless, the level of awareness among the Ogoni

people and the international community merits due consideration and recognition. The international furor following the execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa greatly succeeded in raising the profile of the Ogoni struggle worldwide, but the Ogoni have been unable to fill the gap left by such an inspiring and charismatic leader. The Ogoni and other ethnic minorities throughout Nigeria continue to utilise numerous nonviolent methods, but these measures have not matched the sophistication or success of those employed in the early and mid-1990s.

## Madagascar: The Soft Revolution

The history of political change in Madagascar is fraught with violence, but it also features powerful nonviolent movements. The country was officially proclaimed a colony of France in 1896, after the French military subdued the Merina Monarchy of Queen Ranaivalona III. After a brief respite as a republic within the French community beginning on 14 October 1958, Madagascar secured its independence on 26 June 1960.<sup>90</sup> One-party rule characterised the initial period following independence, until a nonviolent struggle took root in the early 1970s. Eventually mired and overwhelmed by violent insurrection, the nation experienced a degree of stability in the mid-1970s and continuing into the late 1980s and early 1990s, when a popular nonviolent uprising consumed the country. Spontaneous and undisciplined protests would again spiral into violence and autocratic rule until the elections of 2001.

### **Ratsiraka and Popular Protest**

Social Democratic Party leader Philbert Isirana became Madagascar's first president after independence. He won election in 1960 and reelection in March 1972. His second term lasted only two months, ended by

large anti-government demonstrations. The political upheaval that followed brought Admiral Didier Ratsiraka to power in June 1975.<sup>91</sup> Ratsiraka would rule the country from 1975 to 2002, with the exception of a brief spell between 1993 and 1996, when, in the first multiparty elections on the island, Albert Zafy assumed the presidency.<sup>92</sup>

Like other leaders who cling to power for too long, Ratsiraka faced increasing opposition. For sixteen years, he presided over a government that practiced a socialist revolution.<sup>93</sup> Popular protests erupted in 1989 over accusations of election fraud. Alleged irregularities included stuffed ballot boxes and voter-list manipulation to exclude youths, most of whom opposed the incumbent president.<sup>94</sup> At the inauguration, thousands of anti-Ratsiraka demonstrators took to the streets. In the capital, Antananarivo, violence between anti-Ratsiraka protesters and security forces resulted in some seventy-five casualties.

Similar protests occurred in 1991, in opposition to Ratsiraka's socialist policies. Crowds of nearly 400,000 demonstrated, this time determined to march peacefully to the presidential palace to demand Ratsiraka's resignation.<sup>95</sup> As the protesters neared their destination, presidential guards shot at the unarmed demonstrators, killing approximately 130 people.<sup>96</sup> The massacre increased sympathy for the protagonists, and a general strike began in May 1991, crippling the country's economy. The growing nonviolent movement compelled Ratsiraka to agree to hold elections in 1993. The opposition candidate, Albert Zafy, the central leader of a consortium of sixteen political parties, won with about 67 percent of the vote. Zafy's tenure was, however, short-lived. The legislature impeached him for violating the constitution, and he resigned in 1996. Ratsiraka won the election to replace him the following year.

## **December 2001 Elections**

Madagascar held presidential elections in December 2001. The mayor of Antananarivo, Marc Ravalomanana, and Ratsiraka faced each other as primary challengers. Before becoming mayor in 1998, Ravalomanana had been a political novice who had made a fortune in business. According to the official results of the 2001 elections, Ratsiraka had won 40 percent of the vote to Ravalomanana's 46 percent. Because neither had secured a simple majority, a second round of voting was scheduled for March. The run-off election would not, however, materialise, as Ravalomanana charged that the election results had been falsified and that he had actually won 53 percent of the vote. The Constitutional Court ordered a recount.

## **The Ravalomanana Revolution**

Even before the initial official results had been announced, allegations of fraud were leveled against Ratsiraka. Demanding that Ratsiraka step aside, Ravalomanana called on his supporters to organise a general strike and massive demonstrations, which would cripple the capital in January 2002. International flights were suspended, and business ground to a halt as Madagascar experienced the largest general strike in its history.<sup>97</sup> Close to a million protesters filled the streets, demanding an end to Ratsiraka rule. A second-round of voting was unnecessary, they proclaimed, as in their opinion, Ravalomanana had won and therefore should be installed as president.

With each passing day, the crowds taking to the street grew larger. One protester described the atmosphere as being 'like a holiday everyday'. As in 1991, protesters from both sides defied a curfew and state of emergency. Outdoor 'balls' began sweeping across the capital, with thousands of dancers filling the streets.<sup>98</sup> Demonstrations and

protests continued for about seven weeks. Ravolomanana's supporters clamoured for him to seize power and declare himself president, but he held that any decision must be made 'calmly'. Ravolomanana eventually unilaterally declared himself president, eliciting condemnation from the international community despite massive support at home. Thousands of Ravolomanana followers formed a human barricade around his residence, pledging to block any attempt to arrest him.<sup>99</sup> Vigils and songs became recurrent methods of these tactics to protect Ravolomanana.

After weeks of unchallenged demonstrations, Ratsiraka supporters marched to Antananarivo to confront Ravolomanana supporters. Nuns and representatives from religious groups attempted to prevent an outbreak of violence by positioning themselves between the opposing groups and singing hymns to calm them.<sup>100</sup> Clashes nevertheless erupted between the two groups, the first occurrence of violence during the electoral standoff. Unlike in 1991, during this period of unrest, between late 2001 and early 2002, the security forces maintained their neutrality. The military emphasised that their role was to protect citizens, not to harm them, which contrasted sharply with the actions of the presidential guards who had opened fire on protesters at the gates of the presidential palace.<sup>101</sup> When Ravolomanana announced his 'cabinet' in April 2002, his supporters escorted the officials to their offices in Antananarivo. Security personnel stood by and watched, mainly unable to take action because of the 'sheer size of the opposition's support'.<sup>102</sup>

Counter-demonstrations organised by the Ratsiraka camp led to rampant violence by both sides, seemingly eliminating any peaceful resolution of the conflict. Attempts to broker peace by Senegal president and elder statesman Abdoulaye Wade led to the signing of an accord by the two contenders in Dakar, Senegal, but the agreement did not hold.<sup>103</sup> Both men had agreed to accept the results of a recount, and

in the interim, Ravalomanana would accept Ratsiraka as president and serve as his deputy. Ratsiraka promised to end a blockade of Antananarivo. Upon returning to the island, Ravalomanana reneged on his word, as did Ratsiraka on his agreement to accept the results of the recount. The leaders' actions fed the violence between their rival groups, resulting in deaths, reports of torture, and disappearances on both sides.<sup>104</sup> After the recount, the Constitutional Court officially declared Ravalomanana president, on 6 May 2002. Ratsiraka refused to accept the result and continued clinging to power until amid continuing violence, he fled to the Seychelles.

## **Conclusion**

Madagascar's 'soft revolution', as described by one of the protesters,<sup>105</sup> contained a mix of nonviolent action and violent confrontation. The determination of the Ravalomanana supporters, numbering close to a million, brought the country to a standstill for about seven weeks. Lacking any coherent strategy, the spontaneous uprising against the long-time rule of President Ratsiraka showed resilience and creativity and impressive numbers. This last element may have been decisive in the military's decision to remain neutral during the course of the struggle. While violence became widespread at times, the lack of government-sponsored violence limited the number of casualties despite the massive gatherings of demonstrators. Although the details of what provoked Ratsiraka to cede power remain largely unknown, Ravalomanana and his supporters succeeded in taking power, adding a chapter to the country's nonviolent history to accompany its touted accounts of political violence.



# 4

## Countering Arguments for Violent Action: The Role of Women

Women have played leading roles in nonviolent struggles in collaboration with men and on their own. Notice is increasingly being taken of the significant contributions of women throughout African history. This chapter recounts the Aba revolt in Nigeria and the Pare women's uprisings in Tanzania, two challenges to colonial authority led by rural women.

## Aba Women's Revolt

In 'Igbo Women from 1929–1960', John Oriji describes the revolt of the women of Aba as one of the most significant events in the colonial history of Nigeria because it represents the first revolt organised by rural African women.<sup>106</sup> Fear of taxation was the underlying reason for the revolt in the southeastern Calaba and Owerri provinces. A census conducted in 1926 had resulted in the taxation of men in Okolo and other parts of Igbo land.<sup>107</sup> By the next census, people had become wary that women too would be taxed. Concerned about the pending census, women met and decided that they would refuse to be taxed.

At a meeting of the women of Okolo, an elderly lady, Nwanyeruwa, reported a confrontation that she had had with one of the census enumerators sent by the warrant chief to count her household and property. This incident sparked action, as the women in the *mikiri* (a general meeting) began sending leaves from a palm tree, the traditional symbol of invitation, to women in the nearby areas of Owerri province.<sup>108</sup> About 10,000 women accepted the invitation to Okolo. They began nonviolent protests in November 1929 and continued them for more than a month. The women chose singing and dancing as their action methods, at times composing songs ridiculing their opponents or articulating their grievances. On occasion they occupied the compounds of the targets of their protests. The women not only demanded that they not be taxed, they also insisted on the resignation of war-

rant chiefs—the symbols of colonial authority who had become the objects of their protests—and the abolition of their offices. Warrant chief Okugo of Okolo became their first victim, when the women gathered in his compound and demanded his resignation. When the district officer, John Hills, refused their demand to put the warrant chief on trial, the women followed him everywhere for an entire day. He got a respite only after appealing to Ikonja, Mwannedia, and Nwugo—the women’s leaders, known as the Oloko Trio—who convinced Hills to agree to trying Okogu.<sup>109</sup>

Other areas joined in the protests, and the women of Oloko visited them to persuade protesters to remain nonviolent. Violence eventually surfaced, however, in Aba, when a British driver killed two women in a car accident. Women broke into and burnt Native Administration Centres and native courts. With violence escalating, authorities dispatched the police and military to quell unrest. The security forces opened fire on the women on two occasions, killing and wounding a total of 100.<sup>110</sup> Eventually they occupied Igbo land with the intent of forcefully quelling the revolts wherever they occurred. A commission of inquiry later investigated the reasons behind the revolts. The outbreak of violence notwithstanding, the Aba women’s revolt served as an inspiration to women, who similarly came together in later years to protest other issues. They succeeded in obtaining their objectives: abolishing the warrant chiefs system and deferral of the taxation of women for the time being.

### Pare Women’s Uprisings

In the Shambaai region of northwest Tanzania, Pare women revolted against the system of taxation in January 1945. In addition, the women organised in opposition to the forced labour demands of colonial authorities.<sup>111</sup> The immediate incident that sparked the uprising

in January 1945 that continued into 1946 was the visit of the district commissioner to the Usangi chiefdom in the Shambaai region. As word spread of the visit, some 500 women walked to Shambaai to confront him about the tax system. The women prevented him from leaving without responding to their inquiry. A fracas ensued in which the officials at the meeting were mobbed. The protests continued for two days, with the women singing songs and encircling the chief's house. The women also adopted as an action method the use of inappropriate tools for carrying out forced labour in the agricultural schemes of the colonial government.

Protesting their husbands' inability to challenge the chief's ban on attending a meeting of the Tanganyika African National Union (TANU) and wanting to see Bibi Titi Mohamed, the leader of TANU's women's section, the women of Pare carried out a domestic strike, refusing to perform the usual domestic chores of cooking, fetching water, and farming. Confronted with this situation, the men defied their chief's orders and extended an invitation to the TANU leadership. The nonviolent methods used by the Pare women were to a large extent successful in that in the end their demands were mostly met. The mechanism of change in these instances was accommodation.

# Reading

## Women and Nonviolent Struggle in Africa

By Iyenemi Wokoma

**W**omen undeniably suffer great hardship in times of conflict, and African women are no exception. Considering that the continent has been awash with conflict for decades, women have certainly endured their share of the burden. Even in times of peace, women are subject to an assortment of oppression and injustice. Women, however, have not only been victims, but also have been agents of change in working to bring about a better world for themselves, their families, and their nations. They have sought peace during conflicts, helped their nation-states heal and move forward in the aftermath of war, and fought for social justice and women's and human rights. In doing so, they frequently turned to techniques of nonviolent action. As Pam McAllister notes, however, the dearth of literature on women's roles in nonviolent movements denies them credit for the creative ways in which they have acted collectively.<sup>112</sup> In some instances in Africa, women themselves do not appear to appreciate their contributions to peace, underestimating the impact of their work. As several vignettes from Africa highlight, women have made great contributions to nonviolent direct action.

## The Niger Delta: Ugborodo (Escravos), 2002

The Niger Delta is the most conflict-ridden region of Nigeria, primarily because of environmental degradation from oil exploration and exploitation as well as the inequitable distribution of economic resources and political power. Despite living on land that makes the country the world's sixth-largest oil exporter, the peoples of the Niger Delta rank among the poorest in the country. This anomaly between the wealth

Iyenemi Wokoma is a lawyer from the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. She earned a master of arts degree in gender and peace building from the University for Peace, Costa Rica, in 2005. She entitled her thesis 'Assessing the Accomplishments of Women's Nonviolent Direct Action in the Niger Delta'.

springing from their land and the lack of local development has spread frustration among the local population, triggering incessant conflict within the region on the one hand and between the local peoples and the oil companies and the Nigerian government on the other.

The conflicts with oil companies and the federal government have subjected the women of the delta region to rapacious violence, including beatings, rape, and murder. In most cases, women receive no redress, given the lack of legal and institutional accountability and general failings in the rule of law. Furthermore, for many women, the death or incapacitation of husbands, fathers, and sons means greater responsibility and hardship. They also suffer economically from the pollution of rivers and farmlands, their natural sources of livelihood.

In these circumstances, women who may see themselves as victims have also emerged as activists in their communities. This, however, is not a new phenomenon. The Aba women's revolt of 1929, the Ogharefe women's uprising of 1984, the Ekpan women's uprising of 1986, and several other movements of the 1990s represent poignant examples of Nigerian women mobilizing and exercising their collective power through nonviolent means. Realising the futility of violent action, women of the region have extensively employed nonviolent action. One relatively recent widespread action was the nonviolent opposition to ChevronTexaco by women of the Ugborodo (Escravos) in July 2002.

Escravos comprises the rural communities of Ajidigho, Imaghagho, Iyala, Ogidigben, Madogho, and Ugborodo in the Warri South area. Dutch Royal Shell and ChevronTexaco operate in the region. The latter (known in 2002 as Gulf) began explorations in Escravos in 1964 and still has flow stations and oil fields in the area. The inhabitants of Escravos are primarily Ijaw, Ilaje, and Itsekiri. Like other rural communities in the Niger Delta, they depend on fishing and subsistence farming for their livelihoods. Decades of environmental degradation and pollution caused by oil exploration has left the local peoples impover-

ished, with their sources of livelihoods increasingly decimated. Little or nothing has been done to alleviate the devastation or to safeguard the remaining resources. According to one local environmental justice group, 'rusty zinc shacks covered by soot and acid rain line the narrow streets. There are stretches of marshy soils and oil stained ponds, oil films floating on the water endangering marine life, and parched looking palm trees that were once sources of livelihood'.<sup>113</sup>

By June 2002, simmering resentment reached a crescendo. Women were aggrieved that they could no longer fish in the Warri River or the Ugborodo Creek because ChevronTexaco activities had driven fish and crayfish beyond their reach. Farm yields had dropped drastically because of degraded or contaminated soil. Flooding at high tide from the nearby Atlantic Ocean had become a common occurrence. Moreover, they argued, ChevronTexaco preferred to employ people from other communities, while their children and husbands remained largely jobless.

The women met to articulate their grievances and to seek a dialogue with the oil company. More than 700 women of Escravos held a meeting where they resolved to petition ChevronTexaco for a clean environment and employment for their children. A month later, the company had yet to acknowledge their letter. The women met again and decided to occupy the premises of ChevronTexaco in an attempt to compel company officials to enter into a dialogue about their grievances. On 8 July 2002, the women invaded the ChevronTexaco platform at Escravos, bringing operations at the facility to a standstill and refusing to leave only after they had spoken to the managing director.<sup>114</sup> The Escravos protest, which became a ten-day siege, was the beginning of a month-long demonstration against ChevronTexaco and Shell.

The women protesters, between the ages of 30 and 90, numbered only 150 when their occupation began, but they were gradually reinforced, with their number growing to more than 2,000. Among other

things, they demanded the provisioning of jobs for their husbands and sons; cleanup of oil spillage and protection of the environment; clean water, electricity, health care, and free education; respect by the oil companies for local customs and traditions; and assistance in establishing microeconomic enterprises. The women also seized control of the ChevronTexaco oil terminal airstrip, docks, and stores—the only points of entry to the facility—disrupting the production of about 450,000 barrels of crude oil each day the protest lasted. Sometimes working in shifts of 200 at a time, they occupied the facilities around the clock. Armed with only food and their voices, the women also sang and danced. To drive their point home, they even threatened to disrobe, a powerful local shaming symbol.<sup>115</sup>

### **The ‘Curse of Nakedness’**

According to one report, ‘most Nigerian ethnic groups consider the unwanted display of nudity by women as an extremely damning protest measure that can inspire a collective source of shame for those at whom it is directed’. Regarding the power of nakedness, Sokari Ekine, international representative for Niger Delta Women for Justice, said that ‘the mere threat of it will send people running. These are mature women, and for mothers and grandmothers to threaten to strip is the most powerful thing they can do’.<sup>116</sup> In the Niger Delta, women use the ‘curse of nakedness’ as a last resort, when all other means have been unsuccessful. Ekine, in ‘Women’s Responses to State Violence in the Niger Delta’, notes that ‘though greatly feared and rarely used, nakedness as a form of protest is legitimate within the cultural context of the Niger Delta and one of the few occasions when women are able to manoeuvre themselves into a position of power’.<sup>117</sup> The use of the threat of disrobing, though potent in terms of Nigerian culture, is also controversial, because of the connotation in many patriarchal societies

of women as the bearers of curses. According to Allison Drew,

women may often choose to use traditional techniques or draw on traditional protections when they are ignored and marginalized in their protests. . . . For many women, the most efficient strategies have traditional bases. Some of these strategies may be recognized as ritualized protests that do not actually challenge the structure or basis of political authority or male dominance, but they are legitimate, institutionalized means that women use to rebalance the social and gender relations. Because the use of such protest temporarily turns social and gender relations upside down, they encapsulate a symbolic threat to the prevailing social order.<sup>118</sup>

The tactics and determination of the women convinced ChevronTexaco to dispatch senior executives to the negotiating table. The parties agreed to the company employing more local people, funding schools, electricity, and other infrastructure projects, and assisting women in establishing poultry and fish farms.<sup>119</sup> Jay Pryor, managing director of ChevronTexaco Nigeria said, '[W]e are delighted that this crisis has been resolved peacefully, even though the process has been painstaking'.<sup>120</sup> The gains attained by the women contrast with the frequently violent and fruitless clashes that have taken place between youths and the soldiers and police. According to Oronto Douglas, an environmental human rights lawyer, 'through marches and demonstrations, sit-tights and nonviolent occupations, through songs, poetry and international campaigning, networking, the frontiers of environmental action in the region have gained unstoppable momentum'.<sup>121</sup> Esther Tolar, a spokeswoman for the group, said that history had been made: 'Our culture is patriarchal. For women to come out like this and achieve what we have is out of the ordinary'.<sup>122</sup>

Mahatma Gandhi stated the following in a message to Chinese women:

if only the women of the world would come together, they could display such heroic nonviolence as to kick away the atom bomb like a mere ball. . . . If an ancestral treasure lying buried in a corner of the house unknown to the members of the family were suddenly discovered, what a celebration it would occasion. Similarly, women's marvelous power is lying dormant. If the women of Asia wake up, they will dazzle the world. My experiment in nonviolence would be instantly successful if I could secure women's help (New Delhi 18 July 1947).<sup>123</sup>

The Niger Delta women's struggle remarkably achieved success without a loss of life. Christiana Mene, a member of the Escravos Women's Coalition and one of the leaders of the occupation, said women must take up the struggle in the Niger Delta. This success led to similar all-female protests throughout the region, and in August 2002 Shell facilities were occupied. Security forces of the oil companies dispersed some of the subsequent occupations, brutalising women in several instances. The women's actions attracted international attention and were regarded as the most effective tools for having forced multinational oil companies doing business in Africa to improve the societies in which they operate. The UN news agency IRIN noted that 'the recent protests by women at oil facilities have altered the rules of engagement in the longstanding conflict in the Niger Delta oil region'.<sup>124</sup>

It is relevant to note that although the initial actions were carried out separately by women from different ethnic groups, the last occupation saw a coming together of Ijaw, Ikaje, and Itsekiri women for the first time against the oil corporations. Recognising the divide-and-conquer tactics that had been used against them in the past by the oil companies, as well as the need for cooperation if they were to succeed, the women worked across ethnic divides. Emem Okon of the Niger Delta Women for Justice is quoted by Ekine as saying, '[W]hether or not these women succeed in restoring corporate sanity by making the oil giants respond to the plight of their host communities, they must have

by their united action contributed immensely to peace building among the Itsekiri and Ijaw communities in Delta State.<sup>125</sup>

## Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET)

MARWOPNET—also known as REFMAR in French—came into existence in May 2000 as the situation in the Mano River Union countries of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia began to deteriorate. The women of this subregion, suffering from the effects of war, had sons dying and daughters being raped. Amid the tension and fears of a probable derailment of the peace process, they organised a protest in which thousands of women marched to the mansion of President Charles Taylor in Monrovia, Liberia, on 6 May 2000 carrying placards proclaiming 'We want peace, no more war'. Reaching out to the presidents of all three countries of the Mano River Union with the aim of easing tensions among their countries, MARWOPNET succeeded in bringing them back to the negotiating table by way of a conference hosted by the king of Morocco. MARWOPNET was also the only women's organisation officially invited to participate in the Accra peace talks on Liberia, held in Ghana in 2002. Through protest marches, peace vigils, sit-ins in front of parliament, radio discussions, and meetings with rebel groups, the women of MARWOPNET were able to positively affect the peace process in the Mano River subregion. In recognition of the efforts of the group, the United Nations General Assembly presented MARWOPNET with its Human Rights Award in December 2003.

## Women of Somalia: The Sixth Clan

The civil war in the 1980s devastated Somalia and led to millions of internally displaced people and refugees, an institutionalised war

economy controlled by warlords, and overall social and political instability. Human rights violations were rampant, with women being doubly victimised, often having their fundamental and gender-specific rights violated. This situation motivated some Somali women to seek a peaceful end to the conflict.

The Mudug region, one of the richest in the country, was also one of those most severely affected by the war. The Mudug Region Peace Agreement represents an example of Somali women's participation in conflict resolution. After the signing of the peace agreement, women from different clans mobilised and through radio programmes educated the populace about the negative effects of the civil war. Through the same medium, they also illustrated to women that they had been primary victims of war. In addition to these efforts, the women adopted traditional conflict resolution methods to settle disputes between nomadic groups over access to water and grazing lands. Women's efforts in nonviolent conflict resolution have also included the promotion of peace education through seminars and informal discussion groups, with women and youths as their main targets.

Concerned Somali women organised an innovative action to have their voices heard. At the first Somali peace and reconciliation conference in 2000 in Arta, Djibouti, only the representatives of Somalia's five main clans were recognised as official delegates; all of them were men. Officials denied a place for a group of women led by Asha Haji Elmi, one of the founders of Save Somali Women and Children, a cross-clan national network of women's social and humanitarian organisations, because they were not considered official representatives of their clans.<sup>126</sup> In response, the women stood their ground, arguing the impossibility of peace without the full involvement of women. They pointed to the energies of women as being decisive in post-conflict peace building and lobbied for and received recognition as the so-called Sixth Clan of Somalia and thus a place in the nation's peace

process, which included the establishment of the Transitional National Government. They also succeeded in securing a quota for women's representation in parliament and government.<sup>127</sup>

The Sixth Clan used the most basic nonviolent action methods of protest and persuasion, promoting through visitations, delegations, and deputations their concern that peace could not be built for Somalia without the full participation of women. They were able eventually to bring the leaders of the five main clans in southern Somalia to accept the need to sit together and talk. Bringing the warring clan-lords together was something no one had been able to accomplish previously. At Arta, the women challenged the delegates to think past clan lines in drafting the peace agreement.<sup>128</sup> They also placed on the table an expansive set of community issues, broadening the conception of what it means to build peace beyond the mere brokering of power. The Sixth Clan has continued to work for peace in Somalia, and women continue to invigorate the search for peace.

## Burundi: Hutu and Tutsi Women Unite

Hutus and Tutsis of Burundi were sharply divided by civil conflict. In the neighbouring communities of Busoro and Musaga, the women remained in their villages while their husbands either went to war or left in search of jobs. The Hutu women of Busoro and the Tutsi women of Musaga were not, however, spared from the physical and psychological effects of the war. One day, the women of Musaga collected food and clothes, which they took to victims in Busoro. They also organised with the women of Busoro and marched to the local government office, demanding an end to the bloodshed. Joining hands, they for hours sang 'Give us peace. Give us peace now!' before dispersing. Although this protest did not end the war, it served as a bridge that helped build trust between the two communities. The women have continued their

work through the group Twishakira Amahoro (We Want Peace).

## Senegal: Women of Casamance March for Peace

Casamance, in southern Senegal, has for years been enmeshed in a conflict between government forces and rebels of the Mouvement des forces démocratiques de Casamance (MFDC). The droughts of the 1970s and 1980s had led to extensive economic hardship and low standards of living for the local population. Furthermore, the sociocultural differences between northern and southern Senegal came to serve as flash-points, as issues of identity became paramount. This situation led to the formation of the MFDC, which advocated independence. Women of the region have been active in efforts to bring about peace, organising and participating in meetings, rallies, and marches in Ziguinchor and other towns, demanding an end to the hostilities that have killed their children and the initiation of serious peace talks.

On 27 October 2002, some 3,000 women marched through Ziguinchor, stopping at the offices of the regional governor and those of MFDC leaders. They demanded and received pledges from both sides to work towards an eventual peace settlement. Many of the participants were those traditionally entrusted with the care of the sacred forests of Casamance, where disputes were settled according to local customs. These 'guardians' are highly respected in their communities and are organised as an association called Kabonkétor (Reconciliation, in Joola, the local language).

## Zimbabwe: Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA)

When Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, whites—comprising less than 1 percent of the population—owned nearly 40 percent of the land, including the vast majority of prime agricultural land. Lack-

ing the funds and the political will to address civilly this division of land, President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party launched the violent occupation of white farms in 2002, after blaming white farmers and the country's opposition for his loss in a referendum for a new constitution that would have considerably expanded the powers of the president. The government's actions resulted in food scarcity, exorbitant inflation, massive unemployment, and political violence. Women particularly felt the consequences of Mugabe's policy and in 2003 established Women of Zimbabwe Arise (WOZA).



Women of Zimbabwe Arise, or WOZA, is one of countless organisations of African women pursuing positive political and social change through collective nonviolent action across the continent. Here, Insiza rural women march in 2006 against the skyrocketing school fees being charged for the education of their children. More than 118 women were arrested, despite their carefully disciplined demonstration. The government released them on the same day, when the prosecutor refused to press charges against them. Demonstrations are symbolic acts of peaceful opposition and attempted persuasion, which go beyond verbal or written expressions of opinion but stop short of the action methods of noncooperation or nonviolent intervention. A demonstration shows that the nonviolent challengers either oppose or support something, the depth of opposition, and sometimes the proportion of persons concerned. Photo: WOZA.

*Woza* is a Zulu word meaning 'come forward'. The group, consisting of black, white, and Asian women, formed itself as a civic movement to provide women from all walks of life with a forum through which to speak with a united voice on issues affecting their daily lives and to encourage women to stand up for their rights and freedoms. Committed to the use of nonviolent action, WOZA's key activities include nonviolent civil defiance, such as street protests and support of the right to freedom of expression.<sup>129</sup>

On 14 February 2003, WOZA conducted its first public nonviolent action. Protesting the worsening situation in the country by marching in the cities of Harare, Bulawayo, and Victoria Falls under the banner 'Yes to love, No to violence', their only 'weapons' were Valentine's Day notes and roses to hand to passers-by. In Harare in response to government security agents' efforts to disperse their peaceful march, the women sat on the pavement and sang the national anthem. In Bulawayo, police dispersed the group, arresting some people and holding them overnight. The next morning, they walked out of confinement onto pavement covered with roses that had been placed there by supporters. WOZA had issued instructions to its members participating in the demonstration to put flowers on police station pavements in the case of arrests to show that they came peacefully and with love in their hearts.<sup>130</sup>

On Mother's Day, 10 May 2003, some 400 women gathered in the public square in front of the parliament building in Harare. Praying and singing, they swept the square with grass brooms while employing the slogan 'It's time to sweep away the violence'. In Bulawayo, women also sang while sweeping the street, chanting, 'Mothers, stand up! Stand up and work, for life is tough and it needs to be sorted out'. Authorities arrested forty-six of them.<sup>131</sup>

In March 2005, more than one hundred women held a vigil in a Harare park, singing and praying for peace. Police harassed and arrested

several of them. Despite repeated arrests and brutality at the hands of police and security forces, members of WOZA continued to organise peaceful protests. In the words of WOZA's Jenni Williams, 'The impetus really was that women were bearing the brunt of the instability in Zimbabwe and as the people who were suffering most, they should have been speaking out more and holding the regime accountable'. Williams, who has been arrested eighteen times mostly at WOZA-related protests, also said, 'We call it tough love because we love our country enough to sacrifice being arrested and beaten'.<sup>132</sup>



Zimbabwean women symbolically sweep Harare clean with roses in their hands in a police-approved march in the city centre on 10 May 2003. In Bulawayo, in southern Zimbabwe, police arrested dozens of women for attempting to hold a similar event, calling the gathering illegal. Historians have generally ignored nonviolent struggle, although it is an ancient phenomenon enjoying even greater currency today worldwide. Much of the history of this technique has been lost forever. It is important for communities and scholars to work together to document the accomplishments of nonviolent action, to understand its power, and to preserve the record of what can be achieved without resort to violence. Photo: Howard Burditt/Reuters.

## Conclusion

The above accounts, though only a small indication of what women have done in Africa, are representative of what has been accomplished and what remains possible. For homegrown peace initiatives and non-violent movements to take root, it is important to highlight achievements so others can learn from them. These examples also symbolise the inherent power of women as agents of peace, not simply victims of conflicts.



# Reading

## Rural Women's Peace Link: A Study of Powerful Rural Women

By DeEtte Wald Beghtol

**O**n a hot weekday morning, some 100 people met in a church in Kainuk, Kenya, a remote rural town on the border between the Turkana and Pokot districts. All the children sitting on the porch suddenly took off like a startled flock of birds, running at breakneck speed away from the church. When parents sitting inside the church saw their children in flight, they dashed after them. The children had heard what sounded like a gunshot. In the Turkana district of North Rift, Kenya, children have been taught to run for the safety of home at any hint that the community might be under attack. The parents knew their children would be terrified, so they ran to catch them and calm them. There was no attack that day, just emotion and fear set on hair-triggers.

The North Rift Valley in northwestern Kenya is an area of contrasts. Grassy savannahs climb to high mountains that descend precipitously to desert. The area, largely rural, is spotted sparsely with small towns and villages. Some mountain villages are accessible only on foot or by mule. Ethnic groups have for centuries raided a few cattle from one another with minimal effects on the culture of the area, but with the availability of small arms from neighboring regions of northern Uganda and southern Sudan, these rivalries eventually developed into full-scale wars in which groups burned villages and raided thousands of cattle and took them to markets outside the area. Prior to national elections, it was not uncommon for politicians to exploit these animosities for political gain. The possibility of being attacked became the daily reality for the residents of Turkana and Pokot. In response, the Rural Women's Peace Link (RWPL) created multiple strategies to reduce violence and build peace.

DeEtte Wald Beghtol is a teacher and lawyer who for the past several years has facilitated learning for African students through the Dag Hammarskjöld Centre for Peace, Good Governance and Human Rights at the Mindolo Ecumenical Foundation in Kitwe, Zambia.

The Rural Women's Peace Link began as a department of the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) in Eldoret, Kenya. It established fourteen area networks of women working for peace in their local communities. NCCCK founded the programme under the direction of Selline Korir, who believes that women can expand their traditional roles and play an important part in peace building in rural Kenya. RWPL has influenced many different segments of society, including its elders, youth, men, police, government officials, and other peace groups.

## Local Organising

The Rural Women's Peace Link uses creativity in devising nonviolent approaches that mesh with local cultural heritage. They began by building on a system of local and area peace committees set up by the NCCCK and then expanding the network into new areas. They advocate for more women's involvement in the committees, demonstrating how the inclusion of women can strengthen committees numerically and in breadth of skills. They overcome traditional barriers to women's leadership in their communities by using 'strong yet soft' ways.

In the early stages of the programme, the RWPL had difficulty meeting with women in some areas. Women traditionally were not allowed to leave their villages and feared beatings by their husbands if they talked to strangers. Korir therefore approached village elders and requested permission to talk to their wives. Some agreed; some did not. Korir was willing to start small, meeting only with the women who could safely do so. They then began working on income-generating projects, from which the men also stood to benefit economically, assuming they allowed their wives to participate. Elders of the village were asked to join in, to gain their support. Through RWPL activities, women learned how to reach beyond traditional gender roles. For example, one woman leader approached her member of parliament (MP)

directly and asked to speak at his church. Neither her ethnic group nor the church traditionally had allowed women to speak, but the MP invited her, and she delivered her message.

The RWPL next expanded its networks across ethnic lines. In the past, clan clashes and animosities had been a major source of violence in the area. Groups who supported particular politicians were armed and encouraged to confront the opposing group. Thus, when it came time to vote, the outcome favoured the politician most successful in forcing the opposition to flee. Women had acquiesced to such violence in fulfilling the traditional role of offering support to their sons and husbands and singing war songs to encourage them in fighting. When women began to work together on community health projects, education, and cooperative income generation, the old ethnic hostilities gave way to friendships. They began to sing songs of peace. Because of past violence and mistrust, the government had prevented cross-border meetings in the area. Korir explained the goals of the programme to government officials and convinced them of the trustworthiness of women and how they could help bring peace where men had failed. The government changed the rules to allow women, and women only, to work across ethnic borders.

## Education as a Nonviolent Tactic

The Rural Women's Peace Link promotes cross-cultural peace exchanges between ethnic groups in northwest Kenya and surrounding areas. Kenyan women visited women in rural regions on the Ugandan side of the border, after which the two groups began to see the other as allies instead of enemies, sharing stories and strategies. A group of Muslim women from northern Kenya met with primarily Christian Rift Valley women to teach them peace-building skills that they had used in their area. In the process, they built interreligious bridges. Another peace

and development strategy involved midwives, who are badly needed in remote rural areas where medical care is kilometers away in town. The women's networks trained midwives and formed midwife groups that promote peace by serving all ethnic groups without prejudice, thus forming interethnic ties.

When local rural women meet with women from other areas, their desire for literacy increases. They view women with education as role models and begin to believe that they also can become educated. Trainers respond by helping the women set up literacy classes, but education does not stop at literacy. For example, women with literacy skills have been trained as paralegals. These women gain new status in their communities and use their knowledge and abilities to advocate for justice, an essential ingredient in peace.

## Governance

The RWPL has hosted conferences throughout the area in which women from different ethnic groups come together to address issues of governance. In 2002, prior to national elections, they trained women as election monitors. The women in each district asked officials, candidates, and police to sign a pledge not to resort to violence during the electoral process. In places where politicians had fomented tension, the women held marches and rallies to encourage women and others to vote peacefully and to support female candidates. The efforts helped reduce violence, which had marred previous national balloting and resulted in the election of significant numbers of female candidates. Such community activism inspired women to run for office, with several in the area being elected as local councilors, a new phenomenon in these traditionally patriarchal communities. One woman is laying the groundwork to run for parliament in the 2007 general elections.

As women have discovered their power, they have taken on new

roles in the community as peace builders and expanded their role as intermediaries. They have even negotiated with cattle raiders; such a role traditionally was reserved for male elders. Women recently negotiated with raiders who agreed to surrender 1,500 guns to the government. Women also now find themselves in the position of being able to approach young men involved in violence and talk to them more easily than can men because of the traditional respect given to women. The women recognised the necessity of involving youth in peace building. By tradition, it is the youth, under direction of the elders, who raid and attack. When youths were included in peace committees, attacks decreased. Several communities brought together youths from rival ethnic groups to form peace drama groups and peace choirs. The youths have created songs and plays for spreading the message of peace and educating themselves and others about AIDS prevention. The experience of working together on community development projects has fostered relationships, which begin to heal histories of violent conflict. The women of one local peace committee also discovered a creative way of bridging ethnic divides through food. When food aid arrived, they used it as a tool for peace by insisting that it be shared across ethnic lines.

In one area, a peace and development committee decided to organise a nonviolent direct action protest to get the attention of their government representatives. They blocked a major road, refusing to let traffic pass until a government minister came to hear their grievances. When he arrived, the people presented him with a list of their demands, which included security against attack, jobs for widows of men killed in fighting, and a reduction of firearms in the area. The women are planning peace crusades, in which women from both sides of warring communities tour their districts together, gathering support at public meetings organised to debate and agree on a pact for peace.

## Cooperatives Generate Income as Well as Peace

In some areas, women are not allowed to own land, so groups have pooled their resources and bought land for cooperative income-generating projects. Women traditionally did not ride bicycles, but group leaders needed mobility to report approaching attacks and to contact groups in other areas. The women therefore bought bicycles with money from their projects. They now have Women's Peace Cycling days, which also include games for youths from different ethnic groups.

The women raise money in various ways. For instance, they buy things in common—such as cooking oil or kerosene for lamps—and then re-sell smaller quantities to individuals and give the profit to the group. They raise sheep, give some lambs to new members and sell others, returning the profits to the group. In one group, each member grows orange trees to provide nutrition for her family, but then sells the excess to neighbors. Each member has a tree nursery. The group provides the original seedlings that the member nurtures; it provides new seedlings to new members or to others as a gesture of peace making. A large plant nursery on a school ground that parents help tend generates income for school uniforms, books, and scholarships for needy children. The entire community shares in meeting children's educational needs. The women's projects benefit the wider community in other ways as well. They have built community water tanks, supporting and improving community health by providing clean drinking water for themselves and their neighbors. They also have promoted reforestation, asking each member to grow and plant as many trees as possible to improve the local and global environment.

## Do Women Have Unique Peace-Building Abilities?

The Rural Women's Peace Link teaches that women possess unique assets for peace building and encourages women to use their abilities and capabilities to thwart approaching danger through early warning systems. Women working out in the fields or teaching children in schools are urged to remain alert to unusual behaviour and trust their intuition that danger may be near. Women can travel more easily through conflict areas without being stopped, which may afford them the opportunity to report signs of danger to the local police, who recognise that the women's warnings can help them head off violence. RWPL plans to develop early warning training manuals for women and to translate them into local languages.

Women have used traditional symbols in interesting ways to promote peace. When a woman is pregnant, she sews a leather belt decorated with shells and beads that she wears underneath her clothing. Only her husband sees the belt, in private moments. One woman, having failed to convince young men to stop reprisal attacks, removed her belt and laid it across the path the raiders sought to use. The young men took it as a sign that they would be cursed if they went to war, so they aborted their attack. Another woman was asked by her son, the leader of a group of young warriors, to prepare him food so he could go out on a raid. As the mother prepared the food, she spoke loudly enough for her son to hear her blessing the food if it were to be used for peace but cursing anyone who would use its nourishment to do violence. Her son ate the food but decided not to join his band of warriors. The group did fight that day.

In one area, many of the residents from different ethnic groups had for years fled violence. As women began to return with their families, they needed to rebuild their communities and resolved to design them on a lasting foundation of peace. The women began by carrying gourds

of milk, a traditional symbol of a desire for peace, to women of other ethnic groups. When a family that had previously been the enemy returned, the women provided them cups, sugar, and utensils, essentials for the family home, and helped them build a home to replace the one that had been destroyed. They sang traditional songs to welcome the family to the community. They made no distinctions between ethnic groups. All were welcome in the new community they were building together.

The women involved in the RWPL know that there is no peace without justice. After learning that a schoolgirl from a nearby community had been gang raped, one group adopted the victim as their child. A group member became a substitute mother for the girl, and elder women became her grandmothers, provide nurturing and healing counsel. The group provided school fees, uniforms, and expenses, and the larger network provided legal assistance and solidarity to see that the rapists, sons of wealthy people in the community, were brought to justice. Together they sent strong messages to the area of justice as an essential component of nonviolence.

Female genital mutilation—or “female cutting,” the term preferred in these rural communities—is a difficult issue that women are addressing. This tradition is connected to that of cattle raiding and marriage. After young girls are ‘cut’, they are considered ready for marriage. Young men prove their manhood and readiness for marriage by stealing cows, the local measure of wealth, for the required dowry. It is the cattle raiding that escalated to violence and destruction of lives and property. Members of the Rural Women’s Peace Link work in their local communities to educate people about the dangers of genital mutilation and help families find alternative rituals to replace cutting. They provide sanctuary for girls fleeing its infliction and mediate conflicts between parents and daughters so that the girls can safely return home.

In training rural women to be nonviolent activists, the Rural Women's Peace Link helps them build self-esteem and discover their capacity to take on new roles as leaders in their communities. Most important, in the words of one rural woman, "We have stopped hating and despising ourselves." The growing culture of peace in the Rift Valley is sustainable because it is based on women and men, elders and youths, building it together.

# 5

## The Way Forward

The primary purpose of this study is to bring to light the untold or underreported instances of Africans utilising nonviolent strategies in seeking and obtaining redress of their grievances. Some of the incidents or events may be familiar, but they were probably reported in ways that emphasised violence rather than nonviolence. Even when there is no violence, such as during tax revolts, the history books and media ignore, overlook, or downplay the use of nonviolent methods.

Europeans wrote most of the initial histories of Africa, bringing to them their particular perspective and in some cases seeking to justify colonialism. In a history of Ghana, Peter Calvocoressie writes of riots started by former service members. No mention is made of the colonial police officer shooting into the peaceful gathering of marchers. Given Africa's image as a conflict-ridden continent, it is important that such stories be told so that scholars and ordinary Africans alike can reassess what they think they know.

In the Indian struggle for independence, Gandhi inspired the choice of nonviolent resistance. Martin Luther King, Jr., provided similar inspiration to the civil rights movement in the United States. The greatest influence on Africa was the 1945 Fifth Pan-African Congress planned by Kwame Nkrumah and W.E.B. Dubois and held in Manchester. That particular gathering attracted high-profile Africans and laid the foundation for the African struggles for independence. Most countries succeeded in nonviolently securing their independence, with the exception of those with large settler populations, who tended to want to cling to power.

The line separating violent and nonviolent action can be thin, as illustrated by numerous strikes, protests, and demonstrations that suffered the introduction of violence, often by the state. Kenneth Kaunda discusses this situation in his autobiography, *Zambia Shall Be Free*. No matter ones intention, when people have their backs against a

wall they may act or react violently, which necessitates training and discipline in struggles that employ nonviolent methods. Kaunda similarly notes that employing nonviolent methods is easier when one is in opposition than when one is the leader of a country. He for one represents a leader of nonviolence transformed once assuming power. Kaunda, in an interview with Bill Sutherland and Matt Meyer, proffered that one should not 'accept that the voice of the people must be there all the time and is paramount'. The truth of his statement is borne out in the post-independence period. 'Reasons of political realism dictate that pacifists' convictions be modified', said the man who ruled over a one-party state after independence.<sup>133</sup>

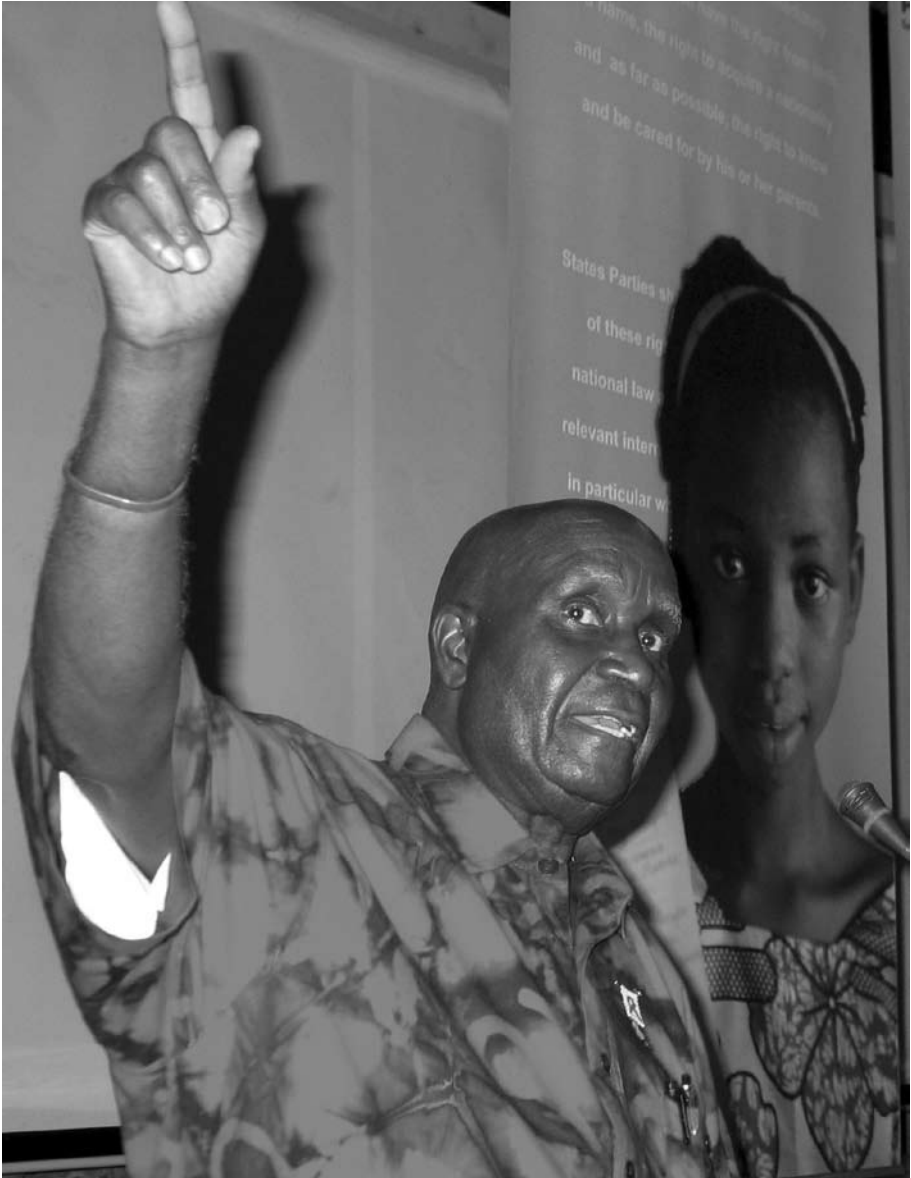
Gandhi, it is worth noting, rejected political leadership. It would indeed be difficult for a pacifist leader to defend a nation from attack. Such a dilemma lends to reliance on or advocacy of the just war doctrine. Whether non-state actors opposing an oppressive regime can succeed in using only nonviolent struggle remains a fundamental issue of discussion. The general view put forward by leading scholars such as Gene Sharp and others is that both state and non-state actors can use strategic nonviolent methods to better advantage than they can violent methods.<sup>134</sup>

The difficulty of leaders in consistently advocating nonviolent struggle has resulted in the phenomenon of today's liberators becoming tomorrow's oppressors.<sup>135</sup> In 1960 Nkrumah, who saw his role as the father of the liberation struggle in Africa, organised a series of conferences in Ghana, the most significant being the 'Positive Action Conference of Peace and Security in Africa'. In addition to responding to French nuclear testing in the Sahara Desert, conference delegates addressed the situation in South Africa, following the Sharpeville massacre. In his opening address, Nkrumah urged the 'continuation of non-violent positive action as the principal tactic'. Resolutions adopted by conference delegates, including the establishment of a centre to train

African revolutionaries in nonviolent strategy and tactics, ultimately suffered from lack of follow-through, as Nkrumah's perspective began to shift.<sup>136</sup> Former Tanzanian president Julius Nyerere also acknowledged the difficult task of maintaining a commitment to nonviolence and nonviolent strategies when there is a nation-state to maintain. 'Once you've accepted the nation state', he said, 'you accept the consequences'.<sup>137</sup>

The case of Zimbabwe illustrates the sad story of the decline of a nation that played a leading role in the liberation struggles of southern Africa. Robert Mugabe became the leader of Zimbabwe after its independence in 1980 and now runs the country like a police state. The state security forces and youth militias have helped him hang on to power in the face of international condemnation and isolation because of the state's poor human rights record and catalogue of repression. Religious, civic, and professional groups have engaged in nonviolent protest. In 2003 doctors and nurses organised demonstrations and strikes for pay increases to cope with hyperinflation; the government brutally suppressed them.<sup>138</sup> In Harare, one demonstration ended with police beating and arresting 400 demonstrators for demanding a new constitution and changes in the legal system.<sup>139</sup> Civic groups like Sokwanele (Enough Is Enough, in Ndebele) emerged in support of nonviolent protest against Mugabe's rule. Sokwanele, an underground movement for nonviolent activism, embraces supporters of many pro-democratic political parties, civic organisations, and institutions. Pius Ncube, the archbishop of Bulawayo, has called for a popular mass uprising against Mugabe, but the regime continues to survive.

What is clear from the accounts presented here is that many were improvised actions lacking in-depth strategic planning. Full-scale strategic planning might very well have changed the outcomes of some of these struggles had it been carried out. At the time, however, little detailed study of nonviolent action had been promoted. Recent advances



Former Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda at the opening of the second eastern and southern Africa conference on universal birth registration in Kenya, 26 September 2005. According to Kaunda, '[N]othing is achieved anywhere and in any field without good organisation'. Strategic planning and organisation are critical to preparing for nonviolent action to succeed. Photo: Joseph Okanga/Reuters.

in the practice of nonviolent struggle, scholarly studies, and the continuing development of the technique have increased the effectiveness of nonviolent struggle.

Kenneth Kaunda has long recognised the importance of proper organisation, stating, “[N]othing is achieved anywhere and in any field without good organisation”.<sup>140</sup> This applies as well to nonviolent struggle. To gain ground in Africa, practitioners of nonviolent struggle must engage in strategic planning and training to equip citizens for the tasks before them. Non-state actors, such as civil society organisations, religious organisations, and non-governmental organisations must play leading roles in encouraging and organising training in planning and implementing strategic nonviolent actions.

In most conflicts, the choice of strategy has direct bearing on the number of casualties incurred. Deaths in nonviolent struggles tend to be fewer than those in violent struggles and usually result from the repressive tactics employed by the opponent. In some instances, usually as a reaction to violence, the target group suffers casualties. In Burma in 1988 several people lost their lives, but in China in 1989 thousands of protesters suffered death when the government crushed their nonviolent movement. These numbers likely would have been higher had the protesters deviated from the nonviolent path to retaliate. In the cases of the South African and the Ogoni peoples, casualties increased after the ANC went underground and when militancy rose in the Ogoni region after clashes with ethnic neighbours and when the security forces stepped up repressive measures. In Madagascar, casualty figures rose when clashes erupted between the rival supporters of Ratsiraka and Ravolomanana.

Nonviolent strategies provide credible alternatives to the use of violence in resolving conflicts. Much work has gone into making nonviolent action more effective and accessible. One example is perceiving nonviolent struggles in terms of military strategy and applying the

tools of military strategic planning within the framework of nonviolent struggle. Retired colonel Robert Helvey has analyzed this approach in *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: Thinking about the Fundamentals*. As long as the use of violence to resolve conflicts is regarded as acceptable, a process to challenge this mindset remains a necessity. As conflict resolution as an academic discipline continues to gain ground, especially in Africa, strategic nonviolent struggle should rise in prominence in academic as well as non-academic areas. Since the inception of the African Union, African leaders have exerted new energies to resolve their conflicts. It would be wise to include strategic nonviolent action among their tools for effective conflict resolution and to avoid or stem rampant violence. Perhaps they will look to the example of Nkrumah during his early days in power to organise in exploring greater uses of strategic nonviolent methods.

# Notes

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- <sup>5</sup> See Gene Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action*, vol. 2 of *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, Porter Sargent Publishers, 1973). For the downloadable list, go to the appendices to *From Dictatorship to Democracy* at the Website of the Albert Einstein Institution, [www.aeinstein.org](http://www.aeinstein.org) or [http://65.109.42.80/organizations/org/198\\_methods-1.pdf](http://65.109.42.80/organizations/org/198_methods-1.pdf) or [www.aeinstein.org/organizations/org/198\\_methods.pdf](http://www.aeinstein.org/organizations/org/198_methods.pdf).
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- <sup>8</sup> Exploring Africa, 'African Resistance, Nationalism and Independence: Unit Two. Studying Africa through the Social Sciences', Module 7B, African History, the Era of Global Encroachment, <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/teachers/curriculum/m7b/activity4.php> for teachers; <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m7b> for students
- <sup>9</sup> G. E. More cited in Jean Suret-Canale and A. Adu Boahen, 'West Africa', *UNESCO General History of Africa*, vol. 8, *Africa since 1935*, ed. A. Mazrui and C. Wondji (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), p. 161.
- <sup>10</sup> Julius Nyerere, 'And Then Gandhi Came' (address delivered in New Delhi, 27 January 1996).
- <sup>11</sup> Exploring Africa, p. 5.
- <sup>12</sup> Paul F. Power, 'Gandhi in South Africa', *Journal of Modern Africa Studies* 7:3 (1969), 452.
- <sup>13</sup> Francis Agbodeka, *African Politics and British Policy in the Gold Coast, 1868–1900* (Evanston, Illinois, Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 131.
- <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>15</sup> Christopher Fyfe, *Sierra Leone Inheritance* (London, Oxford University Press, 1964).
- <sup>16</sup> Agbodeka, *African Politics*, p. 181.

- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 178.
- <sup>19</sup> See Muhammad Khalid Masud, 'The Obligation to Migrate: The Doctrine of *Hijra* in Islamic Law', *Muslim Travellers: Pilgrimage, Migration, and the Religious Imagination*, ed. Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori (London, Routledge, 1990), pp. 29–49.
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- <sup>29</sup> Austin, *Politics in Ghana*, p. 47.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>49</sup> Chainawa, 'Southern Africa since 1945', p. 257.
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## Biographical Sketch: Desmond George-Williams

Desmond George-Williams is the coordinator of the Peace and Conflict Studies Programme at Fourah Bay College, University of Sierra Leone. He also lectures on gender, conflict, and human rights at the university's Gender, Research and Documentation Centre. George-Williams holds a bachelor of arts with honours in English from Fourah Bay College and a master of arts in peace studies from the University of Bradford, United Kingdom. He has participated in a number of Curriculum Development Workshops organised by the University for Peace (UPEACE) in Africa and has facilitated a series of workshops and training programmes on gender and peace and conflict issues. He took part in the UPEACE effort that organised 'Nonviolent Transformation of Conflict,' the 2005 training workshop for youths in the Niger Delta. His 'Changing Gender Roles in Conflict and Post-Conflict Situations in Africa' appears in *Gender and Peace Building in Africa* (UPEACE, 2005).





University for Peace  
Africa Programme  
PO Box 2794, code 1250  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia  
Tel: +251-11-6180991  
Fax: +251-11-6180993  
Email: [africaprogramme@upeace.org](mailto:africaprogramme@upeace.org)  
Website: [www.africa.upeace.org](http://www.africa.upeace.org)

University for Peace  
Costa Rica Headquarters  
Apdo. 138-6100  
Ciudad Colon, Costa Rica  
Tel: +506-205-9000  
Fax: +506-249-1929  
Email: [info@upeace.org](mailto:info@upeace.org)  
Website: [www.upeace.org](http://www.upeace.org)

University for Peace  
Geneva Office  
5, chemin du Rivage  
1292 Chambésy/Geneva, Switzerland  
Tel: +41-22-737-3080  
Fax: +41-22-737-3090  
Email: [info@upeace.ch](mailto:info@upeace.ch)  
Website: [www.upeace.org](http://www.upeace.org)



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