



Recovering Nonviolent History

CIVIL

RESISTANCE

IN LIBERATION

STRUGGLES

edited by **MACIEJ J. BARTKOWSKI**

Recovering Nonviolent History

Civil Resistance
in Liberation Struggles

edited by
Maciej J. Borkowski



BOULDER
LONDON

Published in the United States of America in 2013 by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
1800 30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.rienner.com

and in the United Kingdom by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Recovering nonviolent history : civil resistance in liberation struggles /
Maciej J. Bartkowski, editor.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-58826-870-9 (alk. paper) — ISBN 978-1-58826-895-2

(pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Nonviolence. 2. Civil disobedience. 3. Government, Resistance to.

4. National liberation movements. I. Bartkowski, Maciej J., 1976–
editor of compilation.

HM1281.R435 2013

303.6'1—dc23

2012037146

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the United States of America



The paper used in this publication meets the requirements
of the American National Standard for Permanence of
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1992.

5 4 3 2 1

Recovering Nonviolent History

*Development of this book was supported by the
International Center on Nonviolent Conflict*

*To all those,
known and unknown,
who fought and fight for their freedom nonviolently*

Acknowledgments

The birth of this volume has been—in its microcosmic way—similar to the emergence and actions of the people’s movements that the book describes. It required collective efforts, collaborative spirit, flexibility and resilience, creativity and responsiveness, patience and long-term commitment, and the organized and disciplined involvement of many people whose work contributed to its success.

The idea for the book came to me in August 2009 soon after I joined the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC), a Washington-based nonprofit private foundation that creates and disseminates knowledge about civil resistance. In my informal conversations with the staff of ICNC and a number of its outside academic collaborators, I quickly realized that the histories of many nations have been infused with both mythical and factual narratives about violent resistance, while no less heroic and often more effective means of nonviolent struggle have been ignored, forgotten, or acknowledged only in passing.

From the very beginning of this stimulating journey, which sheds light on the practice and role of civil resistance in creating and defending nations, ICNC’s leadership, together with its founding chair, Peter Ackerman, and its president, Jack DuVall, has been wholeheartedly supportive of the project—both intellectually and materially. Without their support, this volume would not have seen the light of day. Another person who has been instrumental in the development of the book, and whose editing skills and historical insights have been invaluable, is Howard Clark, the author of the chapter on Kosovo. Many times over, Howard played the indispensable role of mentor and ghost editor. Hardy Merriman, ICNC senior adviser, scrupulously and with a great intellectual precision informed by his deep knowledge of strategic nonviolent conflict offered his own corrections and requested further clarification,

all of which enhanced the book. My special appreciation goes to Mary Elizabeth King, the author of the chapter on Palestine, for her unceasing encouragement and insights into nonviolent struggles. Furthermore, engaging discussions with Stephen Zunes, chair of the ICNC academic advisers' committee, enlightened me on many important aspects of civil resistance during independence struggles. Suravi Bhandary, former ICNC program associate, was a valuable behind-the-scenes manager of the project, as well as a diligent assistant in creating the appendix of conflict summaries presented at the end of the book.

I thank the anonymous reviewers whose recommendations and suggestions bear on the improved content of the book. Last but certainly not least, I extend my appreciation to Lynne Rienner and her staff, whose high-level professionalism, experience, and responsiveness made for a smooth transition from a rough manuscript toward the beautifully designed and well-edited book that you have now in hand.

Any mistakes and errors that you might find in the book are an unintended oversight on my part. Please send questions and comments regarding its content to recovernonviolenthistory@gmail.com.

—*Maciej Bartkowski*

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1

Recovering Nonviolent History

Maciej J. Bartkowski

The violence of the few does not withstand the quest for freedom of the many.

—former German President Christian Wulff,
speaking on the anniversary of the construction
of the Berlin Wall, August 13, 2011

Most people look to historical accounts to understand how their own nations emerged and fought for their freedom. Such explanations, whether found in books or imparted through public ceremonies and national memories, often tell of violent battles and insurrections, victories and defeats in wars, and fallen heroes in armed struggles. These narratives support the common belief that violence is the indispensable weapon to win freedom from foreign subjugation, but they ignore the power and historical role that nonviolent civilian-led resistance has played in many national quests for liberation.

This book brings to light the existence and impact of nonviolent organizing and defiance where it has not commonly been noticed. It argues that a number of historical struggles for national self-determination might not necessarily, or even primarily, have been won through violence. Instead, these struggles were decisively waged through diverse methods of nonviolent resistance led by ordinary people.¹ Furthermore, during the unfolding process of civil resistance, it was often the force of population-driven, bottom-up, nonviolent mobilization that shaped nations' collective identities (i.e., nationhood) and formed nascent national institutions and authorities (i.e., statehood). These processes were critical for an independent nation-state—more so than structural changes or violent revolutions that dominate the history of revolutionary struggles and nation making.

Recovering Civil Resistance

This book reveals little-known, but important, histories of civil resistance in national struggles for independence and against foreign domination throughout the world in the past 200 years. Often, these histories have been misinterpreted or erased altogether from collective memory, buried beneath nationally eulogized violence, commemorative rituals of glorified death, martyred heroes, and romanticized violent insurrections. In recovering hidden stories of civil resistance that involve diverse types of direct defiance and more subtle forms of everyday, relentless endurance and refusal to submit, this book shows how the actions of ordinary people have undermined the authority and control of foreign hegemony—colonizers and occupiers—and their domestic surrogates. Despite extreme oppression, the repertoire of nonviolent action has often helped societies survive and strengthen their social and cultural fabric, build economic and political institutions, shape national identities, and pave the way to independence. The narrative of the book contains a heuristic inquiry into forgotten or ignored accounts of civil resistance, showing how knowledge about historical events and processes is generated, distorted, and even ideologized in favor of violence-driven, structure-based, or powerholder-centric interpretations.

Glorified violence in the annals of nations, the gendered nature of violence wielded by men, state independence that is seen as having been founded largely on violence (the view reinforced by a state monopoly on violence as a way to maintain that independence), and human attention and media focus (both centered on dramatic and spectacular stories of violence and heroic achievements of single individuals) all dim the light on the quiet, nonviolent resistance of millions. This type of struggle neither captures the headlines nor sinks into people's memories unless it provokes the regime's response and, more often than not, a violent one.

The outcomes of seemingly violent struggles with foreign adversaries have depended to a large degree on the use of political—nonviolent—means rather than arms. Materially and militarily powerful empires and states have been defeated by poorly armed or even completely unarmed opponents not because they met irresistibly violent force, but because the nations found another source of strength—a total mobilization of the population via political, administrative, and ideological tools. Thus, political organizing has been the key ingredient in the people's revolutions that have helped the militarily weaker successfully challenge powerful enemies. Examples include, among others, the Spanish insurrectionists against Napoleon, the Chinese revolutionaries against the Japanese Army, and the North Vietnamese against the United States and its South Vietnamese allies. In all of these supposedly violence-dominated conflicts, military tools were sub-

ordinated to a broader political struggle for the “hearts and minds” of ordinary people.²

By recovering the stories of nonviolent actions, this book goes against a tide of prevailing views about struggles against foreign domination that fail to recognize and take into account the role and contribution of civil resistance.

Power, Structure, and Agency

The study of civil resistance presented here represents a paradigmatic shift in the understanding of national struggles and the making of nation-states, which moves away from the traditional focus on structures, conditions, processes, military power, violence, and political elites. This investigation approaches historical knowledge in a novel fashion, recognizing that the force that shapes nations and propels their resistance lies in the organized, purposeful, and defiant actions of an unarmed population. Its nonstate alternative to understanding political power goes against the established Weberian canon of political authority that is top down, centralized, static, material, and elite or institution centric. Instead, the people power perspective emphasizes the fragility and diffused nature of political power, its outside-of-the-state origin, and the agency of ordinary people. Regimes are sustained not merely by their material power, including mechanisms of coercion, but also or primarily by the apathy or ignorance of the common people. The dormant people power becomes apparent with a sudden or gradual collective withdrawal of consent and mass disobedience. This force, according to Mohandas Gandhi (Mahatma), gains its strength from the fact that “even the most powerful cannot rule without the co-operation of the ruled.”³

This book shows various mobilizers of the power of agency in liberation struggles. First, there are powerful resources for the emergence and conduct of resistance that lie in culture and are used by local people to resist subjugation. They borrow from existing symbols, rituals, and customs to devise ever more effective strategies and tactics against an oppressor, particularly a foreign one. Religious or cultural ceremonies become occasions to gather and organize in a space not fully controlled by a regime. While engaging in culturally infused resistance, people also create new understandings, meanings, and identities that in turn reinforce unity and resilience of a given collective, mobilize others and spread consciousness, and help nation-building processes. Second, people have the power to independently activate existing or create new nonstate or civic institutions (e.g., religious groups, labor organizations, educational institutions, and civil society associations). These structure-building processes turn out to be a potent weapon of ordinary peo-

ple in waging a protracted struggle for the transformation of their society and its eventual liberation from the control of a foreign oppressor—often without directly challenging the latter or raising unnecessarily its ire until the moment of the movement’s own choosing. Although the book emphasizes the role and impact of agency, it does not disregard structures as they may constitute a crucial part of nonviolent strategies. However, structures remain important insofar as the actions of agency are taken into consideration. At the same time, civil resistance, its trajectories, and even its outcomes are not circumstantial. They are driven and shaped by people’s decisions and actions.

The Main Inquiries in This Book

The case studies in this volume shed light on many key questions, including: What kinds of nonviolent tactics were used in national struggles? What made some nonviolent campaigns successful despite unfavorable conditions and what made others fail or achieve only partial success? What was the impact of diverse acts of civil resistance on the further unfolding of a conflict and its eventual outcomes? How did collective nonviolent actions influence nations, their collective identities, or socioeconomic and political institutions that evolved during the national struggles? Did civil resistance have longer-term consequences on the historical development of these countries? Finally, why do the annals so often ignore the presence and role of civil resistance?

By identifying episodes, periods, and specific campaigns of nonviolent resistance that at particular points in time either constituted a dominant or a sole ingredient behind a national liberation struggle, the case studies answer these questions and so encourage new conversation about the nature, place, and role of nonviolent resistance in state and nation formation.

Civil Resistance as Nonviolent Political Contestation

This book uses the terms *civil resistance*, *nonviolent resistance*, and *non-violent struggle* to refer to the same basic phenomenon defined as a form of political conflict in which ordinary people choose to stand up to oppressive structures—be it occupation, colonialism, or unjust practices of government—with the use of various tactics of nonviolent action such as strikes, boycotts, protests, and civil disobedience.⁴ Such methods include not only overt confrontational actions, but also more subtle forms of cultural resistance or seemingly apolitical work of autonomous associations and parallel institution building. Whether overt or tacit, nonviolent forms of resistance

are a popular expression of people's collective determination to withdraw their cooperation from the powers that be. People can refuse to follow a coerced or internalized system of lies and deception and, thereby, intentionally increase the cost of official control. They also can encourage divisions within an oppressor's pillars of support (e.g., in the ranks of its security forces and military) and exploit the consequences of repressive violence against unarmed resisters by turning them into a strategic advantage for a movement.

Related to its nonviolent nature comes the concept of civil resistance as a separate form of political contestation. This is because action takers wage a battle of ideas in which a movement tries to win popular legitimacy while the authorities struggle to maintain the loyalty of security forces and the neutrality or apathy of the population. The causal ideas behind civil resistance are thoughts and expressions of one or more concrete grievances and demands articulated in articles, pamphlets, leaflets, sermons, speeches, social media, or other means of communication. The ideas and the movements that propagate them may galvanize mass public support, but also face brutal suppression, including physical force wielded by the army or security apparatus of the regime. In that contest, to paraphrase the writings of some authors in this volume, it remains to be seen whether a nonviolent resister such as a writer or a painter can be mightier than the tyrant under whose yoke the population lives.

Weaving Together a National Fabric

Through various creative nonviolent actions aimed at resisting foreign domination, a painstaking process of autonomous state building occurs—both underground and tacit as well as overt and explicit with the skillful use of allowable and available legal and political space. A multitude of repeated acts of participatory and constructive disobedience practiced by ordinary people creates and re-creates a territory-wide architecture of cultural, social, economic, and political alternative practices and norms, often accompanying and supporting more direct and coercive forms of nonviolent tactics.

Next to state building, the practice of civil resistance stipulates yet another transformational force, namely, reimagining communities and awakening them to their shared values, common history, collective understanding, and unifying vision of their cultural, linguistic, social, and political roots as well as a communal life and destiny in a defined public space. Civil resistance is thus an instrument—not necessarily visible to the foreign occupier or well understood by those who practice it—that helps develop people's sense of patriotism and their attachment to their newly invented interwoven time line of memories, relations, and events that sew the fabric of an imagined nation.

Liberation Struggles Through Civil Resistance Campaigns

This book looks at cases that can be classified as *popular liberation* or *self-rule struggles*, which include struggles for independence or self-determination and against occupation, colonial control, or foreign domination—the latter often represented by an indigenous government subservient to outside interests. These cases might otherwise share common issues (e.g., mobilizing unarmed people and challenging oppressive and violent systems) with *rights-based* or *rule-of-law struggles*—but covering these two types of struggle that also include recent anti-dictatorship upheavals in the Arab world is beyond the scope of this book.⁵

Historically, liberation or self-rule struggles in which civil resistance is a predominant method of waging resistance have been uncommon. For example, as of this writing, the most systemic and methodologically rigorous dataset on civil resistance cases that allows for scholarly validation and transferability—Nonviolent and Violent Campaigns and Outcomes (NAVCO 1.0)—identifies 106 mass-based nonviolent struggles against dictatorships, occupation, and self-determination that occurred between 1900 and 2006.⁶ Of this number only twenty-one campaigns can be classified, according to the criteria of this volume, as belonging to popular liberation or self-rule struggles. This book describes in detail four of these twenty-one cases, and, in addition, includes a number of other, lesser-known, instances that date as far back as the eighteenth century, through undertaking in-depth analysis of sometimes decades-long, country-specific nonviolent resistance campaigns. What emerges is a collection of culturally, religiously, temporally, and spatially diverse cases in which the role and impact of civil resistance have historically been understudied and poorly understood.⁷

The thematic coverage of this book goes beyond single disciplinary boundaries and its research speaks to a number of scholarly streams. It examines the cases through analytical and empirical lenses of the history of revolutionary and independence struggles, nationalism studies, the sociology of social movements, comparative and contentious politics, and strategic nonviolent conflict. This book is intended for students and scholars interested in accounting in their research for the purposeful agency of ordinary people who organize social movements and the strategic dimension of the use of nonviolent action in political conflicts. In addition, this volume will be of interest to policy professionals, practitioners, activists, and nonspecialists who look for a greater historical understanding of the phenomenon of popular nonviolent uprisings in order to better comprehend the major unarmed upheavals of recent years and search for inspiration and lessons that can be derived from the nonviolent history of their own or other countries.