

**When Yelling Isn't Good Enough:
Riots and Non-Nonviolent Civil Resistance**

by

Benjamin Steinhardt Case

Bachelor of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2006

Master of Public Administration, New York University, 2010

Master of Arts, University of Pittsburgh, 2015

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

University of Pittsburgh

2020

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH
DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Benjamin Steinhardt Case

It was defended on

August 3, 2020

and approved by

Mohammed Bamyeh, Professor, Department of Sociology

Tarun Banerjee, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology

Michael Goodhart, Professor, Department of Political Science

Dissertation Advisor: John Markoff, Distinguished Professor, Department of Sociology

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Benjamin Steinhardt Case, PhD

University of Pittsburgh, 2020

We are in a moment of uprisings. Considering the more contentious protest moments from previous years, it is evident that the repertoire of tactics in contemporary social movements includes unarmed, low-level collective violence in the form of property destruction, street barricades, thrown projectiles, and unarmed physical resistance to police repression. Analytically, however, we have been trapped in a false dichotomy of violence/nonviolence that flattens unarmed movements into the concept of nonviolent struggle, erasing the salience of protester violence and foreclosing a holistic understanding of contentious movements. This dissertation confronts this problem head on. First, I unpack and analyze the theoretical foundations of strategic nonviolence, which has become the dominant framework in movement analyses, and demonstrate its considerable limitations. Next, I confront the most prominent empirical research on nonviolent conflict. Current studies that claim to find a demobilizing effect of violent tactics rely on weak data that does not speak to the question at hand, as well as on a violence/nonviolence binary that obscures the effects of low-level violent actions. Through statistical analysis of protest trends in the US and South Africa over 72 years, I show that riots in these countries have had an overall mobilizing impact on nonviolent protests. I go on to examine the phenomenological effects of protester violence through qualitative interview studies with activists from the US and South Africa who have participated in physically transgressive protest actions. Activist experiences indicate that many participants feel a contentious form of collective effervescence and a heightened sense of empowerment amidst low-level violent actions, with long-term effects that raise

consciousness and deepen and sustain activists' resolve. Overall, I argue for a more holistic approach to studying the contentious dynamics of social change from below which incorporates the material and experiential effects of unarmed collective violence into analyses of social movements.

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Preface

This work is the result of innumerable conversations and experiences, and I would not have been able to produce these pages without the direct input, discussion, kindness, care, critique, patience, and other forms of support from countless individuals and communities.

First and foremost, I am indebted to the many movements that have inspired, motivated, and educated me.

I have dozens of people to thank who I cannot name, for their willingness to speak with me about their experiences with contentious protest. I hope I do justice to your words.

I am deeply grateful for the many years of intellectual guidance and feedback of my dissertation committee: John Markoff, Mohammed Bamyeh, Michael Goodhart, and Tarun Banerjee. Also to Junia Howell, Dana Moss, Paul Welle, Stellan Vinthagen, and Hank Johnston, who have generously offered their support to this project along the way. For various forms of care, mentorship, co-learning, camaraderie, and partnership, more thanks than I am able to express to: James Alex Siebens, Hatem Hassan, Hillary Lazar, Caitlin Schroering, George Weddington, Chie Togami, Danny Burrige, Ayşe Alnaçık, Sebastián Cuéllar, Matt Hemphill, Gillian Goldberg, Diana Clarke, Gabriel Hernandez, Rachel Elmer, Yotam Marom, Eric Eingold, Zoë Westoff, Larissa Kouglblenou, Pat Korte, Diana Sierra Becerra, Dennis Webster, Bhavna Ramji, Cindy Crabb, and Cat Besterman. There are certainly many more I do not name; I hope you know who you are. And thanks to my mother, Linda, and stepfather, Doug, and to my stepmother, Diana, for the consistent and appropriately critical support.

And finally to my father, Charley, of blessed memory, the first person who will always come to mind when I hear the words Dr. Case.

1.0 Introduction

As long as there has been private property, there have been angry crowds setting it on fire. Riots have rocked cities throughout modern history, in every region of the world, and with remarkably consistent repertoires of action. Violent protests are no less significant today than they were a century ago; in recent decades, mass civil uprisings have threatened or overthrown governments across the globe, most of these including fiery street barricades, property destruction, and physical confrontations between protesters and security or government-backed gangs. Political demonstrations are increasing worldwide, and instances of violent protest in particular have grown and spread (Ortiz et al., 2013). Urban police forces undergo focused riot suppression training and keep specialized equipment on hand at all times in case one should break out (Radley 2014). Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, when people were directed to stay inside and avoid contact, police departments across the country stocked up on riot gear.¹ As we move into what is shaping up to be a new era of street uprisings, it is time to re-examine the ways we understand social movement repertoires.

Riots play a large role in our imaginations as well. In popular culture, from movies and novels to popular art and music videos, the riot is a favorite narrative mechanism for conveying chaos, disorder, and popular anger (Bell and Porter 2008). The riot has been both demonized and romanticized across cultural forms, with their images now widely and rapidly spread via social media and YouTube. Already present throughout popular culture, riots have received a resurgence

¹ See Fang. 2020. "Federal Government Buys Riot Gear, Increases Security Funding, Citing Coronavirus Pandemic." *The Intercept*. May 17. (<https://theintercept.com/2020/05/17/veterans-affairs-coronavirus-security-police/>) Accessed June 3, 2020.

of attention following the contested presence of unarmed protestor violence associated with the global waves of anti-regime and anti-austerity protests and revolution waves in 2011 and 2019. In the US specifically, in the past decade riots have been national headline news in New York City and Oakland and elsewhere during Occupy Wall Street; in Ferguson and Baltimore, and more recently in Minneapolis, Atlanta, and elsewhere in the Movement for Black Lives; following the J20 protests at Trump's 2017 inauguration in Washington, DC; and ongoing street confrontations between antifascist and fascist forces across the country. Riots draw media attention (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996) and polarize public opinion (Caren, et al. 2017), and are the subject of stubbornly belligerent arguments within movements about their legitimacy and appropriateness.

Disputes surrounding violence and nonviolence have long been among the most contentious for social movement practitioners. In the current political moment, they have taken on renewed fervor. Of all the disagreements between activists today, the debate over the use of violence is among the most persistent and fractious – entire movements have self-destructed in the wake of these arguments (see Epstein 1993; Hedges 2012; Varon 2004). For decades in the US and in many countries around the world, the violence-vs.-nonviolence debate on the ground has been primarily over unarmed, low-level collective protester violence, often termed “rioting.” Yet scholarly work ostensibly informing the same debate compares armed warfare to unarmed civilian movements, resulting in considerable conceptual slippage between the operational definitions of violence and nonviolence between the academics and activists.

Nearly all mass movements that challenge power involve forceful collective action – i.e., unarmed but physically confrontational street protest. I write these words after returning from what surely will be called a riot after the fact, a racial justice protest in Pittsburgh in which police dispersed protesters with rubber bullets and tear gas, and demonstrators responded by throwing

bottles.² The potential for violence against demonstrators by police is all but taken for granted – use of violence is supposed to be the state’s monopoly.³ But for protesters, we now judge actions based on the standard of nonviolence, which is to say, on what is and is not nonviolent. In the media, protests are often discussed as either “remaining” nonviolent or “turning” violent. Like the initial wave of Black Lives Matter protests in 2015, recent mobilizations have been accompanied by a chorus of heated arguments and hand-wringing over relatively minor property damage by protesters on the basis that it is *not nonviolent*. Even in the current climate, marked by overwhelming extralegal violence by police and white supremacist gangs, when a recent poll found that 53 percent of US Americans support the burning of the Minneapolis Police Station by protesters in response to George Floyd’s murder, countless pundits otherwise supportive of the Movement for Black Lives and even activists themselves rushed to defend the core nonviolence of protests, blaming property destruction on anarchists and outside agitators, even, in many cases, in the face of experiences and footage to the contrary.

This wave of protest is only the most recent to grapple with the terminology of violence and nonviolence. Part of the reason for the persistence of the violence-vs.-nonviolence debate is that movements typically involve elements of both. But reading the most popular scholarly and activist-oriented writing on civil uprisings, you wouldn’t know it. The field of civil resistance studies, also called nonviolence studies, has taken national center stage in both interpreting and

² In this case, in addition to “violent,” local newspaper headlines would call the incident a “skirmish” and a “clash.” See *Pittsburgh Tribune*, “20 Arrested as Protests Turn Violent in East Liberty, Shadyside” (URL: <https://triblive.com/local/pittsburgh-allegheeny/hundreds-of-george-floyd-protesters-march-through-east-liberty/>); *Pittsburgh City Paper*, “Residents to filmed East Liberty Skirmish Charged with Allegedly Throwing Water Bottles at Police, Both Deny Accusations (URL: <https://www.pghcitypaper.com/pittsburgh/residents-who-filmed-east-liberty-skirmish-say-they-were-accosted-by-pittsburgh-police-and-deny-that-any-objects-were-thrown-at-police-from-b/Content?oid=17398748>); *Post-Gazette*, “Protesters, Police Clash in East Liberty; 20 Arrested, 9 Officers Injured” (URL: <https://www.post-gazette.com/news/crime-courts/2020/06/01/Protesters-police-clash-East-Liberty-Pittsburgh-tear-gas-riots/stories/202006010115>) Accessed June 18, 2020.

³ See Weber (1919).

promoting movement strategy, sponsoring the notion that what makes movements successful is their use of specifically nonviolent methods. The escalating series of Twenty-First Century uprisings across the world has thus been described in terms of a global wave of *nonviolent* revolutions (Engler and Engler 2016; Chenoweth and Stephan 2014; Nepstad 2015a). Central to this framing is the concept of *strategic nonviolence*, the idea that nonviolent methods are the most effective or only way for movements to achieve their goals.

In recent years, civil resistance scholars have claimed to validate strategic nonviolence with empirical research. In 2011, political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan published *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, a large-N comparative quantitative analysis of violent and nonviolent movements. Based on their data, Chenoweth and Stephan find that nonviolent campaigns are around twice as likely to succeed as violent campaigns, with the trend moving toward nonviolence being even more comparatively effective than that. This research has been widely read as closing the door once and for all on the violence/nonviolence debate, proving the superior efficacy of nonviolence. The book won overwhelming praise and numerous prestigious awards, including the 2012 American Political Science Association's award for the best book on government, politics, or international relations; the 2013 Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Changing the World, and it was *The Guardian's* 2011 book of the year. Chenoweth and Stephan's research quickly rose to ubiquity in activist scenes, and strategic nonviolence has become conventional wisdom.

However, despite widespread acceptance, empirical research on nonviolence is defective. In reality, most of the movements we call "nonviolent" in practice have included lots of unarmed violent actions. The co-presence of unarmed violence with nonviolent methods is most often ignored or sidelined in the literature to make room for a cleaner concept of nonviolent struggle.

Specifically, nearly all mass movements that challenge power involve a particular type of violence – unarmed collective political violence, such as property destruction, arson, and physical altercations with police or political opponents. Often described as violent protests or riots, these actions occupy the conceptual space just crossing the line between nonviolence and violence. Furthermore, not only are riots common in the types of movements we call nonviolent, they are often intertwined with nonviolent actions during moments of uprising – a connection that is impossible to see if we approach movements with a starting assumption that violence and nonviolence are inherently opposing forms action.

If the field that dominates the study and circulation of movement strategy, namely nonviolence studies, is ignoring the existence of a common and potentially significant element of struggle, its analysis is liable to be faulty. What I present in this work directly contradicts prestigious claims around nonviolence – understandings of social conflict that are not only widely believed, but which I think many of us *want* to believe. As the chair of my dissertation committee put it to me when I initially presented this research idea: we would all prefer it if Chenoweth was right. However, arguments for the superior efficacy of nonviolence are simply not supported by evidence, and ignoring recurring elements of protest repertoires in our analysis inhibits our understanding of the dynamics that lead to social change from below.

Just because the data does not in fact suggest that nonviolent tactics are more effective does not imply that the types of actions that we consider nonviolent are irrelevant. Far from it. On the contrary, the study of nonviolence should benefit from an enhanced ability to parse actions within civilian movements that are actually nonviolent, rather than imagining civilian movements to be wholly nonviolent. However, I call into question the foundation of the violence/nonviolence binary, and argue that while it may have had uses in the past, that dichotomy now takes us further

from an understanding of movement dynamics. Here the study of nonviolence is implicated. Calling attention to the real-world actions that compose civilian social movements is not only an empirical question, but also brings up the question of what story we are telling about movements. Resistance requires only a defensive posture, but movements geared *toward* something require narrative, a story of the world and of themselves (Selbin 2010). Social movement theorists have similarly, though less poetically, described *framing* tools that movements use to understand their struggle (Benford and Snow 2000). As much as it has significant tactical and strategic consequences, nonviolence has become more of a story than anything, based on an idealized framing of the world. This framing involves three broad components: 1) violence is bad; 2) our enemies are violent; 3) we are nonviolent. Identification with this story serves as a collective identity within movements, allowing activists to locate and connect with others who they associate with the same principles (Polletta and Jasper 2001). However, there is another story, one which receives much less attention in legitimate sources of knowledge. Qualitative interviews in this study indicate that a certain type and limited amount of collective violence is an important part of the story of resistance and revolution. Regardless of the story one prefers, providing movement organizers with empirical research based on idealizations of movements is unhelpful; activists should be armed with research that actually addresses movement realities on the ground.

A lot of scholars know that there are problems with a purist framing of nonviolence, they just don't know what to do with it, and the primary path has been to ignore the problem. Despite riots being fairly common occurrences, in fact appearing central to a series of uprisings in the US and across the world in recent decades, there is surprisingly little existing research on the topic. Unarmed violence within movements has become "*familiarly unknown*: a semi-legitimate cognitive gap, a new 'black box' to which we are increasingly become accustomed to acquiesce"

(Seferiades and Johnston 2012: 4, emphasis theirs). Specifically, recent literature is extremely sparse on interactions between more and less violent forms of unarmed mobilization. Even fewer studies have interviewed rioters themselves about their experiences. This dissertation does both. I use mixed-methods research to confront head-on the reality that unarmed violence occurs and is salient in the context of “nonviolent” movements.⁴

The intervention I make is innovative, but not unique. There have been an increasing number of research studies and popular publications in recent years specifically calling into question the shortcomings of the violence/nonviolence binary, and investigating the unarmed political violence that gets lost in the grey area in between (e.g., Bjork-James 2020; Jasper and Thompson 2016; Ketchley 2017; Kadivar and Ketchley 2018; Meckfessel 2016; Piven 2006; Seferiades and Johnston, ed. 2012). The work of Frances Fox Piven in particular has been crucial to this analysis, both in demystifying protester violence as an area of movement research and in connecting movement-centric analyses of social mobilization to scholarly frameworks. Emergent theory from South African activist-scholars, cited throughout Chapter Six (e.g., Chinguno et al., eds. 2017; Naidoo, Gamedze, and Magano, eds. 2017) points towards a cutting edge of understandings of contentious politics from below. I also want to highlight Shon Meckfessel’s 2016 book, *Nonviolence Ain’t What It Used to Be: Unarmed Insurrection and the Rhetoric of Resistance*, which makes arguments substantially akin to many that I attempt to advance in this work. In fact, reading Meckfessel’s book in 2017, already years into my own research, I was initially tempted to give up my dissertation and simply encourage people to read his book instead. It covers similar topics and from a similar standpoint – Meckfessel interviews anarchists from

⁴ I follow White (1989), whose mixed-methods research on micromobilizations in the Provisional Irish Republican Army, including quantitative methods and in-depth qualitative interviews, allowed exceptional traction on a controversial subject.

Occupy about their experiences, articulates balanced critiques of nonviolence in many ways better than I had, and productively frames the semiotic, embodied political transcendence of the unarmed insurrectionary moment. As it turns out, I think my approach adds a great deal, both in terms of empirical findings and in geographically and temporally broadening the interview scope. Chapter Five especially could be read as a companion to Meckfessel's book, and that my findings and his cohere so closely should serve as additional validation of both analyses.

In the set of studies that compose this work, I will attempt to articulate foundational problems with the field of nonviolence studies and how these problems have limited our ability to understand the contentious dynamics of protest movements. I then proceed to explore aspects of the (massive) grey area that has been largely ignored by movement analyses through the words of activists who have participated in violent protest actions. There are endless opportunities to expand on this research through quantitative analysis of existing or innovative data, as well as qualitative research with activists from different movements, countries, demographics, and so on. Additionally, my critiques of the nonviolence frame are relevant to many actions that I do not directly address, for example strategic sabotage and community defense, leaving a great deal of room for further research in those areas. In the remainder of this chapter, I review some of the ways the phenomena I am addressing have been studied, discuss the applied concept of violence, and give an overview of the argument to come.

1.1 The Study of Crowds, Movements, Nonviolence, and Riots

Sociologist Paul Gilje begins his 1996 book, *Rioting in America*, by saying we should study riots "because they're there." When I first read this opening, as a relatively inexperienced graduate

student, it struck me as a fairly banal introduction. As many of my academic advisors have taught me, simply because something is there, or simply because others have not studied it, does not make it interesting. As this research project progressed, however, it turned out to be strangely difficult to so much as point out gaps in the literature around riots, much less try to fill them in. When it comes to protester violence, many people simply do not want to hear it. Years later, it would dawn on me that my first published paper – which had been through several rejections, including one in which a reviewer submitted a nine page-long comment about the history of Gandhi and the correctness of nonviolence – was simply a quantitative attempt to prove that riots are there. When one considers the degree of attention that riots attract in media and culture, and compares this with what appears to be a decline in the study of riots by scholars of movements in recent decades, and in fact the degree to which the study of that topic is discouraged, Gilje’s opening line starts to make more sense.

Riots have not received the theoretical, sociological, or strategic analyses that other forms of social and political struggle have.⁵ Riots are not mentioned in Mao’s (1937), Giap’s (1961), or Guevara’s (1961) classic manuals on guerrilla warfare, nor are riots included in Alinsky’s (1989) canonical manual on activist strategy. Sharp’s (1973) seminal volume on nonviolent struggle, which is the subject of Chapter Two, mentions riots in passing, but only to associate them with other forms of “violent” conflict. The belief in the correctness and superior efficacy of nonviolent tactics has – or at least had, prior to this latest wave of the Movement for Black Lives – become all but consensus, thereby excluding riots from legitimized repertoires of action. Below I provide

⁵ There are of course prominent exceptions, which include Auyero (2003), Badiou (2012), Bjork-James (2020), Clover (2016), Connery, ed. (1970), Dupuis-Deri (2010), Gilje (1996), Kadivar and Ketchley (2018), Ketchley (2017), Meckfessel (2016), Piven and Cloward (1978), Seferiades and Johnston, ed. (2012), Thompson (2010), Tiratelli (2020), and von Holdt et al. (2013).

brief introductory literature reviews to four fields to help situate this study, which fits somewhere among social movement studies, (non-)nonviolence studies, the study of riots, and the study of crowds.

1.1.1 Crowds and Uprisings

The earliest treatments of riots largely conflated them with crowd behavior in general. In one view, the entire field of sociology coagulated around debates over crowds, which for a long time were understood to be at least potentially synonymous with riots (Borch 2012). Le Bon's 1895 essay, *The Crowd*, is most famous for laying out a theory of group behavior as *crowd hysteria*, that is, as an irrational, mindless, and violent phenomenon. The “myth of the madding crowd” has since been critiqued to the point of debunking, but it nevertheless continues to influence popular and scholarly understandings of crowd behavior (McPhail 1991). To Le Bon, the crowd is “perpetually hovering on the borderland of unconsciousness, readily yielding to all suggestions, having all the violence of feeling peculiar to beings who cannot appeal to the influence of reason, deprived of all critical faculty” (1895: 14). In addition to impulsiveness, irritability, irrationality, and lack of judgment, Le Bon focuses on the suggestibility of crowds, drawing analogies to hypnosis, where those who might have been individuals elsewhere become in the crowd utterly open to the implanted ideas of the crowd the way a patient is (imagined to be) to a hypnotist.

Much popular use was and continues to be made of Le Bon's analysis, but he was not taken very seriously in academic circles in his day. Tarde, who Le Bon drew from, was much more important to academia, primarily through his 1901 work *L'opinion et la foule* in which he

introduced the idea of *crowd semantics* – the idea that crowds put people in a hypnotic state, making them more susceptible to deviant influences and criminal behaviors (Borch 2012).⁶

Émile Durkheim challenged crowd semantics and the fight between Durkheim and Tarde became formative for the boundaries of the congealing field of sociology (Borch 2012:48). Durkheim attacked the foundations of crowd semantics and group opinions in general for their lack of methodological rigor, going so far as to label the conclusions of crowd hysterics “imaginary” (Durkheim 1951:142). To Durkheim, the crowd semantics model is amateurish in that it throws around terms like “contagion” and “imitation” sloppily and unscientifically; a social action could only be considered contagious if the person imitating did so as an unconscious reaction, based purely upon exposure to the model action. Durkheim contrasts this with the a more complex view of social diffusion, where people can incorporate the actions of others based on some level of conscious consent and yet remain the “authors” of the actions they themselves take. (1951:128)

Durkheim’s critique (especially with his rising status in French academia) effectively undermined Tarde’s and Le Bon’s positions, though the latter remained widely read outside the academy. However, later in his career Durkheim would soften some of his previous attacks and actually incorporate points very similar to those of his previous opponents into his own work, albeit with different language and more robust methodology. Durkheim used the term *effervescence* to describe a liminal irrationality and susceptibility of crowds similar to what Tarde

⁶ Both Le Bon and Tarde lean so heavily on racism and misogyny that it can be difficult to differentiate useful observations they might have had from the rest of their thoughts. Both connect the crowd’s lack of reason and impulse to violence to what is typical of “lower” races, and both ascribe the crowd’s susceptibility to influence, impulsiveness, and deviance to its inherent femininity.

and Le Bon had described. In his study of the sociology of religion, describing Australian indigenous rituals, Durkheim writes:

The very fact of the concentration acts as an exceptionally powerful stimulant. When they are once come together, a sort of electricity is formed by their collective which quickly transports them to an extraordinary degree of exultation. Every sentiment expressed finds a place without resistance in all the minds, which are very open to outside impressions: each re-echoes the others and is re-echoed by the others... The passions released are of such an impetuosity that they can be restrained by nothing. (1961:247)

Getting even closer to sounding like Tarde and Le Bon, though without their condescending tone, Durkheim argues that when a person arrives at the collective effervescence state, they “no longer recognize” themselves. A person feels dominated and “carried away by some sort of an external power which makes him [sic] think and act differently than in normal times” (1961:249). A crowd, in this view, is greater than the sum of its parts. The feeling associated with this phenomenon is so powerful that Durkheim suggests that it is the social birthplace of religion.

While Durkheim effectively killed the study of crowd semantics as such, Le Bon’s conclusions (and thus Tarde’s) remain popular, as he was widely read in lay society. Versions of Le Bon’s legacy are visible today; common characterizations of riots as random or wanton violence often resort to derivations of crowd hysteria. We can see Le Bon in the notion of “herd” or “mob mentality” as well as the riot’s association with the more sophisticated idea of *groupthink*, popularized by Orwell (1950). Durkheim himself ended up reinforcing some elements of crowd psychology through a theory of collective effervescence, namely that crowds imbue members with energy and make them susceptible to mutual influence.

Other similarly negative views of riots derive from much older sources. When the view of the riot is not about confused individuals succumbing to a crowd’s will, it can be seen as a deeper window into the ugliness of humanity. Here the rioter serves as an embodiment of the Hobbesian

state of nature, a participant in the wanton chaos that results from lack of proper authority;⁷ not the precipitator of the state's decline but the result of it. On the other hand, other classic social theorists took up the subject of crowds from a positive light. Most influentially, Marx and Engels saw in the crowd *the masses*, that “‘dangerous class,’ the social scum, that passively rotting mass thrown off by the lowest layers of old society” (Marx and Engels 1848: 92) and turned it into a revered agent of history. Marxists reinterpreted the modern crowd as the force that would overthrow the bourgeois order. Among prominent Marxists, Rosa Luxemburg in particular emphasized mass action (specifically mass strike) over party platforms and leadership (Luxemburg 1918). Along these lines, Park (1972) serves as a prominent representation of the sociological camp that switched from viewing crowds as irrational mobs to viewing crowds as vehicles for, or agents of, social change and liberation.

The questions of why crowds *rebel* or why they *mob* lead in different directions, but their connection is in the capacity of the riotous collective to upend society. As Canetti put it in his study, *Crowds and Power*: “To the crowd in its nakedness everything seems a Bastille” (1962: 20) – or at least it seems so from the perspective of the Bastille. Whether one views the crowd as a protagonist or antagonist of history, both views risk flattening individuals into a single consciousness when they act in concert, particularly in the type of crowd that gets called a riot.

⁷ See Hobbes ([1651] 2001: 532): “Hereby it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war, as is of every man against every man.”

1.1.2 Social Movement Studies

“The long history of protest movements is in fact mainly the history of mobs and riots” (Piven 2012: 20). Sociological studies of movements in many ways emerged directly from attention to mobs and riots via the study the French Revolution (e.g., Hobsbawm 1963; Thompson 1963; Rudé 1959). According to Rudé, the phenomenon of utilizing the term “riot” as an epithet to delegitimize popular protest dates back to this inaugural revolution of Western modernity (1959:186). Sociology generally understands movements in terms of contentious politics that involve collective claims and sustained campaigns, typically aimed at authorities, and employing public displays and repertoires of contention in pursuit of those claims (Staggenborg 2007; Tilly 2004; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). Social movements can also be approached on cultural, moral, and relational bases, and their actions do not always target authorities (Darnovsky, Epstein, and Flacks 1995; Jasper 1997; Seferiades and Johnston 2012).

There was a surge of attention in the social sciences to riots during and just following the urban uprisings of the 1960s (e.g., Connery 1968; Eisinger 1973; Turner 1969). However, since then sociology has largely moved away from approaching riots as part of movements, leaving a gap in understandings of unarmed protester violence (see Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014; Piven 2012).⁸ Scholars have noted a shift away from armed struggle toward unarmed movements in recent decades, but this shift has often been described in terms of “nonviolent” struggle (Foran, ed. 2003; Goodwin 2001; Nepstad 2015), obfuscating the presence and salience of low-level violent tactics within protest movements. More on that below and throughout.

⁸ Gilje (1996), Piven (2006), Schneider (2014), and Seferiades and Johnston, ed. (2012) are notable exceptions, in addition to comparative studies of the 1992 Los Angeles riots such as Abu-Lughod (2007) and Gale (1996).

Aside from problems deriving from the language of nonviolence, the sociological study of movements has largely excluded an analysis of riots in the past half century through a heavy focus on organizations and formal processes (e.g., McCarthy and Zald 1977; Snow and Benford 1988; Staggenborg 2007). Examples of this focus are the arguments that it is organizations' ability to mobilize resources to their cause that lead to movement growth (McCarthy and Zald 1973), and that the frames that activists intentionally create to carry their messaging are responsible for movement outcomes (Snow and Benford 1988). The foundational "collective behavior" approach fueled this fire, as it understood social movements in terms of their irrationality as "crowds, panics, mobs, riots, crazes, fads, religious cults and revivals" (Staggenborg 2007:12). Likewise for the "hyper-rationality of resource mobilization" (Eyerman 2005:41), which stokes the same flames from the opposite angle by judging movements by the ability of rational "movement entrepreneurs" to gather and leverage resources in support of their grievances (McCarthy and Zald 1973). The prominent "political process" theory emerged from a study of the effects of urban riots on differing political opportunity structures (see Eisinger 1973), but even then riots serve more as a backdrop than as an instance of collective action.

Riots fit squarely under the umbrella of *dynamics of contention* (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001) and within the scope of social movement *repertoires* (Tilly 2006: 41-2), both terms that I deploy in this work. However, like the focus on organizations, Tilly's famous understanding of social movements as being composed of activists who seek to display their worthiness, unity, numerous members, and commitment ("WUNC") to authorities and to the public at large (Tilly 2003) essentially excludes riots from the field of social movement studies by definition (Piven 2012). Nevertheless, collective claims and contentious interactions around those claims are also central to the concept of social movements from a sociological perspective, and in general riots

meet criteria for inclusion. If social movements are a continuation of the political process via disorderly means (Gamson 1990:139), then riots fit perhaps even better than “orderly” social movement protest – especially in an era when many protest forms have become more performative than disruptive (Seferiades and Johnston 2012; Meckfessel 2016). Nevertheless, studies of riots have been largely insulated from social movement theory in recent decades.

1.1.3 The Study of Nonviolence

While nonviolence studies, also known interchangeably as civil resistance studies and the study of nonviolent action, studies movements, this field has largely “developed in parallel” to the field of social movement studies, “with few points of crossover” (Nepstad 2015b: 415). Not only did nonviolence studies grow as a distinct field from social movement studies, it was also until fairly recently distinct from the political left (discussed further in Chapter 2). Civil resistance studies represents its own field, with its own set of references and norms. It is also relatively young, beginning in the 1970s with the scholarship of Gene Sharp, though the field draws on older studies by US scholars, most notably Gregg (1944), and of course practitioners like Gandhi. Sharp’s inaugural intervention was to theoretically distinguish Gandhi’s nonviolent *morality* from his nonviolent *strategy*.

Nonviolence had typically been understood by its most famous figures, Gandhi and King, as a moral argument for righteousness, grounded in each of those leaders’ religious beliefs. Sharp recognized that aside from the moral argument for pacifism, Gandhi’s movement leveraged certain identifiable power dynamics that allowed him to nonviolently defeat British occupation in political combat. In other words, to Sharp, nonviolence does not work because it is righteous, it works because it effectively mobilizes power. Though he does not base his theory on the US, Dr. King’s

own political deployment of nonviolent strategy has been well documented, and is clearly visible in his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963). This approach became known as *strategic nonviolence*, and has become its own field of academic study, typically spanning departments of sociology, political science, and peace and conflict studies, and producing a variety of research aimed at understanding the particular mechanisms of nonviolent methods (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Helvey 2004; Schock 2005; Nepstad 2015a; Pinckney 2020).

Schock boils mechanisms of nonviolent action down to three major areas: the ability to mobilize large numbers of people on a consistent basis, leverage against authority, and resilience in the face of repression (2013). In addition, civil resistance scholars argue that nonviolent movements facilitate regime defections (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Nepstad 2015a). Central to many of these areas is the idea of the backfiring effect of repression against nonviolent movements – authorities being seen attacking nonviolent protesters is thought to generate public sympathy for a movement and sap a regime’s legitimacy.

Unlike social movement studies, nonviolence studies has largely been oriented toward application in recent years – much to its credit – with large think tanks like the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict (ICNC) and Albert Einstein Center sponsoring public lectures, trainings, accessible publications. Many publications are oriented specifically toward activists (e.g., Engler and Engler 2016; Lakey 2018). The strategic nonviolence framework has become dominant in activist understandings of power, and it continues to be reiterated and reinforced through popular organizer training programs like Momentum and the James Lawson Institute.

The strategic nonviolence approach has been highly useful in politicizing and mobilizing large numbers of people; for example, Momentum trainings have generated multiple, impactful

movement campaigns in recent years based on the architecture of strategic nonviolence.⁹ This user-friendly approach is expedient in onboarding people to social movement activism, but it also has a flip side, and can mislead eager participants into thinking we can script the movement in a retreat center. While the “it works better” framing is compelling for those interested in building power (myself included), it has also encouraged a mechanistic view of movement tactics.¹⁰ This position essentially approaches movements as one would a cookbook, as though we could generate predictably successful outcomes if only our inputs could be correctly measured. However, as Hannah Arendt put it: “Textbook instructions for ‘how to make a revolution’ in a step-by-step progression... are all based on the mistaken notion that revolutions are ‘made’” (1970: 48).

The strategic nonviolence approach can also lead to a valorization and idealization of protest as such, often drawing from research that claims to show a mechanical relationship between getting a certain number of people in the street and political change (i.e., Chenoweth 2017a). There may be a correlation between crowd sizes and movement success (depending on how these are defined), but the focus on mobilizing numbers alone leaves out entirely a theory of *how* those numbers will create the desired change. Indeed, movement scholars have found that the majority of protests post-1960’s and leading up to the 2000’s were placid, routine, and initiated by the advantaged (McAdam et al. 2005). In other words, it might not matter how many people you get mobilizing on a consistent basis if they are mobilizing in ways that are not disruptive to the system. The importance of volatility and incoherence will be focal points in my qualitative analysis of the riot.

⁹ See Kingkade, Tyler. 2019. These Activists Are Training Every Movement that Matters. *Vice*. (URL: https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/8xw3ba/these-activists-are-training-every-movement-that-matters-v26n4) Accessed November 30, 2019.

¹⁰ Not all theories of nonviolent action take this mechanistic approach (see for example, Carter 2012; Chabot and Vinthagen 2015; Deming 1968; Schock 2015; Vinthagen 2015).

The notion that movements can be predictably engineered is appealing but ultimately unrealistic.¹¹ Offering a sense of certainty to participants can be useful in recruiting new protesters, but it also might limit their long-term participation; what happens when that certainty is called into question through experience? The persistence of nonviolent movement-building-guide approach is probably not unrelated to its usefulness from the perspective of formal social movement organizations and non-profits, especially as it relates to securing funding – and one of the central requirements of securing both funding and legitimacy in our society is to proclaim yourself to be committed to nonviolence.

At the core of nonviolence studies is a binary understanding of movement actions: “violent” and “nonviolent.” This view not only muddies the difference between disruptive and non-disruptive nonviolent actions, but also obscures the vast and varied spectrum of collective actions that are not nonviolent and therefore fall under the umbrella of violence – everything from a brick thrown through a corporate window to a bomb killing hundreds of civilians to warfare with millions of casualties. This dichotomy has been reinforced in the literature by the study of political violence in intrastate conflict, which takes a similar analytic view from the other side (see Kalyvas 2006). Prominent civil resistance literature addressing the differences between violent and nonviolent approaches to political struggle typically focus on warfare as the violent category and civilian protest as the nonviolent category, but these proxies conceal violent civilian protests. But violent protests can be clearly distinguished from armed struggle based on armaments, organization, and intentions (Eisinger 1973; Kadivar and Ketchley 2018; Sarkees 2010), and furthermore, as I will demonstrate in this work, violent protests frequently coexist with nonviolent

¹¹ Of course, the mechanical and predictable view of movement-building is not solely an issue for nonviolence studies; it has been a hallmark of many strands of Marxism as well.

mobilizations as part of the same contentious episodes (see also Kadivar and Ketchley 2018; Ketchley 2017; Meckfessel 2016).

The increasing prominence of civil resistance studies in both the academy and in movement communities has brought with it the widespread adoption of the language of nonviolent resistance. Although many have noted the “troublesome” violence/nonviolence dichotomy in describing social movements (Markoff 2013: 235; Carter 2012; Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Schock 2013), most scholars have adopted it anyway, obscuring the role of unarmed, low-level violence in protest movements.

There have been a number of blistering critiques of nonviolence from the left, most prominently Churchill (1986) and Gelderloos (2007; 2013), which have been influential mainly in anarchist *milieus*. While many of the critiques these authors levy are not necessarily wrong, the authors’ apparent frustration with the dominant insistence on nonviolent discipline on the left seem to lead them to favor vitriol over persuasion, and, accordingly, to miss the resonant power of the strategic nonviolent message, which can make large scale social change seem approachable and feasible. Gelderloos is correct that we should not be “trying to offer easy solutions, cheap hopes, or false promises to anyone” (2013: 40), and yet to present movement victories as achievable is not necessarily to offer false hope.¹² On the book jacket of Gelderloos’ 2007 book, *How Nonviolence Protects the State*, CrimethInc. Ex-Workers’ Collective¹³ writes: “It will be a shame if *How Nonviolence Protects the State* isn’t read and discussed by people who disagree with it.”

¹² From the pessimist perspective, which is increasingly tempting these days, all hope is false hope. Then again, as the characters Cassian Andor and Jyn Urso remind us in the Star Wars film *Rogue One*, rebellions are built on hope.

¹³ CrimethInc. is an anarchist publishing group most famous for high-quality prints of situationist-inspired insurrectionary propaganda, such as *Days of War, Nights of Love* (2001) and *Expect Resistance* (2008). On the subject of this dissertation, CrimethInc. has an excellent pamphlet on the concept of violence in movements: “The Illegitimacy of Violence, the Violence of Illegitimacy” (URL: <https://crimethinc.com/2012/03/27/the-illegitimacy-of-violence-the-violence-of-legitimacy>).

But if you really want those who disagree to read your work, it may not be helpful to call them racist, patriarchal, and authoritarian off the bat. And, of course, there are many instances when violent tactics are infeasible or are highly likely to backfire, in which the nonviolent playbook is useful. Gelderloos criticizes the violence/nonviolence dichotomy, and he states up front that it would be absurd to believe in solely the use of violent tactics, advocating instead for a *diversity of tactics* – a common euphemism on the left for the use of both violent and nonviolent forms of action. Nevertheless, his approach to the debate ends up reifying the violence-vs.-nonviolence split and undervalues the massive potential of nonviolent methods as components of political struggle. My arguments are in line with many of Gelderloos', but in my approach, I take CrimethInc.'s book jacket quote to heart, and attempt to go step-by-step through a critique of nonviolence studies *en route* to advocating for a more expansive working definition of civil resistance.

1.1.4 The Study of Riots

The official designation of the riot as we know it can be traced to King George I's Riot Act of 1714. Whereas "riots" had previously been associated with "debauchery" and "unrestrained revelry and mirth" (Clover 2016: 6-7), the Riot Act legally re-defined the term specifically as a physically destructive political assembly, declaring: "persons to the number of twelve or more, being unlawfully, riotously, and tumultuously assembled together, to the disturbance of the publick peace" as related to "the endangering of his Majesty's person and government" should be punished by death "without benefit of clergy."¹⁴ In other words, in the British legal system, which would

¹⁴ See "1714: 1 George 1 St.2 c.5: The Riot Act." *The Statutes Project*. (URL: <http://statutes.org.uk/site/the-statutes/eighteenth-century/1714-1-geo-1-st-2-c-5-the-riot-act/>) Accessed May 1, 2017.

become formative for the US, this decree made the politicization of the riot official from the standpoint of the state. The decree was later rewritten to specifically forbid property destruction in demonstrations while granting the right to peaceful protest (Tilly 2006:190), giving us the distinction between legitimate nonviolent protest and illegitimate violent protest we have until today.

The Riot Act's definition, including its arbitrary choice of the number twelve, has stuck around in scholarly research on riots; though he admits it is imperfect, Gilje defines a riot as "any group of twelve or more people attempting to assert their will immediately through the use of force outside the normal bounds of the law" (1996:5-6).¹⁵ The word "riot" is both ambiguous and controversial, but the types of collective actions associated with the term are surely instances of contentious politics (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Tilly 1995; Tilly and Tarrow 2007). To Charles Tilly the word "riot" has been so thoroughly leveraged for rhetorical meaning that it has become nullified as an analytic term (Tilly 2006:46), and he prefers to exclude the word – though importantly not the actions associated with the word – from his discussion of *Collective Violence* (2003:18). Specifically, at least since the 1960s, the term riot can take on racialized connotations in the US context (Abu-Lughod 2007; McLaughlin 2014). Some favor more clinical terms such as "civil violence" (e.g., Katz 2008), although this alternative blurs the distinction between unarmed civilian violence and civil war. However, as Tilly acknowledges, the word "riot" is both popular and significant (2006:46), and he lists the sorts of actions that get called riots alongside nonviolent methods in explaining the concept of repertoires of contention:

Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as a result of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle. People learn to break windows in protest, attack pilloried prisoners, tear down dishonored houses, stage

¹⁵ As many have noted, the riot being defined in terms of the number twelve associates it with a trial jury, the number of apostles in Christianity, and many other things.

public marches, petition, hold formal meetings, organize special-interest associations.
(Tilly 1995:42)

The sociological study of riots has taken different forms and occurred in different phases, often breaking the riot into types, for example the study of food riots (Engel 1997; Taylor 1997). At least in the US, the term riot has become entangled with race, and the term “race riot” has been applied to Black neighborhoods rioting in response to police violence (Connery, ed. 1970; McLaughlin 2014).¹⁶ However, prior to the mid-Twentieth Century, race riots were more typically associated with white civilians, often beginning as lynch mobs, attacking Black neighborhoods (Madigan 2001). Despite being lumped together as extra-legal collective violence (e.g., Gamson 1975), these are wholly different phenomenon. For the sake of clarity, I will call the latter, i.e., a socio-politically dominant racial caste attacking an oppressed group, a *pogrom*.¹⁷ In studies outside the US, pogroms are sometimes called “ethnic riots,” as with anti-Muslim riots in India (Horowitz 2001; Kakar 1996), or anti-foreigner riots in South Africa (von Holdt, et al. 2013). The sports riot, meanwhile, has its own history and dynamics, not necessarily, though at times, crossing over into explicitly political riots (Dunning, Murphy, and Williams 1988; Malsin 2013; Spaaij 2006). I will discuss further theory and terminology we can use to distinguish between these types on the following section.

Many scholars who choose to deploy the word “riot” do not define it based on abstract criteria but rather based on constituent examples of collective behavior such as smashing windows, attacking buildings associated with political foes, throwing projectiles at police, burning cars, and so forth (e.g. Jasper and Thompson 2016; Wacquant 1993). This approach makes particular sense considering the patterned behavior rioters often exhibit, involving repeated rituals and unspoken

¹⁶ There is conceptual slippage regarding the meaning of riots across cultural contexts as well. See Roy 1994.

¹⁷ See Klier and Lambroza, ed. 1992.

rules (Gilje 1987:17; Horowitz 2001:1). Thompson goes even further in defining the riot based on its “open-ended” collective potential to experiment with violence (2010: 25), i.e., its non-violence. Crucially, violent protests are far from uncommon events in the context of social movement mobilizations, and the word riot is highly recognizable in this context. While the use of this term to subsume unarmed collective political violence is fraught and perhaps lacking in precision, it is nevertheless important to grapple with based on its presence in the popular consciousness as well as scholarly usage.

Many understand that nonviolence and violence in reality represent a spectrum of collective behaviors, but we do not have concise language for that grey area. The term “riot” is the most recognizable word for the contentious space that spans the line between nonviolent and violent protest, and it is for this reason that I continue to use it. As mentioned previously, Tilly argues the word should be discarded based on its overuse as a rhetorical device, but he accepts its constituent actions as part of social movement repertoires and acknowledges the word’s popular significance (2006: 46). In my view, retaining the word is important precisely *because* of its popular usage and recognizability, and definitional challenges can be mitigated by focusing on the “dynamic and relational aspects” of riots (della Porta and Gbikpi 2012). I therefore use the term “riot” to indicate collective, unarmed political action by a group of civilians that involves destruction of property and/or harm to people, and lean into Thompson’s and Meckfessel’s semiotic approaches to the riot. In other words, I use “riot” and “violent protest” synonymously to denote protests against authority that are not nonviolent, acknowledging that all of these terms are imperfect and there are types of riots that may not fit this analysis.

1.2 The Study of Non-Nonviolence: A Discussion about Violence

Terminology has been one significant barrier in meaningfully discussing unarmed collective violence. In this section, I discuss the term “violence” in more depth, and present some initial interventions that will help to clarify the research and analysis presented in this work.

Social movement strategy has long been divided into distinct and opposing conceptual categories of “violent” and “nonviolent” (Gurr 2000; Schock 2013; Sharp 1973; Tilly 2006). Historically, proponents of political violence in social movements have argued that radical change requires armed struggle (e.g., Guevara 1963; Mao 1937), while advocates of nonviolence believe true change can only be achieved without the application of violence by claimants (e.g., Day 1936; Gandhi 1927; King 1963). Diametrically opposing theoretical categories of “violent” and “nonviolent” is a central problem; these concepts do not readily lend themselves to dichotomous thinking.

What constitutes violence is deeply contested to begin with – a discussion that emerges in activists’ words in Chapters Five and Six. First, “there is no consensus in the literature about what is violence” (Bosi and Giugni 2012: 34). Various thinkers and fields have conceived of violence as a moral wrong (e.g., Gandhi 1927; Gregg 1944), as necessary for social progress (e.g., Sorel 1950; Fanon 1963), as structurally or symbolically imbedded in the systems or interactions of the status quo (e.g., Bourdieu 2002; Nordstrom and Martin 1992), as a form of interpersonal communication (e.g., Rosenberg 2003), and so on. Meanwhile, nonviolence as a concept has suffered from the widespread notion that it is defined based on the absence of something, presupposing both a consensus on and a rejection of what that thing actually is (Vinthagen 2015). The term non-nonviolence is absurd, but it is essentially the standard by which we judge movement actions today – based on what is and is not acceptably nonviolent grounded in fuzzy and shifting

understandings of nonviolent discipline. Others have pointed out that commonsense definitions of violence and nonviolence are culture-dependent (Bosi and Giugni 2012: 29), and how seemingly nonviolent actions can end up reproducing violent structures (Chabot and Sharifi 2013).

In terms of clinical definitions of violence for the purposes of studying movements, it is difficult to beat Tilly's: "episodic social interaction that immediately inflicts physical damage on persons and/or objects" (Tilly 2003: 3). However, this excludes systemic violence, which is of course deeply connected to motivations and perceptions of more direct applications of violent tactics in social justice movements. Among the most difficult elements of violence to grapple with is on the one hand calling what appear to be materially violent actions violent, and on the other hand taking seriously the often vastly more destructive and harmful forms of systemic violence. An interviewee, quoted in Chapter Six, calls these, respectively, "small violence" and "big violence." The fact that we use the same word for both can muddy understandings of either, yet they are of course inherently connected. In Paolo Freire's words: "Never in history has violence been initiated by the oppressed. How could they be the initiators, if they themselves are the result of violence?... There would be no oppressed had there been no prior situation of violence to establish their subjugation" (1968: 8).

Putting the same sentiment in terms of the "looting" that always becomes a media talking point when it comes to riots, James Baldwin put it:

... how would you define somebody who puts a cat where he is and takes all the money out of the ghetto where he makes it? Who is looting whom? Grabbing off the TV set? He doesn't really want the TV set. He's saying screw you. It's just judgment, by the way, on the value of the TV set... After all, you're accusing a captive population who has been robbed of everything of looting. I think it's obscene. (Baldwin 1968; np)

Violence cannot be meaningfully discussed without political context, which is to say, without an understanding of power. But even with context, violence is an unwieldy term, prone to

misinterpreted through its expansive association with so many different types of actions. As I will discuss further in Chapter Five, violence is often viewed as *instrumental*, as a tool to accomplish something tangible when other means will not do (Arendt 1970), and this has been the predominant approach to understanding the use of violence by movements as well (Gamson 1975). While there are certainly important material goals of some violent protest actions, to the extent that this violence is instrumental it is primarily via the implied threat of escalation to more serious forms of violence. As I will discuss in Chapters Five and Six, violent protests of the kind I am examining are not meant to materially defeat enemy forces, but rather meant to signal seriousness of dissent. The primary mechanism of protest violence is thus not instrumental but *symbolic*.

The term “symbolic violence” is often associated with the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu; I use it differently, though Bourdieu’s usage will still be important. For Bourdieu, symbolic violence refers to systemic domination in society:

Symbolic violence is the coercion which is set up only through the consent that the dominated cannot fail to give to the dominator (and therefore to the domination) when their understanding of the situation and relation can only use instruments of knowledge that they have in common with the dominator, which, being merely the incorporated form of the structure of the relation of domination, make this relation appear as natural. (Bourdieu, 2000: 170)

Bourdieu’s symbolic violence flows from the dominator to the dominated and is primarily non-physical, based in institutions, knowledge, and norms; it is the way that systemic domination is infused in our lives and perpetuates itself through mindsets and behaviors. It is the obscene view of looting that Baldwin describes. At the same time, there is a “close connection between symbolic violence and physical violence in the making and contesting of social order” and resistance to symbolic violence “not infrequently involves physical violence” (von Holdt 2012: 127). It is a form of this resistance that I explore in this work. As we will see in later chapters, the symbolism of violent protest is intimately connected with a rupturing of what Bourdieu calls symbolic

violence. However, I use the term “symbolic” not in Bourdieu’s meaning, but to distinguish the physical transgression of the riot both from a purely “instrumental” view of violence, and from a mechanical, “strategic” view of nonviolence.

In order to further help describe the particular type of protest I study here, I borrow Michael Schwartz’s distinction between the *institutional* power that landlords wield over tenants (power that depends on the state), and *noninstitutional* power that organized tenants can attempt to exert on landlords (power lying outside the state) (1976:130), and likewise distinguish between *institutional* violence and *noninstitutional* violence. For our purposes, I want to add to this *counter-institutional* violence. When it comes to violence, of which the state is usually looking to shore up its aspirational monopoly, all forms of violence that are not institutional are at least potentially a threat. Nevertheless, there is a difference between the noninstitutional violence of a sports riot and the counter-institutional violence of an anti-police riot. The first is extra-legal violence, but with a coincidental rather than a political stake in opposing authority. Likewise, whereas some sociologists have viewed white lynch mobs and Black anti-police riots as comparable instances of riots (see for example Gurr 1972;1 Gamson 1975), this distinction helps us articulate how the white mob is enacting the institutional violence of systemic racism, even if in an extra-legal way, whereas the Black uprising is enacting counter-institutional violence in resistance to the institutional violence of systemic racism.

As we have seen, the riot as a form of collective action is by no means inherently liberatory; it depends on the dynamics of the assembly *vis-à-vis* systemic power. Riots might generally be extra-legal forms of collective action, and they might bear tactical similarity from bird’s eye view, but where the anti-police riot relies on counter-institutional power, the pogrom relies on institutional or noninstitutional power, depending on the posture of the state toward the groups

involved. Nevertheless, the dynamics of the anti-police riot and the pogrom are not completely disconnected. In at least some cases, pogroms can be understood as deriving from the same frustrations as anti-police riots, but mis-applied and targeting the wrong people. To this point, in addition to the counter-institutional student riots described in this work, South Africa has seen a surge in noninstitutional ethnic and anti-immigrant riots against Zimbabweans and other foreigners in recent years (von Holdt 2013; von Holdt et al. 2012).

The theory of decolonization, primarily associated with Frantz Fanon, will also be important to this analysis. Fanon has become famous for his advocacy of revolutionary violence (see Fanon 1961), though this has been frequently misread in overzealous ways. Decolonization at its core is about remaking oneself and one's people through struggle (ibid; Memmi 1957). According to Fanon, post-colonial politics that do not deal directly with decolonization can end up becoming twisted into racism and the mentality of the former colonizers, particularly concerning the deployment of violence:

Whereas the national bourgeoisie competes with the Europeans, the artisans and small traders pick fights with Africans of other nationalities. In the Ivory Coast, outright race riots were directed against the Dahomeans and Upper Voltans who controlled much of the business sector and were the target of hostile demonstrations by the Ivorians following independence. We have switched from nationalism to ultranationalism, chauvinism, and racism. (Fanon 1961: 103)

This difference between riots-as-counter-institutional violence and riots-as-chauvinism marks a typical disparity between violence-against-property and violence-against-people, respectively, in anti-police riots and pogroms. For example, the “long hot summer” of 1967, the most violent national outburst of urban uprisings in modern US history (so far), overwhelmingly targeted property, with most fatalities resulting from police or national guard bullets (see McLaughlin 2014). Conversely, in the Tulsa Riot of 1921, also called the Greenwood massacre, the majority of the dozens or hundreds of fatalities, depending on the estimate, were caused by

white assailants targeting Black bodies, homes, and businesses (see Madigan 2001). Pogroms or “ethnic riots” across the world are typically associated with mass atrocities and large numbers of casualties (Horowitz 2001), whereas the type of protester violence I am examining is marked with restraint in terms of the scope of violence, especially against bodies, and selectivity in terms of target, speaking to underlying claims and ideology (della Porta and Gbikpi 2012).

This leads to the last important point to note about the use of the term violence. Not only are we talking about unarmed counter-institutional violence, but we are talking about extremely low-level violence at that. If it makes sense to put violence on a spectrum, the types of protest violence relevant to the qualitative studies herein is about as close as you can get to nonviolence while not being nonviolent; relatively minor property damage, and the potential for bodily harm from thrown projectiles or accidental injury as a result of arson, pushing and shoving, and perhaps a punch or two. The quantitative analysis involves data on larger riots, but even in here the criteria is property destruction and many data points are not associated with fatalities at the hands of rioters. I have at times been challenged by those who claim to believe that property destruction is not violence, arguing thereby that I am not really discussing violent protest. However, I have yet to see this opinion manifest in those who enforce nonviolent discipline during a protest where someone throws a brick through a window or sets a car on fire. One way or another, the aura around the spaces in which these kinds of actions take place certainly *feels* violent. Ambiguity is present throughout this work; I am attempting to problematize the violence/nonviolence dichotomy as an effective conceptualization of unarmed political actions at the very same time as I explore the salience of a specific type of unarmed violent collective action.

1.3 Outline

As I developed the research project that led to this dissertation, I began to notice something. Whether at a conference, activist scene, or a social gathering, whenever I would tell someone I studied riots, they would light up – it is interesting material, and timely, they would always say – and then they would proceed to tell me my conclusions. Whether they were close to the mark or not, the reaction became a noticeable phenomenon of its own. Riots are undeniably there, but everyone already thinks they understand them. Riots are destructive, they ruin movements. Or they are necessary; nothing gets done without violence. Or they are sheer chaos, the inevitable face of human nature in a society that has forgotten how to constrain its impulses. Or they are the sort of thing you would expect from the French (or whoever). Or they are the byproduct of late capitalism, whatever that is. One way or another, riots are a spectacle, but are often dismissed for further analysis because we assume we already know what they are. This dissertation attempts to first understand a primary source of riots’ neglect as they relate to movements, namely the field of nonviolence studies, and second explore the riot on its own terms.

In this chapter I have introduced this work, provided context, and presented a prefatory literature review. The rest of this dissertation can be broken down into two broad interventions: First, I argue that dominant theories about violent protest from the field of nonviolence studies are misinformed; second, I explore the phenomenon of violent protest through the experiences of participants. The first part is presented in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, where I challenge dominant arguments around strategic nonviolence on theoretical and empirical bases. In Chapters Five and Six, I explore the dynamics of violent protests in the experiences of rioters themselves, based on two qualitative interview studies. The chapters draw heavily from several published

articles, book chapters, and forthcoming publications, as well as one article currently under review.¹⁸

Chapter Two delves into the foundational theory of nonviolence studies – Gene Sharp’s three-volume magnum opus, *The Politics of Nonviolence Action* (1973). There have of course been many critiques of strategic nonviolence, and many arguments for the use of violence, but I wanted to synthesize what is most compelling and useful about both, and since there are literally no arguments out there against any use of nonviolent techniques, this approach requires starting at the beginning of the argument *for* nonviolence, which is to say, against any use of violent techniques. Of course, the idea of nonviolence goes back long before Sharp, but Sharp is the seminal theorist of the framework for nonviolent action in movements today, and the operating theory remains largely unchanged. I therefore begin at that foundational level, unpacking the strategic nonviolent understanding of power so as to demonstrate the limitations that continue to affect nonviolent strategies – and explain the need to explore unarmed violence in order to first bring Sharp’s theory of power closer to reality, and second, to make it applicable to movements that seek radical change from below.

The most prominent contemporary work on civil resistance, and the most impactful since Sharp, is surely Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s 2011 work, *Why Civil Resistance Works*. The book is based on Chenoweth’s NAVCO dataset, which claims to compare violent and nonviolent approaches to revolutions and find that nonviolent strategies are systematically more effective – presenting at last empirical proof that nonviolence works better. In Chapter Three, I

¹⁸ These works include: Case (2021; 2019; 2018), as well as an article currently under review at *Mobilization*: “Keeping Contentious Politics Contentious: Humanizing Violence and Effervescence in Social Movements.” Additionally, several shorter excerpts are also adapted from: Case, Benjamin S. 2019. “Introduction to Decolonization Section.” *Tikkun*. 34(2-3): 38-42.

dissect the NAVCO dataset and find, unfortunately, that it neither measures what many readers think nor helps us understand contemporary social movement strategy. I say unfortunately because many of us, myself included, would indeed prefer if it were true that strict nonviolence in protest is categorically more effective. It is safer (at least for those who can rely on minimum civil liberties) and makes it far easier to secure organizational funding and stay out of jail. But NAVCO simply does not say what most people think it says.

The NAVCO dataset is beset with inconsistencies and anomalies in its data construction, including likely leaving out cases of failed nonviolent uprisings and including cases of successful nonviolent uprising that do not fit the criteria for inclusion the authors describe – and even some that have no supporting evidence whatsoever. But even taken at face value, NAVCO only measures maximalist political struggles, not any types of domestic reform, and only compares armed struggle to civilian struggle, with no measures for unarmed violence. As such, even if the data and methods were unassailable, the data tells us nothing about nonviolence versus protester violence, which is to say, tells us nothing about the types of tactical discussion and strategic debates that are most relevant to activists today. I combine data on riots from two existing datasets and add them to NAVCO, demonstrating that the vast majority of “nonviolent” struggles involved or at least occurred in the context of major riots. In other words, the kind of unarmed conflict that has been widely termed “nonviolent” is in fact typically not nonviolent at all by the standards we use in movements today. Riots are a commonplace feature of civilian-based social movements.

I then take an initial step toward the type of quantitative analysis that would give us purchase on the effects of protester violence on civilian uprisings. I design linear regression and time-series models to analyze existing data on riots and nonviolent demonstrations in the US and in South Africa over 72 years. Contrary to the dominant argument that violent protest demobilizes

movements and is therefore detrimental to their success, I find that riots are broadly associated with *increased* nonviolent mobilization within the same year and also in the following year. I go on to explain how low-level collective violence can be productively incorporated into the power dynamics that nonviolent studies has pointed to.

Chapter Four puts the development of the violence/nonviolence binary as a conceptual tool for understanding conflict in context of Twentieth Century revolutions, and argues that whatever its usefulness in that former stage of social-political conflict, it no longer applies to the norms of civil uprisings today. When Sharp wrote, and Gandhi before him – Sharp’s theory had initially been based on a strategic analysis of the Indian revolt against British occupation – the standard for revolutionary conflict was armed struggle. In contrast, the strategic orientation of sparking a population to resist in mass as civilians dealt with categorically different dynamics. The short-hand of violence and nonviolence, respectively, made enough sense, since warfare ultimately relies on struggle of arms and civilian revolt on unarmed masses. However, guerrilla warfare, spelled out by Mao, Giap, Guevara, and others, was not simply about warfare, but a particular type of asymmetrical conflict that allows a weaker-in-guns but stronger-in-values force to overcome a militarily mighty state. Referring to such a strategy simply as violent misses all of the most important aspects of this strategy that we can learn from. Even more importantly, civilian revolt, while far less violent than even guerrilla warfare, was never fully nonviolent; applying the totalizing term nonviolence has predictably led to the erasure of the low-level civilian violence which always accompanied civil uprisings.

I use an analogy to Thomas Kuhn’s notion of the scientific revolution to help understand how we have become trapped in dichotomous violence/nonviolence language that does not reflect the reality of movements on the ground. To Kuhn, in the search to comprehend an

incomprehensible world, scientists create *paradigms*, or systems of thought, to help structure the most salient questions of the time and provide answers. But because the world is too infinite and complex to be fully understood, each paradigm has things it does well, and also creates blind-spots, things that it misses or gets wrong. As people notice anomalies that do not fit the paradigm, many experts will fight to maintain the analytic system they are used to, covering up or explaining away that which does not fit the theory. Eventually, these anomalies mount up, or realities of the world change such as to make them unavoidable. When this happens, there is a scientific revolution. As uprisings mount across the world, one after the next sparked or accompanied by fires in the streets, we are in the midst of a revolution in the ways we understand revolutions. As social scientists, we can no longer sweep the realities of social struggle under the rug of nonviolence. I conclude the chapter with a case study of the 2011 January 25 Revolution in Egypt, which is often held up as a paragon of nonviolent revolution, to demonstrate the presence of riots and their dynamic interaction with nonviolent protest, and also how this was fully a civil resistance uprising, not an instance of armed struggle. The example is meant to drive home how we cannot accurately analyze or theorize movements today without understanding how more and less violent/nonviolent actions exist and interact.

This work argues that violent protest ought to be examined as a component of civilian protest, not in opposition to it, nor as an aberration, nor as random noise, but as a constituent element of social struggle. Beyond this assertion, I steer away from *explanation* of what we see, toward *investigation* of what we see. In Chapters Five and Six, I focus on the phenomenological effects of participation in movements and moments that experiment with the use of collective violence. This approach makes sense as an initial foray – and there have been several studies that preceded my own (e.g., Auyero 2003; Meckfessel 2016) – due to the association of riots with

mindless chaos, often discussed as though they are subject-less mobs upon which whatever theory of human nature or politics can be projected onto. I therefore explore the experience of the riot from the perspective of the rioter. There are innumerable riots in almost as many contexts, and so there is surely much that can be added to this study, but here I focus on the experiences of anarchist rioters in the US and Fallist student activists in South Africa. Their words speak to the distinct subjectivity of the person in a physically contentious protest, and beyond that, my findings pose more questions than they answer.

While the short-term effectiveness of violent actions to generate popular support or win demands is beyond the scope of this study, participants' accounts point toward a productive, dignifying, and even healing form of low-level collective violence among movement practitioners. Overall, violent actions – or the kinds of physically confrontational actions that break from narrow understandings of nonviolence and are therefore called violent – are in the experiences of participants primarily symbolic, not instrumental, challenging a common view that violent actions are simply a means to an end. Activists who have participated in spaces that transcend nonviolent discipline describe deep emotional and embodied experiences that affect their political engagement thereafter.

Finally, in Chapter Seven, I give an overview of my findings and discuss this study in the context of current events. I present limitations to my study and point to areas for further research, and I end with some concluding thoughts and reflections on the role of riots in revolutionary struggle. As scholars of movements, we are hungry for understanding, and as organizers and activists, we are hungry for knowledge and tools we can use to change the world. In both cases, we can no longer afford the illusion that nonviolent discipline is the only way that movements build power.

The title is taken from a second-hand quote, relayed to me in an interview with a South African activist, based on something a Palestinian comrade of his had once said to him: “We know [throwing rocks at Israeli tanks is] not likely to hurt anyone, but all the hurt, pain, frustration, anger, you have to release it somehow. And sometimes yelling isn’t good enough. Rock throwing humanizes you in the face of a dehumanizing situation.”¹⁹ This sentiment foregrounds much of the analysis to come, and it captures something essential about the persistence of riots in social struggle and the materiality of dissent. Sometimes words, no matter how loud, and in this case strictly nonviolent protest, no matter how well organized, are simply not good enough. The quote’s source also highlights the transnational nature of protest discourse, combined with the supranational dynamics of the riot. Finally, it is an open-ended, conditional statement – *sometimes* yelling isn’t good enough, implying that there are times when it is. To me this feels an appropriate framing clause for a work that attempts to move beyond a counterproductive, antagonistic language of violence-vs.-nonviolence. Of course, the language of violence and nonviolence is present throughout – while you climb out of a hole, you are still in it, until eventually you aren’t. But the aspiration is to be able to discuss civil resistance – i.e., civilian uprisings – without having to argue over violence-vs.-nonviolence, but rather focus on what is appropriate at what time, what the effects and consequences of different tactics are likely to be, and ultimately, how do we understand ourselves as we struggle toward liberation. Sometimes yelling and other forms of non-physical resistance are good enough; sometimes they are not. It is the latter times that are the inspiration for and focus of this work.

¹⁹ See Chapter 6.

2.0 A Sharp Critique

I was first introduced to the idea of strategic nonviolence seven years ago. Someone who I wanted to impress was impressed by Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan's now-famous book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolent Conflict*, and insisted I check it out. Reading that book was a puzzling experience, and my quest for understanding would ultimately lead to this dissertation. *Why Civil Resistance Works* purported to be about movement strategy, but the book did not contain the reference points I was used to. I had spent my political career reading revolutionary theory, studying dual power and guerrilla war strategy, and being trained in the ways of organizing and mobilizing. The book did not cite or even mention the revolutionary theory or social justice canon I expected it to, nor did it present an analysis of oppression or a vision of liberation. The book was geared entirely toward a single point: that nonviolent methods are categorically more effective than violent methods in overthrowing governments.

At first glance, it seemed to me that if you are advocating a strategy before analyzing particular conditions and goals, then you are not really thinking strategically. However, the quantitative findings that the authors present – that statistical analysis shows nonviolent methods to be more effective in overthrowing governments than violent methods – demanded serious attention. And *Why Civil Resistance Works* was all over the printed news, Chenoweth gave a TedTalk, and the book's findings were quickly picked up by organizers, movement trainers, and non-profits. In activist scenes, the book was already on everyone's tongues. By now, Chenoweth

and Stephan's central claim that nonviolent tactics are categorically the most effective has become gospel.

As it turns out, Chenoweth and Stephan's research has massive limitations which render its findings all but meaningless for contemporary movements, which I will discuss in detail in the following chapter. Still, for many scholars, activists, and pundits, that book seemed to close the age-old violence-vs-nonviolence argument, validating once and for all the strategic logic of nonviolence. This chapter takes a step back and addresses the question: where did the logic of strategic nonviolence come from? Below, I present a detailed exploration of the theoretical origins of strategic nonviolent power based on its foundational document, Gene Sharp's three-volume 1973 book, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

Proponents like to call it a theory of power and a theory of change. Really, it is a theory of leverage. The difference is significant. Strategic nonviolence is an apolitical manual for a toolkit; the concepts of power and change are only present in their narrowest senses. In other words, strategic nonviolence devotes all of its attention to the *how*; it assumes the *who*, *where*, and *when* are all interchangeable, and, most importantly, it explicitly ignores the *why*. The study of strategic nonviolence, which is also called nonviolence studies and civil resistance studies, does not originate from sociological research of movements and neither does it grow out of the political left. It is a parallel field of theory and practice of its own, until recent decades when it began to dove-tail in different ways with both social movement studies and left social movements.

Chenoweth and Stephan have become the standard-bearers of nonviolence studies due to their quantitative methods, but the conclusions in *Why Civil Resistance Works* essentially just restate and empirically validate Gene Sharp's inaugural arguments from four decades prior. Sharp's ideas have been taken up, reiterated, and fleshed out by a number of authors, and they underlie just

about all works in nonviolence studies, remaining essentially unchanged. In order to understand the arguments for nonviolent strategy, Sharp's germinal theory is still the most complete source.

Sharp is credited with founding the field of civil resistance studies based on his study of Gandhi's thought and practice. The field grows from Sharp's distinction between Gandhi's use of nonviolence as a political strategy and Gandhi's spiritual beliefs in pacifism, i.e., to parse *strategic* nonviolence from *moral* nonviolence.¹ Sharp claims to leave morality aside and focuses on the strategic part, developing a social-political theory of power oriented exclusively toward the practice of nonviolent resistance. In his three-volume magnum opus, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, Sharp lays out the social and political theory which has served as the foundation of the field of study of nonviolent action ever since. The second volume of this work is also the source of Sharp's famous "198 Methods of Nonviolent Action," which anyone who has participated in a nonviolent direct action training has likely encountered.

2.1 Sharp's Politics of Nonviolent Action

Sharp's 1973 work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, is the bible of nonviolence studies. At the time it was published, Gandhi's theory and practice of nonviolent struggle in the Indian movement against British colonial government was the main reference point for the concept of nonviolence worldwide (Cortright 2009). Through nonviolent struggle, Gandhi had led an uprising to liberate the most populous colony in the world from European rule, accomplishing what many believed was only possible through armed struggle. This revolt appeared to present an inspiring

¹ This distinction is sometimes alliterately worded as *pragmatic* versus *principled* nonviolence

alternative to bloody anti-colonial wars and insurrections. Sharp's career began with Gandhi as well; he was a committed pacifist, refused induction into the Army during the Korean War, edited a prominent pacifist newspaper, and published two books on Gandhi before distilling his dissertation (in Political Theory at Oxford) into *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

Gandhi was clear that he believed in nonviolence as a practice of life, and for him its use in political struggle was inherently connected to a nonviolent spirituality (Gandhi 1927).² Sharp, on the other hand, claimed to leave aside the belief in pacifism and instead analyze Gandhi's strategy in terms of material conflict. He identified and explored the power dynamics that made nonviolent methods successful, and used those dynamics to compose a universal theory of nonviolent power.³ Sharp contends that nonviolent struggle is the most effective method of organizing political power, and that it should be applied on this basis even by those who do not believe in pacifist morality.

The centerpiece of Sharp's theory is the observation that all political power is ultimately based in the consent of the governed. Regimes and leaders might appear powerful, but their power is reliant on the material cooperation of their government bureaucracy and the population at large. This cooperation, Sharp tells us, can be revoked by an organized population and used to influence or topple regimes. According to Sharp, people generally obey rules, even against their interests, whether out of habit, fear of punishment, moral or psychological belief in obedience or patriotism, self-interest, apathy, lack of confidence, or simple ignorance. One way or another, people "usually do not realize that they are the source of the ruler's power and that by joint action they could

² By referring to Gandhi as a pacifist I do not mean to ignore his behavior toward his wife and nieces, his openly racist views during his life in South Africa, his British colonial military service, or his friendly 1940 letter to Hitler. Here I am discussing his philosophy as written, his political strategy in India, and his movement legacy via the work of nonviolence practitioners and theorists he influenced.

³ See Sharp 1979.

dissolve that power.”⁴ Power is with the people, and the state’s authority evaporates in the face of collective withdrawal of support from its population.

The idea is simple and powerful. Many political thinkers had assumed warfare to be the logical, and in many cases necessary, extension of political conflict, summed up in Clausewitz’s famous adage that war is a continuation of politics by other means. Sharp essentially says that the continuation is unnecessary, and in fact counterproductive. By organizing collective refusal and disobedience, populations can direct or overthrow governments without resorting to the vastly destructive and risky violence of war.

Importantly, Sharp challenges the popular notion that nonviolent struggle relies upon changing the heart of the oppressor. Kwame Ture famously argued in a 1967 speech that: “Dr. King’s... major assumption was that if you are nonviolent, if you suffer, your opponent will see your suffering and will be moved to change his heart. That’s very good. He only made one fallacious assumption: in order for nonviolence to work, your opponent must have a conscience.”⁵ On the contrary, Sharp argues that nonviolent action is not about persuading the oppressor, but is an effective mode of political combat. To Sharp, if an opponent changes their mind based on nonviolent action, that is, as Ture put it, very good, but the success of nonviolent action does not rely on such a transformation. Nonviolent action can generate powerful material sanctions that can force regimes to capitulate or collapse against their will. Unsurprisingly, this message was inspiring to many activists who sought to create social change or revolution but lacked the means, will, or disposition for a physical fight.

⁴ Sharp 1973:19-44.

⁵ Quoted in *The Black Power Mixtape 1967-1975*. Ture’s dismissal of King’s nonviolence in this speech is a good encapsulation of the way many radicals have dismissed nonviolence. It is worth noting, however, that it is not necessarily an accurate description of King’s nonviolence; King himself appears to have been more concerned with stopping material violence against Black people than changing anyone’s heart.

Sharp makes a variety of arguments for the use of nonviolent action over violent action, but they all boil down to the idea that direct violence is inherently distasteful. Successful movements require sustained mass participation, and the use of violence alienates supporters and turns away the public at large. The alienating quality of violence cuts both ways, Sharp says, and can be used to the benefit of nonviolent movements. He uses the term “political jiu jitsu” to describe a phenomenon in which violent state repression of nonviolent protesters can generate sympathy for a movement and undermine a government’s legitimacy. Nonviolent activists can exploit this dynamic by putting security forces in a position where they must either forcibly attack protesters who refuse to fight back, thereby expanding sympathy for the movement, or disobey orders, which would empower the movement even more. In chess, this situation is called *zugzwang* – the opponent is compelled to act, but any action they take worsens their position.

Sharp discusses a variety of important mechanisms of nonviolent action such as solidarity, discipline, persistence, and public support, but the main argument, revolves around nonviolent protesters’ ability to generate material sanctions that can pressure or ruin political regimes. Sharp’s argument is potent and has been extremely influential, founding an entire field of study and practice. The argument for nonviolent power is also highly limited at the theoretical level in a number of ways.

2.2 The Illogic of Strategic Nonviolence

Taking Sharp’s theory on its own terms, there are deep conceptual limitations, which are borne out in real world applications of his theory. Problems with Sharp’s theory, I argue, stem from four interrelated problems: (1) He begins with a starting belief in nonviolence that is

exogenous to his theory of power; (2) he defines violence and nonviolence in inconsistent ways; (3) his argument is promoting a method, not a political goal; (4) his approach to power is philosophical, not sociological.

2.2.1 Sharp Begins With a Starting Belief in Nonviolence That Has Nothing to Do With His Theory of Power

Sharp makes a partisan argument, meaning he does not merely analyze society but seeks to persuade the reader to a course of action. In other words, rather than exploring the subject of political power and arriving at a conclusion about the importance of nonviolent action, he seeks to promote the use of nonviolent action and marshals theory and evidence to prove that it can be effective. In and of itself, this is not a problem, but in Sharp's case, if we follow the argument, the thing he is arguing for (nonviolent action) is not actually being argued for, but rather is assumed as a starting point from which the argument proceeds. Beneath Sharp's argument is an unseen claim that nonviolent action is inherently preferable.

For Sharp, history has been primarily characterized by unchallenged regimes, and he sees the existence of tyranny in the world as connected to the masses' ignorance of the nature of power dynamics, which he seeks to illuminate for us. He begins with the goal of promoting nonviolent political action and then assembles evidence that such action has at times been effective and that it has even greater potential to be effective in the future. But the dynamics he describes have to do with the fragile nature of political authority, specifically that governments and leaders are only as powerful as their subjects permit them to be via participation in the functioning of society. The withdrawal of that participation, Sharp argues, can bring down even the most ostensibly powerful regimes. Notice, however, that this observation has nothing to do with nonviolence. Though they

are presented as inseparable, the form of action he promotes does not flow from the substance of his analysis, but rather is tacked onto it.⁶

Many social theorists begin with a partisan argument, but sound models build that argument into the structure of the theory. Marx is credited with pioneering explicitly partisan (as opposed to removed and “objective”) political theory in the formal Western cannon, but his politics are presented as deriving from a thorough materialist analysis of history, not the other way around. Marx’s view that all history is the history of class struggle arises from his understanding of political economy, which he argues for explicitly in his work; he then places himself on the side that he understands to be revolutionary. To take another example, Fanon argues that the legacy of colonialism had not only occupied land, exploited people, and extracted resources, but that the colonial relationship deeply impacts the minds of people subjected to it. His revolutionary resolve may have come from his personal experience at least as much as it did from his study, but his revolutionary argument arises from his social-psychological analysis of the inferiority complexes he saw resulting from French colonialism in Algeria. He then constructs his political vision and strategy based on his analysis.

In Sharp’s case, the argument for nonviolence is not part of his text, but rather precedes it. The reader is therefore not persuaded to believe that nonviolence is preferable – this is assumed – but is persuaded that nonviolent action can be politically effective. The problem is, Sharp claims to be doing to exact opposite: he claims to be arguing for the use of nonviolence on purely strategic terms, specifically as distinguished from a principled belief in nonviolence. Indeed, many of the supposedly secular arguments Sharp makes for why strict nonviolent discipline is essential are

⁶ This is the case with many of Sharp’s more specific claims as well, for example around the backfiring mechanism (i.e. “political jiu jitsu”), which is an identifiable phenomenon but one that is not necessarily tied to nonviolent action (see Case 2018:28).

backed up by citing Gandhi's moral claims.⁷ As we will see, in order to tack nonviolence onto his social theory, Sharp has to twist the concepts and misrepresent the historical examples he deploys. This problem matures into a paradox of nonviolent strategy on the ground: those who believe in "strategic nonviolence" are not assessing conditions and selecting nonviolent action because it is the most strategic tactic in a given instance, but rather are assuming nonviolent tactics are always the most strategic, and proceeding from there.

2.2.2 Sharp Defines Violence and Nonviolence in Inconsistent Ways

In presenting potential avenues for the mobilization of popular power, Sharp creates a dichotomy of political action: violent action and nonviolent action. Strangely, he articulates the problem with this approach himself:

It is widely assumed that all social and political behavior must be clearly either violent or nonviolent. This simple dualism leads only to serious distortions of reality, however, one of the main ones being that some people call "nonviolent" anything they regard as good and "violent" anything they dislike. (1973:64)

Here, Sharp is correct, and in fact through this acknowledgement alone he admits more nuance than many of his disciples. But despite his recognition of this problem, he immediately recreates it. Framing the problem as one of "dualism," Sharp instead presents a six-way breakdown of types of political action: (1) verbal persuasion, (2) institutional procedures backed by the threat of sanctions, (3) violence against people, (4) violence against people and property, (5) violence against property, and (6) nonviolent action. His main purpose in doing so, however, is to clarify that there are actions that are technically nonviolent, for example verbal persuasion, which he

⁷ For example, see Sharp 1973: 610.

wants to distinguish from the category of struggle he defines as *nonviolent action*. This aggregation is technically not dualistic, in that there are six, but there remains an underlying dichotomy between the three actions that involve direct violence (3-5) and the three that do not (1, 2, and 6).

Sharp makes ambiguous reference to the difference between destroying property and harming people, and alludes to a potential for property destruction to be nonviolent,⁸ but he also categorizes “violence against property” as just that – violence.⁹ He groups together “riots, assassination, violent revolution, guerrilla warfare, *coup d’état*, civil war and international war” into a single category of political action based in “applying superior means of violence” (Sharp 1973: 34). He contrasts this with the nonviolent action approach, which is fundamentally different in that it relies on strategic withdrawal of support (ibid). By the nature of this *de facto* dichotomy, he proceeds as though the dynamics of violent struggle and those of nonviolent struggle are *inherently distinct* and *mutually exclusive* – precisely the dualism he himself accurately describes as a distortion of reality.

Sharp’s limited and selective understanding of the power dynamics in violent or nonviolent force is ironically clear in the term he uses for the primary mechanism of nonviolent movements: “political jiu jitsu.” Sharp adapts the term from “moral jiu jitsu,” a term Richard Gregg (1944) had used to describe the way that Gandhi’s *satyagraha* (Truth force) could psychologically destabilize agents of repression by using their force against them. Sharp uses “political jiu jitsu” to describe a similar maneuver that throws an opponent off balance using the opponent’s own force, only in a

⁸ See Sharp (1973: 608).

⁹ A common rebuttal I get from nonviolentists when I share my work is that property destruction isn’t *really* violence. Fair enough. However, that is not the way the terms are treated on the ground, as anyone who has been to an avowedly nonviolent action where someone throws a rock through a window or sets something on fire can attest. Anecdotally, I was once part of a campus occupation where we spent an interminable meeting debating whether or not someone picking a lock to access a space that we needed constituted violence. In other words, in real life movements, at least in the US, the line for what gets considered violence is drawn as close to the nonviolent extreme as possible.

broader political sense as opposed to having an emotional, or spiritual effect (Sharp 1973: 698). Both usages appear to be based on a limited (and likely orientalist) misreading of the reference point.

Jiu Jitsu is a Japanese, and later Brazilian, martial art and combat sport which sometimes involves leveraging an opponent's force against them, but also involves the direct application of force as appropriate and based on the technique and strategy being employed. To Sharp, Jiu Jitsu represents a conceptual framework where the combatant who only uses their opponent's force can knock the opponent off balance and win, the metaphor implying that this is fundamentally different from systems that rely on the direct application of one's own violent force. In fact, all martial arts and combat sports involve a mix of the direct use of one's force and indirect use of the opponent's force; i.e., both "soft" and "hard" techniques. The irony of Sharp's misreading is that if a person attempted to compete in Jiu Jitsu without using any violent force of their own, they would surely lose. The very fact that Sharp uses a *martial* art as an analogy for nonviolent power demonstrates his selective vision in terms of where power comes from, as well as the slippage between meanings of violence and nonviolence in the theory.

As Meckfessel puts it, the argument for strategic nonviolence "deftly exploits ambiguities in the shifting definition of violence, particularly by equating apparently very dissimilar phenomena together as 'violence'" (Meckfessel 2016: 57). Accordingly, Sharp lists riots alongside assassinations and conventional warfare as a violent tactic, based in a fundamentally different set of power dynamics from nonviolent action, while elsewhere he classifies uprisings that involved riots as nonviolent struggle without engaging with the apparent contradiction.

These shifting definitions allow Sharp to misrepresent the very dynamics he claims to explicate. For example, he repeatedly uses the labor strike as a prime example of nonviolent power,

and names the Industrial Revolution era “trade unionists and other social radicals who sought a means of struggle – largely strikes, general strikes, and boycotts – against what they regarded as an unjust social system and for the improvement of the condition of working men [sic]” as instrumental in the development of nonviolent technique (Sharp 1973:77). As with the Jiu Jitsu analogy, Sharp imagines that the strike has historically been a nonviolent tactic. In reality, strikes *do* rely on power dynamics of collective refusal and withdrawal of cooperation, they are just not necessarily nonviolent about it. In precisely the timeframe Sharp discusses, when the labor movement was congealing and growing powerful, organized violence was integrally connected to the power dynamics of the strike (see Clover 2016). It is worth quoting Voltairine de Cleyre at length from her 1897 essay on direct action:

Now everybody knows that a strike of any size means violence. No matter what any one's ethical preference for peace may be, he knows it will not be peaceful. If it's a telegraph strike, it means cutting wires and poles, and getting fake scabs in to spoil the instruments. If it is a steel rolling mill strike, it means beating up the scabs, breaking the windows, setting the gauges wrong, and ruining the expensive rollers together with tons and tons of material. If it's a miners' strike, it means destroying tracks and bridges, and blowing up mills. If it is a garment workers' strike, it means having an unaccountable fire, getting a volley of stones through an apparently inaccessible window, or possibly a brickbat on the manufacturer's own head. If it's a street-car strike, it means tracks torn up or barricaded with the contents of ash-carts and slop-carts, with overturned wagons or stolen fences, it means smashed or incinerated cars and turned switches. If it is a system federation strike, it means "dead" engines, wild engines, derailed freights, and stalled trains. If it is a building trades strike, it means dynamited structures. And always, everywhere, all the time, fights between strike-breakers and scabs against strikers and strike-sympathizers, between People and Police.

A labor strike is the most iconic example of withdrawal of support, but in practice that has often meant physically defending the leverage of that withdrawal by sabotaging the means of production or physically fighting with strikebreakers and scabs. Sharp's vision of the strike is based on a theoretical idealization of what it could look like, not a grounded conception of what it has looked like. And his discussion of nonviolent discipline, which specifically boxes out strategic

sabotage and use of physical force against bodies, makes his misunderstanding of the historical power dynamics of the strike unmistakable. Put simply, Sharp's theory of power is built on tactics like the strike, which are not necessarily nonviolent. So, either the theory is sound but nonviolence is not an important part of it, or the theory is not sound.

2.2.3 Sharp's Argument Is Promoting a Method Alone

Sharp's argument is not promoting a political cause, but rather a method of action in the abstract. This is worth focusing on first of all because it sharply differentiates his work from previous theorists of both violent and nonviolent struggle, and second because it is connected to how Sharp's theory of change is applied. To Sharp, "[t]here is nothing in nonviolent action to prevent it from being used for both 'good' and 'bad' causes," and while he does not define good and bad, he recommends nonviolent action regardless of the cause as a "good" substitute for ("bad") violence (Sharp 1973: 71). Sharp's work was originally inspired by a material analysis of Gandhi's political strategy, but Gandhi constructed that strategy specifically as related to a concrete political goal – to liberate India from British rule. Beyond that, Gandhi theoretically has a broader goal of a just and peaceful society. The method Gandhi promotes to achieve these goals personally is *ahimsa* (the practice of nonviolence), and politically is *satyagraha* (nonviolent struggle). The material calculation that drives *satyagraha* is the observation that the British are unable to administer India without large swaths of Indians continuing to participate in the colonial economy (Gandhi 1927).

Satyagraha, which is often translated as "adherence to Truth" or "Truth force," is inherently connected to the "truth" of righteous struggle for freedom and transcendence (Cortright 2009). The adherence to Truth philosophy-strategy involves behaving as righteously as possible

in all aspects of life, and organizing peaceful noncooperation requiring great sacrifice on the part of participants. By giving in to sacrifice and nonviolently refusing to abide by British administration, Indians could both materially throw off their colonizers and spiritually build dignity and fortitude for independence. Because he is an ideological pacifist (meaning believes in nonviolence in principle), for Gandhi, the method and the end are inseparable. In other words, nonviolent struggle is the appropriate method for achieving Gandhi's political and ideological goals based on the internal construction of his belief system.

Likewise for Martin Luther King, Jr., whose primary political goal when he developed and popularized his nonviolent strategy in the US was to end segregation, with a broader, deeper goal of achieving an egalitarian society. Dr. King's nonviolent approach stems from a combination of his Christian faith, his study of Gandhi, and his strategic calculation based on a power analysis of the political racial realities of the US. Like Gandhi, King's faith, his short-term political goals, his broader political orientation, and his nonviolent strategy are all interrelated.

While they differ in terms of their method, practitioner-theorists of revolutionary armed struggle are similar to Gandhi and King in that their methods are constructed specifically to achieve political goals, which are themselves embedded within ideological goals (I will discuss strategic comparisons of guerrilla war theory and strategic nonviolence theory further in Chapter Four). For the most famous theorists of modern guerrilla warfare – Mao Zedong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Che Guevara – the primary political goals were to liberate China from Japanese occupation, Vietnamese independence and self-rule, and to overthrow the Batista dictatorship in Cuba respectively.¹⁰ For all three, the broader, deeper goal is international Communism.¹¹ Each of their

¹⁰ See Mao 1937, Giap 1967, and Guevara 1963. As with Gandhi, here I am discussing these revolutionaries based on their written and practiced guerrilla war strategies, not commenting on other aspects of their lives or legacies.

¹¹ Though each demonstrated a different conception and commitment to the meaning of communism.

selections of guerrilla warfare strategy is based first and foremost on strategic calculations arising from Marxian analyses of the material contradictions in the regimes they opposed, as well as the observation that occupying forces are unable to directly govern the geographic entirety of a country. Furthermore, for all three, guerrilla warfare as a method is inherently linked to the struggle by the oppressed against the forces of domination and exploitation.

The strategy of guerrilla struggle involves organizing in remote areas of a country where the state's forces have little reach. In the initial phase, revolutionaries organize everyday people to the cause, build community trust and agitate for collective struggle in pursuit of a better future. In this phase, the guerrillas are not equipped to face the state's forces in open combat, and instead focus on organizing and building capacity. It is not until these remote areas become "liberated zones," governed by rebels essentially as a parallel state, that guerrillas begin to engage in anything resembling conventional warfare. All three thinkers are clear that without the support of the people, specifically poor, marginalized, and exploited populations, the movement cannot graduate from the first phase and there can be no guerrilla struggle. Giap, probably the greatest guerrilla strategist in modern history, is explicit that the most important quality of guerrilla war is having a *just cause*. While the liberatory nature of guerrilla struggle is certainly open to debate, and the historical legacies of guerrilla wars are mixed, from the perspectives of Mao, Giap, and Guevara, having a just cause and being "of the people" are essential components for successful guerrilla struggle.

Table 1. Strategic Goals and Methods for Theorists of Revolution

Theorist	Political Goal	Abstract Goal	Method
Mao Zedong	End Japanese Occupation	Communism	Guerrilla struggle
Vo Nguyen Giap	Vietnamese independence	Communism	Guerrilla struggle
Che Guevara	Overthrow Batista regime	Communism	Guerrilla struggle
Mohandas Gandhi	Indian independence	Peace	Nonviolent struggle
Martin Luther King, Jr.	End US segregation	Egalitarianism	Nonviolent struggle
Gene Sharp	Nonviolent struggle	Nonviolent struggle	Nonviolent struggle

In contrast to all five of these practitioner-theorists, Sharp's goal is solely the promotion of means, not ends (see Table 1). Or, put another way, promotion of the means *is* the goal. Of course, many social theorists study methods of struggle without an explicitly ideological component. What is noteworthy about Sharp is that he is making a partisan argument as though it were ideological, but specifically arguing for the use of a method, unattached to a cause. Strikingly, he is ambivalent about the ethical application of nonviolent action within the context of legitimate governments, but he never discusses what he thinks constitutes legitimacy. And, alarmingly, he is upfront that the consequences of overthrowing regimes using the tools he promotes are beyond the scope of his work.

Sharp's distinction between strategic and principled nonviolent action is an important contribution, but it also has the dual consequences of depoliticizing the field of civil resistance that grew from his work and narrowly limiting its view of political struggle. These have deep implications for the theory's conception of power, since a theory of power that claims to be apolitical is either lacking or hiding something.

Think, for example, of the 2011 Egyptian Revolution that initiated the overthrow of Hosni Mubarak (discussed in more detail in Chapter Four). Many nonviolence advocates hailed this as a shining success of their theory; some pundits outrageously even claimed it had been fomented by Gene Sharp himself (see Arrow 2011). While the uprising was by no means holistically nonviolent, those momentous three weeks in Egypt were a deeply inspiring example of popular power that rippled across the entire world. Two years later, another wave of massive protests in Egypt, which from bird's eye view looked tactically similar to those of 2011, ousted Mohamed Morsi, the first democratically-elected president in Egyptian history, and ushered back the military government that the 2011 protests had deposed. From a methods standpoint, these two movements are nearly identical. But the 2011 movement went up against an entrenched dictatorship, while the 2013 movement was in many ways supported by the remnants of that dictatorship that continued to control large swaths of the economy and security forces. Or consider pro-Chavez and anti-government protests in Venezuela between 2002 and 2019, the “red shirts” and “yellow shirts” in Thailand between 2005 and 2014, the Gezi park occupation and anti-coup protests in Turkey between 2013 and 2016, and so many other examples of politically opposing civil resistance movements in the same country. Put simply, promoting a method of resistance without a set of political principles to guide it will always end up reinforcing entrenched authority.

2.2.4 Sharp's Approach to Power Is Philosophical, Not Sociological

Apart from Gandhi's strategy, Sharp bases his system on a very limited bibliography, largely drawn from political philosophy, and with a conspicuous lack of attention to social or revolutionary theory. This foundation leads Sharp to underestimate or ignore real world dynamics

and challenges associated with the types of leverage he proposes, with further consequences for his theory's applicability.

To the question of why nonviolent action had not been successfully used more frequently in history, Sharp answers that it is because people by and large do not understand collective power. Since the dynamics he proposes are meant to be universal, applying to all governments and peoples in all places and times, and since his theory tells him that all power is ultimately with the mass of people, then it follows that oppression only exists because the oppressed fail to act. In Sharp's words: "The degree of liberty or tyranny in any government is, it follows, in large degree a reflection of the relative determination of the subjects to be free and their willingness and ability to resist efforts to enslave them." He goes on to quote (white) South African philosopher Errol E. Harris as saying that "a nation gets the government which it deserves," and Tolstoy in arguing that the British had not enslaved the Indians but rather, based on their (at that time) failure to liberate their country, the "Indians who have enslaved themselves" (Sharp 1973: 29-30).

Sharp's approach is consistent with classic Western political theory, which has tended to bypass context and contemplate society against the backdrop of a theoretical universe in which all things are equal, and is thereby liable to misapprehend the world as we live in it (Goodhart 2018). In other words, even leaving aside the deeply problematic implications of blaming oppressed peoples for their oppression while crediting the populations of imperialist societies for the domestic political liberties they enjoy, this abstract framing, free from complex social dynamics and context, is predisposed to overlook factors that are important for strategic calculations.

Sharp builds on the theories of philosophers like Hobbes, Rousseau, and Comte for his understandings of the state and power. Bertrand de Jouvenel's *On Power*, John Austin's *Lectures on the Jurisprudence or the Philosophy of Positive Law*, and Martin Hillibrand's *Power and*

Morals make repeated appearances as well. On the other hand, contemporary social theorists from Sharp's era and prior are all but absent from his bibliography, and he makes no reference to the revolutionary movements of the 1960s. Though he makes arguments on the subjects of violence, power, authority, social control, resistance, and the question of why people obey or rebel, Sharp does not consult, for example, Arendt, Fanon, Foucault, Gramsci, Lukes, or Marcuse, nor does he engage with classic social theorists like Marx, Du Bois, or Durkheim,¹² nor does he put his work in conversation with movements that were making theory through action in Sharp's time, such as the Black Panther Party or Students for a Democratic Society. Accordingly, Sharp drastically underestimates the complex dynamics that pervade the space between social reality and theoretical nonviolent rebellion.

Sharp briefly discusses historical examples, but their purpose in the text is not to explore and draw out dynamics but simply to substantiate Sharp's claims. The examples he uses further expose his inconsistencies, since several of them involve significant violence, which he sometimes acknowledges and sometimes ignores. For example, Sharp discusses the what he calls the "predominantly nonviolent" Russian Revolutions of 1905 and 1917, claiming that the turn to armed revolt in 1905 led to the revolution's defeat, while better adherence to nonviolent discipline in 1917 led to success (Sharp 1973: 78-79). However, only the most cursory and insincere

¹² Sharp cites Max Weber in passing for his typology of ruling authority. He does not however engage with Weber's classic definition of the state as the institution with a monopoly on the use of violence. Sharp also cites Georg Simmel in passing for his insight into the complex nature of the speaker-audience relationship – not unidirectional but involving the participation of the audience in performing their role, which in turn allows the speaker to perform theirs. Sharp makes a direct analogy to the state – i.e., not unidirectionally powerful but requiring the consent of the public. As with Weber, Sharp does not engage with Simmel's extensive work on society and power. Even the example he cites has complicating implications for Sharp's own conclusions if engaged with beyond a superficial analogy. Audiences, like "the people" in a society, are not unified blocs, but are composed of individuals and groups with different backgrounds, goals, and motivations. In addition to push-back by the speaker and perhaps security, audience members who disrupt an event might find themselves supported or confronted by other audience members for various reasons based on the content and style of the disruption, local norms for such events, social-political context, and so forth.

exploration of either of those historical events could justify claiming them as nonviolent, and the crude explanation of the 1905 revolution's defeat based on a shift from nonviolent resistance to armed resistance is wildly simplistic.

That he views the 1905 and 1917 Russian Revolutions as discrete events in the first place reveals a conceptual limitation that continues to haunt civil resistance studies. Sharp mentions the political changes forced by the 1905 movement (i.e., the creation of a legislature) and social changes that grew in the struggle (i.e., the rise of the *soviets*), but nevertheless he views each rebellion as a completely separate event, which can then be broadly judged as either successful or unsuccessful in their short-term goals. Lost in this two-dimensional approach is the importance of the 1905 revolution in changing Russian society such that the 1917 revolution could have succeeded the way it did. Including social theory in the framework would demand a more nuanced and accurate story, but the purpose of this historical example in Sharp's work is not to illuminate the dynamics of the Russian Revolution, nor to learn from the experiences of its protagonists, it is simply to convince readers that nonviolent action works better. In other cases, such as in describing prison strikes in the Soviet Union, Sharp simply states: "In some of these there was a great deal of violence" and then moves on without explaining what that means or discussing how that violence might have interacted with the nonviolent dynamics he is using the example to illustrate (Sharp 1973: 94).

In her 1968 work, *On Revolution and Equilibrium*, Barbara Deming made a similar move to that which Sharp claims to – distinguishing strategic nonviolence from moral nonviolence. Deming makes her argument in reference to the politics of the Chinese and Cuban Revolutions, and in direct response to Fanon's and Sartre's arguments for the use of political violence. Sharp does not cite or engage with Deming, and reading her work next to his, it is clear that Deming is

committed to the politics and outcomes of social struggle, while Sharp is committed only to the tools of nonviolent conflict. The difference is more than a side note. Deming's work is about real-world nonviolent conflict that exists in lived experience and conditions characterized by complex social-political oppression, specifically in the service of a more nonviolent and egalitarian future on both political and interpersonal planes; Sharp's work is about methods of political struggle in the abstract, in service of short-term goals in the abstract. (I can't help but wonder what the field of nonviolence studies would look like today had it followed Deming rather than Sharp, but it is less of a mystery why Sharp's work has been so much more marketable.)

There are numerous consequences of Sharp's underestimation of social dynamics. A particularly important one for his theory of the power in collective consent and refusal has to do with social, political, and economic stratification. Focusing on the power of people withdrawing cooperation implies there was cooperation in the first place. First of all, Sharp appears unaware of the possibility that constant, ongoing resistance by those at the margins of society and at the bottom of economic, social, and political hierarchies are part of the status quo, and many people at all levels of society might conform or resist in different ways on a daily basis. Second, people's position in society impacts the potential leverage available to them. For a member of a political regime or someone with a coordinating role in the formal economy, the dynamics of withdrawing cooperation might be relatively straightforward. But for those residing on the margins of society or engaged in the informal economy, or those who are systematically degraded, excluded, quarantined, or murdered by governments, withdrawal of consent has less, or at the very least different inherent leverage. This is precisely why riots are sometimes required to make people's "withdrawal of cooperation in the routines of civil life" effective, and why in some industries, sabotage has been a necessary element of labor strikes (Piven 2006: 37).

2.3 The Strategic Nonviolence of Imperialism

Perhaps the most significant consequence of Sharp's abstract foundation is the (at best) profoundly naïve understanding that knowledge of social power dynamics is all that is required to mobilize real world power. Ironically, Sharp's own career stands as a prime counter-example. For all his writing about the social roots of political power – and although Twenty-First Century social movements have picked up and run with his work – Sharp primarily sought to work with governments and capitalists. Here, I will dip only slightly into a whole can of worms for the sake of clarifying the purpose and feasibility of Sharp's theories.

Throughout his career Sharp made repeated failed attempts to persuade governments, mainly in Northern Europe, to train their troops and populations in nonviolent techniques to resist foreign invasion. In 1985, Sharp published a book, titled, *Making Europe Unconquerable*, about methods of defending Western Europe and weakening Eastern Bloc countries using civil resistance methods. The book's forward was penned by George F. Kennan, who had been US Secretary of State, US ambassador to the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, and who was a main architect of the US's Cold War policies. In Marcie Smith's words, "the book is basically a manual for how the United States could develop and resource 'pro-democracy' protest movements in the Eastern Bloc and defend them from Soviet retaliation."¹³ Sharp's efforts to convince US and European governments to train their personnel in the methods of nonviolent action never panned out (as Sharp himself might have predicted if he had taken his own theories about social power seriously), but many within the US government, like Kennan, saw great offensive value in his contributions for the purposes of US imperialism.

¹³ See interview with Marcie Smith on Doug Henwood's radio show *Behind the News*, February 22, 2018 (31:21).

In fact, Sharp's connections to US foreign policy began decades earlier. Sharp had left Oxford in 1965 to finish his dissertation at Harvard's Center for International Affairs in order to work with Thomas Schelling, the economist who coined the term "collateral damage." At the time, Schelling served as an advisor to Project Camelot,¹⁴ a "peace research" initiative run by the Army Psychological Warfare Office looking into "nonviolent solutions to international projects" – the most exposed of a number of military-academic collaborations designed to better understand how to influence social movements and counter-insurgencies in foreign countries (Rohde 2009; Smith 2019).¹⁵ Schelling would also write the introduction to *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*.

Sharp's research at the Center for International Affairs, where he held an appointment from 1965 to 1995, was funded by the Department of Defense in a Cold War context in which the Pentagon was intent on studying the nuts and bolts of social movements in order to incite and support them against the Soviet Union and its allies, and undermine them domestically and in US ally states. In fact, reading *The Politics of Nonviolent Action* as a government manual for how to instigate a rebellion in an enemy state (as opposed for an activist manual for how to change society for the better) its style makes a great deal more sense. Notably, and upsettingly, Sharp's biographies in popular publications (e.g., Arrow 2018; Roberts 2018) and activist facing publications (e.g., Engler 2013; Engler and Engler 2016; Gee 2018) omit the significant parts of his career he spent working with governments, military advisers, and capitalists.

¹⁴ Project Camelot's official name was "Methods for Predicting and Influencing Social Change and Internal War Potential."

¹⁵ See also the publicly available lectures regarding the use of nonviolent warfare for US political interests, for example: "Nonviolent Resistance and Expanding the Unconventional Warfare (UW) Toolkit" at a think tank called NSI, featuring speakers from the US Army Special Operations Command: <https://nsiteam.com/nonviolent-resistance-and-expanding-the-unconventional-warfare-uw-toolkit/>.

The ignorance of or refusal to engage with this facet of Sharp's career conceals a close working relationship between civil resistance scholars and military, government, and private capital interests that continues until today. Many of the most prominent names in civil resistance studies are directly connected to institutions that would seem antithetical to social justice. One of the most astute interpreters of Sharp's work is Robert Helvey, an Army Colonel with the Joint Military Attaché School who met Sharp while he was a senior fellow at the Center for International Affairs and became a consultant at the Sharp's Albert Einstein Institute (AEI) (See York 2013). Helvey's 2004 book *On Strategic Nonviolent Conflict*, published by AEI, articulated among other things the "pillars of support" framework for understanding nonviolent strategy, recently popularized by the Momentum training program. Maria Stephan is a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council, a think tank founded during the Cold War to strengthen US-European cooperation and free trade, and was a strategic planner with the US State Department at the time she co-authored *Why Civil Resistance Works* with Erica Chenoweth, who is now at the Harvard Kennedy School. And Peter Ackerman, author of the 1994 book, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict* and the widely popular 2000 book, *A Force More Powerful* (which has been turned into a television series and a video game), and co-founder of AEI with Sharp, was also a director at the British International Institute for Strategic Studies, and was the managing director of Rockport Capital, Inc., a powerful private investment firm. At the time he co-founded AEI, Ackerman headed a notorious Wall Street junk bond scam that made him \$165 million in 1988 alone but bankrupted the company by 1990; he avoided criminal charges by paying off colleagues in civil claims (see *Business Insider* 2012). Ackerman also founded the Center for Applied Non-Violent Action and Strategies and is the founding chair of the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict.

No further evidence should be required to demonstrate the intricacy of state hegemony than the founder of the theory of strategic nonviolence working with capitalists and addressing his work to government audiences. It would not be difficult to read this information in a conspiratorial light – giving a much darker implication to William B. Watson’s oft-repeated book jacket quote that “Sharp is the Machiavelli of nonviolence” – and it would be irresponsible not to consider it. However, Sharp himself might be a true believer, something more naïve than nefarious. When George Ciccariello-Mayer published an article critical of the Albert Einstein Institute’s role in Venezuela, where it had trained political opponents of Hugo Chavez’s Socialist government, Gene Sharp himself reportedly sent Ciccariello-Mayer an email lambasting and threatening the then-graduate student (see Ciccariello-Mayer 2008). Shockingly, the main concern Sharp voiced in this email was that Ciccariello-Mayer had connected the AIE to the use of violent tactics – not that they trained a coup government!

Regardless, Sharp’s theory of strategic nonviolence is strikingly applicable for US foreign policy purposes. Whereas Sharp’s refusal to deal with politics or context seems bizarre for a social theorist of revolutions, it makes a lot of sense if the application of his theory is the US bringing down rival governments. After all, if the goal is to incite a movement in order to collapse an enemy’s country, that movement’s liberatory politics would only get in the way when the US would later step in to install a friendly regime; much better for the activists to have no politics, only the methods required to weaken their current government.¹⁶

¹⁶ A version of this shortcoming is evident in many of the most prominent nonviolent strategy trainers out there today, as these campaigns often are directed towards limited, reformist goals targeting existing institutions, unattached to any coherent strategy to transform society.

2.4 Conclusion

If Sharp was indeed unaware of the ways US foreign policy deploys his work, then his comprehension of the realities of social-political struggle was in the end astonishingly weak. If he was conscious of his collaboration with governments and capital, then he was something much worse than naïve. Either way, strategies derived from Sharp's theory and the civil resistance field that grew from it are likely to share its characteristics.

Audre Lorde famously said: "the master's tools will never allow us to dismantle the master's house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change." This quote is often taken out of context and misused, frequently to bolster the argument for strict nonviolence (see Solnit 2011). Lorde was speaking of racism, patriarchy, and homophobia embedded in ways that intellectuals organize the tools of analysis we use to understand society. In the same essay, Lorde asks, and then answers: "What does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy? It means that only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable" (Lorde 1984). Following Lorde's argument, we might say that the strategic tools developed by academics, based on abstract theory, and designed for state control, can be used for liberatory purposes, but in applying those tools alone, only the most narrow parameters of change are possible and allowable.

3.0 Molotov Cocktails and Mass Marches: The Existence and Mobilizing Effect of Riots

The past decade has seen massive, unarmed civilian rebellions in dozens of countries across the world, as well as countless more issue-based movements that have changed national conversations and influenced political developments. This Twenty-First Century wave of movements has often been characterized as *nonviolent* – Gene Sharp’s theory come to life – and civil resistance studies has sought to analyze and explicate these struggles using the logic of nonviolent action (Engler and Engler 2016; Chenoweth and Stephan 2016; Nepstad 2015a). While the majority of these movements have taken the form of civilian resistance, as opposed to armed resistance, they have also by and large involved rioting and other acts of unarmed collective political violence. Civil resistance theory has been largely resistant to incorporating property destruction and other low-level violent actions into its analytical framework, but it is not clear that movements can be accurately studied without them. Furthermore, the argument that nonviolent tactics are universally more effective than violent tactics has become accepted as conventional wisdom, but this claim is based upon empirical evidence that does not actually speak to the question at hand. In the previous chapter I made these arguments on a theoretical basis; in this chapter I do so on an empirical basis.

Contemporary debates over the use of violence and nonviolence in movements involves significant conceptual slippage between the operational meanings of violence. While activists often debate the use of violence in terms of unarmed civilian-based actions, much of the literature ostensibly addressing the same debate operationalizes violence as intrastate warfare. As we will see, while prominent studies claim to address the violence/nonviolence debate, they in fact omit protester violence altogether, and therefore tell us very little about the types of actions that are

relevant to movements today. Very few studies investigate the impact of the types of violence that are most common in Twenty-First Century social struggle from below – unarmed collective political violence like property destruction, sabotage, arson, and physical altercations with police or political opponents – not in contrast to but *within* the context of the types of movements that scholars call nonviolent.¹ The shortage of research in this area implies that opinions related to one of the most significant arguments for social movements are largely based on assumption and conjecture.

In this chapter, I argue that: 1) violent collective actions are common occurrences alongside nonviolent mobilizations within the types of social movements that scholars classify as civil resistance; 2) the interaction between violent protest and nonviolent protest within movement uprisings is far more dynamic than dominant theories claim; and 3) violent protest can be productively assessed as part of the repertoire of civilian-based mobilizations.

I address the first point by combining data from two prominent datasets on contentious political actions with the most advanced dataset on nonviolent revolutions to empirically demonstrate that the vast majority of civil resistance campaigns are accompanied by riots. I address the second by applying time-series analysis to existing data for violent and nonviolent protests in the US and South Africa over 72 years. I discuss both cases further in Chapters Five and Six, which present qualitative analyses based upon interviews with activists in the US and South Africa. I address the third point above in this chapter by advancing a theoretical argument for the application of civil resistance analyses to these riots and other violent civilian actions in conjunction with nonviolent actions. Ultimately, I argue that civil resistance studies could benefit from a more

¹ Prominent exceptions include Ketchley 2017, Meckfessel 2016, Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner, ed. 2014, Seferiades and Johnston, ed. 2012, and Piven 2006.

sociological conception of movements in its treatment of the violence question, and in fact remains a useful analytic framework only if it includes a broader range of collective actions that more accurately reflect existing social movement repertoires.

3.1 Why Civil Resistance Works with the Wrong Data

Social movement strategy has long been divided into distinct and opposing conceptual categories of “violent” and “nonviolent” (Gurr 2000; Schock 2013; Tilly 2006; Sharp 1973). The thrust of nonviolence studies since Sharp is that there are certain identifiable strategic factors that unarmed movements generate and contend with that have significant material impacts on movement success or failure. Main areas of emphasis include the importance of mass *mobilization* of civilian forces, *resilience* in the face of repression through discipline and tactical diversity, and the ability to create *leverage* against regimes through disruptive collective action and strategic withdrawal of support (Schock 2013). Nonviolence is assumed to be crucial to all of these dynamics, but as we will see, is in fact required for none of them. The perception that nonviolence is the fulcrum that moves, for example, the leverage movements can exert on governments relies on the misconception that riots are exogenous to civilian uprisings. This misconception is coded into research that has attempted to compare violence and nonviolent methods for efficacy.

It is no exaggeration to say that the most significant work in nonviolence studies since Gene Sharp is Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works: The Strategic Logic of Nonviolence Conflict*. Chenoweth and Stephan claim to have empirically validated the superior efficacy of nonviolent campaigns with a comparative statistical analysis. Since its publication, the claim that nonviolence is categorically more effective than violence has

become nearly ubiquitous in movement framing. The book is based on research derived from the large-N, global NAVCO dataset, which was introduced in 2008 and upgraded (NAVCO 1.1) for the book, *Why Civil Resistance Works*.² NAVCO catalogues and compares violent (i.e., armed) and nonviolent (i.e., unarmed) intrastate conflict between 1900 and 2006. The unit of analysis is the campaign, and each campaign is designated one data point based on its “peak” year, assigned based on the year of highest campaign participation, or in the case of missing data, based on the year prior to campaign outcome.³ In order to be included in NAVCO, campaign must have “maximalist” political goals, in this case meaning the overthrow of a regime, the ouster of a foreign occupation, or secession from a state.

The “maximalist” criteria in NAVCO constitute a pared-down definition of a *revolutionary social movement*, or a movement that advances “exclusive competing claims to control of the state, or some segment of it” (Tilly 1993: 10). It also implicitly includes an element of Skocpol’s (1979: 4) classic definition in that it applies to revolts “from below” as opposed to *coups d’état* and other elite conspiracies. Not all movements from below have revolutionary politics, and some are ambiguous as to their nature of their claims *vis-à-vis* the state (Goodwin 2001: 10), making cross-pollination of social movement studies and revolution studies highly useful (Goldstone 2001: 142). Many definitions of revolution also include the restructuring of political institutions, rapid cultural shifts, and other transformations in social processes and popular consciousness (Epstein 1993; Goldstone 2001; Paige 2003; Skocpol 1979), and of course many social movements advance non-

² Despite introducing the time-recurring NAVCO 2.0 dataset in 2013 (Chenoweth and Lewis 2013), and working toward an event-level NAVCO 3.0 dataset, NAVCO 1.1 continues to be the main source for both academic (e.g. Chenoweth and Schock 2015, Chenoweth and Stephan 2014) and popular audience (e.g., Chenoweth 2017b, Chenoweth and Stephan 2016) publications on this data.

³ See ‘Online Methodological Appendix Accompanying *Why Civil Resistance Works*’ (Chenoweth 2011).

revolutionary claims. Such elements are not considered in NAVCO; the dataset relates to a particular subset of social movements, i.e., those making explicit claims to state control.⁴

NAVCO data does not compare violent struggle to nonviolent struggle. At least not in the way activists typically discuss these terms on the ground. Rather, the data compares civil war to civilian struggle. The “violent” category in NAVCO is derived from existing data on intrastate conflict, primarily the Correlates of War dataset, which catalogues wars between two armed parties suffering at least 1,000 battle-related casualties (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:13; Sarkees 2010).⁵ In other words, “violent” in NAVCO means literal warfare. However, when it comes to the “nonviolent” category, NAVCO contains no variables for the presence of riots or any type of unarmed violence. In this data, riots simply vanish. Unfortunately, this has not stopped the authors and others from using findings related to armed struggle to argue that riots are detrimental to movements. For example, Chenoweth uses NAVCO data to argue that black bloc tactics during the #J20 protests at Donald Trump’s inauguration would hinder resistance to the Trump regime (see Chenoweth 2017). This argument was picked up by others; for example, Amitai Etzioni used Chenoweth and Stephan’s research in precisely the same way to argue that the J20 black bloc and other non-nonviolent antifascist action was destructive to the movement (Etzioni 2017). The example of J20 is especially salient since some nonviolence proponents claim to not consider property damage violence; outside of the much-heralded Richard Spencer punch, the black bloc on J20 attacked property, not people. It was the “burned limousine and vandalized storefronts” that drew

⁴ Findings from this study, however – for example that nonviolent tactics are more effective than violent tactics and that no movement in which 3.5% of a national population actively participated failed to achieve its goals – have been interpreted by activists as applicable to social movements with sub-maximalist claims.

⁵ Chenoweth and Lewis (2013) have discussed reducing this threshold from 1,000 to 25 battle related casualties – a significant difference – but nevertheless, 25 battle related deaths between two armed parties can be clearly distinguished from the types of property destruction and bodily injury resulting from civilian violence.

Chenoweth's criticism on the basis of nonviolence logic (Chenoweth 2017: np). In fact, this type of physically confrontational protest is extremely common within the types of movements that scholars label nonviolent.

Chenoweth and Stephan justify omitting riots from their data based on their unit of analysis: "Campaigns have discernable leadership and often have names, distinguishing them from random riots or spontaneous mass acts" (2011:14). But research on violent protest has long indicated that riots are "not a random phenomenon" but rather "highly patterned event(s)" (Horowitz 2001:1), and that rioters are often collectively discerning and selective in their targets (Tierney 1994). While some argue that riots should be analytically distinguished from social movements, the categories are not mutually exclusive, and the forms at least interact as practices of resistance (Simiti 2012). Especially when it comes to the contemporary violence-vs-nonviolence debate, riots and property destruction in protests are most salient type of violent action, and therefore must be included before results could be reasonably applied to movements today.

Before I interpolate riots into NAVCO data to demonstrate how common they are in civilian uprisings, it is important to note that NAVCO data is of questionable integrity and contains a number of significant errors. It relies heavily on shaky numbers for movement participation, and bases its findings on a single "peak" year that the authors designate either based on their assessment of maximal participation *or* based on the year prior to campaign outcome. The dataset claims to only count "maximalist" campaigns (and so does not necessarily apply to movements seeking reforms⁶ or those without well-branded names and goals), and undercounts failed nonviolent

⁶ Some movements do not even target the state. See Banerjee and Case (2020) for an analysis of methods of disruption for movements targeting private firms.

movements (see Lehoucq 2016). As Lehoucq has pointed out, due to the lack of press they would generate, it is highly possible that a great many of the movements we have never heard of, and so are unaccounted for in the data, remained nonviolent and were ineffective (ibid). Most disturbingly, NAVCO includes some “successful” nonviolent revolutions that have no supportive evidence.

NAVCO codes successful instances of maximalist nonviolent campaigns (i.e., overthrowing a regime in a nonviolent uprising) in Argentina in 1987, in Guyana in 1992, in Madagascar in 2000, in Ghana in 2000, and in Croatia in 2000. The NAVCO Appendix includes a single source for each of these, in four cases an academic journal article and in one case a newspaper obituary for the former president of Guyana. None of these references discusses a maximalist nonviolent campaign. Four of them *do not mention protests at all*. While it is possible Chenoweth and her colleagues consulted additional sources that they simply fail to record in the appendix, considering the prominence of this dataset it is worth examining the sources for these campaigns that are included – especially since in several cases those sources actually appear to serve as contradicting evidence to the corresponding case’s inclusion in NAVCO. I will discuss each in turn

“Argentinean protests against attempted coup, 1987” (NAVCO Appendix: 93): The blurb describes an attempted coup d’état by military officers, after which the government, “aided by popular protests against another military dictatorship, compromised with the revolting officers, preventing major bloodshed from occurring” (ibid). Even on its face, preventing major bloodshed does not qualify as a maximalist political goal or success by NAVCO’s own standards. The single source cited is a 1996 article by Deborah Norden in *Latin American Perspectives*, which discusses and compares extra-legal military action in Argentina and Venezuela. The article clearly states that

the officers in Argentina “did not... attempt to take over the government” but rather were demanding “an end to the government’s perceived campaign against the armed forces, and most specifically, an end to the trials and removal of the army chief of staff” (Norden 1996: 77). The article does not mention protests or civilian mobilizations whatsoever, and the officers in question were successful in achieving concessions (ibid), meaning whatever protests may have occurred against the officers were unsuccessful in preventing those officers from achieving their goals.

“Guyanese revolt against Burnham/Hoyte autocratic regime, 1990-1992” (NAVCO Appendix: 48): The appendix describes “a series of protests in the early 1990’s” in which the ruling party was “removed from power” (ibid). The lone source is Desmond Hoyte’s 2002 obituary in *The New York Times*, which does not mention any protests, but only describes the former president as “bowing to pressure” to introduce press freedoms and electoral reforms, before he was defeated in the 1992 elections (*The New York Times*: np).

“Madagascan pro-democracy movement against Radsiraka regime, 2002-2003” (NAVCO Appendix: 98): This entry describes an opposition candidate, Marc Ravalomanana, winning an election “aided by wide-scale protests” (ibid). The source is a 2003 article in *African Affairs* by Solofo Randrianja, which describes two political opponents who command the loyalty of factions of soldiers and armed militias vying for control of the country, in which “the threat of ethnic war was brandished by both sides” (Randrianja 2003: 320) – hardly a nonviolent threat. The article goes on to describe several “bloody clashes” between the two factions (ibid: 324), with Ravalomanana’s political victory ultimately owing to his political maneuvering, his “social origins,” the support of the business class, and the supportive actions of the army (ibid: 328). The article mentions roadblocks by armed militants, but does not discuss any protests or mass civilian mobilizations of any kind.

“Ghanaian protest against Rawlings government, 2000” (NAVCO Appendix: 81): In this case, the appendix points to the 2000 presidential election in Ghana, telling us that, “[a]ided by a wave of protest against Rawlings, the opposition candidate officially won the presidency” (ibid). Again, it is highly questionable whether protests aiding an electoral process should qualify as maximalist political struggle, but again, the source provided does not even mention protests. The single source is an article by Daniel Smith in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, which describes the 2000 elections in terms of voter registration, turnout, and political process. It makes no mention of protests or demonstrations. The article does say that elections were mostly smooth, with the “tragic exception being post-election violence in Bawku in the Upper East Region” (Smith 2002: 622).

“Croatian protests against semi-presidential system, 1999-2000” (NAVCO appendix: 63). Here, “pro-democracy protests” are described as helping to elect a left-leaning government, but the single source is an article about international criminal tribunals (Peskin and Boduszyński 2003). The government transition that NAVCO codes as a successful nonviolent uprising is described in the source article simply as a defeat of the nationalist party in parliamentary elections by a center-left coalition. The only protests mentioned in the article are by right-wing nationalists protesting arrest warrants issued for generals who had been accused of crimes against humanity (ibid). Despite describing the government’s fear of mass unrest, the article notes the “lack of large anti-government protests” following the decision to arrest former officers and cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ibid: 1130).

These are only the most egregious of a host of inconsistencies, contradictions, and question marks with NAVCO cases and sources. Highlighting these examples is not to say that there were not nonviolent protests in these countries during those years – history has certainly been good at

erasing the role of movements in political and social change – it is simply to say that if there were, NAVCO’s sources do not reference them. And, in fact, the sources that are listed in some cases even contradict the existence of successful, maximalist nonviolent campaigns in those countries in those years. However, despite these and other significant limitations of NAVCO data construction and methodology, Chenoweth and Stephan’s work based on this data remains the most expansive and rigorous quantitative civil resistance research to date. Their book has won prestigious accolades and awards, and is widely read and cited by activists and in social justice communities.⁷ I therefore use the nonviolent cases from this dataset as a starting point to demonstrate the co-presence more and less violent protests during civil resistance uprisings, by adding data on riots from other prominent datasets on contentious political actions.

3.2 The Violence in “Nonviolent Struggle”

While it is difficult to quantitatively measure low-level violent acts within protests, some data on major riots are captured in at least two prominent global datasets on contentious political action. The Arthur S. Banks’ Cross-National Time Series Archive (CNTS) dataset contains a variable for riots, and spans the years between 1815 and 2017, covering the entirety of NAVCO 1.1 (Banks and Wilson 2013). In CNTS, a riot is defined as: “Any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force,” and primarily derives its data from analysis of articles published in *The New York Times* (Wilson 2013:12). The World Handbook of

⁷ For example, *Why Civil Resistance Works* won the American Political Science Association’s Woodrow Wilson Foundation Award in 2012 for the best book on government, politics, or international relations; the 2013 Grawemeyer Award for Ideas Changing the World, and was *The Guardian*’s 2011 book of the year.

Political Indicators Series IV (WHIV), which has a timespan of 1990 to 2004, also contains a riot variable. WHIV derives its data on riots from computer-coded analysis of the *Reuters* newsfeed (Jenkins et al. 2012). I use a combination of these two datasets to add a binary variable for the presence of riots in a given country in a given year, and combine this data with the “nonviolent” campaigns in NAVCO. I primarily draw from CNTS, and use WHIV to fill in missing data.⁸ The simple question this method is designed to answer is: did at least one riot occur in each campaign between the year prior to campaign onset and the year of campaign conclusion?

Out of the comparable “nonviolent” cases in NAVCO, 76 out of 88 experienced at least one riot during the course of the campaign (see Table 2).⁹ In other words, even including the questionable cases in NAVCO (i.e., the cases described above which are coded as successful nonviolent revolutions but are not supported by the sources provided in the dataset appendix), *riots occurred alongside more than 86% of maximalist “nonviolent” movements*. Furthermore, riots occurred around 80 percent (37 out of 46) of successful cases. This is a lower ratio than cases that were coded in NAVCO as unsuccessful, of which 93 percent (39 out of 42) were associated with at least one riot, but still four out of five cases of successful nonviolent campaigns in NAVCO were associated with at least one riot. The civil resistance that NAVCO juxtaposes to armed struggle is in fact not nonviolent in a strict sense, but more often than not involved rioting, if not

⁸ While news sources might fail to report on a riot that happened, they are highly unlikely to report on a riot that did not occur. If one dataset records a riot in a given country in a given year while the other does not, it is reasonable to conclude that the riot occurred, justifying the construction of a binary variable for the presence of at least one riot.

⁹ Of the 106 cases of nonviolent campaigns listed in NAVCO 1.1, 18 cases had to be dropped due to missing data in both CNTS and WHIV or due to coding differences between the datasets. NAVCO codes by non-state territory names such as Tibet and East Timor, and also uses the names of states prior to their political independence. CNTS and WHIV code by country name, so political events in the previously mentioned countries would be coded under China and Indonesia, respectively, while many nations are unaccounted for prior to their emancipation. Because it is not immediately clear in the data if, for example, the riots in Indonesia in 1989 were associated with East Timor, I omitted these cases. Qualitative, case-by-case analysis would be required to expand on this study.

as an integral part of campaigns then at least acting as catalysts or coexisting alongside nonviolent demonstrations.

Table 2. Riots in NAVCO 1.1

<i>Civil resistance campaigns (NAVCO 1.1)</i>	<i>At least one riot</i>	<i>No riot</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Successful</i>	37 (80.4%) (48.7%)	9 (19.6%) (75%)	46 (100%) (52.3%)
<i>Unsuccessful</i>	39 (92.9%) (51.3%)	3 (7.1%) (25%)	42 (100%) (47.7%)
<i>Total</i>	76 (86.4%) (100%)	12 (13.6%) (100%)	88 (100%) (100%)

Of the 13 comparable cases in NAVCO without a riot in either CNTS or WHIV data, 75 percent (9 out of 12) were coded as successful, compared with cases that included at least one riot, of which 49 percent (37 out of 76) were coded as successful. On its face, this might appear to add weight to the assertion that violent action can hurt movement success rates. However, five of the nine successful cases with no data on riots are the cases mentioned above that do not appear to have involved maximalist civilian campaigns. If these were to be omitted, the percentage of successful cases without a riot would fall to 44.4 percent – lower than those that did involve riots. Even counting all 9, however, we must consider the raw numbers – less than 14 percent of cases (12 out of 88) had no riots in the data leading up to or during the campaign. And in reality, that number is likely smaller.

Qualitative sources point to evidence of riots or riotous actions in many instances that are unrepresented in either the CNTS or WHIV data. These datasets are missing data for several key years of social struggle, for example in many Soviet republics during their transition to democracy between 1989 and 1992, many of which involved both riotous and nonviolent demonstrations. For

the country-years that are accounted for in the data, there are likely missed instances of riots. Both CNTS and WHIV draw their riot data from single English language news sources, a limited data collection method that likely involves underreporting errors and selection bias (Wilson 2013:18). *The New York Times* and *Reuters* can and do fail to report on riots that take place. For example, the successful “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan in 2005 is one of the successful nonviolent cases in NAVCO which is associated with no riots in either CNTS or WHIV data, but even civil resistance scholars admit this uprising involved a great deal of violence on the part of demonstrators. An ICNC monograph on nonviolent discipline in three of the “Color Revolutions” describes street battles between protesters and police in Kyrgyzstan during this movement involving multiple deaths, the destruction of at least one police station, and the smashing and looting of government buildings (Pinckney 2016: 57).

Importantly, while there are underreporting errors, there are very unlikely to be over-reporting errors; while they might miss riots that take place, *The New York Times* and *Reuters* are unlikely to report on riots that did not occur. So while the actual number of riotous events is likely to be significantly higher than is recorded in the data, it will almost certainly not be lower. Furthermore, the data that is present only includes major riots (e.g., those involving more than 100 participants and being destructive enough to merit attention as riots in international media) while other types of actions that might be classified as violent, such as smaller riotous actions within otherwise nonviolent protests, equipment sabotage, and targeted vandalism remain unaccounted for. Essentially, if there is such a thing as a purely nonviolent maximalist uprising with the capacity to overthrow regimes, it is exceedingly rare.

There are, of course, campaigns that commit themselves to nonviolent action. But even in these cases, a campaign cannot be reasonably or accurately analyzed in isolation from coexisting

forms of resistance in the same country against the same authorities. It is for this very reason that NAVCO contains a variable for the (armed) radical flank effect – precisely because this factor is likely to impact the outcomes of civil resistance movements. In considering the radical flank effect, however, Chenoweth and Stephan (2011), Chenoweth and Schock (2015), and others have maintained the focus on violence as armed struggle, continuing to erase the salience of unarmed violence. In some cases rioting is internal to and can play a central role in a civil resistance campaign, for example when protestors used a bulldozer to smash through police lines and burned government buildings during climactic protests of the anti-Milosevic movement in Serbia in 2000 (Mitchell 2012; Paulson 2012) – a case that is frequently cited as a poster example of successful nonviolent struggle (e.g., Engler and Engler 2016). In other cases, rioting is at least likely to impact (or spark) a campaign, as well as the collective action frames (Benford and Snow 2000) the campaign influences and is influenced by.

There is broad acknowledgement among civil resistance scholars that violent strategies coexist with nonviolent ones. Prominent nonviolence proponents have long admitted that there is “virtually no case” of a purely nonviolent struggle (Ackerman and Kruegler 1994:9). Pinckney uses a diagram (see Figure 1¹⁰) to visually demonstrate the overlap between civil resistance campaigns and armed struggle. However, as Figure 1 shows, this acknowledgement is still processed through the paradigm which interprets violence as armed struggle. The line between civil resistance and “violent resistance” is drawn between “mixed struggles” of armed and unarmed struggle and “civil resistance with an armed wing,” meaning movements that are driven by civilian mobilizations in a context where there is a separate armed struggle being waged in the same country, i.e., the “radical flank effect” (Chenoweth and Schock 2015). However, civil resistance

¹⁰ Figure 1 taken from Pinckney (2016: 17).

literature as it stands only applies its analysis to actions that conform to strict nonviolence, so while civil resistance campaigns might include the spectrum in Figure 1, Figure 2 represents the types of actions that are considered legitimate for civil resistance campaigns, i.e., strict nonviolence. When unarmed violence is considered, this “purely” nonviolent struggle accounts for at very most less than 14 percent of civil resistance movements. In other words, real world cases of civil resistance struggle typically involve some mix of violent with nonviolent actions – not just nonviolent civil resistance alongside armed flanks, but civil resistance including unarmed collective political violence (see Figure 3).

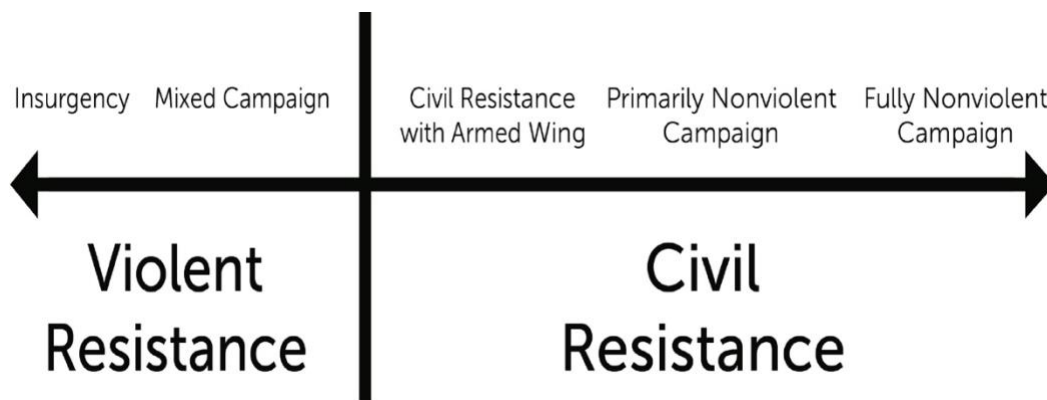


Figure 1. Violent Resistance Versus Civil Resistance in Theory



Figure 2. Violent Resistance Versus Civil Resistance-as-Nonviolence

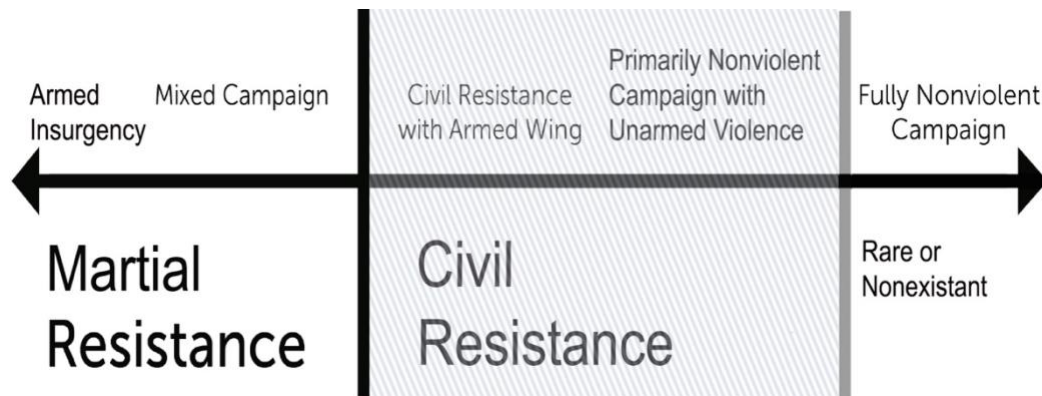


Figure 3. Martial Resistance Versus Civil Resistance

Chenoweth and Stephan theoretically acknowledge as much, and qualify their categorical comparison as being between “primarily” nonviolent and “primarily” violent campaigns (2011:16). However, they go on to use “nonviolent” synonymously with “primarily nonviolent,” which necessarily negates the potential salience of the violent actions that oblige the qualification. Furthermore, in the literature the acknowledgement of the non-purity of nonviolence tends to be processed through a violence/nonviolence paradigm that interprets violence as armed struggle. By continuing to focus on violence-as-war, civil resistance scholars like Chenoweth and Stephan have evaded honest engagement with unarmed violent actions that are not only commonplace in civil resistance movements, but are precisely the types of actions being debated by movement actors today. When unarmed violence is added into the equation, interpretations of NAVCO data change significantly. For example, one of Chenoweth and Stephan’s major findings is that nonviolent campaigns lead to democratic outcomes more reliably than violent campaigns. However, Kadivar and Ketchley (2017) use WHIV data to demonstrate that riots have a *positive* effect on post-conflict political liberalization in nondemocracies.

NAVCO data is problematic for a host of reasons, while CNTS and WHIV data have limitations and gaps. Nevertheless, in combination, they are more than sufficient to clearly demonstrate that riots are present alongside the vast majority of civil resistance campaigns, and

that the most significant and widely cited quantitative research validating nonviolent struggle does not speak at all to the dynamics of protester violence or nonviolence. So if riots are common to unarmed uprisings, how do they interact with nonviolent protest? In the following section, I explore this question using CNTS data on riots and nonviolent demonstrations.

3.3 Molotov Cocktails to Mass Marches

The primary mechanism that Chenoweth and Stephan point to in order to explain their findings is that movements that mobilize more people more consistently tend to win, and they argue that strict nonviolence leads to higher levels of mobilization, making it more effective. But their methods don't actually test the relationship between strict nonviolence and increased mobilization, nor the relationship between violence and demobilization. Sharp's framing argument for strategic nonviolence is that nonviolent action is "a prerequisite to advantageous power changes" and that, "as a consequence, nonviolent discipline can only be compromised at the severe risk of contributing to defeat" (Sharp 1973: 70). Sharp and others in nonviolence studies point to a number of mechanisms that make violent tactics necessarily harmful to movements, e.g., that violence invites repression, negates the backfiring effect of repression, is a barrier to participation, and alienates public opinion (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Nepstad 2015; Schock 2005). As I discussed in Chapter Two, all of these arguments relate to a single, central claim that violent tactics demobilize participation in nonviolent actions, making violent actions necessarily counterproductive. In this section of the chapter, I empirically test that claim using data on riots and nonviolent demonstrations in the US and South Africa over 72 years.

3.3.1 Data and Methods

In order to test the effect that riots have on nonviolent mobilizations, I use existing annual data for the United States and South Africa from CNTS. As previously discussed, this prominent dataset contains variables for both riots and for nonviolent demonstrations, with data collection based on newspaper articles. The riot variable is defined as: “Any violent demonstration or clash of more than 100 citizens involving the use of physical force” (Wilson 2018:np). The nonviolent demonstrations variable is defined as: “Any peaceful public gathering of at least 100 people for the primary purpose of displaying or voicing their opposition to government policies or authority,” and the data excludes “demonstrations of a distinctly anti-foreign nature” (ibid). Because these data are based on reporting from *The New York Times*, “they are somewhat biased geographically and limited in comprehensiveness” (ibid).

Why these two cases? The US and South Africa represent two diverse countries which share enough similarities and distinctions to provide a broad perspective; both are currently (at least as I write this) struggling but established constitutional democracies. Both countries have deep racial tensions and legacies of internal conflict that have spanned decades. They also represent widely differing contexts in other ways that may produce differing conditions of struggle. The US is a longstanding polity which has evolved in response to social movement pressure from below, while South Africa is a quarter century removed from a democratic revolution at the hands of broad-based social movements and international pressure. Prior to that, South Africa was governed by a racial nationalist government, which enforced legal segregation from 1948 (two years after the data in this study) to 1991, when it was overthrown in a democratic revolution. Focusing on the US minimizes geographic and cultural limitations in CNTS data collection methods, while data from South Africa can be reasonably expected to be sufficient for broadly

testing the relationship between riots and nonviolent demonstrations. I also analyze the US and South Africa here to connect with the qualitative interview studies with activists in those countries, which are presented in the following two chapters. Both countries have experienced a resurgence of movement activity in recent decades involving a spectrum of nonviolent and violent tactics, making them excellent qualitative sources for the interplay between more and less violent collective political actions. This quantitative analysis, which gives us a sense of the interaction between riots and nonviolent demonstrations over time, will connect directly to the qualitative interviews with more contemporary activists in the following chapters.

This study uses annual CNTS data from the US and South Africa between 1946 and 2017 (prior to 1946 there are significant gaps in the data¹¹), with a total of 72 observations each. Using an annual measure over 72 years gives a wide-angle view of the overall effects that riots have on nonviolent mobilizations, showing how movements have escalated and demobilized over time. The dependent variable is nonviolent demonstrations and the explanatory variable is riots. Unlike Chenoweth and Stephan, I omit the outcome variable altogether. I do this for several reasons. First, political outcomes are unwieldy things to fit into a data point, and certainly a binary variable. An extra-legal change in formal government with no accompanying shift in systemic power, institutions, or culture, should not designate a successful revolution. As a South African interviewee puts it: “Can you imagine if they had said, ‘okay, no apartheid from ’94 to ’95, then it will resume again’? That is not victory.”¹² Yet, in NAVCO, it would be coded as such. I did not want to replicate this disjuncture. Second, basing a study only on maximalist campaigns would rule out most movements in the US, and most movements in general. Most mobilizations are not

¹¹ In the case of the US, this time period is particularly useful in that it excludes the previous era of “race riots” described as such in news, i.e., pogroms of white mobs attacking Black neighborhoods.

¹² Quoted in Chapter Six.

explicitly maximalist, and many of course mix elements of reformist and revolutionary claims either organizationally or in the opinions of participants. For this study to apply to movement communities across issues, goals, and frames, it should measure levels of overall mobilization, which across the board is generally viewed as positive for movement power (and is the primary mechanism Chenoweth and Stephan attribute to movement victory in any case). Finally, as some of the cases I detailed in NAVCO demonstrate, it is at times unclear the degree to which a movement was the *cause* of a government collapse, as opposed to a component in that collapse. However, because of the theoretical connection between riots and nonviolent protests (i.e., both collective modes of expressing discontent), it is highly unlikely that a relationship between these variables will be spurious, especially in major shocks to the data, for example in the late 1960s or in the past decade. I also include basic exogenous factors. In the US study I include GDP per capita and unemployment rates from the Bureau of Labor and Statistics as control variables. In the South Africa case, I include only GDP per capita, as unemployment data are highly unreliable prior to the 2000s.

For each county's data, I begin with an ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to test the relationship between riots and nonviolent demonstrations within the same year. However, civil resistance arguments claim that violent protest demobilizes *subsequent* nonviolent demonstrations. Therefore, I use a time-series analysis to capture the effect that riots have on nonviolent mobilizations in the following year. For in both cases, I use an autoregressive integrated moving average (ARIMA) model, with first order moving average, differenced once—i.e., an ARIMA (0,1,1) model.¹³ ARIMA modeling is often used for predictive econometrics, but is also useful for

¹³ Diagnostic examination of correlograms, auto-correlation function (ACF), and partial auto-correlation function (PACF) plots for both countries indicate either a first order autocorrelation function or first order moving average. In both cases, an ARIMA (1,1,0) model produces a positive, statistically significant coefficient. The residuals for this

studying the relationship between social phenomena over time (Box-Steffensmeir et al. 2014). The models account for non-stationarity, and I use a single lag, since, given the scale of the data, a riot in one year is unlikely to have an impact on nonviolent protest two years removed if it does not have an impact on nonviolent protest in the subsequent year.

3.3.2 Results: US

Results from the linear regression show a positive, statistically significant relationship between the riot and nonviolent demonstration variables at the 99 percent confidence interval (see Table 1). Each riot is associated with an additional 1.02 nonviolent demonstration within the same year. GDP is also statistically significant, but the coefficient is approximately zero.¹⁴ In addition, the relationship between riots and nonviolent demonstrations works in both directions, i.e., nonviolent protest also leads to higher levels of riots, with the coefficient being slightly lower in reverse.¹⁵ In other words, years with increased riots also see increases in nonviolent protest, and *vice versa*, indicating that violent and nonviolent protest are mutually constitutive of moments of uprising. This initial finding is especially meaningful due to the annual timeframe of the data, since waves of protest can wax and wane within a year.

The time-series coefficient is positive and statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence interval (see Table 3), meaning that instances of riots are correlated with higher rates

model conform to white noise, but the autocorrelation function in both cases is negative, which can indicate errors in the model. I therefore used a first order moving average instead of autocorrelation; an ARIMA (0,1,1) model, which in both cases produces similar results. For the sake of overfitting, I tested an ARIMA (1,1,1) model for both countries' data as well; applying this model, the riots coefficient is still positive and statistically significant, however, the Portmanteau test falls outside the confidence bands. I therefore opted for an ARIMA (0,1,1) model, which diagnostics indicate is the most appropriate.

¹⁴ When expressed in thousands, GDP has a positive coefficient of 0.4.

¹⁵ Not shown in table.

of protest in the following year. Controlling for GDP and unemployment fluctuations, each riot in a given year is associated with 0.56 additional nonviolent demonstrations in the following year. The exogenous factors have no statistical impact on the model. Unlike the linear regression results, the ARIMA model is not statistically significant when reversed, meaning nonviolent demonstrations have no significant effect on the number of riots in the following year.

Table 3. Riots and Nonviolent Demonstrations in the US, 1946-2017

	<u>OLS</u>	<u>ARIMA (0,1,1)</u>
Riots	1.02*** (0.17)	0.56*** (0.11)
GDP (per capita)	0.00*** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Unemployment	-2.56 (0.98)	-0.64 (2.08)
Observations	72	71
R2	0.45	
Adj R2	0.43	

*** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

Shocks to riots and to nonviolent demonstrations occur in different proportions at times, but in nearly all cases they rise and fall contemporaneously. There are almost no instances of a shock to one variable in isolation from the other (see Figure 1). It is important to consider the time-frame of the data when interpreting these results, but increases in mobilization of each type of collective action tend to occur in spikes (as opposed to gradual fluctuations) and occur together, indicating that riots and nonviolent demonstrations in uprisings are related to each other and/or to similar causes, exogenous influences, and collective action frames. Put simply, moments of civilian uprising comprise both riots and nonviolent demonstrations.

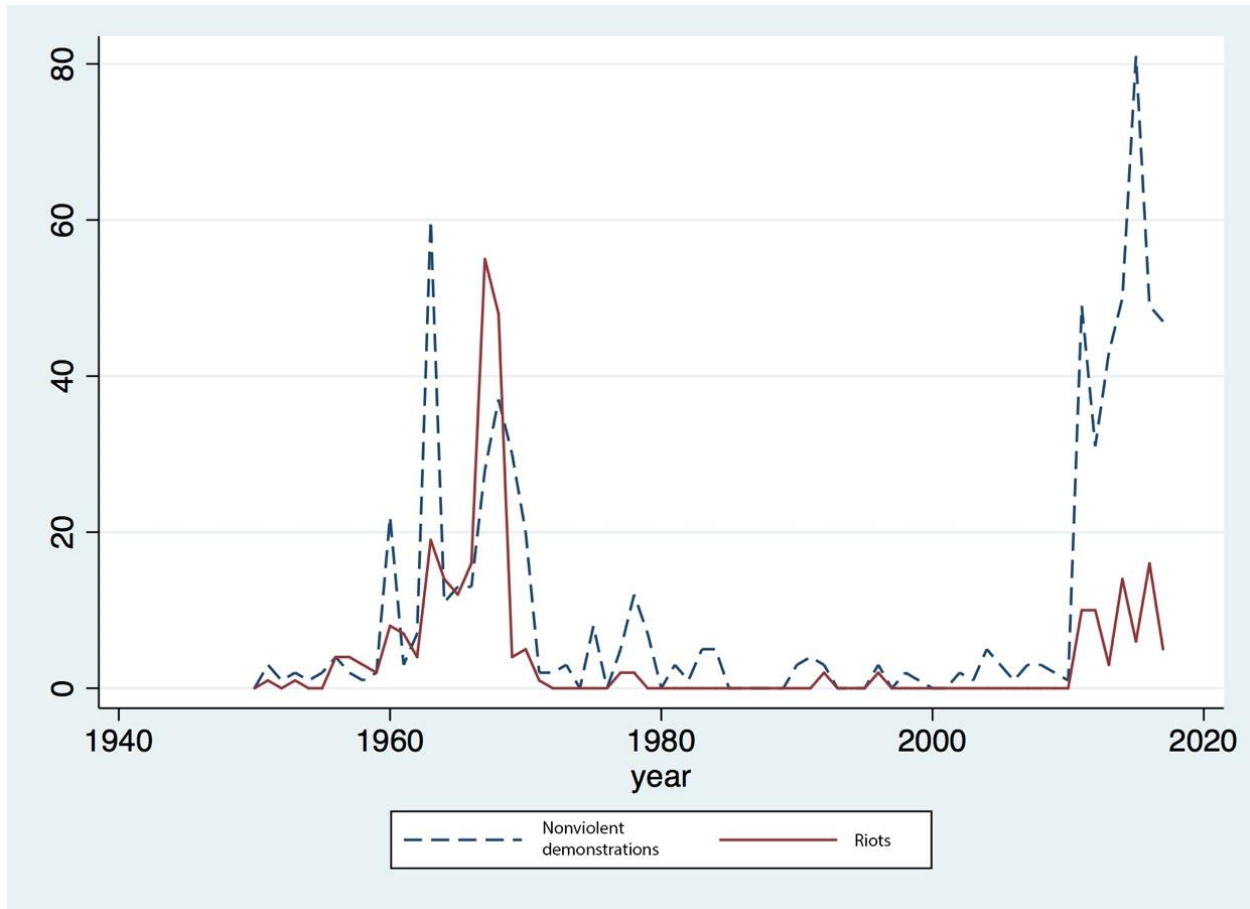


Figure 4. Riots and Nonviolent Demonstrations in the US, 1946-2017

3.3.3 Results: South Africa

Results from the linear regression show a positive, statistically significant relationship between the riot and nonviolent demonstration variables at the 99 percent confidence interval (see Table 2). Each riot is associated with an additional 0.72 nonviolent demonstrations within the same year. In this case, GDP is not statistically significant. As with the US, the linear regression works in both directions, i.e., nonviolent protest also leads to higher levels of riots, with the coefficient being slightly higher in this case (0.78). In South Africa, years with increased riots see increases

in nonviolent protest, and *vice versa*, again indicating that violent and nonviolent protest tend to move together in moments of uprising.

The time-series coefficient is positive and statistically significant at the 99 percent confidence interval (see Table 4), meaning that instances of riots are correlated with higher rates of protest in the following year. Controlling for GDP, each riot in a given year is associated with 0.72 additional nonviolent demonstrations in the following year – in this case the same coefficient as the linear regression. GDP has no statistical impact on the model. Like the linear regression results for this case, the ARIMA model is statistically significant when reversed; nonviolent demonstrations lead to 0.8 additional riots in the following year, and GDP is again not significant.

Table 4. Riots and Nonviolent Demonstrations in South Africa, 1946-2017

	OLS	ARIMA
Riots	0.72*** (0.08)	0.72*** (0.05)
GDP (per capita)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Observations	72	71
R2	0.57	
Adj R2	0.56	

*** *Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)*

The fact that the South Africa results are statistically significant in both directions makes sense when the data is viewed graphically (see Figure 2). In South Africa, shocks to riots and to nonviolent demonstrations are so closely associated in most instances they essentially move together. In some instances, the peak of a spike in the nonviolent demonstration variable follows the peak of a spike in the riot variable, while in other instances a peak in riots follows a peak of nonviolent demonstrations; the largest shocks to both variables occur in the same annual time frame. Again, it is abundantly clear that moments of civilian uprising, i.e., shocks to either variable, involve both riots and nonviolent demonstrations.

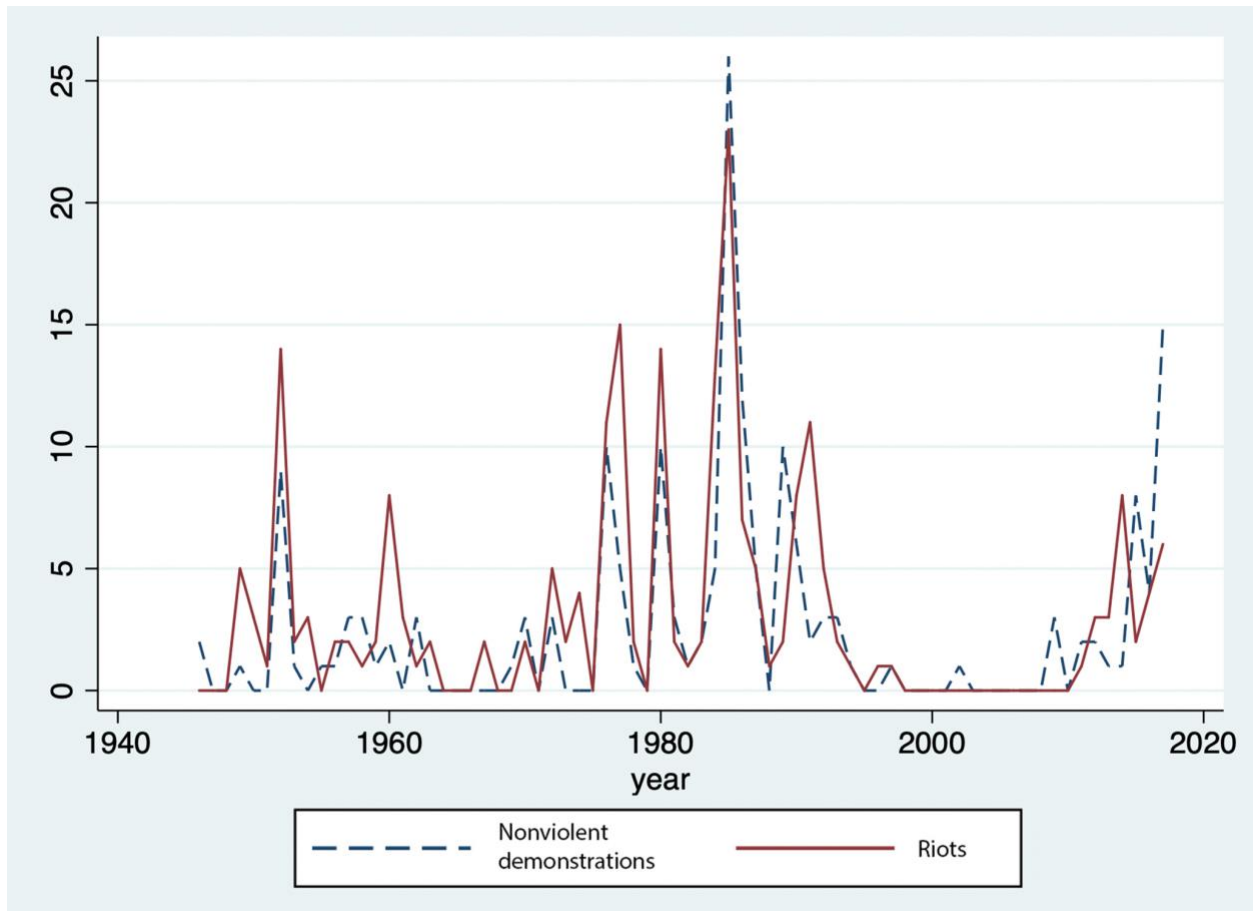


Figure 5. Riots and Nonviolent Demonstrations in South Africa, 1946-2017

In both the US and South Africa, linear regression shows a statistically significant and positive relationship between riots and nonviolent demonstrations within the same year, and time-series analysis of annual data reveals that riots are associated with increases in nonviolent demonstrations in the following year. According to this data, *riots do not demobilize movements, but in fact in the aggregate are associated with increased mobilization.*

3.4 The Mobilizing Effect of Riots

Civil resistance theory holds that violent actions should demobilize movements, but statistically speaking, in the US and South Africa violent protest is associated with higher levels of nonviolent protest. In this next section, I will demonstrate how violent protest actions can be productively analyzed using some of the dynamics that civil resistance studies has proposed.

In the context of unarmed social movements, riots are not only common, but they can be accurately and effectively analyzed in the same strategic framework as nonviolent repertoires. It is not simply a matter of riots being “in between” nonviolent action and warfare on a two-dimensional spectrum of collective political violence; rather, violent protest actions are simply additional components to the assembly of collective actions that makes up civil resistance movements. Riots as protest actions fit into the civil resistance framework in every way except for their physical destructiveness. While the material and experiential conditions differ for more and less violent forms of unarmed demonstration, a protest that turns violent does not convert an instance of civil resistance into an instance of armed struggle. Contrary to the belief that violent actions undermine the logic of civil resistance, three main concepts in civil resistance theory according to Kurt Schock (2013) – *mobilization*, *resilience*, and *leverage* – as well as two concepts which could be grouped under leverage but involve their own dynamics – *the backfiring effect* and political *polarization* – are all enhanced by making unarmed violence legible within movement repertoires.

Mobilization: One of Chenoweth and Stephan’s foremost findings is the importance of mass participation for campaign wins. Though they acknowledge that the quality and diversity of participation is important (2011:39-40), according to their research, numbers are the primary indicator of success. No campaign that mobilized at least 3.5% of a national population failed to

achieve its maximalist goals (Chenoweth 2017a) – a number that has been widely popularized to the point that it is repeated *ad nauseum* among some circles of activists. Importantly, participation in a campaign is not the same as public opinion about a campaign. Chenoweth and Stephan claim to measure “active and observable engagement of individuals in collective action,” not public opinion polls (2011:30). Chenoweth and Stephan’s arguments for why violence reduces active participation, such as the need for strenuous physical training, the hardships of commitment to violent struggle, and moral barriers to using violence (2011:36-37), apply far more to armed insurgencies than to protestor violence. Participation is not a monolithic feature of movements, however; there are multiple forms of participation and various, fluctuating structural and systemic constraints and opportunities that impact participation, requiring great awareness and tactical flexibility on the part of activists in order to successfully navigate (Polletta 2016). Riots might frighten some people away from participation in nonviolent actions, but they might also politicize people and rouse them to action.

The Iranian Revolution, which has been seen as an early forerunner to 21st century civil resistance revolutions (Foran 2003), involved at least 23 riots between 1977 and 1979 in CNTS data. Importantly, this violence was not a separate guerrilla insurgency or radical flank, but rather took the form of unarmed street violence *as* civil resistance (Kurzman 2004:69). According to Karen Rasler’s event-level analysis of the Iranian Revolution, 44 percent of protest actions in 1977 and 1978 were violent (1996:137). Nevertheless, the Iranian Revolution mobilized an unprecedented 10 percent or more of the country’s population (Kurzman 2004:121). Neil Ketchley’s work on the 2011 Revolution in Egypt, discussed further below, shows that participation in nonviolent mobilizations *increased* following the outbreak of riots (2017:47). While violence might indeed reduce movement participation in some circumstances, there are also

reasons to believe riots could have negligible or positive impacts on movement participation in other cases. Anecdotal evidence suggests this variation exists even in countries like the US, where riots are roundly rejected in mainstream media as illegitimate forms of protest: the flames, concussion grenades, and property destruction that greeted Donald Trump's 2016 inauguration did not appear to reduce participation in the Women's March the following day, which was perhaps the largest nonviolent march in US history (Chenoweth and Pressman 2016). Likewise with both discernable waves of the Movement for Black Lives, which began with riots in Ferguson and Minneapolis, respectively, both followed by the escalation and spread of mostly nonviolent actions.

Resilience. Resilience refers to activists' ability to weather repression, recover, and adapt (Shock 2013). While a traditional social movement studies approach might hold that a movement's resilience is correlated with its ability to mobilize resources (McCarthy and Zald 1973) and exploitable political opportunities (Tarrow 1998), civil resistance scholars have tied resilience to a movement's ability to innovate and vary actions in a way that outflanks authorities, undermines a government's control, and drains the regime's legitimacy (Nepstad 2015b; Shock 2005). Put another way, movements are more resilient when they employ a *diversity of tactics*. In the case of Egypt in 2011, tactical flexibility between more and less violent collective actions was able to generate a revolutionary situation within weeks in a country that had experienced little political change in decades (Ketchley 2017).

There are certainly reasons to believe that unarmed violence limits a campaign's resilience. Violent actions often carry heavier legal penalties, and engaging in them can expose activists to enhanced repression, protracted and expensive legal cases, and so forth. Beyond the tactical cost/benefit though, there may be significant *emotional* benefits to riots, both for participants and

onlookers, which strategically enhance a movement's overall resilience (see Johnston 2014). Emotion has often been starkly juxtaposed with rationality in scholarly discussion of social movements (and in the social sciences in general), but "rational action involves underlying commitments that are best rendered through an emotional lens and vice versa" (Seferiades and Johnston 2012:7-8). The possibility that riots can have an empowering effect on movements, serving an iconographic function that could "boost morale and enhance the heroism of radicals" (Ackerman, Bartkowski, and DuVall 2014) should not be discounted. The phenomenological impact of participation in or observation of physically confrontational protests is easily overlooked in studies that focus on short-term political outcomes, but might be salient for movement trajectories. The following two chapters are dedicated to exploring this, and what previous research there is into the political-emotional experience of riots speaks to this point as well; Javier Auyero (2003:170) quotes an activist in Argentina recounting how participation in a riot had transformed her from a "beaten down" woman who had taken "thirty-six years of crap" into a "commando woman" who was ready to take action.

Leverage: To many social movement studies and civil resistance scholars, a movement's leverage is people's collective ability to withdraw support from a regime and disrupt the status quo, imposing sanctions on the target (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011:18; Piven and Cloward 1978; Schock 2013). Put simply, the leverage of revolutions and social movements alike hinges on activists' disruptive capacity. In the civil resistance framework, riots can be understood as a radical disruption of the civic norm, or "withdrawal of cooperation in the routines of civil life" (Piven 2006:37). In and of itself, the assertion that riots are disruptive is likely an uncontroversial one, which is part of the point – it is clear to all that riots are disruptive. Of course, just because violent protests are disruptive does not mean that nonviolent tactics cannot be. However, many standard

tactics that are considered nonviolent by government and mass media, that is to say, the most affirmed forms of protest, are very often *not disruptive*. These “performances of *potential* disruption – like peaceful protests, pre-arranged business-union ‘scheduled strikes,’ or even petitions and grievances – ultimately derive their leverage from the threat of actual, material disruption” (Meckfessel 2017:16-17, emphasis his).

Seferiades and Johnston (2012) argue that the interplay between violent collective actions and more conventional nonviolent approaches to social movement organizing has to do with the increasing difficulty movements have disrupting oppressive systems. In order to be effective, social movements must be “sufficiently pungent to disrupt the workings of the system” (ibid:5). However, protest organizations, especially in Western democracies, often deploy non-disruptive repertoires which might have the appearance of contention but which nevertheless fail to exert meaningful pressure on authorities, creating a *disruptive deficit* (ibid). Studies have found the majority of protests in the US leading up to the Twenty-First Century to be non-disruptive, routine, and initiated by the advantaged (McAdam et al. 2005). The disruptive deficit of modern conventional protest, in tandem with the neoliberal capacity to “manage the marginalized” (Katz 2008) and coopt dissent, produces a vacuum likely to be filled by political violence. In the face of decrees by professional activists and social movement organizations that all participants must adhere to strictly nonviolent forms of protest (see Schneider 2012), especially when it is clear to the aggrieved that these forms are ineffectual, some turn to violent forms, which, while less respectable and perhaps less strategically-oriented, are at least manifestly disruptive. As Seferiades and Johnston put it, “in seeking conciliation through exclusively conventional protest, institutionalized claimants end up inadvertently fomenting the kind of political violence they most dread and despise” (2012:6). Regardless of whether or not rioters in any given instance see

themselves and their actions as political, riots can be incorporated by consciously political movement forces as a form of tactical escalation and as a threat. In the words of Frances Fox Piven, riots “give muscle to the demands” of a movement.¹⁶

Central to many of the arguments that violent tactics hinder movement success, including arguments around mobilization, resilience, and leverage, is the logic of the *backfiring effect* (Sharp 1973:657). Civil resistance theory claims around the backfiring effect have to do with the juxtaposition of violent repression to nonviolent protest, thereby shifting public opinion in favor of the protestors. Violence on the part of protestors, the argument goes, both increases repression and decreases public support. Problems for this narrative include the presumption that movement success requires each action leading to increased public sympathy, the reliance on media to represent protest actions accurately, and the systemic bias that likely plays into mass perception of protest (Meckfessel 2016:190-3). Political scientist Omar Wasow recently found that riots in 1968 were responsible for the presidential election of Richard Nixon by driving white moderates to vote for a “law and order” agenda (Wasow 2020). This research has since achieved a great deal of publicity online in nonviolence circles and in fact was cited by Chenoweth years before it was published.¹⁷ Despite the hay that has been made of these findings – for example George Lakey using Wasow’s results to argue that ongoing protester violence in Portland, OR could end up being responsible for Trump’s continued presidency¹⁸ – what Wasow actually finds is that in areas that are at least 90 percent white, the 1968 riots resulted in a very small (around two percent) loss of Democratic vote shares when compared with a fantasy “counterfactual scenario that King had not been assassinated on April 4, 1968, and 137 violent protests had not occurred in the immediate

¹⁶ Lecture in the Sociology Department of the University of Pittsburgh, March 26, 2015.

¹⁷ See Chenoweth 2017b.

¹⁸ See Lakey (2020).

wake of his death” (Wasow 2020: 649). To say nothing of the implication that movement strategy should be oriented around two percent of voters in white neighborhoods, and with all due respect to predictive statistical modeling, if we’re going to talk about made-up counterfactual scenarios we should be able to come up with something more interesting than a marginal difference in white voting blocs. It is not at all surprising that widespread uprisings could lead some people who perceive themselves as having something to lose to side with authorities. Indeed, effective polarization, discussed below, requires such a sacrifice in the short term.

The backfiring phenomenon likely has more to do with preexisting disposition toward the forces of repression, the appearance of disproportionate or illegitimate repression, or agreement or disagreement with the underlying grievance than it does with absolute nonviolence on the part of the protestors. It is uncontroversial that protestor violence can be expected to increase the likelihood and severity of repression, but while some have argued that repression demobilizes activists (e.g. Oberschall 1973; Olson 1965), other research prior to this dissertation demonstrates that repression can have an overall positive impact on mobilizations (e.g., Rasler 1996). A violent response from police can diffuse activists, harden their resolve, create disillusionment about the established order among onlookers, and set off “micromobilization” processes that expand opposition to a regime (ibid). Riots can thus generate a similar backfiring effect as nonviolent protest.

Chenoweth and Stephan note that one of the pivotal moments of the Iranian Revolution was sparked by a protestor throwing a brick through a window, an action that triggered intensified repression, which in turn led to increased mobilization (2011:103). They suggest the involvement of an *agent provocateur*, but nevertheless describe the action in terms of its positive impact on movement growth. Likewise, riots in Ferguson and Baltimore did not appear to demobilize

nonviolent Black Lives Matter actions, but rather added to the resurgent moral crisis of institutional racism in the US, as well as to popular discomfort with militarized police forces. Regarding the 2020 wave of the Movement for Black Lives, a Monmouth University poll found that 54 percent of US Americans believe the burning of the Minneapolis police station was a justified response to the murder of George Floyd (*Newsweek* 2020).

Like Chenoweth and Stephan's suggestion about an *agent provocateur* in Iran, police and liberal groups were quick to blame property destruction in Minneapolis and elsewhere on outside agitators. And like the Iranian Revolution, when it comes to the uprising these actions sparked, in a sense it does not matter who threw the first rock or set the first fire – the popularizing effect is the same; *agent provocateurs* can make miscalculations. When nonviolent actionists accuse violent protestors of undermining the backfiring effect, they are saying that protestor violence reduces the likelihood that the average onlooker will sympathize with the protest and/or that it drives popular opinion away from the movement. In fact, both protestor violence and repression can have impacts in both demobilizing and mobilizing directions. In other words, violent actions are polarizing.

Polarization – the “widening of political and social space between claimants in a contentious episode” (Tilly 2004: 222) – might be interpreted as a reduction in mainstream public support for a time, but it is also closely linked to “the possibilities of articulated rebellion” (Esteban and Ray 1994) and leads to higher levels of civil conflict (Østby 2008). This type of polarization is in fact key to the logic of direct action in civil resistance, powerfully explained in Dr. King's famous Letter from a Birmingham Jail (1963) – direct action forces people to take sides. Indeed, a recent study found that riots decrease the number of people who have no opinion on a political issue (Caren et al. 2017). For the population at large, riots are exciting and frightening and create

an atmosphere of uncertainty (Jasper and Thomson 2016). In some circumstances this might have an overall demobilizing affect. In others, it can lead to the type of polarization that clarifies social-political cleavages, galvanizes supporters, and ultimately increases mobilization.

Writing of the French Revolution, Markoff describes how peasant insurrections were no military threat to the vast French war machine but rather represented a threat to the “moral unity of army and nation,” making them distinctly efficacious (1995: 379). The physical challenge to normalcy and authority involves different subjective and material dynamics for a riotous crowd than it does for a less violent one, but nevertheless it typically does not present a straightforward military threat to armed police.¹⁹ Riots might feel intimidating, but the police face a similar dilemma with most riots as they do with peaceful protests in how much force they are willing to apply in an attempt to end the disruption – or risk spreading it. The decisions police make in terms of how they will engage rioters occur at all levels of the chain of command, including both rational and emotional considerations such as a fear of mobilizations escalating, fear of being physically hurt, desire or hesitance to physically hurt others, commitment to following orders, etc. These considerations are common to both nonviolent and violent civilian actions, although emotions and consequences of decision-making are palpably higher during violent protests.

Movements are fluid, evolving and adapting tactical repertoires over time (Tilly 2006; Wada 2016), in different places, and between different groups connected to or operating alongside one another. Schneider (2014) describes how many activists in the US who were mobilized by the “ghetto riots” in the 1960s later joined and led nonviolent social movements – a phenomenon we

¹⁹ This was not always the case in the way it is today. In previous eras, a riotous crowd could possess weapons approximating those held by soldiers and potentially pose a military threat to state forces, even when not organized in a martial formation. However, this possibility has faded as weapons technology and state control have expanded (see Robinson 2014).

will see reflected with anarchists in the following chapter. In his work on local protests in northwestern Argentina, Auyero (2003:136) describes a process of increasingly violent mobilizations alongside nonviolent protest actions, in one case culminating in a major riot, through which a group of claimants began to act as a “we” and became “the people”— a liminal collective identity that constitutes the birth of a revolutionary subject (see Bamyeh 2013). Violent protest actions might thus be important to civil resistance movements from strategic, symbolic, and subjective standpoints.

Based on his study of social protest in the US, Gamson (1975:81) argues that the use of violence frequently coincided with success, concluding: “Violence should be viewed as an instrumental act, aimed at furthering the purposes of the group that uses it when they have some reason to think it will help their cause.” There are, of course, many reasons to believe that violent tactics can hurt movements, which I have reviewed. Like any tactic, riots and unarmed violence are likely to have potential benefits and potential costs for movements, depending on context and on a variety of factors. In order to effectively analyze the impact they have in specific civil resistance movements, violent actions must be incorporated into the overarching analytical framework. Below I briefly discuss a single case study in order to highlight the contradictions imbedded in the nonviolence lens for understanding mass protests, and to more fully flesh out the importance of incorporating riots and protester violence into analyses of unarmed uprisings.

3.5 Conclusion

The vast majority of civil resistance campaigns are accompanied by major riots. The NAVCO 1.1 dataset, the most prominent empirical validation of nonviolent conflict, is riddled

with inconsistencies and what appear to be significant coding errors. Furthermore, the dataset is not built to measure violence versus nonviolence but rather warfare versus civilian mobilizations. Even if the data it contains were flawless, NAVCO speaks to the comparative success-rates of protest movements and intra-state war. The dataset tells us nothing at all about unarmed violence within protest movements, making it all but irrelevant to debates among activists today. Violent actions are neither uncommon in, nor incompatible with, civil resistance. Furthermore, whereas dominant theories have argued that riots have a demobilizing impact on nonviolent protests, statistical analysis of riots and nonviolent demonstrations alongside one another in two countries demonstrates that riots can have an *overall mobilizing effect*.

Violent actions are common in civil resistance movements, and there are empirical and anecdotal reasons to believe that they are not necessarily detrimental, but rather interact with campaigns in complex and varying ways depending on circumstances – like any other set of tactics. If the moral argument against the use of violent action is set aside, there is no remaining reason to omit unarmed violence from strategic analyses of civilian-based movements. In order to more accurately examine and theorize social movement dynamics, the concept of civil resistance must be disentangled from strict nonviolence and operationally redefined to encompass a broader scope of collective actions, including riots and targeted property destruction. Ignoring low-level violent actions undermines analyses of real-world movements, and including them can actually enhance the analytic tools that civil resistance studies proposes. In civil resistance analysis, violence should be treated as “one of several forms of confrontation within a wider *repertoire of actions and strategies*” (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014, emphasis theirs). In the following chapter, I will explore the need to incorporate unarmed violent actions into movement analyses from a broader perspective, challenging the very nature of the violence/nonviolence binary.

4.0 Paradigm Shift: The Age of Street Rebellion

In this chapter, I examine the false dichotomy of violence/nonviolence as a paradigm, using an analogy to Kuhn's theory of scientific revolutions. This lens focuses on the development of the violence/nonviolence dichotomy as a product of the particular era in which it emerged, that is, a previous era of revolutionary political struggle, and the framework's resulting inability to accurately capture the realities of social movement formations today. Strategic nonviolence as proposed by Sharp was only one expression of the idea of nonviolent struggle, and though it became the most prominent for movements, it developed with a previous era's language for describing the methodologies of revolutionary social movements. When armed struggle was the standard for revolutionary conflict, the language of "nonviolence" as an alternative to the "violence" of warfare was broadly useful. Today, when the standard for political struggle is civilian uprisings in urban centers, the language of violence and nonviolence within civil struggle no longer describes the same distinction. Explicating this transition involves exploring the similarities and differences between strategic logics of guerrilla war and nonviolent rebellion on a grand strategy level. I will then use secondary sources to demonstrate how the categories of violence and nonviolence have shifted in our era with a discussion of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, an iconic uprising and a "critical case" for which there exists excellent existing quantitative and qualitative research.¹ In order to understand contemporary movements we must make unarmed, violent actions legible as part of the civil resistance repertoire. I argue that the categorical differences that the violence/nonviolence dichotomy attempt to describe can today be more accurately framed as

¹ See George and Bennett (2005).

the difference between armed *martial struggle* and unarmed *civil struggle*, and that this analytic switch allows for a richer exploration of civilian-based uprisings – and enhanced possibilities for movements to understand their own power.

4.1 The Violence/Nonviolence Paradigm

Thomas Kuhn describes a paradigm shift as a change in worldview (Kuhn 1962). Society places importance on certain problems based on historical conditions and the needs of the time. In the search for answers, scientists end up with a system – a paradigm – for interpreting salient questions and providing the needed answers. Kuhn calls a paradigmatic lens, or the standardized lens through which problems are viewed in order to find solutions, the “normal science” of a given era. When eras shift, new questions emerge, and anomalies threaten the coherence of normal science, many experts remain stuck in the previous worldview. It is often easier to ignore that which does not appear to fit the model or attempt to force the new reality to fit the modes of thinking that we are comfortable with than it is to jettison the analytic system itself.

The broad question of how ordinary people can collectively resist oppression and successfully topple brutal regimes has likely been around as long as the state. The particular conditions of different historical eras, however, have shaped this question in different ways at different times. Kuhn himself analogized the scientific revolution to the political revolution (1962: 93). For the bulk of the Twentieth Century, beginning around the 1930s, the standard for revolutionary movements was armed struggle (see Goodwin 2001). The archetype of the revolutionary was Che Guevara – the scrappy guerrilla soldier fighting in the remote mountains or the jungles. It was in this Twentieth Century context that the violence/nonviolence dichotomy and

the terms of the strategic debate between them emerged. While guerrilla war in the model of national liberation insurgencies was the standard for revolutionary struggle, many social movement mobilizations were distinctly different; they were civilian-based, unarmed, sometimes explicitly eschewed violent action, and were organized around a fundamentally different logic from that of warfare. For both analysts and participants, the problem was how to understand the difference between these basic types.

Strategic analysis of classic guerrilla war theory (from Mao, Giap, and Guevara), and nonviolent struggle theory (from Gandhi) reveal the traction that the terms “violent” and “nonviolent” used to have. As collective strategies designed to liberate people from oppressive regimes, guerrilla war and nonviolent struggle actually share many commonalities (see Carter 2012). While Giap considered having a *just cause* the key to a revolutionary movement, Gandhi believed the key was *Truth force* – starting points which are not so dissimilar. In fact, guerrilla theory and Gandhi’s nonviolent theory bear more similarities than the violence/nonviolence framework as it is discussed today would lead one to think. The target regimes that Mao and Guevara penned their strategic theories in reference to – the Japanese occupation of China and the Batista dictatorship in Cuba, respectively – both commanded apparently powerful militaries, but also contained internal contradictions open to exploitation. Specifically, both regimes were oppressive and unpopular in occupied areas and neither had the capacity to observe or control large swaths of their claimed territory. Gandhi’s strategy was likewise based on a social power analysis focusing on the material contradictions of British colonial rule, namely its reliance on the complicity and participation of Indian workers and consumers (Ackerman and Duvall 2000). Both theories of struggle base their strategic logic in a material analysis of political conditions and on the exploitation of structural weaknesses embedded in militarily formidable regimes.

Civil resistance scholars claim that mass popular support and the backfiring effect of government repression are aspects of nonviolent strategies (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Chenoweth and Schock 2015), but in fact both are primary factors for success in guerrilla war as well. In guerrilla strategy, insurgents operate in remote, rural areas that are all but out of reach for the state, in order to provide space to organize and time to establish trust and rapport with local populations. According to the strategy, in the initial phase of struggle guerrillas initiate limited hit and run attacks and ambushes, but avoid open battle with government forces at all costs, preferring to retreat or melt into the local population when confronted. Government forces, eager to eliminate the insurgency but unable to distinguish militants from civilians or supporters from anyone else, are forced to retaliate against locals in guerrilla base areas more or less indiscriminately. However, the repression only validates the existence of the liberation movement and convinces regular people that the regime is their enemy. In this way, guerrilla strategy exploits the adversary's perceived strength by maneuvering the state into over-applying violent force, thereby driving popular support toward the rebels (see Arreguín-Toft 2001). In the second phase of struggle, base areas are developed into counter-states, operating in parallel to the government and prefiguring revolutionary governance, while guerrilla forces build their capacity. Only in the third and final phase do rebels command the equipment and forces to engage the state, which at that point would be faltering in their legitimacy, in conventional war.²

Importantly, while many guerrilla movements have failed to make it to phase three, those that made it to phase two have demonstrated remarkable staying power, typically either ending in negotiated settlement with the government or hanging on in de facto stalemate. This tells us two

² In addition to Mao (1937), Giap (1961), and Guevara (1963), see also Taber (1972).

things: first, popular support is indeed a powerful element of movement success, but armed struggles have been able to generate incredibly dogged popular support where they have been able to carve out autonomous regions. Second, since the “backfiring mechanism” is central to the development of base areas, this phenomenon is therefore not necessarily tied to nonviolent methods, but rather seems to have more to do with the perception of unjust or disproportionate repressive force on the part of authorities than with the absence of violence on the part of activists.³

For Gandhi, meanwhile, forcing authorities to violently repress protestors through disruptive nonviolent disobedience would eventually win the hearts of the authorities themselves, convincing them of their subjects’ humanity and of the inhumanity of the colonial situation. For civil resistance theorists, the real strength in this aspect of Gandhi’s strategy lay in the popular sympathy generated for a movement when police are seen violently attacking people who clearly refuse to do harm in return. As the theory of nonviolent direct action goes, by disrupting the status quo nonviolently, protestors put police in a “decision dilemma” (Boyd and Russell 2012), whereby they are obliged to use force in order to end the disruption, but where that repressive force will backfire and generate increased support for the movement. In other words, both guerrilla war and nonviolent civil resistance strategies aim to achieve leverage over their more powerful enemies by putting them in *zugzwang*. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, both revolutionary guerrilla theory and Gandhi’s nonviolent strategy also had deeper *theories of change* for society.

With similarities between classic guerrilla and nonviolent struggle in mind, the major difference between these two different approaches to political revolution has to do with their respective dispositions toward the use of violence to achieve their goals. One strategy relies in the

³ For further examples, see Lindekilde (2014) on the backfiring mechanism as applied to terrorism and Siebens (2015) on the backfiring effect of foreign state intervention in intrastate conflict.

end on military force; the other relies on non-cooperation and civil disobedience (Carter 2012: 27-29). In the past it therefore made a certain kind of sense to distinguish between the military strategy and its civilian-based alternative in terms of *violent struggle* and *nonviolent struggle*, respectively. Sharp launched civil resistance theory by exploring the dynamics of the latter type, which at the time had received much less attention in terms of strategy dynamics than had the dominant model of revolutionary warfare. But despite supposedly jettisoning the moral pacifism, throughout his career Sharp maintained the notion that nonviolent action is fundamentally “contrasted” with violent action, and that “[t]hese are the two main classes of ultimate sanctions” available to a movement (2012: 194). Civil resistance studies therefore grew from the idea that “violent struggle” and “nonviolent struggle” are not only different in terms of their strategic approaches to social change, but that they are ideal types that are inherently antagonistic (Schock 2013). Faced with social science that discussed violence as being a crucial component to revolutionary struggle, civil resistance scholars attempted to demonstrate the superior efficacy of nonviolent action compared with violent action, leading to the violence-vs.-nonviolence debate as we know it today, and resulting in empirical research projects such as the NAVCO dataset.

Sharp is correct that Gandhi sought to leverage material power via nonviolent noncooperation, but Gandhi’s real theory of change ultimately relied on changing hearts and minds on all sides of the conflict. In other words, by distancing their approach from this element of the theory, strategic nonviolentists actually jettisoned the mechanism by which nonviolent struggle was meant to change society for the better, leaving only a narrow toolkit for pursuing short-term political change. That strategic nonviolence became the most popular version of nonviolence theory exacerbated the limitations associated with the dichotomous language of violence/nonviolence.

Previously, the broad differentiation between “violent” and “nonviolent” forms did not answer all questions time perfectly, but it was a useful shorthand for distinguishing between two different approaches to socio-political revolution. Still, even in its time, the dichotomy concealed a great deal of salient information about both methods of resistance, which are all the more visible from our perspective now. Not only is violent protest common in civilian mobilizations that challenge power, guerrilla war strategy also necessarily includes a great deal of activity that does not involve direct violence. Guerrilla war certainly involves violence, but calling it violent specifically as opposed to nonviolent encourages a superficial view of that form of struggle as purely and completely violent. In reality, contrary to the simplistic view that participation in guerrilla war necessitates “taking up weapons and killing” (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 34-38), active participation in guerrilla warfare can include sheltering, feeding, supplying, informing, spreading propaganda, functions of governance in captured territories, organizing allied student or workers groups in cities, legal solidarity work, fundraising, or simply contributing actively in the daily life of guerrilla base areas. Accordingly, these aspects of “violent” struggle have received appropriate attention in many studies of guerrilla war.⁴

If “violent” struggle relies upon the logic of war, but also necessarily involves a great deal of actions that are not violent, what is a “nonviolent” movement? In civil resistance studies, nonviolent actions are understood as actions taken by groups and individuals that do not injure or threaten to injure persons, and many scholars and activists also insist that to be called nonviolent, actions must not destroy property as means to achieve their political goals (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 13-17; Sharp 2012: 193-194). Some see this negative approach as overly simplistic

⁴ For vivid accounts of life during guerrilla struggle, see for example Anderson (2004), Becerra (2017), and Roy (2011).

in that it fails to consider “constructive nonviolence” and “hides the multidimensional character of nonviolent struggle” (Vinthagen 2015: 101), but nevertheless the definition of nonviolent action as action that does not harm or threaten persons or property is widely accepted and can be easily operationalized.

Social movements involve collective claims and sustained campaigns aimed at authorities, and that employ public displays and repertoires of contention in pursuit of those claims (Staggenborg 2007; Tilly 2004, 2006). Movements are understood to have *repertoires of contention*, meaning the various familiar tools that are available to activists to pursue collective claims, or the recognizable things movement actors do to demonstrate their existence and pursue their goals (Tilly 2006). Social movement repertoires can be rigid (i.e., the same types of action used over and over) or more flexible (i.e., types of action are not closely linked to one another), meaning that different types of collective actions associated with similar claims against authorities can be understood as part of the same social movement (ibid; Wada 2015), regardless of whether or not all participants approve of each other’s methods. So, is a nonviolent movement one that includes only nonviolent repertoires, or can nonviolent movements involve violent actions?

According to Chenoweth and Stephan, a campaign can technically be classified as nonviolent if it is *primarily* nonviolent (2011: 12), implying that a campaign can be considered nonviolent even if its participants use some violence. Indeed, as we have seen, if the category of “nonviolent movement” were to be restricted to only movements with repertoires that included exclusively and incontrovertibly nonviolent actions, there would be very few nonviolent movements to study. Specific actions can certainly be nonviolent using the definition applied by nonviolence studies, but the idea that entire movements can be nonviolent is a fallacy. The nonviolent movement has become a kind of “master frame” (Benford and Snow 2000); based on

an idealization, but nevertheless widely understood by activists and onlookers alike, giving it great rhetorical significance.

Beyond the evidence presented in the previous chapter, contemporary examples of the failure of civil resistance-as-nonviolence paradigm abound. Consider attempting to study the initial wave of the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movements without discussing the 2015 uprising in Baltimore following the police murder of Freddy Gray. Black Lives Matter had promoted disruptive but nonviolent protest, and the city of Baltimore never had an official BLM chapter.⁶ But the Baltimore uprising corresponded to the same collective action frame as BLM, which started as a Twitter hashtag in 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman for fatally shooting Trayvon Martin, and was popularized after the 2014 police killings of (and subsequent acquittals of police for killing) Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and many others. The Baltimore uprising was widely perceived as part of the BLM social movement (see Rickford 2016), and was a flashpoint for “official” – and nonviolent – BLM mobilizations around the country. The impact that the Baltimore uprising had on the movement can be debated, but either way it would be misleading to skip over those events altogether in telling the story of Black Lives Matter. Imagine discussing the more recent wave of the Movement for Black Lives, which escalates as I write, becoming perhaps the largest protest movement in US history,⁷ without talking about the burning of the Minneapolis police station that directly followed George Floyd’s murder.

⁵ See Garza (2014).

⁶ See: <http://blacklivesmatter.com/find-chapters/> Accessed September 10, 2017.

⁷ See Buchanan, Larry, Quoc Trung Bui, and Jugal K. Patel. 2020. Black Lives Matter May Be the Largest Movement in US History. *The New York Times*. July 3. (URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/07/03/us/george-floyd-protests-crowd-size.html>) Accessed July 4, 2020.

Or consider the protests that marked Donald Trump's inauguration in Washington, DC. On January 20, 2017, a coalition of protestors, some using the hashtag #DisruptJ20,⁸ organized permitted and unpermitted marches and rallies throughout the city and blockaded entrances to the inauguration ceremony. The different actions involved differing levels of contention, in some cases including low-level violence that resulted in smashed bank windows and a torched limousine. In other instances on the same day, protestors engaged in disruptive nonviolent direct action, while others still rallied in a park and marched along a permitted route. Police used pepper spray, "non-lethal" grenades, and rubber bullets on demonstrators, injuring many and eventually rounding up and arresting more than 200 protestors and journalists.⁹ The following day, the anti-Trump action dubbed the Women's March drew millions around the country, including perhaps 500,000 in Washington, DC.

Extrapolating from NAVCO and other civil resistance research, Chenoweth (2017) argued that the presence of protestor violence on January 20th would hurt the anti-Trump movement by diverting news coverage from nonviolent actions and reducing movement participation. However, there is no evidence that the images of inauguration protests that went viral worldwide would have had such reach without the broken windows, flames, and concussion grenades. In fact, research suggests that radical actions and property destruction are often helpful components in attracting media attention (McCarthy, McPhail, and Smith 1996). Neither did the violence on January 20 appear to reduce participation in the Women's March the following day, which was, at least until

⁸ See <http://www.disruptj20.org>. Accessed September 15, 2017.

⁹ See Vargas, Theresa, Taylor Hartz, and Peter Hermann. 2017. Inauguration protestors vandalize, set fires, try to disrupt Trump's oath, as police arrest more than 200. *The Washington Post*. January 20. (URL: https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/protesters-bring-shouts-skirmishes-and-shutdowns-to-inauguration-celebration/2017/01/20/00ea4c72-df11-11e6-acdf-14da832ae861_story.html?utm_term=.ecda7fa1a603) Accessed September 15, 2017.

June 2020, “likely the largest single-day demonstration in recorded US history” (Chenoweth and Pressman 2017). Pausing for the moment the argument over whether or not property destruction on J20 helped or hurt the Trump resistance, the evident co-presence of more and less violent actions in Washington, DC over that 24-hour or so period points to the thorough insufficiency of the violence/nonviolence framework in comprehending the real-world civil resistance repertoire during those unarmed, civilian protest actions.

Many analysts have struggled with how to account for the obvious reality that violent actions are a common occurrence in “nonviolent” movements. In some cases, such as the January 25 Revolution in Egypt (discussed in more detail below), some civil resistance scholars simply ignore the riots that accompanied more widely publicized nonviolent mobilizations (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2014; Gan 2013; Lawson 2015). In other cases, civil resistance scholars mention the presence of violent actions in passing but then proceed without engaging with them (e.g., Engler and Engler 2016; Paulson 2012). In an edited volume that defines civil resistance as synonymous with “non-violent” action (Roberts and Garton Ash 2009: 2), Williams’ chapter on the 1989 “Velvet Revolution” in Czechoslovakia includes “more confrontational” actions such as “pelting tanks with rocks and bottles” and using commandeered buses to barricade streets in what he calls “full scale civil resistance” (2009: 118-121). In his participant observation of nonviolent Palestinian mobilizations in the West Bank, Hølgit footnotes his inclusion of stone throwing as being within the nonviolent repertoire based on the context in which it takes place (2015: 5). Using standard social science and civil resistance studies definitions of collective political violence (e.g., Gamson 1975: 74; Sharp 2012: 307; Tilly 2003: 12), throwing rocks at people is a violent act. Or, at very least we should be able to agree that it is not a nonviolent act. However, despite the conceptual awkwardness, in the case of Palestinian resistance dominated by nonviolent action, a

civil resistance scholar deemed it necessary to force those actions into the repertoire of nonviolent civil resistance. Indeed, in NAVCO, the First Palestinian *Intifada* is classified as nonviolent because it was “relatively nonviolent,” despite stone throwing being an iconic tactic of that revolt (Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 19).

Social movement scholars have by and large adopted the violence/nonviolence binary as well, and between the 1970s and the past decade or so, few studies paid much attention to the role of unarmed collective violence in political struggles (Bosi, Demetriou, and Malthaner 2014: 1). Some have noted the “troublesome” terminology of the violence/nonviolence binary in the study of civil resistance movements (e.g., Markoff 2013: 235; Carter 2012; Roberts and Garton Ash 2009; Schock 2013), but in the absence of alternative terminology, most have persisted in using it anyway. Even when scholars attempt new terms, without a thorough critique of the violence/nonviolence framework itself, the binary reasserts itself. For example, Carter (2012) and Schock (2005) deploy the terms “unarmed resistance” and “unarmed insurrection,” respectively, which are intended to account for some repertoire flexibility around low-level violence, but both scholars also continue to use the term “nonviolent” as essentially synonymous. Meckfessel (2016) too uses the term “unarmed insurrection,” but his focus – rioting in the Occupy movement – is quite different from Schock’s, which is nonviolent civil resistance. Bjork-James (2020) uses “unarmed militancy” to describe the combination of peaceful methods with forceful confrontations between protesters and security forces in Bolivia, but then again, Dr. King’s methods have been described as “militant nonviolence” (e.g., Mathis 2018).

In his edited volume on *The Future of Revolutions* (2003), Foran and many contributing authors appear to wrestle with terminology to discuss what seem to be different types of movements with variously more and less violent aspects to them, but they too adopt the word

“nonviolent” to describe civilian-based revolts. Pinckney, in struggling to classify a civil resistance movement in which “violent unarmed clashes were endemic,” describes the 2005 “Tulip Revolution” in Kyrgyzstan as “barely nonviolent” (2016: 57) – an absurd term given the subject of a movement that clearly involved violence, but one which makes clear that the line between “violent” and “nonviolent” in civil resistance research is not drawn at the point when movement actors begin to use violent tactics. Indeed, the violence/nonviolence dichotomy has become so taken for granted that scholars such as Jack Goldstone use terms like “relatively non-violent” (2001: 141), while Asef Bayat can label Arab Spring participants as “non-violent rebels” (2017: 10) directly after recounting the early days of the Egyptian Revolution, which “saw the largest crowd in the nation’s streets, where protestors fought security forces, attacked police stations, burned government buildings, and chanted, ‘bread, freedom, justice’” (ibid: 7). The cracks in this paradigm have been growing, and amid globally shifting norms for social movements and revolutions, they are becoming unsustainable.

As Kuhn describes, anomalies in the normal science of an era build until the paradigm itself is called into question. And anomalies in the normal science of the violence/nonviolence paradigm have been noticeable for some time. Chabot and Sharifi (2013) problematize the violence/nonviolence dichotomy based on the violent outcomes that have often followed “successful” nonviolent uprisings – beginning, in point of fact, with India post-1947. Seferiades and Johnston (2012) analyze dynamics of rioting and protest violence in social movements with a focus on relational interactions between more and less violent elements of movements – a notable exception to the focus on tactics of war and terrorism in much of the literature on political violence. Johnston (2014) also identifies emotional and relational mechanisms associated with the escalation of political violence in movements. Meckfessel (2016) discusses the important role of riots, or

“unarmed insurrection,” in civil uprisings, and Ketchley’s study of the Egyptian Revolution (2017) makes a similar, more focused claim that violent protest in Egypt interacted symbiotically with nonviolent mobilizations to create conditions for Mubarak’s removal. Bray’s (2017) explication of the militant antifascist movement discusses the effective role that civil violence has played in leftist efforts to combat far right movements. Auyero’s (2003) excellent biographical history of contentious protests in northwestern Argentina brings out the social, political, and experiential dynamism in different types of disruptive action. It is past time to rethink the violence/nonviolence binary.

4.2 Times Change

Paradigms emerge because they solve certain problems that are deemed important particularly well at a particular time (Kuhn 1962: 23). The problem in this case is how to understand the difference between types of revolutionary social movements. For most of the Twentieth Century, the standard for revolutionary struggle was guerrilla warfare; its alternative was civil resistance. Since warfare necessarily involved the application of violence, and since early proponents of the alternative (i.e., Gandhi) were principled nonviolentists, the difference was understood as the difference between violence and nonviolence. This framework was based on the major philosophical and strategic difference between dominant models of these two strategies for collectively pursuing revolutionary change from below. It left some things out of the picture, but was useful insofar as it applied to those particular types of struggle in that particular era.

Today, the theoretical standard for revolutionary movements has shifted from rural guerrilla insurgencies to mass protest insurrections in city centers. Advances in surveillance and

military technology, increased state visibility in remote geographic areas of the world, the end of the Cold War, declining proportion of rural versus urban populations, and the deflation of ideological Marxism-Leninism-Maoism all contributed to the declining potential for revolutionary guerrilla war as it had been constituted a half-century ago (Goodwin 2001; Robinson 2014). Armed struggle for liberation has certainly not disappeared, with some decades-old guerrilla insurgencies hanging on in remote areas of places like India, Colombia, and the Philippines. More recently-launched armed campaigns, for example the Zapatistas in southern Mexico (Esteva 1999; Foran 2003) and the Rojava Revolution in northern Syria (Üstündağ 2016), are evolving in form and adopting a posture and strategy of armed self-defense rather than armed conquest of the state. Despite the waning feasibility of armed revolution, the capitalist world system, specifically its neoliberal variant, and authoritarian political regimes have continued to reproduce social tensions that produce revolutionary outbursts (Seferiades and Johnston 2012; Wallerstein 2004). In the neoliberal, urbanized Twenty-First Century, these outbursts have predominantly taken the form of civilian-based mass uprisings in urban centers (see Bayat 2017).

The face of the revolutionary is no longer the guerrilla in the mountains facing off against the army; it is the protestor in the streets facing off against lines of police. Whereas the image of the revolution had been the Sierra Maestra, now it is Tahrir Square. Looking at this shift through the violence/nonviolence lens, it appears as a trend away from violent and toward nonviolent uprisings (see Chenoweth and Stephan 2014). Indeed, these movements have not been characterized by the strategic logic of warfare and by and large have not included the body counts that accompanied most guerrilla wars. However, they have also not been nonviolent in any absolute sense. Among participants in these contemporary movements, the debates over violence and nonviolence have not been over whether or not to take up arms against the state, they have

been over property destruction, thrown projectiles, physical defense against police and political opponents, and so forth. In other words, the operational meanings of violence and nonviolence have shifted based on changing norms for revolutionary social movements, while the applied terminology continues to follow a paradigm constructed in and designed for a previous era. The new wave of uprisings does not mark a shift from violent to nonviolent resistance, rather, *it marks a shift from martial resistance toward civil resistance*. Whereas armed warfare and unarmed civil resistance have fundamentally different strategic logics, unarmed civilian movements that involve little property destruction and unarmed civilian movements that involve a lot of property destruction are different versions of the same type of contentious collective mobilization.

Goldstone (2001) identifies a typological shift in revolutionary struggle beginning in the 1970s with the Iranian Revolution, followed by the anti-Marcos civilian uprising in the Philippines in the 1980s, and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The movements that drove these transitions, while revolutionary at least in the political sense, showcased a different type of revolution. In an “age of revolutions” dominated by guerrilla warfare (Goodwin 2001: 3), the “unthinkable” 1977-1979 revolution in Iran (Kurzman 2004) represented both an innovation and a harbinger of civil resistance revolutions to come, its dynamics anticipating a revolutionary model that would become the standard for collective revolt in a new era. Charles Kurzman famously called the Iranian Revolution “unthinkable” because intelligence agencies and foreign policy experts had been convinced of its impossibility beforehand, but it was also unthinkable in terms of its method. An unarmed civilian uprising succeeded in toppling a seemingly stable regime backed by the US in a matter of months. An escalating combination of massive street protests, labor strikes, and riots eroded state control, and mass defections eventually collapsed the regime (ibid).

The Iranian Revolution thus confronted analysts with the first major anomaly in the violence/nonviolence paradigm. For the most part, its participants did not apply military strategy, nor did they organize around armed combat and seizure of territory. However, unlike the Indian struggle against British colonialism, this revolution was not led by committed nonviolentists. The Iranian Revolution included many acts of collective political violence; alongside massive nonviolent marches, protests, and strikes, there were at least 23 major riots in Iran between 1977 and 1979.¹⁰ The revolution was not nonviolent. But it was not warfare either; it involved less violence than an intrastate war likely would have, and a different type of violence too. As a contentious episode led by civilian mobilizations it resembled the nonviolent model more closely than it did warfare. Because of this, through lens of the violence/nonviolence binary the Iranian Revolution was eligible to be labeled as a nonviolent movement (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2011: 116; Nepstad 2011; Schock 2005). Since then, similar civil resistance struggles involving mass urban civilian mobilizations and including varying amounts of violence have emerged as the new norm for revolutionary struggle.

The poster image for the Twenty-First Century revolution has become Tahrir Square, the public space in Cairo where protesters gathered in early 2011, forcing the government into crisis and collapse in a matter of weeks. Since then, a variety of developments have seen the first presidential election in Egypt, subsequent waves of mobilization, bloody repression, political maneuvering and market manipulation, and, several years later, eventually a return to *de facto* military government. However, the initial three weeks of civilian uprising in 2011 were part of sparking a global wave of movements, which in a long view of movements we very well might still be in. Below I will discuss this uprising as it relates to contemporary norms for revolutionary

¹⁰ Arthur S. Banks' Cross-National Time Series Archive data (2018).

movements. As will be clear, the “January 25 Revolution” was neither guerrilla war nor was it strictly nonviolent, demonstrating the stark need to rethink the terms we use to understand mass mobilizations.

4.3 Riots and Mass Protest in the January 25 Revolution: A Brief Case Study

The 2011 Egyptian Revolution, one of the so-called “Arab Spring” revolts, is widely cited within civil resistance and nonviolence studies fields as an exemplary case of nonviolent civil resistance (e.g., Chenoweth and Stephan 2014; Engler and Engler 2016; Gan 2013). This episode is emblematic of civil resistance in that it was civilian-based, highly decentralized, and sought to overthrow an authoritarian government. The movement created and utilized popular slogans, drew massive popular support, occupied public space, sparked nationwide uprisings and labor strikes, made use of creative and evolving tactics, and was successful in ousting the country’s head of state. And the movement made widespread use of violent tactics.

Following the stunning overthrow of the Tunisian government by a spontaneous civil revolt, Egyptian activists, who had previously been planning protests against police violence for January 25, found the streets full of political newcomers, inspired by a new sense of possibility (Bayat 2017:9). Protestors emerged from all walks of life, focusing their ire on the Mubarak regime and echoing the popular slogan of the Tunisian uprising: “The people want to overthrow the regime!” (El-Ghobashy 2012:31). In only seventeen days, “the people” forced the removal of Hosni Mubarak, who had held power for almost three decades. In addition to its swift success, civil resistance scholars extolled the Egyptian movement for creating a nonviolent “global

sensation” (Engler and Engler 2016:252) and ‘accomplish[ing] what years of violent rebellion could not.’ (Chenoweth and Cunningham 2013:272).

In fact, in the opening days of the revolution nearly 100 police stations were sacked and burned (Ismail 2012:446). Throughout the three-week uprising there were numerous confrontations with police and government-backed gangs involving massive street fights and the heavy exchange of projectiles (Ketchley 2017; Shokr 2012). To El-Ghobashy (2012:22), it was “four continuous days of street fighting, January 25-28, that pitted people against police all over the country” which transformed an episode of protest into a “revolutionary situation.” The January 25 Revolution involved spectacular acts of nonviolent resistance and contained widespread nonviolent sentiment, but to the extent that the seventeen days between January 25th protest and Mubarak’s ouster can be viewed as a bounded episode, that episode was far from nonviolent. “[T]o gloss over the role of anti-regime violence in bringing about a revolutionary situation, or to portray it as incidental to the trajectory of the mobilization, is to obscure and distort the process by which Egyptians were able to oust a dictator of three decades” (Ketchley 2017:47).

More than simply being present alongside peaceful demonstrations, rioting and other violent actions interacted dynamically with less-violent and non-violent mobilizations.¹¹ While the riots were separate from the large demonstrations that made international news, the attacks on police stations were meant as retaliation for lethal force used against nonviolent protestors (and for police brutality in general) and to open space for nonviolent protests to continue (Ismail 2012:446; Ketchley 2017:38). Neil Ketchley’s (2017) research on contentious politics of the January 25 Revolution brings out the ways that violent rioting and nonviolent protests appeared

¹¹ In addition to riots, popular committees involving neighborhood defense were an important social aspect of the revolution (see Hassan 2015).

“both synergetic and complementary” in their combined ability to create a revolutionary situation (ibid:21).

In the first days of the revolution, nonviolent protestors, many of them seasoned activists, had initial successes evading authorities and massing in streets and public squares. However, as police regrouped, protestors were beaten back and temporarily demobilized by sheer force of repressive violence. There was also another group of “early risers” in the revolution, which have received much less media or scholarly attention. These were local crowds, often from poorer urban districts, who attacked local police stations with increasing frequency and ferocity in the opening days of the revolt (Ketchley 2017:37). According to Ketchley, it was this group that forced the police to retreat from attacking protestors in city centers in order to defend their stations, creating unpatrolled streets for nonviolent protestors to re-take, and providing time for them to grow their occupations of public space, most notably Tahrir Square. Overall participation in the revolution *increased* following riots, with the largest mobilization taking place two weeks later, on February 11, the day Mubarak would end up being deposed (ibid:19).

Riots targeting police stations created immediate, material sanctions against agents of the regime for their use of force against nonviolent protestors and compelled authorities to make decisions under duress about where, when, and how to deploy their forces. The backfiring effect did not function exactly as nonviolent actionists predict, since initial repression of nonviolent protests was somewhat effective. Instead, repression was followed by violent protests, which then suffered the highest casualties as a result of increased police repression, but which also cleared the way for nonviolent activists to recoup and grow. The backfiring effect in this case was twofold, relating *both* to increased repression that generated an immediate response from some *and* the subsequent decreased security presence that provided a mobilizing opportunity for others. Massive

nonviolent demonstrations ultimately caused the crisis of legitimacy that overthrew Mubarak, but it was anti-police riots that created space for the larger mobilizations to gather momentum and reach the tipping point.

What makes the 2011 Egyptian case eligible for characterization as “nonviolent” for those who labeled it that way is actually its *civil character*, that it took the form of civilian mobilizations as opposed to the martial mobilizations of armed struggle, and the *relative* difference in acute violence applied by protestors and authorities, not its participants’ refusal to engage in any violent actions. In other words, the Egyptian uprising could only be considered nonviolent *in comparison to the repressive force used by the state* (El-Mahdi 2011:np). However, in order to justify the overarching and totalizing label of “nonviolent,” violent actions must be left out of the story or pushed to the margins. To claim that movements no longer deploy civil violence, but “[i]nstead, from Tunis to Tahrir Square, from Zuccotti Park to Ferguson, from Burkina Faso to Hong Kong, movements worldwide have drawn on the lessons of Gandhi, King and [nonviolent] everyday activists” (Chenoweth and Stephan 2016:np) is to encourage a dangerously narrow view of movement repertoires. As the Egyptian case demonstrates, doing so severely obscures our view of civil resistance movements on the ground.

That the field of civil resistance has been largely oriented toward activist application (Shock 2013) makes it all the more crucial that its scholars get their analyses right. Acknowledging violent protest tactics as legible actions within the civil resistance framework would enable researchers to more effectively explore the dynamics that participants in these movements experience and create, as well as the trajectories that lead them to achieve their goals (and the dynamics that may influence subsequent setbacks).

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discuss how the argument for exclusively nonviolent tactics has become common sense, and how the very conceptual framework is designed to understand of the contentious dynamics of movements from a previous era of social-political struggle. I argue that while the violence/nonviolence dichotomy always contained contradictions, it at least used to describe meaningful categories. In an age when civilian-based street rebellion has become the standard for revolutionary mobilizations, these descriptors for movements have outlived their usefulness. Abstract categories of “violence” and “nonviolence” are neither mutually exclusive nor inherently antagonistic in movement repertoires on the ground. The concept of *civil* resistance is an important analytic category as distinguished from *martial* resistance, but for it to be useful as an analytic tool, and more importantly, as a tool of action, civil resistance must be critically disentangled from nonviolence. In terms of typologies, whether or not a movement takes up arms to go to war with the state or takes up signs to march in the street is highly important, while whether or not some rocks get thrown at police in the second scenario is an entirely different question. Civil resistance – which is to say the general unarmed civilian-based protest repertoires – contains a variety of strategies and tactics, which, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, include some that could be considered nonviolent and others that could be considered violent. Different repertoires might operate differently in different circumstances, with successes, failures, and experiences contingent on a host of factors, but there is no conceptual physics in which “violent” and “nonviolent” actions function as polar opposites in civil struggle.

Despite the changing norms for revolutionary movements in recent decades, the violence/nonviolence dichotomy has remained the normal science of movement analysis. Whether or not it is acknowledged or consciously subscribed to, the framework is nearly universally applied

as though it makes sense. Hopefully, by now it is clear that this binary approach to categorizing social-political struggle simply does not fit the realities of movements today, and in fact leads to misunderstanding.

This is not to say that there is no difference between a “violent” protest and a “nonviolent” one. Rather, it is to say that the application of the violence/nonviolence dichotomy as it has been constituted can inhibit social scientific examination of the processes, mechanisms, relationships, and experiences embedded in the different approaches *within* civil resistance uprisings. In other words, we are faced with an incomplete conceptualization that inhibits analysis of contemporary social movements. The old approach to the question of how to classify methods of political revolution simply does not provide the analytic leverage that it used to. Classifying “relatively” nonviolent movements as *nonviolent* encourages the assumption that any violent acts that took place within a civil resistance struggle were necessarily alien to the movement and either inconsequential or detrimental to it. In a dichotomous framework in which a movement must ultimately be categorized as either violent or nonviolent, “relative” nonviolence either gets disregarded or ends up being included in the category of nonviolent. Rather than ignoring these potentially significant actions, making assumptions about their impact, or being cornered into claiming that throwing rocks at people is nonviolent, it would be both more productive and more conceptually consistent to reassess our understanding of what civil resistance actually constitutes.

Adding riots and other violent protest activities into the legible repertoire of civil resistance strategies and tactics does not necessarily discount the productive elements of civil resistance analysis; on the contrary, it allows that analysis to encompass a fuller range of actions that take place within movements and conceptualize them as they actually are. There is something compelling about drawing a distinction between the belief in moral nonviolence and an analysis

of the unarmed processes that enable unarmed civilian social movements to achieve their political goals. Accordingly, the idea of strategic nonviolence became the main interpretation of the normal science of the violence/nonviolence paradigm. Since Sharp's intervention, many scholars and practitioners claim to advocate nonviolent action purely as a superior strategy, distinct from any moral claims. But if one is not willing to critically assess one's strategy and tactics based on evidence and conditions, then the term "strategic" loses its meaning. Sharp's notion of the nonviolent revolution always presented a limited and problematic view, but also conditions have now shifted. The hard line between violent and nonviolent tactics was never analytically sound, but it used to at least describe relevant categories. Today, it is no longer feasible to ignore the violent actions that often take place within and alongside mass movements. By exploding the violence/nonviolence dichotomy as an analytic tool, we can open space to examine social movements and revolutions in terms that are more empirically accurate and appropriate for how protests actually unfold in the Twenty-First Century – what is shaping up to be an era of street rebellion.

At times, violent actions might indeed hurt a movement's chances for success, or perhaps complicate what success means. In other cases, the use of violence may be beneficial to the goals of civil resistance movements. And either way, there are likely to be important experiential effects of different types of mobilization on participants, if we are able to look at them on their own terms, not simply *as* violence. To explore these questions, we must make riots and other physically forceful actions part of the story.

5.0 Anarchists and the Effervescent Riot

How do violent protests interact with social movements? In recent decades, mass civil uprisings have threatened or overthrown governments across the world. Protest events are increasing worldwide, and instances of violent protests in particular have grown and spread (Ortiz et al., 2013). Violent protests – often called riots – are spectacular events that draw attention, polarize opinions, and spark heated debates among actors seeking social change. Rising levels of protests which involve contentious violence mean that more and more people across the world are experiencing these dynamics; understanding them is essential to understanding the social impact and long-term effects of contentious protest. This chapter and the next advance a phenomenological analysis of protester violence in two countries, in this chapter the US and in the next, South Africa, contributing to broader understandings of social movements, crowd behavior, and power.

A robust body of literature on social movements has described and explored the dynamics of US protest and argued for both the symbolic and material importance of disruption (e.g., Jasper 1998; McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001; Piven and Cloward 1978). However, as we have seen, prominent studies operationally conflate civilian-based struggle with nonviolent struggle, thereby obscuring the role of unarmed violence in contributing to movements' disruptive capacity, thereby limiting scholars' ability to accurately conceptualize real world movements. Understanding how violent protest fits into analyses of movements is essential to comprehending contemporary uprisings. Most sociological work on riots focuses on explaining why or how riots occur (e.g., Abu Lughod 2007; Gale 1996; Gilje 1996; Schneider 2014; von Holdt et al. 2012). However, with

sparse exceptions (e.g., Meckfessel 2016), few recent US-based studies have asked rioters themselves about their experiences.

In this chapter, I present an in-depth interview study with activists who have participated in violent protest actions, associated with “black bloc” formations in the US. The black bloc is an anti-surveillance protest tactic, primarily associated with anarchists, in which participants cover their faces with bandanas or other forms of mask and dress in black, making it difficult for authorities to distinguish between individuals in a group (see Dupuis-Déri 2010; Thompson 2010). These formations often involve property destruction and physically confrontational protests. Black blocs received a surge in attention following the “Battle of Seattle” protests against the WTO in 1999, and again more recently after violent protests at Donald Trump’s 2017 inauguration.

First, I briefly review social movement literature and situate this study. I then provide a brief background on the case before presenting the qualitative data and analysis. Interviews from both the US and South Africa (presented in Chapter Six) demonstrate that, as I argue, unarmed violence can play an important role in activists’ consciousness and long-term political engagement, essentially keeping contentious politics contentious.

5.1 In-Depth Interviews with Anarchists

In Chapter Three, I demonstrated that riots have an overall mobilizing effect on protests in the US. Recent research also shows violent protest to have democratizing effects on movements (Kadivar and Ketchley 2018). Other studies have found that riots can play important strategic functions in unarmed conflict (Ketchley 2017) and can involve complex social and political meanings (Thompson 2010; von Holdt et al. 2012). However, few studies in recent decades have

asked rioters themselves about their experiences. Le Bon's archaic theory of "crowd hysteria" (1895) has been largely debunked but nevertheless persists in popular consciousness through notions of crowd or herd mentality (Borch 2012), making it all too easy to overlook the individual subjectivities of rioters. The few recent studies that have involved interviews with rioters (e.g., Auyero 2003, 2007; Meckfessel 2016) point towards distinct subjective impacts from participation in these actions. In this study, I expand on this research by directly interrogating the sensation and affect of rioting through the experiences of participants. Their words point toward distinct phenomenological impacts of rioting, impacting activists' political participation, trajectories, and identities.

This study emerges from analysis of in-depth interviews with activists in the US who politically identify with anarchism and who have participated in black bloc actions. The interviews were conducted between 2015 and 2020 with activists who participated in the "black bloc" tactic. I selected an in-depth, semi-structured interview format based on that method's particular benefits for social movement research, especially related to contentious activity (Blee and Taylor 2002). Interviewees in both cases were contacted based on personal references within activist scenes, through subsequent snowball sampling, or based on chance encounter in activist spaces. All interviews were conducted in person and ranged from 45 minutes to 2.5 hours in length. Interviews were mostly with individuals, with two exceptions of couples in the US who preferred to be interviewed together. Additionally, this research benefits from observing activist spaces, consulting activist-written literature, and numerous informal conversations.

Due to the sensitive nature of relevant activities it is necessary to take precautions to protect interviewees' identities. I disclose overall demographics and locations but obscure specific information that might identify an interlocutor. Gender pronouns are accurate but names are

artificial and some locations are omitted. In the US, the 28 participants interviewed were based in five cities in different geographic regions. Demographically, thirteen were men (including one transman), ten were women, and five were trans/gender nonconforming. The majority (21) were white (several of those self-identifying as white were also Jewish), three were Black, two were Latino, one was Asian-American, and one identified as multi-racial.

5.1.1 Anarchism and the Black Bloc

The black bloc is widely associated with anarchists and involves groups of people dressed in black and wearing masks, who often engage in confrontations with police or political opponents during demonstrations (Dupuis-Déri 2010; Thompson 2010). The collective intention or willingness to destroy property and use force against authorities is a primary characteristic of these formations (ibid). The practice of dressing alike and “masking up” is designed to provide security through anonymity, and, in addition, the aesthetic allows for “the creation of an illusory stable identity” which can be adopted by participants in pursuit of an empowering collective identity within larger protest actions (Avery-Natale 2010: 105).

When it comes to US anarchism, black bloc formations are given disproportionate public attention. Black blocs leapt to prominence in the wake of the 1999 “Battle of Seattle” riots against the World Trade Organization, an event that is widely considered pivotal in the “anarchist turn” (Critchley and Bottici, ed. 2013), and since then anarchism has been all the more closely associated with black bandanas and thrown projectiles (Graeber 2009). The media contributes heavily to this association, with anarchists commonly featuring in Hollywood cinema as antagonists fomenting

senseless chaos and destruction.¹ This association between anarchists, villains, and chaos makes experiential analysis all the more important, especially regarding the actions appear closest to the stereotype, i.e., groups of masked rioters lighting fires, breaking windows, and fighting police.

While anarchists have been active in US politics for well over than a century, and despite how thoroughly the image of the black-clad anarchist protester has saturated popular depictions, in reality the black bloc is fairly new. One interviewee in this study, in his 50s, described having heard about the black bloc from a German anti-authoritarian leftwing group, the Autonomen, and subsequently working to incorporate it into the US protest repertoire:

In '89 it was the anarchist gathering in San Francisco, and the Autonomen were there to do a workshop, and I remember people asking them if they were going to be at the DOA (day of action) tomorrow, the idea was to open up a squat in Berkeley, but somehow the cops found out about it and they were there. We had this huge march, it was hundreds of people, masked up, ready to open up the squat and then the cops stopped us. And the Autonomen were there, despite saying, "no we can't violate our visa by being in the streets doing illegal action," but they were right there. And we liberated libations from a Coke truck at one point. People were just frustrated and we started marching around Berkeley and there was a Coke truck, you know with the sliding doors on the side, and we ran to the truck and people just liberated cases of Cokes, which were then used as projectiles to throw at the cops [laughs]. We couldn't open the squat so people just started throwing Coke cans at the cops in front of the building. And people had wrist rockets, you know we came prepared, and we went up and down the main street in Berkeley and took out tons of windows, and it was pretty awesome in some ways and problematic in other ways. Yeah. But the black bloc wasn't a concept that was in the movement lexicon [in the US]... After that we started thinking about how we could bring it here.

Personal accounts of activists who have participated in protester violence add necessary phenomenological insight to the understanding of contentious politics. I do not seek to establish hard timelines or detailed accounts of particular actions; rather, I attempt to draw out experiential meanings and affective responses to participation in more and less violent forms of protest. I draw from all respondents' remarks in my analysis, but this text uses the specific words of several

¹ For some recent examples, see: XXX (2002); the Batman movie, *The Dark Knight* (2008); Mission: Impossible movies, *Rogue Nation* and *Fallout*; James Bond movies, *The World Is Not Enough* (1999) and *No Time to Die* (2020).

individuals.² I mainly focus on accounts of four queer women, Zi, Em, Ely, and Owe, who are based in different cities and regions. All four have participated in black bloc actions in which physical force was applied, including, for one of them, at what several interlocutors described as the first black bloc action in the US. All four have also engaged in multiple nonviolent actions during their activist careers as well. Through these narratives we gain insight into how participants make sense of violent protest actions through their own experiences, as well as how participation in those actions has affected them and their political work.

5.2 The Embodied Symbol of a Riot

Violence, according to Hannah Arendt, “is distinguished by its instrumental character” (Arendt 1970: 46). We tend to think of violence as Arendt does, as an instrument to accomplish something tangible. Early studies of movements understood it the same way: “Violence should be viewed as an instrumental act, aimed at furthering the purposes of the group that uses it when they have some reason to think it will help their cause” (Gamson 1975: 81). Ironically, the strategic nonviolence school now approaches all movement actions instrumentally, and argues against the use of violent tactics precisely on the basis that they are not instrumentally effective. However, a central theme that emerges in interviews with black bloc participants is how the violence of the riot is *primarily symbolic*, not instrumental.

² Auyero (2003) is the best example of a rich sociological interview analysis involving protester violence; likewise I focus on the words of several individuals in order to draw out phenomenological effects of these experiences with more depth than shorter quotes from more individuals.

The collective violation of the sanctity police authority and of private property through the riot is deeply symbolic for participants. There are instrumental qualities of particular actions, of course; looting, for example, can have both instrumental and symbolic qualities (Simiti 2012). Unarresting³ a person is principally about keeping the potential arrestee out of police custody, but, as we will see, there is a deep, symbolic accompanying sense of empowerment for the unarrestors. For many participants, the experience of participating in a violent protest has lasting phenomenological effects that supersede any direct material outcome.

5.2.1 Riot in the Words of Anarchists

In the late 1980s, Zi was an activist with the Youth Greens, then a radical wing of the Green Party before the organization's move into electoral politics. Zi was part of an affinity group⁴ that participated in what she and several other interlocutors described as the first black bloc in the US, on Earth Day, 1990. Prior to that, she describes her frustration and growing disgust at the inaction that characterized the political actions she had participated in. For example, she describes peacefully counter-protesting an anti-abortion march, an issue for which she felt strongly, leaving her feeling disheartened: "It was super depressing! I just didn't feel like it was an effective style of resistance to what we were being confronted with... I felt pretty defeated, on the protest front." In another instance, she discusses how even the appearance of being angry was policed by "the nonviolence people" in conventional protests:

I would go to these protests... and they were *so* boring. Like this one time, me and my friend, we baked a cake to feed the protesters, and the cake said, "Fuck you George Bush"

³ Also called "de-arresting."

⁴ Autonomous cluster of activists with trusted personal ties who operate together during an action.

[laughs], and this lady who was part of the protest comes up to us and is like: “that’s violence.” *To our cake!* It was so depressing.

The timing of the black bloc’s arrival in the US is noteworthy – just as the Soviet Union was collapsing and the US was rising to global political hegemony. The solidification of a neoliberal, non-profit approach to social movement organizations, amidst the famed “end of history” narrative that held that we had passed the final stage of ideological conflict (Fukuyama 1992), where the typical protest was calm and peaceful (McAdam et al. 2005), contributed to a “disruptive deficit” among movements (Seferiades and Johnston 2012: 6), where mobilizations increasingly took on the façade of contention with conciliatory or reformist content. Beyond the strategic implications of this development, the disruptive deficit is felt by participants, resulting in a subjective “loss of political meaning” (ibid). In other words, protests that don’t challenge power in reality feel like they aren’t challenging power to participants.

Exposure to protests that did not feel powerful led Zi to seek out those who seemed interested in “actually doing something.” She was inspired hearing of the black bloc tactic in Germany, which was being popularized among anarchists as a method to physically defend squatted residences against the police: “It didn’t sound boring, it sounded serious.” Zi’s group decided to organize a black bloc action at a major city’s Earth Day march in 1990. The plan was to break off from the large, permitted march and cause chaos to highlight the seriousness of climate change and the need to treat it like a crisis. She describes arriving that morning:

It was kind of scary... when we got there, the black bloc was meeting up a little before the big march was convening. And they had lit a dumpster on fire and pushed it into the street... and it was like, oh shit there’s a fire in the middle of the street! And in that moment, it felt like the tables had turned, you know? I mean, this isn’t a “Fuck you George Bush” cake anymore – this is fire in the street. I remember being scared but also enlivened.

Then the action started:

It felt cohesive. Which I guess I had never really felt before. You know, when I had gone to protests before, it was usually with one friend of mine. And it was just us standing around feeling alienated, you know? This was like – we’re all in a group, and the adrenaline is going... It felt like we were one cohesive unit, all moving together, but all doing our own things.

In addition to “cohesive” and “enlivened,” Zi and nearly every black bloc participant I interviewed frequently used words like “exciting” and “thrilling” to describe those exceptional moments. Several interlocutors articulated the feeling as “euphoria.” For all interviewees, the euphoria did not last beyond the action itself, but for many the sensation led to lasting shifts in political consciousness. For example, another interviewee, Ely, described politicizing in high school, which led to seeing the overwhelming problems in the world more clearly, which in turn quickly led to hopelessness: “Most of the stuff I had gotten was depressing on an intellectual level, like, the world is fucked and Big Brother is watching you, I get it. But what can you *do*?” Ely would find her way forward during and after the 1999 “Battle of Seattle” riots at the World Trade Organization, saying, “taking action with people who weren’t defeatist was amazing.” She went on to discuss how that riot changed her, leading toward a life of radical politics: “Once you realize how fucked up the world is, it’s either swallow the pill and buy in, or kill yourself, or just wallow in despair. Then you meet people who fight back, who practice an alternative, and it becomes the only way.” By alternative, to be clear, Ely was not referring simply to rioting, but a collection of anarchist practices that go along with taking the streets for many black bloc participants. When I asked which was most important to her, she responded: “Anarchism is always about becoming. So some people live communally, some people dumpster,⁵ some people organize in their workplaces, some people fight the cops and fuck shit up. I say, ‘all of the above.’”

⁵ Short for “dumpster dive,” meaning to rescue edible food from the garbage.

Zi related a coincidence that juxtaposed for her the difference between her previous, alienated experience with conventional protest and the adrenaline-fueled euphoria of the bloc. While her black bloc was moving from one target to another, they passed by the main Earth Day march, and she happened by chance to see an old friend from her hometown. The two had been close until a falling out when Zi had begun radicalizing:

And she was standing there, watching the protest go by on the other sidewalk. And she was crying. Just watching the protest and crying at how awful the world was or something. And I was just like, *fuck that* – just crying in response to this crisis we’re in. Because... a couple years ago I would have been there too. I would have been on the sidelines right next to her, feeling overwhelmed and hopeless and crying. But instead I was in a cohesive unit, energized and running down the street trying to change things in a different way.

For Zi, the sensation was formative in that it created an embodied sense of radicality that raised consciousness and fueled her through her political life. During the interview, she became visibly animated and smiled excitedly when describing the heightened sensation of participating in the riot, revealing how powerful those embodied moments are for her even today. The feelings retained their positive affect over time despite Zi also acknowledging that in the immediate material sense the actions she was describing made next to no difference: negligible property destruction, likely covered by insurance or the taxpayer, and not directly impacting the “crisis” she refers to above.

The euphoric feeling many participants describe during a riot is reminiscent of the collective *effervescence* that Durkheim articulates in his study of indigenous Australian rituals, where he argues that the sensation is so powerful it constitutes the birthplace of religion (Durkheim 1915: 246-50). For Durkheim, effervescence is essentially a mechanical human product of the assembly of bodies in one place for a unified purpose, heightening the experience of participants. Zi, like many rioters, describes a similar effervescent sensation, with a similar visceral sense of cohesion with the group. However, contrary to Durkheim’s effervescence, for these activists the

experience is inherently connected to the contentious power dynamics of their particular type of assembly. The euphoria they describe is embodied political struggle, a *contentious effervescence*, which at once grounds the heightened sensation in opposition to identified material oppressions and at the same time offers a feeling of freedom from them – what some interviewees describe as a glimpse into a liberated world.

Despite his earlier critiques of crowd theory for lacking in empirical rigor (Durkheim 1897:142), Durkheim's effervescence reflects many of the same flaws. In particular, the notion that people become wholly susceptible to outside influence and that "the passions released are of such an impetuosity that they can be restrained by nothing" (Durkheim 1915: 247) are hyperbolic at best, reflecting the least empirically-grounded aspects of Le Bon's "crowd hysteria," i.e., that crowds are irrational, impulsive blocs devoid of judgment (Le Bon 1895). For Durkheim, social boundaries and individual discernment break down in the wake of the effervescent experience (1915: 247). This idea is connected to a longtime misconception that riots are expressions of wanton violence. To the contrary, a number of studies have found rioters to be highly selective in their tactics and targets (Kerner et al. 1968; Simiti 2012; Tierney 1994), and in this case, despite the effervescent feeling reported by Zi and others, the only targets in most actions were corporate and public property, and no one was seriously injured (by protesters). That the black bloc generated the feeling that "we were one cohesive unit, all moving together, but all doing our own things" is itself evidence that the contentious effervescence Zi felt was both an enhanced collective experience and also one in which the individual retained her sense of self and autonomy. The self is altered in that liminal moment (some participants reporting self-awareness of this alteration in real-time), but is nevertheless a discreet self, apart from the group. This account challenges the underlying supposition common to Durkheim's crowd effervescence and Le Bon's crowd hysteria

that the heightened collective experience involves the individual losing their self in the overwhelming trance of the crowd.

Contentious effervescence can have transformative properties for a person's consciousness and identity. Zi describes the lasting subjective alteration she experienced during her first black bloc, specifically after her participation in an "unarrest," the act of physically wresting an arrested comrade out of police custody:

I felt really empowered by being part of a group like that. And that was something I wanted people to know was possible. And the unarrest, you know? That we didn't have to just go along with the power over us. That we could physically remove ourselves from that kind of power and violence and control, feeling really just a fundamental shift in my capitulation to authority. I was in kind of an abusive relationship at that time, and it was the end of my tolerance for that. It just seemed like a lot more was possible.

Through the act of fighting a friend out of police custody, Zi, in the moment, organically connected the coercive authority of the state with abusive interpersonal dynamics. The internalized empowerment of resisting one led to a personal transformation that affected her clarity, ability, and drive to resist the other. To view that particular black bloc action instrumentally in terms of whether or not it advanced a short-term strategic goal would be to entirely miss the point. Zi reported the sensation of the riot instilling in her a sense of empowerment that not only had a lasting impact on her political engagement, but transformed her relational personality.

Georges Sorel famously advocated the use of violent tactics to rouse the complacent middle class to class war (Sorel 1950). To Sorel, the growth of a liberal middle class was preserving the capitalist system by blunting its fundamental antagonisms and giving people hope in the system, what in the US came to be called "the American dream." In his words, violent action by the proletariat against the middle class could "so operate on the middle class as to awaken them to a sense of their own class sentiment" and allow the class war to proceed (ibid: 90). Thompson notes the relevancy of Sorel's theory today, and also that it "needs to be revised slightly" in order to turn

middle class “dissident energies” against the system (2010: 5). In the words of black bloc rioters, we see evidence of this revision – both a connection to Sorel’s theory and its inversion.

For Sorel, violence had to be done *to* members of the middle class in order to raise *their* consciousness in terms of their interest in fighting to *preserve* the system. In this case, the violence of the riot has a similar consciousness-raising effect, but as a result of violence being done *by* the rioter (many of whom are white and come from middle class backgrounds), raising their *own* consciousness in terms of their interest in fighting back *against* the system. The key is the empowering sensation of physically opposing authority, which worked on the one hand to counter the pervasive sense of alienation both in society and in conventional protest, and on the other hand to clarify antagonisms with authority. As another participant, Em, put it: “It only takes one or two experiences being beaten up by cops in the streets to really, really understand in a physical, almost animal way that these people are not here to help you.”

Zi’s experience here shows how the subjective experience of rioting can be constitutive of a newly empowered subject, manifested not only in subsequent movement participation, but in her personal relationships and identity. Other studies have likewise noted an empowering personal evolution following participation in a riot (see for example Auyero 2003: 170). The subjective influence of protester violence in this case impacts society even beyond the sphere of social movement contention (itself already a constructed abstraction within a social whole), via the production of altered subjects, characterized by lower obedience to authority, lower tolerance of abusive power dynamics, and an embodied knowledge that more is possible in the world.

Em also found her way to black bloc tactics as a result of unsatisfying experiences with conventional protest: “There are so many experiences of disempowerment, including in movement organizing. I didn’t personally feel like I had power in any of the political protests I saw and was

part of.” She focuses on the experience of being violently attacked by police while protesting nonviolently: “it’s not like we were smashing windows or setting fire to their cars, it was like I’m standing *here* and not *there*, so then it becomes like just the pure experience of authority.”

Em is from a middle-class libertarian family in a rural part of the country, and first politicized around local labor strikes and then anti-war mobilizations. After disappointments with conventional organizing, Em found anarchism. The first time she felt her child kick in the womb, she related to me with a smile, was while she and her partner were blocking a street during Occupy. As several other respondents described, being physically attacked by police despite not representing a threatening presence during nonviolent actions – “the pure experience of authority” – had created both frustration and a feeling of disempowerment for Em. In contrast to that feeling, she reports feeling invigorated when entering that contentious space outside of strict nonviolent protest. Importantly, it was not necessarily tied to taking any violent actions, but rather to the type of contentious gathering that does not adhere to nonviolent discipline, thereby unleashing the potential for physical transgression. In describing this feeling, she quotes another activist from the Battle of Seattle:⁶

There’s this guy on a megaphone, and it’s this really intense moment, there’s teargas raining down, and he said: ‘I know you think that’s fear in your chest right now, but it’s not – you’ve just never felt freedom before.’ I still have a hard time saying those words, it’s so powerful.

She begins speaking faster, and more animated, describing herself identifying that feeling during a subsequent action:

It was absolutely terrifying, but it also had that feeling! You know, once you crack open that understanding of, “am I allowed to do this and that?” – once a fissure opens in that, there is a whole other range of possibilities before you, and it’s so beautiful. It’s thrilling...

⁶ Here, Em is quoting a participant in the Battle of Seattle from the 2000 documentary, *This Is What Democracy Looks Like*. This activist quotes himself as having said: “that’s really not fear in your gut or in your throat, that’s really your first taste of freedom” (2000: 26:45).

like, oh my God, the world is so much more interesting, and there is so much more to be done... And I thought of that quote and I was learning to examine that particular adrenalized experience, you know? And do I know how to handle the sensation of freedom? And when have I ever had the opportunity to try?

As Martin Buber put it: “Convictions based on pure thinking cannot be decisive in themselves” (Buber 1952: 62). For Em, the embodied understanding of the need and possibility for a new world is elevated past what would be possible simply through intellectual learning. The feeling of expansiveness and beauty that accompanied physically forceful collective actions is in and of itself important to focus on. Even defenders of riots typically describe them as destructive forces – perhaps destroying what needs to be destroyed, but destructive nonetheless. Riots might be destructive, but participants also describe a generative sensation that both sustains their long-term political engagement and imbues them with a vision that, as the anti-globalization movement insisted, another world is possible.

Em specifically connects the euphoria of the contentious action to freedom itself. This description of freedom recalls the “anarchist enlightenment” that develops in a revolutionary moment as an ordinary person, through collective action, “experience[s] herself *directly* as the agent of a grand moment in history” (Bamyeh 2013: 191). Some have argued that the riot and the commune⁷ exist on different ends of the same spectrum of contentious embodied resistance (Badiou 2012; Clover 2016), or in Em’s terms, as sensory practices of freedom. In this case, that “grand moment” is far less acute than it was in Tahrir Square, but nevertheless is experienced in the moment as being imbued with that potential, as Zi put it, that “the tables had turned” against the forces of oppression.

⁷ E.g., the Paris Commune, or in the previous example, Tahrir Square in January, 2011.

The sensation of embodied freedom emerges when the repressive sense of obligation to the rules of a society is “cracked open.” Many scholars who have examined the dynamics of riots have observed that the violation of private property laws and selective police enforcement of rules of protest in particular represent the political core of that form of collective action (Connery 1968; Piven 2006; Schneider 2014). But few who have not interviewed participants (or participated themselves) may have envisioned the accompanying feeling as “beautiful.”

Em goes on to describe how having felt the “sensation of freedom” deeply affected her perspective:

I think there are aspects of my personality that have been formed by those breakthrough moments... There is an aspect to radicalism that says, “better things are possible” and that gives you the ability to predicate other things on that assumption, and that isn’t always tangible to you if you haven’t had those concrete experiences... Sometimes that ends up being institutionalized and sometimes it ends up being a high you chase, and in my case it’s more just been like I am not afraid to demand that the world be different, because I’ve seen the potential for other things. And I take a lot of comfort from that. I don’t anticipate that I’ll be able to see the changes I envision in my life or my child’s life, but just understanding that power structures as they are now are not fossilized and not permanent, I feel like all of these things can be broken and transformed, and I think that’s a real gift.

Here, Em relates the deep and lasting impacts on her political outlook and resolve, deriving from those exceptional moments of collectively breaking foundational rules of authority. This account supports the theory that collective political action generates effervescence in crowds (see Kearney 2018), but it also adds a crucial element to it, since these activists do not find the effervescent feeling in conventional protest, and in fact report its opposite. In this case, it is not collective action as such, but a particular kind of contentious political action which is the source of the effervescent moment and its lasting effects. That the collective action contains the potential for violence or property destruction, violating the sanctity of private property and police authority and thus representing a political fight, is integral to the sensation, as in: “this isn’t a ‘Fuck You George Bush’ cake anymore – this is fire in the street.” At the same time, the sensation is not solely

dependent upon the potential for violent action either; it is an embodied connection between that contentious space and political struggle.

Em: I think some people go seeking that [high], and I don't think you always can. I don't think you can always will those circumstances, I think they're emergent in struggle. But you have to be willing to put yourself in the place to have that moment. And I think those moments are really magical.

The “magical” sensation described is both deeply connected to political orientation and to the willingness to cross a line of disobedience, symbolized in this case by willingness to engage in property destruction – though importantly, not necessary by actually doing it; some interviewees did not personally engage in any violent actions during the black bloc actions they described, yet described the experiences in terms of collective identity. The effervescence, while liminal in its phenomenological sensation, constitutes a “breakthrough” which in a sense represents the birth of a new political subject. This new subject has both enhanced sense of political possibility, and the visceral understanding that politics is a fight.

The riot as discussed here is primarily a symbolic act. Or, more precisely, it is a collection of symbolic acts. As Zi and many other respondents alluded to, smashing a corporate window during a protest is not really about destroying that window in the tactical sense, and, in fact, is barely about the cost of replacing it – it is about smashing a concept.

This symbolism does not imply rash or un-strategic thinking. In fact, the majority of respondents, including those quoted in this chapter, are strategically-minded activists who voiced frustration with insufficient attention to strategy on the left. As Em put it, after describing a seemingly successful militant action in which her group initially backed down lines of riot police and occupied a bridge: “And that’s a great metaphor for the left, right? It’s like, we take the bridge, and now what?” She went on: “We can have these militant marches or even, you know, take over the road or a bridge for a few hours, but we don’t always have the structure or numbers to take the

next step. How do you turn these actions into levers of real political power?” This measured appraisal contradicts the notion that riots are spontaneous and irrational outbursts of mob violence by people who are devoid of strategic sensibility, and also points toward the need to situate the riot’s symbolic importance in conjunction with a strategic outlook.

It is important to note that all respondents had the same experience or perspective on acts of violence in the black bloc. For one interviewee, Owe, participating in the black bloc over decades of activist experience was central to her political identity, but for most of that time she personally believed in nonviolent strategy. Though many of the black bloc actions she was a part of involved acts of violence by others, Owe preferred to focus on medic work and art. Her belief in nonviolence made her an exception among respondents, but her experiences too speak to the emotional power of the black bloc formation:

I definitely remember that it was exciting. You know? It definitely made us feel a sense of unity. There were nerves because we could get arrested or beat up, but also me and the folks I was with, all of us had gotten arrested and beaten up before... it did feel like we were with like-minded people who were all fighting for the same kind of vision of radical social change, not just a discourse around the Democrats and Republicans, but a sense that the whole system is rotten from the inside.

Despite her personal disavowal of violence – unlike many other interviewees, she had been inspired to radicalism by the Congress of Racial Equality and other Civil Rights groups – Owe notes that many of her comrades, in one case a close friend and roommate, did engage in property destruction and use of physical force during protests and antifascist actions.

Well I think at the time, I did not smash a window and I was not interested in that, but I also felt like if somebody in my group is smashing the window of a multinational corporation to draw attention to it being a problematic place, then maybe it’s misguided but I don’t see it as the biggest sin [laughs]. I’m like, why are people focusing on this minor property violence when, you know... people are getting beaten by the police and that’s not the public narrative, the public narrative is look at these few anarchists who were breaking windows in a store that was closed, and the company has money to pay for it.

She personally did not partake in violent actions, but she understood why others did, and was happy to take the streets alongside them and defend them. And, as it turned out, recent events had shifted her perspective in favor of protester violence, but she personally had never personally engaged in violent actions during protests. Interestingly, while Owe did briefly discuss a feeling of unity and empowerment in the bloc, she was one of the few who did not speak of those moments with the excited affect that others did, nor did she describe effervescent-like feelings. The difference might not be that she had never personally engaged in violent actions during the effervescent moments – several others did report affective power in moments of collective physical transgression in which they personally were not engaging in violent actions – the difference appears to be that Owe did not “believe in” those actions, as she held a specific belief in nonviolence.

Burning barricades or throwing rocks at the police in some circumstances have tactical applications, but in most cases, these acts symbolize a fight more than they actually engage in the fight. Rock-throwing cannot defeat even moderately armed police in an unbridled confrontation of force, and dumpster fires are not terribly difficult to put out or move. Even major riots that escalate to widespread property destruction could be put down with the full application of deadly force that the police (and certainly the military) have at their disposal. The police make their own strategic and emotional calculations about their use of force, not the least of which is fear of riots spreading or developing into complete social breakdown. The physical violence on both sides of the riot is therefore marked by the quality of restraint. At the very same time, the symbol of the riot is the opposite, especially in a political context where nonviolent tactics are standard.

It is worth quoting Owe at length, as she connects the symbol of protest violence with strategy against the overwhelming violence of the US state:

We're clearly living in an oligarchy and people think we're living in a democracy. You know, we've never been in a democracy. Just the lack of education of the general population in terms of how our government works, you know even voter suppression. On a basic level people are really unaware of how perverted our system is by the people who have all the power within it. And so it makes me think a lot about, you know this history of anarchists in the Spanish Civil War, or Jews in the ghettos [in Europe], folks who are existing right before fascists completely took over and who were doing some really badass collective organizing to get rid of money and operating of barter systems. You know fascist policies become normalized gradually, and I see that happening in the US... So the presumption that any kind of civil disobedience must be "better" or more pure than what is being put on us is ridiculous. And it's a form of gaslighting by the entitled. So you know if people are ignorant about the extent of state violence, and leftists are drawing attention to that, that's good. The black blocs are like infants with a rattle compared to the state violence around us... I just think that we're in such a violent society, I think there needs to be people drawing attention to that in some way. And who knows, maybe there is a zone where property destruction, if done on a massive level, could it be effective if it was actually scaled up? I don't know, I'm not personally going to go down that route, but it's always a question of scale with tactics. If you think about economic boycotts in previous eras, where people say "I'm not spending money on this business in our neighborhood," what's the 21st century version of that? Where it's not just like how you spend your money – that doesn't do much anymore; corporations are so large, and finance capital is totally insulated, so economic boycotts are less likely to have a real effect. So what could create a similar kind of sanction? That's part of the process of figuring out what our strategy might be. And setting things on fire certainly sends a message, and let's be honest, it's as good an idea as the next.

With respect to the scope of political violence, the riotous actions discussed by black bloc participants are so minimal they can barely be considered violent – and indeed many argue that property destruction is not in fact violence. But to say that breaking a window or torching a cop car is *not* violent would be misleading; there is a palpable and undeniable difference between a protest in which property is physically attacked and one in which physical destruction is off limits. Even returning to Sorel, who is (in)famous for promoting the use of violence as consciousness-raising strategy, himself ends up "proposing nothing more violent than the famous myth of the general strike, a form of action which we today would think of as belonging rather to the arsenal of nonviolent politics" (Arendt 1970: 12). As we have seen, the strike is a locus of a great deal of confusion and misperception about the use of violence, but the point is, the crux of the

contemporary debate between violent and nonviolent tactics is drawn as far to the side of nonviolence as possible. The “violence” being discussed, which is indeed qualitatively different from actions in which property destruction is forbidden, is nevertheless primarily symbolic; public dissent-as-property-destruction symbolizes the inherent violence required to forcefully resist structural violence. And the feeling of violating the sanctity of private property and of police authority, two pillars of liberal society, delivers for many a transcendent sensation. These forms of low-level violent resistance symbolize the fight – and one’s position, perhaps identity, in it – in a way that can be felt in the body. Amidst a bureaucratic neoliberal system that is consistently and relentlessly disempowering, feeling that embodied power can be transformative.

It is not simply neoliberalism in some abstract sense that is disempowering, but also social movement organizations and strategies that are shaped by neoliberal constraints – the “gaslighting by the entitled” that Owe referenced. The physically transgressive actions of the black bloc take place in reference to disempowering actions in conventional protest and movement organizations, as Zi’s quote above testifies to. Em described how the disempowering quality of conventional organizing can have deep impacts on a person’s identity; the black blocs was a mode of action that countered the disempowerment of the system with the embodiment of fighting back, contributing to the formation of a more empowered identity:

There are so many experiences of disempowerment. Including in movement organizing. I didn’t personally feel like I had power in any of the political protests I saw and was part of... I think there are important parts of identity that are formed through experiences of power, either being repressed by power or having the opportunity to wield power.

⁸ Em acknowledged the historically tactical application of the black bloc to defend squats in Germany, and described similar tactical applications she had participated in. Nevertheless, in her experiences related in this interview, the most transformative aspects of participation in black blocs resided in their subjective quality.

Some have attempted to conceptualize a riot as the direct conduit to broad social transformation (e.g., The Invisible Committee 2007⁹). But there are obvious limitations to the ability of a riot as discussed here to directly transform society. However, in the words of black bloc participants we see how the riot has the direct ability to transform individuals and collectives. Riots can symbolize the embodied persistence of political struggle in society and infuse participants with a visceral sense of which side they are on. The riot might not in and of itself transform broader society, but then again no single tactic does. Black bloc participants describe how the riot imbues participants with a lasting empowerment and the visceral sense that society can be changed for the better, sustaining long-term engagement in political work.

5.3 Conclusion

This chapter explores one perspective on the mobilizing effect of riots in the US. Activists who have participated in black bloc “riots” report that the experience of pushing past the boundary of accepted nonviolent protest has played a radically sustaining role in their activism. Moments of physical confrontation have lasting phenomenological impacts, in this case heightening, and in a certain sense creating, an empowered political consciousness. The conclusions in this chapter reflect the experiences of protesters who have participated in low-level violent collective actions – though not necessarily undertaken violent actions themselves. They do not necessarily imply that certain types of nonviolent actions could not also generate an effervescent sensation, as some have suggested (e.g., Kearney 2018). They do, however, point to the affective power of the riotous

⁹ Incidentally, one interviewee had this to say about these authors, who are French: “The Invisible Committee or whatever are hated by French comrades. I hear they’re rich and show up late to riots.”

space. Riots, at least a certain kind of riots, have distinct symbolic power, representing the embodied visceral reality of social struggle. The effects of the riot on participants are all the more pronounced in a neoliberal environment in which it is more and more difficult to tell form from content in social movement actions. Violence in protests, even very low-levels of violence, exists in constant comparison to an ideal of nonviolent struggle on the one hand and the overwhelming brutality of systemic violence on the other, marking out an interstitial symbolic space where politics are clarified and, in a sense, new political subjects are born.

6.0 Fallists, Decolonization, and Humanizing Violence

How do violent protests interact with decolonial struggle? I begin here with the concept of decolonization because contemporary political struggles in South Africa cannot be discussed without it. (Perhaps this is true of everywhere.) In the words of contemporary South African activists, it quickly became clear that the student movement was inseparable from the struggle to decolonize the country; decolonization and violence are intertwined.

At least since the Haitian Revolution, revolutionaries have grappled with decolonization (see James 1963). Imperialism is not merely military occupation, it was the violent imposition of an order – governmental organization, logic, knowledge, and culture. Movements that sought to throw off imperial domination therefore sooner or later faced the elements of colonialism that run deeper than overt political control (see Mamdani 2012). The political language of decolonization as we know it comes from the Twentieth Century liberation struggles of Africa, Asia, and the Americas, and in particular from Frantz Fanon – who, not coincidentally, also figures prominently in the discourse around violent political struggle. Decolonization is about both overthrowing European colonial occupations and undoing colonial ways of thinking and being (Fanon 1952, 1961). In other words, decolonization is the process of disordering the colonial order, and re-ordering the world into something just. And, as Fanon put it in the opening sentence to his most famous work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, “decolonization is always a violent event” (1961: 1).

Fanon was a revolutionary and clinical psychotherapist from Martinique who, after studying in France and practicing in Algeria, joined the Algerian resistance against French occupation. Fanon’s written work is largely about what it means to recognize, expose, and disrupt colonial regimes of state and mind that have been both aggressively beaten and more subtly

socialized into people over generations through colonial relationships and institutions. To Fanon, it would not be enough – in fact it would not be possible – to overthrow colonialism without destroying the colonizer inside the mind of the colonized, which manifested itself through various inferiority complexes. In order to achieve this liberation of the mind, body, and nation, Fanon pointed toward the power of violent revolt. Importantly, to Fanon, revolutionary violence is ultimately *not* instrumental, as Arendt would have us believe, but rather is at its core about colonized people proving to themselves that they are strong, capable, and worthy.

The concept of decolonization has to do with upending colonial regimes that far outlast colonial governments, bringing up questions such as what it takes to practice languages of knowing, communicating, and relating that jettison the imposed colonial mindset (wa Thiong'o 1986). To writer and philosopher Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, the essence of decolonial practice is about decentering Western epistemologies, that is, European colonial ways of thinking and knowing, which had been forcibly imposed on most of the world while erasing other bodies of knowledge (ibid). Here, the university is a centerpiece.

In March 2015, a student activist at the University of Cape Town (UCT) threw human excrement on a statue of Cecil Rhodes. Until it was removed a month later as a result of escalating protests, that statue had sat for well over a century as though presiding over the campus, which was once part of Rhodes' personal estate. Student organizers, in what would come to be known as the RhodesMustFall (RMF) movement (after their Twitter hashtag), covered the statue entirely and occupied an administrative building and held public actions until the UCT management¹ agreed to remove it (Chaudhuri 2016). Rhodes was a British diamond magnate and an architect of European colonization, particularly in southern Africa, where he presided over the Cape Colony

¹ What US Americans call university “administrations,” South Africans call “management.”

in what is now South Africa, and helped to found “Rhodesia,” which was named for him and is now Zimbabwe. Beyond his personal profits, Rhodes was a believer in British imperialism, and was pioneer in colonial occupation, administration, and ideology. In 2015, students had decided they had enough of his statue at UCT, and anti-colonial protests quickly spread across the country and beyond, to among other places Oxford University, home of the renowned Rhodes Scholarship, which is funded by Rhodes’ estate (see Rhodes Must Fall, Oxford 2018). The action against the statue was the spark, but the movement was about much deeper issues, not least the institutional structures and legacy of colonial education. And the legacy of colonialism in the South African educational system is not subtle; at the onset of RMF, the politics department at the most prestigious university in South Africa did not offer a single course on African politics.²

Later in 2015, movements bearing the hashtags OutsourcingMustFall³ (OMF), which focused on low-wage university workers who are “outsourced” from private companies, and FeesMustFall (FMF), which focused on university tuition, picked up the baton of decolonial struggle in South African universities, with the participants of all three movements coming to be known as Fallists (Gillespie and Naidoo 2019). This chapter focuses on Fallist activists who participated in university uprisings in 2015-2016. My interviews mainly focus on participants in FMF, which arose in 2015 in protest over proposed hikes to university tuition,⁴ with many also

² The following is from an interview with professor at University of the Witwatersrand, describing how the movement was taken up by certain graduate students and faculty:

Professor: ... the movement within the politics department was trying to demand Black lecturers, demand a course of African politics in the politics department, which wasn’t there (laughs).

Me: Really? That’s shocking.

Professor: It’s shocking. Completely shocking.

³ Also called #EndOutsourcing.

⁴ FeesMustFall as an identifiable movement began at Wits, a prestigious and historically white institution, and quickly spread to other schools. However, protests and riots against tuition (and other issues) are common at historically Black technical colleges, most prominently at Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). While a deeper discussion of the relationship between activists at these different universities is important, it is outside the scope of this chapter.

directly associated with OMF and RMF. The FMF movement temporarily defeated the 2015 national fee increase after disruptive and sometimes violent protest and campus occupations at universities across the country. When fees were again raised the following year, a second, smaller, and more politically radical wave of protest challenged the hikes again, this time unsuccessfully. FMF was most prominently associated with the 2015 uprising at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in Johannesburg, though many schools and campuses were home to uprisings, and it directly followed and overlapped with OMF campaigns. Both FMF and OMF followed and overlapped with RMF campaign. All three struggles were intimately connected, and each represented deeper and intertwined political goals focused on class, race, and gender inequalities, and above all on the decolonization of higher education in South Africa (see Chinguno et al., eds. 2017; Gillespie and Naidoo 2019; Naidoo, Gamedze, and Magano, eds. 2017). RMF in particular went global, with decolonization campaigns targeting colonial symbols, institutions, and curricula at universities across the world (see *Rhodes Must Fall*, Oxford 2018).

The different Fallist campaigns highlighted different aspects of the struggle, but were understood by participants as inherently connected (Kassa 2017; Kgoroba 2017; Mahlanhu 2017).

In the words of a Fallist interviewee from UCT:

FeesMustFall is an extension of RhodesMustFall because it was a direct progression from symbolic decolonization to material decolonization of the universities. Insourcing is about decolonization too. Because those workers travel from townships to work for some private company like they are still second-class citizens or even slaves, like this is not their country! They can't afford to send their kids to school on their wages, so even FMF is directly connected to the workers as well.

Beyond being connected to one another, all of these campaigns were steeped in intersectional politics,⁵ unavoidably challenging the fallacy of the “single-issue” movement. Fallist

⁵ Intersectionality is a term credited to legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991), and is associated with other Black Feminist scholars like Patricia Hill Collins (2000). The original intervention challenged the idea of “single-

movements cannot be understood as anti-colonial without also understanding them as queer feminist and anti-capitalist. Intra-movement tensions and conflicts along intersectional lines arose from the outset and were present throughout, and activist-written accounts do not shy from discussing the messiness and power of a radical movement working through internal anti-Blackness, misogyny, transphobia, and class contradictions (see Dlakavu 2017; White 2017; Rhodes Must Fall, Oxford 2018).⁶ Full discussion of South Africa's decolonial student movements are important, and many exist already, some visible in the citations herein.⁷ This chapter must be understood in its wider context, but the analysis here focuses specifically on the phenomenological effects of protest actions which cross the line between what is understood as nonviolent and violent.

Fanon figures prominently in this chapter, not the least because student activists frequently cited him and his influence. Fanon's theory, therefore, precedes the movement, seeds it, and provides a powerful analytic framework for understanding it. It is worth mentioning that this multi-level dynamic between theory and practice flows through interviews with Fallists; the experiences of student activists, many of whom are graduate students of the social sciences, often involved direct reference to political and social theory, as well as reflexive engagement with those theories.

issue" politics, pointing to the ways Black women in the US faced both racism as Black people and also sexism as women in an *intersectional* dynamic that altered and multiplied the effect of both forms of oppression. The intersectional idea is often traced to the Combahee River Collective statement of 1974. Since then the word has come to mean a variety of things, but is often associated with the ways that multiple forms of systemic oppression create differently oppressed identities. On intersectionality politics in the Fallist movements, see Mupotsa 2017.

⁶ The will to (self-)critique in Fallist scenes was exceptional, if at times appearing to me to border on excessive. In activist publications, public talks, and personal interactions many Fallists were determined to center the marginalized and prioritize praxis. Witnessing the book release events for two activist-written publications about FMF, I was reminded of Amílcar Cabral's famous admonition of the revolutionary: "Hide nothing from the masses of our people. Tell no lies. Expose lies wherever they are told. Mask no difficulties, mistakes, failures. Claim no easy victories" (Cabral 1970: 72). For their part, Fallists certainly appear to live up to this wisdom.

⁷ Student activist publications regarding the Fallist movements demonstrate exceptional theoretical depth and analytic sharpness. I highly recommend *Publica[c]tion* (Naidoo, Gamedze, and Magano, eds. 2017), *Rioting and Writing* (Chinguno et al., eds. 2017), as well as the publication *Chimurenga*, which is not specifically related to student activists but involves some, and publishes material that is influential and related to the overall politics of the Fallist movements.

6.1 In-Depth Interviews with Fallist Activists

This study emerges from in-depth interviews with fifteen activists in South Africa specifically associated with Fallist student movements.⁸ As with the study presented in the previous chapter, I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews based on that method's benefits for social movement research related to contentious activity (Blee and Taylor 2002). Interviewees were contacted based on personal references within activist scenes, through subsequent snowball sampling, or based on chance encounters. All interviews were conducted in person and ranged from 35 minutes to two hours in length. Interviews were mostly with individuals, with the exception of one group of two students and one group of three students who were interviewed together. Additionally, I observed activist spaces, consulted activist-written literature, and attended multiple activist events and public talks, as well as book releases for two activist-written publications about the Fallist movements.

As with the study presented in the previous chapter, I take precautions to protect interviewees' identities due to the nature of the activities being discussed. I disclose overall demographics and some locations but obscure specific information that might identify an interlocutor. Gender pronouns and racial identity are accurate but names are artificial (with the exception of activists I quote directly from writing they have published, in which case I use the names they use in the publication for that citation). The majority of the fifteen interviewees were based in Johannesburg, while four were based in Cape Town and one was based in Pretoria.

⁸ Formal interviews and observations were conducted in July and August of 2017. Travel and lodging were supported by the Stanley Prostrednik Memorial Scholarship. Observations on this research trip were facilitated by those of a previous visit to South Africa years prior. Communication with activists for this study began online in late 2016 and continue until today.

Demographically, eight were women and seven were men; eight were Black, four were white (including one Jewish person), two identified as “coloured” (mixed-race heritage), and one was of Asian descent (who was Muslim). Interlocutors included students and former students from Wits, University of Johannesburg (UJ), and UCT, as well as one professor and one university worker at Wits who participated in FMF. Formal interview data is supplemented by numerous informal interviews and interactions in activist spaces.

Personal accounts of activists who have participated in protester violence add necessary phenomenological insight to the understanding of contentious politics. As this study reflects fewer formal interviews than that of the previous chapter, and because I have less experiential context as a researcher, I draw directly from more respondents’ remarks in this analysis. Through these narratives we gain insight into how participants make sense of violent protest actions through their own experiences, as well as how participation in those actions has affected them and their political work.

6.2 Humanizing Violence and the Decolonial Riot

The South African FMF movement emerged from student solidarity with workers’ campaigns at universities across the country to resist “outsourcing,” or the replacing of workers who had been employed by the university with private contractors. Through a campaign-oriented lens, FMF was sparked by tuition hikes at major universities, and its demand was a retraction of fee increases. Like respondents in the US case, the disruptive tactics of the Fallist movements mobilized participants who had been disillusioned by conventional protest. One Wits student reports hearing about a protest at the university gates, and asking: “was this another one of [the

elected student government's] frivolous ploys to seek attention from the university management?" Upon discovering that students were forcibly barricading the gate to protest tuition hikes, he says: "without second invitation I joined the blockade" (Moyo 2017: 51). For Moyo, the forcefulness of the protest imbued it with reality and made it viscerally worthwhile.

Domestic and international media focused on protests at Wits, a prestigious and historically-white university, where students occupied and shut down campus in 2015. However, many other universities rose up as well, and from students' perspectives the struggle was not limited to fees but was intertwined from its inception with the struggle for workers' rights, and beyond that the struggle to decolonize higher education and national politics. An excerpt from a group interview with three Wits undergraduates, Kay, El, and Tee, who had all participated in FMF actions, illustrates the connections between FMF and the broader political context and history of struggle. It also points to key areas of internal disagreement among participants.

Kay: Okay, we got the zero percent⁹ but that's it, and only for one year. FeesMustFall is about fees of course but it is also about deeper changes.

Interviewer (hereafter, I): Do you think the government is capable of making the deeper changes FeesMustFall needs?

El: Yeah, they can. They have been around for a long time in the struggle and in the state. They have a lot of know-how about the system and how it really works. But they don't want to do it.

Tee: They're comfortable.

Kay: They're so comfortable! It's true.

Tee: It's like if I'm dating this girl, and after a while I know she won't leave me, so I can just go days without showering, because I don't care even if I'm filthy. That's what the ANC is like. [Everyone laughs]

El: They're so comfortable, man.

⁹ In December, 2015, after months of escalation and amidst demonstrations and riots in Pretoria, then-president Zuma announced that there would be a "zero percent" increase in student fees for the upcoming year.

I: So how do you get the changes you need?

Tee: You have to make them *uncomfortable*. And to make them uncomfortable, you have to compromise yourself.

El: He's telling the truth.

I: What do you mean?

Tee: You have to compromise yourself. You have to do things you don't want to do. You have to throw stones, even risk your life. That's what you have to do if you want to make these people in power feel uncomfortable. Then things might change.

El: There were problems and no one was listening. After FeesMustFall, now they're listening.

Kay [to El and Tee]: But do you think FeesMustFall was successful?

Tee: I think so.

El: No!

Kay: No, man. Because FeesMustFall won the zero percent, but it was only for one year! Can you imagine if they had said, "okay, no apartheid from '94 to '95, then it will resume again"? That is not victory.

Tee: Yes, but now they are listening. That is why FeesMustFall must continue.

To these students, the goal was the removal of fee increases and related student interests, and at the same time the struggle was also about the legacy and present condition of the ruling African National Congress party (ANC). While these students do not specify here the "deeper changes" that they sought, they allude in multiple ways to the connections between the ANC revolution against apartheid and their political moment. Like many participants, these students characterize their movement as both a continuation of the struggle against apartheid and also as a movement targeting the protagonists of that prior struggle. Notably, by comparing FMF negatively to the anti-apartheid struggle in terms of its failure to secure more lasting change, we learn that

Kay sees the ANC as having been necessary and successful in the struggle of their time, only moments after naming that same party as the enemy of the change he wants to see in his time.

For Cee, a student at UCT who participated in the Fallist movements, Fallism was a direct extension of the long process of decolonizing South Africa, saying, “Our parents did their thing, now we have to do ours.” He went on to explain:

The ultimate goal is to create a new society, these struggles like FMF are about winning changes that can bring more poor people to the universities and it is about making the universities for Africans. And about creating a new movement culture that can do these things... of course I respect the anti-apartheid movement; apartheid had to end and they ended it. And for a while there was euphoria around that and for good reason. And people tested how much they could change society in the new system and they found that there were big limitations, mainly capitalism. But some people thought their job had been done and they left the movement to the state. Now it is our turn.

The Fallist movements in many ways represent a solidification of discontent from the left over ANC political stagnation, mismanagement, and corruption. While in the US, the 1990s and early 2000s represented a time of political torpor for left social movements, in South Africa that decade marked a time of radical possibility. After the fall of apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela, the ANC government enjoyed great popular support and, for a few years, a honeymoon period during which movements largely demobilized and petitioned their concerns to the state from within the system (Ballard, Habib, and Valodia, eds. 2006).¹⁰ (This relative demobilization from the mid-nineties to the mid-aughts is clearly visible in Figure 5 in Chapter 4.) The consolidation of democracy in this decade also came with a turn toward a neoliberal economic program, and the exacerbation of social justice grievances which mounted over time (Madlingozi

¹⁰ One of the editors of this volume, Adam Habib, was Vice Chancellor of Wits during the FMF uprising, and according to students and workers was a personified target of protests at that university. According to activists, students at one point essentially held Habib hostage in a general assembly, forcing him to call university board members on the phone to relate student grievances (Habib himself said he was not held but elected to remain at the general assembly). In any event, that Habib is an academic authority on protest in post-apartheid South Africa and also was the target of one of the defining post-apartheid movements should not go unmentioned. See Leopeng (2017).

2007). The mid-2000s saw renewed escalations of both peaceful demonstrations and unrest across the country (von Holdt 2013), and in a sense the Fallist movements codified and articulated growing national discontent with the path of the ANC revolution.¹¹ The repression that the state and the universities brought down on Fallists through police and private security (often referred by interviewees as “bouncers” among less polite monikers), makes the cleavages between movements and the ANC unmistakable.¹²

While there was some tension in the FMF movement between those who emphasized the tangible need to remove fees and those who emphasized the cultural-political struggle to decolonize the university system, most interviewees agreed that both were integral aspects of the movement. The larger political tension¹³ appeared between those who believed the ANC government could ultimately be pushed to continue the decolonial revolution or whether Fallism represented a new revolutionary movement to remove the ANC altogether and replace it with something new. The latter position was referred to by multiple interlocutors using the part-literal, part-figurative term: “burn it down,” as in, “the *burn it down contingent* did this or that.” This tension was exacerbated by the resources and clout that ANC-backed student government officers wielded, at times, according to some interviewees, working to demobilize the movement.

¹¹ Is Fallism a civil resistance movement or is it a post-civil resistance movement? In the connection and the antagonism between the ANC revolution and the Fallist uprising, the limitations of the campaign-oriented frame of civil resistance studies is apparent. Both Sharp’s theory and Chenoweth’s data would endeavor to characterize these as discreet campaigns, analyzable on their own terms based purely on their tactical repertoires. The reality of Fallism as a movement of its own and also an outcome of the outcomes of the ANC movement simultaneously challenges the notion of the campaign as a unit of analysis and highlights the failure of civil resistance literature to take seriously the outcomes of campaigns.

¹² In addition to standard riot suppression techniques such as tear gas and rubber bullets and imprisonment, repression included pursuing, physically attacking, and sexually assaulting activists on campuses and in their residences.

¹³ Other major tensions within the movement included gender, leadership, and representation in the struggle (see Chinguno et al., eds. 2017).

The language and praxis of decolonization were common threads in both positions described above, but far more pronounced in the burn it down contingent. Decolonization in this context points to the colonial legacy of apartheid, and European colonialism more generally, manifested in everything from stark and persistent racial wealth disparities, to faculty composition at universities like Wits and UCT, to Euro-centric curricula and material. In addition to South African revolutionaries who had advocated more radical paths during the anti-apartheid struggle, such as Black Consciousness Movement leader Steve Biko, Fanon's work made frequent appearances in interviews both explicitly and implicitly. Fanon, as mentioned earlier, is famously associated with his prescription of political violence for colonized people to reclaim dignity and agency. At times activists would simply use his name and our understood shared understanding of Fanon's work to stand in for the argument that revolutionary violence is an essential aspect of struggle, for example, saying something like, "you know, it's like Fanon said," by way of explaining why a rock was thrown or a building set on fire.

For Fanon, violent revolt is a means for colonized peoples to overcome their internalized inferiority complex through the exercise of force against their oppressors (Fanon 1961).¹⁴ Fanon has also been pigeon-holed into his advocacy for violence in ways that obscure other elements of his theory that are required to properly understand the violence part. As Arendt once put it, it is as though only the first chapter of *The Wretched of the Earth*, titled, "On Violence," has been widely read (Arendt 1970: 14). After chapter one, Fanon discusses problems with excesses or misdirection of violence, including the ways it can lead to counter-revolution from within. Fanon's approach to violence has thus been described as a radically democratizing force, which could prevent "a new

¹⁴ Fanon's advocacy of violence against the oppressor as a means for oppressed peoples to reclaim the dignity and self-respect that it would take to create and govern liberated post-colonial countries bears distinct similarities to the effect that Gandhi had argued adherence to nonviolence in the face of oppression could produce.

postcolonial elite from imposing a regime of symbolic violence which might incorporate and pacify the people” (von Holdt 2012: 116). Two decades on from a new regime that succeeded in some areas but is failing tremendously in others, Fallist explicit and implicit references to Fanon speak directly to this position.

Fallists occupy an ambiguous space between and against the university system. They target the colonial education structure, and advocate metaphorically and also in some cases literally burning it down (Mehlolakulu 2017).¹⁵ And yet they are students, and their academic training is as evident in their interviews as it is in the writing and analysis Fallists have produced. During the Wits campus occupation, students held nightly study meetings – “Wits Protest Sociology,” – where they would unpack and reflect on the activities of the day, as one activist reflected, “because at the end of the day we are still students, and the academic project must continue.”¹⁶ An activist collective that produced an edited volume on Fallist struggle describes the tension: “There is something about a decolonial moment that requires incoherence. Or just perhaps is incoherent. Conversely there is something about an intellectual tendency or perhaps just an academic one that seeks to impose order: coherence” (Publica[c]tion Collective 2017: 3). Fallism grows from that interstitial space between the incoherence of decolonial revolution and the coherence of academic intellectualism. And, unlike their predecessors in the anti-apartheid movements, Fallists are in an awkward position concerning their targets in the state as well – who in fact are those predecessors themselves. Unlike the National Party government, the ANC does not represent sheer, unadulterated colonialism, racism, and oppression, but something far more complicated. Lest they

¹⁵ In perhaps the most extreme example, a campus law library was burned down during the 2016 wave of the movement. (See *Reuters*. 2016. South African University Library Torched, 32 Arrested. September 7. (URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-safrica-protests/south-african-university-library-torched-32-students-arrested-idUSKCN11D1YZ>) Accessed August 12, 2017.

¹⁶ Quoted from the book release event for *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits Fallists*, July 27, 2017.

be tempted back into thinking the revolution can be further progressed from within the system, protester violence – fires, barricades, property damage, and scuffles with police and security – therefore holds the political struggle in a contentious space.

Many South African students described riots similarly to US black bloc participants in terms of the adrenalized experience in the moment. An activist at UCT, Emee, who was involved in several fights with police and security associated with both the 2015 and 2016 waves of the movement, became perceptibly animated when discussing those moments beyond strict nonviolent protest. In her words: “Fighting the police and security was a rush. You must understand we were so angry! So when I was at the barricades and it was so big, it felt like history in the making.” She is speaking more rapidly. “Even when I was shot with a rubber bullet, I should have been afraid. It was like getting hit with a bat. I couldn’t breathe, but it also gave me even more of an adrenaline rush.”

Ess, a graduate student activist at UJ, describes a protest in which she did not personally engage in violent actions, but where the presence of protester violence inspired a similar reflection as those who had. In this case, police had violently dispersed a student road blockade near campus, prompting some students to throw rocks at the police.

It gave me energy... It was necessary! We needed that. Because they’re treating us like animals, like people without rights, like non-beings. And I think when we throw stones, it’s a way of reclaiming our humanity again. You know, to say we also have some form of agency in the fight... it gave me courage to see that.

For Ess, as with other interviewees, the act of low-level violence against authority gives her not only energy but courage, and generates the empowering feeling of having “agency in the fight.” Here, just as was the case in the US study, the presence of rock-throwing counters feelings of dehumanization and affectively enhances the subjective experience of a member of the crowd *who did not directly participate*, indicating the discursive power of the tactic extends beyond the

individual actor to a group experience to a collective identity. Ess even uses “we” to refer to the stone-throwers even though she was not a stone-thrower in this particular instance. Her identification with the action while not directly participating provides further evidence against canonical theories of crowd behavior, which hold that the rioting crowd typically imbues participants with a contagious and unrestrainable urge to violence (e.g., Canetti 1960; Durkheim 1915; Le Bon 1895). On the contrary, studies show that many participants in riots do not directly engage in violent actions (Simiti 2012), but here we see a positive affective experience from participation in the collective riot from an individual who does not herself throw rocks.

Ess describes this same feeling in more detail in a subsequent action. During a night march that included parents and other community members, the police opened fire and dispersed the demonstration:

The police start firing rubber bullets at us... People have been shot in the back, they're laying there, and people are hiding out, the cops are walking around with their guns... like a warzone. And it's so intense, and we are so broken. It feels like there's no hope. So at that point a bus shelter was burnt. And we all thought it was beautiful. To see the fire. Because it's what Fanon mentions. It's kind of like a therapy for us. We needed it in that moment. We needed the roads to be blocked and we needed the stones.

In describing the importance of violent actions by students, Ess challenges the appropriateness of the word “violence” for those same actions. In one instance, she even corrects herself midsentence, her voice containing a frustration with the lack of better words for what she is describing: “So there was also an attempt to use violence to – not *violence*; it's termed violence, but, certain actions or tactics, let's put it that way – to be able to then trigger people, to wake them up.” Ess is not frustrated that actions were called violent on the basis of rock-throwers because of the illegitimacy of that action; she is frustrated that the word violence, which is understood to be negative, has to be used at all for rock-throwing, which she considers essential. Many interlocutors

from both South Africa and the US likewise took issue with the rhetorical use of the term “violence” to describe physically destructive action by protesters.

Ardee, an outsourced worker at Wits who was active in the OMF campaign and was an ally to students in FMF, framed violence in terms of who was ultimately to blame. To him, if the students were responding to provocations from security, then those responses were not violent, because they would not have happened if they had not been provoked. In the quote below, he discusses a large concourse in a centrally-located campus building,¹⁷ which was the source of many altercations during FMF:

They say the students are violent. But I can confess that was not true. Because I was involved in those things. I was always with the students. What we have is that the university just decided to bring outside securities and the police, and those people kept on provoking the students. For example at Wits, the place the students want to go when there are actions or big meetings, they use that concourse. So if you block the way of the students to go there, surely there will be a fight. Because whatever they do, they make sure they have to reach that point. It's what they do. If you don't need violence, don't stop them from going there! Because if they go there they don't do anything wrong. They don't have any violence. They just go there and sit and relax and talk about whatever they need to talk about. What will happen if you block the entrance for the students? You know what will happen. They can't just say, no, the entrance is blocked, we will go out. No! They can't. They'll keep on saying, “we need to go in there!” So when the students were trying to push hard to come in there, the securities decided to push the students out. So then the students tried to force in. So that's how the problem got started. So if you block the entrance of the students, what do you expect? So in fact I can say for me, I think they were provoking the students.

Here we see the baseline understanding of violence is not tacked to the action itself, but to its cause. It is only when you hear someone frame it that way that you realize how normalized it is to assume that whatever police or security forces do is legitimate, and that protesters must always react with deference. In this case, it would be easy to frame as the students' fault for escalating

¹⁷ Specifically, he is referring to the concourse in Solomon Mahlangu House, a large indoor space in a main campus building where student meetings typically took place. It had previously been called “Senate House” and following the FMF uprising was officially renamed for Mahlangu, a martyr from Umkhonto we Sizwe (Spear of the Nation), the militant wing of the ANC during the anti-apartheid struggle.

when security closed Solomon Mahlangu House. Instead, Ardee sees it as security escalating by closing the building in the first place; student reactions to that are then understandable and justifiable. To paraphrase Sartre from the preface to *The Wretched of the Earth*, protester violence is just police violence on the rebound (Fanon 1961: 1ii).

Many Fallists frame violence as a moral issue. For example, a Wits student, Abee, argues for the difference between “big violence” (i.e., structural, epistemic) and “little violence” (i.e., violent tactics in protest of big violence). This solution is a sort of compromise, on the one hand prioritizing the understanding that structural violence is the real problem, and also acknowledging that throwing rocks is in a sense technically violent. Others insist on the incomparability of protester “violence” to systemic violence, and therefore do not accept the same singular word for both, a position summed up for our purposes by Fallist activist Moshibudi Motimele: “Violence has nothing to do with throwing stones” (Motimele 2017). One way or another, Fallists frequently challenge the term “violence” when discussing protester actions, typically re-framing in terms of the systemic violence that the protests were fighting back against. Others – sometimes at the very same time as they critiqued the use of violence to describe protests – argued for reclaiming the term as well. For example, explaining the title of a 2017 Fallist-written book on the struggle, *Rioting and Writing*, a contributor and member of the editorial collective said: “Rioting was a way of responding to the dominant narrative, which was that the students were just hooligans rioting. So we’re saying yes, we are rioting, but we’re also writing, documenting our struggle. It is expropriating the term.”¹⁸ The tension between violence as a descriptor of certain actions and violence as hegemonic political rhetoric is present throughout activists’ accounts.

¹⁸ Quoted from the book release event for *Rioting and Writing: Diaries of the Wits Fallists*, July 27, 2017.

Ess' description of using forceful tactics intentionally to raise consciousness among students who have not yet taken a side in the university struggle recalls again Sorel's prescription of strategic violence to shake the apathetic middle class out of complacency and force them to take a side in the revolution (Sorel 1950) – and, as in the black bloc case, Ess' remarks invert Sorel, speaking to violent tactics being applied to rouse the agnostic or meek to action on her side. Putting this another way, Fallist activists speak of low-level violence in many of the ways that nonviolentists speak of nonviolent direct action – as building the confidence and empowerment of the activists, mobilizing supporters to their side, and provoking retaliation that exposes the realities of the system they are fighting. And, once again, the type of “violence” being applied is extraordinarily minimal. This again points us back to the difficulty inherent in the language of violence versus nonviolence, and especially when making meaning of actions that appear to blur the lines between the two.

Feeling defeated in the face of repressive police violence, interlocutors describe a physically-assertive response as therapeutic and rejuvenating in a way that a nonviolent response lacked the capability to generate. Protester violence here does not reflect the “quest for political meaning” that Seferiades and Johnston propose (2012: 6), but rather the *production and communication of political meaning* – perhaps to opponents and onlookers, but most of all to *participants themselves*.

Karl von Holdt and coauthors suggest that the ordinary deployment of low-level violent tactics in South African protest repertoires, most commonly in the form of stone-throwing and burning street barricades, functions primarily as a signal to authorities to take grievances seriously – a phenomenon they term, “the smoke that calls” (von Holdt et al. 2012). In these interviews, participants discuss “burning it down” as signaling, but more as signaling to protesters themselves

and potential allies than to the state. The difference relates to an underlying, if unconscious, ideological difference between reform and revolution. While it is tempting to view riots as inherently radical due to their deployment of violent means, if their objective is to bring about increased state attention to a social problem so that the state (or capital) will solve it, the implicit theory of change is fundamentally reformist, even liberal. The problems justifying the riot can theoretically be solved by the authorities, who perhaps need a fire lit under them to get them to do it. On the other hand, if the violence of the riot is directed against the forces of the state (and capital) in order to clear space in which to exist outside, or to gather people power against the authority of that institution, then the riot is fundamentally revolutionary. It is this latter type of anti-police riot which Alain Badiou (2012) theorizes has at its horizon the commune, as in the Paris Commune. For some, the smoke of a riot may be meant to call authorities' attention to the site of protest in order to address a grievance; for others, this smoke is meant to call participants to their side of the barricades in order to solve the problem themselves. Crucially, both elements appear to be present among Fallist activists, and in fact this ambiguous relationship to regime and repertoire¹⁹ appears to be a primary characteristic of the Fallist movement.

One particularly notable instance of such a radical deployment of violence aimed at ally rather than opponent was when radicals raided a student government election site and destroyed the ballots. As Bede, a graduate student activist at UJ, told it:

Management was very worried that this Wits thing [the FMF campus occupation] would spread. Of course, some of us were working very hard to make it spread, but without any success because the main student organizations were caught up in the SRC – Student Representative Council – elections. At that time and they were kind of like, “no, we’ve got to do this first.” And nobody was brave enough to risk the elections, because if only one group pulls out then their opponents would win, so no one was really brave enough to give up the elections in favor of trying to win the struggle. They were all at that stage too tied up in getting power through getting onto the SRC, which at UJ is quite in with the

¹⁹ Wording taken from Tilly (2006) on purpose but meant only partially as a reference.

management. So this is a theme of the FeesMustFall experience at UJ, the kind of way management tried to manipulate student organizations and how it failed at some point when, finally, some students disrupted the elections... just went and tore down the tent where the ballots were and threw all the ballot boxes around and tore them up. And at that point one group, the independent ticket if you like, they abandoned the elections. They were abandoned already, you understand, but at least at that point they said it. Then we could focus on the struggle, because at that point Wits was already escalating.

Bede saw the elections as a waste of energy when the focus ought to have been more militant actions. Bede in fact refers to the *de facto* reality of everyone already knowing that the elections were irrelevant, but that it took someone materially disrupting the ballots to disrupt the focus on the electoral process. Ess had described that disruption in a similar way, since even if they did not agree with the direct action itself, many students knew that SRC elections were somehow manipulated by management: “The university seems to have its way of getting its own people in there.” And, in the frustration Bede expressed with wasted energy trying to win elections, which themselves do not produce more people power, this action perhaps contained a larger metaphor for discontent with the parameters of electoral democracy in South Africa – and liberal democracy in general. (The attitude described here fundamentally relates to the US as well, where national elections become the focus of political struggle contained within the most limited parameters, which at least at the moment appears to be leading us from liberalism to fascism [see Goodhart and Morefield 2017].) It is not uncommon for “democratic” governing officials and movements to consider each other illegitimate (Markoff 2015: 136). Here, the complex dynamic between Fallist movements and university SRCs – antagonistic in some ways and in other ways allied – is imbedded within a movement that overall contains similar dynamics *vis-à-vis* the state. The ANC government, which had been victorious in a contest sealed by the poster victory of electoral democracy in modern history, had come to represent the calcification of that very system,

in this case represented by funding student leaders to cool the revolutionary politics of the movement.

For those who spoke affirmatively of violence or forceful tactics that get called violent, many used Fanonian terms. However, a subjective reaction to throwing stones is reported even by students from the historically colonizing society. Abee, a white student activist at Wits, described how he typically refrained from throwing rocks himself due to “race and gender issues,” by which he means it would be frowned upon by comrades because of his race and gender. He would, however, try to support “as a body” by positioning himself as a human shield between rock throwers and police. During the interview he generally describes throwing rocks as “an important emotional release” for Black students in many of the same terms Black interviewees used, including that “it reclaims dignity that you are fighting.” However, Abee describes one occasion during which he personally did engage in rock-throwing:

Abee: It was after a long march around campus when we went to meet at Solomon House and security blocked the doors and beat us away from the steps. We were tired, hot, and just wanted to meet and relax and talk together in our place.²⁰ And they blocked us for no reason. We just wanted to meet, you know, and the university was closed, so it wasn’t getting in anyone’s way. So that was one time I picked up rocks and threw them with everyone.

I: Did it work – to release the anger?

Abee: Yes. It was an emotional release and it was a way of registering that they are doing something we don’t accept. For them and also for ourselves. It didn’t get us into Solomon House that day, but the goal also shifted. When something happens that isn’t right, you have to show your discontent, you have to *show* them, and, you know, show yourself that you are not okay with this. Rock throwing does a great job of registering your discontent.

Abee describes the direct motivation for throwing rocks here as frustration, which broke through both the physical and legal risks associated with violent protest and also in his mind his

²⁰ He is referring to the concourse in Solomon Mahlangu House, the same location referenced by Ardee.

otherwise questionable eligibility to participate. He went on to paraphrase a sentiment that resonated with him, which had been related by a Palestinian comrade of his who had studied in South Africa. Speaking about throwing rocks at Israeli tanks at home, the friend had said: “We know it’s not likely to hurt anyone, but all the hurt, pain, frustration, anger, you have to release it somehow. And sometimes yelling isn’t good enough. Rock throwing humanizes you in the face of a dehumanizing situation.” Here Abee draws from the experience of a comrade from a colonized society in commenting on rock-throwing, but nevertheless he also describes a similar feeling when he engaged in that action himself.

In the preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre makes it clear he believes colonial Europe needs to reckon with decolonization as much as – though in a different way than – colonized Africa. Fanon himself discusses particular insecurity complexes developed by colonizer and colonized alike, complexes which must be overcome through action if a just future involving people who come from both groups is possible (see also Memmi 1957). In this case, however, the experience of a white protester in South Africa throwing rocks at Black security guards in solidarity with Black comrades seems to be something else entirely. Without discounting the possibility that there is something else going on here on a subconscious or at least unspoken level, Abee’s sensory reaction of catharsis as an aggrieved party substantially aligns with experiences of Black protesters, pointing toward something distinct about experiences with the type of action in question. While not contradicting arguments around the importance of anti-colonial violence for historically oppressed peoples, this experience indicates that the collective engagement in violent protest against repressive authority contains its own experiential power dynamics.

Fallists I interviewed from Wits, UJ, and UCT were aware of their universities' proximity to whiteness, including the differences between these universities and the ways those perceived differences impacted their mobilizations. UJ students I interviewed all framed Wits as the more prestigious university, in a way that was significant in their conditions of struggle. For example, Ess explained the difference between the two university spaces with a story:

We were trying to create another space apart from SRC and calling for an assembly. That was one of our major demands. And the vice chancellor said [mocking a gruff masculine voice] "this is not Wits – there will be no assembly!" [laughs] So it was very clear. But you see, that's also profound to say, "this is not Wits." So he recognizes that this space is a different kind of space, meant for a different kind of people. So a different kind of university community.

Class plays a role in Fallism, and Wits students, for their part, were acutely aware of their university's prestige both in terms of capital and historical proximity to whiteness, which of course are intertwined. However, Wits, UJ, and UCT all stand apart from technical colleges and historically-Black institutions. FMF at Wits drew media attention because of that institution's acute prestige, just as RMF at UCT had. But according to students at Wits and UJ, protests over fee increases had originated in the technical colleges, specifically Tshwane University of Technology (TUT). In fact, activists from TUT and elsewhere protest and riot over fees fairly regularly. Nevertheless, in FMF most of these students were quickly boxed out of the domestic and certainly international narratives, and even from the organizing itself. For example, activists describe coordinating across campuses using WhatsApp (a messaging app on mobile phones) text groups. In South Africa, as in most places, phone plans are pay-as-you-go, and messaging costs money; poorer students from TUT and elsewhere without networked access to wealth were unable to participate for long. Even in the case of a thoroughly intersectional decolonial struggle, class and social capital continue to play significant material roles in which voices are elevated. My failure to interview students from TUT and other technical colleges – I had been unaware of their

role until well into my interviews with limited time in South Africa, and was not able to make connections in time – represents one of the sharpest limitations of this study.²¹

The actions of TUT students did make it into this study on the bases of accounts from students at other schools. One student from Wits, Aye, a high-ranking member of the SRC during the FMF uprising, recounts the evolution of a distinctly contentious relationship between Wits and TUT activists. “When we occupied, the VC (Vice Chancellor) at Wits didn’t call the police at first. I guess he was afraid of escalation and how it would look for him. At TUT the police come right away. It is a pattern. The students are more radical as a consequence.” The police response at TUT is another reflection of the legacy of colonialism, and it also, according to Aye, radicalized students, who have become used to fighting police in their campus spaces. TUT protesting and being repressed was a pattern, but when Wits rose up, that drew attention. Bede explained:

TUT and other colleges have won small things through their annual protests – lower fees, registration with debt, and that. The university system was on a collision course with students, but the state, media, and even South African society didn’t care until it exploded at prestigious and historically white universities.

Students from poorer institutions who had been at it for years were understandably frustrated at the “Cinderella” students at Wits and elsewhere who received attention the moment they rose up – at least that is how some students at Wits and UJ framed it. At the climactic protest in Pretoria, when then-president Zuma announced the reversal of the fee increase, students from Wits and TUT were both present – and reacted very differently to the news. When the zero percent fee was announced, Wits students tried to depart the rally, but TUT students intervened, in one case even setting a chartered bus on fire to prevent Wits

²¹ I had one interview scheduled with a TUT student, but we missed each other due to my difficulty navigating public transportation to our meeting spot and our subsequent inability to connect via text – essentially I stood him up by accident and was not able to get in touch about it – and I was unable to re-schedule during the time I had.

activists from leaving. As a non-student activist who was present that day put it to me, with a laugh, “the TUT students were like, okay Wits kids, you wanted to be part of this, now we’re here, let’s do this.”²²

In this description, TUT students use violence *vis-à-vis* students at more prestigious universities in precisely the way Ess had described using violence at UJ – to violently encourage would-be-allies to stand with them. In my interviews, while I was unable to speak with activists from TUT, I was lucky enough to get a description from the other side of that dynamic. Aye was on one of the buses that was set on fire. She did not appreciate it, and in fact had a number of negative things to say about the “rock-throwing brigade” in general, including that the people who escalated were usually drunk and were enacting toxic masculinity. Aye was in fact the only interviewee in South Africa who used the standard nonviolence framing I am used to from the US for acts of violent protest: they are hooligans and trouble-makers, not organizers, they invite repression, they turn off popular support, and so forth, indicating that this rhetoric is present and relevant in the South African context as well. Perhaps it is not a coincidence that she had also been an ANC-backed SRC member, and mentioned that she was considering a career in formal politics.

Aye spent most of our interview speaking to the importance of strategic nonviolence, but, amazingly, after a while, she paused and added: “okay, maybe I even picked up a rock once or twice – but it was because I was angry!” This first of all demonstrates the comparative regularity of rock-throwing in South African protest repertoires. But also, Aye’s comments in opposition to the “rock-throwers” were not entirely from an outside perspective. After that comment, she began discussing those who engaged in violent actions with more empathy, for

²² Informal interview, used with permission.

example, qualifying her earlier blanket statement that the “rock-throwing brigade” were drunk hooligans: “I mean, people know how police will respond, yeah? So they show up drunk to deal with the fear and the pain.” She paused again, sighed, and shook her head. “It’s amazing how police influence the direction protests take.” She went on to explain that protests never began with any violence, but once security would attack, people would hit back out of frustration and rage – overall one of the most common dynamics relayed to me. The bus fire did not get Aye to join the riot that day, but it also did not demobilize her – she was active during the following year’s wave of FMF as well.

6.3 Discussion and Conclusion

If decolonization requires incoherence, and academic writing requires coherence, then academic writing about decolonization has a problem. This chapter presents qualitative interviews that speak to a number of issues and topics, which I do not attempt to wrap into a neat theoretical package. Some of the clearest take-aways are apparently contradictory, for example, that violent actions are important for decolonization, but violent actions usually only take place as a reaction to repressive violence by security forces. I do not attempt to impose coherence by theoretically reconciling these positions. For the purposes of this study, as a component of a larger work on protester violence, I aim to bring out some of the powerful and nuanced aspects of unarmed violence in the Fallist movement through the experiences of participants. And a little theoretical coherence, I hope, does not take much imposition.

In a society that is a quarter-century removed from a democratic movement that toppled fascism, living in a stalled revolution amidst some conditions of racial inequality and colonial

institutions that remain shockingly unaltered, how does one distinguish contemporary revolutionary politics from dusty revolutionary rhetoric? By declaring: “burn it down,” and by doing it often enough to animate the slogan with reality. The “violence” of the riot here, again, is most impactful in its implications, not its direct material results – to authorities, onlookers, and to protesters themselves.

So-called violent protest acts themselves – that is, setting fires, destroying property, and throwing stones – as well as the spaces they took place in, came with particular subjective experiences for participants. For many, the limited application of forceful and physically confrontational or destructive action was therapeutic and *humanizing* in the face of dehumanizing and disempowering police repression of popular protests. Many activists pushed back against the characterization of rock throwing and even arson as violent at all, based on political and social positionality, but again, there is undeniably something viscerally different about the protest spaces which are open-ended regarding these actions and the protest spaces where people enforce nonviolent discipline. In another seeming contradiction, many activists defend the use of physical force as part of the very same rhetorical argument against calling those same actions violent.

Some have distinguished between *institutional* power, which relies on state or systemic authority, and *noninstitutional* power, which relies on people power (Schwartz 1976: 130), to which I have argued that we could add *counter-institutional* power. Likewise, we might follow Fanon’s theory and Fallists’ accounts and distinguish between *dehumanizing* violence of authority and *humanizing* violence of resistance. Here, dehumanizing violence relies on institutional power and ultimately on the state, while humanizing violence relies on *counter-institutional* power.²³

²³ If the anti-police riot relies on counter-institutional power, and the pogrom relies on institutional power, we might say that the sports riot represents noninstitutional power – not inherently institutional or counter-institutional, but with the potential to go either way.

Indeed, it has been said that the most dehumanizing social conditions are those in which there is no visible rage or violence in response to systemic violence (Arendt 1970: 63). Humanizing violence is distinguished by its symbolic and non-instrumental quality, i.e., not necessarily trying to physically hurt or kill an opponent, but trying to register appropriately embodied opposition to dehumanizing violence. Humanizing violence reminds activists that they are in a fight and that they have agency in the fight – in other words, reminds activists that they are truly *active* – and, in some circumstances, infuses participants with a vision of a world in which the fight would not be necessary.

It is important to note the comparative regularity of protester violence in South Africa. Studies of contentious mobilizations in South Africa have referred to the routine presence of low-level “violence” in protest repertoires (von Holdt et al. 2012). At the same time, as with the last chapter, it is also necessary to reiterate what types of material actions are being referred to as violent here. If it makes any sense to discuss political violence on a spectrum, then we are talking about the least violent extreme of violence – mainly property damage to public or wealthy institutions, and in some cases minor potential bodily harm via thrown projectiles or pushing and shoving. Nearly all of the actual violence – in either moral or material senses – is coming from security forces, and this is considerably higher on the violence spectrum. Fanon’s theory is a theme throughout this chapter, but (as of this writing), we are not dealing with a Fanonian scale of violence. Arendt is correct that Fanon is less enthusiastic about violence than he is often read, but even the level Fanon does discuss far surpasses anything the Fallists enacted. The rage is there, and it is reflected in the “burn it down” political rhetoric, but the manifestation is something much lower-key.

Some have attempted to read violence out of Fanon's account altogether, arguing that when reading Fanon's work, "violence" could simply be replaced with nonviolent "radical and uncompromising action" (Deming 1971: 197). Indeed, the actions described by interviewees barely qualify as violence, and are entirely civilian-based, incomparable to the scale or strategic organization of violence in armed warfare. Nevertheless, there appears to be a quality about the willingness to engage in physically confrontational actions, including property destruction and physical altercations with police, that imbues participants with a special kind of heightened sensation, creating the visceral sense of being in a real struggle and fighting back.

Interlocutors in this study do not report the same heightened sensations of exhilaration, catharsis, and empowerment as they relate to "radical and uncompromising nonviolent action," of which there was no shortage in the Fallist movements. This is not to say that those nonviolent actions – "nonviolent" here simply describing a material repertoire – were not instrumentally effective. Like Fanon's discussion of remaking oneself through the physical manifestation of fighting back, the violent collective actions of Fallists are described almost exclusively in terms of their symbolic affect; the violence is instrumental mainly in terms of psychology. But nor does this suggest that the symbolic is not important or necessary. The "disruptive deficit" of many conventional protest movements (Seferiades and Johnston 2012) is not only a structural problem, it is felt by the participant, with depressing and demobilizing effects. In contrast to this feeling, the actions associated with breaking the boundary between nonviolence and violence represent to the protester that there is still a fight taking place.

As before, I do not argue here that violent protest is necessarily positive or positively necessary. Rather, I argue that low-level violent tactics are symbolically and phenomenologically important aspects of social movement uprisings. To activists from South Africa, as with activists

from a very different context in the US, engaging in contentious spaces that test or cross the line beyond nonviolence had significant and distinct subjective impacts. Above all, where conventional protest risks straying into performativity and ineffectualness, riots keep hearts and minds squarely in the realm of contentious politics.

7.0 Rioting in Movement: Understanding the Incoherent

One night during my research in South Africa, I was at a birthday party of a well-connected activist in Johannesburg; I had been invited by friends. My diligent friend introduced me to a group of Wits graduate students, letting them know I was a US sociologist studying riots, then later left me to schmooze. While talking, one of them remarked that “the line between violence and nonviolence is precisely the place where politics happens.” I listened intently, asked her permission to use that quote, then stole away to the bathroom at the earliest polite convenience to record it verbatim. What an elegant introduction to the idea that the language of violence and nonviolence is really about power. To most people, violence is bad, as Sharp had correctly identified, so the ability to designate which actions are violent is really about the doing of power, or in other words, politics. The following morning, when my friend asked me if I had enjoyed myself at the party and made good contacts for my research, I enthusiastically relayed that brilliant quote. She rolled her eyes and told me that line was why she had walked away from the conversation, adding, “that is the kind of meaningless bullshit that makes academics impossible to talk to.”

Sometimes, it feels as though the best sociologists can do is articulate in academic terms that which everybody already knows. And to try to undo the damage misleading theories have done to people’s common sense. In the final analysis, this work mainly points out the obvious – riots happen, riots are part of political uprisings, riots can feel empowering to rioters, and riots send a message to onlookers and authorities. But if those statements feel obvious, it is not for lack of opinions to the contrary.

As I write this, the US is embroiled in a popular uprising over the racist brutality of the police and the persistent racism that pervades our society. Amidst the outpouring of rage, acutely sparked by the police killings of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor – two recent and horrifying examples of Black people callously murdered by police, in one case an officer casually kneeling on a person who posed no threat, who repeatedly pleaded for his life, for eight minutes and forty six seconds until he suffocated to death; the other a woman shot to death in her home in the middle of the night by police supposedly looking for someone else entirely – even now, media, talking heads, and activists are tied in knots over what to do about someone spray-painting a squad car, breaking a corporate window, setting an empty police vehicle on fire.

Bill Peduto, the Mayor of Pittsburgh, the city in which I write this, re-Tweeted¹ a statement by local activist group 1Hood saying that a police vehicle being set on fire during a protest had been the work of an outside agitator who was unnecessarily putting Black bodies at risk – Peduto attached his message to 1Hood’s, promising to arrest the agitator who ruined the otherwise legitimate protest, allowing him to appear the ally of the movement and solving its problems by deploying the police, the very institution being protested. It is important to note that while a white activist did apparently use spray paint and possibly started the vehicle fire, there were many people attacking the unoccupied police car in question, most of them young Black activists. In other words, the initial Tweet was not describing what happened, but was describing a story in which legitimate protests are nonviolent, and violent actions are the work of outsiders. It was certainly

¹ The Tweet by 1Hood reads: “Dear allies, it is imperative that you listen to organizers. These young Black organizers had a clear plan and message that was disregarded. If you fight for Black lives, you don’t unnecessarily place Black bodies in jeopardy.” Peduto’s re-Tweet adds: “To those vandalizing Downtown. You will be arrested. You have turned on the very mission, and more importantly – the people, you supposedly marched for 2 hours ago. You have turned their peaceful march for justice into your self-centered, violent act of attention. (URL: <https://twitter.com/billpeduto/status/1266857104259899392>) Accessed June 12, 2020.

not their intention to arm the mayor with justification for police repression against protesters, but that story we tell is inherently connected to the outcome. Days later, after another march in which protesters did remain nonviolent, the same mayor tried to tell the public that police had *not* deployed teargas against protesters, despite overwhelming experiential, material, and video evidence to the contrary. When this became untenable, he maintained the narrative that a small, outside contingent had become violent, prompting the police response.² In one analysis, this confusion derives from movements' discomfort with the justified reality that people are outraged and need the world to know it. And sometimes yelling isn't good enough. Still, the activists who hold the line of nonviolent discipline are not wrong that protester violence will likely bring down even more police violence, disproportionately targeting Black people. One of the reasons that the violence-vs.-nonviolence argument around riots is intractable is that both sides are right.

Even now, we clearly do not know what to do with riots. What is clear, is that riots happen. Perhaps we should not have needed empirical proof of this, but for those who did, we now have it. For as long as movements have been studied, people have been gathering to break things and set things on fire when they're outraged by systemic injustice, and people are going to continue to do so. Whether or not we like it, we cannot organize riots out of the repertoire. Riots are an ongoing feature of movements from below, and in this sense the discourse around this violence *is* a place where politics happens. If sociological analysis can be useful here, it must help us to integrate recurring moments of unarmed collective violence, or rather those moments that are not decidedly nonviolent, into our understanding of social change where dominant theories have tried to keep them out – academic bullshit, perhaps, but meaningful bullshit I believe.

² “East Liberty protest’s violence spurred by small ‘splinter group’ of outsiders.” (URL: <https://twitter.com/billpeduto/status/1267786041999704071>) Accessed June 22, 2020.

7.1 What Is in This Work

In this dissertation, I argue for the integration of riots and protester violence into the relevant frameworks we use to understand social change from below. The field of civil resistance studies, also called nonviolence studies, has taken the lead in research-driven popular discourse on protest strategies, and its influence has been powerful in many ways.³ This field of study and practice has discounted and discouraged protester violence based on commitments to an unrealistic concept of strict nonviolence and based on misapplied research. The sociological field of social movement studies, for its part, has largely neglected riots due to a progressing orientation toward formal organizations, institutions, and political processes – a lens through which riots are background noise at best. In this dissertation, I center the importance of the riot, not to downplay the importance of what have been called nonviolent methods, nor to disregard the salience of organizations and institutions, but as an additive element that improves our overall understanding of social movements.

I begin with the foundational theory of strategic nonviolence, a field of study which has been widely influential in limiting our view of movement strategies and tactics. I dissect Gene Sharp's seminal work, *The Politics of Nonviolent Action*, and explore both its theoretical and historical problems. The purpose of this theory was never to change society for the better, but merely to promote a limited methodology for protesting governments. Its many shortcomings in

³ For example, the Momentum school (see Engler and Engler 2016; Engler and Lasoff 2018; Kingkade 2019) has birthed an entire wave of movements that have demonstrated the capacity to capture national focus, such as Cosecha, IfNotNow, and the Sunrise Movement. These movements, however, have all demonstrated similar incapacity to sustain themselves and evolve organically past their initial wave of growth; the first two compensated by pivoting toward electoral politics and the third simply launched with that focus to begin with. Their limitations are not solely due to their commitment to nonviolence, but that commitment does in some sense hold them back from more radical possibilities. But that is another story, which will have to remain beyond the scope of this dissertation.

terms of theory, as well as its sordid history of collaborating with the very same governments and capital interests that activists today seek to pressure, should give serious pause to anyone seeking to adopt these tools wholesale.

In Chapter Three, I discuss the most prestigious and widely-accepted empirical research on nonviolent movements, and perhaps the last great bulwark of the normal science of purist nonviolent struggle – Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan’s 2011 work, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, and the NAVCO dataset it is based on. While findings derived from this data, most famously presented in the co-authored 2011 book, *Why Civil Resistance Works*, are widely interpreted as applying to contemporary movements, the data construction is questionable, and even if it was not, NAVCO codes the violence/nonviolence problem into its data: it compares civil war to civilian protest and contains no measures for the kinds of unarmed violence that drive debates over violent tactics today. I then explore the widespread claim that riots demobilize movements using time-series data for the US and South Africa, finding that, in contrast to canonical nonviolence theory, riots have an overall mobilizing effect on nonviolent demonstrations in both countries. I go on to explain how integrating low-level violence into some of the dynamics that civil resistance studies proposes can improve our understanding of how movements mobilize, stay resilient in the face of repression, and leverage power against authorities.

In Chapter Four, I turn to the violence/nonviolence lens itself, through which we often look in order to categorize and interpret movements. I use an analogy to Thomas Kuhn’s theory of scientific revolutions to describe the way that this binary framework for understanding movements became a sort of *paradigm*, created in and for a Twentieth Century era when the primary form of revolutionary campaign was guerrilla war. Civilian protest of course existed then too, but the reference point was armed struggle. In this context, “violent” and “nonviolent” were used as stand-

ins for these broad types, which always concealed a great deal about both, but nevertheless was a useful shorthand. In recent decades, however, conditions have shifted, and revolutionary uprisings have moved away from armed struggle and toward civilian mobilization. Today the standard is the unarmed urban uprising, and in that context, the terms “violent” and “nonviolent” mean very different things. However, many analysts are stuck in the language and worldview of a previous era’s normal science, mired in a violence/nonviolence dichotomy that no longer describes movements on the ground. Repertoires in civilian movements include actions like marches, demonstrations, sit-ins, strikes, pickets, riots, street occupations, and so forth along a spectrum of more and less forceful application. I close this argument using a secondary-source case study of the January 25 Revolution in Egypt to demonstrate how accounting for the full repertoire of civil resistance vastly improves our analysis. This iconic struggle has been widely viewed as nonviolent, but in fact is a prime example of riots leading to increased nonviolent mobilizations. When riots are made legible, the dynamics of civil resistance and lessons we might draw change significantly. The concept of civil resistance is useful as distinguished from armed struggle, but in order to accurately assess movements as they exist today, civil resistance must be conceptually redefined to make legible the range of actions that unarmed movements exhibit.

In Chapters Five and Six, I explore the phenomenology of the riot from the perspectives of activists who have participated in collective experiments with violent protest. In Chapter Five, I present interviews with activists in the US associated with black bloc formations, and in Chapter Six I present interviews with Fallist student activists in South Africa. The words of activists from both cases speak to a distinct subjectivity during physically contentious protest. Far from a flattened group experience devoid of individuality, participants in violent protest report enhanced subjective experiences of empowerment, with transformative impacts that last long past the riot

itself – for some in the US study who discussed actions that had taken place decades prior, for the participants’ lives since. Rioters report no loss of individuality, and yet many related heightened, adrenalized, and politicizing sensations during those moments.

Interviews point to a distinct collective identity created by the riot. In both instances, the emotional power of the riotous moment and space is felt by members of the crowd who personally do not engage in any violent action themselves, indicating this type of contentious action generates a collective identity that can extend to the group as a whole (see Polletta and Jasper 2011). The collectivizing power of the riot is unleashed by even a few actions of individuals – at least in circumstances in which the group is tacitly supportive of those actions. This finding contradicts both a strategic nonviolence view of physically contentious crowds and classic notions of crowd behavior, which hold that people lose their individuality and as part of that engage in the actions of those around them, particularly violent actions. Furthermore, in almost all cases, interviewees describe a heightened political clarity, with radicalizing effects that influence participants’ toward long-term engagement in movements.

In the US case, many participants reported a distinct euphoric feeling during non-violent actions, which I liken to a contentious form of what Durkheim calls *effervescence*. In the South Africa case, respondents tended to focus on the *humanizing* and *empowering* elements of physically confrontational protest actions, which I describe applying the theories of Fanon and others. I build on interlocutors’ experiences and Schwartz’s conceptualization of institutional versus noninstitutional power, theorizing a distinction between *dehumanizing violence*, which relies on institutional power, and *humanizing violence*, which relies on counter-institutional power. This helps us to distinguish the character and disposition of “violence” in protests in response to both broad systemic violence and direct police violence.

In each case study, I focused on where activists' own focuses took me; the symbolism of the riot factored into both, and I discuss black blocs in terms of effervescence and Fallism in terms of humanizing violence, though in fact many activists in both cases relate experiences connected to both themes. The racial composition of the respondents in both cases – both of them in colonial societies – might play a role in this difference, as might the comparative rarity of protester violence in the US. To this latter point, it is possible that violent protest actions have an added experiential element of freedom because those actions are taboo in the US context; in South Africa, where rock-throwing and fiery barricades are more common in standard protest repertoires, engaging in those actions may not feel as transgressive in themselves. The unifying themes, however, are the empowering feeling of “being in a fight” with authority that is viewed as illegitimate or oppressive, and an accompanying subjective transformation. Actions like rock-throwing, burning vehicles and street barricades, and unarresting people from police custody break through the alienation of conventional protest tactics, which often appear contentious in form but are not so in content.

Fanon's theory is a recurring theme, visible in the embodied idea of remaking the self through action, breaking through the alienation and insecurity complexes that derive from life – even middle-class life – in neoliberal capitalist society. Something about the feeling of fighting back in struggle via burning things and breaking things and being willing to physically resist police carries with it the potential to overcome that which has been socialized deep into people. For Fanon, violence is not ultimately about achieving political victory, but about proving the worth of subjects to be recognized – above all, recognized by *themselves*. By “passing through violence” as an agent, the rioter “rediscovers the capacity to *be* political” (Thompson 2010: 123, emphasis his), transforming a participant into a different type of subject, one that views liberation as a tangible possibility. The glimpse of a liberated world in protests that broke through both the constraints of

nonviolent discipline and the blasé haze of life in neoliberal capitalist society to subsequently expanded political vision was a theme among US anarchists in particular, with long-lasting impacts on participants lives.

Not only is the violent protest symbolically important to the participant, it is communicative to authorities. This comes out in interviews via activists' experiences and opinions, which I will expand on in the concluding discussion, but admittedly this particular methodology is not well-designed to empirically address this, as discussed further in the relevant limitations section below. What is directly indicated in this study is that in addition to authorities and participants, violent protest actions are intended by participants to be symbolically important to bystanders as well – reminding them that a fight is taking place, and that one way or another they might end up involve; in other words, pressing people to recognize social struggle and take a side. Acts of violence for the sake of prompting audiences to action recalls Sorel, whose theory of revolutionary violence argues for the use of limited violent tactics as a tool to push the middle-class to take sides in class struggle. In Sorel's case, violent tactics are meant to remind the middle-class that they are by and large on the side of the bourgeoisie, encouraging them to break from their inaction, which itself keeps the working class from recognizing the ongoing nature of class war. In both the US and South Africa cases, however, we see an inversion of Sorel, where violent actions are meant to wake bystanders to the fact that they must choose sides – in hopes that they will side with the protesters.⁴ This is evidence of belief in a sort of reverse backfiring mechanism, where violent tactics are meant to jar people to action and mobilize support.

⁴ Counter-intuitive as it might sound, this strategy has parallels in military combat. In a famous battle in Feudal Japan, a general fired on a contingent of troops from a clan that had not yet chosen sides in a battle that was raging in a valley below – the previously undecided general joined the fight on the side that had fired at them, in a flanking maneuver that was decisive for the battle. See "Battle of Sekigahara," *Encyclopedia Britannica*. (URL: <https://www.britannica.com/event/Battle-of-Sekigahara>) Accessed June 2, 2020.

Perhaps the central finding from this qualitative research is the way that collective actions which transcend the boundaries of nonviolence essentially *keep contentious politics contentious* via the embodied sensation of being in a fight. As decolonial theorist and contemporary of Fanon's, Albert Memmi has said, "revolt is first of all the acknowledgement of an impossible situation" (Memmi 1968: 15). An impossible situation must be acknowledged, and for those who are hurt by it and who have no institutional power, sometimes yelling isn't good enough. Contemporary "legitimate" protest forms largely perform contention without the material reality, something felt by participants themselves. There is a visceral sensation that something must be *done*. Given an impossible situation, as an interviewee in the US case put it, "setting things on fire certainly sends a message, and let's be honest, it's as good an idea as the next."

As I have mentioned more than a few times by now, but am going to mention at least once more, we are dealing here with absolutely minimal manifestations of political violence. In Fanonian terms, the riot might well be the least violent form of violence to contain the accompanying humanizing and cathartic experiences. For property destruction and at times relatively minor harm to persons,⁵ a glimpse of the revolution for participants. The riot requires nothing more than collective action, and yet it at once contains within it the empowerment of the resistor and a grave threat of escalation to more robust forms of violence to the oppressor. It is no surprise then, that the riot has long been a thread in the social fabric.

It is important to reiterate that I do not examine the two qualitative studies as comparison cases: the black bloc is a tactic, while FMF is a multifaceted movement. In both cases, I interview activists regarding one aspect – experiences with violent protest. Nor can either the black bloc or

⁵ In real terms no nonconsensual harm to persons should be considered minor, but then again here we are speaking relative to the scale of violence in war.

FMF be reduced to instances of “violent” collective action. I choose black bloc participants in the US and Fallists in South Africa because their participants represent excellent and different contemporary sources of qualitative experience relating to physically confrontational protest. In the experiences of interviewees from both cases, unarmed collective violence clarified political antagonisms, raised consciousness, and enhanced participants’ visions for a liberated future. For a subject as understudied as the phenomenology of the riot, the differences between the cases provide us with additional baseline material to examine what is as close to a universal protest tactic as it gets.

7.2 What Is Not in This Work: Limitations and Directions for Further Study

The quantitative analysis in this dissertation establishes the weaknesses in dominant studies that claim to assess the efficacy of violent and nonviolent approaches to social change, and demonstrates that riots do not demobilize nonviolent protests, but in fact in the aggregate are associated with higher levels of nonviolent mobilization. There is a great deal that it does not tell us about. Likewise, there are limitations to the qualitative interview studies presented here. Additionally, the richness of the qualitative interviews in both cases is overwhelming; there is much that I heard and learned from interlocutors that is left un-said in this dissertation, in some cases out of an abundance of caution for interviewees’ security, in some cases simply because analytic focus requires leaving some things out – some of it hopefully to be revisited in future work. In addition to limitations of the empirical work in this dissertation, therefore, I will briefly review several topics that arose in interviews but were not explored herein, which merit further research.

7.2.1 Quantitative Research

There are two components to the quantitative research in this study. The first is quantitative only in that it deals with quantitative data; I first read through the NAVCO 1.1 codebook and examined the dataset itself, noticing that it did not measure the types of violence that tend to matter most to activists on the ground. I then combined two existing datasets that do contain measures for riots, and coded them into NAVCO's nonviolent campaigns to discover that nearly all of them involved riots during and just prior to their durations as NAVCO listed them. There are several limitations to this research. First, as I detail in Chapter Three, there are significant problems with NAVCO data itself – it is for this very reason that I decided to move beyond it and work with other datasets for the second component of my quantitative research. Working with NAVCO as a baseline involves accepting its problems; technically, my finding here is not that 86 percent of maximalist nonviolent campaigns involved riots, my finding is that 86 percent of maximalist nonviolent campaigns *in NAVCO* involved riots. This is only a limitation in precision, since there is good reason to believe that the real number of social movements that threaten to overthrow a government and also involve protester violence is significantly higher than 86 percent. That NAVCO limits itself to maximalist campaigns also means that this component of the research (though not the following component) is also limited to maximalist campaigns. Still, NAVCO is so widely regarded and is consistently interpreted as applying to sub-maximalist campaigns anyway, that working within the constraints of that data felt important at least to demonstrate that it does not tell us what most people think it does.

Another limitation is the parameters of CNTS and WHIV, which only include major riots and use as their sources English language news coverage based in the West. Again, this is only a limitation in specificity, since these parameters likely lead to underreporting errors – there is high

likelihood that these datasets fail to include riots that happened, but less likely that they include riots that did not happen. And if data included riots that involved less than 100 people and less than significant material damage, again the number of riots would increase. At the same time, this analysis is at some level at the mercy of the data-recording methods of these datasets.

The second component of the quantitative study comprises two sets of analyses of CNTS data, for the US and South Africa. CNTS data contains variables for both anti-government demonstrations that are nonviolent and demonstrations labeled riots, enabling comparative statistical analysis. Unlike NAVCO, this data has no measures for campaigns success or failure. Ultimately, I think that is just as well, since I am skeptical of binary variables for movement success. Instead I use levels of mobilization, which in any case turn out to be the main explanatory variables in Chenoweth and Stephan's work – according to them, the main indicator of success is sustained and escalating mobilization on nonviolent protests (2011). I therefore test the relationship between violent protest and nonviolent protest, and find that riots are associated with escalating nonviolent protest within the same year and also in the following – making them efficacious elements of civil resistance by Chenoweth and Stephan's standards.

However, CNTS data is annual and national, and thus an extremely blunt tool with which to measure interaction between types of action. In terms of the time-frame, it is because of the annual measure that I examine the impact of one type of protest on the other within the same year and also in the following year, to get a sense of trends and trajectories of uprisings. In terms of the national scope, it is no more imprecise than NAVCO in this regard, but still quite imprecise. One further avenue of study could be to analyze daily data, which WHIV has, for particular cities or regions, to see how one type of mobilization impacts others. However, while this level of granularity would add something, it would also miss something else without a national-level study

alongside it. For example, following the Baltimore uprising in 2015, mobilizations of all sorts were muted for a time, but nonviolent solidarity actions exploded nation-wide. The national scope of data allows for this type of diffusion, which we have reason to believe is increasingly common in the era of mass communication, but lacks the capacity to see more precise local mobilization patterns. Additionally, while I include two exogenous variables in the US case and one in the South Africa case, the study's robustness would benefit from accounting for additional factors. GDP per capita and unemployment, which I account for in the US case (in South Africa unemployment measures are unreliable before recently) are the most likely to be relevant, but there certainly could be others. I fail to remember their name, but I recall being at a conference last year where someone suggested that the weather could be an important factor to when and how different types of protest mobilize others.

Overall, there are substantial limitations to this study. In the aggregate, on a national level, over the course of a year, riots are associated with increased nonviolent demonstrations in the US and South Africa. I believe these data and results are more than good enough to say with confidence that riots do not broadly demobilize nonviolent protest on a national scale, and that in the aggregate they have a mobilizing effect. Investigating further will require more granular levels of data and more detailed methods – providing a fertile direction for further research.

7.2.2 Qualitative Research

The two qualitative interview studies contain limitations of their own, which is mostly to say, they give us insight into how some activists in some countries and some movements have understood the violent protest actions they have been a part of, but that they do not necessarily speak to any universal experience. In the US case, I interview anarchists who have participated in

black bloc tactics. They represent an interesting case because, unlike many rioters, I suspect, they sometimes show up with the intention to riot, and in fact many ascribe to an ideology that encourages it. In many cases, such as the anecdote relayed earlier in this chapter, anarchists are blamed for causing violence and chaos at otherwise peaceful protests. While this is more often not the reality, there are occasions when it is. Either way, black bloc anarchists do not speak for all rioters, and, as I'm sure many would insist, they do not even speak for other anarchists. That being said, there were remarkable similarities in the accounts that many activists shared about their contentious moments in the streets, leading to the analysis in Chapter Five.

In the South Africa case, my research has added limitations. I do not have the familiarity with South African movements scenes or norms of protest that I do in the US based on my own experience as an organizer and activist, which undoubtedly weakens my analytic capability. I also had very limited time in country by comparison to the US case, and interviewed fewer individuals as a result. My positionality as a white US American researcher also likely limited my access, and in one case that I know of a potential interviewee refused to talk to me when she discovered that I was from an American university – if you want to know about violence, she told me, look at the way that American academics treat the world. There are likely nonresponses I got which were related to this understandable dynamic as well, but I cannot say for sure. Of the activists I was able to talk to, I believe my familiarity with movements from a practitioner standpoint, and my association with respected networks, was able to convince most that I would do justice to their struggle in my work, and that they could speak openly to me without fear of their identity being compromised or of me taking credit for their ideas. In any case, my positionality combined with my restricted time in South Africa surely limited the analysis in Chapter Six.

A word on counter-examples: While I did not hear activists who had participated in both violent and nonviolent actions speak about the empowering, consciousness-raising effects of the latter, this is not to say that nonviolent actions cannot have that effect. What is more dignified: to sit there nonviolently and be beaten or to embody fighting back? I can only venture that it may depend on what you believe. If you believe in nonviolence on a religious or spiritual level, then it might feel dignified to refrain from violence no matter what. That is a spiritual victory, and is thus politically empowering; they are not breaking you. For others, fighting back, even against all odds, even if the “battle” cannot be won, even if you don’t really want to hurt anyone, showing them and yourself that you still fight back is the spiritual victory, and is thus politically empowering. Either way, the visceral sense that they are not breaking you, that you are a subject, an agent in your own history, that strength contains within it something special. This study does not say that the only way to achieve this is through physical violence. It does, however, indicate that is one path, and an important one.

In addition to direct limitations, there were things that were revealed in interviews that I did not pursue, or possibilities to pull on other analytic strands that I did not. Below I briefly discuss several, with an eye on areas for future research.

7.2.3 Gender in the Riot

It is difficult to talk about violence without gender coming to mind. When you search the keyword “violence” in our university library system, the majority of the results relate directly to gender: gendered violence, violence against women, domestic violence, and so forth. Gender is necessarily embedded in social movements, as it probably is in everything, and specifically so around violence. In research on anti-racist movement scenes in Japan, a recent study found that

violent protest actions can create atmospheres in which gendered violence is overlooked, and can exacerbate gendered exclusion and sexual harassment (Shaw 2020). In the US, the accusation against activists who breach nonviolent discipline as being irredeemably hypermasculine is common (see for example Solnit 2011; Hedges 2012), and was reflected by some people I spoke to in South Africa as well. In this study, some interviewees spoke to the presence of toxic or aggressive masculinity in riots, but most associated this behavior with problematic individuals, and, according to some participants, possibly even *agent provocateurs*. As one participant in the US study put it:

Within an affinity group or collective, at least the groups I've been part of, there is a tremendous amount of work around gender equity, and it's never perfect, but I don't feel like action machismo is a problem we run into. But there are always a couple people who are bloc-ed up who aren't accountable to anyone.

The connection of the black bloc to movement affinity groups, communities, and scenes that are often committed to gender equity at least on a political basis, where individuals are unmasked apart from during actions (and for those who didn't previously know, COVID-19 has probably educated everyone that it isn't all that difficult to recognize someone you already know with a mask on), is at least one safe-guard against problematic behavior. There is no doubt though that the riotous space provides an avenue for some activists to justify hypermasculine behavior. Still, at least in the interviews I conducted, experiences during protests with toxic masculinity (from comrades) were in the vast minority, and only represented a significant point of discussion in one interview in each case (though a great deal more discussion in several interviews was devoted to problematic masculinity in organizing scenes in general, and of course in police repression). It is conceivable of course that my own positionality as a cis man with generally normative presentation influenced what interlocuters shared with me, but the willingness and in fact eagerness with which some activists discussed violent patriarchy in movement scenes but *not*

in black bloc tactics is some indication that the information I received was not entirely unreliable in this regard. On the contrary, as the quote above states, many of the activist scenes consistently involved in violent protest actions are aware of and intentional about internal discussions of gender equity.

Interviews do suggest a complicating story about protester violence and gender. While it was my goal to attempt a demographic balance in terms of interviewees, I operated via networks, snowball sampling, and chance, and I did not have to go out of my way to interview women or LGBTQ people (all five letters of which are represented among participants). Focusing on the words of queer women in the US study was in part intended to mitigate hegemonic masculinity slipping into activist accounts, but also the experiences they shared did not differ greatly from those of cis men. (I did not specifically ask about people's sexuality, so I only knew if people identified as queer or gay or straight if they told me. Likewise, I did not ask about gender, but several people chose to tell me they were trans or nonbinary.) Not only did women speak openly about their experiences with violent protest, but in many cases those actions had significant positive impacts and associations for them on feminist bases, and several of the women I interviewed displayed a chip on their shoulder about the typical association of physically confrontational protest with men.

My findings regarding empowering feelings around gender resulting from women's participation in riots are consistent with the few interview studies there are with rioters (see Auyero 2003; Meckfessel 2016). And in previous eras, food riots in various countries have been closely tied to the participation and leadership of women (Engel 1997; Rude 1959; Taylor 1996; Thompson 1964). Nevertheless, the majority of participants in riots are likely men, usually young

men, and my balanced interview sample might understate hegemonic masculine experiences of those actions.

The gendered aspects of violent protest are an important area for future study. Masculinity might be pronounced in spaces where violence is allowed or encouraged, and at the same time many women and queer-femme activists reported feeling empowered by experiences with rioting, and some spoke to the feminist activist spaces associated with them. Hegemonic masculinity is everywhere – in my experience there is no shortage of toxic masculinity in groups committed to political nonviolence – and the ways in which it flows through violent protest is less straightforward than one might think. One way or another, the perception of protester violence as inherently masculine is itself a manifestation of normative logic, and is perhaps something we must decolonize from.

7.2.4 Race

Race is an important element of Chapter Six insofar as race is central to the discussions of decolonization and movements in South Africa. But there is a great deal more that can and should be said about race as it relates to violent protest. As I discussed in the introduction, “race riot” has become its own term, and one that can mean a variety of things. In some senses, the riot itself has become a fundamentally *raced* concept, especially as it relates to the US (see Rakia 2018). In the US study, the lack of discussion of race is a larger limitation. As many scholars have pointed out, movement studies has often boxed race into a particular category, abstracted from otherwise “race-neutral” analyses, whereas in reality race permeates the social fabric of the US (see Weddington 2019). Especially today, as protests escalate across the country for Black Lives and the movement for racial justice, and as instances of violence in these protests have often been blamed on white

anarchists, it is important in some senses and also fraught in others to center a study of riots in the US on white anarchists. While most US interviewees were white, several were not, which kept me from a deeper racialized analysis of the “white riot,” as Joe Strummer and AK Thompson put it, since I wanted to integrate the experiences of all interviewees. At the same time, there were not enough non-white participants to merit a worthy comparison group.

There were differences along racial lines in both studies that are worth mentioning. Activists in South Africa, most of whom are Black, tended to describe a euphoric sensation during violent protests less often and less centrally, and instead spoke more to the feeling of humanization and empowerment in the face of state repression. Feelings of humanization and empowerment likewise came up in interviews with white activists, but to a lesser degree. In the US, only three interviewees are Black, which is not a large sample, but of those three activists, two of them described heightened effervescent feelings in substantially similar ways as white black bloc participants, while the third was more matter-of-fact about their experiences and affectively less heightened when discussing riotous moments. Two white interviewees were similarly emotively nonchalant about their experiences with riots. While there were differences within groups, it seemed the difference between nationality came into play more than race in each national study. The cathartic experience relayed by white South African Fallist activists who had participated in protests that included rock-throwing and fighting with police resonated closely with the experiences of Black and Coloured South African Fallists, just as the experiences of Black US anarchists in black blocs was in many ways similar to that of white anarchists when it came to the heightened sensation of the riotous space. While there has been a wealth of research into the “race riot.” Research specifically on racial composition and experiences within contemporary protests and riots is an important area for future study.

7.2.5 Class

Economic class background is another area that many interlocutors spoke to, which I chose not to make a central part of this analysis. There were many discussions of class among Fallists, both in terms of individual class and the class-association of university spaces, which I mention in Chapter Six. But there was significantly more to it than I felt able to speak to, especially given my position as a foreign researcher. As I wrote in Chapter Six, one of the most significant limitations of that study in particular was my inability to interview activists from TUT and other technical colleges, who activists almost universally named as the originators of the student movement, and whose actions were consistently the most contentious. There was a stark class difference in engagement with the official Fallist movements between activists at the institutions I interviewed people at – the ones that received media attention and thus the ones I had been aware of – and the activists at less prestigious and poorer institutions, who typically come from poorer backgrounds, and in many cases were restricted from participating in physical or virtual organizing with the former group on that basis.

The application of Fanon's theories to class in black blocs is a theme in AK Thompson's 2010 book, *Black Bloc, White Riot*, which is a cultural-theoretical exploration of the ontology of black bloc rioting, and was named after a combination of Fanon's 1952 work, *Black Skin, White Masks* and The Clash's 1977 song, "White Riot." Thompson sees the connection between the book and song as both the dealing with "ontological impossibilities" which can only be "resolved by changing the world" (Thompson 2010: 20). In his analysis of the black bloc, Thompson focuses of the cultural alienation of white middle-class suburban life – the ways in "which the category 'white middle-class political being' is experienced... as a contradiction in terms" (ibid). I was aware of this understanding, and class did indeed emerge as a topic in some of my interviews with

black bloc participants – mostly as interviewees relayed their personal histories. After analyzing my interviews, I chose not to follow these threads in this study. Among the interlocutors in the US case of this study, many interviewees were not from middle-class backgrounds (some were from working class and poor backgrounds, and at least one grew up wealthy). Although I had some interesting stories, and there is certainly hay to be made there – riots are mostly frightening for those of us with something to lose, and black bloc anarchists are perhaps an exception, since those among them with something to lose are often trying to lose having something to lose – I did not feel as though the subject of class represented enough qualitative data for inclusion as a main focus.

Another area this dissertation does not deal much with class is in terms of class struggle. It shows up in Chapter Five in the discussion of alienation, through the connection between workers' struggles and student struggles in Chapter Six, and implicitly through many of the theorists I deploy and because everyone I interviewed to a person identified themselves as an anti-capitalist. This study shares with Marx attention to what Arendt calls “the very basis of leftist humanism,” namely the idea that people can create themselves (Arendt 1970: 12). However, I do not utilize a historical materialist frame to understand riots and violent protest – for that, I encourage readers to see Clover (2016).

7.2.6 Repression

“It’s amazing how police influence the direction protests take.” That quote had been relayed by the South African activist I interviewed who was most critical of violent protest actions. She was lamenting how many protests that could have – in and her view, should have – remained nonviolent became something else because of police violence. Among South African activists who were more enthusiastic about their experiences with confrontational tactics, the overwhelming

sentiment was also that in most cases protests escalate to riots because of actions taken by police or security forces. In the US, where most interviewees discussed actions when they showed up ready to escalate, if not with the intention of rioting, many also described arriving at participation in black bloc tactics after experiences being assaulted by police during peaceful demonstrations. As one interviewee put it, “I was very aware that nonviolent protest, if you’re doing anything actually disruptive, it gets met with violence if they want, and the narrative will become that the protests were violent no matter what you do.” Nonviolence advocates since Sharp argue that nonviolent actions can be, to use Seferiades and Johnston’s words, “sufficiently pungent to disrupt the workings of the system” (2012: 5). And quantitative analysis of police repression has demonstrated that the best predictor of police repression is how threatening the protest is deemed to be (Earl, Soule, and McCarthy 2003). In the quote above, we see how when nonviolent protest is sufficiently disruptive to make a material difference, it is often treated as though it were violent anyway, and in fact called violent in order to justify the repression – a sort of reverse backfiring mechanism, if such a term makes any mechanical sense. As a comrade remarked to me during Occupy Wall Street, nothing radicalizes a person quite like getting cracked over the head by someone who’s supposed to protect you.

Qualitative interviews in this study indicate that police repression is variously responsible for, 1) the escalation of some protest events into riots, and 2) the radicalization of activists who experience police violence during nonviolent protest; two factors which could be read as cyclical, though they were not explained that way. Even beyond the spectrum of violent rejoinders to police violence, how the police behave is responsible for a great deal of what happens in protests at a granular level, from march routes and duration to tone and affect. There are clear and obvious barriers to researching police tactics in protests, and research on dynamics between police and

protesters risks helping police better suppress protest – there is a reason police training and strategy are not made publicly available – but broad existing research exists, mainly focusing on categorizing and describing types of repression (e.g., Davenport, Johnston, and Mueller, eds. 2005; della Porta and Reiter 1998). Relevant research also outlines the militarization of the police in recent decades (Radley 2014).

Earl and Soule (2006) identify two main factors that predict police violence against protests: first, the police anxiety around maintaining control, and second fear of getting hurt. While this data is useful, many anecdotal counter-examples do not appear to fit, specifically when police initiate violence against non-confrontational crowds, which if anything raises the chances both of police losing control of a situation and risks to their own safety. One recent study found that police in India learn to orient their moral compass toward violence, such that they can torture detainees while believing they are ultimately upholding human rights (Wahl 2017). And, of course, Michelle Alexander’s 2010 book, *The New Jim Crow* argues that the police and the criminal justice system are through one lens simply contemporary enforcers of a racial caste system – which likely tells us a great deal about how police view certain types of protest – and several scholarly studies of the police focus directly on their evolution from southern slave patrols (e.g., Brucato 2014; Hadden 2001).

These studies reveal important aspects of the police experience of what we from a social movements perspective call repression, but there remains a great deal we do not know in this area. One particularly interesting possibility (which I actually began to explore at some point and then put aside for the purposes of this dissertation due to do time, resources, and focus limitations), would be to examine publicly available footage of a contentious demonstration or riot, and then attempt to plot the movements of protesters and police on a map from minute to minute – what

happens, for example, if instead of seeing the movements as two opposing forces, we examined both groups as one interconnected dynamic? In a recent foray into this type of approach, Chloe Haimson recently examined interactive engagements between Black Lives Matter protests and police regimes (Haimson 2020).

As for opportunities for future research on this subject in general, for better or worse, there is no reason to believe there will be a shortage of emergent case studies in the near future. When the COVID-19 crisis hit – itself ostensibly as unrelated to mass gatherings such as protests as it gets – police departments stocked up on riot gear.⁶ The Whole Foods in Pittsburgh didn't board up its windows to keep the coronavirus out. One of the few economists who predicted the collapse of the housing market just over a decade ago recently advised that we are headed for food riots in major US cities.⁷ The Pentagon recently began training exercises for a youth-led civil rebellion.⁸ We truly may be entering, as Alain Badiou (2012) put it following the 2011 global wave of protest, the rebirth of history.

7.3 Riots, Resistance, Revolution: Concluding Thoughts

Strategically-minded activists look for the ways we can mobilize large numbers of people in a sustained way, and those who say riots can make this task more difficult are not wrong. Then

⁶ See Fang. 2020. "Federal Government Buys Riot Gear, Increases Security Funding, Citing Coronavirus Pandemic." *The Intercept*. May 17. (URL: <https://theintercept.com/2020/05/17/veterans-affairs-coronavirus-security-police/>) Accessed June 3, 2020.

⁷ Theron, Mohamed. 2020. "'Dr. Doom' Economist Nouriel Roubini Says He Predicted US Protests 'Months Ago.'" *Business Insider*. June 1. (URL: <https://markets.businessinsider.com/news/stocks/nouriel-roubini-dr-doom-economist-predicted-riots-months-ago-protests-2020-6-1029268529>) Accessed June 2, 2020.

⁸ Turse, Nick. 2020. Pentagon War Game Includes Scenario for Military Response to Domestic Gen Z Rebellion. *The Intercept*. June 5. (URL: <https://theintercept.com/2020/06/05/pentagon-war-game-gen-z/>) Accessed June 7, 2020.

again, no one said it would be easy. There are undoubtedly risks and costs associated with riots for movements, communities, and of course rioters themselves. However, as this research indicates, outbursts of riots are associated with overall *increased* mobilization. And there are big opportunities we forfeit if we aren't willing to set things on fire, if we aren't willing to force police to do what the system requires of them – to defend the law and order of the status quo. Most importantly, riots happen whether those who organize movements want them to or not. They are a part of the civil resistance repertoire. It is not really viable to encourage people to riot on this basis, and even if it were, people do not riot because a researcher tells them to; people riot because they are fed up, frustrated, outraged, heartbroken. Riots have been going on since before we have been studying movements, and there are no signs they are going away. If anything, they are on the rise. So for those who aren't masking up and breaking bricks in half, the question becomes: how do we understand the power dynamics at play and how do we respond when people inevitably do riot?

The things that make riots cathartic and emotionally empowering are likely the same things that make them messy, unpredictable, and uncontrollable. Or, as some Fallists put it, incoherent. From a broad perspective of social change, the tensions at play in riotous spaces can make them difficult to situate. Even Badiou, who articulates the connection between what he calls the “immediate riot” (i.e., the riot) and the “historical riot” (i.e., the commune, as in Paris 1968), in other words the connection between what appears to be mass destruction of riots and the opening of generative revolutionary space, misses the subjective importance of the immediate riot experience. For opponents and supporters alike, the easiest way to approach their incoherence is to imagine riots as subject-less, based in crowd hysteria or mindless imitation, a background condition, a sign of the times, a bellwether of other changes, a political opportunity structure. But their position in the long struggle for liberation can only be properly understood if we are willing

to acknowledge the rioter as a subject – before, during, and after the riot. A non-static, transforming subject, even.

In considering the experiences that were shared with me, and of course considering my own, I'm reminded of the three metamorphoses of the spirit that Nietzsche proposes in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1885). The first is a load-bearing spirit, represented by a camel, which carries the weight it is told to; then a rebel, represented by a lion, which fight back and destroys the old ways; and finally innocence, represented by a child, the ability to create a new system which is not in reaction to the old, but is fully its own. In this allegory, Nietzsche describes essentially the same process as Kuhn, and the same as Fanon – revolution. When it comes to the riot, we are dealing with the second metamorphosis, that of the lion. Nietzsche describes the lion's struggle as against a great dragon named, "Thou shalt." On every scale of the dragon is inscribed the words, "Thou shalt!" Where the camel had long carried what it was told to, the spirit finally responds, in *Rage Against the Machine's* words, *fuck you I won't do what you tell me*, and transforms into a lion. The lion *becomes* in the process of a fight – a vulgar process – and is thus designed to fight, to hunt. The lion is required for the struggle against the dragon, but also limited by it; this hunter spirit's *raison d'être* is its prey, what it fights, what it struggles *against*. Its success necessarily means another transformation, one which moves beyond the fight against, and fully into the creation of something new.

Nietzsche does not describe the defeat of the dragon; it is implied in the lion's subsequent transition to the spirit of the child. Physical victory is not part of the story, the point is the fight itself. Like *Zarathustra's* lion, from a distance the violence of the riot is not meant in the instrumental sense, it is not realistically about militarily destroying the forces of the enemy, but rather is as a psycho-social process of destroying the values of present day society within the

collective and individual self. The will to violence in the rioter reveals an experience of living in the moment, not just a rebellious experience, but where capitalism and authority both depend on rationality and predictability, an anti-capitalist, anti-authoritarian one too. In and of itself, the actions of the riot are not creative, but the experience at least holds the potential to become the existential foundation for a revolutionary vision. Riots in one sense are reacting, resisting something, rebelling against something, but in another sense they experientially open the door to the next metamorphosis, the possibility of moving from resistance to revolution.

For the riot to be liberatory as such it must necessarily be a liminal condition, both in terms of the experience for the individual, and of struggle for the movement. As Arendt describes, violence risks becoming irrational as soon as its agents begin to rationalize its organized use (1970: 66). In Fanon's terms, the riot contains the potential of decolonial violence's purpose without providing the organized threat of institutionalizing that violence. The riot's apparent chaos, its anarchy, which is seen as a flaw to those seeking to control movements, ultimately also means that as a form of struggle it lacks the capacity to become institutionalized. Of course, institutions can coopt the sentiment behind riots, leading to, among other things, the fear that underlies Le Bon's analysis – the Terror. But in itself, the riot is temporary and always in movement, and thus can only open a portal to other places and times. Here it becomes clear how analyses that attempt to ascertain the short-term efficacy or inefficacy of riots to achieve goals is missing the point. The old adage that violence never solves anything is not necessarily wrong. The idea of this type of limited, low-level violence is not to solve the problem, it is to clarify the problem. And clarifying the problem can be a step to solutions. Burning the police station in Minneapolis did not physically drive the police out of the city for good, and it is unlikely any participants thought it would. It did help a lot of people to see the problem of policing for what it is, and soon after the city council

voted unanimously to disband the Minneapolis Police Department and replace it with an alternative model of community safety.⁹ Years and years of organizing in communities and counter-hegemonic intellectual work made abolishing the police possible, but it seems so did a riot.

It is also unlikely that city councilors themselves were present at the Minneapolis riot, but here it is important to come back to the essence of rioters' full subjectivity. The riot only exists in the hours between when the riot starts and when the riot ends, but the people who participate in riots continue to exist in the world.¹⁰ The people I interviewed are not only rioters, they are teachers, students, medical professionals, publishers, poets, service workers, sex workers, athletic trainers, blue collar mechanics, white collar non-profit staffers, lawyers, artists, therapists, and even policy-makers. They are family-members and locals, connected to a variety of networks, regulars at the café and the bar. Rioters are all around us, meaning that the experiential effects of riots are all around us.

Riots cannot create in themselves, but they can improve our vision of society's contradictions, and at least in some circumstances, open us to visions of a liberated future that we *can* create. On a tactical level, Ketchley has demonstrated in his work on the Egyptian Revolution how riots can also open physical space to create the popular momentum capable of bringing down a government (2017). Then again, the Egypt of today, as far as I am aware, is far from a liberated outcome. Riots as collective formations are brief and typically fade within hours or at most, days. The riot in and of itself, and the mass nonviolent protest in and of itself, and even the two together

⁹ Levin, Sam. Minneapolis Lawmakers Vow to Disband Police Department in Historic Move. *The Guardian*. June 7. (URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/jun/07/minneapolis-city-council-defund-police-george-floyd>) Accessed June 12, 2020.

¹⁰ This phrasing is borrowed from *Fight Club*, the 1996 book by Chuck Palahniuk and 1999 film directed by David Fincher. Among other things, *Fight Club* is about the use of unarmed violence to achieve enlightenment. For a thorough analysis of its relation to riots and specifically the black bloc, see Thompson (2010:).

are, in the final analysis, far from sufficient. Most of all, riots reveal the reality of social struggle in a way that few other kinds of actions can.

We can and should challenge the rhetorical use of “violence” to describe low-level protester actions when the same term is applied to systemic violence, repression, and warfare. Yet the nonviolence theorists and political violence theorists alike get something right about the connection between riots and more extreme forms of violent action. Whether or not participants are actually prepared to, the willingness to break things and burn things and throw things at people signals a psychic willingness to do more. The specter of the Haitian Revolution lives in every anti-police riot in a Black neighborhood – in every torched police car, a glimpse of the world in which the last shall be first and the first shall be last. And not only for the rioter. From Fanon and Memmi we learn that deep down colonizers know their position is illegitimate, based on violence. Somewhere more or less consciously in the mind of the oppressor lingers the fear that in the end, all the violence that has been heaped upon the oppressed for the sake of profits and privilege will be returned with interest. This anxiety was formative for the nascent United States as well. In 1797, just following the Haitian Revolution, Thomas Jefferson wrote:

But if something is not done and soon done, we shall be the murderers of our own children... the revolutionary storm now sweeping the globe will be upon us, and happy if we make timely provision to give it an easy passage over our land. From the present state of things in Europe and America the day which begins our combustion must be near at hand, and only a single spark is wanting to make that day tomorrow.¹¹

That spark is visible, in a flashing moment, in the flames of a riot; its smoke perceptible in every protest that refuses to declare itself nonviolent. The possibility of violent tactics is thus

¹¹ Quoted from the National Archives. (URL: <https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Jefferson/01-29-02-0405>) Accessed June 20, 2020.

symbolic for all involved; it does not necessarily lead to any material victories, and the application of violence can have significant costs, but even when they are not sacking the government, riots remind those on all sides of the barricades that politics is still a fight. They remind us that Margaret Thatcher's famous slogan for the neoliberal world order – There Is No Alternative – is still aspirational; there is still an alternative. The advocates of nonviolence are correct that violent tactics are likely to bring greater repression. Riots represent a clear and present danger to the status quo, and in certain moments they touch a nerve in a way that nonviolent disruption, however widespread, simply cannot.

If any single thing can be taken away from this work, let it be that oppositional and inherently antagonistic categories of nonviolent and violent action do not serve us when trying to understand the contentious dynamics of social movements from below. Certainly, pretending that riots do not exist or do not matter for movements only hurts our understanding of the dynamics that create social change. Violent protest is not some alien parasite attaching itself to otherwise organic nonviolent struggle, nor is it an aberration, nor is it proof of humanity's chaotic and antisocial nature. The standard repertoire of actions that get labeled riots, or violent protest – throwing projectiles at police, damaging government or private property, barricading the streets, burning symbols and vehicles and buildings – are integral components to the uprisings of our time. Put another way, riots are part of civil resistance movements. More than that, moments when angry crowds experiment with violence have distinct and significant impacts on participants and audiences. By removing “violence” as a catch-all category for everything that is not nonviolent, we de-mystify the actions that are classified as such, and allow those actions that have been flattened into a single abstract concept to be returned to reality. Once we accomplish this, the subset of “violent” action that gets called riots or protester violence can be sociologically disentangled

and examined as part of social movements on its own terms. By moving beyond violence and nonviolence as a holistic dualism, we are able to more productively analyze the types of struggle that would have populated both categories – with the steepest learning curve for those actions that cross the line that has been drawn in between.

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