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CHAPTER 24

Women in Civil Resistance

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Most of what we commonly call women's history is actually the history of women's role in the development of nonviolent action.

Pam McAllister (1999, p. 21)

Recent scholarship has revealed contributions of women throughout the ages to the development of nonviolent methods for waging conflicts. The findings are unearthing a version of history in which women's involvement has been conducive to the use and expansion of civil resistance and nonviolent struggle. With women, until recently, customarily excluded from the jurisdictions in which societies decide to exercise political violence, because they were considered inadequate for military service, and as they were generally untrained in the use of weaponry, it should come as no surprise that women's choice of action strategies has been concentrated in waging conflicts through means other than armed confrontation. Women have tended by necessity and choice to explore the vast area of strategic nonviolent action, and did so centuries before the terminology was coined and its study and building of theory and practice had commenced.

Indeed, political behaviors and thinking in general were the most explicitly masculine endeavors of all human activity (Brown, 1988, p. 4). With women omitted from the classic studies, gender bias was incorporated into the definitions and theories of knowledge. Although the discipline of international relations, for example, began with a search for a better understanding of war, conflict, and anarchy, it became concerned primarily with the Great Powers. Early disputes occurred between realists and idealists, and over whether international cooperation could be pursued, which until recently kept women invisible in the field. The high politics of state policy, security, and macroeconomic management have functioned as

a male preserve. According to political scientist Fred Halliday, "In conventional ideology, women are not suited for such responsibilities and cannot be relied on in matters of security and crisis" (Halliday, 1988, p. 159).

Part of the reason for the downplaying of the participation of women in the recording of history is the predilection of patriarchal societies to view all human activity through the aperture of male interests. Until comparatively recently, with women largely excluded from the institutions of decision making at the core structures of power, they were viewed as peripheral in the making of history, as most leaders were male. Women were barely considered actors of significance, unless they had risen to leadership in anomalous fashion—such as, for example, Cleopatra, the Queen of Sheba, Queen Elizabeth I, Catherine the Great, or Joan of Arc. Otherwise, women were assumed to play marginal roles or to be powerless spectators to the drama being enacted by the male leaders at center stage. The role that women had played in shaping social history, and in particular the way they may have been involved or influential in addressing conflicts, was not viewed as creditable or worthy of being chronicled.

That women's contributions to social and political change have been ignored, perhaps deliberately erased from human history, is now generally accepted, and this in all probability includes their participation and efforts in nonviolent civil resistance. The phenomenon of civil resistance as a technique of political action has deep roots, is applicable in a broad range of situations, and fascinates an expanding body of proponents and scholars. It has sometimes resulted in major historic alterations.

What makes a nonviolent movement or campaign different from institutionalized politics? Revolts and uprisings have occurred without violence throughout history, although more often than not nonviolent struggles have themselves gone unrecorded. Gandhi often said that "nonviolence is as old as the hills," referring to orally transmitted accounts of customary forms of noncooperation in his native Gujarat from centuries past. By the latter part of the 18th century in North America and Western Europe social movements were congealing, such that the contours of the phenomenon can be briefly summarized. A nonviolent movement is a civilian-based form of struggle that exerts social, political, economic, and cultural forms of power. It works by organizing mobilizations or campaigns that are constructed with the intentional abstention from violence, or the threat of violence, while making a conscious and group determination to fight with sustained collective actions that are nonviolent. Often called by Gandhi's term "civil resistance," it is enacted and expressed through a panoply of nonviolent methods, such as marches, strikes, boycotts, and vigils. It applies its unarmed power outside the standard institutionalized processes of politics. Rather than working through agencies or representatives, with nonviolent direct action the "people power" is applied to the source of the grievance.

Civil resistance is one of the terms that describe the sustained use of methods of nonviolent action, often in an uneven or asymmetrical conflict. Its organized public action makes collective claims on the targeted group, and the participating people, groups, or societies intentionally adopt a policy of not using violence or military strategies. One of the ways that this social power is wielded is by withdrawal of their cooperation with a source of grievance or oppression, and by using specific nonviolent methods (for example, civil disobedience, mass petitions, and sit-ins). The challengers' actions can disrupt the capacity of the targeted group to wield its accustomed power, thereby causing shifts among the bulwarks that support the oppressive adversary, such that it may yield. This withholding of cooperation can bring about political and social alterations that have otherwise not been possible through standard institutionalized politics. The application of a repertoire of nonviolent methods can be exerted sequentially, pressuring strategically and aiming for a goal. It does not refer to the mere absence of violence, which can be explained by many factors.

In appreciating civil resistance, the summation of historian Charles Tilly can be useful. He identifies three separate elements as involved in the mobilization of a social movement: First, a sustained, focused, organized public endeavor makes collective claims on authorities and officials among the targeted group. Second, elements of political action are used in combinations including the following: special-purpose associations, alliances, and coalitions; public (not secret) sessions; petition drives (with signatories acknowledging their identities); solemn and disciplined marches and processions; open rallies and assemblies; demonstrations; often-silent vigils; announcements to the public media; and pamphlets, flyers, banners, posters, placards, and pickets putting across clear statements of objectives and goals. Third, worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment are exhibited on the part of participants and their constituencies. In contrast to a one-time mass meeting or petition drive, a campaign goes beyond single events. It links the claimants, the group targeted by the claims, and a larger public. In Tilly's words, "Not the solo actions of claimants, object(s), or public, but interactions among the three, constitute a social movement" (Tilly, 2004, p. 4).

Gandhi once observed, "Woman is more fitted than man to make exploration and take bolder action in nonviolence." This remark and other, similar generalizations have led to debates between those who offer an "essentialist" assertion, in which women are more "naturally" drawn to nonviolent resistance for biological reasons, and those who reject such a naturalistic physiological argument, instead offering sociological, political, cultural, and historical reasons as more reliable in examining the perceptible pattern of women's preference for nonviolent action being more frequent and systematic than that of men. The tenants of the second school of thought are careful not to make any "essentialist" arguments,

because patriarchal systems are based on pre-scientific or unscientific assumptions about the supposed “nature” of “male” and “female.” The study of gender as it has accelerated over the past several decades has consistently shown that assumptions about the intrinsic nature of women versus men must be deconstructed as socially determined categories. We, the authors, would therefore question any argument of essentialism about whether it is in the “nature” of or “natural” for women to choose nonviolent action more consistently in the historical record than men. Instead, we have sought to examine the experiences of women, historically and in the contemporary era.

A full critique of historical analysis pertaining to women and civil resistance would require a separate volume; thus in our approach we will concentrate on examples, or cases, that offer insights into larger themes and point to areas for future research. With historical accounts generally diminishing women’s contributions, it is in oral accounts, stories, tales, legends, and myths that we will start our exploration to identify early indications of women’s use of nonviolent methods of protest, persuasion, civil disobedience, noncooperation, and disruption, when faced with injustice, suffering, and oppression. By searching out real-life examples, we also are less likely to crash upon the shoals of essentialism.

WOMEN’S ACTIONS OF CIVIL RESISTANCE FROM TIME IMMEMORIAL

We commence with two very old stories, one from a religious text and the other from a drama, that present two of the oldest chronicles of civil resistance, in which, revealingly, women are featured in the leading roles. Although without substantiated knowledge, these two narratives are likely to represent a generalization of real-life events that can help to illustrate how women have acted to organize time and again, in intentional, planned resistance to unjust orders and male-structured powers.

The first story comes from the Bible, in the Old Testament book of Exodus: “The king of Egypt said to the midwives Shiphrah and Puah, ‘When you act as midwives to the Hebrew women and see them on the birthstool, if it is a boy, kill him; but if it is a girl, she shall live’” (Exodus 1:15). In the face of an order from the ruler to perpetrate genocide, Shiphrah and Puah disobeyed and allowed the boys to live. When Pharaoh questioned them, they invented a story, which was a creative form of resistance: “Hebrew women are so vigorous and quick that they give birth before the midwives arrive” (Exodus 1:19). Apparently Pharaoh accepted this explanation, either because the midwives had enough unchallenged expertise on childbirth that they were able to deceive and equivocate, or because ruling power structures tend to dismiss seemingly powerless people and underestimate their capacity for cleverness, organization, and resistance.

This may be one of the first organized actions of civil disobedience ever recorded.

The efforts and accomplishment of women have often gone unsung, but at the forefront of silent and invisible resistance, women have been saving the lives of the persecuted. Harriet Tubman personally escorted more than 300 slaves to freedom in the U.S. northern states, unseen, on the Underground Railroad. Gentile women were essential to saving Jews throughout Europe during World War II and finding them safe haven. We can assume based on examples such as these that women have always been participants, organizers, and activists, giving sanctuary and providing food, at the forefront of silent disobedience and resistance.

The second tale presents another form of noncooperation. The ancient Greek playwright Aristophanes wrote a now-famous comedy called *Lysistrata*, where the heroine persuades the war-weary Athenian women to go on a sex strike, to pressure the men to bring about an end to war. In the farcical spoof, the men agree to the terms, and the play ends with a song and a dance. It premiered in Athens in 411 BC, toward the end of a grueling war against Sparta, and no written evidence substantiates the plot of *Lysistrata* as having been inspired by real events. The fact that sex strikes have occurred in many different parts of the world and in varying cultures in more recent history—including among women who had never heard about *Lysistrata*—allows us to infer that this form of noncooperation may have been drawn upon since the ancient period, and that one such case may have inspired Aristophanes.

The first *documented* case of the use of Lysistratic nonaction (as it is now defined in the field of strategic nonviolent action) concerns the women of the native North American Iroquois tribes circa 1600. At the time, tribal Iroquois men controlled when and against whom they declared a war. Tribal Iroquois women decided that they wanted to stop unregulated warfare. They ceased intimacy with the men and started boycotting love making and child bearing. Iroquois men, believing that women knew the secret of birth, were stricken by fear when they realized that children would not be born. Women also began to restrict the warriors' access to supplies, because they had complete control over planting and cultivating crops. Although the Iroquois men controlled politics, they could not go to war without the necessary supplies, such as dried corn and moccasins, which were produced by women. Iroquois women had therefore two powerful points of leverage—sex and food—for pressuring men, who eventually gave in to the women's demands by granting them veto power concerning all wars.¹

More recently, the sex strike has been used in varying settings, usually mixed with other nonviolent methods, as a powerful means of persuasion where unrepresentative power in society is held solely by men. In 2003, the women of Liberia—Christians and Muslims alike—formed an

all-female coalition that relied in great part on market women. Unquestionably, women's organizing contributed to bringing about the end to Liberia's 14-year bloody civil war, using, among other measures, Lysistratic nonaction.

Both the biblical story of the refusal to obey the ruler's killing orders and the Greek story of Lysistrata disclose the use of noncooperation actions over millennia, in which obedience and cooperation were withheld, or expected actions were not performed, including those anticipated by the men who possessed the powers of coercion.

Another well-known method of noncooperation is the boycott, a collective action in which people abstain from interacting with or buying from a person, organization, or even region, as a form of protest. The term originates in 1880, when, as part of its campaign for the "Three F's" (fair rent, fixity of tenure, and free sale), the Irish Land League withdrew the local labor required to harvest the crops on the estate of an English peer, Lord Erne, and began a campaign of isolation in the local community against his land agent, Captain Charles Cunningham Boycott. In County Mayo, Ireland, as the legally appointed land agent, Boycott had 11 tenants evicted. In response, the Irish peasants and merchants shunned and socially ostracized him. Women were quick to take action. Local laundresses refused to wash his laundry, and his servants and cooks quit. Blacksmiths refused to shoe Boycott's horses, and shopkeepers declined to serve him. Of course, long before the word "boycott" came into use, consumers had on occasion stopped buying from unfair merchants (Marlow, 1973). Although the word came into English in the late 1800s, the practice and policy was in use on a much grander scale more than a century earlier in the British colonies in North America, in their quest for independence, under the terms "non-importation" and "non-consumption." The word was incorporated into French (*boycotter*) and German (*boykottieren*) and other languages by the early 20th century. No one knows how long the actual practice of economic noncooperation now known as the boycott was used before it acquired this name. Here, too, women continue at the forefront of social and economic ostracism. One early recorded use of the boycott dates to the 16th century and was launched by a woman against the economic power of the Pope, as head of the Church of Rome.

Doña Gracia Mendès Nasi (1510–1569) was born to a rich family of Jewish merchants from Portugal, who had been expelled from their native land as part of the "ethnic cleansing" policies of the Reconquista in Portugal and in Spain. Exiled to Constantinople, where the Sultan had welcomed and protected Jews, Doña Mendès Nasi became a member of the economic elite of the "Sublime Gate." When she heard that the entire population of Portuguese Jews in the city of Ancona, Italy, had been arrested by order of Pope Paul IV, she single-handedly spearheaded a boycott of the port of Ancona by all Ottoman Jewish merchants, with the blessings of the Sultan (Aelion Brooks, 2002).

Fast-forwarding to modern times, we can find many more examples of acts of civil disobedience and nonviolent action planned and implemented by women in the defense of their own rights or the rights of others. But before we delve into a further exploration of these struggles, we need to give a more precise definition to the term “rights.”

ANY “RIGHT” IS A RESULT OF ANTECEDENT STRUGGLES AGAINST INJUSTICE AND OPPRESSION

At any given moment in history, legal systems have enshrined injustices, until these wrongs have been challenged by movements that have put enough pressure on power structures that they would eventually “concede” to change the laws. As famously expressed in 1857 by abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass,

Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will. Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have found out the exact measure of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon them, and these will continue till they are resisted with either words or blows, or both. The limits of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those whom they oppress. (Douglass, 1857)

This same basic principle was expressed by 19th-century abolitionist leader and women’s rights activist Lucretia Mott in similar terms: “Any great change must expect opposition, because it strikes at the very foundation of privilege” (Mott, 1853).

What we call today universal human rights and women’s rights is the result of decades of usually nonviolent struggle by peoples, minorities, and women who demanded that these rights be indeed recognized. Regrettably, the discourse of human rights laws and international conventions rarely credits their codification to struggles waged by mass social movements for their establishment. Women were generally among the leading actors in waging these struggles.

WOMEN IN THE AVANT-GARDE OF STRUGGLES FOR HUMAN RIGHTS: REEXAMINING HISTORY THROUGH THE LENS OF WOMEN’S NONVIOLENT ACTION

As scholars of gender studies are reexamining history by paying closer attention to the role of women, new aspects of well-known movements of civil resistance are surfacing, revealing a critical role for women leaders and organizers. The civil rights movement in the United States is one such example, and several recent books and articles shed a light on the contributions of women to the movement, in which one author of this chapter and of another in this work,² Mary King, was actively involved (see King, 1987).

Women in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement

A pivotal moment in the history of this crucial movement was the Montgomery Bus Boycott—a city-wide 381-day campaign of economic noncooperation that was entirely conceived and organized by women activists. For three years prior to the start of the Montgomery action, the black community's Women's Political Council of Montgomery had been planning a city-wide action against racially segregated buses. In conceiving the idea of a bus boycott, they met regularly in churches. Jo Ann Robinson of the Women's Political Council drafted and circulated an early leaflet calling for a boycott, aware that African American women were the largest contingent of customers of the segregated city buses that took them to work, mostly as domestic servants. A boycott by black women would prove to be economically disastrous for the bus companies and therefore would be a particularly efficient tactic to contest legalized segregation. The black women of Montgomery had been looking for the ideal moment to begin their action.

The notion that Rosa Parks had "tired feet" is a figment of the imagination. At 42 years of age, she had attended workshops in nonviolent action in Monteagle, Tennessee, in the summer of 1955. Virginia Durr, a white client of Parks for her skills as a seamstress, who was a supporter of efforts to end lynching and the poll tax, raised the money for the workshop fees. When Parks refused to give up her seat for a white man on December 1, 1955, she was warned by the bus driver that he would have to have her arrested. With a calm and composed voice she replied, "You may do that." She knew precisely what she was doing and had half a dozen opportunities to leave the bus before the police arrived. Parks was an experienced activist in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) and, in her role as secretary of Montgomery's NAACP branch, had earlier invited the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. to join the group's executive committee. Due to the high esteem in which Parks was held for her charitable work and service, her arrest aggravated the black community such that it would respond to the call to boycott the buses. On December 5, 1955, the city's black pastors selected King to head the Montgomery Improvement Association, formed to guide the action against segregation policies on municipal buses. Twenty-six years old, King was a relative newcomer among the city's clergy. We cannot say with certainty, but it is worth considering that if we had not heard of Rosa Parks, we might not have known of King.

Throughout the U.S. struggle for civil rights, women consistently played major roles, even though historians have often failed to credit them with the ideas, methods, strategies, and results of their actions. Detailed accounts of the part played by 52 women in one of the key civil rights organizations, the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), are found in Holsaert et al. (2010).

Women and Solidarnosc in Poland in 1980–1989

In June 1980, a sudden explosion in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, formerly Danzig, resulted in the deaths of 8 laborers, with another 60 injured. Anna Walentynowicz, a crane driver in the shipyard, fought for protective apparel and improved safety of operations. On July 9, after 30 years on the job, she was dismissed on a charge of having 10 years earlier amassed candle stubs from a cemetery to melt down into new candles to memorialize more than 50 workers who had been killed in 1970. Police accused her of stealing. In a Gdansk flat that summer, a group discussed the possibility of striking to get Walentynowicz rehired. It included a master plumber named Lech Walesa. Anna's arrest was the spark that ignited what would in 1980 become the *Solidarnosc* (Solidarity) union. At dawn on August 14, 1980, members of a free trade union committee, of which Walentynowicz was co-founder and spokesperson, smuggled into the Lenin shipyard a mound of hand-written placards and flyers insisting that she be reinstated and given a raise in wages. At 6:00 a.m., when the first shift had clocked in, committee members marched through the huge shipyard, bearing their posters and asking others to join them. Four years earlier Walesa had lost his job there, but he now heaved himself over the 12-foot fence at the shipyard's perimeter and would soon take the lead in striking. A strike, however, usually means walking out. The shipyard nurse, Alina Pieńkowska, spoke emotively, asking that the workers not leave. As several thousand strikers settled down to sleep in the yard, a novel nonviolent variation of the "sit-in strike" became crucial for maintaining nonviolent discipline, as everyone remained inside (King, 2009, pp. 24, 39, 35).

By September 1981, Solidarity's membership had reached 10 million workers from all backgrounds and professions (constituting a third of the working-age population in Poland). One half of its members were women. Poland's national nonviolent revolution, starting in 1980 and culminating in 1989, marked the first significant step in the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Women played a critical role, albeit under-recognized. When the independent self-governing trade union Solidarnosc was created on September 22, 1980, in a national meeting, it became the first trade union not under communist control in a Warsaw Pact country. Several of the actions led by Solidarity featured the women of the union in prominent roles, such as women's hunger marches in protest against food shortages in August 1981.

On December 13, 1981, when the authorities of the Communist Party state imposed martial law, most of the male leaders of Solidarity were rounded up and arrested, including Lech Walesa. The police locked up a few of the women leaders and organizers as well, but had underestimated their numbers. Many of them were therefore not apprehended, and they regrouped to reorganize, hiding the few remaining male leaders and

founding the structures of an underground Solidarity. They published the main Solidarity newspaper and provided continuity to a movement that was in danger of being entirely crushed. By their leadership role during the darkest times of communist repression, the Polish women who saved Solidarity gave rise to a powerful feminist movement in the years that followed. The story of these women, who crucially contributed to the fall of the communist dictatorship in Poland, has been recently recovered and rediscovered (Penn, 2006).

That Solidarity would rebound from seven years under martial law surprised virtually all onlookers. More remarkable was what followed. For 59 days, February 6–April 5, 1989, the government's chief negotiators, Lech Walesa, and Solidarity's most trusted advisers negotiated. Thirteen working groups held 94 sessions, often conversing overnight. At a gigantic oak round table, and various sub-tables that accompanied it, former political prisoners sat with their erstwhile jailers. The multiple layers of negotiations would not only bring totalitarianism in Poland to an end and transform Solidarity into a legal trade union, but would chart a new parliamentary democracy. The round table agreement between Poland's regime and the opposition movement was signed on April 5. The death knell for communist rule in the Eastern bloc thus sounded eight months before the Communist Party state of East Germany would decide to open the Berlin Wall, which is so often and erroneously credited with ending communist rule (King, 2009, pp. 60–62).

From those two historical examples we can infer that women have been a driving force, sometimes the main driving force, behind civil resistance movements, although their efforts have often been hijacked by male leaders who took credit for the women's contribution.

However, one movement that—by definition—was clearly identified as women led and women run was the century-long movement for women's rights.

A CENTURY OF ORGANIZING FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Gender inequities have been the norm in the preponderance of human societies, until women sought rights and entitlements, often in mass movements. Women have had to be largely responsible for their own emancipation and uplift. To be sure, the presence of male allies has often helped, but the impetus has usually begun with women (King, 2013). Little in the way of civil liberties or rights has been beneficently bestowed on the female half of humanity; women have had to fight for one right at a time, through nonviolent direct action. Often denied fundamental justice and rights, subjected to murderous violence and rape, unable to secure gender-sensitive rulings from misogynistic judiciaries, what women have done for themselves as agents of history and actors for social change has been

largely responsible for tangible historical changes in their standing, privileges, and freedoms to allow them to live meaningful lives.

Before they began to fight for their own rights in the 19th century, women had often been engaged in struggles for the rights of others or in seeking broader rights for their communities. The cohering of countrywide struggles, which proceeded slowly and transnationally, gave sustenance and knowledge to dispersed movements that began working on self-emancipation. The focus on women's rights was often born out of other struggles.

One of the driving forces behind the emergence of women's rights movements was the major involvement of women wage earners in the struggles of the working class beginning in the 19th century, as they sought to obtain the right to organize through labor unions. Struggling on behalf of their broader communities of co-workers provided a powerful vehicle for women unionists, in Europe and in the United States, to press for their own rights and the emancipation of women throughout the 20th century. Whether the iconic figure of Louise Michel in France, an anarchist and educator and an organizer of the Paris Commune in 1871, or women unionists in the United States such as Lucy Pearson and Maud Malone, such early examples of women activists and organizers represented important role models for later generations of working-class women seeking broader rights as full citizens.

The Movement for Women's Rights in the United States

The impetus for emancipation among women of the social and economic elites came from other struggles. In the United States, it was through the movements for the abolition of slavery in which thousands of white women from the upper and middle classes became involved, thereby producing momentum for the birth of women's rights movements. Having been treated as minors without the ability to control their lives, white women frequently empathized with communities similarly treated as inferior. Through struggles against deep fundamental injustices, they started to articulate the commonalities between their subjection as second-class citizens and the subjugation of slaves to their masters. This sentiment was expressed by white abolitionist and advocate of women's rights Lucy Stone (1818–1893), in a letter to her mother: "I expect to plead not for the slave only, but for suffering humanity everywhere. Especially do I mean to labor for the elevation of my sex" (Moore Kerr, 1992: letter, March 14, 1847, p. 43).

Women formed a large contingent of the U.S. abolitionists at a time when they were generally not active in the public sphere. Mostly through religious groups and historic peace churches such as the Quakers, Mennonites, Unitarians, and the Universalists, which were resolutely abolitionist, women found a platform for organizing. The experiences of the

antislavery struggles brought together white women and black women to work for the first time in solidarity, establishing ties of sisterhood beyond the conventional lines that divided their societies at the time. White and black women activists played a key role in hiding the fugitives along the Underground Railroad, and organizing their escape routes from the southern states to the North and Northeast.

Those strong ties of solidarity contributed to the reframing of their common struggle as a battle for freedoms for both slaves and disfranchised women. Emerging from the fight against slavery, the U.S. women's suffrage movement was born. Among its most vocal advocates were Susan B. Anthony and Lucretia Mott. As early as the 1840s, suffragists would mobilize large audiences of women in what would by 1869 become the first congress of the National Woman's Suffrage Association.

One hundred years later, the U.S. civil rights movement, in which women played key strategic roles, created the momentum for other women's struggles, its lessons in how to organize accelerating the second historical wave of the women's rights movement in the United States, known as the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s. By their involvement in the civil rights movement in the South, women activists had acquired the strategic skills and discernments on which they could build the movement for women's rights of the subsequent two decades.

What had started in the 19th century and extended into a century-long movement for women's rights produced groundbreaking campaigns, introducing methods that would widen in their use by movements for social change throughout the 20th century. Analyzing some innovative features of the American suffragist³ movement, Nadine Bloch notes, "Before telephones, before TV, before the web, these women mobilized masses of people in a widespread and colorful campaign. Their successful tactics continue to shape campaigns today, even if many organizers have no idea where those tactics originated" (Bloch, 2013).

The suffragists used clear symbols, images, and colors to construct a "brand," creating a communication maneuver that would in the next century become the trademark of the so-called color revolutions against authoritarian rule, such as Ukraine's 2004–2005 Orange Revolution. In the United States, the suffragists at the turn of the century chose white, expressive of purity, gold as a symbol of hope, and purple for dignity. Their methods and strategies have become integral to the repertoire of civil resistance. They organized long, multi-day marches decades before Gandhi's 1930 Salt March, including marches from New York City to Albany and from New Jersey to Washington, D.C. Indeed, the March 3, 1913, Woman Suffrage Procession in the capital of the United States was described at the time by *The New York Times* as "one of the most impressively beautiful spectacles ever staged in this country." It included nine

marching musical bands, four mounted brigades, three heralds, perhaps 24 floats, and more than 5,000 marchers. Along the procession, women were harassed, insulted, and even injured by onlookers, while the police stood by; 100 women were hospitalized with serious injuries. Press coverage of the mayhem stunned the nation. The march had the effect of shifting attention away from president-elect Wilson's inauguration the next day.

The National Women's Party, led by two pioneers, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, organized the first-ever picket of the White House. These groups of women were called "silent sentinels" and were comprised of more than 1,000 women who stood with their banners every day from January 10, 1917, through June 1919—except on Sundays.

Their peaceful protests brought prison sentences and threats of incarceration in asylums for the women. Word of brutal conditions at the nearby Occoquan Workhouse across the Potomac River and serious abuse by its prison guards leaked out, including reports of beatings, horrendous conditions of solitary confinement, and force-feeding when the women went on hunger strikes. These disclosures seeped out and reverberated against the U.S. government, creating outrage in public opinion and building sympathy for the suffragists' cause. The protagonists had put the government into a dilemma, in which any response would help the challengers.⁴ With such dilemma actions, the daring women helped to usher in the adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, passed by Congress on June 4, 1919, and ratified on August 18, 1920, which prohibits any United States citizen from being denied the right to vote on the basis of sex.

Throughout their decades-long campaigns, women advocates for suffrage also innovated in their communication strategies with the news media of their times—newspapers, radio, and even motion pictures—to educate a broad public and persuade them to support their cause. For example, in 1917, they were able to collect *more than 1 million* signatures, all through face-to-face contact, which were displayed as they marched down Fifth Avenue, in New York City, on October 21, 1917, with 20,000 supporters and a crowd of an estimated half-million people.

By their strategic use of communication, the suffragist movements of countries around the world have been acknowledged as among the most successful international activism movements in history. International relations expert Fred Halliday termed the transnational quest for the women's franchise the most remarkable transnational movement of the modern age (Halliday, 1988, p. 162). Women's suffrage movements globally amassed an astonishingly sophisticated record of international campaigns, spanning several decades and several continents, from the late 19th century to the mid-20th century.

Transnational Women's Nonviolent Action for Equal Rights

In 1893, New Zealand became the first nation to enfranchise women to vote. As the 20th century opened, women's nonviolent suffrage movements formed in China, Iran, Korea, the Philippines, Russia, Sri Lanka (Ceylon), Turkey, Vietnam, and Japan.

The 1905 first Russian revolution, which was mostly nonviolent, began with women's protests against the price of bread, an event that would launch the suffrage struggles in Russia. The 1910 Mexican revolution opened the way to the first feminist demonstrations of the country. In 1917 in India, even before Gandhi had started his extensive decades-long nonviolent campaigns, Muslim women organized a conference launching a campaign for the abolition of polygamy. Throughout the 20th century, women have organized nonviolent action to advance their claim to be recognized as equal citizens to men. In 1951, approximately 1,500 women flooded the Egyptian parliament to ask for their right to vote, a movement that culminated in 1956 with women's hunger strikes, which resulted in their victory in gaining suffrage in Egypt. And in Western democracies, the struggle for women's rights did not stop with their victory in obtaining the right to vote, but went on through decades of protest and strikes to be recognized as holding equal rights in family law and labor laws, and in all aspects of social and economic life. The first equal-pay strike was launched in the United Kingdom in 1968, in factories producing Ford's sewing machines.

Such campaigns launched by women have not only served the advancement of their equal rights, but in each of their societies have enhanced the skills and abilities of ordinary people, men and women, to undertake nonviolent civil resistance on diverse other issues or forms of oppression.

TWO HISTORICAL TRENDS: FROM OTHERS' RIGHTS TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS—OR THE OTHER WAY AROUND?

In synthesizing these observations, two fundamental historical trends stand out:

1. On the one hand, by mobilizing for the broader rights of their communities or the rights of other persecuted minorities, women have gradually come to question and challenge the nature of the societal structures that maintained them in subordinate status compared to men, thereby piloting movements of women's self-assertion or liberation.
2. On the other hand, when women have mobilized against gendered inequities or for their own equal rights, it has also spearheaded strategies and tactics that have strengthened the practice of nonviolent action,

thereby helping all other movements struggling for human rights and democratization, ushering in more rapid social change for more freedoms and justice.

These two trends have responded to each other in a positive feedback loop that has reinforced both the abilities of women to struggle for their own rights and the capabilities of all human beings—men and women—to engage in successful campaigns for rights, justice, and authentic democracy.

As a broad historical pattern women have often fought on behalf of the rights of others before locating sufficient social space to fight for their own. It took several generations for Western women to begin experiencing the second trend. In the 20th century, the pace of change has hastened throughout the world, yet claims for women's rights have tended to lag. After other struggles have been fought and won, in which women had played a major role, they were only then able to focus on their own uplifting, entitlement, or empowerment.

In the nonviolent mobilizations to end European colonialism that encircled the globe during the 20th century, the sometimes massive involvement of women meant that upon reaching liberation and in struggling for independence (through armed or unarmed campaigns of resistance) they were included in the universal suffrage that followed. The right for female citizens to vote had become part of the accoutrements of the modern nation-state.

However, formal legal rights do not necessarily translate into equality in all contexts where centuries-long conventions and habits of inferior female status are entrenched in the basic political and social structures. Western women in the early 21st century are in some cases still struggling for the recognition of equal pay for equal competence and responsibility. They have yet to achieve equitable representation in the core structures of governmental power, or on the boards of directors of corporations. In other parts of the world, the struggle for women's rights (the second historical trend) is sometimes at its start, where the concepts and values of women's equal rights may be seen as radical and anarchistic ideas. What kind of space can women activists find?

Pioneering first waves of women activists may pay a high price for their engagement; they may be stigmatized as "mad-women" and either ridiculed or vilified by the established media of their time. This was the case for Alice Paul and Lucy Burns in the United States a century ago, as it is for many women's rights activists in deeply patriarchal cultures in the world today.

Yet other approaches are also available so that women can be effective without daring groundbreaking feats. Especially in social settings where entrenchment of traditional patriarchal structures makes it difficult to

attend meetings outside the home, women have nonetheless been able to engage in acts of civil resistance without direct confrontation with the preferred stereotypical choices imposed on them. Yet they may end up utilizing what little space had been allowed to them within customary constraints to leverage their limited power, as they seek not to defy patriarchal restrictions but to use them to their advantage.

WOMEN'S USE OF TRADITIONAL ROLES UNDER SEVERE REPRESSION

All patriarchal societies tend to define gender in terms of exaggerated stereotypes, both male and female. On the one hand, alpha-male values of physical strength and military "courage" are glorified and men are encouraged to become "hyper-males," who are supposed to be desensitized to emotions, signs of "weakness," and the realm of women.

On the other hand, in such cultural settings women are restricted to the inner world of the home, as devoted wives and caring mothers, and are assumed to be fragile, vulnerable, and "emotional"—in other words, unable to be rational, while needing constant protection from a male relative, whether father, husband, or brother.

Under such societal norms, women are both subjugated as minors unable to make their own decisions, and idealized, put on a pedestal as the "good wife," the "good mother," the nurturer and protector of the young, and the educator and keeper of values and culture. Patriarchal societies are founded on such habitual family values, which form an essential cultural pillar of support for all of their social systems.

These precise characteristics can, however, give women a strategic advantage, because they allow them to function within customary stereotypes while utilizing the tools that can be employed as weapons against certain aspects of the society's patriarchal structures. Throughout history, women have been able to call upon strategies of resistance from that place of vulnerability—as mothers and wives, or as poster girls exquisitely personifying ideals of femininity. As they challenged the authorities in the name of those "superior" family values, as good wives and devoted mothers, they were able to create powerful, irresistible dilemma actions.

That women have been able to be effective in fighting using civil resistance under systems of extreme patriarchal hegemony is not in contradiction with their ability to utilize the technique to advance their own rights, entitlements, and choices, at different times and circumstances.

Berlin 1943: Wifely Revolt!

By early 1943, Nazi authorities were determined to make Berlin "Judenfrei" and to deport the remaining Jews still living in the capital of

the Third Reich. On February 27, 1943, 5,000 Jewish Berliner men were rounded up by the Gestapo and held in its building on Rosenstrasse before being sent to death camps. Many of these men were married to non-Jewish wives, hundreds of whom started a spontaneous campaign, converging on the Rosenstrasse to demand that their husbands be released.

Defying threats of arrest, and reassembling after every attempt to clear them away, several hundred women chanted, "We want our husbands back!" and then, as things became more serious, calling out, "Murderers! Murderers!" to the police and members of the Nazi security squadrons that ringed the building. By March 6, the crowd had grown to approximately 1,000. In staging a demonstration of protest in front of the Gestapo, the Gentile women posed an embarrassing dilemma to the Nazi authorities. According to historian Nathan Stoltzfus, Hitler and Goebbels wanted to avoid disturbing Berlin's female population at a time when the propaganda minister had just called on them to mobilize for "total war" (Stoltzfus, 1996). They grudgingly admired the women for their "German faithfulness" to their husbands, which had been sustained through years of humiliation and discrimination. Had the women been Jewish, they would undoubtedly have been shot. Instead, these women defying the Nazi authorities on the Rosenstrasse offered the image of perfectly devoted "Aryan" wives, the very foundational cultural value on which the whole regime stood.

After a week of trying to sit out their very public defiance, Goebbels and Hitler capitulated and gave orders for more than 1,700 imprisoned Jews and partially Jewish husbands to be released. They ordered the return of 35 who were already in Auschwitz.

The women had won. Their husbands survived to the end of the war. Even though the Rosenstrasse protest remained an isolated event, it shows that, against all odds, in one of history's most cruel and repressive regimes, women had the ability to enlist their "core" archetypal identity as wives and mothers to fight for their husbands' lives, and that they were able to achieve victories based on traditional values.

Argentina 1976–1983: The Mothers and Grandmothers Arise!

The military junta that ruled Argentina with an iron fist from 1976 to 1983 attempted to suppress all forms of opposition by systematically kidnapping all people who would speak up against the regime. Thousands disappeared; they would be tortured and executed, their remains buried secretly in undisclosed places. The level of fear in society reached such heights that no one would openly ask questions, until a group of women decided to hold the regime accountable for the disappearance of their children. They had met by chance as they walked the corridors of governmental

bureaucracies, trying to gather evidence concerning the whereabouts of their children. On April 30, 1977, a group of 14 converged on the central square of Buenos Aires, La Plaza de Mayo, in front of the Casa Rosada, the presidential palace, with pictures of their disappeared children. Their request was singularly simple: what happened to our children?

From that date on, every Thursday at 3:30 p.m. mothers and grandmothers of the disappeared would return to the plaza, in growing numbers, to challenge the authorities. The regime dismissed these pitiful old women, calling them "las locas" (the mad-women). Yet it faced a dilemma of whether or not to publicly suppress this weekly action. Rather than sending the troops to openly fire shots into this crowd of women, repression that would have backfired and provoked outrage, the authorities tried to intimidate them by "disappearing" several of the protesters' own founding members, such as Azucena Villaflor, Esther Careaga, and Maria Eugenia Bianco. Despite the threat of being kidnapped and killed, the women were undeterred and returned week after week, month after month, year after year, demanding the truth.

Called Las Madres de La Plaza de Mayo, they also cultivated international attention, seeking to stimulate pressure by other governments on the country's dictatorship by publicizing the stories of the "disappeared." In 1978, when Argentina hosted the soccer World Cup, the mothers' demonstrations at the Plaza were covered by the international media, while several soccer players from elsewhere attended their weekly demonstration in solidarity.

Creating symbols of resistance that branded their movement, they wore white headscarves, on the back of which were sewn photographs of their vanished children. Their determination convinced rising numbers of women to join the struggle. Las Madres empowered others to speak out about human rights abuse in Argentina. They utilized several methods of protest and persuasion, including petitions and leaflets that were distributed in public buses and trains; they recruited celebrities such as Nobel Literature Laureate Jorge Luis Borges; they dramatized their plight by carrying carpenter's nails, identifying with Mary, the mother of Jesus of Nazareth, who had also been tortured and executed by the state; and they built ties of solidarity with labor unions and other organizations in order to take actions of noncooperation, including labor unrest, slowdowns, and strikes.⁵

Even after the fall of the dictatorship, they continued their mobilization in search of information on the locations where their loved ones had been buried. Subsequently, the grandmothers carried on the effort to locate their grandchildren, who had been abducted as infants and given by the authorities to families loyal to the military regime for adoption.

This movement led to a new form of political feminism, in which the women embraced customary values. As Las Madres walked together in

the Plaza de Mayo, their acting out of traditional roles in the public eye became a form of defiance. As analyzed by human rights activist Rita Arditti, the mothers were not interested in “challenging the gender system and the sexual division of labor.” Rather, Arditti says,

They demanded the right as “traditional” women to secure the survival of their families. . . . The Mothers created a new form of political participation, based on the values of love and caring. Motherhood allowed them to build a bond and shape a movement without men and through this process, the women transformed themselves from “traditional” women defined by their relationships with men (mothers, wives, daughters) into public protesters working on behalf of the whole society. (Arditti, 1999)

In other social orders where tradition prevails, as for instance in Africa, movements of women have emerged that operate within the unique space accorded to women as mothers and grandmothers, striking back at regimes of oppression and terror by consciously leveraging their customary roles in patriarchal cultures.

The Women of Liberia: Doing the Unimaginable!

Liberian women played a major role in ending 14 years of civil war, an example of civil resistance led and enacted by women that is worth closer inspection. Liberia had for decades been stricken with inter-ethnic conflicts, fueled by economic competition for its underground natural resources and the trafficking of carmine “blood diamonds” with neighboring Sierra Leone. When dictator Charles Taylor took power in the late 1980s, civil war ensued, with warlords launching guerrilla fighters from the rural areas to the cities, notably the capital, Monrovia. By early in the 21st century, Liberia had literally become “Hell on Earth,” as described by Leymah Gbowee—in a state of anarchy, with daily tolls of thousands of rapes and murders, and a civilian population that was equally terrorized by the regime’s thugs and the guerrilla warriors, both of whom deployed bands of drugged and brainwashed child soldiers.⁶

In 2003, Gbowee began by mobilizing the women of her church to start a campaign to demand peace between warring factions. One of the underlying divisions was religion, as Charles Taylor and his followers were Christians while most of the opposing warlords were Muslims. Gbowee reached out to Muslim women in the mosques and through collaboration built with them a coalition that unified Christian and Muslim women to bring peace back to their homeland. The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace was born. Entirely women led and women organized, this movement undertook daily demonstrations on the road leading to the presidential palace. The women were dressed in white, signifying peace, and they pressed for one demand, articulated as We Want Peace Now. Crossing religious and

ethnic boundaries to work together, thousands of Christian and Muslim women gathered in Monrovia for months. Voicing Muslim and Christian prayers, they organized daily nonviolent demonstrations and sit-ins, defying Taylor's orders.

Mobilizing the seemingly powerless women and mothers was initially not perceived as threatening, yet they actually posed an embarrassment for Taylor's government, which was forced to listen to them so as not to lose face. Officially inviting the group to the presidential palace, Taylor was presented by Gbowee with a petition from a large number of women, in which the petitioners asked for negotiations to bring about peace. Moreover, the women called upon their vast networks of relatives and social relations, in particular focusing on the market women, who were often related to warlords. These familial and community links would eventually put pressure on the guerrilla leaders to sit down to negotiate with Taylor. Among the measures that the women chose to use was the Lysistratic non-action of sex strikes, in order to pressure men on both sides of the strife to accept the principle of a negotiated agreement.

Pressured internally by the women's movement and externally by the international community and leaders of other African nations, the two sides ultimately agreed to meet in Accra, Ghana, for negotiations. The women of Liberia sent a delegation of 600 to Accra to maintain pressure on the negotiators. After weeks of failed talks, the women locked arms and encircled the hotel where the negotiations were underway, thereby preventing anyone from entering or leaving the parley until an agreement was reached. The former Nigerian head of state, General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who was leading the negotiating delegation, realized the social power possessed by the women and established a close alliance with them in order to facilitate pressure on the Liberian male delegates, who finally found their way to an agreement. As a transition phase began, Taylor was ousted but replaced by former warlords, who were regarded as equally corrupt. The women remained at a high state of mobilization throughout this changeover, paving the way for what would become the democratization of their war-torn country. They would also subsequently play a key role in disarming the rebel militias of Liberia's child soldiers. They also assumed a responsibility for healing the severe dislocations produced by prolonged civil war, in which they publicly gave and promoted forgiveness for the children who had become serial rapists and killers—and whom the women considered to be victims as much as they themselves were. Solely the women were able to assume and enact responsibility for disarming this lost generation of children and to prepare for their moral and social rehabilitation. They went on to register as many of the country's women citizens as possible so that they could take part in national balloting, and at the polls they made sure that every woman would cast her vote in Liberia's first democratic election, which contributed to the

election of the first woman president of an African country, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf.

Gbowee and President Sirleaf were awarded the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize.⁷

By “doing the unimaginable,” as expressed by Gbowee, the women of Liberia showed how a group of determined women can achieve what otherwise seems impossible, even under gruesome circumstances.

The Impact of Lysistratic Nonaction

Gbowee writes in her memoir that the months-long lysistratic noncooperation action had little or no practical effect, but was extremely valuable in attracting media attention. Even 10 years later, whenever she talks about the mass action, the first question is “What about the sex strike?”

By itself it was insufficient, but utilized in combination with other methods, it helped to create unity among the women of the broad mobilization and therefore played an important part.

The withdrawal of intimacy has been used in different societies to achieve varying types of goals; it is worth a closer look to compare these cases and assess the efficiency of this age-old approach.

Turning to South America, in 2011, in a four-month, 300-woman sex strike in the town of Barbacoas, Colombia, the women foreswore sexual intimacy in staking their claim for a promised paved road leading to their municipality. They succeeded when local authorities promised to improve conditions on the roads connecting Barbacoas to the nearby settlements.

In general, contemporary sex strikes appear to be more successful in traditional societies, with relatively closed social systems that are conservative in matters of sexuality, and where most of the men are married and unable to engage easily in sexual relations outside of marriage. In such cases, women may be able to utilize a sex strike as a method to apply leverage on men, as long as they are able to persuade a large majority of women to join the effort, and if they are collectively able to maintain discipline over long periods of time.

Sex strikes succeed better when women’s demands are specific and realistic rather than broad. On the other hand, a highly publicized 2006 sex strike by the girlfriends of gangsters in a violent region of Colombia was called off after 10 days with no indication that their demand—an end to gang violence—had been met (Anderson, 2012).

Other Exemplary Women’s Movements in Africa

In other African countries, women’s movements have been at the forefront of social change during the past 30 years, again utilizing traditional and customary roles and functions possessed by women. Wangari Maathai in 1977

created the Green Belt Movement, a campaign to avert desertification by planting trees, to provide energy for rural women. Maathai was repeatedly arrested by the authorities, her offices targeted and closed, in particular during her fight to protect Uhuru Park against projects involving the building of huge shopping malls and offices, which were regarded as riddled with corruption and fraud. She and many other women activists of the movement she led utilized hunger strikes to fight for and obtain the liberation of incarcerated political prisoners. For her targeting of corruption in politics and preservation of the environment, she had to go into hiding several times. Maathai was subjected to exceedingly repressive measures, and she was beaten many times. Notwithstanding insults and attempts by the government to try to silence her—in which she was termed “a crazy woman” and her followers “a bunch of divorcees”—Maathai was able to mobilize 50,000 poor women to plant 40 million trees over a period of 30 years (Maathai, 2007). She was awarded human rights prizes across the world, and in 2004 the Nobel Peace Prize was bestowed on her. Throughout her life she was a source of inspiration for millions of women in Africa and elsewhere, and the flame of her spirit continues to inspire after her death in 2010.

Throughout the African continent, women’s movements of civil resistance have flourished during the last decades, struggling against the endemic corruption of their governments, as well as for the betterment of their lives and those of their children and communities. In their struggle against the dictatorship of Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe,⁸ the movement catalyzed in 2003 by Jenni Williams, Women of Zimbabwe Arise! offers such an example that is rooted in the traditions and customs of Zimbabwe while aiming to empower women in new organizational and leadership roles. This civic movement strives to provide women from all walks of life with a united voice, so that they can speak out on issues affecting their day-to-day lives, while encouraging them to stand up for fundamental rights and freedoms. The movement—whose acronym WOZA means in the Ndebele language “Come forward”—also enables female leaders to widen community involvement in pressing for solutions to the many crises in Zimbabwe. In their use of some of the symbols of femininity and love, such as the rose, and their celebration of Valentine’s Day as WOZA’s anniversary, they have branded a movement that capitalizes on what are perceived as feminine and “motherly” qualities. Williams uses poetic language to speak of “mothering their vote”⁹ in birthing democracy. As caring mothers for the future of their country, they also use humor and jokes to mock Mugabe as a “naughty child” who needs to be scolded for misbehavior. Despite being arrested, beaten, and submitted to vicious brutality by Mugabe’s henchmen (at the time of writing, Williams has been arrested 52 times since 2003), the women of WOZA have persisted with their mobilization. Their membership having reached 75,000 thus far, 10 percent of whom are men, Jenni Williams has been called by London’s *Guardian*

newspaper “one of the most troublesome thorns in Mugabe’s side” (E. Day, *Guardian*, May 9, 2009).

DEMOCRATIZATION AND WOMEN’S LIBERATION: THE ISLAMIC WORLD AT A CROSSROADS

As noted earlier, two historical trends merge in struggles for women’s rights and exertions for “broader” rights, and these have often gone hand in hand. Whenever women have mobilized for the rights of their communities, they have garnered recognition for their contribution and in so doing have earned more rights for themselves as women, helping to close the gap between their status and that of men, in societies that are traditionally male ruled and oriented. Whenever women have stood up for their own rights, even at the price of animosity and rejection from the mainstream, they have nonetheless been able to advance the rights of others.

That women have fought for rights and justice in Arab societies and Islamic civilization is not new; indeed, previous waves of emancipation have been followed by periods of setbacks where women have lost some of the rights that they had recently gained. Will the current revolutionary phase of the Arab Awakening, which started in 2011, bring forth another wave of liberation from patriarchal structures for women? How will these trends play out in the Islamic world, whose patriarchal structures are regarded as among the most resistant to social movements for liberation and equality of women?

Palestinian Women in Their Struggle for Statehood and Women’s Rights

Palestinian society has represented for other Arab countries a model and precursor in its early use of popular resistance, dating back in coherent form to the 1930s. In terms of women’s rights, too, Palestinian women were ahead of their time, waging struggles as early as the 1920s.

After the British Mandate for Palestine was established, Palestinian women from the educated elites of Jerusalem launched a campaign in which they in essence asked the British authorities to honor their promises made to the Arabs during War World I and grant them their independence (as they had honored their agreements with the Jews). Muslim and Christian women together staged colorful presentations, sometimes presenting potent symbols, such as on April 15, 1933, in Jerusalem a Christian woman speaking in the Mesjid (Mosque) of Umar and a Muslim woman speaking at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (King, 2007, pp. 91–92). Throughout this period, Palestinian women created in ingenious and clever ways militant forms of resistance to aspects of the British Empire and to the threats against their way of life.

In this early phase, the Palestinian struggle was petitionary and nonviolent (Qumsiyeh, 2011, pp. 48–76). The first coherently armed movement emerged in 1936, and from then on armed struggle became a more visible form of resistance for the rights of the Palestinians, ushering in a militaristic phase of the struggle led and organized by male armed combatants. From the Nakba (catastrophe) of 1948 to the Naqsa (1967), generations of Palestinian militants engaged in armed resistance, having been trained in the refugee camps in Lebanon, Syria, or Jordan that were established after the 1948 war. Only a tiny minority of women combatants joined those troops. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) included women at many different levels, but not in leadership positions. A few well-educated women from elites played important roles in the 1960s, both as activists on behalf of Palestinian statehood and also as feminists.¹⁰ After the 1948 war, Palestinian society remained deeply traditional, with very few women in a position to work for or to claim equal rights. Within the Palestinian territories militarily occupied by Israel after 1967, the next generation's Palestinian women started to pave the way for a more profound social transformation of their society. They were able to assume leadership and begin organizing hundreds of civic associations, which would form the backbone of a de facto Palestinian civil government, in the absence of a formal one.

Never more than during this period did Zahira Kamal's observation ring true:

Personal and national liberation go hand in hand. When both sexes are deprived of their freedom and national dignity by the Israelis, it would be inappropriate for us to deal only with sexual inequalities. On the other hand, we will fail both women and our cause if we do not understand that liberating women from discrimination will better equip them for waging a successful national struggle. (Cited in King, 2007, p. 97)

When the first intifada broke out in 1987, and the crackdown from the Israeli army began, it was the women who set up, ran, and led the popular committees that sprang up throughout the villages. Under curfews that could last up to 23 hours, it was the women who could get out of the refugee camps for an hour and obtain everything needed for their families. As schools and universities were being closed down for weeks and months, it was in the homes of the women that classes were held (King, 2007, pp. 221–225). With everyone homebound, the strengths of women were vital and noticed.

Not only were women indispensable, from December 1987 to March 1988, they alone held more than 100 demonstrations (King, 2007, pp. 87–99, 225). Palestinian women were key actors in the 1987 intifada, whose achievements include the 1991 Madrid conference and the opening of political space for the 1993 Oslo Accords, notwithstanding the latter's subsequent

invalidation by all parties to the conflict (King, 2007, pp. 298–305). The movement brought pressures for the Israeli government to negotiate with the PLO, a process that led to the beginning of some autonomy for the Palestinians through the Oslo accords. As the exiled PLO returned from Tunisia, harvesting the fruits of four intense years of popular resistance in the West Bank and Gaza, leading to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in 1994, however, women were not politically rewarded for their immense contributions to the 1987 intifada. On the contrary, they were marginalized in the political phases that followed; very few were invited to take part in the political composition of the Palestinian Authority. The 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century represented an unanticipated change from better to worse in terms of women's rights and entitlements in Palestinian society. The waves of resurgent Islamic revivalism crashed against the gates of modernity in Palestine, as in the entire Muslim world, bringing Hamas into power in the elections of 2006 and with it a renewal of conservative patriarchal constraints on the role of women. The schism between Hamas-led Gaza strip and Fatah-led West Bank is not only political disunion; it plays out in the ways in which Palestinian society shapes the social and political spaces for women's activity and fulfillment.

As analyzed by political scientists Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan in their groundbreaking work, a comparison between the first intifada (1987–1991) and the second intifada (2000–2004) displays clearly how the first mobilization, based on the organizing of nonviolent campaigns, sought to include all actors in Palestinian civil society, especially women, whereas the second enlistment, which turned itself almost immediately into an armed confrontation, left no space for unarmed activists, in particular women, to play any significant part (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011, p. 145). The second intifada constituted a failure for Palestinian society, provoking levels of violent retaliation from the Israeli armed services that had never been encountered before. Its most unfortunate result may have been the destruction of embryonic and fragile Palestinian institutions and sociopolitical infrastructures, leaving the Palestinian economy bloodless.

Out of the tragic experience of what has been called the second intifada, however, a new wave of activism has emerged, resolutely rooted in the principles of nonviolent struggle, where both men and women are engaging in a longer-term mobilization resting on tactics that have proved efficient in other struggles—such as a boycott, divestment, and sanctions campaign—designed on the model of the anti-apartheid movements in South Africa. In all of this subsequent organizing with civil resistance, women activists play an equal role to men, and are reclaiming the political space they had lost in the previous period.

In their decades-long struggle against the occupation, the Palestinian women have been joined by Israeli women activists who have played an important role in their own society in systematically denouncing the

human rights abuses perpetrated against the Palestinians. Women's organizations are strong in Israel, fighting both for women's rights and for the rights of minorities (Palestinians who are Arab Israeli citizens), as well as for the Palestinians' human rights and for the end of military occupation. These organizations have been working with Palestinian activists since the 1987 intifada, building ties and fostering solidarity with Palestinian women.

One of them, the Women in Black, was created in 1988 by Israeli women, some of them survivors of the Holocaust, to condemn the military occupation and the use of excessive force by Israeli troops against the young Palestinians who were challenging it. They have conducted weekly vigils on Fridays at lunchtime near the Israeli prime minister's residence. Wearing black to convey mourning, they silently hold placards opposing their government's policy: "Dai L'Kibbush" or "Down with the Occupation." Women in Black has more than 150 chapters worldwide today.

Israeli society, modern by many standards, is still highly patriarchal and militarized, as are all societies structured around military prowess. In that sociocultural environment, women's movements have been able to wage successful campaigns, in particular through the strategic use of their traditional roles as mothers. The Four Mothers Movement in Israel, named for four mothers whose sons served in elite Israel Defense Force (IDF) units in Lebanon, used petitions and vigils to win tens of thousands of supporters to the cause of the complete withdrawal of the IDF from Lebanon. Israeli scholar Tamar Hermann credits this movement with generating the pressure on the Israeli government to withdraw the IDF from Lebanon in June 2000. She calls it "the most successful grassroots organization in Israeli's history," whose adoption of nonviolent methods was "a classically rational choice" (Hermann, 2009, pp. 260, 261).

The Women of the Arab Awakening: Between Tradition and Rebellion

One of the major challenges for the Arab Awakening, and its aftermath, is the delicate articulation between the aspiration for democracy and the quest of women for their liberation and their equal rights.

The women of the Arab mobilizations have been rising in many different roles, sometimes as "sisters" and "mothers," sometimes as independent women claiming a right to enter the political space as equals to men. Women have been walking a fine line between tradition and modernity, between patriarchal stereotypes and the advancement of their rights.

Wide differences are found among Arab countries in the status of women. Tunisia has been since the 1960s at the avant-garde in reforming the laws to give full equal rights to women (Charrad, 2001), whereas at the opposite end of the spectrum Yemen is a country where women are rigidly

constrained by strict patriarchal rules and subjected to harsh discriminatory policies when it comes to family law. These differences affected the kind of political space that women occupied during the Arab Awakening. If women formed important contingents of all the differing Arab movements against dictatorships, they expressed their desire for change in different ways.

In Yemen, they did so in a way that had to be respectful of the societal restrictions. Tawakul Karman, a journalist and human rights activist, and a 2011 Nobel Peace Laureate, declared that women in Yemen fought for others' rights, not for women's rights, because they would have lost their credibility if they had mixed their own demands with the demand for more freedom for all. Tawakul herself made sure not to be seen as a "feminist," which would have been unacceptable and would not have allowed her to play the leadership role in which she excelled. Women activists in Yemen used the traditional stereotypes to claim their space in the streets, asking for their male counterparts to be released from jail, and working for the freedoms of journalists and other people. As Karman expresses it, "Women fought to give men their rights!" Their constant mobilization on the streets raised the stakes and posed huge dilemmas for the authorities in a context where women are supposed to stay inside their homes. Here again is a case where women, even in a very socially restrictive environment, were able to leverage their conventional role to the advantage of the whole society.

In Egypt, the mobilization began several years before the start of the Arab uprisings. Egyptian blogger Dalia Ziada shares,

People mistakenly assume that Egypt's revolution was spontaneous but we had been studying and learning for 10–15 years through study groups and nonviolent workshops, especially in 2007–2008. These workshops exposed us to cases of nonviolent action and they inspired us. I learned about the U.S. civil rights movement and translated a comic book on Martin Luther King into Arabic and distributed it through my blog and also in print. It was passed around widely. At first people didn't understand what nonviolent resistance was, or why it was important, but gradually, the knowledge empowered people and helped all of us believe that we can do this.

In the blogosphere, Egyptian women activists were among the most active in sharing knowledge and monitoring torture. The spark for the January 25, 2011, demonstration was a post in Facebook, by means of the passionate voice of 26-year-old Asmaa Mahfouz who, on January 18, called out to people to join her on Tahrir Square to protest against the corrupt regime:

I, a girl, am going down to Tahrir Square and I will stand alone and I'll hold a banner, perhaps people will show some honor. If we still have honor and want to

live in dignity on this land, we have to go down and demand our fundamental human rights. If you think yourself a man, come with me on January 25. Whoever says women should not go to protests because they will get beaten, let him have some honor and manhood and come with me on January 25. If you have honor and dignity as a man, come and protect me and other girls at the protest. (Mahfouz, 2011)

In this call, Asmaa Mahfouz, wearing the hijab, calls on Egyptian men in a language that is thoroughly resonating with the stereotypes of an ancient patriarchal society. As a woman who is not supposed to assume a public role because it would be “shameful” to do so and would risk being beaten or worse, she calls on men to display “honor”—a supreme patriarchal value—by protecting her and other young women who are participating openly. Her video went viral on the Internet and helped spark the mobilization of January 25 on Tahrir Square that marked the beginning of the Egyptian nonviolent revolution.

When the nonviolent protagonists started a nonstop sit-in, and live-in occupation of Tahrir Square, about 20 percent of the demonstrators were women. In a society plagued by sexual harassment, a type of miraculous transformation happened in this unique space where thousands of young men coexisted with thousands of young women: an atmosphere of dignity and respect reigned, and not one incident of molestation was recorded. Men and women worked in close cooperation, in total equality, and with respect for each other. Yet the movement also included women activists from older generations, who played an important monitoring role and provided a sense of family, calming anxieties and advising young people. Some nicknamed them the “mothers” of the revolution.¹¹

From this societal experiment where men and women lived as brothers and sisters and as equals in Tahrir Square, emerged the expectation that women would continue to play a role equal to that of men in the political redefinition of their country. How to carry this experience over to the rest of society? In the transition phase that followed, and after the election of the Muslim Brotherhood and its leader Mohammed Morsi as president of Egypt, Muslim clerics have attempted to marginalize women, and push them out of the political space and back into their homes. The wave of discontent that ensued has been carried by women activists throughout, and as hundreds of thousands of protesters took to Tahrir again in June 2013—a movement that led to the fall of Morsi and his government—women again formed a large portion of the demonstrators. In this new phase of transition, the women’s agenda for increased equality is becoming one of the main issues of the political fight between Islamists and Secularists.

The same historical trend can be observed in Tunisia. The country had been at the vanguard of the Arab world in terms of women’s status since its independence in 1955, as Tunisian women had been granted equal legal

rights in the constitution, under President Habib Bourguiba. In Tunisia, women's organizations have always been strong and have influenced policies, even at the time of the dictatorial government of Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali. In the aftermath of the January 2011 revolution, in which women had taken part in large numbers, women's organizations remained mobilized in the democratization phase and demanded that their voices be heard equally to men's. After three years of a political contest between the Islamists of the Ennahda party and the other political forces, an historical compromise was reached, which marks a remarkable democratic achievement in a regional context where similar contests have created violent tensions. In Tunisia, a new constitution was voted in on January 26, 2014, with a massive majority (200 in favor, 12 against, 4 abstentions), based on the rule of law and on fundamental democratic principles. Article 46 of the constitution declares,

The State is committed to protect, promote, and improve inalienable women's rights. The State guarantees the equality between men and women, so as women can assume all responsibilities in all fields. The State strives to apply parity between men and women in all elected bodies. The State is committed to eradicate all forms of violence against women. (Sallon, 2014)

In their struggle against patriarchy, a first major victory was won in 2011 by all Arab societies. Even if not expressed, the first concession sought by the 2011 Arab revolts was rejection of the right of a dictator's sons to succeed him. The passing of power from father to son was a characteristic of patriarchal and tribal societies, in the Arab world and elsewhere. As expressed by anthropologist John Borneman: "The public renunciation of the son's claim to inherit the father's power definitively ends the specific Arab model of succession that has been incorporated into state dictatorships among tribal authorities."

In all Arab countries today, as women have increasingly played key roles in the movements of opposition to authoritarian regimes, the second phase in the democratization of their societies has opened a space for them to confront directly some of the patriarchal coercions they face, and to join a struggle that regards the claim for open and democratic societies as equivalent with the assertion of women's equal rights.

Iranian Women Pave the Way for Democracy: Strategies of Struggle under the Veil

Iran presents the case of an Islamic republic established in 1979, where the mullahs have imposed a strict application of the sharia body of sacred law. In this most constraining societal space, women have still been able to organize and work for their rights.

An important social prerequisite that allowed such a women's movement to emerge is the fact that despite its traditional patriarchal structures, the Islamist republic, based on economic socialist principles, had granted to all citizens—men and women—universal access to education and health care. As a result, women's rate of literacy in Iran is among the highest among Muslim countries.

Even if formally not accorded equal rights, because of their relatively high involvement in the country's economic life, and thanks to their high levels of education, women have slowly and silently navigated their constricting environment to create spaces of freedom and expression for themselves.

An example of silent yet profound disobedience (or at least disregard) of traditional expectations was the extremely rapid fertility transition in Iran from 1990 to 2010. An important mainstay for strongly patriarchal societies is a presumption that the husband controls his wife and children and in particular decides if and when his wife should have other children or not. However, it has been universally documented that, when women are given the opportunity to make such choices for themselves, they will take control over their reproductive capacity and over the size of their families and in so doing, they weaken one of the major pillars of patriarchy.

Against all expectations, under a most socially and sexually conservative religious regime, the women of Iran have engaged from the period of the late 1980s onward in the fastest fertility transition ever recorded in human history. Sociologists and demographers have tried to understand the paradox of this surprising reproductive revolution.

Iran's Revolutionary Fertility Transition

When the shah was ousted in the Islamic revolution of 1979, the fertility rate in Iran was high, around six children per woman on average, a rate characteristic of the early stages of the demographic transition. The new regime, led by an assembly of staunchly conservative clerics, suppressed all of the family planning programs that were in place. As a result, fertility rates rose even higher shortly afterward, up to seven children per women. At those rates, population growth is extremely high (typically 2 percent per year, with more than a doubling of the population each generation).

The census of 1986 resulted in the realization by government officials that population growth could not continue at this very high level without producing major negative consequences for economic development. It became clear that the Islamic state would not be able to meet the social needs of such a growing population in terms of health and education, especially as the price of oil—Iran's main revenue source—had been declining sharply in the early 1980s (dropping from \$90 per barrel in 1979 to \$25 per barrel in 1986, using 2005 as the base). Reluctantly, conservative

Islamist leaders had to recognize that reinvigorating a strong family planning policy was an absolute necessity, and the national family planning program was launched in 1989. From then on, religious leaders actively supported the new program, and the advantages of family planning were preached in the mosques. The spread of the national public health system to all regions of the country and down to the village level meant that the program could be delivered effectively and efficiently to most women in the country. In Iran, free family planning is available within an hour's walk for perhaps 90 percent of the population. However, what these clerics might not have anticipated is how quickly Iranian women would seize these new opportunities to realize the most rapid fertility transition ever recorded, from 7 children per woman in the early 1980s, to below replacement level, 1.9 children per woman, in 2006.

The Iranian case has taken demographers by surprise all over the world (Abbasi-Shavazi et al., 2006). In analyzing the Iranian transition, they concluded that the necessary conditions for a revolutionary fertility transition to occur were all met in Iran: low levels of infant and child mortality; institutional changes that provided free and broad access to contraception (both of these factors being allowed by health care diffusion and accessibility); transmission of the idea that limiting the number of children in the family will enhance the family's economic well-being and improve the opportunities of each child; and finally, and most critically, universal access to education for girls and women (with very high levels of university enrolment for young women). These factors dramatically shifted the balance of power within the marital couple in favor of the woman by giving her the opportunity to make reproductive choices, and beyond this, by her becoming much more of an equal partner to her husband in the making of decisions. These changes have occurred not only in urban centers but also increasingly in rural areas, ushering in an unprecedented silent "feminist" revolution, under the veil.

Having empowered themselves to take control over their reproductive choices, women expected increasingly more equality with their husbands in taking decisions within the family, based on a higher quality of interactive communication within the couple. And if those expectations were not met, marriages increasingly ended in divorce, as shown by the tripling of their numbers, from 50,000 in 2000 to 150,000 in 2010, and reaching in Tehran the rate of 26 percent of marriages ending in divorce. Nothing suggests a slowing of this trend; during 2013, the divorce rate increased further, while the marriage rate significantly dropped (A. Shahi, *Foreign Policy*, May 29, 2013).

Such societal transformations are vividly depicted in Iranian cinema, as films show the evolution of men-women relationships in all their complexity and how Iranian women are increasingly making their own choices. The critically acclaimed film *A Separation*, winner of an Academy

Award in 2012 for Best Foreign Film, masterfully shows such complexities in the story of a middle-class couple going through a divorce, and the parallel story of their maid and her relationship with her very conservative husband.

Women's Rights Movements as Catalyst for Broader Political Change in Iran

Silent empowerment of women within the family has set the stage for the emergence of a strong women's rights movement in Iran, which launched in 2006 the One Million Signature Campaign. This was an ambitious petition drive that sought an end to polygamy, stricter punishments for men who perpetrated honor killings and other forms of violence against women, and equal rights in marriage and in inheritance laws. The Iranian women who organized this campaign mobilized their networks, in urban and in rural areas, through house meetings, around kitchen tables, inviting other women as well as men who were sympathetic to the cause of women's rights. They used the Internet to communicate their messages and reached out to women's organizations worldwide, giving an international dimension to their campaign. They staged dilemma actions that publicized their activities; for instance they burst with banners into stadiums, where their presence was forbidden, forcing the police to arrest them in front of the cameras, and by doing so communicating their claims to large audiences. Their campaign was successful in uniting people from different backgrounds and in starting a broad discussion about women's rights within Iran's civil society.

Several of the key leaders of the drive were arrested and given long prison sentences, which slowed down the campaign. However, the momentum of the One Million Signature Campaign was not lost, since it is largely credited for preparing civil society for the "green wave," the defiance movement against Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's sixth President, after the 2009 presidential elections, which were widely believed to have been hijacked by the regime. As Sherin Ebadi, 2003 Nobel Peace Laureate and Iranian human rights lawyer, put it, "A victory for women paves the way for democracy in Iran"; and if women had not succeeded yet in acquiring equal rights, the struggle they waged indeed paved the way for the "green wave," in which they participated in very large numbers.

Even if the 2009 green wave did not achieve its articulated goal, it prepared civil society to rebound whenever given the opportunity. The surprising result of the June 2013 presidential elections reflects the critical role played by women in the deep societal and political transformation of Iran in the last decade. Though hardly a progressive politician, Hassan Rouhani, the moderate cleric who won the election, went out of his way to seek support of the women during the electoral campaign through

his strong message of gender equality, saying in a video aired over state television that “in my government, differences between women and men won’t be tolerated” (Aneja, 2013).

Throughout the Islamic world, the struggles that women are waging nonviolently for their equal rights are at the core of the democratic transitions of their entire societies. Women’s groups, along with youth groups, are leading the way on significant social transformations.

WOMEN’S STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE IN CIVIL RESISTANCE

From the observation of diverse movements across the ages and throughout the world, we can conclude that women have been able to utilize some strategic advantages in waging nonviolent civil resistance.

If historically women have been primarily involved in nonviolent struggles rather than in violent conflict, it is because they did not have as easy access to weapons as men but also, and primarily, because their role and position in society required that their first priorities were to protect their children and family. Therefore, women’s engagement has usually favored actions that carried the lowest risk of being injured or killed. Civil resistance, especially in its methods based on dispersion¹² and not concentration, carries much lower hazards than armed resistance.

Women pioneered many of the hundreds of nonviolent methods that have been observed throughout history. Through their patient discovery of the power of nonviolent action, women activists have been able to capitalize on five sociological features that gave them an edge and a specific advantage in civil resistance movements, compared to men:

1. Women’s presence lowers the level of violence and repression from security forces.
2. Women are often the best keepers of nonviolent discipline inside the movement.
3. Women tend to organize in horizontal networks, which prove to be more efficient and resilient for a movement than male-run hierarchical systems.
4. Women display fewer internal rivalries and can frequently achieve greater unity than male activists.
5. Women show a greater ability than men to build ties of solidarity across and beyond societal lines of division (be they religious, ethnic, or socio-economic) and political rivalries.

1. Lowering the Level of Violence and Repression from Security Forces

The presence of women in marches, protest demonstrations, and processions, especially in the front lines in direct contact with police and security,

has tended to have the effect of lowering the level of violent response from the security forces.

It is a universal fact that the violent targeting of women and children is considered much more unacceptable than violence targeting males. Security forces are more hesitant to strike back at unarmed women, because such a show of violence would provoke outrage and could backfire against the police and army.

Psychological factors explain this lesser use of force; in particular, a crowd of women is seen as potentially less aggressive and dangerous than a throng of men, so security forces don't feel as threatened by female as by male demonstrators. This phenomenon is accentuated by the fact that women activists often tend to present themselves in a—literally—disarming way, offering gifts, cakes, and flowers to the security forces. Fraternalization (literally brotherly outreach) with the troops seems a little easier to achieve for women than for men, as women can display more familiarity in dealing with security forces, as if they were their sons and brothers, sometimes giving them hugs and kisses. In doing so they can reach out to the troops' humanity and they pose a much greater moral dilemma for the officers if given orders to strike at them.

Recognizing this advantage, countless social movements throughout history have intentionally placed women in the front lines to induce a lesser violent response from the security forces and also to protect the male activists marching in the back. This tactic has been used in demonstrations universally, from the U.S. civil rights movement to the Arab Awakening. This practice can also manifest that the march or demonstration is in opposition to a policy, procedure, executive action, government entity, or law; it is not against the human beings who are enacting the contested policies or laws.

One of the earlier examples is the French Revolution, where the women of Paris took part in large numbers in all the main actions, from the storming of the Bastille to the later revolutionary events. One action in particular was as far as anyone knows entirely planned by women: On October 5, 1789, thousands of women marched the 20 km from the central markets of Paris to Versailles, the seat of royal power, to demand bread from the King. Admittedly this was not an entirely unarmed affair, as some of the women carried whatever knives, swords, or pistols they could find. Drummers and flutes were heard. The king's troops that protected the royal family hesitated to use armed force against the women. Negotiations ensued and ultimately, facing the pressure, Louis XVI and his family were forced to give in to the women's demands and to follow them to Paris. Escorting the royal family back to the capital, the women chanted that they were taking "le boulanger, la boulangère et le petit mitron"¹³ to bring the bread back to the people of Paris. This was a turning point of the French Revolution, as the Parisian women undermined the power of the King, who was from

then on closely kept in check by the people of Paris, until his tragic fall three years later.¹⁴

2. Women Seek to Lower the Level of Violence in Society

In addition to lowering the level of violence that can be expected from security forces, the significant presence of women among the ranks of civil resisters also has the effect of lowering the risk that violent behaviors might erupt from within the movement itself. In several cases, women have been the keepers of the requisite nonviolent discipline, monitoring and even “grounding” youths who would be tempted to display aggressive behaviors toward security forces, which could create a pretext for violent reprisals from them. For instance, in the popular resistance movements of the Palestinian territories, older Palestinian women sometimes were able to keep younger males from throwing stones, a gesture that would invariably trigger violent retaliation from the militarily armed Israeli troops.

More generally, there are suggestive indications that greater levels of involvement of women at all levels of civil society, and in policy making, could have the effect of lowering the levels of violence in human society. Political scientist Anne N. Costain argues that “women desire to reduce the role of force in society,” and reduction of violence is a central feature of the political agenda of women’s rights advocates (Costain, 2000, pp. 175–180). By coding content in articles from the *New York Times* from 1950–1986 and 1980–1996, she asserts that women’s rights campaigners, in the United States at least, are fundamentally concerned with reducing the level and extent of the use of violence in American society. Women, as a group, have consistently and from the beginning of modern polling, been much more likely to articulate negative emotions about violence than are men, both when the violence is an abstraction and when it is a real-life reality. Conceding at once that “a greater number of women than men oppose use of force to achieve political ends,” in Costain’s view nonviolent action and “opposition to use of coercive means to achieve goals” can be considered either as a strategic preference or a basic framing contour of the women’s rights movement (Costain, 2000, p. 178). She finds it to be both for U.S. women activists. Moreover, she asserts that the broad social critique proffered by recent women’s groups that “holds society accountable for problems ranging from domestic violence to a criminal justice system that makes convictions for rape and other sexually exploitive crimes” is reflecting a pattern in which the basic concerns of women emerge (Costain, 2000, p. 179). The configuration also shows opposition by women and women’s groups to violence against women in expansive terms, including pornography and violence expressed in pop culture, also counting sexual harassment. At the heart is deep and broad advocacy of nonviolent alternatives to methods that rely on armed force.

3. Women Have a Way of Organizing That Fosters Horizontal Networking

Sociologists studying how people organize have noticed a major difference between men-run and women-run organizations. Groups led by men tend to be more hierarchical, based on command structures, with orders and sanctions given by the leadership in a top-down manner. Those led by women often have a tendency to be more lateral, with a sharing of responsibilities and leadership among several members. If men's chosen structures resemble pyramids, the structures built by women are apt to look like interlocking circles, reflecting networks of networks.

As expressed by two political scientists, "More than any other groups, women's organizations use the terms 'network' and 'networking' to describe their interactions" (Keck and Sikkink, 1998, p. 167). This networking capacity is particularly important for mobilizing and recruiting large numbers for a movement. Women's connections in intergenerational sets of contacts of family ties, and their collateral solidarity encompassing all generations, often allows them easily to mobilize children, youth, the elders, and the disabled to take part in a nonviolent struggle.

Historical examples encountered here exemplify the way that the mobilization of women's networks on behalf of popular nonviolent movements is a key component in the success of these struggles, such as the case of the Christian and Muslim women of Liberia who brought the warring factions to negotiate peace. Networking competencies become particularly critical when a movement is forced to go underground, as when Poland was for seven years under martial law, when the women of Solidarnosc kept the movement alive and indeed growing in its darkest hours.

In cases where formal institutions don't exist, such as in the Palestinian territories in the 1970s and 1980s under Israeli military rule, it was the Palestinian women who ran parallel, or alternative, institutions such as schools and health services, which formed a de facto informal governance of the Palestinian society, in the absence of having their own government. These women-led social welfare organizations formed a vital network of networks that allowed the first intifada to emerge as a massive nonviolent popular movement that was able to carry out months-long actions of strikes and boycotts, thanks to the network of parallel institutions that had been patiently woven like a social tapestry by the Palestinian women for many years before the start of the intifada in 1987.

Networking among parallel civil society institutions is an essential component of any movement that needs to rely on alternative organizations while it withdraws socially and economically from the pillars of support of the dominant system against which it struggles. Women are commonly the main architects and organizers of these society-wide networks, and in charge of the logistics of the massive "withdrawals" that strikes and boycotts represent. As labor strikes are organized, such as in the Gdansk shipyards,

it is often up to the women—either workers themselves or wives of male workers—to steward the solidarity network supporting families, ensuring that basic goods and services are covered while families cannot earn income. As main decision makers in the choice of what they buy or don't buy for their families, they also are at the forefront of economic boycotts of goods and services. When the women of Montgomery decided to boycott the segregated bus services in 1955, they organized alternative means of transportation that would allow people to continue working during their lengthy struggle.

In South Africa, in the city of Port Elizabeth, the idea of a consumer boycott against the white-owned businesses and institutions was conceived by the middle-aged black women of the township, who suggested it to the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organization (PEBCO) in May 1985 (Ackerman and DuVall, 2000, pp. 356–357). The economic boycott began on July 15, 1985, and was met with a 100 percent compliance rate, which was feasible only because the women mobilized to address in advance the shortcomings of not shopping at businesses in Port Elizabeth, but, rather, shopping exclusively within the townships. The Port Elizabeth boycotts, which were led by youth activist Mkuseli Jack, became one of the most successful non-violent campaigns of the multiyear anti-apartheid struggle.¹⁵ And here again the women were the source of inspiration as well as the main organizers and implementers of this crucial campaign.

Women's reliance on networks of solidarity during periods of duress and economic stress allows them to prepare for the consequences of long-term campaigns and to shelter their families from its harshest outcomes.

In a time when social networks are redefining the political space and the democratic discourse, networking abilities play a particularly important role. The Arab uprisings, which have been nicknamed Revolutions 2.0, have relied heavily on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Those virtual spaces have proven to be particularly attractive for young Muslim women activists who were drawn to them as political spaces of expression, in a constraining social context where they were not expected to express themselves publicly. The Internet space offers women ways of expressing themselves beyond the traditional restraints and boundaries.

At the global level, all the major social networks—Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Wordpress—have statistically more female users than male. Undeniably, the skills gained by women in the blogosphere will equip them even better as digital activists, communicators, and as organizers of webs of networks of activists. Women bloggers in Iran have had a particularly important following online.

4. An Underlying Values Conversation?

In the 1980s, sociological study in the United States began to show that women became involved in public office for reasons different from those

of men. We employ one study's insights as a proxy. Social scientists Susan J. Carroll and Wendy S. Strimling, of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University in New Jersey, build on research that found women's participation to be "more often motivated by public-serving considerations, while men's participation is more often motivated by self-serving considerations."¹⁶ Carroll and Strimling's survey research (1983, table 5.7) finds women more likely than men to report that concern with public policy issues was "very important" in their decision to seek office (for state senate, 44 percent of women say that it was "very important" versus only 19 percent of men). They find (1983, table 5.13) that women were more likely than men to put a priority on the ability to combat various forms of discrimination as very important in their decision to run for office (Carroll and Strimling, 1983, pp. 116, 120).

Based on these findings, we pose the question of whether, for male activists, advancing their own personal goals and careers and gaining personal recognition may conceivably play a role in their decision to become involved, or stay involved. If there are rivalries, do they arise from competitiveness between male leaders whose intentions conflict with the agendas of others for capturing leadership and power inside the movement? In certain circumstances, this could undermine the necessary early efforts to build unity among constituencies, sectors, and activists. Of course, the same questions may fairly be raised with women.

Female activists may predominantly choose to become involved in order to protect the interests of their families and communities. It is often as mothers concerned about the well-being of their children that their engagement starts. Women, however, often pour their energy and resources into a movement without thinking about the kind of recognition their actions will bring to them personally. Leadership and responsibility may be shared by women activists in ways that foster cooperation and discourage personal rivalries. Such characteristics can accelerate unity in the movement.

5. Women Building Ties of Solidarity across Divisions and Separations

Another observation arising from exploring the diversity among women's movements is the aptitude shown by women in defying divisions and overcoming disunion across common lines of separation. Women may reach out to women from other social, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, building ties of solidarity with them—and also establishing networks that are critical to the success of the movement.

Examples abound, such as white and black women abolitionists working together during the 19th century, and interracial civil rights workers working collaboratively in the 20th century; Christian and Muslim women joining together to create a mass movement of women for peace in Liberia; Israeli women reaching out to Palestinian women during the 1987 intifada

and beyond, building ties of solidarity, and bidding for peace with justice between Israel and Palestine.

In their political analysis of the role of women's organizations in bridging communities at war, Hunt and Posa assert, "Women have been able to bridge the divide even in situations where leaders have deemed conflict resolution futile in the face of so-called intractable ethnic hatreds" (Hunt and Posa, 2001, p. 41). During the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina that raged between April 1992 and December 1995, an astonishing 40 women's associations remained organized and active across ethnic lines. In South Sudan, women working together in the New Sudan Council of Churches conducted their own version of shuttle diplomacy and organized the Wunlit tribal summit in February 1999 to bring an end to bloody hostilities between the Dinka and Nuer peoples. Innumerable other examples of such efforts led by women's organizations at bringing peace between warring factions have led the United Nations Security Council to adopt on October 31, 2000, Resolution 1325, the first resolution to address the disproportionate and unique impact of armed conflicts on women, and that stresses the importance of women's equal and full participation as active agents in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace building, and peacekeeping.

In cases where ethno-religious divisions in society can be manipulated by powerful authorities in a typical "divide and conquer" strategy, building unity across schisms within the opposition becomes even more vital than normal. The Syrian revolution was tragically hijacked because of the inability to build such unity.

In contrast to Tunisia or Egypt, whose populations are comparatively homogeneous in terms of ethnic and religious identities, Syria is a mosaic of communities.¹⁷ In Syria, the dictatorship of the house of Assad has been able to defeat the opposition by playing upon inherited divisions at the price of a bloodbath, which claimed the lives of more than 146,000 Syrians between March 2011 and March 2014, according to an estimate of the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights.¹⁸

The opposition to the Assad regime has been unable to build unity among its factions, many of which have split along religious or ethnic lines. Rivalries among leaders and dissension have plagued the protagonists, rendering them unable to build a strong and cohesive front against the dictatorship. The Syrian opposition is predominantly male run. Indeed, women have represented less than 10 percent of the Syrian National Council since its inception in 2011, even though at the grassroots level women have represented a major force, having led and organized several notable nonviolent actions during the first year of the Syrian revolution. In a spirit of unity, women from all religious backgrounds worked together.

A revolution that was conspicuously nonviolent from March to August 2011 turned into an armed contest between the regime and the opposition, including several factions that were armed by a variety of third parties,

each with its own parochial interest. In this context, the role of women shifted from political organizing to humanitarian interventions, and it fell to them to organize relentlessly demanding relief efforts. In other words, women were marginalized from the political process at the moment when the networking and organizational skills that they had displayed should have been of colossal value and worth in the reconstruction of their society. A survey conducted in 2012 of 20 key women activists in Syria, from all walks of life and all backgrounds (Sunni, Shiite, Christian, Kurd, and others) showed that during the first year of the revolution, the women interviewed had been striving to maintain unity among themselves, reach out to women from other communities, and work together against the regime by designing innovative tactics of resistance.¹⁹

Considering how the Syrian civil society has tragically been torn apart since 2012 by an horrendous internecine war, it can be postulated, based on other peacebuilding efforts following deadly civil strife, that massive efforts will be needed for the reconstruction of Syria, and these will invariably require the intelligent work of women, as protagonists for peace and reconciliation, with their networking skills, to reweave the fabric of society. The tragic situation of Liberia in 2003 was saved by the strength of its women's movement. Can Syrian women follow the same route?

IN CONCLUSION, A FEW RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recognizing the critical role that women have played in nonviolent struggles, whether charted or unrecognized until now, and their ability to harness specific advantages and develop particular skills for designing successful nonviolent campaigns, we can say that this is a field of research and inquiry that deserves much more attention among scholars, as well as practitioners and activists who are already engaged in nonviolent action.

Sharing more broadly the success stories of women protagonists in leadership roles will help other women in areas beyond to develop their own successful strategies, in their endeavors waged either for the advancement of their own rights and equality or for the development of broader rights for freedom, human rights, and democratization for their societies.

Questions that women proponents of civil resistance may ask include the following:

1. How can women activists capitalize more specifically on their identifiable advantages, by becoming even more efficient networkers in a world that is increasingly connected through lateral webs of networks? How can both men and women nonviolent challengers learn from these particular advantages and become able to organize more efficiently, utilizing horizontal connections that are based on a sharing of responsibility and dif-fused types of leadership?

2. How can a women's movement bring on board the rest of society, especially male-oriented civil resistance movements, so that they can work together? Even if successful, women's organizations (such as WOZA in Zimbabwe) sometimes don't work in conjunction with the rest of civil society, which can be distinctly male oriented. How can women's groups develop strategies for the dissemination and sharing of knowledge, values, methods, and tactics in and for the broader society?

Considering the articulation of the two historical trends—with strong connections between movements aimed at ensuring more justice and freedom for all and movements directed at women's equal rights—how can women leverage their participation in struggles with broad purposes in ways that guarantee that they can gain more equity and recognition throughout society? Chroniclers report that during the revolutionary phase of a movement, women are often told that “this is not the time to focus on women's rights, but whenever we have achieved our goal [collapsing the regime, acquiring independence, etc.], then we will address women's equality.” History has shown that if serious capital gains of equality are not earned and secured during the revolutionary phase, male-oriented structures re-form and reassert control after the crisis stage, and hence women lose any advantages from their stalwart participation and leadership. As noted, this happened to Palestinian women after the 1987 intifada, to the detriment of all the people. Thus, it is essential for women campaigners to enunciate clearly that the two struggles go hand in hand, and that one cannot be fought without the other.

Through the skills acquired by women who are active in nonviolent campaigns of civil resistance—from conceiving actions, planning, strategizing, to implementation and subsequent monitoring—women can become fully empowered and highly sophisticated activists, gaining leadership capacity and strategic tools that can make them key actors during the reconstruction phase when the movement has succeeded and reached its goal.

The involvement of women can never again be conceived as a by-product or consigned to a parallel track with momentous social movements, but must now be regarded as a core component. This will be even more fully recognized in future struggles, as the conflicts of the 21st century may increasingly be fought through nonviolent civil resistance, whose movements have been shown to have greater chances to succeed than armed insurrections or guerrilla warfare.²⁰ Women resisters will therefore be able to carve for themselves wider spaces for liberation from traditional patriarchal constraints, as they also fight for the broader rights of their societies, more and more often as critical leading actors in these movements.



Figure 24.1

Women's involvement in nonviolent civilian movements a century apart is shown in two photographs from Cairo: In 1919 (*top*), Egyptian women addressed the assembled crowd in a protest action against British colonization (INP News Agency), and in 2011 (*bottom*), women participated in large numbers in the Tahrir Square nonviolent revolution (Tatiana Philiptchenko/megapress.ca).

NOTES

1. See “Iroquois Women Gain Powers to Veto Wars” in the Global Non-violent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/iroquois-women-gain-power-veto-wars-1600s>.
2. See also Chapter 25 in this volume.
3. *Note:* In this chapter we will use the term “suffragists” to designate the women activists of this movement (having the same suffix as “abolitionists”) and not the name “suffragettes,” which was bestowed on them at the time, a term with condescending and paternalistic connotations.
4. “Dilemma action” is the name given to a tactic used by a movement that places its targeted group or adversary in an impossible dilemma: either it does not react against or repress the challengers, thereby allowing their legitimacy to consolidate, or, if it takes a hostile action, it will provoke indignation among onlookers and the general public, thus compromising or losing its own legitimacy and spreading awareness of the grievance being opposed by the nonviolent challengers.
5. See Lester Kurtz, “The Mothers of the Disappeared: Challenging the Junta in Argentina (1977–1983),” available at the International Center on Nonviolent Conflict, <http://www.nonviolent-conflict.org/index.php/movements-and-campaigns/movements-and-campaigns-summaries?sobi2Task=sobi2Details&sobi2Id=28>.
6. The movement led by Leymah Gbowee has been documented in the award-winning film *Pray the Devil Back to Hell* (2008), which recounts the creative strategies and tactics utilized by Liberian women to bring about negotiations between the combatant forces.
7. Tawakkul Karman of Yemen was included as a third laureate, for her prolonged efforts in leading nonviolent civil resistance there during the Arab Awakening.
8. Prime minister during 1980–1987, Mugabe has claimed six terms as president and became part of a unity government in 2008, resulting from a challenge by Morgan Tsvangirai. He was reelected in 2013 with 61 percent of the vote, notwithstanding reports of electoral fraud by African and international observers.
9. Jenni Williams, lecture, June 19, 2013, International Center on Nonviolent Conflict’s Fletcher Summer Institute, Fletcher School of Diplomacy, Tufts University, Boston.
10. For instance, Palestinian journalist Raymonda Tawil, who founded the Jerusalem Press Agency.
11. Ghada Shahbender, an Egyptian human rights activist, had her own four children on Tahrir Square with her, and, in addition to her strategic role as one of the organizers of the movement, she played the role of “mom” for her own children and for dozens more young people, making sure they were emotionally safe throughout the 18-day challenge.
12. Noncooperation methods such as boycotts and stay-home strikes, for instance, are “dispersion” methods, which are difficult for the authorities to repress; protests and demonstrations in central squares and municipal places of assembly, which are “concentration” methods, present much higher risks.
13. The baker, the baker’s wife, and the baker’s boy.
14. *Historical note:* The fear of people’s power and of having the executive and legislative branches “trapped” inside populous cities led several countries to move

the capital city to the countryside. The U.S. Congress decided to leave Philadelphia for a location away from any major population center: a swampy, muddy, mosquito-infested site on the Potomac River between Maryland and Virginia, which was to become Washington D.C. Interestingly, this decision was made on July 16, 1790, only a few months after the French king had been forcefully “kidnapped” by the women of Paris (though there is no evidence that this historical event might have influenced the American decision).

15. See the episode on the Port Elizabeth boycott in the documentary series *A Force More Powerful* (Steve York, 1999).

16. Attributed to Edmond Costantini and Kenneth H. Craik, “Women as Politicians: The Social Background, Personality, and Political Careers of Female Party Leaders,” *Journal of Social Issues* 28 (1972): 236, as cited in Carroll and Strimling (1983, p. 116).

17. Tunisia is almost entirely Muslim Sunni; Egypt is less homogeneous, with a large community (10 percent) of Coptic Christians. In contrast, Syria is ethnically composed of Arabs, Kurds (10 percent), and other, smaller ethnic minorities such as Druze and Assyrians. Religiously, if 70 percent of the population is Muslim Sunni, the ruling Syrian elite belong to the Alawite community (a variant of Shia) and represents 10 percent of the population. Christians also represent an important minority (10 percent).

18. The United Nations’ last estimate dates back to July 2013, with a figure of at least 100,000 but the UN declared in January 2014 that it would stop updating the death toll as conditions on the ground made it impossible to make accurate estimates. It is believed that a third of the casualties are civilians. Reuters, March 13, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/13/us-syria-crisis-toll-idUSBREA2C1ZR20140313>

19. See Chapter 18 in Volume 1 by Rajaa Altalli and Anne-Marie Codur. Many actions led by women activists aimed at creating unity among communities—such as marches where they would brandish posters, some saying “I am Christian,” some saying “I am Muslim,” and all saying “We are here to free Syria.”

20. See Chenoweth and Stephan (2011). In their study of 323 violent and non-violent insurrections between 1900 and 2006, they found that nonviolent resistance campaigns were more than twice as effective as violent uprisings in achieving their stated goals, at far less cost in human lives, and with much greater prospects for democratic development after the campaign ended.

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