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The Paradox Of Repression And Nonviolent Movements

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Introduction

Nonviolent Strategy and Repression Management

LEE A. SMITHEY AND LESTER R. KURTZ

“It is not repression that destroys a movement,” warns one of our contributors, George Lakey. “It is repression plus lack of preparation” (1973, 111). From Bull Connor’s dogs and fire hoses attacking US civil rights demonstrators to the massacre at Amritsar in colonial India, the use of coercive force against dissidents often backfires, becoming a transformative event (Sewell 1996; Shultziner, chapter 3 in this volume) that can change the course of a conflict. Rather than demobilizing a movement, repression often ironically fuels resistance and undercuts the legitimacy of a power elite. Although a long scholarly tradition explores the unintended consequences of martyrdom and other acts of violence, more attention could be paid to what we call the paradox of repression, that is, when repression creates unanticipated consequences that authorities do not desire. Efforts by power elites to oppress movements often backfire, as Brian Martin (2007) calls it, mobilizing popular support for the movements and undermining authorities, potentially leading to significant reforms or even a regime’s overthrow.

Our goal in this volume is to examine multiple aspects of the paradox of repression; in our own experience while exploring various social movements around the world and observing daily news reports, we now see this paradox in many spheres of life, historical epochs, and geographical regions of the world (see Kurtz 1986; Smithey and Kurtz

2003; Lyng and Kurtz 1985). In this chapter, we will introduce the concept and explore its relevance to empirical cases that this ensemble of authors has researched. In our conclusion (chapter 12), we discuss its possibilities and implications for future research. We have designed the volume to incorporate contributions from both scholars of social movements studies and practitioners of nonviolent civil resistance who have firsthand experience of repression and who have worked to manage it proactively through the careful and strategic use of nonviolent methods. Our purpose is to develop a better sense of the topography of the concept and discuss how it might enrich our studies of collective action, contentious politics, and social movements.

Repression and Its Paradoxes

In an asymmetrical conflict, when actors representing the status quo use force (psychological, physical, economic, or otherwise) to repress their opponents—especially those engaged in nonviolent movements—the use of coercion often backfires. As civil rights activist, clergyman, and author Will Campbell writes, “Of one thing I am certain: [the civil rights movement] was not destroyed by hooded vigilantes and flaming crosses. Nor by chains used on school children, dynamiting of churches and homes, mass jailings. All those things were an impetus to the Movement and brought determination to the victims” (1986, 198; cf. Durkheim [1893] 1984; Erikson 1966). Repressive coercion can weaken a regime’s authority, turning public opinion against it. Paradoxically, the more a power elite applies force, the more citizens and third parties are likely to become disaffected, sometimes inducing the regime to disintegrate from internal dissent.

Repression involves efforts by people in power to demobilize dissent and social movements resisting a regime, corporation, or other influential institutions. Drawing upon Goldstein (1978), Christian Davenport (2007a, 1) observes that most scholars of repression define it as “actual or threatened use of physical sanctions against an individual or organization, within the territorial jurisdiction of the state, for the purpose of imposing a cost on the target as well as deterring specific activities and/or beliefs perceived to be challenging to

technique used by authorities is the promotion of hegemony, in which dissidents censor themselves (for more details, see chapter 8).

Relational Nature of Conflict and Power

The paradox of repression functions more powerfully when challengers take advantage of the relational nature of conflict and the multiple sources of power posited in the work of scholars such as Georg Simmel ([1908] 1971), Mohandas K. Gandhi ([1945] 1967), Gene Sharp (1973, 2005), and Nancy Bell (2008). Conflict, as Simmel contends, is not the opposite of cooperation but of apathy or not knowing. That is, conflict is itself a form of interaction, a fundamental aspect of human nature that cannot be eliminated, but can be carried out by a variety of means along a spectrum from the most violent (e.g., thermonuclear war) to the most nonviolent (Kurtz 1992).

Repression is the expression of one type of power—often exerted under the assumption that it will crush the “powerless” or at least prevent or mitigate their insurgency. If, however, multiple sources of power are available to parties, and conflict is negotiated as a form of interaction, repression may not be accepted by its targets. Furthermore, bystanders may come to perceive a social movement’s program and activities in a new light if they are repulsed by an elite’s acts of repression against the movement; others outside of the local power elite may choose to take a role in questioning the authority of a regime.

Following Gandhi’s lead in redefining power, Gene Sharp (1973; 2005) shows how insurgents can change their perspectives on power so that even political power is not seen as monolithic but is the result of multiple sources of power, the most important being the “consent” of the governed.¹ Nancy Bell’s (2008) article on alternative conceptions

1. The term *consent* has become standard in the nonviolent action literature and refers to the simple proposition that large institutions, and states in particular, can only function because a sufficient number of people consent to cooperate in their functioning. Once participants begin to withdraw their participation, the institution necessarily weakens unless the disobedient can be easily replaced, requiring further mobilization for resistance. The word *consent* is perhaps an unfortunate choice as it

of power explores, in similar fashion, the difference between coercive “power over,” on the one hand, and “power to,” or cooperative empowerment, on the other (cf. Kurtz 2005). The former is “the traditional definition of power that focuses on power as domination, generally maintained through authority, force, or coercion,” whereas the alternative perspective “focuses on power as ‘empowerment,’ ability, competence” (Bell 2008, 1703–4). Advocates of “power over” consider the accumulation of power a zero sum game, in which one side wins and the other loses. Conversely, “empowerment theories emphasize power relationships based on the assumption that the availability of power (as ability, competence, energy) is unlimited and that the dynamics of power relationships can be of the “both/and” or “win/win” variety. “In other words, power is potentially exercised by all people involved in an interaction, and an increase of power on one side does not necessarily lead to a lessening of power on the other” (1704).

Thus, empowerment theorists (often women) define power as an attribute rather than something one owns or commands (see French 1985); they view it instead as a process or an interactive dynamic, a communal phenomenon. This shift is especially helpful in looking at what are usually considered asymmetrical power relationships between the “weak” and the “powerful.” Moreover, as Bell (2008, 1705) notes, “people in communities are held together by common interests, which serve as the catalyst for the exercise of ‘power from below.’ Power in this context is not seen as limited in quantity, but is rather a regenerative phenomenon.” We join Bell in reconceptualizing power and locating it both within and between groups in relation (including opponents in conflict), not as a free-floating resource that can be accumulated and deployed by elites.

Similarly, Gandhi ([1945] 1967) contends, “Even the most despotic government cannot stand except for the consent of the governed,

could be interpreted to imply a conscious and willful agreement to participate in one’s own domination. We believe *obedience* or *compliance* are better terms, as neither suggests approval of a corrupt elite.

which consent is often forcibly procured by the despot. Immediately the subject ceases to fear the despotic force, his power is gone” (313). When the “so-called master” attempts to force obedience, “You will say: ‘No, I will not serve you for your money or under a threat.’ This may mean suffering. Your readiness to suffer will light the torch of freedom which can never be put out” (313). When people are mobilized for noncooperation on a collective scale, as they were in the Indian Freedom Movement, the most powerful entities (such as the British Empire) may be unable to repress insurgents effectively because even their brutality becomes a starting point for increasing opposition.

With this sort of relational perspective on power and the possibility of noncooperation, the “weak,” as Bell (2008, 1705) puts it, “are redefined as an important part of power interactions and their role becomes a primary focus of interest in alternative theories.” Nonviolent activists do not simply absorb repression and accept it passively but anticipate it strategically as part of a sophisticated interaction, which they can shape (see Ackerman and DuVall 2000). Michel Foucault (1980, 116) calls this power at the grassroots level the “concrete nature of power”; that is, that which can be seen in daily struggles rather than in the state and other social institutions designed to create and maintain power from above (cf. Scott 1990). When mobilized, it can drive a resistance movement.

Thus, Sharp (1973, 2005) claims that nonviolent actionists, as he calls them, should not be dismayed or surprised at repression—it is, rather, a sign that their action constitutes a serious threat to the regime. If the protesters persist, the regime’s problems may be aggravated:

As cruelties to nonviolent people increase, the opponent’s regime may appear still more despicable, and sympathy and support for the nonviolent side may increase. The general population may become more alienated from the opponent and more likely to join the resistance. Persons divorced from the immediate conflict may show increased support for the victims of the repression. Although the effect of national and international public opinion varies, it may at times lead to significant political and economic pressures. The

opponent's own citizens, agents, and troops, disturbed by brutalities against nonviolent people, may begin to doubt the justice of his policies. Their initial uneasiness may grow into internal dissent and at times even into such action as strikes and mutinies. Thus, if repression increases the numbers of nonviolent actionists and enlarges defiance, and if it leads to sufficient internal opposition among the opponent's usual supporters to reduce his capacity to deal with the defiance, it will clearly have rebounded against him. This is political jiu-jitsu at work. (1973, 113)

Of course, nonviolent activists are not the only actors in a conflict trying to affect backfire and its effects. As Brian Martin asserts (2007, 2012, and in his foreword to this volume), people in power commonly use five types of methods to minimize backfire: "covering up the action, devaluing the target, reinterpreting the events (by lying, minimizing consequences, blaming others, and reframing), using official channels to give an appearance of justice, and intimidating and rewarding people involved." McDonald, Graham and Martin (2010) call this the "outrage management model."

Gandhi, Sharp, Gregg ([1938] 2007), and others have clearly established the fundamentals of the paradox of repression, but the circumstances in which it occurs, or how activists manage it, are less well understood. We turn now to a closer examination of the interaction between repression and resistance and attempts by nonviolent activists to take advantage of the paradox of repression.

Repression and Dissidence

The question of the relationship between repression and collective action is well worn but unsatisfactorily developed. Neither empirical studies nor theories of the impact of repression on social movements are conclusive, although statistical empirical evidence for the backfire effect is growing (e.g., Chenoweth and Stefan 2011; Sutton, Butcher, and Svensson 2014), confirming widespread case study and anecdotal support. In their review of "almost everything we know about state repression," Davenport and Inman (2012) note that the dominant

research on repression assumes that political leaders calculate costs and benefits of coercive action and use a rational decision-making calculus to decide whether or not to employ repression. They contend that four findings in the study of repression are persistently important: first, “domestic factors such as democracy and political dissent generally outweigh the importance of international factors like trade dependence/globalization and the signing/ratifying of international human rights treaties. Second, we know that economic development measured by GNP per capita decreases state repression” (621).

A third finding, they contend, is more problematic: although previous studies show that democratic polities are less likely to repress, Davenport and Armstrong (2004) found that “democratic institutions have no impact on government coercive activity, but that above a specific threshold (e.g., above 0.8 on the Polity measure), democracy influences repression in a negative and linear manner as generally believed” (Davenport and Inman 2012, 622). Finally, studies of repression show that “when authorities are challenged with some form of conflict, they engage in some form of repressive action—simply, threatened governments normally respond with force” (622).

But what is the impact of repression on levels of resistance? That, Davenport and Inman assert, is more problematic; indeed, “repression has been found to have every single influence on behavioral challenges, including no influence” (2012, 624). One explanation for this conundrum is that “researchers generally ignore the fact that upon being repressed, dissidents could change tactics.” In fact, a major goal of this volume is to explore repression management by social activists: How can those challenging a system anticipate, plan for, and shape, the consequences of repressive events? Looking at qualitative insights on the impact of repression, Davenport and Inman conclude that “repressive behavior is unable to curb challenging activity; however, the reasons for this influence vary significantly” (625).

As Opp and Roehl (1990) observe, “deprivation theory, resource mobilization theory, and the theory of collective action make different predictions about the effects of repression on political protest” (521). We do not presume to resolve that issue here. Clearly in some

situations, repression works for the authorities, whereas in other situations it backfires. We have an insufficient number of empirical case studies to make any clear generalizations about the conditions under which repression actually promotes movement goals, although both theorists and researchers suggest a range of possibilities.

Some scholars emphasize ways in which repression may mitigate protest (see, for example, Oberschall 1973; Tilly 1978). Others, however, examine how it facilitates movement organizing (Gerlach and Hine 1970), while still others suggest that the relationship assumes an inverted U-shape (Gurr 1970) in which low levels of repression can be effective in undermining preliminary mobilization and very high levels of repression can demobilize or destroy a movement (e.g., Tiananmen Square). Once mobilization gains momentum, however, and has broad popular support, only high levels of repression can quench it. Some have asserted that regimes and opposition movements react to one another and reach a state of equilibrium (Francisco 1995, 1996; Gartner and Regan 1996). When Goodwin and Jasper (2012, 289) conducted a comparative analysis of fifty case studies of social movements to test political opportunity theory, they found unexpectedly that social movements were more likely to emerge under intense or increasing repression (nine of their fifty cases) than in situations where declining repression was a significant factor (seven of the fifty). Franklin (2015) found that in Latin America, repression filters out challengers that are less committed, so that repressive conditions lead to more persistent challengers.

Whereas most social movement scholars study repression from the point of view of the movement response to repression, Christian Davenport (1995) explored how fifty-three states responded to perceived threats from social movements in a time series analysis from 1948 to 1993, an issue that we will address in chapter 8.

We are particularly interested in those situations in which repression does serve paradoxically to strengthen social movements, and we seek to broaden our understanding of the factors contributing to this phenomenon. The resource mobilization perspective assumes that any society has enough discontent to fuel a social movement but that

potential activists assess a risk-reward ratio before deciding to participate (McCarthy and Zald 1973, 1977; Oberschall 1978). Repression constitutes one potential cost of participation that will deter individuals from participating unless other rewards, such as those forthcoming from movement success, relationships with other activists, or a motivating sense of moral outrage, can compensate for the anticipated costs.

In the political process model, the prevalence of political and other opportunities external to the movement, such as divided elites within the regime, economic shifts, or the development of third party support, also influence assessments of the prospects for movement success and thus mobilization (Kriesi 2004; McAdam 1982). Emphasis on cost and opportunity, however, encourages scholars who approach the problem from the standpoint of the regime to ask which strategy or combination of repression and concession is most likely to shape an opposition movement's analysis of opportunities and thus pacify it (Goldstone and Tilly 2001). We believe it is equally important to examine mobilization processes, strategizing within movements, and how movements can create opportunities, even in the face of repression.

Opp and Roehl (1990) conducted one of the earliest up-close quantitative analyses of the paradox of repression. They studied attitudes toward protest before and after a major repressive event against an antinuclear power movement they studied in Germany. Indeed, they found that people were radicalized by the repression and became more motivated to participate in the movement. They concluded that repression interacts with movement micromobilization processes in which solidary incentives and cognitive liberation can compensate for high levels of repression.²

Similar results emerged from Marwan Khawaja's (1993) sophisticated multidimensional quantitative measurement of repression that

2. In social movement studies terminology, *solidary incentives* refers to the emotional psychological or other benefits accrued from personal relationships developed with other activists. *Cognitive liberation* refers to the dawning belief among individuals that a movement could be successful, encouraging them to participate.

looks at both collective and individual sanctions against Palestinians on the West Bank reported in a sample of Palestinian and Israeli newspapers between 1976 and 1985. Actions against individuals included “the use of tear gas, acts of beating, shooting, unlocking stores, threat of ‘negative sanctions’ against organizers or protestors (including threats to close schools), dispersion by force, and arrest” (55). Collective repression variables include the indiscriminate use of intimidating or provocative methods by the army, including curfews, closing schools or shops by military orders, military checkpoints, home-to-home searches, “invasions” of (or breaking into) places such as colleges, military “raids,” and subsequent sieges on towns. “Provocations” involved actions such as the army’s ordering bystanders or passersby to perform various kinds of physical actions, including standing on one foot against walls, sitting blindfolded on the floor for several hours, or removing stones from the streets (56). Although both relative deprivation and resource mobilization theory expect repression to decrease the level of collective action, most of the repressive measures against Palestinians—especially those directed against individuals—preceded increased collective action. Repression seems to have increased the ability of movement leaders to frame the regime in a way that encouraged the resolve of Palestinians and heightened their involvement in resistance.

Opp and Roehl’s and Khawaja’s findings suggest that decisions and strategies within social movement organizations bear on the impact of repression. William Gamson’s (1975) analysis of authority-partisan interaction similarly suggests that the probability of collective action can be increased by movement strategies. Tarrow (1994, 88) points out that movement organizations can make new political opportunities by beginning to weaken the establishment, thus signaling the possibility of resistance by other organizations. In short, the methods and tactics social movement organizations deploy matter in the balance of power between regimes and challengers. Movement organizations can plan and execute strategies that enhance mobilization and influence the outcome of a struggle. Kurt Schock’s (2005) groundbreaking book on unarmed insurgencies is perhaps the first to explicitly bridge the nonviolent action literature with the political process model, and

while he rightly emphasizes the effects of complex opportunity structures on dissent, he also emphasizes the capacity of movements to use nonviolent tactics to take best advantage of opportunities and to resist even under high levels of repression.

Nonviolence and the Paradox of Repression

Certainly, opportunity structures change. Economic crises exacerbate grievances, and divisions within elites can embolden challengers, but the strategy and tactics of the movement interact with opportunity structures, the regime, and the public. To the extent that the movement can tailor its tactics to prevailing circumstances, it might shift advantage from the power elites.

Many activists are learning how to cultivate the right circumstances to take advantage of the paradox of repression. As Jonathan Schell (2003) eloquently asserts in *The Unconquerable World*, one of the most profound legacies within modernity has been the realization of popular nonviolent power. The last century produced a surge of innovation in nonviolent conflict strategies and methods, many of which have made effective use of the paradox of repression. (Violent insurgencies may also sometimes benefit from the paradox of repression, but their own use of violence can undermine and diminish support within their own communities and especially among third parties.)

Despite its ubiquity, the obscurity of the paradox of repression should not be particularly surprising. It is most apparent in conflicts in which one party employs strategic nonviolent strategy. However, it is only in the twentieth century that we witness the prodigious expansion of nonviolence corresponding with globalization and accelerating technological development. In a globalizing world where communications, travel, and arms technologies have become widely available, even small pockets of resistance have developed the capacity to challenge more traditionally powerful institutions, such as corporations and states.

Greater international interdependence requires economic and political cooperation across an increasingly complex network of cross-cutting alliances. The use of coercive force in this environment may

offend or inconvenience mutual allies and neighbors and leave an aggressor isolated. The United States has experienced this dilemma in connection with the invasion of Iraq. Despite considerable support from the United Kingdom, the Bush administration encountered significant obstacles in cobbling together a coalition of smaller, less influential states. Larger states on the United Nations Security Council, such as France, Germany, and Russia, probably declined to participate in part because of significant economic interests in the region, but they were also under pressure from their own citizens who sympathized with the Iraqi people and considered the invasion unjustified aggression.

The structure of insurgent groups has also changed to take advantage of ever-emerging electronic communications technologies, such as fax machines, the Internet, cell phones, and instant messaging, while limiting the ability of authorities to repress resistance. Nonviolent direct action sometimes takes on the form of cell or affinity groups developed by non-state terror organizations to avoid repression. However, this trend may diminish the paradox of repression. As we will see shortly, the paradox of repression relies in large part not on avoiding repression but on enduring and sometimes provoking it.³ In order for insurgents to invoke the sympathy and outrage of bystander publics, these publics must relate to and identify with the target of repression. Although affinity groups may make resistance groups appear shadowy and unrecognizable, much important organizing for nonviolent campaigns has taken place underground. The latter approach is more likely to prove effective in highly asymmetrical scenarios, where there is little ambiguity over public sympathies and the illegitimacy of a regime.

The paradox of repression is one manifestation of what the pre-eminent scholar of nonviolence, Gene Sharp (1973, 2005), calls “political jiu-jitsu.” In the martial art of jiu-jitsu, one uses the weight and momentum of one’s opponent to throw the opponent. Similarly, in

3. George Lakey warns against provoking repression because it “may alienate the revolutionaries from the people, brutalize the police, and even brutalize the demonstrators” (1973, 106).

strategic nonviolent action, one can use an opponent's resources, needs, and culture to one's own advantage. Thus, for example, arrests and imprisonment have always been a primary tool of governmental authorities against agents of social change. Nonviolent activists, however, have often prepared for arrest and willingly accepted or even sought incarceration in order to overload jails and strain government bureaucracies. The same dynamic can apply to the use of cultural resources to trigger the paradox of repression. Richard Gregg ([1938] 2007) first wrote about this dynamic as "moral jiu-jitsu," drawing on Gandhi's idea that self-suffering would induce conversion by an opponent, who, when confronted by a nonviolent resister, would lose "the moral support which the violent resistance of most victims would render him" (44).

As students and activists of nonviolence understand, the paradox of repression can be cultivated. True, in some cases, such as the ethnic cleansing of Native Americans, repression has been so complete as to overcome nearly all resistance. In other cases, however, where the relationship between opponents has been better integrated and where those traditionally considered less powerful have developed effective methods of resistance (such as cell structures and nonviolent collective action techniques), imperial and authoritarian states have found themselves unable to contend with grassroots opposition, often because the movement was able to rob the regime of some of its legitimacy. While the overtly systematic use of nonviolent collective action theory varies widely from case to case, training and strategic planning continues to spread. The cases we offer as illustrations do not always document an intentional preparation for the paradox of repression (though preparation is common, as we elaborate below) but indicate how challengers adopted collective action tactics that often both amplified and subverted attempts to repress and intimidate nonviolent activists.

Repression Management

We have set aside a portion of this volume to address what we call *repression management*, or the idea that social movement organizations can increase the likelihood of the paradox of repression occurring through

preparation, mobilization, strategy, and tactical choice. Repression management might include preparing to withstand repression, temporarily avoiding repression, or choreographing confrontations with opponents in ways that are more likely to produce the disgust that can occur when nonviolent activists suffer repression. Framing (Snow et al. 1986; Benford and Snow 2000) or interpreting repression for publics through the media, social networks, and other communications outlets in such a way that it induces moral outrage is also important. We follow Kurt Schock in his book *Unarmed Insurrections: People Power Movements in Nondemocracies* (2005), in which he calls for social movement scholars to further explore “how the characteristics and actions of a challenge affects (*sic*) the repression-dissent relationships. Whether repression crushes dissent or promotes mobilization depends on a variety of conditions other than the level of repression, some of which may be at least within partial control of challenging groups, such as how the challenge is organized, movement strategy, the range of methods and mix of actions implemented, the targets of dissent, and communication within the movement and with third parties” (157). Several authors in this volume approach the paradox of repression from this pragmatic or strategic perspective.

Contributions of This Volume

The chapters in this book have two main goals: to gain a more nuanced understanding of how the paradox of repression works and when it has happened, on the one hand, and to examine how nonviolent activists have managed it, on the other, to enhance the extent to which it empowers movements and undermines unjust systems. We hope this volume will be valuable to scholars and activists alike, and we have recruited both scholars and activists as chapter authors (including several authors who are both). The first task of the contributors to this volume is thus to look at various aspects and cases of the paradox of repression to get a better sense of its topography beyond the isolated anecdotal cases diffused through the scholarly literature and activists’ lore. We provide a conceptual and empirical overview and bring together quantitative and qualitative scholarship with activists who

have experienced repression and experimented with its management. We begin with Erica Chenoweth's quantitative birdseye view of the phenomenon across the globe over half a century. Chapter 2, "Backfire in Action: Insights from Nonviolent Campaigns, 1945–2006," analyzes her large data set comparing 323 violent and nonviolent campaigns for major change to evaluate how backfire works and which movement features are most likely to provoke it.

Chenoweth identifies three critical factors facilitating a positive outcome from repression: (1) sustained high levels of campaign participation, (2) loyalty shifts among security forces and civilian leaders, and (3) the withdrawal of support from its foreign allies.

Doron Shultziner's conceptual chapter addresses a key aspect of the paradox of repression by delving into two historical cases. In chapter 3, "Transformative Events, Repression, and Regime Change," he focuses on the central tension between the parameters of opportunity structures and the agency of collective action. He explores the social psychological impact of "transformative events," which can sometimes suspend the habits and assumptions that normally underpin the political status quo and open up new opportunities for resistance. Transformative events that involve repression can thus operate as a causal mechanism or path to regime change and democratic outcomes. Shultziner focuses on cases such as the Soweto Uprising in South Africa and the Montgomery bus boycott to illustrate the relationship between repression and backfire as transformative events.

Elite defection has been identified as an important factor in the success or failure of nonviolent civil resistance campaigns, demanding that we delve into the ways in which agents of repression experience the repression they carry out. In her exploration of successful nonviolent revolutions, Sharon Erickson Nepstad (2011) found that defections by security forces were an important strategic factor. Nonviolent resistance has an advantage in managing and framing repression because it can create dilemmas for repressors.

Rachel MacNair reminds us in chapter 4, "The Psychology of Agents of Repression: The Paradox of Defection," that aggression and fear are not physical properties that people hold in their hands, but are

psychological experiences. Agents of repression do not merely follow orders; they are caught up in complex psychological dynamics and risk suffering what she calls *perpetration induced traumatic stress* (PITS; see MacNair 2002 and chapter 4 in this volume).

In recent years, the nature of civil resistance has changed with the increased role of the Internet and social media in political processes. Jessica Beyer and Jennifer Earl bring their extensive expertise in this emerging field to bear in chapter 5, “Backfire Online: Studying Reactions to the Repression of Internet Activism.” It is crucial to understand the ways in which online activism and the activists behind it interact with the state and other entities interested in silencing them. Drawing on recent cases studies, Beyer and Earl systematically present various forms of online repression and show how it has backfired on elites. They explore the affinities between different types of Internet activism and repressive tactics, identifying multiple levels of analysis of how backfire and deterrence can be differentiated according to the actors involved (individual versus group and public versus private).

A second major aspect of the book turns to repression management; that is, how nonviolent resisters—but also repressors—have attempted to shape the outcome of repression to their benefit. We begin with the firsthand experience of Jenni Williams, founder of the movement *Women of Zimbabwe Arise* (WOZA). In chapter 6, “Overcoming Fear to Overcome Repression,” Williams emphasizes the importance of establishing a movement culture that prioritizes non-violence and encourages empowerment through shared leadership and the creative use of traditional cultural themes to withstand and blunt repression. When WOZA transformed the traditional role of motherhood to scold and challenge the dictatorship of Mugabe, the activists were met with a brutal repression of their movement. By accepting and even courting arrest, Williams argues, the activists took away the regime’s major weapon of repression, turning it instead into a source of empowerment for the movement and individual participants, increasing the costs of the regime’s efforts to thwart them. They mobilized a campaign of “tough love,” transforming a culture of fear into a culture of resistance and constructing a creative leadership structure that

allowed them to be more flexible in their tactics than the rigid authoritarian police establishment bound by its limited repertoire.

Chapter 7, “Culture and Repression Management,” focuses on the symbolic aspects of repression and its backfire. We conceptualize nonviolent struggle as a dance between an establishment and its dissidents, a regime and its insurgents, as they contest the frames used to make meaning of repressive events. This chapter explores proactive efforts by nonviolent activists to choreograph actions in ways that help to ensure the backfire effect of repression by clearly establishing the aggression of the agents of repression. In chapter 8, “Smart’ Repression,” we address the growing efforts by elites to be more strategic about how they use repression, in order to mitigate the effects of its potentially backfiring. That chapter examines a relatively unexplored aspect of repression, the use of tactics that are deliberately crafted to demobilize movements while mitigating or eliminating a backfire effect.

Dalia Ziada gives us a participant’s-eye-view of the Egyptian revolution of 2011 in chapter 9, “Egypt: Military Strategy and the 2011 Revolution,” although she is also familiar with the literature on strategic nonviolent action. What she found most remarkable was that the army in some instances chose not to use violence during the citizen uprising, and ended up collaborating with the activists to oust President Mubarak, although they returned to the usual armed forces *modus operandi* after seizing power from Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood in 2014. Ziada provides a firsthand account of the events of 2011 based on her own participation in the revolution and draws on her interviews with Egyptian and American military personnel.

In chapter 10, “Repression Engendering Creative Nonviolent Action in Thailand,” Chaiwat Satha-Anand explores activist creativity following repression in Thailand. He argues that repression, such as the violent actions in 2010 of the Thai government against protesters in the Red Shirts movement, created space for new movement leadership and the introduction of creative nonviolent resistance. He calls this dynamic “the cleansing effect of violent repression.” In this Thai case, Sombat Boonngamanong developed a series of highly symbolic

and creative flash mob actions that drew on a history of nonviolent resistance in Thai society.

Finally, veteran activist, scholar, and trainer George Lakey concludes the volume by providing insights from decades of practical experience and reflection in chapter 11, “Making Meaning of Pain and Fear: Enacting the Paradox of Repression.” According to Lakey, nonviolent activists create narratives that provide meaning for their risks, injuries, suffering, and losses, helping them to transform pain and fear into opportunities for mobilization. These stories in turn have consequences for the tactics and strategies they choose and help to trigger the paradox of repression. Activists use these stories to prepare in advance for repressive events by training and shaping confrontations.

By weaving together these case studies, scholarly analysis, and activists’ reflection, we aim to shed light on how the paradox of repression works in multiple contexts and how activists have managed repression to enhance its potential to backfire and empower resistance.

Repression as Relational Conflict

Nonviolent resistance is based in large part on the strategic harnessing of relational power. We focus on one subform in this volume: the strategic cultivation of the paradox of repression. Sometimes, when one party takes coercive action that violates basic norms, its ability to rally support and cooperation—its legitimacy—is undermined, threatening its capacity to meet its own goals. The contributors to this volume present cases in which authorities or elites used intimidation, coercion, and sometimes violence in attempts to crush dissident movements; but in each case, intimidation and physical force were seen to violate norms of proportionate response and helped to mobilize movement recruits. Elites’ efforts rebounded on them, undermining their legitimacy and diminishing their ability to govern as they wished.⁴

4. These unintended consequences may occur without any framing by opponents, and as the case of the Catholic modernist movement demonstrates, repression can activate a movement that did not exist previously (Kurtz 1986).

Moreover, activists can rhetorically frame the actions of their opponents or can choreograph their own actions in ways that draw attention to repression by opponents. By adopting nonviolent tactics, activists can generate a striking contrast between their own actions and the “unfair” tactics of their opponents. The dissonance that gap creates can, in turn, provoke a moral outrage that increases the support and involvement of local and third parties. Such a contrast can also cause factions to develop among a movement’s opponents as some withdraw their cooperation and refuse to participate in further repression. When repression does occur against nonviolent civilians, it may serve as a deterrent to other regimes, as when Gorbachev (1996) took note of the negative consequences worldwide of the Tiananmen Square massacre and decided not to back communist states across Eastern Europe with force when they faced nonviolent uprisings a few months later (see Smithey and Kurtz 1999).

Activists may also draw on local indigenous cultural resources to sensitize potential recruits and sympathetic publics to acts of repression (Sørensen and Vinthagen 2012). Legacies may be framed that perpetuate the paradox of repression long after the immediate crisis has passed. Dissidents in Czechoslovakia in 1989 commemorated the death of a young student, Jan Palach, who self-immolated in response to the 1968 invasion of Prague by Warsaw Pact troops two decades earlier. Similarly, the legacy of the British Army’s killing of civilians on Bloody Sunday in 1972 continues to influence Northern Ireland politics today, more than forty years after the event. Figuring out how to harness cultural resources requires indigenous creativity or what James Jasper (1997) has called “artfulness” in developing effective tactics. The ability of activists to design effective nonviolent collective action creatively that mitigates repression or induces it to backfire may develop out of rational strategizing, but it will often emerge instinctively from the habitus, the intimate, unspoken, and inarticulable perception of relations that is uniquely local. This creativity is the source of agency, which complicates cost-benefit paradigms since it is elusive and difficult to measure, and yet can significantly enhance the power potential of groups who might otherwise be considered susceptible to repression.

In short, although the paradox of repression is a phenomenon that is widely glossed over in both policy and academic circles, it seems an obvious and ubiquitous fact in twenty-first century political culture and a key element in the history of successful nonviolent movements. We hope that this collection of studies will enhance understanding by reconceptualizing repression as an interaction between conflicting parties, by expanding our scope of the spheres in which repression occurs, by delving into the social, psychological, and cultural dimensions of repression, by thinking more closely about the costs of repression among agents of repression, and by introducing repression management to explore ways in which strategic nonviolent activists become powerful agents within repressive contexts.

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