PROTEST AND SOCIAL MOVEMENTS


Robert M. Press

# Ripples of Hope

## How Ordinary People Resist Repression Without Violence

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Ripples of Hope

# Protest and Social Movements

Recent years have seen an explosion of protest movements around the world, and academic theories are racing to catch up with them. This series aims to further our understanding of the origins, dealings, decisions, and outcomes of social movements by fostering dialogue among many traditions of thought, across European nations and across continents. All theoretical perspectives are welcome. Books in the series typically combine theory with empirical research, dealing with various types of mobilization, from neighborhood groups to revolutions. We especially welcome work that synthesizes or compares different approaches to social movements, such as cultural and structural traditions, micro- and macro-social, economic and ideal, or qualitative and quantitative. Books in the series will be published in English. One goal is to encourage non-native speakers to introduce their work to Anglophone audiences. Another is to maximize accessibility: all books will be available in open access within a year after printed publication.

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# Ripples of Hope

*How Ordinary People Resist Repression without Violence*

*Robert M. Press*

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Cover illustration: Many Liberian women demonstrated for an end to Liberia's civil war. The women shown here continued their vigils for lasting peace after the war ended in 2003, as part of an organization led by Liberian Leymah Gbowee, a 2011 Nobel Peace prize winner. Photo by Betty Press, Monrovia, Liberia, 2006.

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*Dedicated to the many people of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya who actively resisted repression from regimes in their country, often at considerable risk to themselves; and to my wife and partner in our travels, Betty Press, who believes as much as I do in the future of Africa.*

# AFRICA


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**Figure 1 Sierra Leone secondary student at a human rights workshop in Bo, Sierra Leone, 2009**

Photo by Betty Press

# Introduction

This book is about the human spirit and the kind of people Robert F. Kennedy may have had in mind when he spoke in South Africa in 1966 during the harsh days of apartheid, two years after Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

> Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.[1]

Mothers, students, teachers, lawyers, clergy, and many others featured in this book, from uneducated market women to professors, stepped out of the shadows and relative safety of anonymity into the often dangerous spotlight of repressive regimes. Mostly without violence, they stood up for democratic freedoms and human rights, for dignity and a better life. Their nonviolence does not mean they did nothing: they engaged in nonviolent strategies, and they took action.

Few studies have focused on the importance of such nonviolent resistance in Africa in challenging repressive regimes. But this study also offers insights into civil resistance anywhere. Unlike some of the more recent struggles in the Arab world, including North Africa, most of the struggles highlighted in this book occurred before the use of Facebook and Twitter; activists stayed in touch through informal channels. Their struggles were not immediately successful, but eventually they were. Not all the activists stayed true to their stated goals once change had come, but many did. In most cases the peaceful resistance alone was not responsible for forcing the regimes out of power: international pressures, sometimes military intervention played an important part. But without the domestic pressure against the regimes it is unlikely that change would have come as soon as it did.

This is a timeless book and a global story: the kinds of struggles portrayed continue today in many parts of the world, often in the form of mass protests that offer some sense of support in terms of numbers. But around the world there are many other people who challenge repressive regimes in small

1 Robert F. Kennedy, "A Tiny Ripple of Hope" (Day of Affirmation address at Cape Town University, Cape Town, South Africa, June 6, 1966), *American Rhetoric*. http://www.americanrhetoric.com/ speeches/rfkcapetown.com/.

groups or even as individuals. This book is about some of those people in three sub-Saharan African countries and how they challenged regimes that used detention, torture, even murder to try to keep them quiet. They insisted on a halt to political detentions, state murders, torture, and the lack of the rule of law. In most cases, they had never been asked in detail about their nonviolent activism; most seemed eager to tell their story, stories seldom heard in the West.

Shortly after Nelson Mandela's death in late 2013, one newspaper published the names of some of the political activists in prison in ten countries including Russia, China, Ethiopia, and Vietnam (where Vietnamese Catholic priest and pro-democracy dissident Father Thadeus Nguyen Van was completing his twentieth year in prison since the 1970s for advocating for freedom and democracy).[2] In Bogota, Columbia, David Ravelo was serving an eighteen-year sentence for aggravated homicide; international human rights groups called the charge bogus and said he was imprisoned for speaking out on human rights violations in his country. Others were being held in Indonesia, Uzbekistan, and Tibet, where popular singer Lolo was sentenced to six years in prison in 2013 for writing and performing songs that advocated independence from China. In Bahrain, Abdulhadi al-Khawaja, the father of Bahrain's human rights movement, was serving a life sentence following his arrest after a series of pro-democracy demonstrations in 2011. And in Rwanda, two women journalists – editor Agnes Uwimana Nkusi and reporter Saidath Mukakibibi – were imprisoned for their independent reporting that was allegedly inciting civil disobedience.

This book tells the story of how people in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya stood up to repressive regimes and eventually helped force the abusive leaders out of power. It builds on existing theories of social movement but suggests revisions that help explain nonviolent social movements in repressive settings. The model presented includes individual and organizational activism, as well as mass demonstrations. In all three countries, the narrative traces the growth of what became a culture of resistance. This study differs from most studies of social movements in several ways. This study:

– focuses on activism by individuals and small groups, rather than the usual focus on large, often formal organizations (this approach reveals

2 Dominque Mosbergen, "Nelson Mandela Was Released From Prison after 27 Years. These 10 Political Prisoners Are Still Waiting," *The Huffington Post*, December 7, 2013, accessed December 18, 2013, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/12/06/political-prisoners-nelson-mandela_n_4401305.html#es_share_endedhese.

a broader range of participants in nonviolent social movements than is normally recognized);
– shows that when it is too dangerous to pursue formal, organized challenges to a regime, individuals and small groups can sometimes manage to continue informal "resistance in abeyance" (at low levels), while waiting for safer times when they can emerge more fully and openly;
– traces how social movements actually start in poor, repressed countries;
– explains how nonviolent resistance movements can survive with minimal material resources and little in the way of the external advantages that are usually associated with social movements' progress, especially in the democratic West.

Here are three examples of the kind of nonviolent resistance this book is about.

In Sierra Leone, just days after a military coup, independent reporters were being arrested by the new regime. It fell to veteran journalist Olu Gordon, as secretary general of the national journalists association to deliver a protest letter to the junta headquarters. "I was *petrified.* At the time we just took chances – we did what had to be done."[3] Later some independent newspapers began operating from secret locations, distributing their copies hidden inside the pages of pro-government papers. (The story of the resistance by underground reporters and treatment of some who were caught is related in Chapter 4.)

Three Kenyan mothers, including Milcah Wanjiku, were convinced that the state was about to execute their imprisoned sons. They organized a nonviolent protest with a small group of other mothers of political prisoners, camping out in a park in downtown Nairobi. The government warned them not to do it but the women were undeterred. "What can I be afraid of when my son had been locked up? I felt my son would be hanged," Wanjiku said. Unsure how to respond, especially against mothers, the government waited several days before sending in police armed with clubs and teargas to disperse them, as well as the growing number of volunteers protecting them. But the mothers reassembled at a nearby church and, with the help of domestic and international publicity and pressure, eventually won the release of all but one of the prisoners. Years later Milcah Wanjiku said she

3 Olu Gordon, in an interview with the author, November 28, 2008, in his newspaper office in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Gordon, who died in 2011, was a longtime independent journalist and a former faculty member at Fourah Bay College.

would protest again if her son was in danger.[4] (The story of the mothers' protest is detailed in Chapter 8.)

Liberian human rights attorney Tiawan Gongloe had been challenging authoritarian President Charles Taylor's abuses of the rule of law despite the risks to him. Then he was detained and subjected to a long night of torture in a police station. Word of his plight quickly spread and a large crowd of his supporters quickly gathered spontaneously outside the station, following him the next morning when police took him to a local hospital. The crowds made him realize that "people did appreciate the things that we [he and other human rights attorneys] were doing for protecting the rights of the people. I think they [the regime] intensified human rights advocacy by their repression because – the more they became repressive, the more people became resilient."[5] (His story is told in full in Chapter 6.)

Olu Gordon, Milcah Wanjiku, and Tiawan Gongloe were among the many ordinary people of their countries who became heroes in the eyes of their fellow citizens. They provided some of the "ripples of hope" that encouraged others to protest as part of nonviolent social movements that resisted repressive regimes. In most studies of social movements, this kind of individual or small-group contribution has often gone unnoticed.

## Case Studies and Organization of the Book

The book is based on some 170 interviews by the author over a ten-year period in the three countries, mostly with former activists and others, plus extensive archival research and review of relevant literature. Interviews provide a window on resistance that archival studies and event counting do not, offering insights into the strategic choices participants take and revelations regarding their motives. As one noted scholar of political contention/social movements notes: "As we move from supposedly objective political opportunities to more subjective ones, perceptions become crucial, and the only way to get at perceptions is through interviews."[6] Chapter 1 offers theoretical perspectives on nonviolent social movements in repressive settings;

4 Milcah Wanjiku, in an interview with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, October 12, 2002. Wanjiku is the mother of human rights attorney Rumba Kinuthia. Her daughter, Margaret Wangui Kinuthia, also took part in the protest and was injured.

5 Tiawan Gongloe, in an interview with the author, Monrovia, Liberia, June 19, 2006.

6 James M. Jasper, e-mail message to author, February 22, 2014.

the conclusion presents implications of such resistance. The Appendix gives details on methodology, a list of interviewees, an historic comparison of repression levels in the three countries, country chronologies, and abbreviations. Each of the three case-study countries went through long periods of repressive rule during which people nonviolently challenged the regimes. In Sierra Leone and Liberia people suffered civil wars during the study period, but as in Kenya, the nonviolent resistance occurred mostly in their respective capitals except when the fighting reached those cities. The book is organized as follows:

**Part one: Sierra Leone**

Chapter 2 focuses on a nationwide student uprising in 1977 that never fully developed into a social movement because of the repression and co-optation of the regime and for lack of planning and coordination with potential allies. But it helped launch a culture of resistance. Chapter 3 looks at how women, primarily, helped push a military junta out of power during a civil war and helped restore democracy through a widespread, open social movement. Chapter 4 examines how mass noncooperation against another, more violent military regime weakened it and set the stage for international military intervention that ousted the junta. During this time, a fragmented and often clandestine resistance in abeyance kept the culture of resistance alive under extremely dangerous conditions.

**Part two: Liberia**

Chapter 5 shows how a model for a social movement developed in Liberia in the 1970s. Then in the 1980s, nonviolent resistance was forced into abeyance because of the extreme violence of the Samuel Doe regime that overwhelmed brave efforts by individual attorneys, independent journalists, students, and others. For several years after Doe was murdered, as a civil war continued from late 1989 to 1996, there was a period of democratic interim government when human rights organizations established roots. Chapter 6 analyzes how, after rebel leader Charles Taylor became president, these roots enabled a nonviolent social movement to courageously challenge Taylor despite his repressive efforts against activists. A second social movement, open and not directly threatening Taylor, involved campaigns by women for peace.

**Part three: Kenya**

Chapter 7 examines the period of 1987 into 1991, when the regime of President Daniel arap Moi was torturing political dissidents, and before most organizations joined the resistance. Nevertheless, mostly individual human rights activists mounted a nonviolent social movement, staying in touch with each other through professional and personal ties. Chapter 8 looks at the period 1991-2002 when individual activism gave way to a social movement of small group then large organizations that developed, as in Sierra Leone and Liberia, into a culture of resistance that eventually helped bring a regime change.

# 1 Resisting Repression without Violence

## New Theoretical Perspectives

*Without heroes, we're all plain people, and don't know how far we can go.*
Bernard Malamud, *The Natural*[1]

This study contributes to our understanding of nonviolent social movements in repressive settings in several ways. It shows how a broader concept of such movements and their participants reveals a wider range of activists than noted in most studies. This includes individual activists operating without the support of organizations but closely linked to the movements. The study also provides new evidence that in times of high levels of repression, a nonviolent social movement may operate "in abeyance," which is to say at a lower level, until repression is reduced. During such periods resistance continues but less openly; indeed, sometimes clandestinely. At times it is fragmented, making it harder for a regime to clamp down on it.

The study adds important nuance to the theory of "opportunity." Major social movement theorists have acknowledged that activists can proceed in the absence of opportunities and despite repression, but in the words of one of the theorists most closely associated with the opportunity theory, such instances are likely to be rare (McAdam 2004, 226). This research provides evidence that resistance in the absence of perceived opportunities may not be so rare. It happened repeatedly in all three countries examined, often in the face of severe repression. The scholarly spotlight on movements in repressive settings tends to focus on large, organized movements and mass demonstrations. This study, however, shows that paying closer attention to small, informal groups and networks provides a more complete understanding of how a nonviolent resistance operates in repressive settings. The concepts of minor actors and their often spontaneous role in a resistance movement helping major actors, as well as the unpredictability of a social movement are also introduced.

This study makes several major arguments:

1 *Individual activism, a much understudied part of social movements, can play a significant part in nonviolent resistance.* The literature on social movements is practically silent on the topic of individual activism. Individual activists are not members of a self-identified resistance

1 Malamud (1952, p. 154).

organization. They may contribute to the resistance, for example, as part of their professional duties, such as lawyers or journalists, when their professional organizations are either reluctant to be active or unable to provide support for their activism. They are linked to the movements by professional or personal ties. Sometimes they later join resistance organizations and even help lead them.

2 *During periods of high repression, nonviolent social movements may lack a formal structure but continue in abeyance, informally, at a lower level of resistance, waiting for safer times to emerge more openly and formally.* During such times, nonviolent activists may have informal organizational structures, as small groups and individual activists meet, sometimes clandestinely, to coordinate and plan their activism. They continue challenging authorities in a variety of ways that may include legal challenges, critical reporting, public speeches, and spontaneous demonstrations aimed at chipping away at a regime's power and legitimacy. When repression lessens, formal organizations may appear or reappear, supported by mass demonstrations at times, until a new wave of repression curtails them. At such time, smaller-scale acts of resistance may resume.

3 *Nonviolent resistance can take place even under severe repression without favorable conditions or "political opportunities" and with only limited material resources*. In resisting repression, activists lacking structural opportunities or encouraging external conditions, are often motivated by a strong desire for dignity, freedom, and a chance to make a decent living, or in some cases by political ambition. They proceed despite repression, taking considerable risks to achieve their goals. In developing countries with only minimal material support, they are fueled in part by commitment and courage.

4 *Nonviolent social movements in repressive settings involve a broader and more complex array of participants in more fluid actions than is generally recognized*. The usual focus in social movement studies is on large organizations and mass demonstrations. But this misses a lot of what happens. Small groups and informal networks of activists, in addition to individual activists operating without organizational support, play an important role. Their involvement in the resistance is often more fluid than is generally recognized. Activists or "players" may shift in and out of various "arenas," or centers of activity, making strategic choices as to when to move in or out of a resistance campaign, often more than once.[2]

2 The terms in quotes are used by Jasper (2012).

5 *From modest starting points, nonviolent activism can grow into a "culture of resistance" unless blocked by extreme repression.* In this study, a culture of resistance is defined as a process in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime become a norm for activists and a visible segment of the general public. Nonviolent resistance in repressive settings, once started, is akin to the downward flow of water; it moves around obstacles (repressive responses from a regime) and gathers force (supporters) unless blocked, at least temporarily (by severe repression by a regime).

6 *There is a need for a universal model of social movements, one that can work in the democratic West as well as in repressive settings.* Typically social movements in peaceful settings are aimed at regime reform, but in repressive settings the aim is often regime change. This study suggests a new model for social movements to help bridge this gap, defining a social movement as *a process of challenges to targeted authorities that may involve individual as well as organizational activism, and at times mass public support, and is aimed at either regime reform or regime change.* The model or definition does not insist on the usual characteristics cited in the literature that a social movement be "sustained, organized and public" (Tilly 2004, 3).

## Individual Activism

Nonviolent social movements in repressive settings are likely to include individual activists who are not supported by any organization. Many key participants in the movements studied were professionals, drawn into the resistance not as members of a resistance organization but out of a commitment to the principles of their profession. They were linked by professional ties or personal friendships to others in the resistance and were thus part of an overall movement.[3] But they acted as individuals when their

3 Noted social movement scholar Doug McAdam, in an e-mail message to the author, March 6, 2013, said that in protest event counts, "individual acts in the name of a movement are routinely counted as part of the struggle." Counting individual acts, however, is not the same as noting nonviolent resistance by individuals acting on their own and not as part of an organization. The individual activism shown in the current study as part of nonviolent social movements is generally overlooked in the literature. Tilly (2008, 210) ended his last book with this note: "Most of all, the book argues that students of contentious politics should move away from classified event counts and single-episode narratives toward procedures that trace interactions among participants in multiple episodes."

professional organization was not part of the resistance or in some cases opposed political activism. Their actions soon marked them as opponents of the regime. Their activism is part of the broader array of social movement participants that many studies miss.

Examples of this category of professionals acting as individuals, without the support of any organization, include the lawyers in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Kenya who defended political detainees. They often did so as individuals when their bar association was not willing to challenge the regime and they were not members of a resistance organization. The same was true for independent journalists who continued to write critical articles despite regime threats. They were not part of any formal resistance organization and acted essentially as individuals when their newspapers consisted of little more than a couple of small rooms with some old typewriters and offered little protection or support. At times their press union did speak out for journalists' rights, though that offered them little tangible protection. Some journalists were detained and tortured; a few were killed.

Some individual activists later join formal organizations that are part of a resistance. Their contribution to change, either as individuals or later as organizational activists, is recognized in the nonviolent resistance literature of Gene Sharp (2005, 419, 458) who emphasizes the importance of weakening the authority and legitimacy of the targeted regime. By challenging regimes on rule of law, defending activists, or exposing abuses through the media, individual (and organizational) activists in all three countries studied helped weaken the legitimacy of the regimes both at home and abroad and signaled to others that resistance was possible, though often at a cost.

James Scott, in *Weapons of the Weak* (1985, 297), makes a strong argument for paying close attention to "both individual and collective acts of resistance" and resistance that is not part of a formal organization. "If we were to confine our search for peasant resistance to formally organized activity, we would search largely in vain, for in Malaysia as in many other Third World countries, such organizations are either absent or the creations of officials and rural elites. We would simply miss much of what is happening." He adds, "The inclination to dismiss 'individual' acts of resistance as insignificant and to reserve the term 'resistance' for collective or organized action is as misguided as the emphasis on 'principled' action." Scott criticizes the "privileged status accorded organized movements."

## Resistance in Abeyance: Organization without Organizations

There tend to be two general, and not so surprising, relationships between repression and resistance: the level and type. (1) When repression is at a very high level, resistance is likely to decline into abeyance, possibly even going underground then resurfacing when it is safer. This pattern may repeat itself depending on levels or cycles of repression in the future. (2) During periods of high repression, the types of resistance are also likely to change. When repression makes formal organizations too dangerous, activists are likely to resort to a less formal approach, resulting in fragmented resistance by individual activists or members of small groups. Some of the mechanisms of this kind of low-level resistance are (a) individual activism without support of an organization; (b) small, informal group activism; and (c) clandestine meetings to plan further resistance.

Lack of formal organizations during a period of abeyance does not mean resistance is totally unorganized or even chaotic. In most instances, except for spontaneous demonstrations, there was *organization without organizations*. Some of the social movement literature argues that this kind of high-risk activism is supported by "[s]trong, pre-existing friendship ties" (Gamson 1990, 61). In the current study, activists were connected by professional or personal ties. In all three countries, they operated in the relatively small world of their national capitals, where most of the resistance took place. It was an even smaller world when one considers that, for the most part, the key activists typically were among the educated elites of the country. They had frequent contact with each other as longtime professional colleagues and friends. In all three countries these kinds of activists gathered informally to discuss their resistance and sometimes to coordinate it.

The study also notes the relationships between the theories of abeyance and cycles of protest (e.g., Tarrow 1998, 128-30, 141-60). A resistance in abeyance refers in this study to a resistance that is limited in scope because of the repression. When it is too dangerous to have a central or formal organization or organizations, a practice of resistance in abeyance nevertheless continues to challenge the regime. Some portion of the challenge may be clandestine; it may be intentionally fragmented for survival purposes. Tarrow argued that during periods of decline or inactivity by a formal resistance organization or organizations, smaller, more informal organizations sometimes continue their activism. Groups such as churches, cooperatives, or trade unions provide "abeyance structures" which keep resistance alive on a lower scale until the opportunity for

larger activism is present again.[4] Tarrow also argued that there was a cyclical rise and decline of movements for various reasons. In the three countries examined there were numerous ebbs and flows of resistance, depending on the intensity of repression, but also on the issues. For example, in Kenya, participation in the resistance peaked during election periods but was lower and more fragmented between elections and during periods of intense repression.

In her study of women's social movements in the 1900s, Taylor (1989, 761) defines abeyance as "a holding process by which movements sustain themselves in nonreceptive political environments and provide continuity from one stage of mobilization to another." Taylor also adds: "My approach relies heavily on the central premises of resource mobilization theory: political opportunities and an indigenous organizational base are major factors in the rise and decline of movements." The current study finds the contrary to be the case: the resistance in abeyance often took place with few, if any, political opportunities evident to the participants and often it took place with minimal material resources. Material resources in all three countries, especially in Liberia and Sierra Leone, poorer countries, were very limited. Activists at least partially made up for this in terms of the "resource" of motivating ideas, including a commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

## From Abeyance to Formally Organized Resistance

When repression subsides in an authoritarian state, there is likely to be a reemergence of a more formally organized social/resistance movement (the terms are used interchangeably in this study). The transition is gradual: it takes a while before activists and their supporters are convinced that things have really gotten better, safer. Some regimes gyrate between periods of concessions and repression, undermining a transition. There is never a guarantee that the worst is over. When a transition from abeyance to formal organizations occurs, it emerges from the fragmented centers of resistance that have been operating quietly, waiting for better times. The

4 Tarrow notes (1998, 129-30) that theorizing on this concept of "decentralization" traces back at least to the 1960s in the United States and Europe; for Gerlach and Hine (1970) it meant lack of a single leadership and the absence of card-carrying membership. Taylor adds that decentralization was part of the model of the civil rights movement in the US South and later promoted by activist Saul Alinsky (1971) for use in US cities.

mechanisms of transition may include a growing willingness on the part of the general public to show up at public demonstrations once police have stopped arresting or even shooting at participants in such events. Lawyers associations may become politically active after a dormant period when the chairs of such groups no longer shy away from direct challenges to the regime. Independent newspapers forced to shut down or go underground may resume publishing openly. Women's organizations that have met behind closed doors may begin holding open meetings and staging marches. Human rights organizations that were in touch informally may begin meeting in open coalitions and issuing public statements in the name of the organized groups.

While the theory of abeyance is a useful theory that describes what happens when the repression gets too intense for a traditional social movement – a nonviolent resistance movement – to continue openly, a weakness in the theory is that it assumes that at some point when the repression lessens, the movement can resume a more open stance. There are two problems with this: (1) The concept of a "movement" is vague: is it one big organization with members who come out of hiding and take public stances? Is it a coalition of organizations? Is it the same people who reemerge, or a new cast of players? Could it be a combination of small groups and individuals acting outside of organizational support, as this book suggests? (2) The theory also seems to imply that when things get safer, a central organization emerges (or reemerges) to lead a resistance. In Sierra Leone, in a period of reduced repression in the mid-1990s, many women's organizations successfully formed a centrally organized coalition to push the ruling military junta out of power and restore democracy. But in fact when things get safer, instead of a central organization, there may be a proliferation of organizations engaged in a resistance campaign or campaigns (as happened in Kenya in the 1990s), despite occasional violent outbursts by police against a strengthening political opposition. No main organization emerged to lead the continuing resistance. In one sense this was a positive reflection of the growing advocacy for change; in another sense it signaled growing competition among organizations for international funding, publicity, and membership.

## Resistance without "Opportunity"

Several recent studies have shown the effectiveness of nonviolent resistance (Bartkowski 2013; Chenoweth and Stephan 2011; Ackerman and Karatnycky

2005; Ackerman and Duvall 2000).[5] Others have provided convincing evidence that favorable structural conditions – often known as political "opportunities" – even when present, are not necessary conditions for resistance (Goodwin and Jasper 2012). Opportunities are generally considered to be conditions in the economic or political circumstances in a society that encourage activists to proceed. These are exogenous circumstances, ones beyond the control of those engaged in the resistance.

In the current study of three sub-Saharan African countries with repressive regimes, the resistance took place with little in the way of perceived opportunities. Instead, there was repression; still, there often was nonviolent resistance in the face of this repression. When the repression was overwhelming, some resistance continued in a less organized and open way, resuming in a more formal approach when the repression lessened. This reduced repression could be described as an "opportunity," but not in the usual way the term has been used in social movement studies. Whether using McAdam's 1996 illustrative set of opportunities, or his initial macro set from 1982, there were few if any political "openings" that made resistance easier or safer. In his earlier work, McAdam (1982, 176) lists factors likely to produce "shifts in the structure of political opportunities … wars, industrialization, international political realignments, prolonged unemployment, and widespread demographic changes." In his later list (1996, 27), synthesized from various scholars, McAdam includes as potential political opportunities: "1. The relative openness or closure of the institutionalized political system; 2. The stability or instability of that broad set of elite alignments that typically undergird a polity; 3. The presence or absence of elite allies; 4. The state's capacity and propensity for repression."

McAdam is usually identified in the literature with his emphasis on "opportunity" as key to social movements. Tilly (2008), Meyer (2002), Tarrow (1998), and numerous other key movement scholars have also identified the importance of political "opportunity." In their collaborative work, McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly (2001) sought to move beyond a static identification of opportunity and emphasize the dynamics of interactions between those making claims and those upon whom the claims were made. McAdam had earlier argued (1982, 48, 50): "While, important, expanding political

5 Ackerman and Karatnycky (8) found that there was "more than a three to one chance" of a country achieving transition to political freedom where the civic opposition is nonviolent or mostly nonviolent. Chenoweth and Stephan found (215) that the probability of a country remaining a democracy five years after a nonviolent resistance campaign was 57 percent compared to 6 percent for successful violent campaigns.

opportunities and indigenous organizations do not, in any simple sense, produce a social movement … Expanding political opportunities combine with the indigenous organizations of the minority community to afford insurgents the 'structural potential' for successful action … All three factors, then, are regarded as necessary, but insufficient, causes of social insurgency."

In 2004 McAdam complained of the "wooden manner in which it [the concept of opportunity] has been applied by movement scholars" (205). He called for greater attention to "culturalist and rationalist tenets" (230). More recently, McAdam argued that scholars have made the political process model he developed "overly structural" and not paid enough attention to the importance of people acting on structural conditions.[6] McAdam has also acknowledged that people can mount resistance in "unpromising structural circumstances," though arguing that such cases "are bound to be rare" (226). The current study of three countries suggests that such cases may not be as rare as one might think. Structural conditions are analyzed in the country chapters, but the study provides evidence from those countries that significant nonviolent resistance took place in the absence of clear and perceived political opportunities and in the face of considerable repression. But repression can stimulate resistance, as Goldstone and Tilly (2001) have shown, citing various other studies.

## Broader, More Fluid Participation in Resistance

In addition to the less-studied phenomenon of individual activism, small group resistance receives far less attention than do large organizations and mass movements. Most studies of social movements in repressive settings tend to concentrate on large movements and mass public demonstrations, as in Eastern Europe (e.g., Karklins and Petersen 1993; Kuran 1991; Lohmann 1994); in the Soviet Union (Beissinger 2002); in Latin America (e.g., Eckstein 2001); or in Iran (Kurzman 2004). Even the relatively few studies of social

6 In an e-mail message to the author, March 6, 2013, McAdam wrote: "It is certainly true that in the way that it developed, the political process model was overly structural. That was not, however, true of my original formulation of the model. For me two factors – the political opportunities and existing organizations/networks available to would be activists – defined the structural potential of a movement. But whether that potential would be realized, was entirely dependent on processes of social construction and collective interpretation among the aggrieved population. Bottom line: at root the theory was exactly the blend of culture and theory, and top down facilitation and bottom up agency you are calling for."

movements in sub-Saharan Africa, while providing excellent insights into nonviolent resistance, focus mostly on large movements (e.g., Zunes, Kurtz, and Asher 1999; Tripp, et al. 2009; Ellis and Kessel 2009).[7]

The current study examines some large organizations and mass demonstrations. But often the nonviolent resistance profiled herein was carried out by small groups, informal networks, and individuals. In Sierra Leone it was a small group of students that initiated a demonstration in 1977 that developed into a nationwide boycott by university and secondary school students. A small group of mothers used a dramatic protest in Kenya to challenge authorities to release political prisoners. To overlook such contributions to the social movements/nonviolent resistance movements that developed in all three countries studied would be to miss important parts of the story.

As noted above, activists or "players" move between "arenas" (Jasper 2012). For example, as shown in this study of three sub-Saharan countries that suffered under repressive regimes, professional people may move into the arena of activism and file legal challenges against a repressive regime or write critical articles and editorials, then slip back into their normal roles as attorneys or journalists, occupied with the more mundane features of their jobs. It is this fluidity that is missing in many social movement studies. Instead of being a "member" of a "social movement," these professionals, and others – mothers, students, market women, clergy – were part of a more fluid, less formal, but active and important resistance that ebbs and flows depending on the needs and challenges of the moment. Contrary to the more traditional and structural concepts of political "opportunity," these part-time activists were not necessarily cowed into submission by repressive acts of the regime. On the contrary, it is often those very acts that spurred them into action as players in various arenas of political contention. "A social movement is never a unified player, but a shifting coalition of players (groups and individuals) who come together for occasional events based on perceived overlapping goals" (Jasper 2012, 21-2). In this study of nonviolent resistance in sub-Saharan Africa, the players acted at times as members of organizations, and at other times with little or no formal organizational support, functioning on their own, though usually in touch with other individual or organizational activists.

7 Stammers (2009, 39) argues that the link between human rights and social movements has received inadequate scholarly attention.

Scott's arguments on resistance (1985, 290) have relevance for the study of non-organizational, nonviolent resistance by individuals, small groups, and informal networks against repressive rulers. The focus of the current study on challenges to regimes takes a more political edge than Scott, however. Scott was studying small-scale farmers in Malaysia. The resistance by the farmers, Scott noted, was primarily to "mitigate or deny claims (for example rents, taxes, prestige) made on that class by superordinate classes (for example, landlords, large farmers, the state) or to advance its own claims (for example work, land, charity, respect) vis-à-vis those superordinate classes." In the current study, the resistance focused on demands on the state to allow such basic human rights as freedom of speech and assembly. When those in the resistance concluded that the state would not grant these rights adequately, their focus switched from regime reform to regime change. This resistance took many forms, including using the courtroom to challenge regime abuses; investigative media and think tank exposure of regime weaknesses and abuses; and secret planning sessions to coordinate small-scale acts of resistance. These and other small types of nonviolent resistance often are missed in an overly narrow focus on large resistance organizations and large-scale actions.

## Establishing a Culture of Resistance

A social movement is a composite of many small steps, decisions and actions by individuals, sometimes acting on their own, sometimes in organizations, angered by a sense of injustice, inspired by the hope of justice, hungry for dignity and freedom, or in some cases seeking personal gain. For many, human rights and democracy are gateways to a better life and worth a struggle, worth the risk. The real heart of a social movement is the living, pulsating, emotional, day-to-day efforts of activists. There comes a moment when participants in a social movement/resistance movement do something to put their hopes and words into action. At that moment they cross a line. In a repressive setting, they leave the relative safety of anonymity, of compliance, and join others as marked opponents of repression.

This growing resistance, if not overwhelmingly repressed, can develop into a "culture of resistance," defined in this study, as noted above, as a process in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime become a norm for activists and a visible segment of the general public. Early activists and activism encourage additional resistance. Through planned or spontaneous demonstrations led by activists, public resistance can become more common even in the face of continuing repression. More people attend

political rallies, even when those are banned; the media becomes bolder in its criticism; people talk more openly against the regime. In all three countries, the resistance exposed the abuses of the regimes, weakened their legitimacy and encouraged more resistance. The resistance in all three countries that are the focus of this study eventually led to a culture of resistance that helped set the stage for the regime changes that occurred.[8]

There are three major elements to the establishment of a culture of resistance; they are likely to overlap each other and their sequence is not always the same.

1 *Individual activism*. The concept of individual activism, a topic generally not analyzed in social movement studies, involves resistance not supported in any significant way by an organization. For example, an attorney may decide to legally challenge the treatment of political detainees by the state; yet the attorney's professional law organization may be unwilling to offer any support of this challenge, preferring to shy away from political actions. The attorney's own law firm may be too small and financially weak to provide much support. This happened in Kenya, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.

To overlook such challenges in the analysis of regime change and nonviolent resistance would be to miss important elements of the pressures that can build up against a repressive regime. The usual focus in social movement studies on organizational activism is thus limited. Regime leaders are aware of any kind of challenges: individual, organizational, or mass. Why shouldn't political analysts also take notice of individual activism when it occurs? One reason individual activism is almost always overlooked, and rarely analyzed, may be that it isn't easy to track. It requires locating activists or former activists and interviewing them (or in historical cases, documenting their actions via archival records) instead of tracking the easier-to-detect actions of organizations. The order of these elements is not always the same. In Kenya, there was an important period of mostly individual activism/resistance by independent journalists, attorneys, in the late 1980s and into 1990-91. Organizational activism became dominant in Kenya after the adoptions of multiparty elections. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, there were examples of individual activism at various times, especially by attorneys and journalists, depending on the level of repression of the regimes: sometimes individual and organizational activism overlapped.

8 Mass violence and deaths after the disputed 2007 presidential election in Kenya was a major setback for Kenyans.

2 *Organizational activism*. This is the more traditional focus of social movement studies, yet even here the focus tends to be on large, well-established organizations. Tracking informal organizations, as some studies do, is also important, especially in a repressive setting where overt, open, and centralized organizations make easy targets for a regime. In this study, organizational resistance – by opposition political parties, women's groups, students, unions, and others – played a key role in turning a society away from silent enduring to open resistance. Individuals can help break the wall of silence, but they are limited in what they can accomplish. Organizations are usually better equipped to conduct the more routine and day-to-day activities that keep pressure on a regime.
3 *Mass resistance*. This is an important element of a nonviolent resistance movement. It is one thing to have a few brave individuals challenging a regime; organizational resistance can keep the pressure on and even increase it. But without some indications of mass public support, a regime may be encouraged to continue repression, confident of survival in the absence of overt, widespread opposition. In Kenya, two major but illegal (at least in the eyes of the incumbent regime) rallies, offered clear evidence to the regime that the resistance by individual activists had much more public support than was evident. That mass resistance resurfaced again before the 1997 elections and in the years leading up to the election in 2002 which finally saw a change of regime. In Sierra Leone, when a military coup took place in 1997, it was met with some individual and organizational opposition. But it was the mass nonviolent response (in terms of strikes, staying home, and closing businesses, for example) that gave a clear signal to the regime and the diplomatic world that the junta lacked credibility in the eyes of the people. In Liberia, mass marches by women demanding an end to the war in 2003 kept pressure on the regime.

It is important to add that this study does not argue that the establishment of the three elements of a culture of resistance always leads to a regime change, or that the existence of a culture of resistance is necessary to effect regime change. Nor is the establishment of a culture of resistance part of a deterministic model: the appearance of one element in the resistance culture does not lead automatically to the others. In addition, this study notes that there is always uncertainty involved. The resistance can be blocked by mass repression, but it can be helped by unpredictable events and the actions of sympathizers. As noted later, minor actors sometimes

spontaneously play a role in the survival of key activists. *This study does argue that in all three countries, change would not have come when it did without the nonviolent resistance.*

## New Universal Model for Social Movements

In general, the focus in social movement studies on organizations – often large organizations – and mass demonstrations, has proven highly useful. But where repression has limited formal, open activism, there is a need to look closer at both individual and small, informal group activism. As noted, nonviolent resistance in repressive settings can occur not just under dangerous conditions but without much in the way of material resources or structural opportunities normally associated with movements in the democratic West. This raises an important question: is there room for a universal model of social movements, one that fits movements in the democratic West as well as repressive settings anywhere? Under repressive conditions, social movements may not exhibit the typical hallmarks of resistance in peaceful settings as noted above: "sustained, organized and public" (Tilly 2004, 3). Goodwin and Jasper (2004, 3) use a similar definition but add that the "collective, organized, sustained" challenges may also target "cultural beliefs and practices." David S. Meyer in his study of social movements in America offers this definition: "collective and sustained efforts that challenge existing or potential laws, politics, norms, or authorities, making use of extra-institutional political tactics" (Meyer 2007, 10).

Social movements operating in the face of repression can ill afford this kind of openness and organization; the repression can interrupt activism. Typically social movements in peaceful settings are aimed at *regime reform*, but in repressive settings the aim often is *regime change*. This can make activists, whether operating individually or collectively, a target of a repressive regime. Using the definition cited above (see argument No. 6), this study suggests a new model, one that recognizes individual as well as organizational activism and sometimes mass public support, embracing regime change as a goal as well as regime reform, but without the expectations cited from the literature. The model recognizes the importance of strategic choices by participants in a resistance (e.g., when to join, what to do, when to do it). "In strategic rather than structural models, individual actions can make a difference" (Jasper 2012, 33). Future research using this new model in other repressive settings may help identify a broader range of activists than without it.

## Theoretical Implications

### Structure and Resistance

This study argues that structure in the sense of political "opportunity" is not necessary for the kind of nonviolent resistance that took place in these three countries. But neither was activism alone the only factor in the changes that occurred. International donors used their leverage at times to pressure the regimes for change, most notably in aid freezes in Kenya. International human rights organizations often were effective in winning quick release of well-known activists from detention through negative publicity and direct contact with regime officials on behalf of the detainees. The poor economy in the 1980s across much of Africa and the upsurge in Western international support for human rights after the end of the Cold War were all part of the backdrop against which the activists operated. Further, it was military intervention, not simply nonviolent resistance, that brought an end to a military regime in Sierra Leone. In Liberia, President Charles Taylor resigned under international indictment and with a rival rebel force approaching the capital.

Each of the regime changes in these three countries came only after mounting domestic nonviolent resistance. That resistance documented human rights and other abuses by the regimes, shredded claims of regime legitimacy and rule of law, and exposed corruption. It set the stage in Liberia and Sierra Leone for military interventions. By contrast, widespread civilian welcoming of the previous military junta in Sierra Leone offered the international community little incentive to oppose it until domestic resistance against it grew several years later. In sum, the nonviolent resistance alone did not cause the regime changes to democratic rule that eventually took place in all three countries; this study argues, without such resistance change would not likely have come when it did.

From the close-up vantage point of 170 in-depth interviews by the author, with past activists among others, this study offers a broader, more nuanced view of social movements than many studies. Unlike archival research from afar, it reveals the day-to-day fears, hopes, courage, tactics, and strategic choices of those who stood up for human rights, democratic rule, dignity, and a better life. The theoretical arguments developed from this qualitative research are grounded in actual events and they are "faithful to the evidence" (Neuman 2004, 30). But theoretical arguments alone do not reveal the emotions, the life of a social movement and its participants. Studies that argue social movements are more than calculated, mechanical responses to structural conditions in society are correct. The problem is that even in such works,

the analyses tend to leave out the story of the ordinary people who challenge authority, especially in repressive settings. The current study presents the voices of the challengers as well as a theoretical analysis of the evidence.

Emotions like courage, a need for respect and dignity, a gut feeling that things could and should be better, and a determination to do something – even some small thing – to make life better, played an important role in the nonviolent resistance that took place in all three countries. Structural explanations work to a certain extent in describing the conditions against which resistance takes place, and against which emotions play a part in resistance. If these background issues were highly favorable to daily life there would have been much less reason for a resistance. But structural explanations by themselves cannot explain why someone decides to challenge a repressive regime. Neither can emotions.

Jasper (2003) argues for the importance of emotions in social movements. Goodwin and Jasper (2004, 79) ask, "when does an increase in repression, or the use of certain types of repression, lead to greater mobilization, and when to less." The way they phrase the question is important: they not only recognize that repression may actually increase resistance, they assume that beyond a certain point repression leads to less resistance.

Pearlman (2013, 392) argues that emotions such as a sense of "dignity … anger, joy, pride, and shame have emboldening effects." They make people more likely to join a "political resistance," despite the dangers. But emotions of "fear, sadness, and shame give rise to dispiriting effects. They increase individuals' tendencies to make pessimistic assessments, discount prospects of change, privilege information about danger, have a low sense of control, and avert risk." She applies this argument to the Arab uprisings of 2011 in Tunisia, Egypt, and Algeria. Pearlman concludes that the massive retaliation by the Algerian regime and remembrance of the past war there against France provoked fear on the part of the resistance which helped block a revolution there. She further argues that positive emotions helped spur the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt. But it may be even more complicated than that division: some protestors facing repressive regimes may simply feel they have nothing left to lose. For example, in 1977, the *Abuelas* (grandmothers) of the Plaza de Mayo in Argentina managed to turn their despair over the loss of their children (and in many cases, their grandchildren) into nonviolent resistance with a long series of demonstrations against the brutal regime, demanding to know what happened to them.

This study considers the relationship of resistance and repression by examining activism that involved courage, principle, or ambition – or some combination of the three. It is beyond the scope of this study to try to analyze the individual motives of activists interviewed, but the words of many interviewed are compelling in the context of highly repressive settings. This

study suggests that a synthesis explanation, considering rational choice, social movement explanations, including the often overlooked concept of emotions and from psychology the concept of moral rationality and altruism as part of what motivates people to resist repression.

In their works on why people joined the mass demonstrations against the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe in 1989 (the year the Berlin Wall fell), Karklins and Petersen (1993), Lohmann (1994), and Kuran (1991) offer differing rational choice explanations of why people engage in resistance. Karklins and Petersen argue that protestors calculated their safety based on the size of the demonstration and the regime's response: larger demonstrations assured people there was less risk to protest. But there is a tautological aspect to this: more people join the protest when crowds are larger; when crowds are larger more people join the protest (612). Their rational choice argument with calculations on both sides gives much credence to the ability of demonstrators and the regime to plan things out logically. But in countries with repressive regimes, demonstrators may be motivated more by emotion than calculation; the country's strongman may be subject to emotional reactions themselves, as well to challenges to the regime's power.

The current study also addresses a gap between the literature on nonviolent resistance and the social movement literature. Social movement literature focuses mostly on the dynamics of a movement, whereas the nonviolence literature concentrates more on tactics. But the division is not analytically useful. This study helps bridge this gap, combining elements of both to explain the resistance that took place by examining both dynamics and tactics. How social movements actually start has also received scant attention. Most studies examine growth and operation of movements but seldom does one trace back to the initial steps as this study does.

Related to this, the study helps us look closer at resistance not just from the point of view of activists but shows how authoritarian leaders see resistance. Authoritarian regimes do not neatly focus only on large organizations opposing them, they are also very much aware of the smaller groups and individuals in a resistance. In the current study, authoritarian regime leaders in all three countries strove to present themselves as legitimate rulers who upheld the rule of law. But they bent the law, warped its application, and used the law as a tool of repression. Still they struggled to convince donors and diplomats that the opposition was the force that was violating the laws. In such cases, an independent newspaper can rip the veil off such pretense and draw international attention to a regime's sham claims of

legitimacy, sometimes opening the way for new international pressures or even military intervention, as happened in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

For Africa, where "the struggle to cross the frontier from personal rule to rule-based governance is still far from over" (Diamond and Plattner 2010, xii) recognition of a broader array of participants in nonviolent social movements offers new appreciation for the capacity of ordinary people to challenge even the most entrenched of repressive rulers. This recognition is clearer when Western-based social movement models are replaced by a more flexible, universal one that embraces responses to conditions in repressive settings as well. This broader recognition in turn may lead some donors and diplomats to reconsider their ways of encouraging greater respect for human rights and democracy by providing aid and training to a wider range of civil society activists working toward these goals. As one longtime scholar of African politics notes in response to the arguments of this study, "The missed realities of social movements that you talk about are actually intrinsically important to the political and social fabric of developing countries, as a necessary intermediate step in building a more truly 'universal' theory of social movements that builds on the experience of all world regions."[9] Harbeson also asks whether social movements were actually stronger than most observers recognized during the repressive Moi years, for example. The answer this study arrived at is yes. The chapters on Kenya show how domestic resistance, contrary to most assessments, was more effective in bringing about multiparty elections than international donor pressures.

## Motives of Activists

In his study of resistance by Malaysian farmers to oppressive working conditions, Scott (1985, 291) makes an interesting observation with regard to how much of the resistance was principled actions against conditions and how much of it was self-interest. "The English poacher in the eighteenth century may have been resisting gentry's claim to property in wild game, but he was just as surely interested in rabbit stew." Like Scott's study, this one does not try to separate out those activists who were acting for a greater good from those who saw potential personal gain in the resistance. Clearly some activists in the three countries in this study who took part in the resistance had hopes of personal gain, either in terms of political power or simply for an economy that would provide more jobs. Some former activists took positions in the new governments, sometimes disappointing fellow

9 John Harbeson, e-mail message to the author, February 25, 2013. Among his numerous books on Africa is: *Africa in World Politics: Reforming Political Order*, Boulder, CO: Westview, 2009.

former activists and others with their performance; sometimes not. It is also beyond the scope of this study to examine the degree of democracy that emerged after the regime changes noted in each of the three countries.[10]

A few activists openly acknowledged they had used the push for human rights as way to weaken a regime and replace it with one more amenable to their profession. Certainly if the repression stopped or was at least reduced, they hoped their chances would improve to work more freely as lawyers, journalists, or students, for example. But to consider that a lawyer risked his or her life to gain a few more clients makes little sense. The costs too far outweighed the benefits. The regimes at various times practiced detention, torture, and murder to defeat those in the nonviolent resistance. Whatever their motives, activists took similar risks in resisting repressive regimes in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The regimes weren't looking at motives but at their actions. And as noted, the regimes didn't care if someone was in an organization or acting on their own as part of an informally linked resistance movement. Resistance marked them as enemies of the state.

The author agrees with Scott that trying to distinguish how much of the resistance was self-interest and how much was not is a debate that yields little additional light in a study of social movement activism under repressive conditions. The interviews fairly consistently yielded an overall impression that most participants were genuinely upset at the lack of human rights and democracy in their countries, resentful at the abuses, and willing to takes risks to be part of an effort to make things better for everyone.

Finally, in the best sense of scholarly research, this study builds on the pioneering work of social movement theorists in the spirit of Charles Tilly's challenge to scholars. In his many works on social movements, Tilly never stopped looking for new ways to explore what he called "contentious performances" of people organizing to make claims. In his last book (2008), Tilly challenged scholars "to bring their own evidence and procedures to bear" on the topic.[11] The current study is presented in the spirit of respect for previous works and a willingness to further understand the amazing determination of people to resist repression nonviolently.

10 The author analyzed some of the changes in Kenya 2002-12 in an article in the *Journal of Human Rights* (Press 2012).

11 The author met Tilly in October, 2007, in his office at the University of Columbia just a few months before his death. His office was stacked high with books, on desks and bookshelves. Referring to books in general, he said: "I like to read them and write them," signing and handing the author a copy of his 2004 work, *Social Movements, 1768-2004*. When I explained the concepts presented in this current study, he called them "very interesting."

# Part one
Sierra Leone

**Figure 2 A street scene in central Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2008**

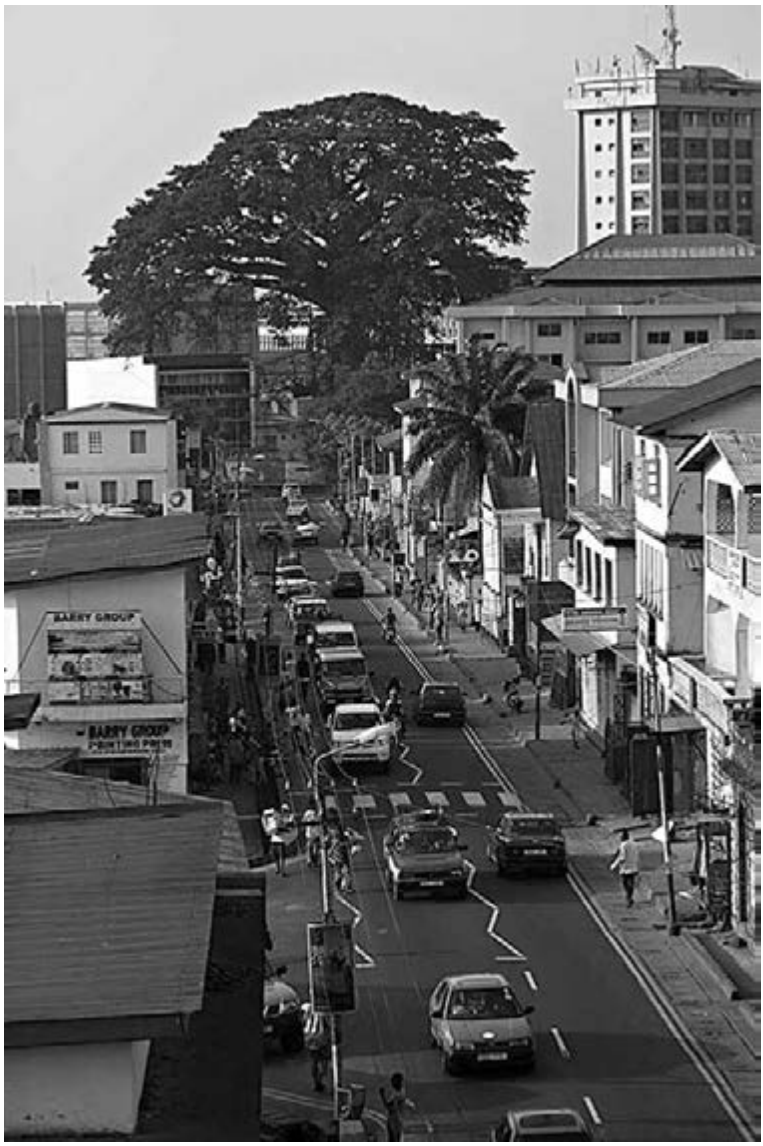


Photo by Betty Press

# 2 Students Shake the Pillars of Power

Sierra Leone, January 1977. Here in this coastal West African nation that is linked to the popular hymn "Amazing Grace,"[1] was home of the captive who led the successful rebellion on the ship *Amistad*, and is the country whose civil war was portrayed in the film *Blood Diamonds*, restless students at Fourah Bay College readied themselves to carry on a long tradition of resistance to repressive rule.

Meanwhile, Siaka Stevens – a president feared for his harsh way of dealing with detractors, including political executions and torture – prepared for his convocation speech as college chancellor. But during his address, students took him by surprise. Waving banners and placards, booing, and shouting "No more one-party," "Free and fair elections," and "Accountability – this is what we want," they launched a protest that built on a history of resistance in Sierra Leone. It never quite developed into a full social movement forging connections with other constituencies in the country, but it contributed significantly to the creation of a culture of resistance in Sierra Leone that would fully blossom in the 1990s against two military regimes. This in turn laid a foundation for the social movements that emerged in the 1990s. And for a brief period, the 1977 demonstrations (which went nationwide among students) shook the pillars of power of the Stevens regime. The resistance momentum continued later that year in a different form: an opposition newspaper, *The Tablet*, involving some Fourah Bay College faculty and activist students. It extended further with more student protests in the 1980s, though on a smaller scale. In the mid to late 1980s, some student activists and others chose an alternate route for resistance by taking training in Libya on how to launch a revolution.

Founded during British colonial rule in 1827, Fourah Bay College, part of the University of Sierra Leone, was once called the "Athens of West Africa" for its proud tradition of learning. It sits atop Mount Aureol, looking out

1 Former slave trader John Newton wrote the poem in 1772 that later became the hymn "Amazing Grace." At one point as a young man he was held practically as a slave himself on a Sierra Leone coastal island by a slave trader he had angered, fed during his captivity by the owner's slaves. Years later as a minister, he "used his pulpit in London as one means of raising British consciousness of the immorality of the slave trade. Newton was one of the leading abolitionist thinkers and activists to support the founders of the Sierra Leone Company, Granville Sharp, Thomas Clarkson, John Clarkson and Henry Thornton, who sought to establish a free settlement for ex-slaves in Sierra Leone" (Sapoznik 2012, 5, 11).

like a sentinel over Freetown, the capital city with its maze of narrow streets overflowing with people. In many ways the city hasn't changed much from that pivotal moment in 1977. Looking down today from the campus where the president and his entourage took their seats in the small, open-air convocation site, the eye is drawn to a sea of rusted, corrugated iron-roofed homes stretching upward one, two, four, five stories like trees competing for sunlight, of which there is plenty. At street level, between modern, taller office buildings, history continues unruffled by time: barbers ply their trade in tiny kiosks while teenage girls, balancing stacks of charcoal-filled baskets on their heads, seek customers; two-story wooden homes hark back in style to the early days when freed slaves rescued by the British (after the British ended their slave trade) gathered upon their arrival beneath the giant cotton tree in the center of town. The tree lives on today, home to bevies of bats that fly off at dusk and return by dawn.

Despite the bustle and the energy of the people in 1977, all was not well. "The worsening economic situation in the country due to high level corruption, nepotism, over-centralization of the state machinery, clientelism and patronage, the oil shocks of the 1970s, and others, had adversely affected all sections of society" (Alie 2006, 85). Many people were struggling to make a living, hoping and praying for children who didn't die at birth, and facing an ever-weakening economy under the leadership of a president who used a combination of cunning and repression to silence critics. Most people lived in the crowded slums of the capital and in the few major outlying cities. Rural villagers shared the deprivations.

The previous colonial power had gradually spread its control outside of Freetown, forming a protectorate of the rest of the area that is Sierra Leone today. The British wanted to keep the French colonizers at a distance and not end up with an English city-colony surrounded by French-speaking Africans. The British used "indirect" rule, getting locals to do the administrative work for their colony. But that meant they had to start creating schools. They gradually started some, in Freetown and later up-country, but with limited curriculum – just enough learning to do the clerical and other administrative tasks. Fourah Bay College was an exception, but bright young students, including college graduates, had only limited prospects with the British in control. Gradually, with much help from missionaries establishing schools throughout the country, and with formation of some colleges, this began to change.

## Roots of Resistance

President Stevens probably should not have been so surprised at what happened at Fourah Bay College in 1977. The history of resistance in Sierra Leone is a long one. In 1839, for example, when fifty-three Africans from Sierra Leone were abducted by Portuguese slave traders, sold to Spanish planters, and chained on board the Cuban schooner, *Amistad* bound for Cuba, they rebelled.

They had no way of knowing that their freedom would be successfully defended in the US Supreme Court in 1841 by former President John Quincy Adams. The court ruled in their favor and they returned to Sierra Leone. By all accounts the man who led the slave rebellion on the *Amistad* was Sengbe Pieh, whose name was incorrectly written by the Spanish as Cinque. In court, after the *Amistad* had been seized by the US Navy, he described himself as the son of a chief. He was an imposing figure.[2] Virtually everyone who met him agreed he carried himself like a natural leader, with a charismatic magnetism, a forceful intensity. Somehow, even in chains in an American prison, he managed to hold center stage and to fix himself in the American imagination at the time.

When the British finally declared their claim in 1896 over all of Sierra Leone, establishing a "protectorate" for the area outside of Freetown, they followed up in 1898 with a tax on every home. Resistance quickly spilled over into what became known as the Hut Tax War of 1898. Though the resistance was widespread, the British focused on apprehending Bai Bureh in the Port Loko district.[3] The British were unable to apprehend him but punished other dissidents "mercilessly"; some chiefs were imprisoned, "huts and farms of defaulters set on fire, and payment exacted at gunpoint. The terror of the colonial state was unleashed with a vengeance" (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 42-3). Soon the Mende in the south joined their northern Temne counterparts. Later, after Bai

2 A sketch of Cinquez (an alternative spelling), was probably done by James (or Isaac) Sheffield around 1839 while he awaited trial in New Haven, Connecticut. The original is now in the US Library of Congress and available online at http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2003690782/. (This is listed in the References section under the name Sheffield.)

3 "Bai Bureh was, the resilient general and military strategist who led the Temne in the war against the British in 1898 … Intimations that Bai Bureh was responsible for the Hut Tax War of 1898, which grew out of his resistance to British aggression, are un-founded," according to historian Arthur Abraham (1974, 9, 106). Abraham cites Bai Bureh's account that he was drawn into the conflict in response to the killing of some people by the British.

Bureh surrendered in late 1898 he was first imprisoned then sent into exile, returning in 1905.

The Hut Tax War may have marked the end of that kind of armed resistance (until the civil war began in 1991), but the Creoles[4] and others continued to press for political rights, including through newspapers critical of the British administration. Labor organizations were also especially active. Examples of this twentieth-century resistance included: strikes by railway and other skilled workers between 1906 and 1914 to win higher wages; riots in 1919 over depression conditions and late payment of WW I war bonuses; and a strike in 1926 by railway workers over "deplorable work conditions," supported by strikes by the Krio elite. When colonial officials offered a series of constitutional proposals in 1947, the Krio elite (now "replete in lawyers") mounted a campaign to reject them (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 46-7; 60). In this way Sierra Leoneans provided models of resistance for what occurred in the early years of independence. But under the regime of Siaka Stevens and his All People's Congress, the resistance was nearly silenced by a combination of force and co-optation. "Stevens systematically destroyed all forms of political and civil opposition" (Alie 2006, 97). Stevens and his party managed to capture most of the energy of civil society that might otherwise have developed into social movements (Rashid 2013). The resistance was evident again from time to time in specific protests, including the 1977 student demonstrations; it began to emerge more fully in the 1980s after Stevens stepped down, coming to full fruition in the 1990s. "The case of Sierra Leone demonstrates at least that the root cause of the problem lay in the systematic ruin of state institutions by a succession of corrupt and inept dictatorships, indulged by external donors and a network of *pirate* businessmen. As economic and institutional decay set in, the regimes lost all legitimacy in the eyes of the people they claimed to govern" (Chege 2002, 159).

4 Creole (often called Krio, though originally Krio applied only to their language) are a mix of people of various origins including: former slaves recruited by the British from Nova Scotia and Jamaica, liberated slaves recaptured by the British from slavers off the coast of West Africa and released in Sierra Leone, and some freed slaves from the UK. "By the 1860s, wealth and some education had produced in the ranks of the recaptives and settlers the beginnings of a Krio elite, owners of property and aspirants to a lifestyle that was the envy of their poorer kinsmen … If the Krio were themselves divided along class and cultural lines, the alienation of some of their dominant families from the indigenous populate was even more pronounced" (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle 1999, 26-7, 32-3).

## Rebirth of Resistance

Most social movement literature describes what induces a person to join a movement, how a movement does or does not advance, and sometimes what makes a movement decline. Seldom is there an explanation of how a movement actually starts or is attempted. It is not an easy research question to examine, but one can get a reasonable idea by locating past participants and leaders and interviewing them. In 1977, students at Fourah Bay College were about to attempt to start a social/resistance movement, though it was unlikely they were actually conscious that they were doing so or had thought out the full consequences. At that time, Stevens, a former labor leader and suspicious politician, was in control with a regime based on nepotism, paternalism, and fear. He had survived coups and assassination attempts, and he had learned to manipulate, co-opt, threaten, and punish those who might pose a challenge. But the economy was slipping, and radicalism was growing among college students. In addition, Stevens had made a relatively minor mistake with the Fourah Bay College students, and it was about to trigger a protest that would shake the regime. The question in 1977 became whether he would survive what began as an unprecedented act of resistance to him at the convocation and grew into a nationwide resistance.

## "Opportunity?"

Social movement theories as applied in the democratic West by McAdam and other scholars typically emphasize the importance of political "opportunities" that help a movement to advance. Generally these are considered to be something in the structure of the society, something beyond the control of the activists. Lack of opportunity is also considered critical: the greater the repression, the less chance for a social movement to advance. In Sierra Leone, there was little in the way of apparent opportunity for restless students in 1977. Instead they faced a repressive regime that would resort to force when it felt force was necessary. They also faced a regime skilled in the use of co-optation to limit the scope of any emerging challenge. Referring to McAdam's updated and synthesized, "highly consensual" list of opportunities (1996, 27): the political system was closed and stable; there were no obvious fissures among political elites or elite allies of the students (something that soon would become even clearer). Using McAdam's earlier suggested list of "opportunities" (McAdam 1982, 176), the country was not at

war; Sierra Leone was not industrializing; the Cold War was underway but with no realignments affecting Sierra Leone at the time; and there were no widespread demographic changes, a vague concept given the difficulty of determining when such changes might provide an opportune moment for action. Political freedom was limited. There was chronic unemployment, however, and the economy appeared to be worsening.

Beresford Davies was a new student at Fourah Bay College in 1977. Life had been "much better" in the early 1970s, though "not for everybody in Sierra Leone," he recalled. "People were having a good time. Nobody was rushing to go out of the country." For relatively little money, he would go to the market and fill up a small basket. "I'd buy milk, I'd buy tea, I'd buy sugar, coffee, salami sausage, butter – *any kind of thing* I would require." But by 1977, the economy was in decline. That potential "opportunity" for action was easily offset by the repressive nature of the Stevens regime. Stevens' nepotism and paternalistic style of government showed no signs of changing. "Stevens would say the elections are 'free and *fair*.' Students would say they are 'free and *fear*,'" Davies recalled, laughing. To help keep order, Stevens used the SSD (Special Security Division) an agency opponents referred to as Siaka Stevens' Dogs. "Torture was an instrument [of the state …]. By '77, you know people had gotten to the point where they are giving up to an extent … Because they [opponents, including students who had demonstrated unsuccessfully in 1968] tried all that they could to change [the policies] of the central government, but Siaka Stevens had sewn up the system … Nobody was ready to challenge him because challenging him would be trouble: you'd either get killed or you'd be forced to run away …"[5]

## Phase I: Student Resistance

Sierra Leonean historian and Fourah Bay faculty member Joe A.D. Alie noted (2006, 85) that students were particularly hard-hit by the combination of bad politics and bad economy at the time. "Poor educational facilities, inadequate and inappropriate curricula, programmes, and lack of employment opportunities for young people over the years contributed to their marginalization and turned them into a rebellious group. The students,

5 Davies, in an interview with the author, December 3, 2009, on the campus of Milton Margi College of Education and Technology, near Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Davies, a former Fulbright Fellow with a PhD in social science from Clements University in the US, was a faculty member at Milton Margi College.

particularly those in the University, became very radical and anti-system." Against this backdrop, facing a repressive regime and with little in the way of a clear "opportunity" on their side, students at Fourah Bay College were about to shake things up in 1977, creating their own opportunity.

Students were already focused on the growing opposition to apartheid in South Africa and had in their midst some students from southern Africa, including Zimbabwe and Namibia. When Kenneth Kaunda, president of a "frontline" state of Zambia, was scheduled to visit Sierra Leone that year for the first time, students planned to welcome him. They had received permission from the college officials and were on their way to the ferry that would bring Kaunda across the bay from the international airport when the government intervened. It was Jan. 20, 1977, the day Jimmy Carter was being inaugurated president of the United States. The students suddenly heard an announcement that the Sierra Leone government had called off the student welcome of Kaunda, apparently fearing it might be misinterpreted as an anti-American gesture on the US inauguration day. But the students rejected this reasoning and greeted Kaunda anyway. On their return, they took a break at Victoria Park in downtown Freetown. Police dispersed them with teargas. After dinner that night at their campus some of the students in the "Gardeners," one of the student social/political groups, gathered behind a hostel for a secret discussion. One of the students was Hindolo Trye, president of the Student Union at Fourah Bay, and president of the Gardeners.

> So it was at that gathering we started to think: let's begin to look at the whole country. If these people [the government] can think about America – the effect of our demonstration on America – let them begin to look at the effect of a demonstration in Sierra Leone pertaining to what was happening. Because at that time we had a de facto one-party system of government. And there was a lot of corruption. Things were not right.[6]

President Stevens was scheduled to address the annual convocation on campus January 29, just a few days later. "We said that will be the best time for us to organize such a demonstration so we can outline some of our own shortfalls to our own leaders. So we started planning from the 20th."[7] Pulling off a surprise protest against the president would not be

6 Hindolo Trye in an interview with the author, December 12, 2008, in his office as minister of tourism, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

7 Trye interview.

easy, especially in a repressive state. Elected student leaders often had wide popular support, but they had to proceed with cunning to avoid detection by pro-government students who would tip off the police. So elected leaders tried to keep planned demonstrations secret until the last minute then suddenly take a vote. Whoever voted against the plan would be identified as pro-government. In their preparations to challenge the president, student leaders contacted someone off campus to write up instructions for the protest so that the handwriting could not be traced to any student. The Gardeners would lead the demonstration and begin at a signal from Trye.

> I would give a sign. I would pretend as if I'm fixing my gown. I would stand up and sit down fixing my gown. And that's the time everybody would come out with their placards. And then they'll be singing: "This is what we want." So it was shocking to everybody because nobody expected that.[8]

At Trye's signal, the twenty or so students who had been invited into the reserved seating section of the convocation and some among the hundreds of students standing around the edges pulled out their signs hidden in their clothing and began booing and calling out. "He [the president] was flabbergasted. I don't think he had ever experienced anything like it before."[9] Davies, one of the students, recalled:

> He was in the middle of delivery of his address to the convocation when the students unfolded banners condemning the government. Right there, there was complete uproar. They [Stevens and his entourage] were not able to continue with that convocation, they had to move to town, for safety.[10]

**The Power of Small Groups**

It was a nonviolent protest. There would soon be violence by students in response to attacks by government thugs and the SSD, and as the protests spread, there were student attacks on some government property. But for now they were exercising what today is known as nonviolent resistance or nonviolent "conflict." Either term signals a deliberate response to repression,

8 Trye interview.

9 Gordon interview. Gordon, who died in 2011, was a longtime independent journalist and a former faculty member at Fourah Bay College.

10 Davies interview.

either through acts of commission or omission, doing something or refusing to do something. One of the prominent proponents of nonviolent resistance, Gene Sharp, notes (2005, 36): "[P]eople have immense power potential. It is ultimately their attitudes, behavior, cooperation, and obedience that supply the sources of power to all rulers and hierarchical systems, even oppressors and tyrants." Sharp also stresses that victory is not easily won and requires the activists to consolidate their gains and be ready to respond to countermoves by the opposing power. Would the students of Sierra Leone be able to build on their momentary success and help bring a shift of political power in their country? (Twenty years later, Sierra Leoneans would refuse to cooperate with a military junta, depriving it of the legitimacy and power it so desperately sought and helping attract international intervention that brought the regime down.)

For the moment, students had more power than the president. Looking back years later, some Sierra Leone professionals argued that the demonstrations were a movement and that it had the potential to topple the government had labor joined forces with the students. Others disagree. "We could have brought the government down if we had had the experience; I certainly think so. There was a window of opportunity. It [the resistance] was a *very fierce* period of uprising … against a one-party system.[11] The resistance was "very, very close" to ending the Stevens regime, said another observer. "The Labour Congress could have tilted the balance if they had sided [with the students]. They may have been able to tilt the balance in favor of true democracy.[12] Gberie (2005, 44) doubts this claim. He writes: "The student-inspired protests … were a failure … [and] led to the consolidation of Stevens' hold on power … But they also exposed the weaknesses of the state and *the potential for small groups of dissidents* to shake it to its foundations" [emphasis added].

For the moment, students were refusing to be obedient to an oppressive president. What might have been just a one-time protest, not a "movement," quickly shifted from a Fourah Bay campus protest to a national campaign to bring about real political change. Many students were still celebrating the audacious challenge at Fourah Bay to the president when supporters of the government countered with violence that triggered what became a countrywide protest. It is not clear that the campus protest would have spread nationally without the response from the regime.

11 Gordon interview; emphasis in original.

12 Davies interview.

**Regime Repression Stimulates more Resistance**

Early prominent social movement studies such as McAdam's (1982) argued that without opportunities there was not much chance for a movement to progress. Some later studies recognized that the counter-resistance to a movement, including repression, could actually stimulate more resistance (e.g., Goldstone and Tilly 2001). Beyond an undefined point, however, repression is likely to stop a nonviolent resistance movement, as it did in Syria where a peaceful movement starting in 2011 was soon almost entirely shut down by the government's massive use of force against civilians. In Sierra Leone, the first countermeasures to the students' peaceful protest came the Monday after the weekend demonstration on campus. Members of the youth wing of the president's party, All People's Congress (APC), commonly considered by students to be thugs, attacked the campus with support from members of the Internal Security Unit. They destroyed property and assaulted some students and members of the staff.[13] This repressive response to a peaceful protest added to the frustration and determination of students, both in the college and in secondary schools.

Student leaders at Fourah Bay had been in contact with student leaders in Freetown's secondary schools, including some who would later surface as activists in the 1980s (Rashid 2004, 77). Although no advance plans had been made for them to join or support the Fourah Bay demonstration, secondary students soon became involved due to an unforeseen chain of events. Amidst word that the government was planning to close Fourah Bay College after the demonstration, secondary school students vowed to boycott their own classes. The protest message was then quickly "framed," as the social movement literature describes a rallying focus, as "*No College: No School*." This slogan helped spread the resistance nationally from Fourah Bay to across the nation as secondary students, who saw their future linked to the University, joined in (Rashid 2013). Fourah Bay student president Hindolo Trye was taken into police custody.[14] In an interview, Trye recalled what happened next amidst word that the government would close Fourah Bay College:

13 Trye interview; Alie (2006, 86). Rashid (2004, 75) notes: "Students were brutalized and extensive damage wrought on campus property. Armed units of the Cuban-trained paramilitary Internal Security Units … personally controlled by Stevens, followed on the train of the thugs, allegedly to control the situation. They joined in the operation and arrested a number of lecturers and student leaders."

14 In the interview with the author, Trye said he turned himself in because the police were looking for him.

> I remember the Inspector General of police … His son was also a member of the Gardeners and a student at Fourah Bay College at the time. So we were used to him; he was used to us because we used to go for weekends in the house with his son and so on and so forth … He said a lot of your friends want to come and see you: what should I do? I said "allow them to come and see me three by three." That was a mistake they made. So when they came in it was "Plan Two:" Bring in the school children. The IG came to see me at about 11 or 12; by 2 or 3, the whole streets of Freetown were littered with protesting students; these students and college [students] combined [shouting] "No College, No School" from the east, the west, the north, and the south of Freetown. So after that from Freetown it [the demonstration] extended to the provinces. By then we had incorporated all the other colleges: Njala [University], Makeni Teachers College; Freetown; Bo Teachers College; Bo Normal Teachers College – all of them [supported] "No College, No School" So there was massive protest in Bo, Kenema, Kono; everywhere in the country.[15]

"Plan Two," involving secondary school children, had not been prepared in advance, even by Trye's acknowledgement. Rather, it was a quick response to circumstances, a choice of tactics in the resistance. It was a major strategic initiative that transformed the resistance from a one-time campus event into a national protest. (It is worth noting here that this book argues for updated and broader conceptualizations of what social movements are, especially in repressive settings; one that includes individual and small group resistance with less automatic focus on "opportunities" and more appreciation for the initiatives of activists.)

Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, a high school student at the time who participated in the demonstrations in Freetown, recalled the sequence of events. University students would come down from their campus late at night and talk to secondary school student leaders. When the clashes broke out after the Fourah Bay demonstration, "police used live bullets." In response, some government property was destroyed by students as they went on strike around the country, according to various accounts. Students threw petrol bombs at government vehicles, buses, and police. "When police blocked [us] … we started pelting stones at them and 'missiles' (Molotov cocktails). They burned down a dozen or six police vehicles."[16] Olu Gordon, who graduated

15 Trye interview.

16 Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, interview with the author, Freetown, Sierra Leone, December 1, 2008.

from Fourah Bay in 1979 and lectured there in the 1980s, saw a girl killed near a police station and said two other children might have been shot by police as students rampaged through the streets of Freetown. According to Gordon, the spread of the resistance nationally came about in part when students from the then-closed Fourah Bay College returned to their homes in various parts of the country and "agitated" secondary school students into joining the protests. Interestingly, he noted, students were particularly active even in the city of Makeni, part of the APC's northern power base of the president: "There was a lot of discontent, even in the north."[17] Gibril Foday-Musa was a secondary school student at the time in the southern city of Bo, Sierra Leone's second main city after Freetown. "We led a demonstration against APC …We wanted an end to [single party] rule."[18]

**Resistance Impact**

In the wake of the nationwide student protests, the government took a two-pronged approach to regaining control. "All educational institutions in the country were closed for several weeks and the Stevens administration, through the use of brute force, restored law and order" countrywide (Alie 2006, 86). At the same time, Stevens personally began to negotiate with student leaders over their main demand to have a multiparty election. President Stevens had temporarily locked up the Fourah Bay College student president Hindolo Trye in a waterfront cell at Government Wharf. Beads of water drifted into the cell from the splashing waves, Trye recalled.[19] When released, he and other student leaders further "framed" the continuing protest as a national movement by calling for a meeting of the student presidents of other colleges and universities in Sierra Leone. Together they drafted a set of resolutions which they released February 8, 1977, at which point the resistance "became a more coherent political challenge" (Rashid 2004, 76). "Every day, for hours. [Stevens] was chairing all these meetings. It was Stevens, some members of his government, and the students." The daily student leaders' negotiations with the president and members of his cabinet brought crowds of students and others around State House. When the student leaders emerged after a day's session, they would walk to nearby

17 Gordon interview.

18 Gibril Foday-Musa, in an interview with the author, January 31, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

19 Trye interview.

Victoria Park, surrounded by supporters and there announce the results of the day's negotiations.[20]

In the end, Stevens agreed to student demands for "free and fair" multi-party parliamentary elections and an end to the one-party system, "clearly a concession made to the students' leadership" (Gberie 2005, 44). But Stevens had no intention of seeing his ruling party, the APC, lose the May 6, 1977 elections. "Amid widespread violence, harassment, killing, and destruction of rural settlements [by government forces], only a mere 15 opposition SLPP [Sierra Leone People's Party] candidates squeaked through to Parliament" (Rashid 2004, 76). But even that was too much for Stevens. On May 22, 1978, his party introduced a bill which passed and converted the country back to a one-party system, defended by Stevens as a necessary measure to avoid the country splitting into "tribal factions" (Alie 2006, 87). Part of the new law required SLPP members of Parliament to switch to the APC or lose their seat. All but one of the fifteen, Mana Kpaka of Pujehun, switched. For former student leaders such as Trye, the election they had worked so hard to achieve was a major disappointment. What really hurt was that some of the Fourah Bay College lecturers that Stevens suspected of having supported the students' protest accepted uncontested seats from the ruling APC. Trye said in the interview that he was *"extremely disappointed"* in the way the election was manipulated after "all the sacrifices; all the school children that were killed in protesting." Trye extrapolated:

> Some [SLPP winners who agreed to switch parties instead of resigning] were made Ministers and given an official vehicle. Those who were not made Ministers were given an official vehicle … All three students who went in under SLPP were made Junior cabinet Ministers. [Emmanuel] Grant was made Minister of something. All of our friends who were making all that noise were then part and parcel of the system.[21]

Emmanuel Grant's short-lived opposition victory and later political career is an example of the mercurial nature of Sierra Leone politics and an example of why the student-initiated protest of 1977 failed to bring lasting political change. Grant, a former student at Fourah Bay and a school teacher at the time of the 1977 demonstration, was one of the fifteen who won a seat in Parliament on the SLPP ticket. He was a popular candidate among those tired of the Stevens regime. As part of the government's intimidation of

20 Trye interview; emphasis in original.

21 Trye interview.

opposition candidates police fired guns at the polling station and even tried to seize the ballot boxes. But Grant's supporters "fought with the police, seized some guns from them. Somehow we were able to get those boxes into the counting station and were able to guard them. That's why I say it [his election] was a miracle." But the next year Grant agreed to switch to APC rather than resigning when the one-party law passed. He was rewarded with the post of deputy minister of finance. (He ran again in 1982 and was reelected; Stevens appointed him minister of education from 1982-86.) Grant explained his decision to switch parties rather than resign:

> The SLPP group was of the opinion that democracy will never return to this country again and they felt if we [SLPP-elected MPs] were there, we'd be able to secure their interests. Selfishness of human beings; that was the point. Nobody wants to lose. But I would have thought the best thing we could have done was to have quit Parliament and go into a private life. But that didn't happen. They instructed us to stay. So all of us, including our leader, stayed.[22]

### Civil Society Fails to Support Protesting Students

The student-led resistance of 1977 expanded more rapidly than its leaders had anticipated. The nationwide student uprising that spread from the Fourah Bay campus and the temporary detention of the student president followed by his release to negotiate with the head of state alongside other student leaders was impressive. But there was no planning on how to consolidate those gains other than to leverage an election and hope for a credible opposition in Parliament. There were formidable obstacles to further success, not just the emasculation of opposition victories in Parliament despite popular support. "It was the students who made a name, but there were a lot of people underneath who supported the students, or else you wouldn't have gotten anywhere. It was a mass movement."[23] But participants in mass movements can grow weary or be drawn back to routines by their normal interests (Tarrow 1998, chap. 9).

Although the student protests went on around the country for several weeks, the promise of elections – and upcoming national student exams – took the steam out of the resistance. Unfortunately for the students,

22 Emmanuel Grant, in an interview with the author, December 12, 2008, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

23 Grant interview.

their unorganized mass support had not been enough. Key civil society organizations that might have tilted the balance of power away from the government and offered strategic and political leverage and experience that might have led to a different outcome had stood on the sidelines. Labor was the main holdout. Accounts differ on the reasons, but the most widely cited explanation is that they had been co-opted by Stevens, an acknowledged master at the art. "Political activism by the labour movement was silenced through co-optation of labor leaders during the 1977 student crisis, and then crushed in the wake of the 1981 labor unrest" (Kandeh 2004b, 177). Stevens had come up through the labor ranks himself; he and his party had "deep networks in the labor movement." Stevens also warned the professional class by radio that their businesses were likely targets if the protests "spiraled out of control" (Rashid 2013).

Tejan Kassim, a labor movement official then, confirmed that labor did not support the student uprising. But, he countered, this was due in part to lack of unity among the students. He cited support for the government among the Limba, an ethnic group Stevens used to help break a labor strike in 1981. Kassim added that when police started shooting at the students in 1977, the Labour Congress issued a statement against that.[24] Trye, looking back on his perspective as the Fourah Bay student president at the time of the demonstrations, argued that it was not just labor that failed to support the students. "The doctors, the professionals are not [consistent in resistance efforts]. The labor union – they've always been bought over. Personal interests. You know Siaka knew them. Stevens played on the vulnerability of the human being. So they were vulnerable – to material things."[25]

Women, who had been active politically in the 1940s and 1950s, retreated into social organizations in the 1970s due to the extreme violence against critics by the Stevens regime, according to Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, a prominent human rights attorney.[26] (Women's organizations would reemerge in the 1990s in a major push for peace and a civilian government to replace a military junta.) In 1981, when the labor movement finally did stage a strike in the face of worsening economic conditions, it was the students who failed to turn out to support them. Though labor leader Kassim noted that students stayed home

24 Tejan Kassim,in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Kassim was general secretary of the Artisans, Public Works, and Services Employees Union at the time of the interview, a post he had been elected to in 1972.

25 Trye interview. Gberie (2013) notes: "Trade unions, professional organizations, are not normally expected to follow students."

26 Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009. At the time, she was deputy chair of Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, a government agency.

from classes, this was more likely because the teachers on strike were not in their classrooms. Some Sierra Leonean former activists speculated that either students were still resentful for lack of labor's support for the 1977 student demonstrations, or they had lost some of their former steam for resistance. But by the mid-1980s, students at Fourah Bay College had reenergized under the leadership of their student president, Alie Kabba, whose story is related below.

As in Kenya and Liberia, the bar association often was not active as an organization to defend human rights, leaving human rights attorneys to act individually in defending political dissidents or making other legal challenges to the regime. This was another example of individual activism that becomes part of an attempted social movement as seen in the broader definition of a movement used in this book. In the 1970s the Sierra Leone Bar was sidelined by co-optation by Stevens. "[It] had been in the forefront of leading demonstrations against Stevens. Lawyers are on record here of having downed their tools on a number of occasions and having led marches up to state house to meet Stevens and make demands … in the 70s." But then the Bar was compromised by appointment of its president or other senior members to government posts, says attorney Abdul Tejan-Cole. "So as a result of that it ended up making the bar association a little more impotent. The bar ended up condoning what was going on [regarding repression of human rights]." When Tejan-Cole became president of the Bar Association, he issued an apology for the association's failure to act as an organization. Some individual attorneys were active in defending human rights, but their impact was minimized by failure of the Bar Association to support them.[27]

Teachers also stayed on the sidelines in 1977. So did most leaders of the clergy, Christian and Moslem who "had always been on the conservative side, and allied to ruling governments"[28]. In Kenya, a handful of clergy spoke out boldly against the repression of President Daniel arap Moi in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In Liberia, Catholic Archbishop Rev. Father Michael Kpakala Francis was one of the most courageous vocal critics of both Samuel Doe and Charles Taylor. In Sierra Leone, few clergy spoke out against Stevens; the rest were either afraid to do so or supported him.

> At that point in time the whole country was an one-party state. If you said anything here, people were arrested for what they called "careless talk." More often than not, they [clergy] would resort to Romans chapter

27 Abdul Tejan-Cole, in an interview with the author, February 24, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

28 Ismail Rashid, in an email to the author, December 15, 2013.

> 13 which speaks about … render to Caesar the things that are Caesar … But to come up at that particular point in time, as it were, to say: "Mr. President. We totally condemn what you are doing" – it did not happen in the strict sense of the word. [29]

## Phase II: Political Shape Shift: A "War" of Words

The narrow courtyard leading into Stop Press café is unremarkable and easy to overlook from the busy downtown street lined with angle-parked cars along a sidewalk overflowing with people, some of them working or studying at an adjacent university building. Young men hawking CDs or other items know the café well and approach clients seated in the small outdoor section in front of the indoor kitchen, sometimes venturing to the upstairs dining room, an unpretentious space with plain tables and a basic but tasty menu of rice, meats, and vegetables.

If you don't know the faces, it looks like any other café, though the spirited talk hints at something more. Stop Press is more than it first appears: it is not just a place to eat; it is an unofficial political gathering spot, mostly for supporters of the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP). The SLPP is a former archrival of Siaka Stevens' All People's Congress (APC), a rivalry that continues today with a new cast of politicians. At midday, history and the present mingle. Young attorneys in suits, other young professionals – men and women – and professors, settle in at tables in the cramped outdoor section. Look closer and on most days, if you know the faces, you can spot political activists, journalists, former student protest leaders and others from the turbulent Siaka Stevens era, survivors of those repressive years. One day, according to one of the regulars, President Ernest Bai Koroma of the APC party dropped in, perhaps for the food, but more likely as a friendly gesture to SLPP stalwarts. The café is run and owned by Pios Foray, who graduated in the turbulent year of 1977 from Fourah Bay College. He

29 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Humper, Retired Bishop Emeritus of the United Methodist Church, of which Stevens was a member, in an interview with the author, April 20, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Humper served as president of the Inter-Religious Council of Churches and as chairman of the post-civil war Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone. In spite of the possible consequences, he added, "to some extent, the late S.M. Renner spoke out; the late Dr. M.N.C.O. Scott of the Anglican Church spoke out," as well as Bishop Michael Kelly of Bo; and the late T.K. Davies of the Pentecostal church from 1971-78. He did not specify when they criticized the government. Some clergy were more direct in their criticism of the military junta that seized power in 1992, he added.

and three other activists in December that year launched *The Tablet*, an opposition newspaper that became the extension of the resistance started with the student protests earlier in the year.[30]

One might ask: how can a newspaper be the focus of a resistance? The usual, Western-based definitions of social movements are hard-pressed to answer the question. The typical focus is on organizations that assemble people for protests, though many social movement scholars do recognize the concept of process, not just organizations. The more flexible conceptualization of social movements offered in this book takes a less narcissistic or self-observing approach to movements than usual, focusing less on the mechanics of a movement and more on the purpose and the way the targeted authorities view the various kinds of resistance a movement can encompass. Under this approach it makes good sense to focus on *The Tablet.* It had the same purpose as the demonstrations – to bring about fundamental political change in Sierra Leone through public challenges to the authorities, in this case through risky institutional channels. The regime was not very friendly to critical journalism.[31]

*The Tablet* was inextricably linked to the student protests and resistance at Fourah Bay.

"Radical student leaders became radical journalists with the launching of the *Tablet* newspaper" (Rashid 2004, 77). *The Tablet* was tightly linked to Fourah Bay College and a clear extension of the social movement the students attempted to start. "For the population it [*The Tablet*] was a continuation of the student strike. They knew that."[32] Both Pios Foray and Frank Kposowa, two of the four founders of *The Tablet,* graduated from Fourah Bay in 1977, the year of the student-led national protest movement. Foray considered Fourah Bay faculty member Cleo Hanciles, a supporter of the student protests, as his mentor, along with a journalist from the 1960s, I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson.[33] Hindolo Trye, student president in 1977, later wrote for

30 The other three founders of *The Tablet*, according to Pios Foray and his brother John Foray were: Charlie Kallon, Lamine Warrity, and Frank Kposowa. Olu Gordon and I.B. Kargbo became key contributors. (Kposowa names Hindolo Trye, former Student Union president at Fourah Bay in 1977 as a founder.)

31 Rashid (2013) notes that the APC's own newspaper, *We Yone*, had been a powerful tool against SLPP in the 1960s and 1970s.

32 Trye interview.

33 It is interesting how each generation of activists took models from the previous one. Abdul Dimoh Kposowa, for example, who led a 1977 demonstration at his secondary school considered as his role models Pios Foray, Hindolo Trye, I.B. Kargbo, and his relative Frank Kposowa. "They were guys I admired. They were eloquent speakers." In an interview with the author, December 1, 2008 in Freetown, he recalled a phrase they often used: "The Struggle will continue."

the newspaper. So did *Tablet* contributor Olu Gordon who was expelled from Fourah Bay along with faculty colleagues Hanciles and Jimmy Kandeh in 1985 along with forty-one students after another major student demonstration. "[A]ll three were deemed friendly with students" (Rashid 2004, 81). "With the start of *The Tablet*, "the student opposition just took another direction."[34] It was more than an opposition newspaper in an era when there was no opposition press. It was the voice of the resistance, of dissent at the time. Like the *Nairobi Law Monthly* in Kenya in the late 1980s and early 1990s, *The Tablet* became a kind of rallying point for the intellectual class. Some of the professors, the lecturers at Fourah Bay College, contributed to the newspaper.'[35] Their aim was the same: bring about a political opening of a fossilized, nepotistic system that was blocking economic progress and denying human rights. *The Tablet* lasted until 1981 when the government dynamited its press in downtown Freetown.

While one can still find copies of *The Tablet* in a monitored reading room in the library at Fourah Bay College, the best place to start tracking down its founders and key contributors is at Stop Press café. Most days founder Pios Foray is sitting, often with friends, at his usual table with his back to the kitchen, facing the rest of the patio from where he can keep an eye on business. My interview with him took place at this post. He continued to greet people as they arrived or left.

"We were radical, young idealists. We grew out of a liberal background. We thought we were the national conscience. I used the system to beat the system."[36] Foray said they found two printers, John Love and Ina McCarthy, who were willing to ignore government warnings against *The Tablet*. The paper tried to establish itself as a reasoned voice of the opposition, though from time to time their critical articles landed the staff in detention or forced them to hide. At one point he was ordered to appear at Parliament and faced charges of contempt for an article the newspaper had published which offended an appointed member of Parliament, Major-General Joseph Momoh, who was also the head of the Republic of Sierra Leone Military Forces and later to be named president by Stevens. "There was a *huge state of tension* in town. We had a large number of followers. We went with those

34 Davies interview.

35 I.B. Kargbo, in an interview with the author, April 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Kargbo, who wrote for *The Tablet*, was minister of information and communication in the APC government of President Ernest Bai Koroma.

36 Pios Foray, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009, at Stop Press café in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

to Parliament."[37] Foray successfully defended himself and was given "a hero's applause" by supporters. He and Hindolo Trye later fled into exile in the United States "as a result of the APC's repressive tactics" (Rashid 2004, p 88, n. 12).

Could they have been even a stronger voice for change? Independent journalist Paul Kamara, winner of the Train Foundation (New York) Civil Courage award for "steadfast resistance to evil at great personal risk," thinks so. "The SLPP (the main opposition party to Stevens APC) decided to transform themselves into the printing press of *The Tablet* newspaper." Kamara contends *The Tablet* was co-opted to some extent by allowing a close and wealthy ally of President Stevens to furnish them with a printing press and vehicles, a "compromise of principles" of independent journalism. "Then when the newspaper opposed [the regime], the system came for them." The press was blown up, no doubt at government orders, in 1981, according to Kamara.[38] Foray acknowledged that things "went haywire" after the press was provided in 1979 by a backer of the president, Jamil Sahid Mohammed, who was also an entrepreneur. He did not explain further.

**The Cost of Resisting Repression with Words**

As a foreign correspondent in Africa, I encountered many courageous people who stood up for freedom in one way or another, often through their profession, especially lawyers and journalists. Their work was much more dangerous than mine. Periodically over a five-year period, I covered the civil wars in Somalia, Sudan, and part of Rwanda, among other stories. But we foreign journalists would fly back to our base in Nairobi, Kenya, leaving the danger behind. Once while in Khartoum, capital of Sudan, in the Arab-controlled north, a local paper published a recent story I had written based on my visit to a rebel-held town in the south of the country. I was not harassed by the government, though later I learned state security agents were questioning my activities. In one rebel-occupied town in southern Sudan I was briefly held under "arrest" by a local commander for having interviewed the unhappy local chief who resented the takeover of his area by southern rebels from a larger ethnic group. My wife, photographer Betty

37 Kargbo interview.

38 Paul Kamara, in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, on the flat roof of his *For Di People* newspaper office in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Kamara established *For di People* as an independent newspaper in the early 1980s and maintained a strong critical approach toward all regimes for several decades. Kamara was still its editor when I interviewed him in 2009.

Press, and I were arrested by the military at gunpoint and held (unharmed) for two days in Uganda for visiting a rebel-held area. Yet our escape routes from danger as journalists were usually as close as the nearest international airport. Local journalists in Africa, however, who persistently exposed wrong doing by repressive regimes, were never that safe. For them the exit door sometimes led to detention, or worse.

In Sierra Leone, Kenya, and Liberia, I met and interviewed numerous journalists who had been mistreated by their government or forced to flee their homeland. In Sierra Leone, "[t]hroughout the 1970s the media was constantly harassed sometimes by over enthusiastic APC supporters. In addition, there were draconian press laws which hampered the work of journalists" (Alie 2006, 97). If President Siaka Steven could not co-opt someone he considered a risk to his power, he could be violent. By the time *The Tablet* was launched in late 1977, Stevens had already engineered the pseudo-legal executions of a number of his political foes. Interviewing surviving activists from that time it is easy to overlook what some of them risked to be a part of the nonviolent resistance to the Stevens regime. Two journalists for *The Tablet* illustrate the cost some activist journalists paid.

**Refusing to Flee**

*Frank Kposowa*, a co-founder and editor of *The Tablet,* met me in the members lounge in Parliament, a place he once covered as a journalist some three decades before being elected as a member of Parliament. The building sits atop a small hill in the midst of sprawling office buildings in downtown Freetown. It was here that members had voted the will of Stevens, wiping out temporary opposition gains by the SLPP in the elections students had helped force with their demonstrations in 1977, returning the country to one-party rule. It was here that hand-picked leaders of various organizations were seated as members in Stevens' efforts to co-opt any potential bases of power against him: the military, the bar association, labor. Bring them in; make them feel needed; give them prestige: take away their critical voices.

As we huddled together at a table on the side of the members lounge, Kposowa would suddenly stop talking when someone walked by in earshot, at one point for a long time. Was this a carryover from his heady days as an opposition journalist before he was elected to Parliament? He pointed to his still-visible facial scars that came from torture following one of his many arrests for his work with *The Tablet*. During those years under Stevens, "everybody was afraid. This was the time when you make your will before speaking" he says, laughing. "You could be in detention for one month, after

which you advise yourself not to talk again. Then he [Stevens] would give you a job," a typical Stevens response to potential challengers to his power.

> At that time we were really very radical. We had no respect for ethics. I'm being honest. We went raw. To make an impact on somebody's life style, you have to speak in the language he understands. We didn't have guns. We carried on the [struggle on the] front page of our paper: "The use of words is a choice of arms."[39]

His arrest and torture came as a result of an article which apparently touched a nerve with Stevens. Kposowa criticized the president's plans to host an annual summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1980. The summit preparations would involve considerable expenses at a time when the country's economy was already bad. On another occasion he was detained for an article he had written critical of the government as part of his "Ears to the Ground" column. "He was beaten up very seriously. He was admitted to hospital," I.B. Kargbo, another writer for *The Tablet* at the time, recalled in a separate interview.

Why did Kposowa persist? "We were young and radical. Wherever we went we were hailed; people were giving us money. They called our name" he said. This seemed a rather vain reason for risking his life. But while acknowledging that the fame and money were certainly attractive, later in the interview he offered a deeper insight on his opposing repression. When a brutal rebel group naming itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) seized power in 1997, Kposowa was president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). The AFRC was practically at war with independent journalists. He considered fleeing the country.

> Sometimes I get very emotional. And it was the morality of it all. Here I was: elected by a professional association to provide leadership and I was afraid. Here were journalists, my own people, fanning flames of civil disobedience … to oust perpetrators of human misery. I had an opportunity to leave this country. I did take that decision one time. But half way, I burst into tears. I said: this could be interpreted as deep betrayal [of my profession]. And these boys are holding out … For me to turn my back on them – it was one of the few moments when I was actually emasculated. I said I cannot [leave]; I turned back: I must be with them.

39 Frank Kposowa, in an interview with the author, April 15, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

> And because of that, once civilian rule was restored and my term had ended, they [fellow journalists] voted me [president of SLAJ] again.[40]

## Independent Journalist Escapes Arrest by Jumping out a Window; Press Dynamited

*I.B. Kargbo.* In my interview with him, Minister Kargbo spoke distinctly and slowly as if carefully measuring his words, perhaps a habit developed as the official spokesman for the government, perhaps to recall with detail his political resistance some thirty years earlier. During the interview he put off numerous attempts by others to reach him by cell phone. It was something that happened often in such interviews. Former activists seemed very keen on telling their story. I often got the distinct impression that no one had previously asked them to recount it in any detail. In Kenya, for example, Paul Muite, a leading human rights attorney generously agreed to one, then a second lengthy interview, later saying it was the first time he had ever reflected on his activism in any great detail. He asked for a copy of the transcript which I provided.

At one point early in the interview Kargbo closed his eyes and recalled the "near absence of people to agitate for political and human rights" in the late 1970s and 1980s under Siaka Stevens. He analyzed both the 1977 student demonstrations and the 1981 labor strike, calling both of them "unsustainable." He argued that neither the students" nor the labor unions had a sustainable project. The old guard in the labor movement did not support the students in 1977, he said, because they still saw President Stevens as a "comrade." Stevens had come up through the labor movement. Then students didn't support labor's strike in 1981 because the student union had "lost its teeth" and its Maoist and other radical "ideology" by then.

> [The students] didn't provide any positive results. So some people did not want to take the risk of associating themselves with a non-sustainable movement. The military was clearly against it – the student uprising. The military was firmly behind Siaka Stevens. The police were firmly behind Siaka Stevens. They [the students] did not have a structured system that can keep their programs and policies intact on a sustainable basis. And this is why you have these gaps there. And the workers, too; it's the same

40 Kposowa interview.

> thing. This was not helped either by the fact that later the government decided to recruit some of these people into government.[41]

(Perhaps it should not be surprising, but it is interesting how numerous anti-regime activists in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Liberia, ended up in high government posts. In Sierra Leone when I interviewed her, Zainab Bangura, who helped lead a women's movement for peace and democracy in the mid-1990s, she was minister of foreign affairs. Trye was minister of tourism; and another former key *Tablet* contributor, Kargbo was minister of information and communication, both in an APC government, the same party they had opposed in their activist days.)

By 1979 *The Tablet,* Kargbo continued, "became a full blown organ for promoting human rights issues. People relied on it to come up with alternative views on state governance." While officially tolerated by the Stevens regime, sometimes just reading it could be a problem in some parts of the country. Marian Samu, for example, was arrested in Bo in 1981 because she had a copy of *The Tablet*. She was detained for two weeks for possession of "subversive" documents. Undeterred, the arrest spurred her interest in journalism – and politics. She began helping gather information for the newspaper. In 1991 she was vice president of the student union at Njala University and participated in a demonstration on the main road near Njala campus in 1991.[42] When I told Kargbo I had read some copies of *The Tablet* and found them surprisingly unremarkable, uncritical, and rather bland, he responded:

> The one-party state at the time did not provide much room for [an] effective opposition. And at the same time, we did not want to appear to be an anti-state instrument. So there was this neat balance that was most sincerely to insure that the people were informed properly and also insure that the government was put on its toes to promote at least some aspects of good governance; and the newspaper also exposed … any irregularities in the running of the state.

This attempt at a middle ground was precarious. While Kargbo said President Stevens at times called on *The Tablet* for advice, even soliciting names of people for a new government whom he then appointed, articles critical of the government got writers into trouble. At one point the newspaper

41 Kargbo interview.

42 Marian Samu, in an interview with the author, January 23, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone

published an article critical of the wife of a minister. The article was based on what the editors and a reporter thought was solid information, but it turned out to have been false. "Somebody set us up," Kargbo said. On another occasion, the paper's support of the 1981 labor strike was the breaking point in its tenuous relations with the government.

> I wrote an article: "The Lessons of August 13 [1981]" on all the weaknesses of the government, the disappointments, the un-adherence to the promise made [to labor] by the President. And of course that also contributed to the intensification of the uprising. The workers became even bolder than before until Siaka Stevens declared a state of emergency. The same night, the police invaded my premises. I jumped out of the window. I could not [get] access to my car. I was lucky: I saw a very brave taxi driver, all by himself. Everybody else was at home. I flagged him down and he gave me a lift to the center of town. I actually did go to the newspaper to see the level [to which] it had been vandalized.

Kargbo was found and arrested the next day. He was detained for forty days along with most of the key labor union leaders. Pios Foray and Trye fled into exile; Frank Kposowa stayed in Sierra Leone but fled to Makeni. That same week, *The Tablet's* presses in downtown Freetown were blown up. It is widely assumed the government was responsible.

The second phase of the resistance started by students at Fourah Bay College had ended. A third phase had already begun. Students continued demonstrations throughout the 1980s and to a lesser extent into the 1990s at which time two other social movements emerged to challenge two military juntas that deprived people of both their human rights and their longing for a democracy that might also improve economic conditions and provide a life for people.

Kargbo illustrates how some who engage in nonviolent resistance in one forum (as a student leader) can continue to resist in another (*The Tablet* newspaper); and, in this case, how some survive to later join governments after a repressive regime has been replaced.

## Phase III: Radical Activism: From Seeking Regime Reform to Regime Change

The period of 1980-92 saw several major political changes with students continuing the resistance begun in 1977 through organized protests using a variety of tactics, both violent and nonviolent. Others turned to a more

radical option: taking training in Libya on how to start a revolution. In 1980, Stevens generated more antagonism by hosting the expensive summit of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) at a time when the economy was deteriorating. "This activity was perhaps the most important single factor that precipitated the rapid collapse of the economy" (Alie 2006, 107). Students organized a campus strike in protest of the conference but it was ignored by the government.[43] As noted previously, in 1981 labor organized a national strike; teachers also struck. The strike was quickly put down through a variety of tactics by Stevens, but it represented a growing public resentment to the way Stevens was governing the nation. It was also a sharp contrast to labor's docile failure in 1977 to support the nationwide student strike. In the 1982 elections, an opponent of the government was killed in the Pujehun District near the Liberian border. In response, some residents organized a "campaign of defiance known as Ndogboyosoi ("bush devil"). The APC responded brutally, and thousands of peasant families were uprooted from their homes" (Keen 2005, 18).

Stevens, previously seen as the master of the game of control, appeared to be unable to prevent eruptions of resistance from various segments of society, especially from students. Unlike hierarchical organizations such as the Labour Congress or the Bar Association, or even the military, where he could wield his co-optation wand, awarding leaders with seats in Parliament, Stevens was unable to control students. Despite government supporters among the students, and despite the threats and use of violence to quell demonstrations, Stevens, and later President Momoh, never managed to fully quell students' social push for change. In 1984 there was a major student demonstration in Freetown in reaction to the ambiguity by Stevens about whether he would like to be a president for life. "Over 2,000 college students and urban youth took to the streets carrying placards which condemned the president's apparent plans for life presidency. The demonstrators stormed City Hall in Freetown and disrupted the ongoing APC summit" (Rashid 2004, 80). While some of the student organizers of demonstrations had larger goals than campus reform and wanted to see Stevens gone, they were not able to mount the kind of national protest that university and secondary school students had carried out in 1977. They made one last major attempt, under new student leadership and amidst a growing radicalization of students at Fourah Bay College. Olu Gordon, who graduated from Fourah Bay in the 1979 and was a lecturer there in the

43 *The Tablet*, February 20, 1980, cited in Rashid (2004, 78).

1980s, compared the intellectual atmosphere among students in 1977 to that of the mid-1980s.

> They were very radical [in the mid-1980s]. There was a high degree of socialist influence which was lacking in our time. We [in the 1970s] were familiar with Mao and Marx and what have you, but [there was] no considered ideological direction. But by '85 that had changed [with] a lot of student groups – you had the socialists on campus; Green Book [of Libya's Gaddafi]; you had the Pan-Africanist groups; you had [North Korea's] Kim IL Sung study groups. You had a lot of ideological groups on campus.[44]

At a time when the regime appears to have been convinced that ethnic and political divisions among students at Fourah Bay College – no doubt encouraged by the regime – prevented student unity, students rendered the government a surprise. Alie Kabba was elected student president – unopposed – in 1985. Considered a radical, Kabba had already started taking training in Libya on how to start a revolution. His election was an indication of the united determination of the students to seek bold leadership to oppose a corrupt, failing regime. In an interview, Kabba reflected on his thinking at the time.

> '85 was the crystallization of forces working for change. I felt anytime we could affect deep change. The one party dictatorship looked very vulnerable at the time. The economy was going downhill. We thought that was the time for us to go for it. I was pointing the finger at the President. We needed an end [to Stevens]. We must organize to transform – basically regime change.[45]

The "frame" for his message was *not regime reform but regime change*. Kabba points out that where the 1977 demonstrations were initially planned, the spread to secondary schools was not, a point that even then-president of the student union Hindolo Trye makes. By contrast, according to Kabba, a lot of planning went into the 1985 demonstrations. Communications had previously been established with student leaders at other campuses around the country, in particular at Njala University near Bo, and at Kenema. Kabba and others then made contact with secondary school student leaders, building

44 Gordon interview.

45 Alie Kabba, in a telephone interview from Chicago with the author, October 11, 2012.

on their involvement in 1977. Kabba's team did not make contact with the labor unions; something he acknowledges was a mistake. "We planned mass civil disobedience: go straight to the State House and launch the first in a series of mass protests, not just in Freetown [but nationwide]."

But the nationwide demonstration never happened. Before it could occur, the Stevens regime responded to what they perceived as a growing militancy on campus and possible links to Libya under Kabba's leadership. State Security Division personnel "raided the campus brutalizing and forcibly removing students staying on campus. The incident led to a citywide demonstration." The University student leadership, including Kabba, was declared ineligible to re-register. After a subsequent protest demonstration on campus, which included burning a Mercedes Benz belonging to the vice-principal, Cyril Foray, protests continued in the city where students were joined by local youth (Rashid 2004, 81). "It became more than a student action [and] lasted about a week. Siaka Stevens flew to the military barracks from Freetown. Some thought the military would take advantage [of the unrest and stage a coup] … We had 1,000s [demonstrating]. We took over the city."[46]

Gordon recalled the protest. "They [the protestors] shut down the town. The minute the students came downtown the police tried to stop them. There was tear gas all over the place. And if you are walking around you could get shot."[47] The University later expelled Kabba and three lecturers: Gordon, Jimmy Kandeh, and Cleo Hanciles. Student demonstrations continued into the 1990s. In 1985, Stevens stepped down, orchestrating his replacement by his loyal head of the army Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh. According to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission final report (2002):

> Momoh, attempted to decelerate the economic and political decline through the promulgation of an economic state of emergency and a multiparty constitution. These measures were, however, managed in a dictatorial and abusive fashion, which rendered them "too little, too late" to salvage the situation. Against this backdrop, Sierra Leoneans became increasingly disgruntled and aggrieved with the malaise in governance and their inability to do anything to alleviate it. Many citizens, particularly the poor, marginalised youths of the provinces, became open to

46 Kabba interview.
47 Gordon interview.

> radical means of effecting change: they would readily answer the call to arms when the so-called revolution began to enter the country in 1991.

Students generally gave Momoh a two-year "honeymoon," but by 1987 resumed their protests and demands for multiparty government with a major demonstration. There was an effort to keep the protests nonviolent. "We had organized a 'police' force to keep it nonviolent." But students reacted to violence against them from the government. "By the time Momoh came to power we knew how to make firebombs. When police fired tear gas, students threw teargas back."[48] In a meeting in 1990 with President Momoh, the Vice Chancellor of Fourah Bay College Cyril Foray, and others, Abdulai Wai, student president at Njala University, delivered a letter from students calling for a constitutional change for multiparty elections. Momoh argued for continuing a one-party system. "He [Momoh] called us all kinds of names. He was furious. After his rage, Foray raised his hand and supported multiparty. The moment CP spoke, everything was calm. The following week, Momoh formed a national commission to study switching to a multiparty system of elections."[49] The following year, however, the APC Secretary General announced there would be a one-party election in 1991; that multiparty would be put off for five years.[50] Students at Njala University staged a demonstration in favor of multiparty democracy. Students at Fourah Bay College held their own protest for multiparty elections, as Hindowa Momoh recalls:

> We marched down the hill. But we could not even get there. The police arrived at the bridge [on the way downtown from Fourah Bay College]. We call that bridge "Solidarity Bridge." We had stones; and they had guns. We had eight [white] students [from Kalamazoo, Michigan]. We used them as shields. [He said the American students had agreed to that.] We were tear-gassed; there were wounded students.[51]

48 Kalilu Totangi, in an interview with the author, February 11, 2009, at Stop Press café in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Totangi was President of the Student Union at Njala University, 1993-94.

49 Abdulai Wai, in an interview with the author, January 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Rashid (2013) adds that this led to a "nationwide consultation process which led to the writing of the 1991 [multiparty] constitution. Ironically, the war started in the middle of this process."

50 Wai interview.

51 Hindowa Momoh, in an interview with the author, January 23, 2009, in Freetown Sierra Leone. Momoh, a lecturer in public administration at the time of the interview, was president of the National Union of Sierra Leone Students, 1993-94.

In 1991, shortly after the start of the civil war, Momoh finally agreed to multiparty elections. By then, the "winds of change," a popular phrase in many countries in the early 1990s, were blowing across sub-Saharan Africa in favor of democracy and human rights. A post-Cold War West was finally showing genuine interest in both. In some African countries, especially Kenya, where Smith Hempstone was the US ambassador, the US was pushing for change. Some former student leaders in Sierra Leone credited student pressure plus domestic pressure for forcing Momoh's hand. "In my opinion, domestic [pressure for multiparty] was more important [than international pressure]. Anarchy prevailed."[52]

**Training for Revolution**

When a regime uses enough repression, it may be able to halt open nonviolent resistance, but it runs the risk of driving it underground. To some extent that is what happened in Sierra Leone. The failure of key segments of the still-weak civil society to support the student protest of 1977; the 1981 dynamiting of *The Tablet* printing press and retaliation against its writers and editors; and the repressive crackdown on student activism at Fourah Bay in the mid-1980s, left student activists with a choice: keep trying various nonviolent resistance tactics, or turn to violent means of wresting change from an intransigent regime. Those opting for continuing nonviolent resistance, extending the 1977 resistance further, had engaged in a series of student-led demonstrations. But having seen the failure of the student movement to win lasting political change, some students and others began exploring alternatives, including revolutionary training in Libya and war. It is beyond the scope of this book to examine in any detail either of these paths. The war, especially, has been well-documented and analyzed by others (e.g., Richards 1996; Abdullah 2004; Kandeh 2004a, b; Gberie 2005; Keen 2005). Of note is the argument of Bolten (2009, 350) on the motives of student activists at this time.

> I argue … that regime change was the goal only insofar as the regime in power attempted to limit, dictate, co-opt or crush the intelligentsia; and students with democratic political ideologies could not thrive under these circumstances. In essence, students acted because, in order to benefit from their education, they needed a government that valued the

52 Momoh interview.

intelligentsia, rather than one of rigid nepotistic structures to which an educated class served only as a threat.

Although this study does not include an analysis of the war, it does examine in subsequent chapters the nonviolent resistance by civilians, mostly in Freetown, to two military juntas that seized power during the war: one in 1992, the second (which included a coalition with the rebels) in 1997. For the moment, because it shows the kind of fallout that may occur after a mostly nonviolent resistance fails to achieve its primary goals, it is worth looking briefly at the ventures of two Fourah Bay activist students' involvement with the Libya training. Several other Sierra Leoneans, led by Foday Sankoh with encouragement and cooperation from Liberian rebel leader Charles Taylor, launched a civil war in 1991 which officially ended in January 2002.

*Gibril Foday-Musa.* We sat on the balcony of a modern apartment that my wife and I had rented with a distant view of the ocean, in the Hill Station section of Freetown. It is a neighborhood of mostly colonial-era wooden homes on high posts built to catch the breeze and minimize attacks by mosquitoes in this rain-drenched coastal country. Gibril Foday-Musa, wearing a T-shirt, cutoff jeans, and a hat inscribed "Che Guevara," seemed dressed to suit his accounts of how some students became radicals in the late 1970s and early 1980s. But his hat offered no clue to his nickname: "Gaddafi." In 1989, after revolutionary training in Libya, he had brazenly crossed back into Sierra Leone at an official border post wearing a track suit with thousands of dollars hidden in his clothing. He was on a daring mission: hire recruits to help start an armed overthrow of the government.

There was a direct link from the student demonstrations at Fourah Bay and the audacious plans of that young man. In 1977, when university students sparked the nationwide protests that challenged the one-party state, Gibril was in secondary school in Bo, where he joined in the protest which had spread there. Four years later he arrived as a student at Fourah Bay with his still-developing spirit of rebellion. With the limited student political gains of 1977 in mind, he began reading radical literature by Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi and Thomas Sankara of Burkina Faso. Sankara's charisma and revolutionary rhetoric inspired a generation or more of idealistic African youth.[53] At Fourah Bay his yearning for freedom

53 After only four years in power, Sankara was gunned down in 1987 by troops loyal to his supposed friend, Blaise Compaoré who succeeded him as president, bringing an end to Sankara's revolutionary government.

from the repressive Stevens rule was further kindled by faculty members such as Gordon, Hanciles, and Kandeh, who were eventually fired for being independent thinkers at a time when the regime wouldn't tolerate dissent.

> In 1981 I came to the University and at the University we witnessed a whole lot of problems with the government of Siaka Stevens. We started advocating not only for freedom of the press, we started advocating for a regime change … That was also the period of the Cold War. The University was a fertile ground for the international community. The Americans were coming. The North Koreans were coming. The South Koreans were coming. The Libyans were also there. Even the Russians were there, recruiting sets of students.[54]

Gibril began studying *The Green Book* of Gaddafi, a pursuit that earned him the nickname, "Gaddafi." He accepted a Libyan offer to visit. On one of what would become numerous trips to Libya, he was part of a group of about thirty to thirty-five people, including perhaps ten university students. Gibril began regular travel to Libya. At one point he took military training in the Libyan desert. Commenting on this training, he expounded,

> It was serious military training. Six months commando training … We wanted a revolution – we wanted to fight. Because after the demonstration [in 1977 at Fourah Bay College] when they [the government] shattered us, we decided to say: "No: the next time we demonstrate we need to get our own guns.[55]

At that time, Libya was supporting revolutionary fever in various parts of the world, including Burkina Faso, Liberia, and Sierra Leone. The US considered Gaddafi a terrorist. When it came his turn to host the annual summit meeting of the OAU in Tripoli, the US lobbied nations against attending. Stevens decided not to attend, "persuaded, no doubt by bribery rather than principle, to boycott the summit." After that, Gaddafi "spared no opportunity to embarrass and undermine the Sierra Leone government" (Gberie 2005, 49). Gibril began recruiting for the future revolution, slipping back into Sierra Leone and meeting in small groups with people who had been spotted in other venues as being critical of the government. It was a courageous endeavor in the police state of the time. "Yes, it was dangerous, but exciting, too. It

54 Gibril Foday-Musa, in an interview with the author, January 31, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

55 Foday-Musa interview.

was really exciting," he recalled. Among the would-be revolutionaries from Sierra Leone, some of whom had taken training in Libya, there was "a lot of in-fighting, a lot of suspicion" that spilled into the open in Ghana, a departure point for many of the trips to Libya. "People were developing bad blood because they thought Alie [Kabba] was becoming the darling of the Libyans. Alie was more charismatic than all of us. He was likeable, intelligent. I had trust in him." The split was mostly between the ideological and the military wings of the group, which had not yet chosen a name.[56]

One of the people in the meetings in Ghana was Foday Sankoh, son of a peasant farmer, who had a primary school education. He was a former, low-ranking member of the Sierra Leone Army and had been imprisoned 1971-78 on charges of involvement in an attempted military coup. "Sankoh *had nothing to do* with the Fourah Bay College student movement," Gibril stressed. After most of the other radicals had given up on plans for an armed revolution, however, Sankoh forged ahead, launching a civil war in 1991. "We wanted an intellectual revolution. Foday Sankoh was not [an intellectual]. We had a problem with [that] – a serious problem. And the Libyans were really not happy with the situation because they wanted us to launch immediately. They wanted us to fight immediately … We had a radical split with Sankoh himself over timing of the war." Sankoh wanted to start the war sooner than the others.

In the end, Gibril and his colleagues, except the few who went with Sankoh to launch the war, dispersed. While in Ghana Gibril completed his journalism training and returned to Sierra Leone in 1990. When the military seized power in 1992, he saw a chance at last to share his revolutionary ideas. It seemed the right moment and he was hopeful as he presented a junta contact with a twenty-page paper and was told it would be given to junta leader Valentine Strasser. He later saw signs they had adopted some of his key ideas but without attribution. "Without credit, without credit." He softly repeated the phrase a third time, "Without credit. I never would have wanted much – [very softly] credit." At this moment, on the ground, two stories below the balcony, a chicken's clucking was louder than his voice. After that, he added softly, his revolutionary spirit "went away." Today he lives in Freetown.[57]

Gibril Foday-Musa illustrates that sometimes fine line between nonviolent resistance and violent resistance. In his case, he prepared for a violent response to the repression in his country, but ultimately he backed away from that and later became a part of civil society again.

56 Foday-Musa interview.

57 Foday-Musa interview.

*Alie Kabba*. His name kept popping up in my interviews. Alie Kabba. Where was he, I asked, as I made my way around Freetown talking to men and women who had stood up to repressive regimes and lived to tell their story? Oh, he's in the US, one person said. Maybe Chicago. His name was mentioned when there was talk of the aftermath of the 1977 demonstrations; he was part of the next wave of idealists/radicals. There was never an exact term for student leaders who simply wanted an end to a seemingly endless one-man, one-party rule based on corruption, intimidation, and cronyism that would almost certainly block their own future employment – unless they joined the sticky web of collusion with the regime that had co-opted so many before them. Some professors from the college and a number of students, including Kabba, who was elected student president at Fourah Bay in 1984, found in Gaddafi's *Green Book* inspiration for the kind of change that was not taking place at home. Kabba explained the attraction.[58]

> We weren't interested in the loaves – we wanted to change the bakery; to get rid of Stevens. [Gaddafi had a] very, very appealing message of power to the people: organizing people to be their own champion. It was everything contrary to the one-party dictatorship. We had no space for civil society [at home]. Getting this popular message of grassroots [politics] – was refreshing. "Power to the masses." I was searching for ideas, not ideology. I was trying to come up with an idea that was Sierra Leonean. In the process I came up with "WeismGaddaf," an attempt on my part to create a philosophy – interconnectedness among people – one that sought to basically assert that my interest is intimately connected, and together we could strive with something uplifting … African communalism.[59]

Kabba was exposed to revolutionary doctrines and training in Libya. As president of the student union at Fourah Bay College he attempted to implement some of the concepts from Gaddafi's *Green Book.* This led to an armed and violent occupation of the campus by government's State Security Division in 1985, which in turn prompted a citywide demonstration by students and others. He went underground for a few weeks after the police detained his fellow student leaders. After police began looking for them

58 Kabba interview.

59 This is very close to the widely-quoted African proverb: "I am because we are; we are because I am," which is "attributed to South Africa. It speaks to the interconnectedness and responsibility that we have for each other. It embodies the concept of *Ubuntu*, the African idea of living harmoniously in community" (Betty Press 2011, 1).

and raided their homes, Kabba and several other student leaders, including Ismail Rashid boldly showed up at police headquarters. This took police by surprise. A deputy inspector arrived shortly with a detention order for Kabba signed by President Stevens in red ink.[60]

Kabba was held for several weeks then defended by a lawyer pro bono, the late Claude Campbell. At a time when the bar association was lying low, individual lawyers like Campbell and others stepped up to defend people the government wanted to silence. Upon his release he stayed in Freetown for a while but grew ever more suspicious of how far the government would go to silence himself. When he and some of his friends were mysteriously "invited" to meet with President Stevens at a military barracks some distance from Freetown, Kabba opted out. He was wise to do so. Armed security forces stopped his friends' vehicle on a lonely stretch of road and asked "Where is Alie Kabba." Shortly thereafter, his lawyer told him: "These people really want to kill you." He soon left the country out of concern for his personal safety.

After his trips to Ghana and Libya, however, Alie grew disillusioned with the idea of being able to organize a revolution in Sierra Leone. He and his co-conspirators had neither the forces, equipment, nor the funds to carry it out. He later thought of another option: "Build a broad-based coalition through civil protest – passive resistance, I still believe in it … tap into the energy of the masses … as a popular uprising." But with this plan, too, he realized "we didn't have the capacity … There was a danger of spontaneity that would not make systemic change." After completing his education in Ghana and later in Nigeria, he immigrated to the US.

His fire has not died out. "My past caught up with me. I thought I would not be interested in activism [anymore], but I started working for state of Illinois. That's when I discovered nonviolence. I'm not a Marxist anymore; I never really was." At the time of the interview Kabba was the executive director of the United African Organization, a Chicago-based coalition of African community-based organizations that promote social and economic justice, civic participation, and empowerment of African immigrants and refugees in Illinois. He is married and has two sons and two daughters.

Alie Kabba illustrates the dilemma a repressive ruler faces regarding popular nonviolent resistance: ignore it and it may undermine the regime's power; repress its leaders and they may turn to violence and even attempt a revolution.

60 Kabba interview. The others who had gone to the station voluntarily were not in student government and were not detained (Rashid 2013).

**Implications of an Informal Resistance**

In a repressive setting, open resistance led by small groups and individual activists is possible in the absence of more formally organized structures. During times when formal opposition organizations are considered too dangerous, small groups and individuals, operating more fluidly and informally, can mount a resistance movement when participants are impassioned enough by their cause to risk violent reprisals by the state. Identifying such movements requires a more flexible concept of resistance than much of the social movement literature presents. This kind of resistance can take place without apparent structural opportunities and with minimal material resources. Demonstrations, however, even large ones, are unlikely to achieve lasting reforms without well-organized plans on how to keep the pressure on a regime after the main demonstrations end, or how to replace the regime. Without effective alliances with other key sectors of society, an uprising – even a major one that seems to threaten the pillars of power of a repressive regime – is likely to fail. One generation's activism, however, can be a model for greater activism in the future, regardless of the success achieved, sometimes leading to a culture of resistance, as happened in Sierra Leone.

The resistance never fully developed into a social movement because of the repression and co-optation skills of the Stevens regime, and for lack of follow-through planning. But it had many of the hallmarks of a social movement, especially using the broader concept of a social movement developed in this book. In Sierra Leone, most of the political "opportunities" cited in much of the social movement literature were not present during the late 1970s and '80s. There was widespread unemployment; and the economy was worsening by 1977 when students at Fourah Bay College staged a major demonstration against the regime of Siaka Stevens. But this potential advantage was more than offset by the regime's record of repression. Instead, a small group of students created their own opportunity, seizing on a scheduled presidential visit to their campus to surprise him with placards and shouted demands for political reform. The protest quickly grew into a nationwide protest that spread to secondary schools and other colleges across the country.

Though it started peacefully, as police and government thugs attacked demonstrators, some students responded with Molotov cocktails and stones and damaged public property. The demonstrations temporarily crippled normal life in the country. The resistance took place before there was much in the way of an activist civil society. Repression and co-opting by the regime

had rendered key potential civil society players generally ineffective or unwilling to join the resistance. Students, one of the few organized bodies of potential activists, were somewhat divided along ethnic lines between supporters and opponents of the regime. Student organizers of the uprising had little time to forge a supporting alliance with labor, other professional groups, or women's organizations, an alliance some observers said might have toppled the regime. President Stevens did agree to student demands for a multiparty election to Parliament, but a year after the election he reneged and won passage of a law to change back to a one-party system.

This up and down momentum echoes Tarrow's theory of social movement cycles (1998). He describes a rise and fall phenomenon; in Sierra Leone, there were several in this period. After the peak of activism during the student demonstrations, the level of resistance changed – along with its shape. The focus of a second stage begun in late 1977 was several individuals who formed a small, independent newspaper, *The Tablet*. The co-founders and key writers were mostly former student leaders and activist faculty members from Fourah Bay College. It became the voice of the movement until its presses were dynamited by the regime. The energy of the resistance revived in the mid-1980s with more student-led demonstrations and a separate strike by the labor movement. Again, failure to forge effective alliances among key sectors of the emerging civil society weakened the collective clout of the movement. There appear to be several explanations for the failure of students in 1985 under radical student leadership to achieve a major nationwide impact: (1) failure of students to establish close relations with the labor movement, including teachers; (2) the continuing use by the state of repressive and preemptive violent tactics against student protesters; (3) a realization among student leaders that it was useless to try to wrest the concession of multiparty elections from Stevens, something students achieved temporarily in 1977, because he was just as likely to renege on the results as he had then; (4) a continuing deterioration of the economy which, instead of providing an "opportunity" for expanded resistance, created a feeling of helplessness that changes could come peacefully; (5) lack of other apparent exogenous "opportunities" of the kind generally regarded as helpful for a movement, such as splits in the ranks of the military.

But a culture of resistance was growing in the 1980s that came to fruition in the 1990s when civil society effectively opposed two military juntas. In terms of social movement activism, the students had left a mark. The repression by the regime had not stopped the resistance, including the government-backed attack by thugs on the Fourah Bay campus in 1977 and elsewhere around the country. Despite efforts to intimidate and brutalize

supporters of opposition candidates in the "multiparty" elections of 1977, many people had turned out to register their dissatisfaction at the polls. Students alone could not overcome a long record of co-optation of key elements of the emerging civil society organizations and some of its leaders. But the students had shown that even a repressive regime has weaknesses. As Gberie (2005, 44) noted above, students also showed "the potential for small groups of dissidents to shake [a repressive regime] to its foundations." These lessons would be acted on in the 1990s. The activism in the 1970s and 1980s left another important legacy, as one Sierra Leonean historian noted (Rashid 2004, 77):

> The 1977 student intrusion into politics had limited gains. If anything, it served to revive a government under crisis but also *opened up the possibility of sustained and organized opposition outside formal structures* (emphasis added).

**Figure 3 Secondary school students and instructor at a human rights workshop in Port Loko, Sierra Leone, 2009**

Photo by Betty Press

# 3 Women Help Restore Democracy

A civilian social movement led mostly by women resisted military rule and helped push the junta out of power in Sierra Leone in 1996. The story of how the movement – strengthened by independent journalists and others – managed to outmaneuver armed soldiers in a struggle for power is a tale of courage, wit, and use of nonviolent strategies. International pressures were also at work but by most accounts, including those from the US (which played a role), it was the ordinary people of Sierra Leone who deserve most of the credit. During 1994-96, women emerged from political obscurity in Sierra Leone for the first time in decades to lead the charge against the military junta of 1992-96 and demand a return to civilian rule. In the process of developing an effective nonviolent social movement, they defied the dangers of the military, organized broad alliances of organizations of women (mostly) and men, marched in the streets of Freetown, and rallied support across the country. Finally, at two national conferences, women leaders, including the head of an association for market women, helped sway the vote against the military staying in power. Democratic elections and a civilian president followed.

Other elements of an emerging civil society, including labor, journalists, teachers, and others, joined the campaign and helped deepen a "culture of resistance," building on the resistance by university and secondary school students in 1977 against the Siaka Stevens regime and additional resistance by university students in the mid-1980s. Most written accounts of this period focus on the devastating civil war and the later international intervention of West African and British troops that finally ended it. The nonviolent resistance of Sierra Leoneans remains a largely untold story.[1] This chapter begins with a dramatic confrontation between the military and two journalists who played a key role in the development of the social movement of resistance to the junta. Next, the chapter focuses on how the women's movement and other elements of civil society came together to oppose the military nonviolently with some international support for their cause. Finally, the two national conferences are examined where the direction of the nation was changed, including the dramatic moment at the second conference when a market woman confronted the military with a compelling statement. The chapter attempts to answer these questions: (1)

1 Christopher Clapham (1997, 903-9), for example, provides a historical account of that period with detailed attention to the politics and military but does not mention a civilian resistance.

how can a civilian, nonviolent resistance movement push a military regime out of power against their will; (2) how does such a movement actually start (the focus is on the women's part of the movement, which was the new element in this period); (3) what role did the international community play in ousting the military; (4) what kind of tactics and strategies did the women and other groups use to overcome the military's plans to prolong its stay in power?

## A Modern David Uses Words, not Stones

A dramatic confrontation between the military and civilian activists came in late 1995. Top commanders of the civil war front were in the conference room at the Defense Ministry. They had summoned two key activists in the broad, open resistance against the military: independent journalist Paul Kamara, owner of *For di People*[2] newspaper, and his associate, Sallieu Kamara (no relation). The military issued a blunt warning for them to stop publishing critical articles about the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), which had seized power in April 1992. The critical reporting by the two, as well as some other journalists, was an example of how people can be drawn into a resistance movement through their profession rather than membership in an activist organization. Some attorneys were similarly drawn into the resistance movement this way, as well as some clergy and others. This broader base of resistance is one of the themes developed in this book. While traditional social movement theorists might argue that such professionals were not part of a social movement opposing the regime, the junta itself made no such neat distinctions. They knew who was against them. Paul Kamara was linked through professional or personal ties to other parts of the movement, including the resistance by women and other professional groups such as labor and teachers. They shared the same commitment to peace, human rights, and democracy, as well as the same desire to see a working economy in which people could make a living. They faced the same dangers.

"The room was packed full of senior military officers. We are the only people who are civilians in that place."[3] It was an uneven match, or so it

2 Krio for "For the People."

3 Sallieu Kamara, in an interview with the author, April 20, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. The emphasis was his during the interview.

seemed: the country's top military commanders in a military government in a showdown with the son of a poor farmer who struggled through his student years, often on one meal a day. But as a secondary-school student Paul Kamara joined the national student protest against the repressive Siaka Stevens regime in 1977. The year after his university graduation, Kamara launched *For di People,* a small, independent newspaper. This was under the Stevens' regime, which had engineered the execution of some of his political rivals and did not hesitate to punish critics. Kamara's goal even then was to support "humanity, freedom, and justice." The NPRC leaders had already chastised him once for having the audacity to expose some of the early human rights abuses of the junta shortly after it seized power.[4] Kamara, for example,pointed to "the rape of a senior hotel manageress, beatings of people who opposed the military's will and the bloody executions of 26 people who were accused of being involved in a coup plot, even though most of them were already in detention when this phantom coup was being plotted."[5] After those exposes (which were based on investigations by his newspaper), the NPRC refused to issue his paper a license in an effort to silence the criticism.

## Tracking Resistance via Energy and Ideas, not just Social Movement Organizations

But Kamara would not be silenced. What he did next illustrates the fluid nature of a resistance movement under repressive conditions. Tracking such fluidity requires a focus not so much on the forms of the resistance but on its energy – the ideas and passion that drives some activists. When the military banned his newspaper, Kamara and some of his colleagues at the small paper simply transferred their energies to the National League for Human Rights and continued the same resistance against the NPRC's abuses. This kind of shift is typical of what happened in all three countries studied, sometimes for tactical reasons, sometimes for survival, or both. Staying one step ahead of the police or military is a question of security as

4 Paul Kamara, Sallieu Kamara, and Olu Gordon were among the first journalists to meet with the NPRC commanders on their first day in power and "looked up to them as revolutionaries and critics of the APC. But they became wary of them as they became critical of the regime's excesses" (Rashid 2013). Rashid, a Sierra Leonean, is a professor of history at Vasser College and the author of several books and articles on Sierra Leone.

5 Paul Kamara in his acceptance speech for the Civil Courage Award by the Northcote Parkinson Fund, October 13, 2001, in Turin Italy.

well as strategy. This fluidity is part of the loose webbing of a social movement under repressive regimes that often goes undetected by a focus on the more traditional structures of dissent. It would be easy to not recognize a newspaper as part of a resistance movement. So the shift of energy from the newspaper to the human rights organization would be missed. Yet both organizations had the same purpose, and in this case, some of the same activists at the head; to count one and not the other is like counting some tentacles of an octopus but not all of them in trying to understand a whole social movement. Shifts like this are where the study of social movements can get very interesting – if one breaks out of the narrow definitional boundaries of what a movement is and instead of looking for organizations, looks for the *process* of resistance – a point that social movement theorist Joe Foweraker encouraged (1995, 23).[6] A key point is to follow the *energy*, not just the *form*, of a resistance movement.

As shown in the previous chapter on Sierra Leone (in the section dealing with the independent newspaper *The Tablet* in the late 1970s and early '80s), a newspaper can be part of a social movement. It is not what one ordinarily thinks of as being part of a "movement," but as we've seen, *The Tablet* became the focus of the energy and the talents and some of the key people in the resistance movement against Siaka Stevens. Now, under the repressive rule of the NPRC, *For di People* and a handful of other independent newspapers became centers of energy, ripples of hope spreading the belief that it was possible to resist the military junta. At a time before formal resistance organizations had emerged that fit the usual Western model of a social movement, newspapers played a critical role in maintaining pressure on the government. They were linked through informal ties to other emerging elements of society that also energized the resistance. Sallieu Kamara, Paul Kamara's deputy editor, was an eyewitness to a dialogue that occurred between the minister of defense and Paul Kamara in 1995:

> *Minister of Defense*: Paul, you people are talking human rights; you always talk human rights; you always condemn us: all sorts of things in the name of human rights. I think we are very close to coming to the end of the road. Some of these things we will no longer take from you. And if you

6 Foweraker distinguishes between the "social networks" (39) that may help form a social movement and the movement itself, a point well taken. But this study argues that when social networks are used to plan and produce acts of resistance, as they were in Sierra Leone, they move from pre-movement status to being an integral part of a social movement.

> continue, we're going to kill you; and when we kill you we see if human rights will give you life again.
>
> *Paul Kamara*: We are very much grateful for you inviting us here. But you have your own responsibilities as soldiers to protect the territorial integrity of this country. We have our own responsibilities as human rights activists and as journalists to do what we are doing. And as long as you continue to do your role in protecting this country, we'll also continue to do our role as journalists and human rights [advocates]. So if you have to kill us, kill us now or else we'll continue our work.

On the way out of the compound, the head of the army caught up with them and pleaded, "Paul, these guys are going to kill you. I want you people to leave everything."[7] The refusal to bow down to military demands dramatically illustrates the kind of courage that is the backbone of nonviolent resistance under repression. Shortly after their confrontation with the NPRC commanders, the two journalists were detained and their newspaper office was thoroughly searched. They were not killed, although the NPRC had summarily executed some other perceived or actual opponents. Apparently reason prevailed, or perhaps the military leadership, already splitting,[8] felt too much under the gaze of the international spotlight to cause a major disturbance by dispatching one of the country's champions of human rights. Others may have assured the military officers that Paul Kamara had always been independent of regimes, that he wasn't going to change in spite of threats. By Kamara's count (in 2008), he had been arrested for his independent reporting by every government from the Stevens regime onward, even during democratic periods.

Paul Kamara faced more danger later. In January 1996, using the Stevens model of co-optation, the NPRC, looking for new legitimacy at a time when their ranks were split and they were stalling on elections, offered him the job of secretary of state, land, housing and the environment. After persuasion by fellow Sierra Leonean James Jonah, a retired United Nations under-secretary-general for political affairs, he accepted the post. However, Kamara instructed the NPRC leadership that his newspaper would continue its independent critical reporting under the editorship of Sallieu Kamara, which it did. On the night of February 26, 1996, Paul Kamara was gunned

7 Sallieu Kamara interview.

8 The splits in the military provided a classical "opportunity" for resistance, but the repressive nature of the military made it very dangerous to take advantage of such an opening.

down on a street in Freetown while driving with Sallieu, who recalled: "They fired on him at close range. *They left Paul for dead*." But Kamara survived and returned to his independent reporting in time to condemn a subsequent junta that seized power in 1997 from the government which had been democratically elected the year before. As a result, he was beaten by the rebels, who also ransacked his office.

Paul Kamara illustrates the courage and the cunning of an individual activist engaging in nonviolent resistance against a repressive regime. For the regime, such an activist presents a challenge they are not well-equipped to deal with: an activist who is not intimidated by the usual threats. Against such courage only force may halt the activist, but that risks condemnation at home and abroad – and further resistance.

## Motives of Activists

In an interview on the flat roof of his *For Di People* newspaper, Paul Kamara explained his motives for persistently reporting abuses by every government since and including that of Siaka Stevens. "All those governments have jailed me and they say I have been a thorn in their flesh. I wanted to make the world a better place."[9] In presenting him with the Civil Courage Award in 2001, John Train, founder of the New York-based Northcote Parkinson Fund, noted, "The courage of individuals, like Mr. Kamara, will help shape our future. We honor a citizen whose steadfast courage, over many years, in defense of freedom shines as a beacon to those who would follow the path of liberty."

One day an official from the Central Intelligence Division of the government asked Sallieu Kamara why he took such risks to report the news, especially since he had two daughters, implying that the risks were obviously not worth it, that it would be safer to live abroad. "I believed in what I was doing. And at that time I was enjoying it," Kamara said. Recalling his response, he offered,

> I said I have two daughters and they are far better off than many others. I can still afford to give them basic food daily. But they have millions of their colleagues who cannot even afford basic meals. Why not stay on and fight for those children? Taking my two daughters out of the country

9 Paul Kamara in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

> will not solve the problem. Spend all the years abroad and you come back – the problem is there. So we have to stay.

## Deepening a Culture of Resistance: Civil Society Re-emerges

Civil society, by most accounts of Sierra Leoneans interviewed, had been vibrant pre-independence, was later seen in professional groups (e.g., labor, teachers) during the Stevens years, but was still relatively weak in 1992 when the NPRC seized power. The year before, a rebel group calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) had launched a civil war.[10] Led by a dismissed Sierra Leone Army corporal, Foday Sankoh, the RUF claimed it was fighting against government corruption and poverty and sought to institute democracy. Their actions were quite to the contrary.

> Throughout its nearly eleven-year campaign of largely terroristic violence, the RUF targeted mainly those very disposed people, killing and mutilating them [primarily by amputations] in an orgy of bewildering cruelty, while all the time looting the country's rich diamond reserves and maintaining an extremely profitable trade in them with outsiders, through Liberia's Charles Taylor (Gberie 2005, 6).

The Sierra Leone Army was poorly equipped and poorly trained and the war was at a stalemate, amidst accounts of corruption and looting by army officers. Momoh, who had finally agreed to the idea of multiparty elections, did not resolve the issue. "This lack of professional training and equipment was a deliberate policy to make the army a non-fighting force, so that it would not have the ability to challenge the APC [All People's Congress] government [of Stevens and later Momoh]" (Alie 2006, 139). By the time a group of soldiers from the frontlines in the south staged a coup in April 1992, the public was demoralized, frustrated at the lack of progress against the war, and tired of reports of army corruption. Arrival of the NPRC at first signaled for many a welcome break from the repression and failing economy of the past. It would become clearer later how ethnicity, regionalism, and political ambition played a part in the 1992 coup. But after more than two decades of repressive rule by essentially one man, Siaka Stevens, and seven years of rule by his handpicked successor, with an economy spiraling down, leaving millions in desperate conditions, and with a growing civil war

10 It is beyond the scope of this study to examine the war itself.

started in 1991, the NPRC coup was literally welcomed by many with dancing in the streets of Freetown. This gave the new military rulers a certain legitimacy, not only in the eyes of the local population but in the eyes of the international community which "had no alternative but to go with the thinking of the civil society" in supporting them.[11]

Not everyone was so happy, however. Abdulai Wai, a student leader in the mid-1990s was one of the many who had campaigned for multiparty democracy and elections which were finally being planned. "I felt shattered. I didn't dance."[12] The joy faded for many others as NPRC abuses and desire to hold on to power became more obvious, and as the war dragged on. "Civil society became very active by questioning the activities of the NPRC."[13] Various strands of civil society flexed their muscles against continued NPRC rule, challenging not only its tenure, but its very legitimacy. Sallieu Kamara describes how a "culture of resistance, a culture of advocacy," evident in the student demonstrations of 1977 and the 1980s, expanded during the NPRC period:

> You have women organizing themselves; you have political parties organizing themselves; you have the youth … organizing themselves; you have the Association of Independent Journalists. So all of us, we all [came] together … We [had] a *very good network with all of these*. If the women are organizing something, all of us would be there. Some men in the Association of Independent Journalists, [were] not journalists at all [but were part of the resistance]; and a few lawyers were with us. We were all part of the thing [the resistance].[14]

The Sierra Leonean social movement against the NPRC was comprised of networks of individuals, small informal groups and alliances of groups. Some professionals were drawn into the resistance through their work and support for democracy and human rights. Jusu-Sheriff and Isha Dyfan, for

11 Abdulai Bayraytay, in an interview with the author, April 28, 2009, in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Bayraytay was an official in the Ministry, working directly with the foreign minister, Zainab Bangura, a former leader in the women's resistance movement against the NPRC in the mid-1990s. He contrasted civil society's welcome of the NPRC with its widespread opposition to the arrival of another military junta in 1996 which ousted a democratically elected government.

12 Abdulai Wai, in an interview with the author, January 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

13 Bayraytay interview.

14 Kamara interview; emphasis in original. In one sense, the NPRC coup was part of the culture of resistance, but its leaders later tried to repress it (Rashid 2013).

example, had been members of the Sierra Leone Human Rights Society and defended student activists/radicals in the mid-1980s. The networks included journalists who risked their own safety to report human rights and other abuses by the junta; some attorneys, some clergy, and most prominently, women's groups – from the wealthy to poor and uneducated market women – a force felt as far back as the 1940s but which had been partially submerged in the 1970s under the harsh hand of former President Siaka Stevens.[15] Traditional, Western-based definitions of social movements tend to miss key parts of this broad range of resistance; yet it was this varied resistance, informally linked, that proved to be an effective force in pushing the military junta out and bringing a democratic government in despite objections from the military hierarchy.

## Military Abuses

Arrival of the NPRC in 1992 at first signaled for many a welcome break from the repression and failing economy of the past. But Max Conteh, a longtime official with the Sierra Leone Labour Congress recalls how the jubilant support for the NPRC by many began to change. "Soon, people started to observe that the NPRC started to derail the focus for which they came into power. And also they saw their … stay in power prolonged [the civil war]. People thought for democracy to come came back would be a better way to end the war."[16]

The arrival of the NPRC represented a "rupture in the military and in national politics" (Rashid 2013) but in terms of regime repression, it was not such a sharp break from the past; it was simply a change of characters. Amnesty International reports soon began revealing a darker side of the NPRC leaders that portrayed them as abusers of human rights, not champions of prosperity and future democracy. As the NPRC made little progress toward ending the war, gradually Sierra Leoneans realized the junta was more eager to hold on to power and its trappings of privilege than ending the conflict. Some of the human rights abuses occurred in

15 Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, she was deputy chair of the human rights commission of Sierra Leone, a government organization.

16 Max Conteh, in an interview with the author, February 6, 2009, at the Labour Congress office in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, Conteh was director of education of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress. He served as deputy director of education for the NPRC.

Freetown; others happened in the war zones as NPRC soldiers fought and sometimes collaborated with the rebels, giving rise to the term "sobels." Amnesty International reports included these examples:

> *December 1992*. Twenty-six people were summarily executed by firing squad in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, on December 29, 1992, some following secret and grossly unfair trials and others apparently after no trials at all. At least three others were extra judicially executed. Some were allegedly tortured before being killed. The defendants were held incommunicado, had no defense lawyers and were denied all rights of defense or judicial appeal. [Amnesty also reported that unofficial sources] have alleged that there were no coup attempts [and that the so-called coups were excuses for getting rid of political enemies.][17]

> *February 1995*. It's often impossible to tell whether it's Revolutionary United Front (RUF) rebels, deserters from the army, or government troops who are devastating towns and villages throughout the country, killing, raping and mutilating defenseless people … It appears that some disaffected soldiers have joined RUF forces, whereas others have formed separate armed groups. Both the RUF and disaffected soldiers are responsible for the torture, killing and abduction of civilians. Government troops are summarily executing captured rebels and others suspected of collaborating with rebel forces, with severed heads of their victims sometimes displayed on army vehicles.[18]

## Birth of a Social Movement: Women Lead the Charge for Regime Change

While independent journalists provided one part of the social movement that grew to resist the NPRC for its human rights abuses, another key part of the resistance was led by women, despairing of the economy and disillusioned by the junta's failure to end the war. Peace was seen as the best way to improve the economy; and gradually women activists organized to resist the NPRC. A democratically elected government appeared to be the best option for both peace and an improved economy. Though the social movement literature is rich with theory on how social movements start,

17 *Amnesty International Newsletter*, March 1993.
18 *Amnesty International Newsletter*, February 16, 1995.

there is little in the way of documented evidence of how one actually begins. The attention is generally on how a movement grows and acts; the moments of birth are rarely included. Spotting those moments in history requires in-depth interviews with a wide range of people who were involved. The story of how the women of Sierra Leone became the lead force for peace is a story of alliances, determination, and at times, courage. At one point, at a national conference, with soldiers outside the venue beating would-be women observers, a market woman speaking inside directly challenged the power of the military to prolong their stay in office.

Women were politically active in the 1940s and '50s and part of the 1960s. Constance Agatha Cummings-John, for example, "helped mobilize women into politics," working closely with market women. In 1952 she organized the Sierra Leone Women's Movement; in 1966 she served briefly as the first woman mayor of Freetown. But under the repressive hand of Siaka Stevens, women retreated mostly into social work, only to remerge against the NPRC in the mid- 1990s:[19]

> In the struggle against the one-party state … politics was extremely violent and so the women withdrew and they went into all these different women's groups: church groups, development groups, social groups of all different kinds. When the war came [1991], these groups came into their own because politics was now banned – but the women were there. They were now catalyzed and mobilized around the issue of restoration of peace.[20]

Women felt left out of the World Conference on women, held in Nairobi, Kenya, July 1985 because it was mostly government officials who attended.[21] They began organizing for the Fourth World Conference on Women, to be held in Beijing, September 1995. The first step was to organize for the regional preparatory meeting to be held in Dakar, Senegal. In 1993, Amy Smythe, who was president of the Sierra Leone YWCA from 1993-96, formed a special group for peace which later developed into the Women's Forum that became the central organization in a coalition of women's groups and

19 Jusu-Sheriff interview. Rashid (2013) adds that Stevens' APC was able to "capture and co-opt some vocal factions of the women's movement into its women's league."

20 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

21 The official name was the "World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace."

had a rotating chairmanship. At first the focus was on peace, not democracy. She said,

> We had been saying that we want this conflict brought to an end but nobody has been listening to us. For us it was not about the authoritarian [rule in Sierra Leone]: women were suffering; women were affected by the conflict, and yet they did not have a voice … and the 1994 preparation [for the Dakar conference] gave them that opportunity.[22]

The Women's Forum emerged in 1994 and included "all political, religious, ethnic, and other groups, such as the National Displaced Women's Organization, the National Organization for Women, the Women's Association for National Development, the Young Women's Christian Association, the women's wing of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, as well as women traders associations and several Muslim and Christian women's associations." They prepared for the UN Women's Conference in Beijing in 1995 then "joined forces with the newly formed Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace [SLWPM]" (Tripp, et al. 2009, 205). To go from planning for an international conference to planning how to help end a war devastating their country meant organizing alliances, coalitions, and informal linkages to other groups in a still-young civil society. Their tactics included "marches; seminars; we knocked on doors; we had one-on-one discussions with the international community; we issued press releases; we worked with the bar association – all kinds of things."[23] The Women's Forum acted as a coordinating body but one intentionally designed not to replace or control other organizations. It had a rotating leadership that each month saw a new organization leading it, including small ones.[24]

> So in 1994 … in our planning process, we were meeting together with women of all walks of life … sharing information, going back to our networks, collecting information – mobilizing our networks from the grass roots upward … planning and educating ourselves and learning to work together for peace. So that by the time we came back and formed the Women's Movement for Peace, we constituted a force – a force that

22 Amy Smythe, in an interview with the author, January 31, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
23 Smythe interview.
24 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

> not only analyzed [issues] for peace but called for peace, called for an end to the military regime and for a return to the democratic mode.[25]

Part of the focus of the groups in the Women's Forum coalition was organizing and educating; part of it was, at least for the senior women among them, using their respected position in society to gain the ear of the military junta leaders, including young Valentine Strasser, head of the NPRC. "These were young boys we had taught in school. [Strasser] was my pupil. He was quite honest … Because we were older women: they respected us; they listened to us."[26] Another woman who early helped organize the nonviolent resistance against the military was Dr. Nana Pratt. "There was fear in the way the military comported themselves … We preferred the worst civilian regime to a military one that is nondemocratic. We raised our voices." Among other tactics employed, she and other women visited camps of the displaced from the on-going civil war, providing assistance – and talking politics, inviting them to Women's Forum meetings across the country.[27] Women held meetings, directly lobbied NPRC senior officials, wrote articles, in their campaign for peace and democracy. Women organized a march.

The leadership of the SLWPM included a senior military officer, Kestoria Kabia.[28] Technically, her participation was not in opposition to the military's stated goals of peace – and democratic government, in that order. As what had seemed a distant war now expanded, posing a threat even to Freetown, a number of groups were energized. A march in Freetown organized by SLWMP in 1995 was described as "20,000-strong" (Bradbury 1995, 49, cited in Keen 2005, 154). Tripp, et al. (2009, 205) adds these details:

> [The march was a] "carnival-like event led by pediatrician Fatmatta Boi-Kamar. It was the first public demonstration by women since the 1960's. Professional women danced through downtown Freetown and linked arms with female soldiers, small-scale businesswomen, and nurses, singing "Try peace to end this senseless war." Bystanders were captivated by the festivity and joined this parade of women. The demonstration

25 Smythe interview.

26 Smythe interview.

27 Nana Pratt, in an interview with the author, February 6, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Dr. Pratt was also active with a women-led peace initiative when a second military junta seized power in 1997.

28 Smythe cites three other women leaders in the Movement: Zainab Bangura, Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, and Isha Dyfan.

> gave new legitimacy to existing peace groups that had previously been suspected of fronting for various political parties.

The various women's organizations formed or strengthened in the mid-1990s gradually narrowed their focus to not just peace, but elections for a democratic government *before* peace was achieved. This set them on a political collision course with the military which was intent on holding onto power until peace was achieved, a process that was not moving with much speed. At this point, Zainab Bangura, an insurance company employee, and attorney Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff teamed forces to try to give the general women's peace movement a sharper, political edge. Bangura had contacts among the Temne ethnic group and was politically focused; Jusu-Sheriff had a political science background and, through her mother, Gladys Jusu-Sheriff, contacts among women nationally. Jusu-Sheriff's husband was at the time minister of foreign affairs in the NPRC government. In 1995 she and Bangura formed the Women Organized for a More Enlightened Nation (WOMEN).[29] Jusu-Sheriff (2000) observed "the women's intervention might also have made a negotiated settlement a more respectable option, minimizing loss of face for both government and rebels."[30] Now the goal of the movement was clearly not just peace but democracy: that meant regime change, she wrote:

> We had to do more than just pray for peace and call on the military for peace and call on the rebels for peace. We've got to take the lead now. It is only a return to civilian government, democratic government that will put us in the position to be able to end this war. We cannot trust these soldiers to end the war.

The women approached Sierra Leonean and longtime United Nations official James Jonah, who was in the country to help with the eventual transition of the military to a democratic government. He was planning a national conference and they asked him for representation at it for women from around the country; they got his agreement for twelve. Other key coalitions in a now vibrant civil society were also opposing the military in one way or another and would be represented at the conferences – there would be two – that determined how long the military would rule. The US government facilitated some meetings of women's organizations that were pushing for

29 Jusu-Sheriff interview. "They reportedly threatened to expose corrupt politicians financial links with the military unless the politicians backed the elections" (Keen 2005, 156).

30 Keen (2005, 156), paraphrasing Jusu-Sheriff's statements in Lord (2000, 46-9).

democratic elections. Kiki Munchi of the US Information Agency (USIA), helped them develop civic education materials for the Teacher's Union, for example. USIA also sponsored journalism training and other workshops in various parts of the country that were related to democratic issues. When the women said they wanted to take a stack of documents to take to the conference, USIA made photocopies for all the delegates.[31]

## Growing Civil Society Opposition to Military Rule

Another coalition, the National Coordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP) brought together sixty professional, voluntary and religious organizations around the peace issue; and around this time the Sierra Leone diaspora became active on the same issue (Rashid 2013). Two other major coalitions came together at the conferences in 1995 and '96: The Sierra Leone Association of Nongovernment Organizations, and the Civil Society Movement of Sierra Leone. Festus Minah had a front row seat for the rise of civil society to oppose the NPRC and a second military Junta in 1997-98. He served as vice president of the national Teacher's Union (1990-96) and as its president (1996-2005). He explains how two groups – market women and teachers – came to oppose the NPRC and shift their focus from regime reform to regime change.

Support for the NPRC was weakening. A growing segment of civil society was turning against what seemed to be an endless rule by a military now seen as unresponsive to citizens, unable to halt the war, but most willing to help themselves to the resources of the people and the country, either as "sobels," or in outright misappropriation of state funds. Market women in various parts of the country being robbed of their wares were not the only groups feeling the impact of the civil war. Teachers in war zones were forced to flee their posts. But rather than compensate them during this period, the Ministry of Education, then headed by Christina Thorpe, refused to pay salaries for teachers not at their posts. This kind of policy may have seemed logical in peaceful areas, but in areas where even the Sierra Leonean military had abandoned, it made no sense to the teachers. The Teachers Union mobilized the displaced teachers for a meeting with NPRC ministers, including Thorpe. Reaching them was not difficult; most were staying in camps for the displaced or on the grounds of schools in Bo,

31 Kiki Skagen Harris (née Munchi), in an e-mail to the author, January 17, 2009. Such help continued under USIA's Dudley O. Sims who helped foster democracy in both Togo and Liberia.

the country's second main city after Freetown and close to civil war zones. Meanwhile, information was coming out that the NPRC was draining the Ministry of Finance, supposedly to pay for the war but using it for their personal benefit. This misappropriation, which prolonged the war, added to the demands of teachers and others for constitutional government.[32] "Thousands" of teachers showed up for the meeting with Thorpe and at least six other cabinet ministers. By this time the demands had grown: the Union leaders asked for "salaries and constitutional government." They got neither, though Minah notes that shortly after that Thorpe stepped down as minister of education.

> Our next step was: get the information out that NPRC was not serious about pursuing the war. This time it was not just teachers; it was Labour Congress, teachers, working with professional bodies, working with other groups – human rights groups. And we had a battery of some NGOs that were within the system. And so we asked for the return [of democracy] which led to the first Bitumani [one of two national conferences on the future of Sierra Leone].[33]

With the collapse of the economy over the intervening years, teachers remained the most active part of the Labour Congress, widely represented nationwide. The declining economy and the war had weakened the mine-workers and various unions tied to small-scale manufacturing, including dock workers.[34] The Sierra Leone Labour Congress as a whole had lain low in 1977 during the student strike, had organized a short-lived strike in 1981, and, according to Labour Congress official Conteh, did not organize a national strike against the NPRC.[35] Some local member unions, however, did hold strikes during this period. Even this low level of labor resistance concerned the NPRC. "The NPRC thought that would destroy their national and international reputation if the strikes continued." Labour and a wide range of civil society groups as well as traditional leaders, and the military would be represented at the two national conferences.

32 Festus Minah, in an interview with the author, January 21, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.
33 Minah interview.
34 Ismail Rashid (2013).
35 Conteh interview

## National Conferences: "The Military Realized Late We Were Serious"

The NPRC under Strasser stated from the beginning their intention to hand over power to an elected civilian government. In 1994, the NPRC formed an Interim National Electoral Commission to oversee the election process. They chose Jonah to head it. In August, 1995, Jonah organized a national conference known as Bitumani I at the Bitumani Hotel in Freetown, bringing together a wide range of delegates, including "political leaders, traditional chiefs, religious organizations, labour unions, women, and youth groups …The spirit of reconciliations, patriotism and seriousness of purpose that prevailed during the three day-meeting came as a welcome surprise to all. More remarkable was the decisive emergence of women as a political force to be reckoned with" (Alie 2006, 155). The popular call for elections "did not start with them [the women]. But, we were definitely the most organized at Bitumani I.'[36]

Leading up to the Bitumani I conference, women had engaged in a nationwide campaign to educate other women about the need for peace and for elections of a democratic government. "The military realized late we were serious."[37] The women prepared for the conference. "We had to prepare for Bitumani. And we were pretty much the only people [prepared]. We organized ourselves. We prepared a women's position paper."[38] At the conference, delegates reached a consensus that elections for president should be held in February.

On January 16, 1996, NPRC chairman captain Valentine Strasser was deposed by his deputy Julius Maada Bio in a bloodless coup. Strasser had angered some of the top commanders by sending them back to the barracks as he apparently planned to move toward elections. Bio and others had begun organizing a National Unity Party to contest the elections themselves. "Strasser, late in the day, said he was going to contest the elections. That was the main reason why they pushed him out." But Bio was also ambitious; he would later run for president and lose in 2012. Bio made contact with rebel leader Foday Sankoh after the decision at Bitumani I to go ahead with elections. "Foday Sankoh was saying we don't need elections now. It was after that that he [Bio] called Bitumani II … Basically I think the

36 Jusu-Sheriff interview.
37 Smythe interview.
38 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

intention was to prevent the elections from going ahead."[39] Bio initially had pledged to go ahead with the elections, but then raised doubts by calling for the new national conference to re-consider whether elections should go ahead or be postponed until later, presumably when peace was achieved. Opponents quickly saw this as a ploy to prolong the NPRC in power. "People said 'absolutely not. No way.' By then [women] are so radicalized. And then we have the march: the second women's peace march."[40]

The second Bitumani conference, therefore, set for February 12, 1996, was shaping up to be the litmus test for whether the NPRC would step down – or not. Bio had plans to persuade traditional chiefs and a range of others to go along with a continuation of military rule. But his plans were dashed by a decision by the Interim National Electoral Commission to host the conference on condition that "only those delegates who had attended the August 1995 conference would be invited." (Alie 2006, 56). Still, the delegates' vote would effectively determine if the military would stay or go. The traditional chiefs were "bought over by the NPRC government."[41] The army began announcing that it could not guarantee the safety of voters if the election was held before the war was brought to a close. Then just two days before the conference, the homes of INEC chairman Jonah and presidential candidate Tejan Kabbah were "attacked with grenades and gunfire. Soldiers were widely suspected of being behind the attacks" (Keen 2005, 156).

## Market Women v. the Military: The story of two Maries

Across Africa and in many other countries, market women (and men) sit at small tables, often outdoors and often unprotected from the sun except perhaps by an umbrella or cloth. They sell grains, vegetables, clothing and almost anything else, sometimes from dawn to dusk. It is humble work, but it provides the money to pay for schools fees, feed a family, and buy the occasional extra. Sometimes, as with the "Nana Benzi," market women of Togo and other West African coastal countries, their sales bring a lot of money. I once interviewed one of the "Nana Benzi" (so named because a number of them owned a Mercedes Benz). During the interview, she carried on a conversation on one of her two cell phones while calling out to her

39 Julius Spencer, in an interview with the author, May 18, 2009, at Spencer's media office in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

40 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

41 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

house servant. In many countries in Africa, if the market women decide to go on strike for a political reason, much of the city or town feels the impact. When a small group of mothers in Kenya staged a strike, camping out in a city park to protest the political detention of their sons, it captured the attention of the regime and won wide public support. (That protest is described in this book in a chapter on Kenya.)

As the civil war that started in Sierra Leone in 1991 spread, so did attacks on civilians. One of the main targets of ambushes was women transporting farm and other goods to markets, especially in rural areas where the rebels were active. "Actually one could not decide whether it was NPRC or RUF because it came out from the warfront … We had 'sobels,' soldiers in uniform but behaving like the RUF."[42] The impact of these attacks on market women deprived them of income they needed to pay school fees; as a result, many children had to stay home. Among the market women, these economic grievances grew along with a realization that the war and their own family stability were linked. Gradually their focus shifted to a perceived need to get the NPRC out of power and bring in an elected government to restore peace and the economy. The military was now planning just the opposite: to stay in power until there was peace, but they showed no signs of achieving it. Two market women, both named Marie, played an important role in the second national conference (Bitumani II) in challenging the NPRC's plans to prolong their stay in power. One of them, Marie Touray is a tall, confident woman, the kind of person people notice when she walks into a room. She had no formal education. The other, Marie Bob-Kandeh, is shorter, full of energy, and had only a few years of high school education.

*Marie Bob-Kandeh.* She was sitting at a desk in a crowded, plainly-furnished office in downtown Freetown where she does her paperwork as secretary general of the Market Women Association of Sierra Leone. When the coup took place in early 1996, it was the last straw for her and many other market women.

> We have different categories of women in Sierra Leone. We have the elites; we have the grassroots people … We [market women] work on a commission basis; most of us are the breadwinners of the home. Our women were not earning enough money to look after the children. So when the coup took place, there are so many symptoms to tell us that these people are not willing to give [up] power and let the civilians take

42 Minah interview.

> over. So we joined other women's organizations [alliances] to organize Bitumani I and II.[43]

Zainab Bangura, who later became the country's minister of foreign affairs under a civilian government, visited the women in some thirty-five markets in Freetown, talking to the chairlady of each market, explaining why Sierra Leone needed to move toward peace and democracy. She explained to them why the military had to leave. Bangura framed the message in terms of the economy, not just war and peace. There was a clear economic gap between the well-to-do Bangura and the market women. Some of the market women at first were skeptical of her. "They [elites] would only come to us when they need us. And after they succeeded, they would just abandon us." Once convinced, the market women organizers from Freetown began spreading their message upcountry of "elections *before* peace." Again the message was framed in both economic and political terms: elections to bring a government that would end the war and improve the economy.

> We told them that all of us have eyes to see what is happening on the ground; that with these military people things are going from bad to worse every day. We used to sell to Lebanese people. Now most of them have run away because of the military [which] doesn't have respect for elders [or] women. They aren't ruling by the constitution; they're ruling by decree … They can kill you at any time if you are walking and someone has made an allegation that you are committing a crime.[44]

*Marie Touray*. One of the market women upcountry was Marie Touray. Enough people I had interviewed in Freetown mentioned her to lead me to make an appointment. Though never having had formal education, she had become a leader among the local market women and active in politics. She in turn began advocating among local market women. "I told them we need a recognized government, a legitimate government that will bring development and [attract] the eyes of the international community to see us and to help us."[45] Now, at a critical point in the contemporary history of Sierra Leone, she had been called on by some of the Freetown women's

43 Marie Bob-Kandeh, in an interview with the author, February 2, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

44 Bob-Kandeh interview.

45 Marie Touray, in an interview with the author, March 26, 2009, in her hometown of Kenema, Sierra Leone.

leaders to go to the Bitumani II conference and speak for market women in general. They invited her because of her local stature and credibility as a spokesperson for women. She was president of the Kenema market women's association.

Marie Touray arrived at the conference in Freetown with a letter from the market women's association. Upon her arrival, she spoke to the conference organizer and told him: "Jonah, we're surprised you called another conference. Because we already agreed [at Bitumani I] that we want elections." Outside the conference, things were getting nasty on the street. "There were soldiers, armed to the teeth. We were in there [the conference] hearing them beating people outside.[46] Among the crowd outside trying to get in to observe (she was not a delegate) was the other Marie, Marie Bob-Kandeh. "We met at the Aberdeen Bridge [near the Bitumani Hotel] … but we had some resistance with the military. That is where we were flogged. I was flogged … it was painful; it hurt."[47]

Inside the conference hall, the debate was underway at the podium and on the floor. A number of speakers had been urging postponement of elections until the war was over. Then it was Marie Touray's turn to take the podium. Holding up the letter from her organization she said candidly that she couldn't read, but she said she knew what was in it. She called out loud and clear: "*We want no addition, no subtraction from the election date* [chosen at the first conference]. Women delegates quickly echoed the call: "*No addition; no subtraction*." Soon the hall was filled with shouts for "*No addition; no subtraction*." Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, one of the key organizers of the women's efforts at the conference, recalled, "That just changed the tide; it just needed one person to have the courage to say [that]."[48] Delegates voted "overwhelmingly" to keep the elections as planned.

The elections were held two weeks later on February 26-27, 1996, despite threats from the rebels and amidst some shooting. "A battery of international and local observers monitored the elections, and their assessment was on the whole, positive" (Alie 2006, 156). In a peaceful runoff election March 15, the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) candidate, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, won; NPRC Chairman Bio stepped down March 29, 1996.

46 Touray interview.
47 Bob-Kandeh interview.
48 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

## Implications of a Successful Nonviolent Resistance to a Military Junta

It is one thing for a nonviolent social movement to oppose a repressive civilian regime, especially if the resistance comes at a time in a country's history when civil society is not very active or well developed. That was the case when a group comprising mostly students challenged the regime of Siaka Stevens and shook its pillars of power but was unable to topple him for lack of broader support. A nonviolent social movement challenging a military junta, however, faces even more danger. A military regime is not likely to make even the pretense of having legal safeguards against abuse of human rights. Challenging such a regime in the midst of a civil war is even more complicated, yet that is exactly what activists did in Sierra Leone in the mid-1990s. With women's groups in the lead, civil society mounted an effective campaign to oblige the military to leave power sooner than its leader, Bio, intended. A combination of domestic pressure (expressed by mass demonstrations), lobbying of junta officials, critical publications, and a very widespread public resentment at the continuing war, resulted in the military accepting calls for elections before peace was achieved instead of the other way around. It was a clear example of the ways in which a social movement seeking regime change under dangerous and unpredictable conditions can still have an impact.

Led by women organized in a social movement, including market women such as Marie Touray and Marie Bob-Kandeh, Sierra Leone's civil society played a key role in edging out the junta peacefully, even as the junta had lost international credibility.[49] "The NPRC in the final analysis realized there was a coalition between the international community [and] the civil society. They had [an election] commission that was actually bent on having an election; and the people supported the election: the country itself was ready for an election."[50] After the second national conference, Marie Bob-Kandeh returned to her market in Freetown; Marie Touray returned to Kenema. Years later, people were still talking about the role women had played in the reluctant departure of the military. Ultimately Bio and the NPRC military government had stepped down peacefully almost exactly four years after they seized power. Julius Spencer, who would go on to be named minister of

49 Some Western governments (e.g., US, Canada, Netherlands, Germany, France, and the UK) provided NPRC leaders with an enticing additional reason to step down: scholarships to study abroad.

50 Zainab Bangura, in an interview with the author, May 5, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

information in the Kabbah government from 1998-2001, argues that in the end, Bio had little choice. Civil society had come together overwhelmingly against prolonging military rule. And the international community was watching very closely. "I think it had been made very, very clear to them [NPRC under Bio] that they had to respect the will of the people."[51]

There is another view of why the military stepped down, one more focused on internal weakness of the NPRC itself. There had been some splits in the military over whether to proceed to elections or not. Though the civil society opposition to the NPRC probably preceded the splits, the splits provide a classical example of "opportunity" according to the social movement literature, though the record of violence by the NPRC was known. The relegating of certain senior officers to the barracks by NPRC head Strasser in order to pave the way for a transition angered those sent back. Other NPRC internal problems were even more complicated. One senior NPRC official told human rights attorney Jusu-Sheriff, whose husband was minister of foreign affairs with the junta that the senior officials could not trust their young subordinates who lied to them. The NPRC, she concluded "found themselves overwhelmed by the problems that they faced … They were out of their depth … they didn't have good people. The whole thing [governance] is much more complex than they *ever, ever imagined*. And they just couldn't cope."[52]

At another level, the implications of what happened were an endorsement of nonviolent resistance and of the power of social/resistance movements under harsh conditions. It is important to recall that the NPRC had its dark side, with violence against civilians and perceived political opponents in Freetown. Upcountry some NPRC soldiers posed as rebels and stole and even cooperated with rebels, the "sobel" phenomenon referred to earlier. Nonviolent resistance against such a regime was dangerous. But as the unpopular civil war dragged on, there was growing opposition to prolonged military rule.

This is the background against which there was the re-emergence of a strong civil society for the first time in several decades. Not all segments of civil society joined the resistance, but enough people did, enough new organizations and revitalized old ones did, to make a difference. The tactics varied from institutional channels – writing letters and arranging personal meetings with NPRC officials – to non-institutional, such as public marches. Journalists such as Paul Kamara played a key role in the resistance, not only

51 Spencer interview.

52 Jusu-Sheriff interview.

publishing critical commentary on the NPRC that weakened its legitimacy in the eyes of Sierra Leoneans and the international community, but serving as a focus for the opposition. At one point key resistance leaders such as Bangura and others met at Kamara's *For di People* office, despite police presence at the door, to strategize resistance against the regime.

The various segments of the resistance comprised a large social movement that linked a vast network of overlapping memberships, friendships, and professional ties. People kept in touch through personal communication in a pre-cell phone and essentially pre-computer era in Sierra Leone. Although there was a noticeable gearing down of energy in the resistance once the elections were held, women's groups continued to push for peace. Various other groups in the resistance remained intact. Little did the activists know that all the energy and skills of civil society would soon be demanded again when yet another military coup took place. On May 25, 1997, the rebel Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) forced the elected Kabbah government to flee to Guinea. What the rebel leaders had not counted on, however, was the strength of an awakened civil society that would resist the new junta nonviolently, this time through a social movement using a very different tactic.

**Figure 4 The author, political, police and military officials (from left to right) at a human rights workshop in Bo, Sierra Leone, 2009**

Photo by Betty Press

# 4 Mass Noncooperation Helps Defeat a Violent Junta

*I feel very proud of my country. It was one of the most heroic periods in our history. There were lots of individual acts of heroism by civilians.*
Olu Gordon, independent journalist[1]

It wasn't what a new group calling itself the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was expecting when it seized power in Sierra Leone on May 25, 1997 from Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, who had been elected just 15 months earlier.[2] A previous military coup launched in 1992 by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC: 1992-96) had been welcomed with dancing in the street in the capital of Freetown. This initial civilian welcome of the NPRC after years of repressive, one-party rule offered no reason for international intervention, though public, nonviolent resistance starting about two years later gradually turned the tide against them and helped push them from power.

This time the initial reaction to a military junta was different. Instead of jubilation, there was mass civil disobedience: banks and many shops closed; schools shutdown across the country; many people refused to go to work; civil servants did little work. The civil society that had flexed its muscles to help get rid of the previous military rulers now sent a clear message to the newcomers: you are not legitimate: step down now. The nonviolent resistance/social movement against the AFRC involved a variety of tactics, was carried out by individuals and organizations, was at times overt and at times clandestine, and had both an economic and political impact. It amounted to an "unprecedented civil disobedience as patriotic Sierra Leoneans refused to cooperate with the junta" (Alie 2006, 179).

The immediate mass rejection of the AFRC by the civilian population opened the door from the start for the military intervention by West African troops (mainly Nigerians). That intervention enabled the elected government to return from exile in Guinea in March 1998, ten months after it had

1 Gordon interview. During the period of the AFRC in Freetown, Gordon, who died in 2011, was an independent journalist targeted by the junta.

2 The AFRC junta controlled the capitol of Freetown from May 25, 1997 to early February 1998.

been deposed.[3] During the time of the AFRC, "nonviolent demonstrations erupted spontaneously around the country and the continued strikes and boycotts made the country ungovernable" (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011). "The role of civil society in ending the NPRC dictatorship and resisting its AFRC sequel is unprecedented in the annals of military rule in independent Africa" (Kandeh 2004b, 179).

This chapter will examine the brutality of the regime; the nonviolent social movement that took place against the AFRC junta, and the tactics used by civilians against the regime – including noncooperation, a nonviolent "war" by independent journalists, and use of a propaganda/informational clandestine radio station: Radio Democracy. The chapter will also examine two courageous protest marches, one led by students, the other by women; the final brief orgy of violence of the rebels; international intervention that ultimately restored peace; and implications of the peaceful resistance to an extremely violent military junta.

## Nonviolent Social Movement

The civilian response to the AFRC junta can be seen by some scholars as a poignant example of nonviolent resistance; it can be seen by others as a social movement. In fact, it was a combination of the two: a nonviolent social movement. As argued in the theory chapter, the divisions between these two theoretical viewpoints at times can be arbitrary and unnecessary. That is not to say that all social movements are nonviolent; some are violent. And some nonviolent resistance may not amount to a social movement. But in this case the nonviolent resistance did amount to a social movement, especially when using the more inclusive definition of a social movement presented earlier: *a process of challenges to targeted authorities that may involve individual as well as organizational activism, and at times mass public support, and is aimed at either regime reform or regime change.*

A broad array of civilian society challenged the junta in many ways, both individually and through groups, using various tactics designed to undermine the credibility and strength of the regime. "The coalition of

3 "The actions of the campaigners allowed the [West African] peacekeeping forces to restore the civilian government." (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011). Although the Kabbah government returned to Freetown in March 1998, fighting continued in the countryside. Nigerian and later British troops eventually established peace and the war was officially declared over in 2002.

interests opposed to the regime included students, teachers, labour leaders and ordinary workers, market women, university lecturers, and even sectors of the state's coercive apparatus like judges, and the police" (Gordon 2004, 191). From the start, the goal among the challengers was not regime reform but regime change. The high level of repression precluded most use of open resistance tactics, though there were some demonstrations, usually brutally suppressed. Instead, many Sierra Leoneans chose the option of noncooperation, refusing to do the normal kinds of work needed to keep a country operating smoothly.

Their resistance constituted a social movement as they turned to non-traditional channels of dissent, challenging authorities in terms of legitimacy. Though there was no central organization or central leader of the resistance, there was communication and for specific events such as the marches, coordination. For example, the march by students, violently broken up by security forces, was planned with the help of reporters and editors in the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, meeting clandestinely.

> There was a higher degree of coordination than I'd ever seen between the various groups. It was mostly informal discussions. And all this was clandestine. You know, students coming around to my cousin's house, or labor union meeting somewhere with labor union people. For example, when I wanted to get out [of Freetown], it was students who smuggled me into Hastings [a small town near Freetown where Nigerian ECOMOG[4] soldiers maintained a small base]. There were checkpoints all along the road.[5]

The civil disobedience was not simply a matter of choice: fear of being labeled collaborators later and fear of being on the streets were also motives for civil disobedience, according to numerous survivors from that period. While in power, the AFRC – a coalition of elements of the Sierra Leone Army and the rebel Revolutionary United Front (RUF) unpredictably responded to resistance with, cajoling, intimidation, threats – and outright brutality. They were dangerous, unpredictable, undisciplined, and ruthless. Journalists, a frequent target of AFRC wrath, and anyone else openly opposing the regime, took great risks.

4 Economic Community Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) provided Nigerian-led combat troops to fight the rebels in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

5 Gordon interview.

## Democracy on Hold

There are contradictory assessments of President Kabbah's progress in his brief nine months of democratic leadership leading up to the coup of May 25, 1997. Kabbah was "scoring some success in the peace process and in the economic front" (Alie 2006, 175). Kabbah "moved the economy from a negative growth rate of minus 6.4 per cent to a positive rate of 6 percent in just one year" (Gberie 2005, 100). Donors were pledging funds for recovery and development. A peace accord was signed in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, November 30, 1996. But Foday Sankoh continued his attacks by his Revolutionary United Front (RUF). He was arrested in Nigeria in March 1997.

Gordon (2004, 185) argued, however, that the Kabbah government had done "more than just alienate the army, it systematically delegitimized itself by relying on the same patrimonial arrangements and repressive anti-people measures of proceeding regimes; making itself almost indistinguishable from those same regimes." He notes that the month of the coup, the Kabbah government was "tear-gassing college students protesting against the SLPP [Kabbah's Sierra Leone People's Party] decision to award a pension to the discredited former president Joseph Saidu Momoh" and was pressing for controls on the independent press.

Whichever assessment one points to, there was widespread disapproval of a military coup replacing a democratically elected government. This is not to say the new junta did not have supporters; they clearly did. They provided their rationale for their coup. But who were these supporters? They included some professionals and politicians, as well as high school drop outs, illiterates, "some former bodyguards and errand boys of the NPRC leaders," and some junior officers of the Sierra Leone Army, including Sergeant Abu "Zagallo" Sankoh (Kandeh 2004b, 164). Zagallo,[6] in a statement given to Sierra Leone police, offered this account of his involvement: "On the day before the coup [he] called up a total of 17 soldiers, including members of the army football team he was coaching, and told them he had a dream in which a man asked him why soldiers had allowed themselves to suffer such punishment in the army, adding that senior officers were to blame" (Keen 2005, 208).[7] Some soldiers had been imprisoned by the Kabbah government on charges of plotting a coup in December 1996, including Major Johnny Paul Koroma, soon to become head of state in the AFRC. A group of soldiers then proceeded to steal arms at a local barracks and continued to the Pademba Road prison in

6 His name appears in different accounts as Zaglo and Zagllo.

7 Keen credits the account to documentation made available to him by Lansana Gberie.

Freetown where they used grenades to blast open the doors, releasing some 600 inmates, including Koroma, arming many. They then took over the State House. Kabbah fled that afternoon to Guinea by ferry. Koroma immediately called upon the RUF, including its imprisoned leader Foday Sankoh being held in Nigeria, to join him in the government. The RUF quickly became the dominant force in the AFRC, including directing the junta's security (Gberie 2005, 101, 106). "Given the amalgam of unpatriotic elements (APC, NPRC, RUF) supporting the 1997 coup, it is not surprising why this coup was so unpopular" (Kandeh 2004a, 166).

The coup makers offered a variety of other reasons for their actions including: dissatisfaction with the supplies the Sierra Leone Army was receiving, including reduced rice subsidies; rumors that the government was planning to dismiss many soldiers; a growing animosity between the army and the Kamajors, a civil defense force formed in the south to protect villagers and others from the RUF. The later reason "reflected perceptions that the government was using the Kamajors as a counterweight to the army and, as such, was incapable of resolving the rift between the two armed factions." The coup makers promised to bring peace to the country (Kandeh 2004a, 164-5).

To some the AFRC coup was both regional and ethnic. "Led by southerners, the NPRC coup was anti-APC while the northern-led AFRC coup was anti-SLPP" (Kandeh 2004a, 178). Regionally, the NPRC coup of 1992, with strong southern support, ousted the APC whose base was in the north. The AFRC coup of 1992 with strong northern support ousted the southern-based SLPP government of Kabbah. Ethnically, some Sierra Leoneans refer to the 1997 AFRC coup as "APC II" because it seemed to pull together supporters of the northern-based APC whose main strength was the Temne (and Limba) against the southern-based SLPP, whose main strength was among the Mende. A Lebanese businessman I interviewed (he did not want his name used) agrees with this analysis. He also argued that the AFRC coup involved some of the northern Limba sons of senior Limba officers executed in the earlier NPRC coup of 1992, adding an aspect of revenge to the 1997 coup.[8]

While some political figures in Sierra Leone fled the country when asked to serve, others accepted a position. I hadn't realized that one of those who served in the AFRC/RUF cabinet was a colleague of mine in the political science

8 Gberie (2005, 109-10 argues that it is a "myth" that the APC coup was a northern one because it attracted politicians from the north and south.

department at Fourah Bay College, in Freetown.[9] Although I almost certainly had spoken to him about my research topic, it wasn't until shortly before my departure, after nine months on faculty, that someone mentioned to me that Alimamy Pallo Bangura had served the junta as minister of foreign affairs for about two months in 1997.[10] Bangura also ran for president on the RUF party ticket in 2002: he got just 2 percent of the vote (Alie 2006, 203). Bangura seemed a bit embarrassed at first when I came into his office and said I had learned about his association with the junta. But he agreed to an interview.[11] "I was invited to help sue for peace. Johnny Paul Koroma [the AFRC leader] promised me to allow me to sue for peace." Bangura said he ran for president on the RUF ticket to give disenchanted youth "hope" and steer them from violence. He charged that the election of Kabbah in 1996 was "stolen" due to fraud.[12]

## A Brutal Regime: "The Whole Nation Was Crying"

All forces in the civil war (1991-2002) committed excesses of violence, but the most brutal was the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), according to the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission.[13] "The whole nation was in mourning. The whole nation was crying," said the Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Humper, who served as president of the commission.[14] While most of the violations and abuses were attributed to the RUF, other significant perpetrators included the AFRC and the Civil Defence Force (CDF), usually formed around a core group of traditional hunters. The second highest institutional count was attributed to the AFRC, whose fighters most notably committed atrocities on a massive scale in the Northern region and in Kono District. The AFRC demonstrated a "specialisation" in the practice of amputations from 1998 to 1999. Of the various groups that comprised the

9 I was a Fulbright Fellow doing research on this book and also teaching classes at Fourah Bay 2008-2009.

10 According to Gberie (2005, 110), Bangura had been dismissed by Kabbah as ambassador to the United Nations.

11 Alimamy Pallo Bangura, in an interview with the author, June 9, 2009, at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

12 He provided no evidence of fraud in the election.

13 Final Report (2002).

14 The Rt. Rev. Dr. Joseph C. Humper, in an interview with the author, April 20, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Humper, a retired bishop emeritus of the United Methodist Church had also served as president of the Council of Churches of Sierra Leone, president of the Inter-Religious Council of Churches and from 2002-2004 as chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Sierra Leone.

CDF, the Kamajors received the most scrutiny, as they were responsible for almost all the CDF violations reported after 1996. Forced cannibalism is attributed only to the Kamajors. A defining characteristic of the CDF became its ceremony of initiation, described to the commission by many witnesses as entailing physical and psychological torture as well as other gross abuses of human rights. Although the RUF was the first to abduct and forcibly enlist children as soldiers and porters, all the armed factions recruited children and deployed them to such end. The main armed groups accused of perpetrating sexual violence against women and girls during the conflict were the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), the Civil Defence Forces (CDF), the Westside Boys, and the Sierra Leone Army (SLA).

Although this violence was widespread and left civilians at the mercy of one or more of these forces, until the AFRC coup of 1997, most residents of Freetown had not seen it face to face. That changed with the arrival of the undisciplined SLA and their dominant partners, the RUF in charge of daily life in Freetown. Suddenly the war was no longer a far off phenomenon. The occasional violence of the NPRC on the streets was nothing compared to the brutality that became common place in the capital. An incident reported by Amnesty International (1998) gives some idea of the nature of the violence under the AFRC.

> On 14 January 1998 a trader, Sama Turay, was shot dead by soldiers on Wilkinson Road in Freetown after an argument. Local residents were forced to hand the body over to soldiers. Residents of the area staged a demonstration along Wilkinson Road the following day in protest against the killing. This demonstration coincided with a visit to Freetown of a delegation headed by the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Sierra Leone, at that time based in Conakry, for discussions with the AFRC on the implementation of the peace agreement signed in Conakry in October 1997. The demonstration on 15 January 1998 was brutally suppressed; soldiers indiscriminately beat civilians and raided homes in the area around Wilkinson Road. They went from house to house accusing civilians of deliberately discrediting the AFRC during the visit of the delegation. One of the victims was a 25-year-old trader. When soldiers arrived at his stall he was hit in the face with butt of an AK47 gun and was also badly beaten on his back. He recognized the soldiers who beat him and described them as relatives of Major Johnny Paul Koroma [head of the AFRC]. Another of the victims was an 18-year-old girl, also living in the Wilkinson Road area, who had joined the demonstration. Three days

> later six soldiers came to her home. She was raped by all six soldiers who then cut her hair and shaved her head with a broken bottle.

Jimmy Kandeh (2004a, 171-2), a Sierra Leonean professor of political science in the United States, offered this broader assessment of the human rights record of the AFRC:

> Crimes against humanity committed by junta operatives included summary executions, mutilation and torture, arbitrary arrests *incommunicado* detentions, sexual abuse and enslavement, abductions, forced recruitment, and the extensive use of child soldiers. All of these violations occurred on a massive scale and were in many instances videotaped by the perpetrators themselves.

## A Critique of Theories of Nonviolence

Gene Sharp, one of the most prominent theorists of nonviolent resistance makes a distinction between "civil disobedience" and "noncooperation." He defines civil disobedience, in part as: "A deliberate peaceful violation of particular laws, decrees, regulations, ordinances, military or police orders, and the like." In part, he defines noncooperation as "deliberate restriction, discontinuance, or withholding of social, economic, or political cooperation … with a disapproved person, activity, institution, *or regime*" [emphasis added]. Noncooperation can be social, economic (e.g., boycotts and labor strikes) and political (Sharp 2005, 544, 547). Of the two terms, civil disobedience and noncooperation, civil disobedience is the more popularly used, including in Sierra Leone, although the peaceful resistance was closer to noncooperation.

> You had *civil disobedience* [emphasis added]. People didn't go to work, even though the junta was really forcing people [to go to work] in order to have a semblance – that things were working. You had civil disobedience [she repeated]. It was pretty successful. It wasn't like people came together and agreed – if they did, it was underground. But everybody just stopped going to work, refusing to cooperate. You had a few who cooperated; the majority refused to cooperate. And things weren't working: banks were

> closed; schools were closed. There was no fuel; food shortages. It was a very bleak period.[15]

According to Sharp (548-9), nonviolent resistance is aimed at weakening what he describes as the "pillars of support" of the regime. "Examples are the police, prisons, and military forces supplying sanctions, moral and religious leaders supplying authority (legitimacy), labor groups and business and investment groups supplying economic resources." Sharp argues that the key to power is obedience; if a regime cannot obtain the obedience of its people, it has no real power. "[T]he power of rulers and of hierarchical systems, no matter how dictatorial, depends directly on the obedience and cooperation of the population" (39).

Sharp (51-65) lists 198 methods of "nonviolent action" which he divides into three groups: (1) protest and persuasion: e.g., public statements, marches, protest meetings; (2) noncooperation: e.g., stay-at-home, boycotts, student or labor strikes, slowdown strikes, designed to produce the "disintegration" of a regime; and (3) nonviolent intervention which is harder for resisters and harder for regimes to withstand: e.g., fasting, sit-ins, occupations of work sites, alternative communication systems and markets.

Sharp's theoretical arguments have been criticized on several points as Schock (2005, 44-6) notes: for not explaining how people are aroused to disobey a regime; not explaining how an alternative system is established; not examining possible regime support from other countries. Shock suggests combining political process theory (including how to frame or explain issues and how external "opportunities" encourage a social movement) with insights from nonviolence theory to provide a stronger theoretical analysis.[16]

In Sierra Leone, there was little need for opponents of the AFRC regime to "frame" or explain the junta's seizure of power as illegitimate: that was quickly recognized by a broad range of the population. And there were few, if any, obvious external circumstances or "opportunities" which would encourage nonviolent resistance. Quite the opposite, the repression was so severe it strongly discouraged resistance. The country was almost universally condemned by other nations. International sanctions on

15 Jamesina King, in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, in the office of the Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone, a government agency, Freetown, Sierra Leone. King, an attorney and former chair of the commission was a commissioner at the time of the interview.

16 David Snow and colleagues develop the concept of framing in various articles, including one in 1986 ("Frame Alignment Processes, Micromobilization, and Movement Participation").

arms were imposed. As critics such as Schock point out, however, Sharp's theories do not say much about how an alternative system is established through nonviolent resistance; the focus is on bringing down the targeted regime, not on establishing a new one. Here Shock's approach of looking for strengths from more than one theoretical framework makes more sense than an overreliance on a single framework.

The current study of Sierra Leone, as well as Liberia and Kenya, suggests another critique of Sharp's nonviolence theories which is similar to the general critique this study offers regarding social movements in repressive settings. Sharp suggests that the theories of nonviolence work best when there is a "wisely prepared grand strategy" (Sharp 2005, 48). That implies, as does much of the traditional social movement literature, that there is need for a relatively high degree of organized planning and coordination to succeed. There were informal networks, personal contacts, and at times coordination for a particular event, as will be shown. *Radio Democracy* played an effective propaganda and informative role and encouraged noncooperation with the regime – as well as warning civilians of the consequences of cooperation and being labeled a collaborator. In Sierra Leone (and the other two countries) there was a popular goal – regime change but there was no "grand strategy" such as Sharp argues is needed. The resistance against the brutal regime originated from different sectors of society in different places and at different times. It was both individual and organizational; it was not formally coordinated. Yet the nonviolent resistance helped lead to a regime change. But this very lack of central coordination and the individual nature of much of the mass noncooperation provided the regime with no easy targets to shut it down.

Social movement studies cited earlier have shown that repression does not always stop resistance and that to a certain point it may actually stimulate more resistance. It is generally accepted that repression does set, as James C. Scott noted (1985, 209), "parameters" on resistance. With this in mind, the case of Sierra Leone during the brief occupation of power by the AFRC offers some interesting insights and complexities with regard to nonviolent resistance. The violence by the AFRC was extreme by all accounts. It was also unpredictable, general in application, and thus terrifying to most residents. This raises the question of how much repression does it take to stop nonviolent resistance? It also raises questions of what kinds of resistance can take place under such circumstances and how does the resistance adapt to the repression. It raises another, perhaps more subtle question about the motives behind such resistance: how much of it amounts to deliberate

defiance of a repressive regime and how much involves actions taken simply to survive the extreme violence, a point discussed below.

> [The regime] began to systematically and ruthlessly suppress political dissent and civil society and student militancy in the major towns and especially in Freetown. The regime indiscriminately arrested imprisoned and tortured journalists, demonstrators and anyone who was critical of the AFRC (Alie 2006, 179).

## Violent Resistance

Beyond a certain point, repression may either stop most resistance or drive it underground with the potential to remerge in the form of insurrection, revolution, or some other form of armed resistance. Rejected by civil society and the international community, the AFRC embarked upon the systematic violence by the state under the slogan "If you don't want us, you'll die." As a result, civil society responded not just with nonviolent resistance, but with people fleeing the country, and through force of arms (Kandeh 2004a, 167.) In Freetown, the capital, with few exceptions (notably a student protest march in Freetown that was violently put down), the resistance was not confrontational with the junta. It was largely nonviolent. But it took place during a civil war that at this period pitted the AFRC primarily against armed Civil Defense Forces, including the southern-based Kamajors among the Mende people, but also northern CDF's and international troops.[17] One Kamajor fighter, Gibril Bassie of Bo, the country's second major city, served in the national military (1992-97) and then joined the Kamajor (1998-2000) to fight the RUF. He objected to the looting by the military, calling that activity "a business." He added: "I stuck to the rules of engagement. I was so vocal. I feared no one." But when the RUF rebels joined the AFRC government "those were hard times." According to Bassie, the junta attacked the Kamajors, burning people alive in some cases, using what is termed "neck lacing:" jamming a car tire around the neck of the victim and setting them on fire.[18]

17 Internationally the civil war (1991-2002) involved at various times Gurkhas from Nepal, mostly West African troops led by Nigerians, government-hired mercenaries from South Africa, and finally British troops.

18 Gibril Bassie, in an interview with the author, December 8, 2008, in Bo, Sierra Leone.

## Civil Society's Nonviolent Resistance: Junta "Not Wanted"

It was against the backdrop of day-to-day violence that civilians in Freetown responded, some by fleeing the country, others by engaging in nonviolent resistance, as individuals or through organizations. In some cases the organizations, such as small independent newspapers, were so meagerly financed and few in staff that the journalists were acting more as individuals than as part of an organization structure that offered financial support, legal defense, and numerical strength for activists. An Amnesty International report (1997) noted:

> Almost all sectors of Sierra Leonean society, including trade unions, religious groups, lawyers, women's groups, teachers, students and journalists, have opposed the military coup. Large numbers of civil servants, teachers and other public sector workers have refused to work in protest against the military coup, despite threats of dismissal by the AFRC.

By most accounts, the nonviolent resistance was nationwide,[19] not just in Freetown. It took various forms: shops closing; banks shutting their doors; schools closing as teachers went on strike; laborers responding to the strike call of their unions; civil servants going to work only to collect checks and not be fired but doing little or no work; people staying home from other jobs. Independent journalists at great risk continued investigations and critical reporting against the junta. Organized labor, including teachers, went on extended strike so schools shut down.

> In summary, the resistance that was offered by the population is first in the history of this country … what you call civil disobedience at its highest level in my own estimation. Right from the word go the AFRC realized that they were not wanted. People didn't go to work; most of the shops remained closed. Those who went to work, they sat down there, did nothing. Group meetings were rare … There was a complete [international] blockade … A good number of people resigned [their work] and returned to their villages.[20]

19 The current study focuses mostly on what happened in Freetown, the nation's capital.
20 Humper interview. The blockade was intended to stop arms shipments but it became a near-total blockade, including of food.

Not everything shut down. Although many Lebanese shop keepers left the country or closed their shops, some stayed open, depending on the level of street violence day by day. Some taxies operated but at elevated prices because of the cost of black market fuel. As noted, civil servants went to work but mostly just to collect their paychecks, exercising a form of "go-slow" resistance. Some civilians and sympathetic members of the AFRC shared food with civilian acquaintances and sometimes would even eat together.[21] Petty markets continued business. Rice, a popular staple, became scarce due to the blockades, so people turned more to local foods.

> We have some crops that grow in the bush, we call them bush yams. A cassava plantation; potato plantation; yams. Those were the main source of livelihood – not only in the rural areas; they were brought here [to Freetown] because there was no importation of rice. Cassava became the main source of food in 1977. People survived on that.[22]

Not that people had much choice, but cassava became what James C. Scott (1985) might call a "weapon" of survival against the junta, as Rev. Humper described it. Humper argued that a deep-seated culture of respect for authority left many Sierra Leoneans reluctant to protest outside of traditional channels. But he described a way small farmers respond when authorities are seen as illegitimate. If the illegitimate officials are coming to their town to give orders, farmers "take their machetes or their cutlasses and go to their farms. When [the authorities] come to the town there is nobody there."[23]

**Individual Noncooperation**

There were at least three reasons individuals resisted the junta through noncooperation: (1) as a protest in support of human rights and a return to democracy; this motive most clearly fits the brave, critical reporting by journalists, and the individual lawyers who defended people arrested by the junta; (2) out of fear of going to work and carrying on normal activities because it was too dangerous on the streets; (3) out of fear of being labeled a

21 Charles Mambu, in an interview with the author, April 22, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, he was chair of the Coalition of Civil Society and Human Rights Activists, Sierra Leone. Such sharing typically involved civilians and friends or relatives who were in the AFRC but not supportive of the regime.

22 Humper interview

23 Scott's book is titled: *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*.

collaborator later when the legitimate government was reinstalled.[24] Though the latter two reasons amount to resistance, they also are strategic choices for survival.

Fleeing a war-torn country is another form of noncooperation,[25] but it is more likely that people fled the violence of the AFRC not as a form of protest but as a way to survive.[26] Others fled their homes but remained in Sierra Leone. "By June 1995, WFP [World Food Program] staff put the number of internally displaced at 1.5 million (Keen 2005, 186). Hannah Foullah, a student at Fourah Bay College in Freetown at the time of the AFC takeover, recalled her decision to follow the Kabbah government into exile:[27]

> It was a desperate time and because of what was happening you couldn't be sure that you would be safe the next day. You are alive today; you don't know if you are going to be alive tomorrow. You'd hear stories about people who had been raped, stories about people being attacked, you know. So then there was no rule of law because this was an illegitimate regime. So because they were illegitimate, would you complain to them, you know, about your rights being violated? No; so it became obvious that we could not continue living in Sierra Leone for the sake of our own lives because you wouldn't have anyone to go to.
>
> So we went, I remember, June 2 [1997, about a week after the coup]. It was my birthday; there was a big attack … There were explosions and everything, you know. And that was when we decided that we should leave. So we left the following week by road. My aunt had a … minibus, so we took that and that is how we went to Guinea.

24 This assessment is based on a wide range of interviews with people who were living in Freetown at the time the AFRC seized power in what became essentially an RUF-led regime.

25 One US-based organization noted: "The tactic of *protest emigration* [emphasis added] escalated, with an estimated 500,000 people – especially people with skills and professions – leaving the country" (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011). An estimated 400,000 people fled to Guinea, Liberia or The Gambia, according to Gberie (1997, 150 cited in Keen 2005, 213).

26 Life in the refugee camps was not easy; it could also be boring. To help pass the time, a group of refugees pooled their musical talents and formed what became known as the Refugee All Star Band, whose sales eventually went international.

27 Hannah Foullah, in an interview with the author, December 10, 2008, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview she was working in a bank. During the AFRC period she helped run Radio Democracy, set up by the government in exile to help undermine the AFRC.

## A Minor Theory: the Overlooked Role of Minor Actors in Helping Major Activists[28]

Sometimes minor actors step forward to help key activists then fade from historical memory. It is an aspect of resistance that is generally overlooked in studies. But without the intervention of minor actors, the key players might not have been able to carry on. In Kenya, for example, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, some activists narrowly escaped arrest due to tips from sympathetic supporters. In another circumstance, a prison guard helped a dissenter who was being tortured to get a message to an attorney, starting a chain of events that led to a reduction of torture in Kenya by the government. In Sierra Leone, two cabinet members of the ousted Kabbah government, both with a record of resistance to authoritarian regimes, were able to escape the country through the intervention of such minor actors.

In Freetown, the junta was scrambling to set up a government. While some APC politicians volunteered their services, some others who had been in the Kabbah government were offered jobs in the cabinet which would give the illegitimate junta an aspect of bipartisan support. Refusing an invitation put one in danger of being seen by the junta leaders as an enemy. Accepting such a post put the person in danger of being labeled later as a collaborator. One of those asked to take a post was Shirley Gbujama who had been Kabbah's minister of foreign affairs. The AFRC leadership would have scored a victory had she agreed. But Gbujama, a Mende, with a master of education, had chaired the Bitumani conferences that had helped push the previous military regime from power and restore democracy. She was not about to turn around and help the ones who now had pushed aside the elected government. Through the help of others, she was able to escape. "They came to my house and took me to meet the junta. Someone whispered to me [about a forthcoming invitation] to be in the RUF government." [She said:] "OK; thank you. As soon as I got home, I started packing. They didn't know my plans. All the planes had left." In the end, with the help of friends, she managed to get on a small fishing trawler from Aberdeen and went to exile in Guinea.[29]

Emmanuel Grant, who was also asked to serve in the junta cabinet, almost didn't make it to Guinea. The fact that he did escape underscores the role

28 The theory is revisited in the first chapter in the section on Kenya.

29 Shirley Gbujama, in an interview with the author, February 9, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

of minor actors who help activists as a form of resistance to a repressive regime. In Grant's case, he had two narrow escapes by his own account with a minor actor saving him each time. Grant was minister of works when the AFRC seized power. He was arrested and taken in handcuffs to a military headquarters. After two days he and some other detainees were going to be moved to another location when two soldiers came to him. "One whispered to me: 'don't be afraid: We've come to save you. Our boss said we should not take you along with them [other detainees] – it could be dangerous for you.'" They dressed me in military attire, gave me a gun with my military cap and everything … They drove me off.[30]

He was taken to the home of a military officer he knew. There he was told the junta wanted him to serve in their cabinet. But he refused. He was allowed to call a friend who came to collect him. With his friend he planned his escape on a boat to Guinea. Wearing a disguise which included a cap he managed to get onto the boat, but before it left, some rebels began searching the boat. Grant laughs as he recalled his second narrow escape to Guinea with the help of a second minor actor whose help amounted to resistance.

> I was in a very small wardrobe in the Captain's room. It was finally opened, actually. One solider came and said: "Get out!" When I turned around, I noticed that he was alone. So I stood up and he said to me: "Mr. Grant I never realized it was you. If I had known I would not have let them come in. Just stay; we are going to tell them now there is nobody in the boat.[31]

## Individual Resistance: Part of a Larger Social Movement

Scott (1985, 299) notes from his study of resistance by individual and organized small farmers in Malaysia: "Many of the forms of resistance I have been examining may be individual actions, but this is not to say that they are uncoordinated." In Sierra Leone, while on the surface much of this individual resistance appeared to be spontaneous and reflect personal decisions, a system of communication and networking developed, some of it overt, some of it clandestine. It amounted to a nonviolent social movement that responded to the repression of the regime. In Freetown, communities were divided into cells, typically only three or so people per cell. Messages

30 Grant interview.
31 Grant interview.

were passed between cells in code, Shellac Davies explained. For example: "That ink dress should be returned to me." Because there were numerous spies working for the junta, "you were never sure of the messenger."[32] In these circumstances, codes and "silence became an instrument" of resistance.[33] Other communications were open. *Radio Democracy*, broadcasting from a then-clandestine location near Freetown, gave instructions on when people should stay home or go to work. Davies mentioned a three-month period when people generally did go to work but added that when Radio Democracy urged people to stay home from work, many complied. Ridicule is another form of protest. Many people, no doubt discreetly, except perhaps on Radio Democracy broadcasts, began referring to AFRC leader Johnny Paul Koroma not as head of state but "foot of state."[34] There was a large underground network of people from all walks of life providing information to Radio Democracy.[35]

## Resisting and Surviving: "We All Thought We Were Going To Die"

For those who stayed in Freetown and other commercial cities of the country, the question for many was whether or not to continue going to their jobs as usual. If economic activity ground to a halt, opposition to the junta would be evident to all, including the international community. Civil servants worked for the government – now a military government – and were quickly warned by the junta to show up for work. According to many residents at the time who were interviewed for this study, civil servants generally showed up to work but did little other than collect pay checks when those were available. This kind of go-slow or work slow is a form of protest or resistance. "The job you'd normally take an hour to do, you would take a whole working day. Supervisors, too."[36] For other employees, not going to work was sometimes more a tactical survival strategy than a protest. "Initially we used to go to work, but then we stopped because of

32 Shellac Davies, in an interview with the author, January 29, 2009. Davies, a former university student leader in the mid-1990s, was, at the time of the interview, chief financial officer for the Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations.

33 Humper interview.

34 This example of derision was mentioned in several of my interviews and is also cited in Kandeh (2004a, 229, n. 111).

35 Kelvin Lewis, in an interview with the author, February 13, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the AFRC, Lewis was a contributor to the Voice of America.

36 Davies interview.

lawlessness and growing insecurity. We all thought we were going to die … It was a horrible time. If it ever happens [again] I would be forced to just jump into the sea … There's no way I would stay. It was really, really horrible."[37]

Sally Kamara was a student at Fourah Bay College in guidance and counseling when the AFRC coup shook her life. Instead of going to classes and parties she was thrust into a strange new world of violence, fear, and uncertainty. About the only routine that continued was going to church. There were now new reasons to pray. Instead of searching for a job, she found herself like most residents of Freetown searching for food.

> We walked long distances to look for food: we walked *miles, miles*. There are times when you are mid-way and you start hearing guns. Some homes were attacked. You don't close your door at home because when you closed your doors, the junta boys would think you are concealing something. So we left our doors open. At night you don't sleep … in your rooms because if we are caught they feel that you are harboring their enemy. We slept outside with burning tires along the street.[38]

On the surface, one might consider her as simply someone trying to survive, which is correct. But she was also a supporter of democratic government and had been part of the Women's Forum that had helped push the previous military regime out of power. She took training as an election monitor for the 1996 elections. Kamara was in the crowds attacked by police outside the national conference (Bitumani II) in support of elections when the previous military junta was scheming to stay in power. After the Kabbah government returned from exile, she was at the back of the crowd that marched to the well-armed home of rebel leader Foday Sankoh (by then a part of the Kabbah government) to denounce rumors that he was planning a coup. A number of demonstrators were killed.

"Our brothers and our sisters were very strong" she said of her ordeal during the AFRC occupation. At one point AFRC rebels came to the home the family rented. They accused her of being a collaborator with the ousted government of Kabbah and were set to burn the house, an all-too-frequent ritual in those days. But some of her secondary school students were on the scene and told the rebels, she recalls: "She's our teacher. We will not allow you to burn her house." Then one of the rebels apparently recognized her and told the others to move on.

37 King interview.

38 Sally Kamara, in an interview with the author, February 10, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Another category of individuals who resisted the AFRC were individual lawyers who boldly stepped up to defend detainees at a time when their bar association was quiet. Yet another category had elements of both individual and organizational resistance: people whose organization was so small and so weakly financed that it could offer little or no help in support of their activism. Many journalists fell into this category at the time. They worked out of one or two rooms with minimal equipment – often with no computers or phones. Their newspaper could not provide much, if anything, in the way of protection, legal fees, or material support other than a meager salary. In essence, when they wrote critical articles about the junta, they were exposing themselves as individuals to potential retribution; and in numerous cases the junta went after them, individually, arresting, torturing, and in a few cases, killing them.

The AFRC, through its illegitimacy and brutality, pushed many Sierra Leoneans into the category of noncooperation. Whether out of protest or fear, the widespread noncooperation by Sierra Leoneans in daily life under the junta deprived the junta of any claims to legitimacy. The brutal suppression of basic rights and violence against citizens, bravely reported by the few independent newspapers that kept publishing, sometimes clandestinely, relayed that illegitimacy to the international community. This noncooperation, mixed with reports of brutality, served to open the door to the international intervention that eventually drove the rebels out.

While some of those who stayed in Freetown and other parts of the country had a record of activism against the NPRC, it is impossible to dissect how much of their motives for noncooperation in daily life, especially in work, was a protest against the AFRC and how much of it was out of concern for their safety if they went to work or the chance of being labeled a collaborator with the junta when the exiled government returned. In a larger sense, it didn't matter what the motives were: ultimately, the mass of the population did not cooperate with the regime; the country was not functioning in most of the normal ways a country functions. Abdul Tejan-Cole, an attorney who later headed the country's anticorruption commission, suggests that the mass resistance was individual noncooperation on a collective scale.

> I still have some huge questions about how organized it was, how centralized the whole thing was. I don't subscribe to the theory that people sat back because [Radio Democracy] told them what not to do … We had instructions [from Radio Democracy] that people had been asked to do [something] that people simply ignored. People sat back

> and looked at the situation; did what they thought was right. People were sick and tired of so many years of war and suffering and they just said: the only way that my situation can improve is … sit back and say "No."[39]

## Organizational Nonviolent Resistance: Lessons from Gandhi and King

When teachers and other members of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress went on a nationwide protest strike shortly after the arrival of the AFRC junta, they were joining a rich tradition of nonviolent resistance that includes Martin Luther King, Jr.'s campaigns in the 1950s and 1960s against racism in the United States and Mohandas Gandhi's famous salt march against the colonial British in India in 1930.

Gandhi had practiced his developing philosophy of nonviolence while living in South Africa. At the time he returned to India under British rule, the British had long established a monopoly on the production and sale of salt and derived important income from taxing it. His tactic was to violate the British laws against Indians producing salt and urging Indians nationwide to do the same. In social movement terms, Gandhi "framed" his appeal for action, nonviolent resistance, around the unpopular tax on an item that was important to people living in a tropical country, especially given the poverty of the masses.

This was more than a gesture toward cheaper salt: it was a bold defiance of British law and part of a campaign to free India from British rule. As he prepared to march to the sea, he said: "This fight is no public show; it is the final struggle … I do ask you to return here only as dead men or winners of *swarj*, a term he used to mean "political independence … The simple act of standing up to the authorities dispelled the sense of inferiority that colonial rule both fostered and required" (Ackerman and Duvall 2000, 66, 85, 108). On March 12, 1930 Gandhi started a 240-mile walk to coast of the Arabian Sea to a point near the small coastal community of Dandi. It was a place where the watery saline mud was especially suited for boiling to create salt from the residue. Along the way he encouraged local British-appointed officials to resign their posts in protest; and he advised villagers to boycott ceremonies conducted by officials who did not resign. He reached the coastal area

39 Abdul Tejan-Cole, in an interview with the author, February 24, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

April 6, symbolically reaching into the water and pulling up a chunk of saline mud as the first step in producing salt.

> The Salt March gave the world the idea of mass nonviolence in politics. It was also a living sermon to the country, which was heard by many and changed many. That sermon speaks to us just as loudly in the new millennium. The revolution that Gandhi sought to achieve was not merely political. It was also social. The independence he fought for was not only national but also personal. The Salt March was primarily about empowerment; it told people that they were stronger than they thought and that their oppressors were weaker than they imagined (Weber 2002).

The salt march put the British on the spot. If they arrested Gandhi and others who began making salt – as thousands did – they would create more martyrs for the national movement and confirm Gandhi's claims about their oppressive intent. But if they did nothing, they would look weak with regard to enforcing their laws, inviting further protest. Gandhi sought to provoke the British into action by announcing he would lead a raid on the Dharasana salt production in Gujarat that was part of the British monopoly on salt production. Before the salt factory protest, however, thousands were arrested, including Gandhi. The protest proceeded without him. At the Salt Works, some 2,500 demonstrators gathered as police savagely beat unarmed volunteers with steel tipped rods; at least forty-two people were injured. "The watching crowds gasped, or sometimes cheered as the volunteers crumpled before the police without even raising their arms to ward off the blows… The volunteers who were hit simply reeled over on the ground – without making a cry or an effort to defend themselves," according to United Press International correspondent Webb Miller, who was there (Miller 1930).

One of the aims of such protests, as nonviolence methods guru Gene Sharp writes (Sharp 2005, 549), is to deny oppressive authorities the "pillars of support" which oppressive authorities rely on to rule. One of those pillars is "moral" authority, according to Sharp. The violence the British government used against unarmed protestors at the Dharasana salt works robbed the British of any pretense of moral authority in their dealings with Indian subjects.

While Gandhi and King (and others) who advocated using nonviolence tactics pointed to the moral force of nonviolence, Sharp also emphasizes political tactics and strategies involved. He identifies the "pillars" a repressive regime depends on to continue in power as including, in part, "moral and

religious leaders supplying authority (legitimacy), labor groups and business and investment groups supplying economic resources." Chenoweth and Stephan (2011, 44) in their global study of nonviolent resistance campaigns from 1900 to 2006, make a similar point when they stress the importance of "sustained pressure derived from mass mobilization that withdraws the regime's economic, political, social, and even military support from domestic populations and third parties. Leverage is achieved when the adversary's most important supporting organizations and institutions are systematically pulled away through mass noncooperation." As important and essential as individual resistance is in any social/resistance movement, organized resistance is also critical, and Sharp argues (2005, 35), likely to have more impact:

> While individual acts may at times not have much impact, the defiance of organizations and institutions – for example, trade unions, business organizations, religious organizations, the bureaucracy, neighborhoods, villages, cities, regions, and the like – can be pivotal. Through these bodies people can collectively offer disobedience and noncooperation. Organizations and intuitions such as these, which supply the necessary sources of power to the opponent group, are called "pillars of support."

**Teachers and Labor Strike**

Only a day after the coup, The Sierra Leone Labour Congress, Sierra Leone Teachers Union and other trade organizations "encouraged their workers to stay at home and despite pleas and threats from the AFRC, the workers refused to yield" (Alie 2006, 179). The strike by the labor unions, especially the teachers, was a deliberate, nonviolent organizational tactic to weaken the regime by refusing to cooperate in the kind of day-to-day economic and social – educational, in this case – life of the society.

It was a clear message to the junta: you are not welcome; we will not cooperate; step down and let the democratic government return. As one labor official recounted the resistance: "We're going to use what we have. What we have is to work. When we work we generate wealth. And if we don't work, wealth will not be generated. And that will [lead] to destruction of government."[40] This was not a nationwide strike for benefits; this was a nationwide resistance to an illegitimate regime. In a country such as Sierra

40 Max Conteh, in an interview with the author, February 6, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. At the time of the interview, he was director of education for the Sierra Leone Labour Congress.

Leone, one of the poorest in the world, going on strike was a major sacrifice. The question was: how would members survive; how members would feed their families. Many people left the country; many others received money from their relatives abroad. "The foreign exchange bureaus were *packed*."[41] But for many who could not leave or did not have supportive relatives abroad, local culture was a safety net of sorts and an important "weapon" of resistance. Labour Congress official Max Conteh explained:

> Because of our culture and our traditional values we are highly dependent to each other. [We have] strong family ties. During that period, those who have [helped] those who did not have. That is our traditional value. I share with my relations. Even under normal circumstance, that is the way we live. And that will also ensure that people don't starve.[42]

The most powerful part of the Labour Congress at the time was the Sierra Leone Teachers Union (SLTU). Industry is limited in Sierra Leone. Schools are in all parts of the country. Education is a top priority for most families in Sierra Leone and across Africa.[43] Families, especially mothers, will make sacrifices to insure their children get the chance to go to school. Competition at the higher level and at the university level is especially stiff. "The Sierra Leone Teachers Union was one of the first national associations to condemn the coup and declared a teachers strike until democracy was restored" (Global Nonviolent Action Database 2011).

Alpha Timbo was secretary general of the SLTU through much of the 1990s and also general secretary of the Labour Congress in the mid-1990s. As such, he was someone both the NPRC and AFRC courted then tried to intimidate; both efforts failed. He had organized strikes under President Momoh, demanding more and timely pay. "They tried to co-opt me." When the NPRC took power, they offered him a government job which "I declined; I would never serve a military government." When the NPRC set up an advisory committee on the constitution that made a national tour, the

41 Gordon Interview.

42 Conteh interview.

43 One of the saddest things I saw in Sierra Leone was the destruction of a small private, wood-walled school near our apartment in Hill Station in Freetown. The Lutheran church in Ghana owned the land the school was allowed to build on but wanted the land back. After negotiations stalled, they bulldozed the school on a weekend. The publicity was so great that after the teachers walked to the nearby home of President Ernest Bai Koroma and complained, the president visited the site and ordered the church to build a replacement school. The incident is just a small example of the political as well as the social importance of education in the country.

Teachers Union sent people to all the same meetings to argue against it. "We said we do not need a new constitution; let's just fix a date for elections." When the Union held meetings with the theme of "No new constitution; NPRC must go" the police started showing up to try to intimidate people. Timbo tried a new strategy: hold multiple meetings at the different sites at the same time because police couldn't be at all of them at the same time, at least not in numbers. Occasionally two police would show up, outnumbered by 100 or so at the meeting and were beaten by the attendees. "I never called for them to be beaten – except for one or two occasions." When the AFRC overthrew the elected Kabbah government, Timbo was in no mood to back down, even after they offered him a position, which he refused.

> My refusal led to the American Federation of Teachers taking my family [for protection] Because of the atrocities committed, and I was here, I refused to leave the country. I was arrested several times, over 20-30 times. We stopped work [for teachers], so I was under extreme pressure every day. I had to go to State House to talk about how these schools would reopen. I told the teachers I would not call them back to work [until democracy was restored]. I told them anytime you hear my voice on the radio calling them to work I was under duress. We refused taking salaries from them [AFRC]. When the new government came [the elected government of Kabbah] they paid us part of the back salary.[44]

**Journalists Wage Nonviolent "War" against the Military Junta**

Critical reporting by independent Sierra Leone journalists made the abuses of the junta not just a local issue but an international one and helped keep international pressure on the AFRC to step down. The journalists took great risks to report the news. Some were threatened, detained, tortured, and a few killed during the AFRC occupation in 1997-98. Others were targeted and killed in January 1999 when elements of the AFRC returned in a final spasm of violence. The reporting was an important element in the nonviolent resistance against the junta. Olu Gordon, an independent journalist, argued that journalists helped lead the unarmed struggle against the AFRC junta. "The struggle of the independent press against the AFRC junta was in essence a struggle of civil society against the state … Only the press was in a position to articulate those interests on a consistent and daily basis" (Gordon 2004, 181, 191). The news they published was not simply

44 Alpha Timbo, in an interview with the author, February 6, 2009, in Freetown Sierra Leone.

a matter of propaganda; numerous journalists interviewed explained the steps they took to try to investigate before publishing. Journalists were a particular target of the junta, which wavered between an apparent desire for credibility by allowing a semblance of freedom of the press, and the even stronger desire for control and to punish anyone publishing critical news about them.

## Drawn to activism by their profession

One of the targeted journalists was Jonathan Leigh who was working as a stringer for the independent *Democrat* newspaper at the time. His articles brought him such unsought notoriety that he had to wear a disguise when he went to a scene to report. As we were walking along one of Freetown's typical over-crowded sidewalks on the way to my interview with him in a small café near his tiny, second floor newspaper office, I asked him why he had taken such chances to report the news during the AFRC occupation. He stopped, looked at me as if it was a dumb question: "I'm a journalist."[45]

Leigh's response nudged me to think more deeply about similar responses from activists I had interviewed in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya. Though I had probably considered the idea before, it was now becoming more obvious that a whole range of professionals were drawn into human rights, pro-democracy activism not by any decision to be an "activist." Rather, they were drawn into the role of activist, sometimes reluctantly, because of their profession. "This is our work," said Phillip Neville, owner and founder of the *Standard Times* newspaper based in Freetown, who was beaten by the AFRC for his paper's reporting. But like most other journalists interviewed, Neville also said he is an ardent supporter of democratic rule. "We stood firm because of democracy. We had not wanted democracy to be interrupted because we suffered for democracy to come into this country." Like a number of others, he paid a high price for his dedication. "I was seriously beaten up [by the AFRC]. They took everything from me; and they burnt down my house." He credits God for having survived.

Other examples of people drawn into an activist role through their profession were the attorneys who felt obliged to defend detainees who came to them for help. I met such attorneys in all three countries. In the broader concept of social movement developed in this book, this category

45 Jonathan Leigh, in an interview with the author, February 13, 2009, in Freetown Sierra Leone.

of sometimes reluctant activists – professionals drawn to activism because of their work, not through membership in a protest organization – plays an important part in the resistance. Yet such professionals are left out of most studies because they do not belong to a recognized resistance organization.

Mustapha Sesay, for example, was a journalist during the time of the AFRC. He nearly lost his life during the extreme violence by the rebels in January 1999. Asked why he continued his work under such dangerous conditions he said: "We are journalists. Besides, our nation was in crisis … And we also wanted to set a precedent. If the AFRC had succeeded we may have had two or three more coups after that. But it was because of the kind of resistance they had from the general public and the media – the journalists who stood up against them – that the military system has become so unpopular in Sierra Leone."[46]

As we settled into a booth at the café near his office, Leigh, in his typical journalistic approach, went straight to the point about his work and its dangers. When students organized a protest march August 18, 1997 that was violently broken up by police with several deaths reported, he donned a cap and dark glasses to hide his identity as he approached the march to report. "Police were looking for prominent anti-junta journalists. You don't go very close to them [AFRC]. You keep your face down. I was scared, but I wanted to see what was going on." Leigh was arrested in October 1997 shortly after publishing his reports on a member of the junta being involved in the looting of a shop at night. According to his reporting, he said, "The 'boys' working under him [the senior junta official] walked into the shop one night and stole items."

> I was arrested in the afternoon around 5. I was stripped of all my belongings, blindfolded, and taken to [the house of the officer of the junta he wrote about]. I was beaten with rifle butts [by the officer] I sustained injuries on my head. [He was then taken to a military camp at Hill Station in Freetown.] We were treated very badly. One evening the soldiers came around and started to beat up everybody … We were there for some two weeks … I was given twelve lashes seriously with a stick. The place where we used to sleep was more like a dungeon. It was water-logged, moldy ground.[47]

46 Mustapha Sesay, in an interview with the author, February 11, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

47 Leigh interview.

When Leigh was released he immediately left for his own safety to Gambia. He credits international media watchdog groups including the Committee to Protect Journalists, Reporters Sans Frontiéres (Reporters Without Borders), and the International Federation of Journalists with helping win the release of prominent local journalists who the AFRC detained. Leigh is convinced the independent reporting during the AFRC brutal regime helped bring about their demise by broadcasting the abuses of the regime. Ironically, Leigh was later detained by the restored, elected Kabbah government in 1999 for reporting the alleged excesses of a public official in "carrying out his duties." He was "invited" to military headquarters. "I was locked up for three days." He was not mistreated, he said. Later, he charges, some government security officials "planted arms in the office." As a result, he was again detained, this time for 18 days by the police. Then the state dropped the charges.

> The reports [about the AFRC] had a lot of impact in restoration of democracy. If the papers had been all [pro]-junta at the time, it wouldn't have been easy for [West African troops to intervene and chase the AFRC out of Freetown].The papers reported the bad things they were doing: the harassments, the looting. Those outside came to know they have to do something to restore democracy by what they were getting from the newspapers.[48]

Another journalist at the time, Abdul Dimoh Kposowa was writing for the *Standard Times,* hiding from the regime in a downtown apartment, now converted into a modest hotel, the site he chose for my interview with him. Occasionally he stopped talking as a hotel employee passed nearby, perhaps a habit developed during his time as an underground journalist. Kposowa shows me the scars still visible on the palm of one hand, a result of torture by the AFRC. "Every journalist was a target" except those who were pro-junta. When he was located and arrested after writing articles critical of the AFRC, they used a razor blade to tear off some of the skin on his palm and his feet. He was held temporarily in a large, steel shipping container, a common practice by the AFRC, then held for two weeks in the Pademba Road prison in Freetown before being released.

48 Leigh interview.

### Underground Resistance by Journalists

When the junta got tough on journalists, some of the journalists got clever. They changed their main office to "ghost" offices, continuing operations in hiding. AFRC security personnel would show up and find the office open – but empty. Nearby, blending in with the street crowds, a secretary or messenger would keep an eye on the office from a distance. If a friend showed up they would be guided to the real location where the paper continued being put together. When the AFRC-RUF junta began going after vendors of the papers, the vendors got clever, too, slipping the independent papers between the covers of pro-junta publications. Six journalists, including Jonathan Leigh, were arrested and tortured.[49] The Sierra Leone Association of Journalists resisted AFRC "guidelines" and refused to support registration for newspapers. "Daring, courageous and ingenious though the independent media was in resistance to the AFRC-RUF, it survived because it was a part of a lager coalition opposed to the regime." Even lack of material resources worked at times to the advantage of the resistance, providing a reverse twist on the resource mobilization theory as playing an important role in the success of social movements. Most of the press houses "lacked computers or phones and had to outsource their basic production of its copy."[50] "This resource disadvantage enabled journalists to operate in a clandestine manner; to be on the move and to escape being caught. It often became impossible to pin down exactly where the newspapers were being published since their stated offices were just addresses in their imprints" (Gordon 2004, 188-91)

### A Journalist with a "Revolutionary Fervor" for Democracy

Early in my stay in Freetown I heard about a veteran journalist who was active in all three periods of resistance I was studying, from Siaka Stevens days through the AFRC period: Olu Richie Awoonor Gordon, better known as simply Olu Gordon. His penname, according to a colleague, Frank Kposowa, was "Gatsby." He was still an active journalist.[51] His office was on the second floor of a large home on a busy intersection not far from the city stadium where I trained with other runners from time to time. Gordon sat in an over-crowded, dimly lit office with windows facing the

49 Gordon interview.

50 Gordon attributes this observation to a pamphlet by journalist Umaru Fofana (1999).

51 At the time of the interview he was editor of *Peep* magazine.

street, smoking as he talked. At first we just chatted, but he plunged rapidly into an account of the resistance of ordinary people in Sierra Leone to past repressive regimes. I realized that this was going to be much more than a get-acquainted encounter: this was the interview. I asked him to start over so I could tape the full interview. He ended up talking for nearly three hours, interrupted a few times by people who stopped by the office. At one point we watched together out the window as a school marching band led a hearse in a funeral parade. Later, across the busy intersection, a flow of uniformed primary school girls streamed out onto the street from their classrooms as their morning session ended.

Some of the journalists active during the AFRC-RUF occupation in 1997 and 1998 such as Paul Kamara and Olu Gordon were among the most consistent opponents of authoritarian rule in the country – and among the most courageous. Kamara's confrontation with the NPRC is described in a separate chapter. Gordon was a popular young faculty member at Fourah Bay College during the early 1980s when students were challenging the government; in 1985 he was expelled along with two other faculty members, Cleo Hanciles and Jimmy Kandeh.

> We were branded as being radical but I don't think we were doing anything particularly illegal. We just happened to be close to the students. And we had a suspect political background. We'd been with *The Tablet* [an independent newspaper that challenged some of the policies of then President Siaka Stevens]. We'd been student radicals ourselves.[52]

Gordon was present at the two national conferences that pushed for the NPRC departure and for democratic elections. He criticized the AFRC and also the reinstalled Kabbah government which detained him briefly in 2005 for an article about corruption charges against a minister who was close to the president (Reporters without Borders, 2005). While continuing to write critical articles about the junta, he was also involved in the planning for the student demonstration against the junta August 18, 1997 that was brutally put down by junta security forces. By that time, police were watching the newspaper where he worked, at Kamara's *For Di People*. But, in another example of the importance of minor actors and individual resistance, Gordon's cousin, a local businessman, volunteered his house as a meeting place. His cousin said: "Any way I can help I will." It became a kind of war room for planning the peaceful student protest.

52 Gordon interview.

The day before the demonstration, we planned "assembly points, the banners, the posters …" in his cousin's house. Police later suspected his cousin and killed him, Gordon said. "It was really the determination of the ordinary people to get rid of the military regime that really sustained what we did."

Gordon was Secretary General of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) during the AFRC period. Two days after the coup, SLAJ issued a statement calling for the restoration of democracy. "They were arresting journalists [frequently]." At one point it fell to him to deliver a letter of protest to the junta leader over the arrest of journalist Kelvin Lewis.

> I tried to get someone to do it; they wouldn't do it. I had to go do it myself. It was scary because these guys were totally *mad*. A lot of them were on drugs half the time. You never knew what they were going to do. It was the longest walk from the [AFRC headquarters] gate to the mail room and back that I've ever taken. I was *petrified.* When I look back at some of the things I've done, I really think we were stupid. [laughs heartily]. I wouldn't do them now. At the time we just took chances – we did what had to be done. And it had to be done.[53]

When Gordon died in 2011, there were many tributes published, including one which recounted an article he wrote in 1997 in *For Di People* soon after the AFRC called the RUF rebels to join them in the junta. Apparently to terrorize the population, the rebel soldiers caught and dismembered an alleged looter in Freetown. Gordon condemned the act, writing: "They have done this to put fear into us. Well, it won't work. We will not fear them … The very symbol they have used to put fear into us is what we would use to mobilize people against them … They will go … " The tribute noted that Gordon did not use a pseudonym on the article. "He signed it boldly, 'By Olu Gordon' … [T]hat was the essence of Olu Gordon, a relatively quiet man with a revolutionary fervor that appears to make him almost inviolable" (Hanciles 2011).

53 Gordon interview

## Radio Democracy: Psychological Warfare against the "Foot" of State

Evidence on the nonviolent resistance by civilians in Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya to regime repression provides new insights on the theoretically murky question of how repression affects resistance – and how resistance affects repression. The cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia, in particular, where repression was more severe than in Kenya, provide valuable information about what kind of resistance is possible under such conditions; what shape such resistance takes; and what kind of impact it may have. As horrific as the repression was under the AFRC in Sierra Leone during 1997-98, and under Samuel Doe in the 1980s in Liberia, it could have been worse. But in each of the three countries examined in this book, there was the naïve hope on the part of the regime rulers that they could gain international respect and credibility by adhering to at least the semblance of basic democratic and human rights principles. Yet in all three, the regimes were not consistent in this direction, periodically detaining, torturing, and killing perceived and actual civilian opponents.

In Sierra Leone, the AFRC-RUF repression did preclude most open demonstrations, although there were two notable ones, analyzed below. One additional form of resistance, a clandestine radio station, functioned outside the usual resistance-repression framework since the broadcasting took place outside the physical reach of the junta. It reflects the ability of a resistance movement to adapt its tactics according to the level of repression and how they are used against a regime. Had the broadcast station been located in Freetown or some other place under junta control, it could have been detected and destroyed.

Radio Democracy, as 98.1 FM became known,[54] was established in July 1997 by the ousted SLPP government of Kabbah, with financial support from the British and US governments. It was secretly located at the Nigerian-guarded international airport at Lungi, across the wide bay from Freetown. It provided what in social movement terms is referred to as "cognitive liberation," a feeling that there is a way to change an unjust situation.[55] Even if people recognize a situation as unjust, they may be reluctant to do anything about it. "In the absence of strong interpersonal links to others, people are likely to feel powerless to change conditions even if they perceived present

54 98.1 continues today as an independent radio station based in Freetown.

55 The concept is developed, among other places, in McAdam (1999, 48-51)

conditions as favorable to such efforts." Such links provide the "information and perspective that others afford …" (McAdam, 1999, 48, 50).

## A "Ray of Hope"

In any developing society, there are always interpersonal links, but the repression of the junta made them more difficult, especially since society was divided between opponents and supporters of the junta. Radio Democracy, however, provided indirect personal links to a broad invisible network of listeners; the broadcasts provided the "information and perspective" of others cited by McAdam. The broadcasts, a mix of propaganda against the regime, news, satire, and practical information on availability and location of market items, gave sympathetic listeners encouragement to not cooperate with the junta and to hang in there because the exiled government would return. "If someone is drowning and sees a thread, he will grab that thread hoping it will save him. People had lost hope … Radio Democracy was giving hope, that light, that ray of hope to people that all is not lost yet."[56] For Sally Kamara, who was active in the Women's Forum that had opposed the NPRC, listening to Radio Democracy reinforced her desire to outlast the AFRC ordeal. "When I heard it I was lifted." She recalled that the broadcasts encouraged her to "stand firm; that you should not give up. It would soon be fine. The democratically elected government would soon be restored."[57]

Julius Spencer, one of three people who ran the station with Hannah Foullah and Alie Bangura for the exiled government of President Kabbah, suggests the project accomplished two main tasks that helped drive out the rebels and bring back the democratic government:

1 It supported the nonviolent resistance movement against the junta. "It served as a rallying point for the resistance. Without the radio station, I don't think the resistance could have lasted long … The general public – their spirits were kept up and they retained the hope that the government would be restored."
2 The nonviolent resistance of the junta, in turn, attracted international support and encouraged the military intervention that eventually ousted the rebels. "If the Sierra Leone population had cooperated with the junta there would not have been any real moral obligation on the part of the international community, including ECOMOG, to try to restore the government. The main reason that happened is because it

56 Lewis interview.
57 Sally Kamara interview.

> was quite clear the junta did not have any popular support." At the same time, the broadcasts "provided encouragement for the ECOMOG [West African] troops who by the time we arrived [July 1997] were becoming dispirited because of the kind of things that were being said about them on the radio, on television [by the junta]."[58]

Listening to Radio Democracy became a daily event for many Sierra Leoneans, but it was also dangerous. Several interviewees recounted a story of a woman in Freetown being shot when rebels found her listening to the station. Whether the story is accurate or not, the fact that it was spreading around made people cautious.[59] "People had to hide to listen to Radio Democracy because if you are caught, you are as good as dead. Funnily, the military boys listened to Radio Democracy. I remember when we were locked up that night [at a military base]; one of them had his radio tuned to Radio Democracy."[60]

Opponents of the exiled SLPP government saw Radio Democracy in a different light: It was "Enemy No. 1," charged Paolo Bangura who served briefly in the AFRC cabinet. He argued that the station took advantage of the split in the AFRC between the remnants of the Sierra Leone Army and the RUF rebels to "create panic and mayhem" among civilians. "They [Radio Democracy] had moles at every level. They were really alarmists, urging people to stay home from work – warning them to stay home" or be considered collaborators.[61] Spencer does not deny that Radio Democracy broadcast warnings to those who cooperated with the junta. The government-supported station was intent on "instilling some fear in the ordinary people so they would not cooperate with the junta … simply by letting them know the government [in exile] was going to come back … and anybody who cooperates with the junta was going to be seen as having collaborated." After the Kabbah government returned there were a number of revenge killings against suspected collaborators, but Radio Democracy urged citizens to not engage in that, Spencer said. Bangura also charged that some broadcasts pinpointed rebel activity and that subsequently Nigerians bombed those areas causing civilian deaths. Spencer did not deny this:

> That's possible; that's possible. Civilians were killed on all sides. There were more civilians killed by missiles fired by the junta themselves.

58 Spencer interview.

59 Alie (2006, 182) writes that "many Sierra Leoneans caught listening to the radio lost their lives" but mentions no sources to support the statement.

60 Lewis interview. He was detained as an independent journalist and tortured at a military barracks.

61 Bangura interview.

> Basically what the radio station was doing was giving information. Also, in a way, trying to destabilize the junta. That was part of the strategy, to try to destabilize them. So we'd talk about things that they were doing. And when we got the information we would immediately put it out.

## Invisible Networks Supporting Social Movements in Repressive Settings

Most social movement literature stresses "public" challenges to authorities. But in repressive settings, public challenges can be suicidal. This book argues that a more flexible approach to social movement theory is necessary to describe what happens in dangerous circumstances. In Kenya, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, non-public networks of activists supported social movements when the state was too repressive for open ones. In the case of Radio Democracy, Journalist Kelvin Lewis identified a complex but secretive network of people in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy (MRD) which gathered news for Radio Democracy.[62]

> This [MRD] was just a group opposed to the junta and the rebels, a group which professed to fight for the return of democracy; guys who didn't support the soldiers. You had students, you had police officers who had run away; you had soldiers who had joined the other side; you had civilians … There was an organization; there was a leader … These guys would scout around during the day and then in the evening they would wait for the call from Ali Bangura [who] would call, ask them what is the news.[63]

Three citizens in Freetown – two businessmen and a member of the government's security team – developed networks of informants and reported to Bangura.[64] The broadcasts were a mix of propaganda, psychological

62 In an interview, Spencer said he invented the name of the group. Hannah Foullah added that the network included various organizations, including a youth movement. Gberie (2005, 108) calls the MRD a "nationwide resistance … which incorporated almost all the pressure groups and civil organisations plus the [armed] Kamajor and the northern-based [armed] Kapras, a very anti-RUF group. The latter two groups came together to form a stronger, more diversified [Civil Defense Force] force to oppose the AFRC."

63 Lewis interview.

64 Spencer identified the three; a local journalist identified several other Sierra Leoneans in Freetown who were key informants in the Movement for the Restoration of Democracy. The author decided not to identify any of these individuals because he did not interview them to obtain their permission.

warfare, and news. Sometimes informants provided negative reports against individuals as part of a personal vendetta. "We were not in a position to cross check or verify anything that we put out."[65] In the effort to destabilize the regime, Radio Democracy broadcasters announced when the top AFRC officials were meeting and where, sometimes causing those at the meeting to run away for fear of possible bombing by the Nigerian forces. AFRC forces searched in vain for the station but never found it.

## A Nonviolent Woman "Warrior"

*Hannah Foullah* was a key player in the nonviolent part of the resistance to the AFRC. She was studying history and sociology at Fourah Bay College in Freetown when the rebels seized the city in May 1997. When she fled with a relative to Guinea she met Julius Spencer and Ali Bangura who wanted to set up a clandestine radio station to support resistance to the AFRC and help destabilize the regime. Hannah had read about Martin Luther King, Jr. and also followed African politics. "I just felt this is an opportunity I have to serve my own country. I decided Ok let me take it up. They said it would just take two weeks. Two weeks ended up being 9 months [laughing]."[66]

The "station" was set up in a tent protected by sandbags a few meters from the airstrip at the international airport in Lungi, across the bay from Freetown where the AFRC was based. But the rebels had troops in the area and, the third day after the radio team arrived, rebels bombarded the airport which was being defended by Nigerian troops under direction of ECOMOG. "I was so scared. This battle went on for … days." On another occasion a snake slipped into their broadcast tent. "They had to dismantle all the sandbags and everything and eventually killed the snake. For a long time I didn't want to go in there but you had to do the work. We used to eat the rations the soldiers were eating: eh, it was terrible."

Their contacts were impressive. Hannah said they even had the number of the AFRC commander, Johnny Paul Koroma. "We would call him and say we wanted to talk to him and say: "Don't you know that people don't want you [laughing]." They broadcast over the same wavelength as the state radio. "So it meant that people put their radio on the frequency 99.9 [the state radio channel] they would get 98.1. So that was really brilliant.

65 Spencer interview.

66 Hannah Foullah, in an interview with the author, December 10, 2008, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

I really enjoyed that [laughing]." When the AFRC jammed the broadcasts, they increased the power of the signal and continued with the programs. Hannah particularly appreciated the broadcasts by Ali Bangura who used humor and ridicule against the junta members. A decade after her months as a nonviolent warrior for restoration of democracy and human rights enough people recalled her contributions to the resistance to suggest I interview her. I finally located her where she was working in a bank. I asked her what she thought of her work as a wartime radio broadcaster.

> It helped people in terms of their, how do you say, resilience. I think it would have been very easy to just back down, you know. But because we were on air it strengthened the resolve of the people to continue resisting the Junta. Otherwise it would have been very difficult because they didn't have food; schools were not in session, a lot of bad things were happening. So it was difficult.

## Dangerous Marches

Students had played a key role in the resistance to President Siaka Stevens, especially during the 1977 demonstrations which began at Fourah Bay College and spread across the country. They had challenged Steven's handpicked successor President Momoh in the late 1980s and up to the time of the NPRC coup in 1992. Once again they surfaced as a contentious force on August 18, 1997, when they and others staged one of the few overt demonstrations against the AFRC regime in a dangerous "march for democracy."[67] The march had two purposes:

> First was to tell the military: You know what? We don't believe in "juntaism." You guys shouldn't come and destroy the democratic process. And secondly, the demonstration was to send a clear signal that Sierra Leoneans were resolved it needed the support of the international community to ensure that democracy was restored.[68]

67 Amnesty International 1997.

68 Abdulai Bayraytay, in an interview with the author, April 28, 2009, Freetown, Sierra Leone. Bayraytay in that year was secretary general of the National Union of Sierra Leonean Students but was out of the country when the march took place.

Journalist Lewis, reporting for the Voice of America, was spotted and arrested the day of the march.[69] He was beaten with a machete then locked overnight in a freight container at the military headquarters before being released the next day. His colleague Jonathan Leigh, wearing a disguise of cap and dark glasses to escape detection by police, managed to report on the march.[70] The AFRC had warned the students not to proceed with the march, which also involved trade unionists and market women; the junta forces broke up the march with live ammunition and tear gas.[71] At least six students were killed, many others injured, and more than 120 people, mostly students, were arrested on August 18 and 19.[72] The AFRC accused students of being armed, a charge denied by then Student Union President Maclean Thomas: "We have never used AK-47 rifles to demonstrate against the junta because we believe in the ideals of Martin Luther King Jr. by using nonviolent means for our voices to be heard by the whole world" (Global Nonviolent Action Database, 2011).

## Marching on the Rebel Leader's Home: "We Shall Overcome"

Nigerian and other ECOMOG West African troops drove the AFRC junta out of Freetown in early February 1998. President Kabbah returned from exile in Guinea March 10. In 1999 in an attempt to end the war with Foday Sankoh's RUF, he invited Sankoh to join his government, awarding him a position more or less equivalent to vice president. But in May 2000, there were rumors that Sankoh was planning a coup. The same week that the final ECOMOG troops left Sierra Leone, the RUF kidnapped some 500 UN troops and began advancing toward Freetown.[73] This prompted two large marches on the home of RUF leader Sankoh who was still living in Freetown. The first march, led by women, was peaceful; the second, led mostly by men, was not.

The first march, held on May 6, 2000, was organized by the Women's Forum. Still energized from their campaign against the NPRC, the women were well organized. Some women planned to strip as a traditional protest,

69 Lewis interview.

70 Leigh interview.

71 Early in my stay in Sierra Leone, Amy Challe, then an employee of the United States embassy, told me she had participated in the march. It was not until later that I came to appreciate how dangerous a march it had been.

72 Amnesty International 1997.

73 Joe A.D. Alie, in an interview with the author, May 5, 2009, in his office as Head of the Department of History and African Studies at Fourah Bay College, Freetown, Sierra Leone.

something Kenyan mothers did in a protest to free political prisoners, but others, including Shirley Gbujama, who had chaired the two national conferences during the NPRC period, counseled against that. She asked the women to not be confrontational. Convincing women to participate was not easy. Sankoh's home was guarded by ECOMOG forces, and Sankoh and his rebels at the house were also well armed. A senior police officer had told Gbujama that Sankoh's forces planned to shoot anyone who went to his home in Freetown. Gbujama estimated there were some 500 women "from all over," including market women, political leaders and teachers. She and a smaller group of women went ahead of the main group.

> We came up singing "We Shall Overcome" [she sang it on my balcony during the interview]. If we had come in confrontation they would have killed us. We had a loud speaker. Marie Bob-Kandeh [a market women organizer] read a statement asking him to get his people to lay down their arms.[74]

Sankoh responded by shouting insults out the window and "threatened bloodshed. His men were giving signs of amputation and cutting throats," Gbujama recalled, not empty gestures given the RUF record of having done that. But no shots were fired. Things were quite different two days later during a march on his house organized by the Civil Society Movement, with participation from the Labour Congress. The march was massive, comprising a range of civil society, including men and women, boys and girls, political leaders and others. "The groups were peaceful – singing and chanting, but the RUF was uneasy; they felt irritated."[75] But then things turned deadly: shots were fired. "That led to commotion and 21 people of the civil society group lost their lives on that day. Civil society was unarmed."[76] When the women had approached the house two days earlier, ECOMOG troops stayed in place between the women and Sankoh's house; when shots were fired on the second march, the only ECOMOG force, a tank, was driven away down a hill.[77]

74 Gbujama interview.

75 Nana Pratt, in an interview with the author, February 6, 2009, in Freetown Sierra Leone. Dr. Pratt was a lecturer at Fourah Bay College and a member of the Mano River Union Women Peace Network (MARWOPNET), which sought a negotiated end to the war.

76 Ayesha Kamara, in an interview with the author, January 28, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Historian Alie puts the number of killed at the site at "about twenty" (Alie 2006, 200).

77 Tejan Kassim, a Labour Congress official at the time, in an interview with the author, April 17, 2009, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

> In the morning we collected some of the dead. It was not a sight to see: young people [dead]. Women were killed also, women and men. *All of them were unarmed.* There was a girl 21 years old; she had just plaited her hair: beautiful girl. She was shot twice; one in the head, one in the chest. She died holding Foday Sankoh's gate. We found her holding that gate in the morning, dead, the next morning, about 7 o'clock when we went to collect the dead. She came from around Mountain Court East [in Freetown].[78]

In the confusion, Sankoh managed to escape. He was caught in Freetown ten days later (Alie 2006, 201) He was arrested and in March 2003 indicted, along with three of his top commanders, by a UN-sponsored Special Court in Freetown on crimes including "murder, sexual slavery and rape, forced conscription of children and attacks on UN peacekeepers."[79] He died in custody four months later of a stroke. In June 2002, he said in one of his last court hearings: "I'm a god. I'm the inner god. I'm the leader of Sierra Leone."[80]

## Final Orgy of Violence: "We Thought We Would All Be Dead"

If one wanted to assess just how much violence it takes to stop nonviolent resistance, the return of the rebels to Freetown January 6, 1999 in an orgy of violence that halted all nonviolent resistance would be an example. For more than two weeks, the violence that engulfed the capital was overwhelming, as Human Rights Watch (1999) reported:

> Civilians were gunned down within their houses, rounded up and massacred on the streets, thrown from the upper floors of buildings, used as human shields, and burned alive in cars and houses. They had their limbs hacked off with machetes, eyes gouged out with knives, hands smashed with hammers, and bodies burned with boiling water. Women and girls were systematically sexually abused, and children and young people abducted by the hundreds … While there was some targeting of particular groups, such as Nigerians, police officers, journalists, and

78 Kassim interview.

79 United Nations news release, July 30, 2003.

80 Associated Press, July 30, 2003. Another news release on his death is by the United Nations, July 30. 2003.

> church workers, the vast majority of atrocities were committed by rebels who chose their victims apparently at random.

Human Rights Watch (1999) also reported that the senior government pathologist registered burials of 7,335 corpses from the January invasion. The attackers used massive human shields to infiltrate the city and hide from Nigerian counterattacks. Keen (2005, 1) said the attackers "killed around 6,000 people, raping women and girls, before retreating with thousands of boys and girls they had captured. Contrary to most accounts, Keen argued that "the majority of attackers were associated with the Sierra Leonean army, in particular the faction linked to the May 1997 junta but unable to find a place in the reconstituted army under Kabbah."

Voice of America journalist Kelvin Lewis was one of the independent journalists targeted by the attackers. "A lot of journalists were killed … They were definitely targeted. Myself I was targeted. They came for me; they asked for me. My house was one of those torched. I was in the house with my whole family. We had to leap over two walls to escape." The family escaped execution when one of the boys among them recognized a young attacker with whom he had gone to school; the boy told his fellow attackers to leave them alone.[81]

In less than two weeks "nearly 100,000 people were driven from their homes." many found refuge in the National Stadium, but Human Rights Watch (1999) reported that the attackers massacred people gathered for safety in some mosques and other public sites. Within three weeks the Nigerians had driven the rebels out of Freetown at a loss of some 700 Nigerian soldiers. "Overall [in the war] Nigerian losses in Sierra Leone are reckoned to have been over 1,000 killed and several thousand wounded, which is to say that more Nigerian troops died fighting the RUF than did soldiers of the Sierra Leone Army, which often collaborated with the rebels throughout the conflict" (Gberie 2005, 130-32).

## International Interventions: A Nigerian Dictator Helps Restore Democracy

The war continued after Kabbah returned March 10, 1998, and the junta had been driven out of Freetown. Kabbah initiated treason trials of sixty people who were members of the junta or "junta collaborators." Almost all who had not been executed were freed by rebels in their brief return

81 Lewis interview.

to Freetown in January 1999. Twenty-one soldiers, including one woman, were convicted of treason and killed by firing squad October 19, 1998 at a public execution on a beach in Freetown. Amnesty International (1998) condemned the executions as "deplorable." The Amnesty statement noted: "The court martial allowed no right of appeal against conviction or sentence to a higher jurisdiction, in violation of international standards for a fair trial."

International reactions to the AFRC coup in May 1997 had been swift and unified. "By early July 1997 the new military government had become completely isolated by the international community" (Clapham 1997, 907). The Commonwealth suspended Sierra Leone. The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) called upon its members to "abstain from transacting any business" with Sierra Leone. The United Nations followed with a British-sponsored resolution of sanctions against the country. The embargos were aimed at stopping the flow of business and weapons that could be used to prop up the junta. Nigerian troops, dispatched under the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) extended the embargo to rice as well, however, leaving people scrambling to find food and depending more on locally grown crops.

Nigerian troops initially arrived in Sierra Leone prior to the AFRC coup under a bilateral agreement to help implement the earlier peace accord with rebels. But when the rebels seized power in May 1997, Nigerian head of state General Sani Abacha "vowed to overturn the coup and reinstate his friend Kabbah." This put the head of a "brutal and obdurate military regime" in the position of defending a democratic regime.[82] During their time in Sierra Leone, ECOMOG troops, essentially the Nigerians, bombed and strafed civilian areas of Freetown and other parts of the country in an attempt to drive out the junta military, causing many civilian casualties (Gberie 2005, 112-13).

After the final orgy of violence by the Sierra Leone Army and the RUF in January 1999, a peace treaty was signed in Lomé, Togo July 7, 1999 between Kabbah and the RUF. But hostilities still continued. In December 1999, the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone troops began arriving from India, Kenya, Jordan, Zambia, and Bangladesh. The Nigerian-led ECOMOG troops left by May 2000. The same week RUF forces took hostage some 500 UN troops upcountry, killing several in the process. A small British force arrived

82 Spencer interview. Spencer added: "[Abacha] had met President Kabbah at some conference. Somehow they struck some kind of friendship and because of that he was willing to support the government to be restored … The move to drive the AFRC out was mainly Nigerian".

to help the UN mission troops. The captured UN troops were released in July with the intervention of Charles Taylor of Liberia. In August 2000, a small group of AFRC soldiers kidnapped some British soldiers but they were rescued by British troops (Alie 2006, 200). The war was officially declared over by Kabbah January 18, 2002. Kabbah was reelected in May 2002.

## Implications of the Noncooperation with a Military Junta

*I'm not sure the AFRC would have been removed simply through noncooperation. But the noncooperation inspired other actions that resulted in their being removed.*
Julius Spencer[83]

The immediate and widespread noncooperation campaign against the AFRC rendered the country ungovernable and provided the international community an open door for economic and military intervention. Had the population danced in the streets and welcomed the junta the way so many people did in 1992 when an earlier military group seized power, there would have been little reason for intervention from the outside. The massive noncooperation was unprecedented in the country's history, despite years of repressive regimes. The 1997 coup came less than a year after the democratic election of a president, an election which followed years of autocratic, single-party rule then four years of military rule. People were not necessarily united behind President Ahmed Tejan Kabbah, but they were generally united against another military junta.

Civilians expressed this sentiment in a variety of nonviolent ways: teachers and labor went on an extended strike which shut down schools across the country; civil servants and many other employees stopped going to work; many shops and businesses, including most banks, closed. Thousands of others emigrated, most to Guinea where the government was in exile. A clandestine propaganda/news radio station (Radio Democracy) of the exiled government became a popular link that encouraged people to persevere. Some independent journalists continued writing critical articles as the junta wavered between seeking legitimacy with the semblance of a free press and cracking down on dissent.

In terms of social movement theories, this was an example of how it is important to broaden the typical (Western-origin) concept of what a

83 Spencer interview.

movement is. For example, while the severe repression usually discouraged overt demonstrations – there were a few, and they met with violence – there was widespread individual resistance. To overlook such resistance for not fitting neatly into the limited parameters of a movement would be to miss a key part of the resistance that led to the eventual ouster of the junta. Individual actions as well as organizational resistance played a role. Attorney Abdul Tejan-Cole noted it this way: "Everybody realized that something was not in their best interest. And everybody individually knew what they had to do, which ended up collectively being the right thing."[84]

In one of the poorest countries in the world, the line between organizational activism and individual activism merits attention. When an organization is so small and underfunded it may not be able to offer an activist any protection, training, materials, or other support. This study considers such activists as individual and not organizational and would include journalists from the typically small newspapers in Freetown. It would also include attorneys who courageously stepped forward to represent clients detained by the junta. Such attorneys, acting at a time when their bar association was generally quiet, were acting as individuals. The masses of individuals who stayed home, surviving on shared food or meager incomes from continuing petty market sales or remittances from family abroad, were also acting as individuals. But the sum of their resistance was a collective resistance that stripped the junta of claims of good governance and legitimacy. With regard to women, the war and resistance and responsibilities "gave women confidence in themselves. That has had a positive effect on our women nationwide … the war helped liberate women. Future government should be aware: women are stronger."[85]

There were linkages and coordination among individuals and organizations involved in the resistance. Some were open such as the meetings and statements by such organizations as the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists, the Labour Congress, and the Teachers Union. Other connections were not visible. Instead they took the form of clandestine meetings and conversations, the passing of coded messages. Radio Democracy played an important role in linking together those in the resistance, encouraging them, informing them, and also warning them to not cooperate with the junta or be labeled collaborators.

Thus the resistance that took place is an example of both a social movement and a nonviolent resistance movement; in fact they were both. The

84 Tejan-Cole interview.

85 Shellac Davies interview.

academic divisions between the two concepts are unnecessary in such cases. This case study also deepens our understanding of the social movement concept of "opportunity." For the most part, the resistance that took place occurred with no perceivable "opportunity" or external, exogenous conditions that would naturally encourage a movement. Thus the study supports findings elsewhere that repression can stimulate resistance. The case of the AFRC also supports the argument that such resistance is possible in a very poor society with very limited material resources. Above all, the resistance movement against the AFRC is an example of the importance of agency, of individuals and members of organizations taking actions despite several "structural" barriers (namely the repression). At its extreme, as in January 1999, the repression shut down the resistance. But at most other times, the nonviolent resistance continued in one form or another.

# Part two
Liberia

**Figure 5 Saxophone player in a public event in Monrovia, Liberia, 2006**

Photo by Betty Press

**Figure 6 Coffee house in the northern city of Ganta, Liberia, 2006**


Photo by Betty Press

# 5 Nonviolent Resistance in Abeyance[1]

## Courageous Dissent

Baccus Matthews was hard to find. Nearly three decades after he led a mass protest against the government in 1979 that panicked the regime and showed its weakness, a weakness preyed upon in a successful military coup the next year, Matthews had become almost invisible. "I think he lives over there," said one interviewee, pointing toward some old, modest apartment buildings in downtown Monrovia, the capital. No one seemed to have his phone number. Then during one of my interviews in the city, a young man came into the office to fix the air conditioner. I asked his name. "Matthews," he said. I told him I was looking for Baccus Matthews. "That's my uncle." he replied and gave me his number. It was important to find Baccus Matthews. He had showed how one person can nearly topple a government. It took some more research, some more theorizing, and some reconceptualizing of traditional social movement theory to get a clear fix on his contribution to a key social movement and to regime change in Liberia.

This chapter examines two periods of nonviolent resistance in Liberia: (1) the 1970s when social movements functioned openly; (2) the years Samuel Doe was head of state (1980-90), when there was often an abeyance of open social movements due to the extreme repression but some nonviolent resistance continued in various forms.[2] The current chapter begins with some background on resistance in Liberia in earlier years, especially by journalists. Later there were many brave individuals who resisted the Doe regime, often as part of their profession, such as Kenneth Best, editor of the independent *Daily Observer* and a small number of lawyers who challenged the regime's pretense at legality. From time to time there were mass demonstrations, usually put down with violence. Under Doe, especially in his later years in office, there was little in the way of organizational resistance because of the risks. Statements by a few daring members of the clergy were the exceptions. Because of the repression, the traditional concept of an organized social movement with members and

1 As noted in the theory chapter, a resistance in abeyance in this study refers to resistance limited in scope because of repression, when it is too dangerous to have a central or formal organization or organizations. Later, when it is safer, the resistance may resume more openly and in a more organized fashion.

2 The second of two chapters on Liberia focuses on the Taylor presidency period (1997-2003) when a social movement was able to mount a campaign of nonviolent resistance.

mass demonstrations usually was not possible. It was simply too dangerous. In a period of abeyance, waiting for safer times, activists and others determined to push for democracy and human rights, managed to engage in some nonviolent resistance. It involved a variety of tactics, individuals, small groups, and on occasion mass participation, which fits the broader model of a social movement as presented in the theory chapter of this book.

The so-called "Rice Riots" of 1979 that Matthews organized against a government plan to raise the price of rice, a staple in Liberia, were the culmination of a decade of testing the waters of "democracy" by a nonviolent social movement. They were led by two organizations: Matthew's Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL), and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA). They served as a model for later nonviolent social movements in Liberia (Weah 2013). During the 1970s they and others pushed the envelope on pluralism after more than 100 years of concentrated power in the hands of black emigrants from the US, most of whom were former slaves.[3] The regime Matthews challenged with his protest in 1979 evoked such a panicked reaction from the government that from then on it was just a matter of time before someone would take advantage of this weakness and seize power, as elements of the military did about one year later.

The military government, the first to be led by an indigenous Liberian, raised hopes of inclusion. "There was an ecstatic rejoicing of many tribal people that a new order had arrived in which there would be a dramatic and immediate reversal of fortunes between the discredited Americo-Liberians and the oppressed tribal people. This was followed by a sober reawakening" (Liebenow 1987, 191). The new regime of Samuel Doe did not broaden participation, relying instead on his ethnic minority, the Krahn. In a presidential election in 1985 described variously as "controversial" (Dunn 2009, 146), and "thoroughly fraudulent" (Ellis 2012, 63) that was full of irregularities, Doe predictably won, edging out four opponents with 50.9 percent of the vote (Libenow 1987, 296). This was followed shortly by an unsuccessful military coup, after which the regime unleashed such barbaric repression that it stifled the formation of any cohesive, nonviolent social movement. During this abeyance in social movements in Liberia from late 1985 to 1990, when Doe was assassinated in a civil war, some individual activists and small groups bravely continued their resistance despite the dangers that included detention in horrible conditions, torture, execution, and burning

3 Liberian political scientist D. Elwood Dunn (2013) prefers not to use the term "slaves" but "black American emigrants," because not all new world blacks were former slaves and because he considers the term slaves to be pejorative.

of newspaper offices. Some lawyers, academics, journalists, clergy, students, and others, nevertheless, continued to challenge the regime.

## A History of Authoritarianism and Resistance

From 1822-67, more than 11,000 black Americans emigrated to what became Liberia: of that some 4,500 were born free; the rest had been emancipated (Liebenow, 19) on condition that they emigrate to Africa (Moran 2006, 2). They were funded by the American Colonization Society, former masters, and state legislatures. The reasons behind the funding were often far from altruistic.

> Slave owners saw repatriation as a means of removing unwelcome examples of independent, self-supporting free blacks from the view of their slaves. Some white abolitionists who felt slavery as an institution was immoral were nevertheless uncomfortable with the prospect of actually living in a multiracial society (Moran 2006, 2).

The American blacks were joined by 1860 by nearly six thousand Africans freed by the US Navy from slave ships. With financial backing and support from the US Navy in "resisting tribal and European threats to the life of the colony," the emigrants soon developed a hierarchical system among themselves and a dominant political and economic position with regard to the indigenous population (Libenow 1987, 20-21, 19).[4] "Like Sierra Leone, Liberia began its existence both as a haven created by humanitarian interests for black men unwanted in a white country and as a means for the introduction of Christian civilization to the aboriginal African … In the case of Liberia, however, the direction of the American Colonization Society seems to have assumed the eventual establishment of local self-government patterned after American models" (July 2004, 86, 90). This didn't happen, however, resulting in a paradox from the beginning (Liebenow 1987, 1, 5-6): "Till the bitter end … the central political core of the Americo-Liberian elite attempted to hold tight to the reins of power and to reap a disproportionate share of the benefits of economic growth." The emigrants' world along the coast was in many ways cut off from the interior and its population right up to the 1980 coup, as Dunn notes (2013):

4 The so-called Americo-Liberians who were born free in the United States formed the "upper echelons" of the system (Libenow 1987, 19).

> Liberia was born an enclave state in context of the world of the 19th century. The state was initially for black settlers, opening only gradually to assimilated indigenous people. The enclave state began expansion into the hinterland at start of the 20th century … The struggle was then initiated regarding how to blend two world views and two (or perhaps three) cultures [African, Islamic, and Western]. That struggle is with us today in 2013.

Against this authoritarian, hierarchical rule, there is evidence of a long history of nonviolent resistance, especially among journalists who sparred with the various one-party regimes to try to establish and maintain some degree of freedom of the press. In the early 1900s, governments passed a series of restrictions on press freedom, including "sweeping restrictions on free expression in 1916" (Burrowes 2004, 154, 158). But independent journalists challenged the government with published dissent, including by the Rev. James Emmanuel Padmore, editor of the *Bensenville Whip*; J.I.A. Weeks, of the *Crozierville Observer*; and the outspoken Albert Porte (1906-86). "Despite having been sued, threatened, and detained without trial on countless occasions by officials in various administrations, Porte remained active" in his resistance to authoritarian regimes through his publications in various newspapers (119). In hard economic periods when newspapers were sometimes unable to continue printing, Porte resorted to distributing pamphlets challenging the governments on various points, including expansion of power by the executive branch. During the rule of President William V.S. Tubman (1944-71) journalists and others "began to experience very serious reversals, in the form of persistent and unrelenting assaults on press freedom, freedom of speech and even political pluralism" (Best 1997, 49). In 1944 Porte was convicted of sedition "after he criticized the terms of payment negotiated with an American iron mining company" (Burrowes 2004, 271). At the same time, "as the storm of the cold war gathered," the United States drew closer to Liberia "in support of its policy of containing communism (Dunn 2009, 187).

Tubman's successor, William R. Tolbert (1971-80) "immediately began liberalizing the political atmosphere" (Best 1997, 52). But Tolbert was ambivalent about his stated intentions to pursue reform. He reacted to the growing criticism of his regime in this new political atmosphere. In 1975, for example, when the four editors of *The Revelation*, a monthly publication by university students, criticized some of his policies, he had them arrested and heavily fined. From that point on, there was "not a single independent

newspaper left in the country" (Best 1997, 53).[5] Nevertheless, Porte continued his critical writings. In one of his pamphlets, "Thoughts on Change," Porte (1977) wrote of the Tolbert administration: "The rule by decree method assumes the 'papa knows best' attitude and however dramatic the results may be, is in contrast to the somewhat slower, firmer participatory democratic process."[6] He also wrote in "Explaining Why" (1976):

> I am not afraid. I think it is better to be open, frank, and speak the truth as I see it rather than be flattering, deceitful and underhanded. I believe with every fiber of my being that the pen is more powerful than the sword, that God stands by truth and that the truth crushed to earth shall rise again.

When Porte took on the Tolbert regime in the mid-1970s, he was taken to court on libel charges by Stephen Allen Tolbert (President Tolbert's brother), whom Porte had charged with corruption. When Porte was heavily fined, a "spontaneous outpouring of public support for the defendant [Porte] led to the creation of what was arguably the first real Liberian civil society organization, Citizens of Liberia in Defense of Albert Porte (COLIDAP)" (Pham 2006, 79). It was more than a protest on behalf of Porte, as Dunn and Holsoe (1985, 141-2) note. The protest "was transformed before long into a veritable public outcry against the excesses of a government official with presidential connections." For his part, President Tolbert faced the challenge of balancing an expansion of political participation with maintaining stability; a complicated balance Huntington (1968) warns requires a combination of order and development of a viable political party system. "Hence minimizing the likelihood of political instability resulting from the expansion of political consciousness and involvement requires the creation of modern political institutions, i.e., political parties, early in the process of modernization" (399).

5 Elwood Dunn (2013) notes, however, that there were a number of other publications at the time, including at the University of Liberia the *University Spokesman*, and *The Revelation*, produced by PAL.

6 I read these documents in the Albert Porte Memorial Library, Paynesville, Liberia, near Monrovia which has a collection of his writings. In a brief meeting in July 2006 with his widow, Bertha Porte, in her home on the outskirts of Monrovia, she sat on her bed in a checked red and white dress, her white hair pulled back in a bun. Of her husband's courageous publishing career she said: "I encouraged him."

## Cultural Restraints on Resistance?

In Liberia, as in Sierra Leone and Kenya, one might ask why it took the larger "civil society" (a term that generally came into use in Liberia during the study period) so long to rebel or resist. Focusing on Liberia, Yoder (2003, 4) suggests that the culture of Liberians argued against democracy and human rights. In addition to the obvious fear of reprisals from authoritarian rulers, "Liberian political culture places an excessively high emphasis on order and stability while tolerance, accountability, and innovation are afforded too little importance. This imbalance has been a key contributor to Liberia's lack of progress toward a liberal and democratic society." Yoder adds that "[e]ven the pamphleteer Albert Porte, perhaps Liberia's most persistent political critic affirmed the concept of the big man who provides justice and order. Porte did not envision a society without privilege or big people. He just wanted the privileged and powerful to be upright and generous" (45-6), an argument that seems contrary to Porte's own writings.[7] Sawyer, Wesseh, and Avjavo (2000, 11) observed: "The Liberian state evolved as a patrimonial state dominated by the settler oligarchy for about a century and a half." They add that the culture has been marked by "[v]alues of social tolerance, commitment to dialogue, and a predisposition to handle disputes through peaceful means – including striking compromises and reaching consensus."

A quite different interpretation of Liberia's history is offered by Liberian political scientist Elwood Dunn (2013), who argues strongly against the prevailing black colonialism version of Liberian history in favor of what he terms "more than a century of struggle for political and cultural unification in Liberia … Even in darkness there are moments when some light breaks through. Liberia remains an experiment in black self-government." And responding to arguments that the Liberian culture limits dissent, anthropologist Mary Moran (2006, 35, 155) argues that Liberians have a long record of dissent.

> Unfortunately, the obsession with secret hierarchies on the part of anthropologists and the insistence on patrimonialism, old and "neo," by the political scientists combine to leave us with a view of this region of Africa as hopelessly unsuitable for "democracy" or any system emphasizing broad participation and protection of individual rights … To limit the discussion to "big men" and "small boys" in patron-client relations is to fail to account for generations who have dedicated their lives (and sometimes lost them) in the cause of progressive change.

7 See Porte's statement in 1977 quoted above.

## Emergence of Civic Resistance

Tolbert arrived in office promising reform but soon wavered between reform and repression. "What he graciously conceded one day, he ruthlessly took away the next" (Libenow 1987, 170). This angered the old guard as well as the budding reformists. "The more concessions Tolbert made to those who called for political reform, the more he became estranged from the conservatives in his own party (Ellis 1999, 50). The 1970s was "a period of national consciousness; expectations among Liberia's rural and urban poor were raised."[8] In this mixed political atmosphere, two main civic groups emerged that would provide some of the country's future political leaders and human rights advocates: PAL, formed in the United States among the Liberian diaspora in 1975 by G. Baccus Matthews; and MOJA, formed in 1973 and led by Togba Nah Tipoteh, and several other early members including, H. Boima Fahnbulleh, Jr. and Amos Sawyer. Noting the growth of movements in the 1970s, Sawyer said,

> I never really saw my own work purely as human rights work … Ours was a democracy advocacy approach, but based in education. We held seminars, workshops, conferences, and that sort of thing, to educate people and at the same time to provide some kind of platform for advocacy for change. I think it [the political activism] was a broad movement. So these were examples not just of a handful of people screaming from a street corner, but *widespread movements* [emphasis added].[9]

These advocates for change served as models for a younger generation of activists.[10] The two groups PAL and MOJA attracted some of the brightest and later most influential individuals in Liberian politics and proved to be a training ground of sorts for the next decade of political activism. Dunn and Holsoe (1985, 168) describe MOJA, for example, as "the first organized political movement of the Left" in context of the Soviet/American Cold War struggle in Liberia. They add: "Dr. Tipoteh played a major role in developing widespread awareness of the real potential for change. Working

8 Aaron Weah, in an e-mail to the author, December 4, 2013. Weah was a civil society activist, working for the International Center for Transitional Justice in Liberia at the time of this communication.

9 Amos Sawyer, in an interview with the author, June 26, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

10 Tiawan Gongloe, in an interview with the author, Monrovia, Liberia, June 19, 2006. Gongloe, who was active under both the Doe and Taylor regimes, described as "role models" leaders of the two groups, including Tipoteh, Sawyer, Fahnbulleh, Matthews, and Dew Mayson.

through student, labor and other organizations, he used to full advantage the Tolbert government's declaration of interest in "knowing the mind of the people."[11] MOJA formed as an antiapartheid movement by students and faculty at the University of Liberia but soon developed an anticolonial tone that questioned Liberia's honoring the early settlers from the United States over the indigenous (Moran, 2006, 107-8).

> We became the shock force – the real example of the shock force of the intelligentsia – student leaders who were then raising questions, working with workers, and in the process we had increasing numbers of people, including professors, who then wanted to be seen as dealing with these issues rather than sitting on the sidelines.[12]

For the most part their resistance to the persistent authoritarian rule that occurred, despite Tolbert's promises for reform, was non-confrontational, choosing instead to use education, training programs, and discussions, but always with an emphasis on democracy. Tipoteh (born Roberts) explained his motives as trying "to raise awareness as to the role of justice in making people aware of their rights so that they will then use peaceful means to improve their relative power position."[13] Sawyer, later to be named one of the interim presidents of Liberia between the Doe and Sawyer regimes, offered an important explanation of the role of MOJA and other civic groups that were resisting more than a century of authoritarian rule. His explanation parallels this book's argument for an expanded concept of what is included in a social movement.

> You had, for example, the formation of independent unions breaking away from the government-sponsored unions … Workers became an independent union. Many shop stewards decided to speak on their own. You had in the Chamber of Commerce the formation of the Liberian Business Caucus that was raising questions … You had a number of women's groups [forming] … The Liberian Council of churches: very, very active. [Episcopal] Bishop [George] Browne, [United Methodist] Bishop Kulah. [Catholic] Bishop Francis: these people brought huge congregations with them.[14]

11 Togba na Tipoteh was chair of MOJA from 1973-80; minister of planning under Samuel Doe 1980-81. Dunn and Holsoe note he had refrained from giving an account of his sixteen months in the People's Redemption Council government of Doe.

12 Conmany Wesseh, in an interview with the author, June 24, 2006,in Monrovia, Liberia.

13 Togba Na Tipoteh, in an interview with the author, June 22, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

14 Sawyer interview.

Sawyer's points are worth emphasizing here because in the current three-country study, similar phenomenon was found in both Kenya and Sierra Leone: (1) A "movement" of resistance occurred in Liberia in the 1970s, though it did not resemble the popular notion of a social movement. (2) The movement involved a broader range of organizations and individuals than are normally recognized in social movement studies. Yet the elements were interconnected through social and professional ties, united in focus (regime reform as a minimum) and using a variety of tactics to protest in noninstitutional as well as institutional channels. (3) Some key activists in the movement did not see themselves as activists. Instead they saw themselves as just doing their job, as in the case of the outspoken clergy. MOJA and PAL were anything but benign discussion groups, however, they were led by politically ambitious individuals and included some Marxists. Their demands for democracy and inclusion posed a threat in the eyes of the government. "They set the stage for the coup."[15] Weah (2013) goes further on this point: "MOJA and Pal may have adopted a nonviolent approach in their activism but … the military coup of Samuel Doe was a direct outgrowth of the activism of the 1970s."[16] Activists in PAL, the more radical of these two civic groups of the 1970s, called for Tolbert's resignation (Moran 2006, 108).

> The political activists of MOJA and PAL continued to apply pressure on the government, with PAL formally launching itself as an opposition party, the Progressive People's Party (PPP), while MOJA, seeking to politicize the army, established a night school known as the Barracks Union, of which Amos Sawyer was the principal. Tolbert responded by banning the PPP and detaining a number of militants whom he threatened to execute (Ellis 1999, 52).[17]

15 Arthur Kulah, then a bishop of the United Methodist Church in Monrovia, in an interview with the author, July 7, 2006. Kulah wrote a book about his experiences (1999): *Liberia Will Rise Again: Reflections on the Liberian Civil Crisis*.

16 Aaron Weah (2013) adds that co-optation of some members of MOJA and PAL into government in the 1980s opened up space for new political actors, primarily University of Liberia student activists.

17 Ellis points out that one of the leaders of the Liberian student movement in the United States at this time was Charles Taylor who headed back home to be "at the heart of things." In 1989 he launched a civil war in Liberia.

## Rice Riots (1979): Opening the Door for the 1980 Coup

When I finally located Matthews and he showed up for an interview in the restaurant of the Royal Hotel, in Monrovia, he looked intently around the large room then sat down with his back to the wall. My instincts as a former journalist told me this was not someone who would appreciate my pulling out a tape recorder, so I opted to take careful notes. "We did the unthinkable at the time" in holding a mass, public demonstration in 1979, he said. In organizing the mass demonstration against the planned government increase in the price of rice from $22 to $30 for a large sack,[18] PAL founder Matthews was using a nonviolent tactic he said was aimed at breaking a "history of silence" in Liberia on the part of the indigenous and to help achieve a greater political voice for those shut out of the political system. Tolbert claimed no one opposed the price hike and challenged Matthews to find twenty-five people who opposed it. "He [Tolbert] lived in this little cocoon." When Matthews showed up with twenty-five people, including dock workers, students, and market women who opposed the price hike, Tolbert ended up "in a shouting match." One older market lady said the president never thought of anything good to help the people. Matthews told the president he was planning a demonstration April 14, 1979. He and the other demonstrators were well aware that a public protest was "was extremely dangerous." The president warned he would block it with force. With no independent newspaper to carry news of the planned protest, PAL members turned to distributing pamphlets. On the day of the protest, "when the government started shooting, it became a riot."[19]

Police opened fire on civilians.[20] On the third day of the protests, the regime announced there would be no increase and instead a slight decrease in the price of a large bag of rice from twenty-two dollars to twenty dollars. Matthews had gone into hiding to avoid arrest as the regime began searching for him and demonstrators house by house. He surrendered and

18 An eightdollar increase in the price of a bag of rice might not seem cause for risking one's life to demonstrate, but at the time, the "average monthly income of urban Liberians was roughly $80" (Libenow 1987, 171).

19 Baccus Matthews, in an interview with the author July 13, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Matthews died fourteen months later after a brief illness. This may have been his last interview and perhaps the first in a long time.

20 John Stewart, in an interview with the author, July 14, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Stewart, a student leader at the time, recalled the government estimated thirty deaths, but Stewart (who was not present at the time) and Matthews, later estimated that up to 100 people were killed. An independent report (Berkeley 1986, 14) put the casualties at forty.

was detained for two months then released.[21] The fact that the government responded with violence was a mark of its insecurity, and perhaps its inexperience with protest of this sort, even when confronting a nonviolent social movement. The fact that the army, made up mostly of indigenous Liberians, was reluctant to fire on the demonstrators showed the vulnerability of the regime to a coup by the military (Dunn and Tarr 1988, 76-8).[22] The police were led mostly by Americo-Liberians, though the rank and file was largely indigenous, but the police were better paid than the army.[23] The protest was also an example of how a small organization can play an important role in a nonviolent social movement. It showed "that even a loosely organized but determined opposition could capitalize upon events to challenge the regime" (Libenow 1987, 172). The protest also drew in a range of civilians including University students who were not discouraged by the violence. "Students have always been in the forefront as groups in social transformation in this country."[24]

> Students have been the voice, the conscience of society since the '70s. But this is due largely to the fact that political institutions in the country have been generally weak and effectively succeeding in creating a vacuum into which students stepped unwillingly – I would say unwillingly, in articulating and advocating the interests and concerns of the people. [The violence] more or less inspired or galvanized the students. It was not just students who were out on the streets; ordinary people: thousands, thousands … There hadn't been a demonstration like that [the Rice Riots] before in the history of the country. [25]

21 Matthews said he was released in what he called "a deal." In exchange for a public statement of support for the president, the government admitted no wrongdoing but promised some reforms. Matthews was named minister of foreign affairs under the military regime that seized power a year later.

22 This observation by Dunn and Tarr is cited in Moran 2006, 108). In social movement theories of "opportunity" and some democratization theories (e.g., O'Donnell and Schmitter 1986) this reluctance by the army would signal a split in the hierarchy that provided an "opening" of "opportunity" for activists. There was a split, but it was the military who took advantage of it in a coup the next year.

23 Stewart interview. (Stewart is a nephew of activist pamphleteer Albert Port and cousin of Kenneth Best, an independent journalist whose articles frequently challenged the Doe regime.) Stewart, a student leader at the University of Liberia at the time, was arrested four times. Dunn (2013) notes the police director at the time, Varney Dempster, was indigenous.

24 Gongloe interview. He later became Liberia's solicitor general in the government of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, elected in 2005.

25 Stewart interview.

## Short-Lived Hopes for Human Rights and Democracy

Almost exactly one year after the Rice Riots, on April 12, 1980, army Master Sergeant Samuel Doe and a group of his military colleagues seized power, assassinating President Tolbert at his Executive Mansion. Doe's ascension to power marked the first time Liberia had been led by an indigenous person and not an Americo-Liberian descendent, also known as "settlers."

> The settlers reserved all privileges – political, social, and economic – for themselves and their children. The native man was condemned to remain at the bottom of the social ladder, regardless of all the efforts he made for personal advancement. He was segregated against, considered as a heathen, and made to be ashamed of his primitive background. His rebellion against these and other ill-treatments was suppressed ruthlessly, leaving a scar of anger and hatred in his heart and mind" (Justice and Peace Commission, 1994, 17).[26]

Doe's assumption of power raised hopes of the indigenous majority that their voices would at last be heard by government. "There were grievances about imbalance in education, lack of balance in development, concentration of wealth in the hands of a few; and Monrovia being the only place that had anything else. The rest of the country was left in ruins."[27] Another activist from the 1970s noted that there was little excuse for the poverty that gripped most Liberians. "Liberia is rich in resources for a small population; we have iron ore, we have diamonds … we have rubber, we have timber; uranium. We should not be poor. You know why? Bad governance. Also, it is related to the East West conflict, domination of the national economy by foreign interests."[28]

Hopes for an inclusive, democratic government were soon dashed. Doe not only turned increasingly to his ethnic Krahn, he initiated a regime of repression. More than 200 were estimated to be killed in the first few days of his rule; thirteen senior ousted officials of the previous regime were executed on a public beach as thousands watched and cheered. "Within the space of about two weeks, Liberia's new rulers had established a reputation

26 Elwood Dunn (2013) challenges the objectivity of this historical assessment. "There is a National History Project underway led by trained Liberian historians to undertake an inclusive and comprehensive history of the Liberian people. It may challenge the prevailing historiography."

27 Wesseh interview. Wesseh was a student leader at the time.

28 Stewart interview.

for lawlessness and brutality … The People's Redemption Council (PRC) soon "suspended the constitution, dissolved the executive and legislative branches of government, and eliminated the writ of habeas corpus. Martial law was declared. Political activity was banned." More than fifty perceived rivals, mostly military personnel were executed (Berkeley 1986, 14-6). Nevertheless, on May 7, 1980, less than a month after the coup, thousands of students protested at the Executive Mansion. "We said in that statement that the military has done the nation well by the coup and it is time for the military to prepare its exit – back to the barracks."[29]

Lacking technical and managerial skills, the new military government of Samuel Doe allotted four cabinet portfolios to the PAL/PPP, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which was given to its leader, Baccus Mathews, organizer of the 1979 Rice Riots. MOJA members received three posts (Pham 2006, 80). Sawyer was named chair of the National Constitution Drafting Commission, formed in April 1981 by the government and disbanded in November 1983 (Dunn and Holsoe 1985, 155). Other civic leaders were co-opted by the Doe regime as participants (Pham 2006, 80). Many of them joined the leaders who lived luxuriously. But many of these technocrats and liberal politicians were moved aside as Doe increasingly turned to his own ethnic group to govern, disappointing native Liberians who had hoped that this first native president would bring into government many who had been shut out by the Americo-Liberian hold on power of all the previous regimes.

Compared to at least the appearance of an opening for political dissent under the Tolbert administration, the Doe regime had a very low tolerance of demonstrations or criticism. The repression that characterized not just the start but the whole of Doe's regime blocked the successful functioning of a vital, nonviolent social movement. There was an abeyance in social movement activity: low-level resistance, not centrally or even formally organized for fear of reprisals. "There was nobody who spoke up for us, Nobody! Everybody was scared. There was nothing. All the organizations had been banned including the Bar Association throughout the 80's and the 90's. The Bar association was inactive and scared."[30] John Stewart, a former student leader in the late 1970s, was arrested in 1984 on charges of distributing antigovernment literature. "There was a lot of repression all through the 80s." Like many other activists in the mid-1980s, he was tortured and held in unlit cells so crowded prisoners slept in rotation, otherwise standing for long periods:

29 Wesseh interview.

30 Kenneth Best, in an interview with the author, June 17, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

> You know the standard fare, or rite of passage in the post stockade was whipping, 25 lashes on the bare back, strapped to a table and the soldiers call it – excuse my language – f... Mary. They would lie you stretched across the bench, like this and both of your arms would come under and they were handcuffed, the arms, and when they lash you, only your lower body can move, so it induces movement that resembles a person having sexual intercourse, so they say well, that man f... Mary. And they will spill water on your back and sprinkle sand, so that the whip can cut harder ... the sand will cling to your back so when they lash you, the sand can cut to make it more painful.[31]

## Resistance in Abeyance: Courage, Commitment, Danger

This kind of repression blocked formation of open social movements with formal organizations under both Doe and Taylor. "There was nothing like an organized movement."[32] Yet some nonviolent resistance continued in the mid-1980s despite the risks and threats from the regime. Indigenous Liberians had "the notion that ... now was time for all the indigenous people to enjoy the fruits of the country. When Doe suggested the 5 percent Krahn were going to replace the settler group, the rest of the people said that is not going to happen. This was the cause of the internal dissent."[33] The low-level, nonviolent resistance involved teachers, university students, a few members of the clergy, and a handful of lawyers operating individually while their bar association remained quiet. "Human rights activists [were] very strong about their convictions; they lasted a while; then got squashed or fed up with the system ... People knew them; they go down in history; others came, got frustrated."[34] At times they were supported by mass demonstrations, either spontaneous or planned. For example, in 1982 when Doe banned all student activities, six leaders of the Liberian National Student Union were arrested for defying the order. They were condemned by a military court to die but Doe released them only fourteen hours before the scheduled execution, apparently in response to widespread public criticism of the regime's treatment of the student leaders. A wide range of Liberian civilians

31 Stewart interview.

32 Alaric Tokpa, in an interview with the author, June 13, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

33 Elwood Dunn, in a telephone interview in the United States with the author, June 22, 2006.

34 Father Thomas Delany, in a telephone interview in the US with the author, May 2005. Father Delany was working for the Catholic Church in Monrovia, Liberia.

from professionals to market women made public statements against the planned execution. When Doe finally released them, thousands of Liberians poured onto the streets in celebration. "When people act collectively locally, it scares people in power."[35]

> If you talk about the period of the Rice Riots, the initiative that was seized by the students through the early '80s, the religious leaders, journalists, you may not see perhaps an umbrella organization [saying] this was a pro-democracy thing – but these were people interacting and working very closely in many places, sometimes on similar issues, sometimes on the same issue.[36]

**Shooting Books**

Because of the repression, however, "there was not a lot of political activity." Yet elements of the resistance movement continued, despite the risks. A handful of attorneys bravely challenged the regime in court on human rights issues and rule of law. "Because the military was very, very repressive, a lot of activism had to go underground." University students wrote statements critical of Doe's People's Redemption Council (PRC), which students called "People Repeating Corruption," distributing the statements clandestinely on foot, leaving them in public places.[37] When Sawyer and George Klay Kieh, Jr. of the faculty of the University of Liberia were detained for allegedly conspiring to overthrow the government, students boycotted classes and held several demonstrations on the campus exhibiting not only courage, but creativity and even humor, as Ezekiel Pajibo, president of the Liberian National Student Union at the time recalled. The students refused to leave campus and held a three-day vigil to protest the arrests.

> We were really partying, that's true [he laughs]. And on the third day, we did this coffin business. We did an effigy of Doe and we were going to bury the PRC government. A woman [on campus] taught the student demonstrators how to shout in Krahn [the first language of Doe]. The students were in shouting distance of the Executive Mansion. [Doe sent troops to the campus.] They raped women; they beat up the students who were living on campus; and I believe a couple of people may have

35 Gongloe interview.
36 Sawyer interview
37 Stewart interview

> died but we have no way of authenticating that. They shot at everything. In fact they even shot at books in the library and the computers. They said it was the books in the library that were giving [students] a foreign ideology [that inspired the resistance].[38]

The violence forced some student leaders to take their nonviolent resistance campaigns underground. The *Daily Observer* was burnt down. There was no free press in the country. "So one had to find a way to critique the government." In December 1984 Pajibo and some others were charged with publishing an anti-regime pamphlet "Revolutionary Action Committee" or "React." (When I asked if Pajibo had published it, he turned to another former activist, Aloysius Toe, who at that moment was in the nongovernment office where Pajibo worked. "Have we ever acknowledged publishing that," he asked? Then Pajibo confirmed they had published it.) "We were following in the footsteps of the historic pamphleteer Albert Porte." They were sent to the infamous Bella Yella prison, deep in the interior forests.[39] Prisoners were jammed as many as thirty to a small room, making it difficult to breath. They were forced to work from 5 a.m. to 5 p.m. on farms often owned by military personnel. "There were public floggings daily." After six months he was transferred to a prison in Monrovia and released later in 1985 before the presidential elections and after some international pressure from the United States for releasing political prisoners.[40] Organizational activism was minimal at best. Direct political confrontation was too dangerous. So instead, activists encouraged a strategy aimed at weakening the economy, the soft side of the Doe regime.

> They could carry you [away] anytime and kill you. Sometimes in the morning you get up, you see somebody's head in the street. They killed somebody and the head is in the street and everybody sees it. We had no direct human rights institution that was pursuing a democratic process. [But] there were boycotts. Teachers refused to go to work. Then students went on a rampage because teachers refused to go to work. Students got into the streets … to demonstrate because they wanted teachers to go

38 Ezekiel Pajibo, in an interview with the author, July 12, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

39 Another student leader imprisoned there told anthropologist Mary Moran (2006, 153) that the repression of the Doe regime led some opposition politicians to abdicate their role to the student movement. "We [students] were too young, immature, and secondly, it was kind of dangerous … So it kind of forced us to grow many years before our time."

40 Pajibo interview.

> back to work. These were the methods that were used to undermine the economy of the state that brought about the civil conflict.[41]

## Professional Duty: Pathway to Resistance

Another part of the resistance came from independent journalists of whom Kenneth Best, owner and editor of the *Daily Observer* was the most prominent. The *Daily Observer* was closed several times in the 1980s for printing photos (often by photographer Sando Moore) or news of poor conditions in the country, including bad roads upcountry and late pay for teachers. On a visit to the US, where he finally moved in 1990, a man approached Best who was familiar with his newspaper: "How did you manage to survive Samuel Doe, the man asked? And I said to him for that you have to ask the good Lord." Best summarized his form of nonviolent resistance to authoritarian rule under Doe – doing his job as a professional journalist. It was the kind of explanation for activism that reoccurred frequently in my interviews: people were drawn into activism by way of their commitment to their profession, not by membership in a human rights advocacy organization.

> Under Doe there was hardly any human rights advocacy because half the time most of the civil organizations were banned. Politics as well. The press was primarily, under Doe, the only activist organization because a few of us, a few of the papers, had to do what we had to do – cover the wrongs of society, cover the news, good or bad. And that's why we were constantly at loggerheads with the government. My paper was closed down five times under Doe. I went to jail three times. My wife and my secretary and female reporter and female advertising lady went to jail for four days. So there was no human rights advocacy. The only thing that I remember is that we always had a crowd at the office to see what was happening but nobody stood up for us, even the other newspapers.[42]

One of the few members of the clergy to speak out against Doe was Bishop Arthur F. Kulah of the United Methodist Church of Liberia. In April 1981 at a public ceremony he made a statement aimed directly at Doe's regime:

41 Dempster Brown, in an interview with the author, July 13, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Brown, a human rights attorney, argued that the weakening economy and protests against it helped open the way for the civil war that began under Taylor.

42 Best interview.

"The guns that you have used to liberate us should not be used to enslave us."[43] Statements such as this put him at risk; the regime quickly put out word that they intended to arrest him. He went into hiding for a couple of months, moving from house to house to sleep. He fled to the Ivory Coast for several months then returned to Liberia. In the absence of a prominent, central social movement organization, church leaders were "the conscience of the nation" during the resistance, according to Liberian political scientist Dr. Elwood Dunn. "Churches were organized; they tried to do what they could; but it was very difficult."[44]

Aaron Weah (2013) argues that few church leaders brought much to the resistance process in the 1980s, citing the Most Reverend Michael Kpakala Francis, the Roman Catholic archbishop of Monrovia, as a "notable exception." Archbishop Francis made courageous pronouncements against the violence both under Doe and Taylor. Almost all those interviewed in Liberia volunteered that Archbishop Francis was a key moral force against the Doe and Taylor excesses toward Liberian civil society. "Whenever I got arrested, Bishop Francis would speak in church. He was courageous and bold."[45] Archbishop Francis based his opposition to the violence of both Doe and Taylor on a spiritual platform and bravely spoke out against both. "Archbishop Francis really stood up to Taylor and Doe," said Father Delany, of the Catholic Church in Liberia.[46] During Doe's reign, for example, according to a Catholic report: "The government viciously attacked the Archbishop; his life [was] threated but he was undaunted and addressed himself to all the needs of the day." He focused especially on "the rights of people" (Catholic Church of Monrovia, 2001, 11).

## American Ambivalence over Repression in Liberia

In contrast to the push for democracy by the US ambassador to Kenya, Smith Hempstone (1989-1993), the policy regarding Liberia by the US, the closest country to Liberia due to the role of black emigrants from the US, most of whom were former slaves and to earlier US protection of them in the 1800s, was one of ambivalence. There were at times public condemnations by the US of the excesses of Doe, but there were also periods of support, including

43 Bishop Arthur F. Kulah, in an interview with the author, July 7, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

44 Elwood Dunn, in a telephone interview with the author in the US, May 22, 2006.

45 Hassan Bility, in a telephone interview in the US with the author, May 2, 2008. Bility, an independent journalist, was also courageous.

46 Delany interview.

the "possible complicity" in an assassination attempt on Doe and in the attempted coup against Doe November 12, 1985. The US early on pressured Doe to return Liberia to civilian rule and he agreed. But when he reneged, it began a "deterioration of relationship" between Liberia and the US. This ambivalence included acceptance of the controversial election of 1985 which Doe allegedly won as a civilian. The administration of US President Ronald Reagan (1981-89), as part of his Cold War strategy against the Soviet Union, offered "support for developing world clients states such as Liberia" (Dunn 2009, 144, 147, 152). This left Doe largely unhampered in his domestic repression, largely unhampered by any consistent pressure for reform from Liberia's main ally abroad. The US supported Doe's election "victory" in 1985 "on the grounds that even a rigged election was better than no election at all. This effectively shut off the last possibility of evicting Doe from power by constitutional means, or at least by peaceful ones" (Ellis 1999, 63).

After the election, Thomas Quiwonkpa, "the acknowledged leader of the seventeen soldiers who murdered President Tolbert" in April 1980 and later commanding general of the army under Doe and his longtime friend, attempted a coup November 12, 1985. During the few hours that Quiwonkpa and his soldiers were in charge, there were mass celebrations in Monrovia. "Liberians poured out of their homes by the thousand, chanting songs of praise and gratitude" (Berkeley 1986, 20). Doe, tipped off by the United States Embassy of the coup, was able to rally troops to regain control (Ellis 1999, 59). The Doe regime unleashed an orgy of violence after putting down the coup. Hundreds of soldiers and civilians were killed by Doe's forces and many deaths, including that of Quiwonkpa, involved dismemberment and mutilation (Berkeley, 49).

The increased repression after the coup further dampened what little open criticism was forthcoming from civil society.

> From '87 on you didn't really have a civil society that was vocal, that was expressive, you know, that was organized. People spoke out as individuals, but not many people really spoke up. In conversations with people views were expressed. Most people really and truly did not really advocate – and quite frankly, even when you were talking with conscionable people, many times they would be afraid of statements that you would make. There was a fear in Liberia. The regime was repressive; and it could be brutal. And so there was real fear.[47]

47 Etweda Cooper, in an interview with the author, June 19, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Cooper was later active in the push by Liberian women for peace.

Still, some advocates for change sought ways to keep the dialogue for reform alive, sometimes in unconventional ways. For example, some of them would gather almost daily at a small restaurant called The Corner (since burned down) on Old Road in Sinkor, a section of Monrovia, to talk about the issues of the day. This included business people, doctors, lawyers, engineers, and even some government officials. People spoke freely and expressed their opinions and concerns. But there were informal rules for such a gathering.

> One of the conditions for coming in there was if you were a government official, you could never bring your walkie-talkie into the place. If you had a security [bodyguard] your security could not come into the place, into The Corner … because we were trying to protect the confidentiality of the gathering … We discussed all issues … The food was not good. So basically we went there for the conversations, the discussions.[48]

## Civil War Stirs More Regime Repression – and Resistance

On December 24, 1989, forces led by Charles Taylor launched what became a civil war, entering Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire into Nimba County.[49] By July 1990, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) had reached Monrovia. During the intervening six months from the first invasion, the Doe regime cracked down even harder on internal dissent, focusing much of their efforts on what remained of an independent press. That is the period when the *Daily Observer* was set on fire. "The independent media were targeted and destroyed. By July 1990, there was not a single independent media house in Monrovia."[50] With Taylor's troops threatening to seize the capital if Doe did not step down, the Press Union of Liberia, student groups, labor unions, the teachers association, transport union and women's groups and others joined in a mass march to Parliament in a desperate attempt to get Doe to resign. It was "a mixture of everyone; professionals, people from low income, from lower parts of town; from everywhere. It was a concerted effort." The regime warned it would stop the demonstration with force. On the day of the march "heavily-armed road blocks were set up," Gabriel Williams, a

48 Etweda Cooper interview.

49 As with the war in Sierra Leone, it is beyond the scope of this book to examine in any detail the war in Liberia. The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia: Final Report* (2009), among other works, gives an overview of the war and its devastating impact on the population.

50 Gabriel Williams, in an interview with the author, June 11, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Williams was a leader in the Press Union of Liberia at the time.

leader in the independent Press Union of Liberia, recalled. As the crowds approached the Executive Mansion, chanting insultingly for Doe to "come down," resign, soldiers fired in the air then at the demonstrators, pursuing them as they fled in all directions:

> People were getting hurt; people were getting killed. I started running. People were falling over each other … When those guys took control of the city, they began to do a search and cordon [off neighborhoods] … That day was the beginning of the complete breakdown of law and order. There was no more normalcy since that day. The country just descended into absolute chaos.[51]

Doe hung on to power in a state of siege. Taylor's NPFL forces arrived in Monrovia in July 1990. Taylor took control of most of the city and his forces were even firing on the Executive Mansion itself. But West African troops (ECOMOG)[52] arrived in Monrovia on August 24 and prevented his final capture of power and the presidency. Taylor, "enraged by ECOMOG for denying him the military victory which had been within his grasp" was forced to retreat from the city; by then his forces held control of most of the country. Doe was murdered September 10, 1990 in Monrovia by a rival rebel faction, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), led by Prince Johnson. After a series of interim governments, Charles Taylor would be elected president in 1997 and rule until forced to resign in 2003. Despite the repressive nature of his administration, advocates for human rights and democracy continued their efforts.

## Implications of Peaceful Resistance in Abeyance

Liberia offers insights into how a resistance in abeyance survives, waiting for better times to remerge more fully and more openly. Liberia has a long history of nonviolent resistance, particularly by journalists. In the 1970s, several civil society organizations formed to take advantage of what appeared to be a more liberal administration. Key figures in the resistance

51 Williams interview. Williams detailed his experiences during the war in his book published in 2002, *Liberia: The Heart of Darkness: Accounts of Liberia's Civil War and Its Destabilizing Effects in West Africa*.

52 ECOMOG was the armed Economic Monitoring Group of the Economic Community of West African States, which included Nigerian and other troops.

in the 1980s and beyond built on these historical precedents and identified as their models the leaders of political reform groups launched in the 1970s. The Tolbert regime of the 1970s proved erratic: encouraging reform while also cracking down on challenges to its authority. The Rice Riots of 1979, a mass public demonstration against intended government hikes in the price of rice, was met with violence. Hesitancy of the army to fully engage in the repressive government response to the demonstrators exposed the weakness of the Tolbert regime. A year later a military coup led to the assumption of power by Samuel Doe, the first indigenous head of state after continuous rule by descendants of American slaves and other black emigrants.

While the regime of Samuel Doe initially raised hopes that the indigenous population would at last have a voice in governance, his reliance on his ethnic Krahn and his repressive response to criticism left advocates for change at risk. Repression under the Doe rule prevented formation of an open and organized, nonviolent social movement but it did not stop advocates for reform and later for regime change from attempting to make their voices heard. The resistance was in abeyance but it was neither silent nor invisible. It would reemerge more broadly in the 1990s as conditions permitted.

The candles of nonviolent resistance in Liberia never quite blew out during the violently repressive decade of the 1980s under Samuel Doe. A full-scale resistance movement was not possible: it was simply too dangerous. During the last decade of the Cold War, the West – including Liberia's closest ally in the West, the United States – was focused on supporting allies against Communism, not democracy and human rights in Liberia and Africa in general. But a low-scale resistance in abeyance continued despite arrests, torture, and death of some advocates. It took the form of critical reporting, statements by clergy, legal challenges to the regime, and defense of politically targeted detainees. It involved occasional strikes and mass demonstrations, but it also included spontaneous gatherings in opposition to the repression against those charged with standing up for freedom. It involved both individual activists – those acting on their own or without significant support from any organization – and organizational activism such as that of the Catholic and United Methodist Churches.

There was no central resistance organization bringing together the sparse strands of nonviolent resistance. Instead, the various strands often operated separately and in abeyance, though at times they came together quickly for a public demonstration. Usually the resistance took place at a much reduced level than under a more tolerant regime as people waited for the day when more open and organized, nonviolent resistance would be possible. Those

active in this low-level, decentralized and at times clandestine resistance were linked through professional ties or friendships, or both. They were courageous and highly committed. They used the local media when it was available (some media houses were destroyed); they stayed in touch with international human rights organizations which sounded the alarm when one of the activists was detained by the regime.

Contrary to some social movement literature, the resistance operated essentially without structural "opportunities" for advancing. On the contrary, the repression at times was horrific even barbaric; the risk to those challenging the regime in any way was big. Still some resistance continued. But in order to detect such resistance in abeyance, it is necessary to use the broader concept of a social movement this book presents, broader than is generally seen in the relevant literature. The concept of a movement used in this study includes individual as well as organizational activism. It also includes professionals drawn to the resistance by way of their commitment to their jobs, not necessarily as members of a human rights organization. The focus is on resistance, not just organizations that resist. This perspective is more outward looking, more dynamic than the usual inward concentration on the mechanics of a movement. This broader concept also pays close attention to small groups. The study intentionally notes the courage and commitment of participants and includes ample examples of their words and actions.

**Figure 7 Kofi Woods, human rights activist, Monrovia, Liberia, 2006**

Photo by Betty Press

**Figure 8 Elizabeth Sele Mulbah, peace activist, Monrovia, Liberia, 2006**

Photo by Betty Press

# 6 Peaceful Resistance during a Civil War

Following the murder of Liberian President Samuel Doe in 1990 and up to 2003 when President Charles Taylor (1997-2003) resigned, two nonviolent social movements emerged with roots of resistance from the 1980s, 1970s, and earlier. One movement sought to expose abuses by Taylor and eventually to force him out of power. The other, a peace movement led by women, aimed at bringing an end to the civil war began in 1994. In the final year of the conflict, 2003, women staged mass demonstrations to protest for peace.

Activists in these movements included, among many others: a reader of Gandhi, Thoreau, and Martin Luther King; a priest who demanded peace and justice; a journalist whose articles led to his detention in a flooded, underground cell; a lawyer tortured for demanding the rule of law; and mothers who flew to peace talks or stood in long vigils in rain and sun to press for an end to a brutal civil war. Some activists had survived the 1980s and were active again; many more were new to resistance.

After a decade of repression under Samuel Doe (1980-90), the civil war starting in December 1989 took more than two hundred thousand Liberian lives by 1997; it also pushed some six hundred thousand into other countries as refugees, and left some eight hundred thousand internally displaced out of a pre-war population of only 2.5 million. Many fled to Monrovia (Moran 2006, 120). The election of rebel leader Charles Taylor in 1997 finally brought temporary peace. But by 1999, civil war erupted again as another rebel group, Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), based in Guinea, threatened to seize power.

Civil society was still fairly weak during Doe's years, and the resistance operated in abeyance, at low levels, held down by repression. The resistance movements of the 1990s had an important advantage: Amos Sawyer. Chosen as interim president from 1990-94, Sawyer, an academic with political ambition, was supportive of civil society. During his tenure as head of state, advocacy groups had a chance to establish themselves.[1] This period laid a foundation for the resistance that would later openly challenge President Taylor. Taylor was elected president in 1997 after a series of interim governments. Despite Taylor's repression, more selective than wholesale, a nonviolent social movement emerged to seek reform but later to seek his

1 Ruth Perry, appointed head of state in mid-1996, serving until Taylor took power, similarly provided an opportunity for civil society groups to grow. A coalition government including representatives of the main fighting forces was in power from 1994 to 1996.

removal. Taylor resigned in 2003 as rival rebels were approaching the city and as he faced an international indictment for crimes against humanity in Sierra Leone, which he had used as a resource base for his war in Liberia.[2] After an interim presidency led by Gyude Bryant, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected the first female president and took office in January 2006.

This chapter examines how these two movements managed to survive during a civil war and under a repressive ruler. It also examines something the social movement literature often fails to highlight: how movements start. The movements were quite different. One sought peace, using centralized organizations and a public leadership to pressure the regime nonviolently, primarily through lobbying, marches, and vigils. The other movement sought to expose Taylor's human rights abuses and to remove him from power. "We were trying to make sure he stepped down. So we said [to the international community]: Don't support the man."[3] Taylor could agree with the women about the need for peace; after all, peace would enable him to stay in power; he could blame other rebel leaders for the continuing war. Taylor could not agree with activists seeking to remove him from power. In his eyes, these activists were enemies and he responded with selective threats, detention, and torture. During Taylor's regime, the resistance planning against him generally took place in private. "Most of the meetings were secret, informal, or on the phone. We'd meet at social gatherings."[4] But as the abuses and war continued, the resistance, building on the experience of the early 1990s when the civilian interim governments were not repressive, activists began emerging more openly toward the later Taylor period.

There was an increasing use of alliances and formal organizations to coordinate public events. Though seemingly fragmented, the multiple sources of this resistance were linked through professional and/or social ties and could coordinate a mass demonstration on occasion. This nonviolent resistance ranged from legal challenges by individual lawyers, independent journalistic reporting, and statements by outspoken clergy. The resistance involved individual activists – a phenomenon practically ignored in the social movement literature, as well as organizational activism. Human rights lawyers, for example, often not supported by their national bar association

2 Dunn (2013) notes that Taylor was also under "intense pressure" to resign from US President George Bush.

3 Brown interview.

4 Hassan Bility, in a telephone interview with the author, June 22, 2008, in the United States.

as an organization, acted individually, though often collaborating with a few other attorneys to represent politically targeted detainees.

It is important to note that the activism that took place did so in an international spotlight. Various human rights groups and some diplomats were in regular contact with the activists in Liberia. When a prominent activist was detained, these organizations abroad and some embassies would quickly issue protests and demand their release. Liberians in the diaspora also played a role in the pressure on Taylor, publicizing abuses abroad, staying in touch with family and friends and activists in Liberia, encouraging them, and sometimes helping support them. It is beyond the scope of this study to focus on the details of what these international organizations and the diaspora did with regard to advancing Liberian human rights, democracy, and peace, as important as this was. Further, this study does not claim that domestic resistance alone led to the resignation of Taylor in 2003. The international indictment and approaching rebel force combined to force him out. This study does contend that without the domestic nonviolent resistance and the solidarity of activists in Monrovia, especially during the Taylor regime, stripping him of much of his legitimacy and his pretense at the rule of law, Taylor's demise likely would not have come when it did.

## One Country, Two Presidents

A small hole in the thick window glass behind the desk of Liberia's interim president, Amos Sawyer, caught my attention during my interview with him as a journalist. I had started the interview in the cavernous office of the president sitting on the front row of chairs set up at some distance from Sawyer's desk. Because I was doing a radio interview, I pulled my chair around to his side of the desk so I could use my handheld microphone. It was then that I noticed the hole. Sawyer explained it was from a bullet fired from across the street by rebel forces led by Charles Taylor in 1990. Taylor had come that close to seizing power from President Samuel Doe before a West African military force intervened.

Sawyer's tenure as interim President of Liberia (1990-94) provided a rare opening for civil society. He demonstrated a "commitment to press freedom" which led to a proliferation of newspapers, as well as human rights and other NGOs. But some journalists who challenged the actions of the occupying West African troops ran into trouble. "There were instances where reporters were detained and news organs threatened for publishing articles that were considered to be anti-ECOMOG." When Taylor arrived in power as part of

a subsequent interim coalition government comprised of rebel leaders, he and other leaders tried to curb dissent. It was too late: the genie was out of the bottle. People were not ready to settle back and be compliant. "People in Monrovia were used to this kind of freedom of expression, freedom of movement," said Etweda Cooper, who became a key figure in the initial women's peace campaign in the early 1990s.[5]

After Taylor had nearly seized power in 1990, he withdrew his forces from Monrovia, the capital, but continued the civil war. His rebels took control of most of the Liberian countryside and Taylor claimed he was the legitimate president. Liberia was a divided country with Taylor in charge of everything but Monrovia. Monrovia became an isolated zone of relative peace crowded with internal "refugees" fleeing fighting in the civil war. It was in Monrovia that almost all of the nonviolent resistance to Taylor took place during his tenure as president. There would be times, however, when the war swept into the city, causing massive destruction and deaths. The war resumed in 1999 when LURD[6] began challenging Taylor. The fighting continued until Taylor resigned in 2003. At that time he was also under indictment from a Special Court set up by the United Nations and Sierra Leone for his role in aiding rebels in Sierra Leone in exchange for diamonds to pay for his own war.

Having interviewed one of the two men identifying himself as president of Liberia, Amos Sawyer, I wanted to meet the other man, Charles Taylor, who claimed to be "President of Greater Liberia," essentially everything outside of Monrovia. I contacted his spokesman, Thomas Woewiyu, who was also his minister of defense and in Monrovia at the time. We arranged to meet at a restaurant and he agreed to drive me to Gbarnga, several hours north of the capital. We took a taxi to the edge of the city and passed easily through a military checkpoint manned by West African troops. Once across we were in Greater Liberia which was under control of Taylor's rebels. Woewiyu was met by a driver of an SUV and we headed north.

In a civil war, roadblocks can be used by the controlling ethnic group to punish members of a targeted ethnic group on the other side of a conflict, as they were in Rwanda by Hutus killing minority Tutsi in 1994. We had to pass through a number of roadblocks manned by young men and boys who "wielded the power of life and death." They were often "dressed in bizarre

5 Etweda Cooper interview.

6 A split in LURD led to the formation of a separate rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL) which also attacked Taylor's forces.

costumes and wearing traditional war regalia" and sometimes used to stop and kill not only those from rival ethnic groups but civilians of the same ethnic group as those manning the roadblock who they suspected of supporting the enemy, or others in "settling of scores" (Ellis 1999, 116-7). In our case, Woewiyu first identified himself to the armed groups of young boys and men as the minister of defense for Taylor. When this had little effect, he distributed cigarettes to the fighters which, fortunately, was enough to get us through the barriers.

In a modest office building in Gbargna, Taylor, dressed in a full length traditional West African gown, stepped from behind a small table to greet me and thank me for "risking [my] life" to come to the appointment. After answering my questions, including allegations (which he denied) of training child soldiers, something my editors cautioned me not to ask him about, he sat back, smiled, and said: "George Washington had his chance." Clearly he thought it was his chance to be recognized as president of Liberia. Eventually, he was. He was elected despite his deserved reputation as a ruthless rebel commander whose forces no doubt had killed many relatives of the voters. The logic of why Liberians would elect such a man may be captured in a statement by someone who did vote for him but later realized his mistake after Taylor's violence in office became clear. "You know, we were just hoping that Taylor had been fighting for so long to be president, you know, that if we just gave it to him, he would be a good person. But we were wrong: elections can't make you a good person" (quoted in Moran 2006, 123).

## Resisting a Tyrant, Peacefully

As President, Taylor became very repressive against his opponents. One piece of evidence of this repression came from an unexpected source, the US Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). The FBI announced that Charles Taylor's son, whom the elder Taylor had put in charge of internal security in Liberia, had been sentenced to ninety-seven years in prison for crimes of torture.

> Between 1999 and 2003, in his role as commander of that unit, [Taylor's son] and his associates committed numerous and varied forms of torture, including burning victims with molten plastic, lit cigarettes, scalding water, candle wax and an iron; severely beating victims with firearms; cutting and stabbing victims; and shocking victims with an electric device. (FBI 2009)

But against such repression, a nonviolent resistance movement took place. Hassan Bility, one of the independent journalists targeted by the Taylor regime for his reporting, called the resistance an example of "micro-social movements." At times the resistance took the form of mass protests, either organized or spontaneous. Bility, who survived detention in an underground, watery cell for his independent reporting, noted that only a small number of activists were "people who woke up in the morning [and said]: I want to be a human rights activist."[7] Many others were drawn into the nonviolent resistance by way of their roles as lawyers, clergy, journalists, mothers, and academics. Scholar Amos Sawyer and his professional colleague Conmany Wesseh, jointly ran a think tank while Taylor was president, producing reports contradicting some of the unsubstantiated claims by the Taylor regime. They were attacked in their office and nearly killed by thugs, undoubtedly hired by Taylor, who saw the two scholars as part of the resistance movement even though they did not fit the usual description of activists. "*People were not moving all the time with mass action, expecting bullets to hit their breast, but in various ways there was resistance every step of the way*," Sawyer said.[8]

## Moral Basis for Resistance

In 1991, the Catholic Church in Monrovia, under the leadership of Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis, started a nationwide monitoring system, the Justice and Peace Commission (JPC), to document abuses during the civil war. Father Francis based his opposition to the violence of both Doe and Taylor on a spiritual platform. He spoke out boldly to denounce their abuses. Father Francis saw a link between a strong civil society and respect for human rights on the one hand, and peace, democracy and the rule of law on the other. His condemnation of violence focused on the civil war that began in December 1989. During a packed service in his church in 1992, he spoke out forcefully against Operation Octopus, a rebel offensive in 1992 that was slamming Monrovia, eventually leaving some three thousand dead, including five American nuns, and eight thousand wounded by the time West African troops demanded a ceasefire on November 7 (Hubband 1998, 213):

7 Bility interview.

8 Sawyer interview; emphasis added.

> Archbishop Francis used a large straw fan to cool himself. He had wiped away the sweat. Then he wiped away the tears. "We are prisoners," he yelled. "They [the rebels] are destroyers, not builders. They have done nothing for their country. We prayed for these wicked people – liars, who kill us and murdered the sisters."

The Catholic Church monitoring system operated through dioceses in various parts of the country. Their sources included "[prison] escapees, market women – ordinary people," said Kofi Woods, former student president at the University of Liberia in 1987, winner of the Reebok Human Rights award, and the first director of the JPC. From 1991-95 the JPC was most active in information gathering in the Monrovia area; when the roads were reopened after Taylor's election in 1997, their network operated more easily countrywide. The central JPC office in Monrovia was located in a building with the Catholic charity CARITAS so it was easy for informants to come and go without drawing unnecessary attention to themselves. This initiative was the start of a social movement, "We had to build a movement," he said, referring to the need not only to work with local lawyers, journalists, and others, but to build ties to international human rights organizations including Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and the Lawyer's Committee for Human Rights. The strategy was a 3-D strategy: document abuses; disseminate the information; defend the victims of the regime:

> Somebody, somewhere has to start it [a resistance movement] … some group of people however few have to start it … So it is not the majority who comes on board immediately; it is the few who believe in it, who have a passion for it that starts [a movement]. [JPC helped create] a new wave of awareness in society … and those who were creating this new awareness were seen as a threat to the establishment, to the warlords, to the factions.[9]

The JPC became much more than a reporting initiative, it was an advocacy and defense initiative that stood boldly for human rights, focusing especially on abuses by the police and other security personnel and seeking to help the victims. The JPC developed a pact with the Press Union of Liberia (PUL) because the Taylor regime was arresting independent journalists. "We would

9 Kofi Woods, in an interview with the author, June 13, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Woods later became a member of the cabinet in the administration of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf in charge of labor.

mobilize a team of lawyers immediately," said Woods. As a result, along with international condemnation, the campaign against the journalists diminished, Woods claimed.[10] The JPC focused on abuses by police, among other issues:

> We [defended] people that were hunted for political reasons … We helped to free journalists that had been detained for reporting certain stories. We went to the aid of those who were brutalized. In some instances we assisted some of them to go to hospitals to treat their wounds. And we sought the release of political detainees and prisoners.[11]

In 1992, JPC launched its own radio station, Radio Veritas, which aired a program called *Front Line* that broadcast live testimonies from victims of the war and related atrocities. "In our own little way, we were trying to expose some of the excesses of government and trying to insure that the rights of people are expected," said Rennie Ledgerhood, station manager at the time. In 1996, in the midst of the civil war and before Taylor was elected, the station was burned down but the Catholic Church rebuilt it. Once in office, President Taylor was not happy with the broadcasts, including one interview with by then self-exiled senate leader Charles Brumskine. After the interview aired one morning on Radio Veritas, Taylor's minister of justice called in the station journalists and ordered them not to air it again. The station agreed not to rebroadcast the interview. "Every other day they [Taylor officials] were calling me, threatening me to shut the station down; threatening to revoke the license; threatening to issue fines," said Ledgerhood. The government was also unhappy with the JPC reports aired about abuses countrywide. But Taylor was not anxious to confront the Catholic Church and was still trying to gain international respect. "The church has a great force, both internationally and locally."[12] In 2000, the regime briefly shut the station down but reopened it after a barrage of domestic and international complaints. The station agreed to let go John Stewart, a human rights activists from the 1970s who was then broadcasting *Voices from the Front Line*, as well as a popular, non-JPC program *Topical Issues*.

Woods, who grew up poor with a single mother who was often ill, credits her for his own passion about how people are treated. He continued his own

10 Woods interview.

11 Frances Johnson-Morris, in an interview with the author, June 22, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. She was head of the JPC 2004-2005 and later minister of justice in the administration of Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. In 1997 she was chief justice of the Supreme Court.

12 Rennie Ledgerhood, in an interview with the author, June 16, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

activism with various organizations after his tenure as director of the JPC, helping organize what he calls "stay homes:" civil disobedience in protest of abuses by Taylor. His activism made him a target of the regime, leading him to make frequent changes in where he slept at night, welcomed by friends and supporters despite the risks they took in doing so.

> I lived in communities where ordinary people protected me without weapons. They said to me that we are protecting you because you are advocating for us … I always believe that good will transform evil but good will not transform evil by retreating from evil. We must confront evil. It is only by confronting evil that we offer society a moral alternative.[13]

## Human Rights Activism – "Delivering Body Blows to Taylor"

Taylor's repression stimulated a growing resistance. "I think they intensified human rights advocacy by their repression because – the more they became repressive, the more people became resilient."[14] By some accounts of Liberians interviewed, repression under President Taylor was as bad as or worse than under Doe. Human rights attorney Dempster Brown, one of those who challenged Taylor on legal grounds, said bluntly: "He was worse than Doe." An example of the violent and unpredictable behavior of some of Taylor's forces during his presidency adds credence to the comparisons. Noweh Flomo sold peanuts in a market in Monrovia. She was outside her home one day in July 1998, the year after Taylor's election. Some Taylor security personnel came to her house to see her niece who was staying with her. They arrived in a pickup with music blaring and lights on. Noweh told them the war was over and it was no longer time to act like rebels. "They took her into her home, raped her and slit her throat," recalled Etweda Cooper, then running the secretariat for the Liberia Women's Initiative (LWI), a peace movement. But what happened next showed the strength of the human rights activists even at a time of severe repression. Cooper called a press conference to denounce the murder and was herself ordered to report to the police, which she did, flanked by six lawyers including well-known human rights lawyer Tiawan Gongloe and several attorneys from the female lawyers association. Police were apparently intimidated by this show of solidarity by known activists and all but one of them quickly found an

13 Woods interview.
14 Gongloe interview.

excuse to leave the police station. She was read her rights, something the female lawyers had never seen done for a woman in years. Cooper added:

> Then you had everybody calling: you had the human rights groups calling; you had the international human rights calling. The National Endowment for Democracy called. You had the women who decided they were going to demonstrate the next day. It was on Focus on Africa on the BBC because the women had called the BBC. There were members in Taylor's government who went to talk to him. Several ambassadors and human rights agencies called Taylor. At about 9 [p.m.] I was freed.[15]

Liberians had awakened to their power of claiming their rights. Some of them had been in the Liberian diaspora and had returned to Monrovia from the United States, accustomed to the freedoms of America. As the number of advocacy organizations grew, people began coordinating their efforts and cooperating. "They were even coming together as networks." When someone in civil society was arrested for speaking out against abuses, the local newspapers published it; people talked openly about it. Various tactics were used to curb repressive acts by the rebel coalition regime. On one occasion, people had been asked to wear black for a day; on another occasion, civil servants were asked to stay home for a day.[16] Taylor responded to this growing activism. But when Taylor began targeting opponents, human rights groups began targeting Taylor.

> As soon as he got into office, [Taylor] started targeting the human rights groups. He didn't like the human rights groups [or] the press. People disappeared during Mr. Taylor's time. A lot of people disappeared; sometimes we'd find the bodies after two or three months. So – starting around 2000, Mr. Taylor became the target of the human rights groups because he was very brutal. We insisted that he should be removed from office.[17]

## International Support for Advocacy

Though there was no one central organization opposing Taylor, there were several opposition groups in civil society that were well organized, including

15 Cooper interview.
16 Cooper interview.
17 Brown interview.

the Coalition of Human Rights Defenders. "We were highly organized and the leadership was focused on the rule of law and dignity for man."[18] The coalition was formed by local activists with help from other countries including Canada and Senegal. The National Human Rights Center and more than two dozen other organizations became a part of the coalition, which began working closely with international human rights groups such as Amnesty International. At one point the coalition staged a march to protest human rights abuses, defying a threat by Taylor not to do it. Dempster Brown, a leader in the human rights struggle, was one of those arrested. Quick response by human rights groups abroad and by Archbishop Francis, who called Taylor, led to Brown's release. On another occasion, Brown went to Taylor's minister of justice to demand the release of 125 persons jailed without trial. They got into a shouting match. "You do not have the legal right to put people in jail without trial," Brown insisted. He was not detained.

Given the high level of repression during the early Taylor regime years, however, there was not the more classical social movement with a formal organizations; that was too dangerous. Instead, the movement was multicentered; that is, there were various points of resistance including some organizations but also an informal network of human rights lawyers, independent journalists, a handful of outspoken clergy, and others. When a principal activist in this loose social movement was arrested, it trigged a response by other parts of the movement, as in the case of Brown's arrest. When Bility would get arrested, a group of human rights lawyers would descend on the police who were holding him, as human rights attorney Frances Johnson-Morris, an activist attorney at the time, explained. "We were asking and calling upon government to release him [Bility] and drawing the attention of government to his bad treatment and the torture. There was this overwhelming solidarity. Not just with the JPC but with the other human rights organizations."[19]

According to Liberian political scientist Elwood Dunn: "Human rights activism was delivering body blows to Taylor's political machine as their activities delegitimized the regime on a daily basis."[20] The National Bar Association also challenged Taylor in 2001. The bar association in Liberia had been banned and was "inactive and scared" in the 1980s under Doe.[21] Under Taylor, "a few members of the bar [were] outspoken but as an organization

18 Brown interview.

19 Johnson-Morris interview.

20 Elwood Dunn, in an e-mail to the author, 2006.

21 Best interview.

it has not been in the forefront of radical or social transformation."[22] There were exceptions. In 2001, Councilor Emmanuel Wureh, an associate justice of the Supreme Court, was arrested under a sweeping legislative contempt ruling. The bar association temporarily froze the courts with a boycott. Two leaders of the bar, Marcus Jones and Ismael Campbell, were imprisoned for opposing the legislative ruling. Taylor promised to release the two if they apologized. "They told the American Ambassador [who visited them in prison] that they would never apologize to Mr. Taylor. They prefer to die in jail. So Mr. Taylor could not penetrate the National Bar Association."[23] They were released in two months when the legislative ruling against them expired.

The number of human rights organizations mushroomed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. But despite what appeared outwardly as a mass movement for human rights, the number of activists willing to risk the dangers of open advocacy against the regime was relatively small, according to activists interviewed. Many of these organizations were just after donor funds; the actual number of committed human rights organizations was "very small," according to international human rights award winner Aloysius Toe.[24] Human rights organizations were in close contact with international organizations such as the Committee to Protect Journalists, Human Rights Watch, and Amnesty International. "The various international human rights groups would then link up – buttress the work of local human rights groups by issuing statements, by extending their advocacy internationally and giving voice to advocacy on the ground."[25] Taylor tried to cloak his administration in a robe of legality as he continued to seek international support and legitimacy from Liberians themselves. Without this goal, Taylor might have been even more brutal against the human rights defenders.

## Ripples of Hope: Activists Inspire Others

Leaders of the anti-Taylor nonviolent social movement sometimes found themselves the focus of unexpected public support in the form of spontaneous demonstrations. Tiawan Gongloe was a courageous human rights

22 Gongloe interview.

23 Brown interview.

24 Aloysius Toe, in an interview with the author, June 24, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia. Toe, like fellow Liberian activist Kofi Woods, was a winner of the Reebok Human Rights award.

25 Gongloe interview.

supporter as a human rights attorney. In 2003, Gongloe received the highest human rights award from Human Rights Watch. Binaifer Nowrojee, then counsel with the Africa division of HRW, said at the time: "During the darkest days of Liberia's civil conflicts, Tiawan Gongloe was a beacon of hope. Without Mr. Gongloe's courageous intervention, many political detainees, journalists, and other victims of abuse would have languished in prison or worse" (Human Rights Watch 2003). In 2002, Gongloe was arrested for a speech he gave during a visit to Guinea in which he advocated for human rights. He was taken to Monrovia police station and tortured through the night with severe beatings and candle wax poured on his body. Word quickly spread what was happening and a mass gathering occurred outside the police station then later at a hospital where he was taken the next day.

> To my surprise thousands of people turned out to fight the dreadful special police force of Taylor called the Special Operation Mission and came to the police station and advocated for my release. Many persons were arrested as a result of that but they remained defiant until I was released and taken to the hospital. Thousands of people turned out to visit me at the hospital.[26]

Toe, another human rights attorney, also gave hope to others and inspired some to join in resistance of one form or another. His resistance exemplifies the complex interweaving of individual and organizational activism in Liberia under Doe as well as the range of tactics, target audiences, and motives of key activists. "We had to use personal strategies and tactics at times. At other times it was organizational." As we parted after a long interview at his home outside of Monrovia, Toe, answered my last question about what motivated him to take the risks he had. "Gandhi and Martin Luther King," he said quickly, adding: "I can't be silent in the face of evil."[27] In a separate interview (McConnell 2008), he said he was also inspired by Henry David Thoreau. He elaborated on his motivation: "I can't really say how brave I am but there comes a time when everybody falls silent and then a voice that I refer to as God [picks me] up and says, 'It is by you that others are being kept alive.' I take courage from that."

26 Gongloe interview.

27 Toe interview.

## Array of Tactics in the Resistance

During the dangerous Taylor years he was anything but silent, showing how one individual can help create some of the ripples of hope that Robert Kennedy spoke of in 1966. Toe operated at times as a courageous individual and at times as an organizational activist in collaboration with other human rights groups such as the National Human Rights Center of Liberia and the Liberia Coalition of Human Rights Defenders, both comprised of member groups. His activism included helping build popular understanding of human rights. "He started over 100 human rights clubs [and] called attention to human rights abuses and promoted human rights education in Liberian schools. He also organized a network of 245 volunteers in rural communities to monitor and report human rights abuses. In 2001, he led non-violent protests against the politically motivated murders of Liberian activists" (Malek 2005). In 2002, Taylor, who Toe described as "very, very, very arrogant," began arresting "dissident collaborators." Rebels in LURD were pressing Monrovia. Taylor began arresting Mandingos, an ethnic group he suspected supported LURD rebels against him. Taylor was trying to argue that it was for the good of the country to make the arrests. Toe responded with challenges to the regime at several levels and with a variety of tactics.[28]

1 *Local level*. He filed writs of habeas corpus on behalf of some of those arrested and he issued press statements against the arrests.
2 *National level*. When Taylor said the cases would be handled by military courts, Toe went to the military courts and filed more writs of habeas corpus. He had seven attorneys helping him in this campaign, including Dempster Brown and Beyan Howard. During the resistance to Taylor, it became fairly typical that a number of attorneys would show up to challenge arrests of activists. They were usually acting as individuals without the support of the National Bar Association which was only periodically active as an organization in defense of human rights.
3 *International level*. Toe filed complaints in Banjul, Gambia, with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. He also documented some of the arrests and passed the information to Amnesty International, with whom he was working on a project at the time, and to other international human rights organizations.

28 Toe interview.

4 *Mass action*: When the courts didn't respond, he organized a prayer breakfast. He invited President Taylor and diplomats: Only the US charge d'affairs came. He invited some 150 religious organizations: only the Muslims came. No United Nations or other international officials came.

5 *March*. He organized a peaceful protest march to Taylor's Executive Mansion to present a petition to the president. Instead, the government sought his arrest. "Nineteen well-armed state security came to my home." Like numerous other activists engaged in dangerous tactics challenging the regime at various times, Toe wasn't sleeping in his home and thus escaped arrest, though his wife was at home and was taken into custody. She was released the next day upon the intervention of John Blaney, US ambassador to Liberia (2002-2005). Taylor responded to the planned march by putting Monrovia on a war footing, with helicopters overhead. "Every street had soldiers with AK47s and RPGs." Taylor charged that human rights activists were infiltrating rebels into the city. Taylor was looking for Toe. "I went underground for eight days. I refused to go into exile. Either Taylor killed you or he sent you into exile. I said even if I get killed, this is the price some must pay" to advance the rights of others. Then he took what he described as "the ultimate gamble": he turned himself in. He was charged with treason and imprisoned. At this point it was clear that Taylor was not just after Toe: he was determined to halt all resistance to his continued rule and plans for reelection.

> In the illegitimate governing process adopted by the Liberian Government, student leaders, journalists, politicians, human rights advocates and lawyers have fallen victim. It appears that the time has come for religious leaders, [to speak out]. History has proven people's power in the Philippines, Romania, Indonesia Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone and many other places. In union [we are] strong; success is sure; we cannot fail" (Gongloe 2002).

After eight months in prison, as rebels closed in on Monrovia and shelling was occurring, prison personnel fled and the prisoners broke open the gates and fled, too, in June 2003. Toe smuggled himself out of Liberia by boat to neighboring Côte D'Ivoire. He stayed there four months, returning in August 2003 after Taylor resigned.

## Courage and Commitment: Intangible "Resources" in the Struggle for Human Rights

The usual concept in social movement theories of material "resources" as key to a movement does not apply very well to repressive settings such as Liberia was in this period. The country is one of the poorest in Africa, located on the poorest continent in the world. Although some of the activists were well educated and came from various professions such as academics, law, journalism, the clergy, the organizations through which many of them carried out their advocacy for human rights and democracy were modest at best. A few organizations attracted international grants, especially in the later part of the study period. But often locally based organizations had little in the way of resources to offer their activist members, including clerical, financial, security or other assistance.

What the Liberian resistance did have, however, they used well: courage; ideas; ideals; a commitment to freedoms such as the rule of law; a sense of human rights (such as the right to due process in court, the right to publish and speak, and the right to assemble); and in the case of some of the politician activists, the ambition for political power. The focus of the human rights movement was on the absence of rule of law and the physical abuses by the Taylor regime. Challenges to the regime often met with arrests, sometimes torture, and death. The defenders of human rights did not have weapons, but they had these ideas that were powerful enough to build momentum and to gain both domestic and international support. It was really a battle of ideas vs. a tyrant. "We didn't have arms, but we were using our pens."[29]

An example of this courage and commitment was journalist Hassan Bility. Taylor's persistent persecution of Bility was triggered by his persistent reporting from 2000 to 2002 in the *Analyst* newspaper and interviews with the BBC about Taylor's human rights abuses, including Taylor's connections to Sierra Leone. Bility was arrested seven times and held from one day to six months, altogether in thirteen different prisons as Taylor tried to hide his whereabouts. At one point he was held for more than two weeks in an underground cell partially filled with water. During the night he was taken out and subjected to torture by electric shocks all over his body. In the cell he tried to sleep on a metal beam above the water. "If you slept, you rolled into the water. My feet were swollen; I had to crawl on my knees. They tied your hands behind your back so the two elbows touched each other …

29 Brown interview.

for hours. The rope would cut into your flesh." When Bility was arrested, sympathetic guards would smuggle out his communications to friends such as lawyer Aloysius Toe, who in turn would forward it to the international human rights groups. This probably saved his life and almost certainly played a factor in his release.[30]

The example of activists such as Bility sheds light on this concept of "resources" as well as motivational issues for activists. The rational choice argument that people act out of self-interest[31] would seem to falter in cases like his and that of some of the most ardent activists elsewhere, including the other sub-Saharan African countries highlighted in this study. Some Kenyan attorneys freely admitted it was in their self-interest as professionals to see rule of law restored. But why would a lawyer or a journalist risk possible torture or even death to publish an article or land additional legal clients?[32] A pure dichotomy between self-interest and selfless interest does not satisfy. Bility argues that the concept of self-interest was involved but not in the way it is usually treated. "People do things out of self-interest. But the definition of self-interest needs clarification …The reason I was in this [activism] was to see a better Liberia … I wanted people to have food and move freely. Seeing people happy was the motivation. The situation had become so hopeless that if I left, no one would expose things to the international community."

## Women's Peace Movements

The women's peace movement began in early 1994 when Mary Brownell formed the Liberian Women's Initiative (LWI) which was the beginning of "a movement rather than simply an organization or a coalition of organizations" (*African Women and Peace Support Group* 2004, 17). It operated publicly, at some risk, with a central organization and was later joined by other key women's peace organizations. It had an identified leadership and a membership who, especially in a later phase in 2003, the last year of the war, organized mass marches or vigils with women wearing white as a symbol of peace. The movement engaged Christians and Moslems, rich

30 Bility interview.

31 See, among others, Mancur Olson (1965), *The Logic of Collective Action: Public Good and the theory of Groups*.

32 Some professionals and others took these risks while most did not, a behavior Olson (1965) explained as a "free rider" phenomenon.

and poor. They used a variety of tactics ranging from published statements and individual lobbying of rebel leaders and heads of state to, attending peace conferences, mass marches and "stay home" strikes. Though women were active in the peace campaign from 1994 to 2003, the year the war ended, much of the international attention has focused on the important and dramatic marches and vigil of the last few months of the war. Among the leaders of that final push for peace was Leymah Gbowee, who was interviewed for a film on the campaign and in 2011 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize along with Liberia's (and Africa's) first elected female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf. This section will examine highlights of the early peace movement as well as the dramatic campaign of 2003.

Women are usually depicted as victims of conflict, which they are. In the relevant literature "the majority of it tends to view women as victims rather than as active actors, largely as a result of patriarchal structures" (Karam 2000, 2). But women in conflict states can also be agents for change, including in a post-conflict society if they are part of the entire peace process. In Liberia, from 1994 to 2003, women found ways to involve themselves in the peace process despite the reluctance of the male negotiators to allow them to participate. The Liberian case stands out in three ways:

1 Women used their status as victims, and especially as mothers, to gain credibility in their peace campaigns and to help persuade the men to listen to them, which they did. The case of Liberia recalls past images of mothers of Chile, Argentina, and Guatemala, especially, who also used their status as mothers to insist on an end to conflict and a return of missing loved ones.
2 Liberian women peacemakers went beyond demanding an end to conflict: they employed creative tactics to engage informally in the peace process itself. United Nations resolutions call for such participation, especially in peace negotiations. But women have rarely succeeded in joining peace talks. "Official peace processes remain almost an exclusively male domain, and little has been done to encourage women's equal participation" (Sorensen 1998, 28).[33] In Liberia, the women were never allowed seats at the actual peace table, but they did manage to engage rebel negotiators in informal talks. And they rallied thousands

33 Sorensen notes, however (12), that women have been creative in some countries to help bring about peace. In Columbia, women march to the front areas to seek peace; in the Balkans and the Caucasus women hid husbands and sons, lying to authorities about their whereabouts to keep them from being recruited into the fighting; in the Philippines, women started "peace zones" to protect children from recruitment by militias and the army.

of Liberian women to mass demonstrations, marches, and educational campaigns focused on peace and human rights.

3 The case of the Liberian women peacemakers also stands out as an effective, nonviolent, political social movement in Africa, a region seldom studied through the lens of social movement theories. The women framed their message of peace in ways that attracted thousands of women, ranging from educated elites to illiterates. They formed alliances with other organizations, both male and female, and they made effective use of the media, both domestic and international.

In early 1994, a small group of women launched a peace campaign aimed at bringing peace to Liberia after four years of devastating civil war. Mary Brownell and about a dozen other women organized the LWI to press the rebel leaders to come together to end the civil war that had begun in December 1989. They organized two mass meetings in Monrovia calling for elections, full disarmament and an end to the war. Reaction among rebel leaders was mixed; some of it was quite negative. "We were called all kinds of names. We were puppets of Sawyer [then interim president], we were called prostitutes, we were [described] as looking for jobs, husbands, and lovers … frustrated women … We had interests, we did not have positions. Our interest was peace: we were not looking for jobs."[34]

The Catholic Church, led by Father Francis, was one of the biggest supporters of the LWI. That, along with his denouncements of the violence, led to the Taylor rebel forces in April 1996 setting fire to the main office of the church and its radio station, Radio Veritas, which had been broadcasting accounts of violence against civilians during the war. Tipped off that she, too, might be a target, Brownell, with the help of another rebel group led by Alhaji Kromah, went into hiding and later was evacuated by ECOMOG and flown to Freetown in neighboring Sierra Leone. When she returned she and the other women in LWI continued to press for peace until Taylor was elected president in 1997. On numerous occasions, members of various rebel groups, including Taylor's, warned her of plots against her and urged her to avoid certain events. Like many women in this early peace social movement, Brownell credits her faith for her protection, including not having her house burned down as happened to the homes of many perceived enemies of the state. "God was always with me … He sent his angels and they spread their wings over my house."[35]

34 Cooper interview.

35 Mary Brownell, in an interview with the author, June 20, 2006, in Freetown, Sierra Leone.

Prayers were a key part of the work of the women involved in the peace campaigns. LWI actions, for example, included marches, petitions to rebel leaders, fasts, but also "prayer meetings held weekly in churches and mosques throughout the country." Working in collaboration with the Interfaith Mediation Council, the Catholic Church's Justice and Peace Commission, and the Council of Chiefs, women organized "stay home" days in 1993, March 1995, and early 1996. "The stay-home days paralyzed Monrovia, closing markets, government buildings, transport and businesses, and were so successful they were called 'the ghost town action.'" The actions were aimed at advancing peace talks but they also served to develop a sense of solidarity among the collaborating groups (*African Women and Peace Support Group*, 21, 18).

The main goal of the movement was ending the war. With some donations from local Liberian business interests, some of the women began travelling to the series of peace conferences. They asked to be part of the peace delegations but were refused by the rebel leaders. Nevertheless, they made their presence known. "Even though they did not give us that [a seat at the peace talks], I tell you, every decision that they were making, they consulted us, the women." They would win public commitments from the rebels then seek to hold them accountable. Later, when it became clear the rebel leaders were not moving toward peace, the women stepped up their activism. "We took to the air waves and we would blast them out: This is not what you promised us; you promised us to do better; you promised us that the war will come to an end, that you will stop fighting and everything else."[36]

Repeatedly they were refused a seat at the peace talks; it was even a challenge at first to be accredited as observers. However, they talked to delegates outside the formal sessions. "When they came out they wanted to meet with us. We did not side with anybody; we were just neutral."[37] A partial breakthrough came in 1995 at a summit meeting of the nine West African presidents and rebel faction leaders. The women's groups had prepared a detailed paper documenting the suffering of civilians in the war. But spokesmen for the presidents refused them entry into the hall. Then Jerry Rawlings, president of Ghana, and presiding at the conference, broke with protocol and announced: "We have listened to the men, we have listened to all the factions, but we never listened to the civilians; we have never listened to our mothers, we have never listened to our sisters." With that he welcomed Theresa Leigh-Sherman, an educator and a leader in the

36 Brownell interview.

37 Brownell interview.

movement, to the podium where she delivered a thirty-minute report, later recalling the impact. "The whole hall stood up and started clapping. The presidents, tears were in their eyes because they didn't know our side, and that turned the issue of Liberia around. They saw a different perspective of the war. They saw how we were suffering" (*African Women and Peace Support Group*, 77).

**"When Mother Calls"**

One of the more dramatic methods employed by the Liberian women peacemakers came in 1995 when the vicious civil war was dragging on and rebel leaders were not making progress at peace talks. Liberian women peacemakers invited them to a private session in Monrovia designed as an icebreaker. The question was: would they show up? Setting aside other meetings they had for that day, representatives of all the rebel factions came to the women's sensitivity training. They arrived dressed in suits, not battle fatigues. "When your mother calls you, you must show up," said one of the rebel participants. Their arrival confirmed a tradition in many countries that gives special status to mothers, as peace campaigner Etweda Cooper noted. "In Africa when your mother comes to you, to speak to you – you must listen. It has to be."[38]

The rebels sat down for what was intended as a one-day session that stretched into four days. ECOWAS stationed troops from its ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to provide security at the building where the meeting took place, so the press was alerted to the sessions going on in secret inside. But as they exited the sessions, the women would say "no comment." In the meetings the women asked rebel leaders to engage in a series of group confidence-building exercises, including putting pieces of cut paper together as a puzzle, which required everyone's cooperation and rebel leaders talking with each other and relaxing with each other. "They said they appreciated the approach we took … [that] they gained much more in the four days of dialogue" than might be seen in immediate political results, said Elizabeth Sele Mulbah, one of those conducting the sessions.[39] The rebels recommended that international facilitators in the formal peace negotiations use similar sessions, she added.

There is no way to measure what effect the session had on the war. The next month rebel leaders did sign an agreement in Nigeria calling for a

38 Cooper interview.

39 Elizabeth Sele Mulbah, in an interview with the author, June 21, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

ceasefire and an interim government comprised of rebel faction leaders. But fighting soon broke out again, effulging Monrovia itself the following April, and the government comprised of representatives of the main fighting forces collapsed. At a second peace conference in Nigeria in 1996, Ruth Perry was appointed head of state in a third transitional government until Taylor was elected president in July 1997. The election of Taylor brought relative peace, but only temporarily. In 1999, LURD rebels began a series of attacks that continued until 2003 when Taylor stepped down.

The peace movement revived with several new groups joining the campaign. One of them the Mano River Union Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET) was formed in 2000 to push for peace in various ways and to get the three presidents in the immediate region – Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea – to help negotiate peace. Women in Peace Building Network (WIPNET) was formed in March 2003, just months before Taylor stepped down in August. It was led by Leymah Gbowee. In 2011, when Gbowee received the Nobel Peace Prize, the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced she had "mobilized and organized women across ethnic and religious dividing lines to bring an end to the long war in Liberia, and to ensure women's participation in elections."[40] WIPNET also included hundreds of women from refugee camps near Monrovia. At one point, about 1,000 women in WIPNET, dressed in white, marched on city hall for a rally. Women such as Cecelie Danweli, a WIPNET activist at the time, were drawn into the peace campaign by what they saw with their own eyes as a result of the war. "We saw these babies dying from hunger, at one of the schools at the outskirts of Monrovia; old men were dying from hunger." She and others were convinced that the women had to keep attending the peace talks. "If we don't … talk to the 'boys' [warlords] about what's happening, we may not have a Liberia."[41] In April, the group organized women in a sit-in at the small Sinkor, airfield across from a fish market, prompting sit-ins/vigils in towns around the country (*African Women and Peace Support Group*, 44-7.) The group of women in Monrovia was there from dawn to dusk, rain or shine, on a highway President Taylor passed by regularly between his office and his residence.

40 The same year, in awarding the Nobel Prize to President Johnson-Sirleaf, the committee cited her for "having contributed to securing peace in Liberia, to promoting economic and social development, and to strengthening the position of women." The third winner that year, Tawakkul Karman, was cited for having "played a leading part in the struggle for women's rights and for democracy and peace in Yemen."

41 Cecelie Danweli, in an interview with the author, June 21, 2006, in Monrovia, Liberia.

> People told us that … we must be crazy. In Liberia when it rains you see everybody running. We have this saying in Liberia that Liberians are afraid of rain. But who are these women, by the way, who gather under the rain, whether it is raining or not; they don't run. We followed our emotions and our instinct and we just went about doing things.[42]

**Women Seize Peace Talks Hall**

In June 2003, rebel leaders agreed on a ceasefire and a transitional government without Taylor. But almost immediately he reneged on his promise to step down and the agreement fell apart with LURD launching three attacks on Monrovia so devastating that they were dubbed locally as World Wars I, II, and III. "People ran on carpets of shell casings and carried their wounded by wheelbarrow or on their backs, desperately trying to reach the makeshift clinics operated by international volunteers." Meanwhile in July, delegates walked on clean carpets at the four-star La Palme Royal Beach Hotel where they were staying in Accra, Ghana for peace talks. "In the off-hours, you could observe these self-satisfied negotiators lounging around the pool in crisp new shirts, having drinks … The warlords were on vacation, with the international community paying for it all" (Gbowee 2011, 158). Leymah Gbowee was in Accra with other Liberian peace campaign women lobbying delegates outside the conference hall. She felt broken, defeated. "How could I have been so stupid as to think a handful of women could stop a war? *You fooled me, God* … Suddenly I felt a rage greater than any I'd ever known" (160). She decided to organize the women into a spontaneous sit-in, blocking the doors of the conference hall with their bodies until they signed an agreement. "Sit at this door and loop arms," she instructed the women. "No one will come out of this place until a peace agreement is signed." She passed a note to former Nigerian President General Abdulsalami Alhaji Abubakar: "We are holding these delegates, especially the Liberians, hostage. They will feel the pain of what our people are feeling at home." General Abubakar announced to the delegates: "the peace hall has been seized by General Leymah and her troops" (161). Part of the pain delegates felt was the need to go to the bathroom. The Ghanaian press and stringers for international media covered the unusual tactic. After about an hour the women, following a talk with General Abubakar, agreed to withdraw but only after insisting that the talks proceed with all delegates attending regularly.

42 Lindora Diawara-Howard, in an interview with the author, June 22, 2006, Monrovia, Liberia. Diawara-Howard was a WIPNET organizer.

> What we've done today is send out a signal to the world that we, the Liberian women in Ghana, at this conference, we are fed up with the war and we are doing this to tell the world we are tired of the killing of our people. We can do it again – *and we will do it again!*" (163).

The following month, August 2003, Taylor handed over power to his vice president and went into exile in Nigeria where he was later arrested for trying to leave the country without notice. Under indictment by the United Nations-backed Special Court of Sierra Leone, he was detained and eventually tried in The Hague, convicted, and sentenced to fifty years. After an interim government headed by Guyde Bryant, who came under international criticism on charges of official corruption, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected in November 2005. She was reelected in 2012.

## Implications of Nonviolent Resistance during a Civil War

Theoretically, the two social movements mounted in Liberia between 1990 and 2003, most the time during a civil war, show several important points: (1) how members of civil society in a repressive setting can mount a nonviolent resistance movement against a regime, and how such a movement starts; (2) how a movement seeking regime change can survive extreme repression by operating partially in secret (for planning) and partly openly with alliances and multiple organizations, not a central organization that could easily be shut down; (3) the importance of individual activism in repressive settings when key organizations (e.g., bar associations) are not supportive of members' political activism; (4) how nonviolent resistance against a repressive regime can take place in a poor country with very limited material resources, where activists rely heavily on commitment to human rights and democracy as "resources"; (5) how women denied a place at peace talks can still have an impact.

There were contrasts in the way the two social movements operated which offer insights on social movements' survival in repressive settings. The women's campaign, which was not seeking regime change but peace, had a central organization (first just one; later several), and functioned publically with clearly identified leaders. Though occasionally threatened by rebels in the pre-Taylor regime period, they generally did not face extreme dangers because they were no direct threat to the power of President Taylor. The second movement, whose aim was regime change, operated without a centralized, formal leadership. That would have provided too easy a target

for Taylor. Instead the movement was a loosely linked collection of small groups, sometimes united in coalitions, and involving both individual and organizational activism. Even so, the leaders of the various elements of the movement were well known, and some of them were targeted for abuse by the regime. Activists were linked through professional or social relationships, or both. They used a variety of tactics including legal challenges, strikes, critical publications, clerical criticism, and information gathering. Their reports and findings were relayed to international organizations, including embassies and human rights groups which in turn put pressure on Taylor.

Liberian President Samuel Doe (1980-90) managed to thwart formation of an effective nonviolent social movement against his regime with extreme repression. President Charles Taylor (1997-2003) would have liked to do the same but things had changed by the time he was elected after leading a rebel force since late 1989. First, there was a relatively calm period of freedom of speech and association under the interim presidency of academic Amos Sawyer (1990-94). Many newspapers and human rights organizations formed during this period and Liberians (at least in Monrovia) grew accustomed to exercising basic human rights. Second, this was also a period of major political transformation across sub-Saharan Africa from authoritarian regimes to many more democratic ones of varying quality. Finally the West, including the United States, was no longer playing the Cold War chess game in the region and was generally winding down automatic support for authoritarian regimes that had received aid simply because they were not communist. Third, when Taylor was elected, he sought – and needed – international recognition and support: Liberia is one of the poorest nations, and the rebel threat never fully went away. The civil war, which ended in 1997, restarted in 1999. Taylor tried to cloak his regime in a thin and all too transparent veil of legitimacy and rule of law and thus, to some extent, tried to tolerate those who would rip the veil down.

The peace campaign began in 1994 and was led by women. It continued until the end of the war, using a variety of tactics ranging from published statements and lobbying of delegates at peace talks to marches and sit-ins. There are lessons to learn from Liberia for women elsewhere who wish to move beyond their status of victims to that of actors in conflict states, in seeking to shape a return to peace and restoration of society along less patriarchal lines. The women's peace campaign never drew the wrath Taylor levied on the anti-regime social movement which had two aims: (1) expose the human rights abuses of the regime; (2) push Taylor from

office. Whereas Taylor could accept a pro-peace campaign, he could not accept a regime-change campaign. Many of the activists of the anti-regime social movement were detained – some were tortured, some were killed. International notoriety kept some key activists alive and often resulted in their early release.

Were the movements effective? Liberia got rid of two authoritarian leaders in thirteen years: Doe in 1980 and Taylor in 2013, as Liberian human rights activist Pajibo noted. The resistance movements showed the courage, cunning, persistence, and commitment of its participants. However, this study does not argue that the movements brought peace or forced Taylor out of office. Peace came when Taylor resigned. He did so under pressure of rebel attacks by LURD that had reached the edge of Monrovia itself, and under an international indictment for supplying Sierra Leone rebels arms in exchange for diamonds to fund his own war in Liberia. But human rights and peace advocates had weakened his claims of legitimacy, exposed his repugnant abuses of power, and engaged the international community in the campaigns against him.

In the end Taylor may have lost because he forgot the story of the elephant. At one of his last meetings with Taylor, one of his closest confidants, Thomas Woewiyu, reminded him of the elephant story:

> In my tribe, the Bassa, they said you don't show a child an elephant. You don't have to tell him that's an elephant because he knows right away. The thing that Taylor neglected to know was when he saw an elephant he thought maybe it was an ant. He didn't know the power of the elephant, and that was his problem. I said to him, you know, Mr. President, the United States rules the world, and they rule everything in it. You try to exempt yourself and you don't let that elephant recognize you, it will step on you.

Eventually President George W. Bush called for Taylor's resignation. The LURD rebel force that had reached the edge of Monrovia was based in Guinea and aided by that government. LURD also had at least the "tacit support of Britain and the United States," but in many ways was "no different" than Taylor's forces (Global Security).

The war ended in 2003, the same year Liberia ratified the UN Convention on the International Criminal Court. Among President Johnson-Sirleaf's early appointments in 2005 were some of the leaders of the human rights campaigns, including Tiawan Gongloe and Kofi Woods. Aloysius Toe

continued his human rights advocacy as did numerous other former activists against Taylor. President Johnson-Sirleaf tackled the business of a country nearly broke, ridden by decades of ethnic strife and mistrust and with a crumbling infrastructure. The peace continued.

In the struggle between principled ideas and the force of the Doe and Taylor regimes, activist attorney Gongloe said the regimes mistakenly thought they could silence the opposition with brutality but ended up helping create a movement against them. "I think they intensified human rights advocacy by their repression because the more they became repressive, the more people became resilient … Their despotism … brought human rights issues to the front … Pressmen were writing about abuses; journalists were being arrested and newspaper houses were being burned. People were going into exile. So human rights issues became a major issue of concern."[43] Liberian Nobel Peace Prize winner Leymah Gbowee said: "You can tell people of the need to struggle. But when the powerless start to see that they really can make a difference, nothing can quench the fire."[44]

43 Tiawan Gongloe interview.

44 Gbowee's quote is included in an op-ed October 9, 2011 by Carol Mithers in the *Los Angeles Times,* http://articles.latimes.com/print/2011/oct/09/opinion/la-oe-mithers-gbowee-nobel-peace-prize-20111009, accessed March 1, 2014.

**Figure 9 Young street salesman, Monrovia, Liberia, 2006**


Photo by Betty Press

**Figure 10 Village home, Liberia, 2006**

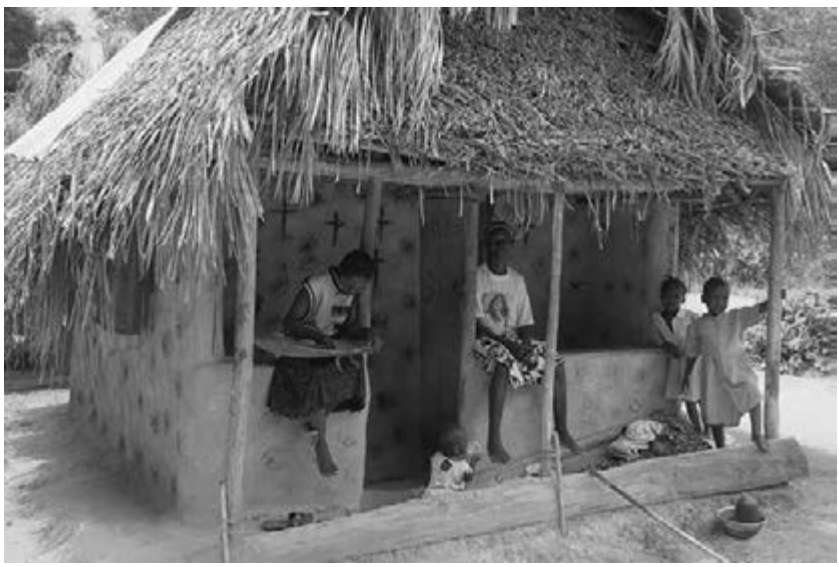

Photo by Betty Press

# Part three
Kenya

**Figure 11 Human rights activist Rumba Kinuthia, Nairobi, Kenya, 2002**

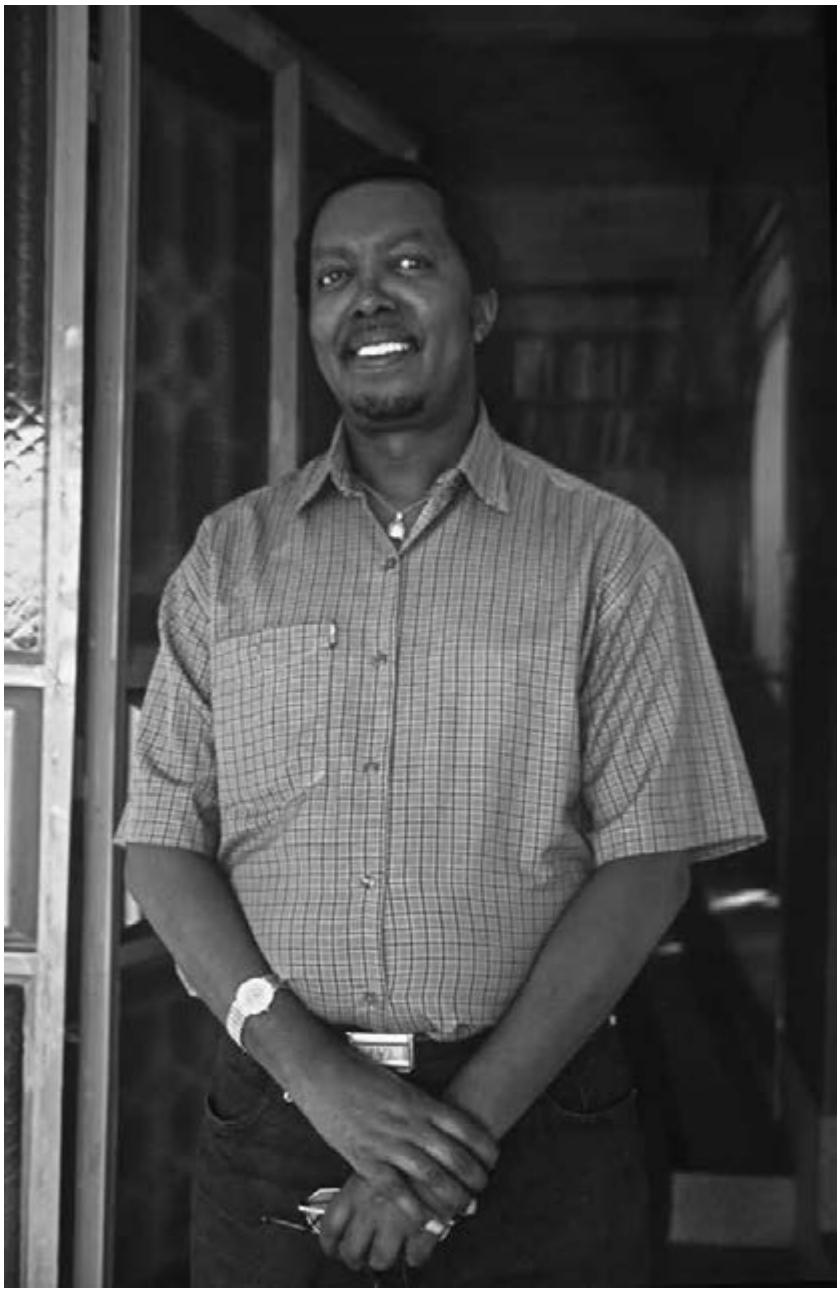

Photo by Betty Press

# 7 Individual Resistance against Repression

In a repressive setting, a social movement is not comprised solely of people who say they are part of a resistance organization; it also includes individuals and members of small, informal groups who are working for the same aim – regime reform or regime change.

Rumba Kinuthia is a tall man with a deep voice. He first granted me a ten-minute interview in Nairobi, Kenya, but it ended up taking nearly two hours. He recounted how in 1979 when the government barred two leading political activists from running for Parliament,[1] he was president of the Students Organization of Nairobi University (SONU) and organized a mass student protest. Kenyan president Daniel arap Moi, who had succeeded Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, when Kenyatta died the previous year, was nervous about suspected plots against him. As a result of the protest, the University was closed; Kinuthia was expelled and detained.

> I was mistreated very badly for 38 days. I was denied food [at times] and kept in a water clogged cell. They would keep me in the water for about 3 days, and then remove me and take me to a dry cell. And then I'd stay there for a few days, go for interrogation and then I'd be taken back [to the flooded cell. During the interrogations he was beaten with] whips and wooden planks and belts [He drew out his words with long, hissing s's.]. I would be naked. Stark naked.[2]

Kinuthia is an example of both individual and later small organizational activism that is explored in the two chapters dealing with Kenya. He is also an example of a professional who is drawn into nonviolent resistance to a regime largely out of his commitment to principles of his profession and not as a member of a social movement organization. He began defending political dissidents as Moi, especially after an attempted coup by elements of the air force in 1982, became more paranoid and determined to wipe out any forms of resistance. His legal work was carried out as an individual; at the time, his professional organization, the Law Society of Kenya (LSK), was not politically active. Rather than being cowed into submission, after being

1 Kenyatta's first vice president, Oginga Odinga, and George Anyonya.

2 Rumba Kinuthia, in an interview with the author, August 21, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

tortured, he continued defending political dissidents. In 1990 he helped organize an illegal (in the view of the government) political opposition rally at Kamkunji grounds in Nairobi and was again arrested, tortured, and detained for three years. Still not subdued, he continued his activism and in 1997 ran unsuccessfully for Parliament.[3] When the interview was over, he stood up from behind his desk in his law office and said he enjoyed the conversation. How could he have "enjoyed" telling me about his torture? I got the impression it was the first time he and many other interviewees had ever been asked such detailed questions about their experiences in the resistance.

Where did activists such as these get their resilience, such courage? Who were these individuals who stood up to a repressive regime and lived to tell their stories? How were they part of a nonviolent social movement that helped bring political change to Kenya? David S. Meyer (2002, 20) reminded scholars to not lose track of the dangers activists sometimes face, to remember the people, and not get totally absorbed in abstract theory. I tried to keep this idea in mind as I made my way back and forth across Nairobi, the capital, tracking down former activists, gathering accounts of what they did.

The period I chose to focus on was from the 1980s to 2002[4] when the ruling party for the first time finally lost in a democratic election. Slowly, the outlines of a political resistance social movement began to emerge, one that grew later into a culture of resistance with open and widespread challenges to the regime.[5] It was sketchy at first: there was no unifying account of the various people who had resisted the repression. And the resistance was not the type usually described as a social movement. Instead, it involved both individual and organizational activism, including individual attorneys, writers, academics, clerics, opposition politicians, and others who challenged the regime and its legitimacy using a variety of nonviolent tactics.

When it was too dangerous for open, organized resistance, activists often operated as individuals, staying loosely connected through informal

3 Kinuthia claims he was rigged out in favor of a government-supported candidate.

4 Though there were earlier legal challenges, including by Kinuthia and others, the legal challenge to torture by Kenyan attorney Gibson Kamau Kuria in 1987 that led to his own detention, stirred negative publicity in the US press and may have been an important factor in the state's reduction (but not cessation) of torture of political dissidents.

5 As previously noted, I define a "culture of resistance" as one in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime becomes a norm for activists and for a visible segment of the general public.

professional and social ties in a pre-cell phone era. After the regime gave in to growing domestic demands to allow multiparty elections starting in 1992, the resistance shifted from one primarily of individuals and small groups to larger open groups, including opposition political parties and various civil society organizations.

This chapter focuses mostly on *individual activism* in Kenya primarily from 1987-91, when this kind of resistance was most evident, building on earlier examples. I define individual activism as activism by persons who take part in a resistance without the support (e.g., financial, material, protection) of an organization. This can also include an activist who is a member of an organization too weak to provide such support. The second of two chapters on Kenya focuses mostly on resistance by small, informal groups, starting around 1991 and on mass demonstrations and other forms of public resistance that grew into a culture of resistance during the 1990s, helping bring a change of regime in 2002 when the ruling party was defeated in an election for the first time.[6]

During this first phase (1987-91), there never was a main resistance organization, but there was *organization without organizations.* The nonviolent resistance was fragmented, and diverse throughout this period. Yet like small streams coming together to form strong currents that, as Robert Kennedy (1966) once said, can "sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression," such fragmented currents of resistance helped erode the pillars of power of the authoritarian regime. In a repressive setting, if one follows the energy in the resistance and the purpose of the activists, expanding the focus from primarily formal organizations and how they fit into the political process, one discovers a much broader range of participants in the resistance than most social movement studies detect. Initially the resistance in Kenya involved primarily individual activists unsupported by organizations, a phenomenon generally not included in social movement literature.

This broader range of activists in a repressive setting may include professionals drawn into the resistance not as members of a social movement organization but as individuals carrying out their professional commitments, as happened in Kenya as well as Liberia and Sierra Leone: e.g., attorneys responding to requests for defense from detained political activists and independent writers operating self-financed publications that issue strong critiques of the regime. This and other kinds of individual activism formed

6 There is some overlap between the two periods with a few organizations speaking out in the late 1980s and some individual activism after 1991.

an integral part in the early resistance in Kenya to the repressive regime of Daniel arap Moi, Kinuthia explained. "These were individual initiatives. There was no organized group. Because as you know, at that point, even holding a meeting, for people who were marked like us, was a very risky affair. So these were things which were being done by small groups of individuals."[7]

The resistance in Kenya later included human rights organizations and the first, clandestine stirrings of opposition political parties whose activists organized two illegal mass rallies in 1990 and 1991. In late 1991, after nearly five years of growing domestic and some international pressure, Moi reluctantly agreed to accept multiparty elections starting in 1992. Most of the nearly 70 people interviewed credit acceptance of multiparty politics to first domestic resistance and next international pressures. There was a broad consensus that the domestic nonviolent resistance was what attracted international pressures on the regime. One of the president's closest aides during the most repressive periods of the regime, Bethel Kiplagat, also credits domestic pressure first then international pressure with bringing about the change.

Kiplagat shared this observation in an interview. He greets his visitor on the ground floor of his office in Nairobi, then bounds up the stairs two at a time, to his office, closes the door, blocks his calls, then settles in and offers an insider view of the Moi regime. From 1983 to 1991, years of high levels of abuse of human rights, Kiplagat, a member of President Moi's ethnic grouping, the Kalenjin, served as permanent secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation. He observed:

> If there is no internal pressure, it is very difficult for the West to put too much pressure. So the idea of having civil society, groups of people, a freer press, developing in a country is very helpful for changes. If you don't have that, it's very hard for foreigners to come in and start saying, you change; you must do this. They will in the end, but it takes longer.[8]

The two Kenya chapters explore activism in Kenya through several theoretical arguments that this book develops. In addition to the ones listed in the chapter on new theoretical perspectives, two minor theories are also introduced in this chapter: activism that depends on a chain of events in most acts of resistance; and the nearly invisible role of minor actors. Both

7 Kinuthia interview.

8 Bethel Kiplagat, in an interview with the author, October 7, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

elements add to an argument that often social movements are unpredictable because of the unpredictability of the chain of events, which can break at any point, and the unpredictable role of minor actors which is often a spontaneous role.

## Professionalism: an Overlooked Entry Path to Activism

An important contribution to nonviolent social movements comes from professionals drawn into an activist role through their profession, even when their own professional organization is not part of a resistance movement and offers little or nothing in the way of support or protection. Some activists self-identify as such and wade into the resistance. Others may have the same commitment toward human rights and democracy but are drawn into the resistance by way of their profession, out of a commitment to the ideals of their profession. Attorneys and journalists were two examples of this in Kenya, something especially clear during the period of 1987-91 when individual activism was at the forefront of the nonviolent resistance.

Human rights attorney Gibson Kamau Kuria is an example of an attorney drawn into activism through his legal work. His most prominent intervention came in 1987 when three detainees subjected to torture retained him. "Gibson at times was purely a lawyer … not an opponent of the government. For him it was really a legal thing," said Kenyan human rights attorney Maina Kiai.[9] Kenyan attorney Martha Koome, who also took up cases of political detainees acknowledged: "There was no strategy that I thought about myself; I just got involved in the normal course of my work as an advocate."[10] One of the leading attorney activists for human rights, Paul Muite, noted that it was natural for some attorneys to wage legal battles against the regime to help strengthen the concept of rule of law which their profession required.[11] Because such activists may not be members of a resistance organization, their contributions to a social movement under repressive conditions may easily be overlooked. In the case of Kenyan attorneys taking part in the nonviolent resistance in the 1980s and early 1990s,

9 Maina Kia, in a telephone interview with the author, September 9, 2003 in the United States. Kia, a former employee of Amnesty International, had started the nongovernment Kenya Human Rights Commission. Under the Kibaki government he was appointed in 2003 to head the government's human rights commission, a job which frequently put him at odds with the new administration.

10 Martha Koome, in an interview with the author, October 29, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya

11 Paul Muite, in an interview with the author, July 23, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

they operated in contact with each other but without organizational support from their professional body, the Law Society of Kenya (LSK), until it took an activist role starting in 1991 when Muite became its chair.

## Resistance despite Repression, Few "Opportunities," Limited Material Resources

As noted in the chapter on theoretical perspectives, most of the nonviolent resistance that took place in the three countries studied took place without major, perceived political opportunities or favorable structural conditions in society. Numerous studies have shown that resistance can take place under repression and some argue that repression actually stimulates more resistance. This study concurs with such findings. It differs from the preponderance of social movement literature in the past several decades, however, which have argued strongly for the presence of structural opportunities or openings in order for a social movement to progress. In Kenya the repression was severe at times, especially in the 1980s. But even by 1997, five years after the regime had permitted a switch to multiparty elections, government security personnel fired live bullets on demonstrators at a public rally in Nairobi, killing several. During the early phase of resistance in Kenya, the kinds of "opportunities" identified in main stream literature were of little use to the movement. Though one could argue that increased international interest and donor pressure (inconsistent and sometimes contradictory pressure) provided activists with external opportunities, it was primarily internal, self-created opportunities by activists themselves that lay behind most of the domestic resistance.

Much of the social movement literature is structural, that is, it focuses on conditions in society beyond the control of activists. It argues that when those conditions or "opportunities" are favorable, movements are more likely to be able to proceed. Although later research has shown this is not always the case, often structural opportunities do seem to enhance movements' ability to proceed. This study highlights activism in three countries where there were seldom obvious "opportunities."

The chapter now turns to exploring these theoretical themes in more depth through a study of the events and of the activists, primarily in the 1980s and early 1990s with some historical notes: (a) early resistance: the colonial era; post-colonial political murders; activism in the 1970s; (b) individual activism, starting mostly in the 1980s by attorneys, independent journalists, and others, including the "chess game" of tactics between attorneys and the regime.

## Early Resistance

Kenya's history of resistance dates back at least to the early 1900s with the struggle of the coastal Giriama against colonial British rule. Another example: some two thousand Kamba farmers in 1938 marched from their dry farming area to the capital, Nairobi, in protest of British policies to restrict the number of cattle allowed on their land. The governor agreed to their demands. From 1952 to 1956, in what Miller and Yeager (1994) describe as a "Kikuyu revolt," an estimated sixteen thousand Mau Mau fighters, motivated by loss of land in the central highlands dating back some 30 years, attacked police posts and isolated farms. The British responded by rounding up an estimated one hundred thousand Kenyans in detention camps; another one million were forced into stockade villages and thousands of homes and small villages were destroyed (24-5).[12] Lonsdale, in a foreword to anthropologist Greet Kershaw's book *Mau Mau From Below* (1997, xvi) writes that the Mau Mau involved "tens of thousands of Kikuyu people [who] felt impelled for reasons which remain hotly disputed, to organize and bind together their loyalties in order to undertake possible civil disobedience and even political murder."

Kenya became independent in 1963 with Jomo Kenyatta as the first president. Although he promised a democratic, African socialist state, within a few years he had become "authoritarian" (Ochieng' 1989, 94). Several prominent political figures were murdered with suspicion focusing on the Kenyatta regime.[13] Even so, there was some resistance to the government in Parliament itself where a group of parliamentarians dubbed "the seven bearded sisters" did their best to oppose the majority.[14]

12 It was not until 2013 that the British government acknowledged responsibility for the deaths of "many thousands of Mau Mau members" as well as the "torture and other forms of ill treatment at the hands of the colonial administration." The government agreed to pay 5,228 claimants a total of £19.9 million and to help pay for a monument in Nairobi in memory of "the victims of torture and ill-treatment during the colonial era." The British foreign secretary, William Hague, also identified the Mau Mau insurgency period as 1952-63 and claimed "the Mau Mau themselves were responsible for the deaths of over two thousand people including 200 casualties among the British regiments and police (Hague 2013).

13 These included Pio da Gama Pinto, a Goan, in 1965; popular labor leader and cabinet minister Tom Mboya, a Luo who was gunned down in Nairobi in 1969; and popular assistant minister and leader of the National Youth Service J.M. Kariuki, a Kikuyu, in 1975.

14 The seven "Bearded Sisters" included: Abuya Abuya, Onyano Midika, Moshengu wa Mwachofi, James Orengo, Lawrence Sifuna, Dr. Chibule wa Tsuma, and Koigi wa Wamwere. One account (Schmidt and Kibara 2002, 10) includes George Anyona instead of Abuya Abuya.

In 1978, President Kenyatta died in office and was succeeded by his vice president, Daniel arap Moi, a Kalenjin. Moi stated in September 1978 that all Kenyans were answerable to him and he was answerable only to God.[15] Moi released political prisoners the same year but soon began cracking down on dissenters. Among academics in the opposition at the time were Katama Mkanga, Mukaru Ng'ang'a, Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, Micere Mugo, Atieno Odhiambo, Shadrack Gutto, Willy Mutunga, and Gibson Kamau Kuria, many of whom were inspired by a Marxist philosophy (Ogot 1995, 197-8).[16] Jaramogi Oginga Odinga and George Anyona attempted to form an opposition political party but the government registrar of societies refused. Shortly after that, in June 1982, Parliament quickly passed a constitutional amendment making Kenya an one-party state *de jure*; it already was one de facto. Less than two months later, on August 1, 1982, elements of the air force attempted a coup d'état. "The coup attempt transformed Kenya's political scene" leaving Moi "[s]everely shaken" (Throup and Hornsby 1998, 31). It was in the 1980s that he began cracking down hard on suspected opponents to the regime, including those suspected of being in one of the underground organizations, especially Mwakenya.

## Hiding in a Charcoal Truck to Run for Parliament

Some stories are worth telling because they show a larger point. The following account illustrates several points: (1) the stubborn and courageous determination of some Kenyans to resist an increasingly authoritarian regime in the 1980s; (2) the equally stubborn and dangerous determination of the regime to prevent such challenges; (3) the regime's charade of legitimacy of such state institutions as the courts and elections. The human rights attorney involved, Mirugi Kariuki, symbolizes dramatic accounts that marked pivotal points in the resistance.

He was one of the independent-minded politicians who still wanted to win a seat in Parliament as a member of the sole party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) but found it to be nearly impossible. Kariuki nevertheless vied in a by-election in 1982 for a seat vacated when dissident

15 Kenya historian Macharia Munene called the author's attention to this quote which he said appeared in in the *Sunday Nation*, September 17, 1978, pages 1 and 3.

16 In 1980, after student riots at the University of Nairobi following a banning of outside speakers, the government seized the passports of twelve lecturers who were considered critical of the government, including Micere Mugo, Ooko Ombaka, Michael Chege, Mukaru Ng'ang'a, Okoth Ogendo, Atieno Odhiambo, Peter Anyang' Nyong'o and Shadrack Gutto (Ogot 1995, 199).

politician Koigi Wamwere was detained in the aftermath of the attempted coup that year. Kariuki faced obstacles set by a government wary of his previous defense of a Kenyan friend suspected of possessing antigovernment literature. President Moi even warned him publicly that he should not run for Parliament. But Moi, even at that early date, was intent on keeping the outward trappings of legitimacy of state institutions and elections. So rather than simply bar Kariuki from running, they put roadblocks in his way, literally.

> I said that that my first priority will be to fight for the human rights of the detained persons. And I'll be calling on the government to release all political detainees. So that was my agenda in the by-election. So Moi talks about it and he said he's warning me, if I repeat it now, I'll face the consequences. This is in an Uhuru Park [the main one in Nairobi] meeting. He's addressing the whole nation and calling me names.[17]

In those days, a would-be candidate had to do two things to run: (a) obtain a clearance paper from the government; (2) present the nomination paper later, in person, by a deadline. When Kariuki was handed his clearance paper, he noticed it was not signed by the president. When he questioned this, he was given a signed one but only after being warned that he should not criticize the government. A friend of his in the national Special Branch (security) office warned him of plans to detain him. Alerted, he was able to climb over a wall of his home compound when agents arrived to arrest him.

He still wanted to present his nomination papers. But the day they were due, police had blocked access roads to the office. His friends hid him in a charcoal truck and approached the barricades. "I was under a tent with the bags of charcoal. So they said, they told police – because there was a police dragnet there, we couldn't pass through – they said, 'Oh, we're just delivering charcoal, here at the blood donor [office].' They allowed; they didn't suspect anything." The truck was backed up to another part of the building and he snuck out, passed through several doors, and, to the bewilderment of election officials, suddenly burst in the back door of the election office and slapped his nomination papers on the table. The intelligence officer who had tipped him off about a pending arrest was in the room and told the election officer that since Kariuki had personally presented his papers the office had to register him as a candidate. So he ran, but he lost to a nephew of the president in what Kariuki claims was almost certainly a rigged election.

17 Mirugi Kariuki, in an interview with the author, August 12, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

## Growing Resistance

Others in the early 1980s tried a variety of resistance tactics, some openly, others covertly, "Throughout the 1980s, various groups opposed the one-party rule using different strategies. This included academics from the University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University; an attempted coup by junior Air Force officers [1982]; and underground movements such as Mwakenya, Umoja, Kenya Patriotic Front, Kenya Revolutionary Movement and the December Twelve Movement" (Ogot 1995, 197,199). Maina wa Kinyatti, a former historian at Kenyatta University was imprisoned under harsh conditions from 1982-88, accused of being part of the underground opposition. "There was a lot of fear, nobody could say anything. We went underground because of that." In an interview with the author he described his motivation as based on "patriotism; love for our country."[18] After the attempted coup in August 1982, Moi cracked down even more severely on suspected dissidents, especially from 1986 to 1988 with numerous detentions and torture, forcing the opposition almost entirely underground.

In 1988, another part of the resistance social movement emerged out of a professional commitment to ethical reporting. The resistance involved a magazine expose of government fraud and a journalist, Bedan Mbugua, who soon became a rallying point for growing popular dissatisfaction with the regime. In an election in 1988 Moi ordered a system of open voting known as queuing where voters stand in public lines at the polling stations behind the candidate of their choice. Even though the candidates were all from the ruling KANU party, some candidates were more popular with the people than others. Mbugua, as editor of the magazine *Beyond*, published by the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK), exposed government fraud in the voting. It was likely not the first time there was a fraudulent election. "What made this rigging different was that ordinary voters had seen with their own eyes how candidates with short lines, if favored by the government, won over candidates with longer lines in polling place after polling place," Mbugua recalled.[19]

The magazine sold out quickly as Kenyans not used to seeing government fraud so boldly exposed rushed to grab even the additional copies printed before the government banned the sale later the day of publication. "Many

18 Maina wa Kinyatti, in a telephone interview with the author in the United States, March 2004.

19 Bidan Mbugua, in an interview with the author, August 13, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. People lined up to vote behind the representative of their preferred candidate.

were being arrested for carrying the *Beyond* magazine. So it was a big, big – the magazine created a very big crisis in the country. And with that reaction, it's like the tide [of resistance to the regime] that you could not stop was born." Mbugua was arrested, but then he was brought to the president's office where he was offered a deal by two presidential aides. He would be freed if he wrote a public apology saying that it was the NCCK and the Church of the Province of Kenya (CPK)[20] that pushed him to write the expose.

There is a certain stubbornness about many of the human rights activists interviewed for this book: they stand up for freedom despite the dangers. They refused to be intimidated and even to turn down good treatment if they give up their principles. Mbugua refused the offer:

> I said I was very happy to be invited to State House because not many Kenyans go to State House. And secondly, I said I was very patriotic, but patriotism, which is deep love for your country, also impelled one to speak about – to speak truth about the same country. I was not pushed to write by the NCCK and CPK. I was the Editor-in-Chief. I made the decision. They had never seen anything like that.[21]

He was quickly judged in a Moi court and imprisoned.[22] The head of the NCCK made a statement that it was Mbugua, not the NCCK that was responsible for the expose. Mbugua says the statement was probably written to prevent the government from banning the NCCK as a legal organization. But the day Mbugua was tried, a huge crowd gathered outside the courthouse in his support. It was another crack in the wall of fear surrounding many Kenyans at the time to stand up against the regime.

## Freedom Corner: Early Cracks in the Wall of Fear

In downtown Nairobi, Uhuru (Kiswahili for "freedom") Park is a busy place most hours of the day. It is located directly across from the tall government building where much of the torture of political detainees took place in the 1980s. People hurry through the park on their way to

20 Bishop David Gitari of CPK had begun criticizing the regime in some of his sermons.

21 Mbugua interview.

22 In 2013 Kenya's High Court (equivalent to a federal court in the US) awarded Mbugua and Gitobu Imanyara (see below) compensation for unlawful imprisonment in the late 1980s in connection with their human rights work (*Standard* newspaper, Nairobi, Kenya, by Wahome Thuku 2013).

work, or relax on the grass during lunchtime, or play with their children on a weekend. But the park would not be there today except for the protest of Kenya's Nobel Peace Prize winner (2004), environmentalist Dr. Wangari Maathai. With some organizational support, she initiated a peaceful protest to block a plan by President Moi to build a six story statue of himself and a sixty-two-story office building for his ruling party. When she wrote the president an open, published letter in 1989 calling for a halt in his plans to usurp much of the park for his party headquarters and his statute, she was writing as the chairman of the National Council of Women, and coordinator of the Green Belt Movement which had organized women around the country to plant trees and do other environmental projects.[23] The association of architects, a private organization, took out a full page ad in a local newspaper criticizing the planned construction. But essentially, it quickly became a one-woman contest of wills that got very personal and helped break the public fear of speaking out against the regime.

> The most significant impact of that action was the empowerment it gave to ordinary people who had come to believe that the ruling party was immovable; it could not be touched; it was like a rock; *it had so entrenched itself.* It was like a wall that could not come down. So it [her save-the-park campaign] gave people courage and they said: "*Ahhh! It can be done!*" It proved that this apparently immovable rock can be cracked. It has been cracked by this woman.[24]

"This woman," as President Moi would refer to her in public statements, should, he said, stay out of politics and had no basis for challenging the authority of the state. He even insulted her publicly by referring to her negatively as a divorced woman. The implied threats to her safety were meant to silence her. But in her political activism, she was always her most determined in the face of such pressure. "My best safety net [is]: I don't see fear." Instead, she responded to the threats with a light but serious touch.

> I told them, essentially: Don't come talking to me about my womanhood because I'm not interested in your manhood … I think the most important

23 The Council expressed support by mail but did not demonstrate publicly; Green Belt Movement kept its environmental focus.

24 Wangari Maathai, in an interview with the author, September 23, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. She died in 2011.

> thing, and which has never really been recorded, or sufficiently studied, was that it's very much part of my nature that I don't give up; and that is probably the scientist in me. I wrote letters to our environmental network throughout the world.

She continued writing polite letters to the government – and to donors who must have wondered why a country they were loaning to had to spend a large amount of money on a party headquarters and a statue of the president. Eventually donors balked and Moi halted his plans. Maathai's contribution to the social movement against the Moi regime was a public challenge that exposed vulnerability to pressure that had rarely been seen in Kenya at the time. Her protest in 1989 came only about two years after the public exposure of torture of political dissidents but more than two years before Moi accepted multiparty elections. Shortly after her challenge there were renewed attempts to form opposition political parties, a campaign culminating with two illegal rallies, in 1990 and 1991; and in late 1991 came Moi's acceptance of multiparty elections.

Dr. Maathai's successful resistance of the regime's plans to take over a city park for its party headquarters was followed by more political activism by women. In 1992, a small group of mothers approached her with an idea of a nonviolent protest to try to win the freedom of their sons who were political detainees. She also joined other politicians in organizing what became one of the new political opposition parties as the resistance moved from a period that highlighted individual activism to one in the early 1990s of small group and organizational activism.

## Individual Activism (1): Urban Legal "Guerrillas"

In Kenya, contrary to what one might expect, it was individual activism, not organizational activism that played a leading role in challenging the Moi regime in the 1980s and into the early 1990s. This was a period when most activist organizations either had not formed or were not yet willing to join the open opposition to a regime that was torturing dissidents. It was during the early 1980s, and more so from 1987-91, that a small number of Kenyan attorneys, began defending accused dissidents, acting as individuals. Attorney Gibson Kamau Kuria, one of the "urban legal guerrillas," had a very small legal office, but sued the government in 1987 to stop torture of suspected political dissidents.

"We were called *urban legal guerrillas* because we spent all our time strategizing on how to expose the atrocities in the government," human rights attorney G.B.M. Kariuki recalled.[25] These "urban guerrillas" included Paul Muite, Gitobu Imanyara, James Orengo, Kuria, Kiraitu Murungi, Mirugi Kariuki, Pheroze Nowrojee, John Khaminwa, Martha Karua, Kathurima M'Inoti and Rumba Kinuthia.[26] They are considered *individual activists* because they were part of a legal resistance at a time when their professional organization, the Law Society of Kenya (LSK), was not politically active and not providing any support to their activism

Independent activists include individuals who were part of small or weak organizations that were unable to provide any significant support. In Kenya, this also included independent owners and writers of self-financed (and barely sustainable) critical publications such as *Society* magazine run by Pius and Lloyce Nyamora and *Nairobi Law Monthly*, run by Gitobu Imanyara, and *Finance*, run by Njehu Gatabaki. It included individuals who were members of an organization that opposed their activism. In Kenya, this included activism by Reverend Timothy Njoya.[27] Such activists in Kenya (and similar ones in Liberia and Sierra Leone) played an integral role in the nonviolent social movement in Kenya against the Moi regime, providing additional voices for reform, rallying public support for regime change, and helping undermine the credibility of the Moi regime. Like the individual lawyers, these other individual voices helped build a *culture of resistance*.

Typically studies of social movements, human rights, and democratization focus on organizations and the factors that hurt or hinder their operation and expansion. Individual activism is rarely mentioned, if at all. Yet much of the critical nonviolent resistance in Kenya occurred because individual activists, attorneys and others challenged the regime. These challenges grew increasingly sophisticated as attorneys engaged in a kind of chess game of tactics against a regime intent on pretending there was rule of law in Kenya but even more intent on not allowing the law to interfere with their hold on power. This individual resistance chipped away steadily at the claims of legitimacy of the regime, showing them to be in violation

25 G.B.M. Kariuki, in an interview with the author, October 11, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

26 These activist attorneys are listed in an order based on the frequency with which they were identified by interviewees (not just attorneys) as prominent activists. There were other human rights attorneys during this period.

27 Rev. Njoya was openly opposed by key officials in his Presbyterian church who did not support his activism. He did, however, have the support of lower level officials in his church, and he was widely popular in Kenya among those dissatisfied with the regime.

even of their own laws and certainly in violation of basic human rights standards such as the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.[28]

## Organization without Organizations

In repressive settings where formal resistance organizations provide too tempting of a target for the regime, where it is too dangerous to organize resistance openly, activists tend to operate informally. In Kenya, individual activists had no formal organization; instead they had *organization without organizations*. By word of mouth, secret meetings, land telephones, activists stayed in touch to share information, and develop legal resistance strategies and help each other in emergencies the best they could in a pre-cell phone era. Though their own professional legal organization was not taking a political supporting role for activist attorneys, those attorneys collaborated when necessary. "If something outrageous happened in the courts, then 15 lawyers, 20 lawyers would sign a statement."[29] Some Kenyan activist attorneys in this period gathered regularly at the downtown office of attorney Japheth Shamalla. Activism in this kind of environment, with government spies and harsh punishment of suspected opponents to the regime, took courage.

> It was in his office that the politicians met. It was his telephone that everybody used; it was his fax that we were faxing New York before I bought my own fax, and other statements. It was really a "war room." And whenever one [of the lawyers] failed to come in the evening, frantic calls [were made] to find out [about them] because they could have been picked up [by police.][30]

"We were representing one another," said Khaminwa, an activist attorney in the early 1980s and onward. "I used litigation" to challenge state power. "I was also part of the activism pushing for multiparty and democratization." His individual activism landed him in detention in 1982-83, starting shortly before the attempted coup in 1982. The night of his arrest, he recalled: "I was

28 Kenya became a signatory to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976.

29 Martha Koome interview.

30 Martha Karua, in an interview with the author, August 15, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. The office belonged to Japheth Shamalla, according to Karua.

searched, stripped naked. It was a bad exercise; it was something I was not expecting."

He pauses, gazes out the window at the busy street below, full of commuters walking along the sidewalks or heading home in crowded minibus taxis known as *matatus*. The evening of my interview with him, he was wearing a blue and green pullover sweater. He had just finished another full day of legal work, two decades after his own detention. As he continued to talk, he climbed with some difficulty up on the top of his desk and reached up to lock a high window as he prepared to go home. "The President [Moi] was given power like a chief. From the outset he was not democratic at all." Khaminwa put on his jacket over his sweater. It was dark outside now. The church singers on the sidewalk below had finished their recruitment exercise. The streets were no longer crowded but were considered unsafe for walking at night. He had a taxi waiting below for him to take him to his home in Karen outside the city. "We kept on doing it [challenging the government's arbitrary use of power through court cases]. We were not scared."[31] A number of other Kenyan human rights attorneys active in the next phase of activism (1987-91) identified Khaminwa and attorneys including Pheroze Nowrojee and Willy Mutunga as role models for their own activism.

## Unpredictability of Social Movements: Minor Actors; Chains of Events

The government of Kenya had long used torture as a means of political control. But in 1987, a year after a major crackdown had begun on suspected political dissidents, including those associated with underground opposition,[32] three political detainees who had been tortured in detention became part of an *open resistance* to the government by launching a legal challenge to the government while still in prison. They were helped by minor actors to make their challenge. The sequence of events helps illustrate not only courage and ideals of the detainees, but two minor theories developed in this study: the *role of minor actors* and the related concept of *chain of events*. These in turn, shed some light on an argument of this study that social movements often are not predictable. They are unpredictable because the chain of events involved in a movement is not something one can map out or predict. There is too much spontaneity, too many unplanned

31 John Khaminwa, in one of two interviews with the author, August 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.
32 Amnesty International, "*Kenya: Torture, Political Detention and Unfair Trials*" (1987).

actions, to generate much in the way of prediction as to where a movement is heading or what impact it will have. There is considerable uncertainty about even the survival of a nonviolent resistance movement. Extreme repression can bring it to a halt; or drive it underground. But even when this happens, some resistance may continue in the open as it did in Kenya. As for the theory of the importance of minor actors, examples below show how unexpected help enables key actors to survive and sometimes to have an impact, including the three political detainees. In other cases, minor actors helped Kenyans avoid arrest, at least for a while.

Under most traditional studies of social movements, the actions of political detainees against a regime, if recorded at all, likely would be noted as brave individual acts. They were individual acts; and their bravery is beyond question. But equally important, their resistance was an element in the social movement that eventually helped bring political change to Kenya. The prisoner activists were part of the movement in several ways: they pursued the same aim as others in the movement: human rights and democracy; they openly challenged the legitimacy of the regime; and they had been part of earlier resistance efforts, both legal and political. In all aspects, their contribution to the social movement against the Moi regime was just as valid as the participation of a Kenyan in one of the mass demonstrations for change or as a member in one of the organizations that, especially starting in the early 1990s, formed part of the resistance. In 1987, even from within prison, they were part of the nonviolent resistance/social movement in Kenya.

The chain of events that led to a reduction of torture for all detainees began with the three managing to resist under torture admitting to unfounded charges. Kiplagat, one of Moi's close aides during this period, confirmed in an interview the regime's treatment of such detainees:

> During that period [1980s] there were people who were not very comfortable [with the regime] from the University [of Nairobi]. They may, or may not have set up this organization called Mwakenya. They were taken to court; some of them were tortured. And they made confession. Whether they were involved or not involved is something we have to [question]. And many … were locked up for five years, six years.[33]

The three detainees had previously attracted government attention as critics of Kenya's human rights. Mirugi Kariuki and Wanyiri Kihoro had

33 Kiplagat interview.

helped defend accused dissidents in the early 1980s; both later became opposition members of Parliament. Mukaru Ng'ang'a was an historian at the University of Nairobi and later leader of the Kenya National Democratic Alliance and a presidential candidate in 1992. With the help of minor actors, they were able to get word to human rights lawyer Kuria that they wanted to challenge their confinement and treatment and the kangaroo trials which often lasted only a few minutes at dawn without lawyers. The closest I came to seeing them as prisoners was one day in Nairobi when they were brought to the courthouse in a government car with curtains hiding a view of the occupants. Later I interviewed both Kihoro and Kariuki. Kihoro explained why he resisted torture instead of confessing to trumped-up charges as others before him had:

> I did not want eventually to feel that I had cooperated in any way with those who had tortured me. I thought it was incumbent upon me to continue in that mood of history of resisting, and resisting in a way that I'm also trying to stand up with my people and to open up my country, for greater debate locally and internationally. My case was very important in opening up Kenya to international scrutiny by donors and human rights groups [about] what was happening – especially torture.[34]

Kihoro, held for three years, was tortured during the initial seventy-four days in detention from July 29 to October 10, 1986, including being beaten with clubs. On three occasions, for a total of twenty-four days, he was confined in a cell flooded ankle-deep with water. This hideous treatment is something Kenyans point out was also practiced by the British. The British high commissioner obtained evidence of the treatment after Kihoro was taken to a hospital: "His [Kihoro's] feet had started to rot."

> There was a trap door in the roof, apparently, through which they lowered the food. And the cell, for 28 days or more was several centimeters, several inches deep in water, so that he could either stand in the water or if he wanted to go to sleep he could sit in the water and get his backside wet and lean against the wall because he couldn't have any beddings; that would have been absolutely saturated.[35]

34 Wanyiri Kihoro, in an interview with the author, June 28, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

35 Malcolm Harper, in an interview with the author, July 2, 2002 London. At the time of the interview, Harper was director of the United Nations Association of the United Kingdom of

A sympathetic guard (a minor actor in the drama of Kihoro's resistance) arranged a secret meeting between Kihoro and his wife in the parking lot of Nyayo House, the tall, downtown government building where the torture was taking place. In that meeting Kihoro asked his wife, Wanjiru, to contact attorney Kuria.[36] The attorney filed suit against the regime and was himself detained, though not tortured. Kuria's law partner, Kiraitu Murungi, then refiled the same challenge and was not detained. Knowing he might be detained, Kuria had briefed *Washington Post* Nairobi-based reporter Blaine Hardin, whose paper timed the story to coincide with a visit by Moi to President Reagan (Hardin 1987). The headline beneath a photo of the two of them at the White House read: "Police Torture is charged in Kenya." Moi apparently was furious at the report and perhaps at the embarrassing timing of it. With the help of the same sympathetic guard, Wanjiru Kihoro, through an exchange of notes with her husband, convinced him to start writing a diary – in prison – describing the torture. Wanjiru, who later became an active member of the Kenyan diaspora opposition in the UK recalls encouraging her husband to record the details.

> I felt that if he had recorded what he was going through it would be like, very cathartic; it would get the thing out and he'd be able to withstand whatever else would come. And that's how he started writing. He didn't sit back and remember, he was writing every – I have the documents at home; I have the letters – diary … And when I sent them to Amnesty, Amnesty [researcher Martin Hill] said this is the first very complete information we have of what is going on.[37]

After the international publicity, the use of torture by the regime became much less frequent. Hill, speaking as a former researcher on Kenya, said one of the impacts of Amnesty's 1987 report ("Kenya: Torture, Political Detention

Great Britain and Northern Ireland. He personally intervened to try to win the release of Kihoro, whose wife approached him in London for help.

36 The other two detainees, Ng'ang'a and Kariuki, managed to get word to Kuria as well. Kuria represented all three until he, himself, was detained because of that representation.

37 Wanjiru Kihoro, in an interview with the author in London. A number of former political prisoners in Kenya have had their stories published, including: Wanyiri Kihoro, *Never say Die*, 1998, published by East African Educational Publishers, Nairobi, Kenya; Maina wa Kinyattĩ', *Kenya: A Prison Notebook*, published by Vita Books, London, and by Mau Mau Research Center, Jamaica, N.Y.; and Koigi wa Wamere, *The People's Representative and the Tyrants*, 1992, published by New Concept typesetters, Nairobi, Kenya.

and Unfair Trials") was to debunk the argument of the Moi regime that they were facing a dangerous, terroristic underground movement, Mwakenya.

> It [the report] points out that the Kenyan government was not facing a serious armed opposition. It pointed out that their reaction to it was disproportionate and involved serious human rights abuses and these ridiculous summary trials of which there have been 70 or 80 … The repression and the search for victims and the torture [was] reduced after that. But it didn't go away.[38]

The "minor actor" in this case, the prison guard who played a key part in this chain of events, was not the only example in which someone sympathetic to the efforts of human rights activists helped protect them in Kenya, Sierra Leone and Liberia. The unanticipated role of minor actors adds to the unpredictability of social movements in general, but especially in repressive settings where key activists might have been blocked or even killed without the help of a minor actor. Other examples in Kenya include these:

– A taxi driver warned attorney Martha Karua that he had been hired by someone working in the president's office along with a second taxi driver to carry policemen to follow her and, when the opportunity presented itself, to block her car. "The moment people want to arrest you, not in the normal manner, but to isolate you, they could have taken me elsewhere. They could have hijacked me, gone and brutalized me," Karua recalled. Instead, alerted, she drove to an upscale hotel in downtown Nairobi, parked, and went inside. When hotel security saw the policemen going from car to car to locate hers, they called the police and the two plainclothesmen were arrested. They were later freed when they provided the name of the person at the president's office who had assigned them to track Karua.[39]
– Rumba Kinuthia was tipped off by an armed government security official about his pending arrest by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) at a Nairobi restaurant the day of an illegal political rally he helped plan (*Saba Saba*, July 7, 1990). "He took me through a back door, and sent somebody to drive my car round [to the back]. They stormed in soon after I left," Kinuthia recounted.[40]

38 Martin Hill interview with the author, July 2002, London. Torture continued on some political dissidents but mostly on common criminals.

39 Karua interview.

40 Kinuthia interview. Saba Saba is Kiswahili for seven, seven seventh month, seventh day.

– Raila Odinga, later a presidential candidate, was smuggled into neighboring Uganda by a Catholic priest and a nun to escape a police dragnet in 1991 shortly before a second illegal rally he had helped plan was held that year at Kamkunji grounds in Nairobi.[41]

## Chess Game of Tactics

Starting in the late 1980s, human rights attorneys engaged in a chess game of tactics with the Moi regime, transforming the court room into a stage for the political opposition. This was another important step forward in the social movement that resisted the regime. Arguments challenging the legitimacy of the regime had been confined mostly to a few independent publications, always under threat of being closed down. Now those arguments reached a broader audience through the mainline newspapers that covered court proceedings. The government would catch on to a new activist legal tactic and try to counter it, but the attorneys responded with new tactics. Pheroze Nowrojee, a serene Kenyan of the Parsi faith with a Gandhi-like appearance, was a human rights attorney to whom some younger activist attorneys in those years turned to for advice. He explained one of the strategies:

> You seek to win [court cases], but by definition, winning is not allowed [before corrupt judges]. Therefore the trial has to be used to make the maximum gains. And you show the oppression, you unravel the oppression, the means of oppression; you unravel its illegality. The more we lost cases in the courts, the more converts we had gained [through the publicity]. So we were the gainers: if we won, we won with a royal flush; if we lost we still lost with two fours, two sevens.[42]

The Moi regime sometimes made false charges against the attorneys in an attempt to block this kind of resistance. In March 1991, the State issued an injunction against Paul Muite aimed at preventing him from acting as chairman of LSK. The injunction had been sought by attorneys, led by Mutula Kilonzo, Moi's lawyer, who were unhappy with Muite's election and following his strong pro-reform speech as the new chair. LSK vice chair Willy Mutunga chaired the first LSK council meeting which gave full support to

41 Raila Odinga, in an interview with the author, October 30, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.
42 Pheroze Nowrojee, in an interview with the author, August 3, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

Muite.[43] Muite explained how the government made a countermove against activists' tactic of bringing cases to court despite the almost certainty of losing. The government would try to intimidate the defense attorneys or order them to submit their statements directly to the judge in order to circumvent access to the statements by reporters. Activist attorneys then tried a new tactic: walking out of the courtroom. This left the defendants to speak on their own behalf, giving reporters fresh material to write about. Attorneys also began focusing on pretrial documents. Instead of filing brief statements of the charges prior to the trials, the attorneys began submitting lengthy explanations on which the charges were based. Reporters would then print the detailed charges as part of their normal court coverage. The flurry of filings and trials sometimes put the spotlight directly on the police and others who were part of the state repression at the time. In one case, Muite found himself interrogating a senior police official in court instead of the other way around.

> I was cross examining a Special Branch officer, a very tall guy. He was seated not far from me. He didn't like the cross examination. So he'd take a minute or two, very arrogantly staring at me [then] say: "I'm not going to answer that question." And I would say to the judge: "The question is proper, legitimate. Can you tell the witness – I was quite firm – we are not in the Nyao House chamber of tortures; we are in a court of law. That [the torture chambers] is his domain, but this is not his domain." And the Magistrate was terrified [Muite laughs, telling the story]. He would order the witness to answer the question. The witness proceeded to tell me: "One of these days you will come to where I am; I'll have you; you will see" [Muite laughs].[44]

As it turned out, the day when the tables were turned was not long in coming. In November 1991 Muite was arrested in connection with the "illegal" political opposition rally at Kamkunji in Nairobi. Muite came face to face with the same Special Branch official whom he had interrogated in court. Now it was Muite's turn to be interrogated. He was held ten days in prison, but not tortured.

43 Mutunga, an early human rights activist, served as vice chair from 1991-93 and as chair from 1993-95. He also served as head of the private Kenya Human Rights Commission. In 2011 he was named chief justice of Kenya's highest court by President Mwai Kibaki.

44 Muite interview.

> It can be very intimidating. It's just that the situation had slightly changed. Perhaps sometimes when you are very high profile [as Muite was] and everybody knows they have arrested you, then they sort of hold back. But you can see them [the police] you can see their hands shaking when they are trying to restrain themselves from hitting you, particularly when you sort of answer them firmly.[45]

## Individual Activism (2): Resistance by Writers, Clergy and Others

In a repressive setting, independent writers and others in addition to attorneys can play an important role in a social movement. Their activism may come not as members or participants in a self-identified social movement organization but in simply carrying out their own professional commitment as journalists, editors or publishers. Just as some attorneys and others in Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Liberia were drawn into an activist role because of these commitments and not because of membership in a resistance organization, so too were some independent writers. In social movement parlance, writers can help "frame" the message of activists simply by reporting what was happening in terms of repression. In Sierra Leone and Liberia, this was seen mostly in the courageous professional work of some journalists; in Kenya a few independent writers established several publications with the express purpose of highlighting human rights abuses and lack of democratic rule.

### Weapons of Words

In the late 1980s, attorney Gitobu Imanyara launched *Nairobi Law Monthly* and Pius Nyamora and his wife Lloyce launched *Society* magazine. The intent of these independent publications was to provide a public forum for critical commentary about the regime.[46] Both were small, family run and self-financed publications with a skeleton staff. Their tiny publishing firms were unable to provide any significant support for their activism except in providing a platform for written dissent. By that criterion, one could identify the editors and writers as individual activists. This kind of entry path to a resistance movement via one's profession, and individual activism

45 Muite interview.

46 *Finance* magazine in Nairobi also published many critical articles about the Moi regime during this period.

in general, is often overlooked in the literature on social movements. These editors in Kenya soon drew the wrath of the Moi regime and eventually were arrested. But by that time they and their publications had become popular at home and were known abroad, which probably accounts for their being held only for a relatively short time. Lloyce Nyamora was handled roughly, including being kicked and held incommunicado until she and her husband were released on bail. They left the country in 1994, returning years later.

As with the case of attorney Paul Muite, it is hard to over-estimate the role Imanyara played in opening up the political system in Kenya.[47] Imanyara became one of the key sources of energy in the nonviolent resistance. He recruited an impressive array of contributors to his *Nairobi Law Monthly*, whose articles defiantly challenged the legitimacy of the Moi regime and its pretense at a just legal system.

> The mainstream media was sort of subdued in its reporting because of the consequences of challenging the single party regime. *Nairobi Law Monthly* was the primary forum and weapon and tool for the movement for human rights in this country for … about five years: '87 to about '92.[48]

This angered the regime. Imanyara was attacked on the street by thugs apparently sent by the government. He was arrested in 1990 and 1991. Yet each time he continued his activism, adding to a widening culture of resistance in Kenya that further expanded after multiparty elections began in 1992, involving mass demonstrations and widespread public criticism of the regime. "The more they punished Gitobu Imanyara, the more the resistance grew … Gitobu, for me, was very, very, very courageous [and] a glaring example of somebody who was acting as an individual. He suffered a lot for it."[49]

At one point Imanyara was ill when in police custody and taken to a hospital where he was chained to a bed during treatment. Imanyara's resistance was a key part of the fragmented social movement against Moi, especially in the

47 Muite and Imanyara were the first and second most frequently mentioned human rights activists named by Kenyan activists and others interviewed for this study.

48 David Makali, in an interview with the author, September 18, 2002 in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time Makali, a Kenyan, was a media studies specialist. *Nairobi Law Monthly* sold between twenty-five thousand to seventy-five thousand copies per edition, depending on how politically hot their cover story was, he said. Makali described *Nairobi Law Monthly* and *Society* as "institutions" because of their popular support including donations.

49 Willy Mutunga, in an interview with the author, September 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

period highlighted by individual activism. He helped frame a message of the regime as legally illegitimate; and he provided a forum for critics, which added to a growing culture of resistance. Local attorneys staged a three-day strike in protest against the confinement of Imanyara and attorney John Khaminwa. International donors and human rights organizations took note of Imanyara's valiant challenges, putting pressure on the government to release him. This international pressure on Moi would grow in the early 1990s, especially from the United States, whose ambassador, Hempstone, became a vocal advocate for human rights and multiparty elections. Donors temporarily froze new funding in 1992 following a major political opposition rally and growing domestic unrest. They again froze new funding in 1997 when the regime killed some people demonstrating for constitutional reform before the elections that year.[50]

Pius Nyamora later identified what he saw as some of the links in the chain of resistance that was growing around that time: Individual activists > foreign media > local media, including activist writers and vendors > local non-government organizations > international NGOs > international pressure on the regime. "It began with individuals." Later "ordinary people provided the crowds at rallies, not fearing death [or perhaps overcoming fear]. "They formed the crowds."[51]

## "God's Kingdom Grows with Opposition"

Further resistance to Moi's rule came from four church leaders who were increasingly openly criticizing the regime for its human rights abuses. The four activist clerics, known as "the quartet" were: Bishops Henry Okullu, David Gitari, and Alexander Muge of the Anglican Church of the Province of Kenya; and Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa (PCEA). The first three spoke with institutional backing; Rev. Njoya's activism was opposed by the Kenyan leaders of his church, though he had popularity among the members and the public. He acted essentially as an individual. Bishop Muge died in early 1990 in a car accident which many Kenyans believed was an intentional government-supported plan to silence

50 Funding freezes are analyzed in the second Kenya chapter.

51 Pius Nyamora, in a telephone interview with the author, December 17, 2002 in the United States. Kenyan historian Macharia Munene (2013) attributes the folding of *Society* less to repressive activities by Moi and more to loss of customers "when it appeared to lose objectivity and became excessively partisan in the politics of 1992."

a bold critic from Moi's own ethnic group. "I still consider the death of Bishop Muge a great mystery," wrote Bishop Okullu (1997, 120-1).[52] Rev. Njoya was several times beaten by police. Rev. Gitari once escaped a mob sent to his house with, he contends, intent on killing him. "We became the spokesmen of the people because it so dangerous for an individual to attack the government because they could easily be detained without trial", said Gitari in an interview.[53] Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, an academic activist at the time (later elected to Parliament), who worked closely with Bishop Okullu, credits the bishop's explicit Easter Sermon in 1990 on political reform with helping lay the inspirational groundwork for the important opposition rally later that year.[54]

After attorneys Muite, Imanyara, James Orengo, Kuria, and Mutunga, Kenyans interviewed for this book ranked Dr. Rev. Timothy Njoya as a key figure in the resistance to the Moi regime. He spoke out bluntly for multiparty elections as early as January 1, 1990, two years before that reform was reluctantly accepted by the regime after growing domestic and international pressure. I tracked him down in a suburb of Nairobi some years after his courageous activism. Like most of the activists interviewed, he had been a brave individual, a nonconformist at a time when conformity was safer. He was overseeing the slow construction of a religious rock garden, a project of his as an outside artist. "I've been here, doing this creativity" he said when we met again.[55]

Rev. Njoya took me on a tour of the small area which already had a pyramid of stone big enough to have a narrow walking path through the base. His son said his father wants him to build an even bigger pyramid. It represents the "ascension and *descension*" of Jesus. Another sculpture signifies the wheat and tares parable. "God's kingdom grows with opposition," he said. After the brief tour of the sculptures, we sat on some of the rocks.

52 Shortly before his death, Bishop Muge defied the threat by a member of Parliament and Minister of Labour Peter Okondo that he would be killed if he set foot in a particular district (West Pokot) where he nevertheless went. Throup and Hornsby (1998, 200) argue that this raises suspicion of government involvement in the death.

53 Archbishop David Gitari (retired), interview with the author, Nairobi, Kenya, November 7, 2002.

54 Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, in an interview with the author August 2, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. The 1990 and 1991 opposition rallies will be discussed in the second Kenya chapter.

55 Dr. Reverend Timothy Njoya, in an interview with the author, July 29, 2002, Ngong Town, near Nairobi, Kenya. I had interviewed him in 1990 after a political rally, as a correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor*. I was assigned to Nairobi from 1987-95, covering East and West Africa, based in Nairobi.

Around his neck Rev. Njoya wears a cross made of two nails. "Everybody has opposition within each other," he says. Nearby workers are chiseling rocks. The tape recorder picked up the high-pitched, rhythmic *tap-tap-tap* as yet another stone was carved into its place in this slowly growing religious testament to the nontraditional, stereotype-breaking concepts of the now-retired activist.

His strategy in the late 1980s and early 1990s had been to try to "eliminate fear" of the regime, he said. He had spoken out boldly for democracy shortly after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. In 1997, as police broke up an opposition rally, he was attacked by police and is convinced that the intent was to kill him. His church hierarchy not only offered no support for his activism, they eventually banished him to a rural church for it. "Yes, to quiet me down," Njoya explained. But it didn't work: he kept on speaking out for democracy and human rights against the government, especially from the late 1980s to the early 1990s.

## Implications of Individual Activism

Individual activism is a missing element in most of the social movement literature. Yet it can play an important role in challenging an oppressive regime nonviolently, as it did in Kenya between 1987 and 1991. At a time when few Kenyan organizations were willing to publicly oppose the human rights abuses by the regime, some individual attorneys and independent journalists, and others did take a public stand.[56] It was dangerous: the regime had already rounded up suspected dissidents and tortured many of them. Nevertheless, individual activists, many of them drawn to the resistance by way of their own profession, courageously resisted through a variety of tactics including legal challenges and critical publications. They played a chess game of tactics in the courtroom as they maneuvered to bring to public attention the regimes excesses.

These individual activists lacked the support, financial or otherwise, of organizations. Human rights attorneys, for example, did not have the backing of their bar association until an activist was elected chair of the

56 During this period, a few organizations did speak out. For example, the International Commission of Jurists (Kenya Section) issued critical statements in international forums against the regime's abuses. The National Christian Council of Churches (NCCK) made some critical statements during this period. The Catholic Church joined the Law Society of Kenya's appeal by LSK chair Muite for repeal of detention laws.

organization in 1991. Several independent writers ran self-financed publications that lacked organizational strength. But individual activists were able to attract international attention. That came too late for some to avoid being victims of torture by the state, but the challenges to their treatment helped reduce the use of torture as a policy of the regime. Altogether, these early challenges of the repressive Moi regime helped break a wall of fear that had kept most Kenyans silent. This in turn helped open the way for organizational resistance in the early 1990s that grew into a culture of resistance.

One might ask: how can individual activists be part of a social movement? As noted in the theory chapter, the definition of a "social movement" offered in this book is: *a process of challenges to targeted authorities that may involve individual as well as organizational activism, and at times mass public support, and is aimed at either regime reform or regime change.* But beyond a definitional issue is the fact that while they operated as individuals without organizational support, they were in touch with other activists, planning their part in the overall resistance. They were frequently in contact with each other, especially during times when some among them were targeted by the regime. In the relatively small world of Nairobi, where most of the resistance took place, they were known to each other. They sometimes worked as small, informal groups such as the times when they gathered in a war room to map out strategies and keep an eye out for the safety of their fellow activists. At the same time, these individual activists were an example of a social movement in abeyance, operating on a limited scale, waiting for safer times to emerge more openly and in a more organized fashion. During a period when it was considered too dangerous for most organizations to self-identify as being directly opposed to the regime, these individual activists helped keep the light of nonviolent resistance lit.

# 8 Establishing a Culture of Resistance

Monica Wamwere, a stout upcountry woman with little formal education, whose smile revealed her mostly missing front teeth, stood amidst the small group of elderly mothers in a park in downtown Nairobi. As the Kenyan police, armed with helmets, shields, clubs, and tear gas circled the mothers, she began leading them in a traditional Kikuyu song. Young male supporters, sitting on the ground in a larger circle around the mothers, locked arms in an attempt to provide a human shield against the impending attack.

It was March 1992. In the face of mounting domestic resistance and international pressures, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi had reluctantly agreed the previous December to scrap the one-party system and hold multiparty elections in late 1992.[1] Opposition political parties were forming. But across the street from the protesting mothers, in the basement of a tall government building called Nyayo House, some of their sons and others had been tortured for advocating reform. They were still in prison. Recently rumors had spread that they might be executed as some others had been who had opposed the regime. Three mothers decided they must protest to try to save their sons' lives.[2] They met upcountry in Nakuru to plan their strategy. At first they had considered demonstrating outside the prison at the edge of Nairobi, but they settled instead on a more daring and visible plan: a hunger strike in Uhuru Park in the heart of the city.

In social movement terms, they were making a very public challenge of authorities in a noninstitutional way, framing their message as an appeal for justice and using one of the most potent forces in the world: mothers. Across Africa and in many other parts of the world, it was considered taboo to strike a mother, protesting or not. They were not an organization; they had only their own funds (at first). They were not skilled at mounting a protest. Driven by a passion to save their sons, they were using their own bodies to challenge a regime that had shown little respect for the law, torturing

1 Moi surprised delegates and even some of his close aides with his announcement at a national meeting of his party, the Kenya National African Union (KANU). "The power stems from the people," Moi told delegates in the modern Kasarani Arena in Nairobi. Just days before, donors had imposed a freeze on new aid. But Moi's decision also followed growing domestic resistance and two major rallies for multiparty which police had violently repressed (Press 1991).

2 Milcah Wanjiku Kinuthia, Rumba Kinuthia's mother, in an interview with the author, October 12, 2002 in Nairobi, Kenya. She said the original three were the mothers of political prisoners Koigi Wamwere, Mirugi Kariuki, and Kinuthia.

and sometimes executing suspected enemies. They were determined and unafraid.

> What can I be afraid of when my son had been locked up? I decided to go there because I felt my son would be hanged. I went looking for Koigi's mother and the other mothers and that is when we came out with the plan to come to Nairobi. We went and told Mr. [Amos] Wako [then attorney general] that we were camped at Freedom Corner and we wanted to find out why our sons had been arrested.[3]

The previous chapter examined primarily individual, nonviolent resistance to the repressive regime of Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi in the 1980s, especially from 1987 to 1992. This chapter examines a somewhat overlapping period of nonviolent activism by small groups 1990-92; and a period of mostly organizational activism 1992-2002, the year the ruling party lost power for the first time. It also looks at mass demonstrations from 1990 onward. In a model developed in this book, each of these elements combined to establish in Kenya (and in Sierra Leone and Liberia), a culture of resistance. This study defines a culture of resistance as one in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime becomes a norm for activists and a visible segment of the general public. A culture of resistance can be blocked by overwhelming force as it was in Liberia under Samuel Doe (1980-90). But massive repression risks driving a nonviolent resistance underground. Doe was killed in a civil war. There had been at least some underground resistance in Kenya in the early 1980s, though the extent remains unclear. In Sierra Leone some people went to Libya for training in revolution, but only a few took up arms and initiated the civil war in that country.

The specific critical events highlighted in this chapter that added significantly to the resistance include (1) the daring protest by mothers of political prisoners demanding release of their sons; (2) two groundbreaking, illegal (in the eyes of the regime) political rallies, one in 1990 and the other in 1991, that changed the political landscape of Kenya and were key steps leading to adoption of multiparty elections in late 1991; and (3) mass demonstrations for reform in 1997, an election year.

It is worth repeating here key arguments of this study. The dominant attention in social movement studies is on organizations, often large

3 Milcah Wanjiku Kinuthia interview. Freedom Corner, as it was later designated in honor of the mothers strike, is within Uhuru Park at the junction of Uhuru Highway and Kenyatta Avenue.

organizations. But this misses important contributions of individuals and small groups. Their contributions can help keep a social movement going until it is safe enough for organizations to take the lead, as happened in Kenya in the early 1990s after multiparty elections were allowed. To help capture a broader sense of a social movement, especially in repressive settings, the analytical spotlight needs broadening to include a more complete range of participants. The focus should be more on the various sources of resistance – individual, group, organizational, and mass participation – and less on structure (formal or informal) such as membership or participation in a self-identified resistance organization, something Tilly emphasizes (e.g., 2008). Some key activists in Kenya, Liberia, and Sierra Leone never identified with a social movement organization yet played a critical role in the resistance. At times an independent publication run by a few individuals can become an important element in a resistance movement as was the case in Sierra Leone in the early 1980s and in both Liberia and Kenya. At other times opposition political parties may take the lead in a resistance as they did in Kenya in the early 1990s. This study also notes an entry path into the nonviolent resistance via commitment to one's profession (e.g., law, journalism, clerical) and not membership in a resistance organization. One could argue that there were several social movements in Kenya, starting at least in the 1980s and continuing to 2002. But with no obvious gap in the resistance during this period, the author has chosen to discuss the resistance in terms of a single social movement with cycles of activism that developed into a culture of resistance, each overlapping phase of resistance building on the previous: individual, small group, organizational, and mass participation.

Small groups played an important part of the process of resistance in Kenya and took center stage in the resistance in Kenya in the early 1990s, including the protest by the mothers. Because it represents a transitional protest from individuals to small group protest (it was both), their 1992 protest is presented out of chronological order, followed by an analysis of the two attempted mass rallies in 1990 and 1991 that are examples of small group initiatives that also involved mass participation.

## Mothers' Strike

The mothers' strike illustrates how a few dedicated activists can attract supporters and sympathy and make a larger impression on the public than their numbers would suggest possible. The dozen or so mothers alone might

have had an impact by themselves. But in the first few days of their outdoor protest, sleeping overnight in the park, they began attracting considerable supporters in addition to coverage by the local and international press, including this author who was a journalist at the time based in Kenya.

The mothers strike quickly became a focus of the nonviolent resistance in early 1992, just as opposition political parties were forming. Earlier the mothers had approached environmentalist and political activist Wangari Maathai for advice. She had stood up to the Moi regime over a plan to build a sixty-two-story building for the ruling party and a six-story statue of Moi in *Uhuru* Park. The mothers met several times in Dr. Maathai's home in Nairobi planning how to proceed. They met with the Attorney General Amos Wako to inform him that they would be waiting in the park until the prisoners were released. They ignored his advice to go home and await a government decision on their appeal. As night approached the first day of the protest, the mothers lit candles, one for each of the approximately fifty political prisoners whose release they were seeking. An Asian woman loaned the mothers an open-sided canopy, the kind used in garden dinner parties. As night approached, a group of men led by Ngonya wa Gakonya, then leader of a religious group known as the Tent of the Living God, arrived to provide protection. At first members of the public came just out of curiosity, but by the second or third day, other Kenyans came to tell their story of how they, too, had been tortured. The crowds grew.

> Once we went there we opened a flood … We provided a forum that so many people needed but didn't have. So by the second day people started coming to visit, to look, to see: "Look at this bunch of crazy women who are sleeping outside!" and to hear our story. By the 3rd day some people started telling their story.[4]

The police were now closing their circle tighter and preparing to attack. I had been reporting on the strike but was also responsible for covering the news across East and West Africa and could not remain on-site with the mothers as much as my wife, Betty, could. Betty Press, a professional photographer, was documenting the mothers and the police that day as she had every day since they began their protest. I was in our nearby apartment in Nairobi writing another story when a foreign journalist called and said she had some film from Betty who had asked her to keep it safe in case police attempted to destroy film at the site of the protest. The journalist said the

4 Wangari Maathai, in an interview with the author, September 23, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

police were closing in on the mothers. I ran to our car and drove as quickly as I could to the site, parked on the grass and threaded my way through the now-tightening circle of armed police to stand with the mothers and Betty. I found myself standing next to Dr. Maathai and only a few feet from one of the mothers, Monica Wamere, who started to sing as the police got closer.

Then the police attacked. Some later reports claimed police beat the women: I saw no evidence of this firsthand, though I couldn't see everyone. The police did attack the would-be protectors who had formed a ring around the mothers who themselves sat in the shade of the canopy. The protectors quickly fled for safety toward the mothers, piling under the roof of the canopy and falling in a pile on and round the mothers. I found myself buried under their bodies with just my head protruding, feeling the crush of their weight. Just then a Kenyan policeman tossed a tear gas canister toward the women under the canopy. The canister hit my head, bounced off, and exploded, sending a cloud of gas through the area. It actually helped: the supporters fled the gas, freeing those of us underneath. Betty meanwhile had sidestepped the cloud of teargas and managed to keep photographing. Some of the mothers stripped at least partially as a cultural protest sometimes used in Africa. "That is a curse, a way of cursing those people – the president and the people who had imprisoned our sons unfairly," one of the mothers said.[5]

The police won the day, but the mothers achieved their goal, eventually. The police took the mothers to their upcountry homes but they immediately returned to Nairobi and started a year-long protest in the basement of the nearby All Saints Cathedral with the support of the clergy there. By the end of the year, all but one of some fifty political prisoners had been freed.[6] The regime had been caught off guard by a protest by mothers and shown itself weak enough to be cajoled by domestic and international criticism into a political action they had not planned. The regime showed signs of nervousness but had not backed off the use of force to break up the protest. Nor had the regime fully renounced torture. Margaret Wangui, the sister of Rumba Kinuthia, who acted as a liaison between the mothers and their supporters in the city, was detained for more than two months and tortured for her part in the mothers' protest.

5 Margaret Wangui Kinuthia, in an interview with the author, October 12, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

6 Unfortunately, according to a human rights group established in conjunction with the mothers' protest, Release Political Prisoners, the number of detained prisoners reached approximately that number again within a year.

> They continued beating me and asking me whether I had been feeding the mothers … whether we wanted to overthrow the government. I stayed one day [in a water-flooded cell]. I could not sleep or sit down. They beat me with small sticks … I never knew where I was because I was blindfolded [during interrogations].[7]

The mother's strike was the first time Kenyans had seen such a direct and public protest of ordinary people that was not put down immediately against a regime many feared. It was "a real milestone" that helped to further break a wall of silence with regard to public protest.[8] The two earlier public rallies that preceded the regime's acceptance of multiparty elections had been broken up almost immediately with force. But, the rallies and the mothers' protest showed how small group resistance can play an important role in rousing public awareness in a social movement when it is too dangerous to have a central organization.

## Small Group Strategic Choices and Tactics: "Exciting the Masses"

> Ultimately it doesn't matter what power the government has. If you can succeed in exciting the masses, the masses rise up against the government; the government has to give way. It cannot imprison everybody; it cannot kill everybody. We came very close to it in 1990-91.[9]

Activist Kenyan attorney Paul Muite was speaking of the two public rallies of 1990 and 1991 which the government broke up with force. "You can say the government saw the people were uprising and they were prepared to escalate the uprising," Muite added, offering that, and not donor suspension of new aid shortly after the second rally, as an explanation for why Moi gave into mounting calls for switching to multiparty elections. Muite also referred to calls for strikes by the operators of the mini taxies in Kenya and efforts to achieve strikes by cash crop growers and civil servants as part of a civil disobedience campaign whose aim was not human rights but "pluralism." The nonviolent resistance movement in Kenya gained further

7 Margaret Wangui interview.

8 Binaifer Nowrojee, in a telephone interview with the author, June 5, 2002, in the United States. At the time, Nowrojee was legal counsel for the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch.

9 Paul Muite, in an interview with the author, July 13, 2003, in Nairobi, Kenya. Muite, a human rights attorney, was later elected to Parliament.

momentum in the 1990s as small groups began to form that took the lead from individual activists. Opposition political parties and other organizations soon followed, supported by an increasing mass participation in public rallies and demonstrations. The model put forward in this book leading to a culture of resistance involves three somewhat overlapping phases: individual activism, organizational activism, and mass public support. In the 1990s, individual activism was replaced by organizational activism as opponents to the Moi regime won concessions that reduced the fear though not the danger of resistance.

## Breaking the "Wall of Fear:" Saba Saba Rally 1990

The Kamkunji site for the first planned opposition rally in July 1990 that would shake the status quo is an open space at the edge of Nairobi central business district, partially ringed by small shops. On the eve of independence in the early 1960s, Kamkunji was the political meeting ground for African anticolonialists. It has symbolic political value beyond its geographic location. Over the years important political speeches had been given there. On a busy street nearby, men push and pull overloaded wooden handcarts piled with vegetables or other goods purchased nearby and being delivered to stores or homes, some at the top of hills that leave the laborers covered in sweat and straining to reach their desitinations. Matatu minibus taxis stream by jammed with passengers who can afford the relatively cheap fares, while rivers of workers pass by on foot walking to or from their tin-shack homes in Kibera and similar slums, where toilets and fresh water are scarce. The wealthier speed by in comfortable cars on their way to their modest, multistoried apartment buildings in complexes sprouting outward for miles from the city center, or to expensive houses with guarded gates.

As I witnessed Kenya's growing political resistance to authoritarian rule, I sometimes wondered how much of it was driven by a sense of human rights, a longing for democracy and justice, and an end to the torture of politically marked dissidents and how much of it was driven by a desire of those out of power to get into power. Or was the nonviolent resistance more basically driven by a hunger for food, jobs, and a sense of dignity among the poor? One day, riding with an educated Kenyan friend who directed a research organization, I asked him as we stopped outside his small but solid, two story home near downtown Nairobi, what was his primary concern as a Kenyan. His answer came quickly: "Putting food on our table."

It was against tough economic conditions, with economies slipping all across Africa in the late 1980s, that a small group of Kenyan activists challenged the government's legitimacy, using the courts to seek an end to illegal detentions and mistreatment of prisoners, and to widen the sense of freedom of press and expression. But individual activists can only achieve so much. It takes more organized efforts to carry a resistance further. In 1990, plans were underway to move to the next step in the pressure for the regime to adopt multiparty elections which activists hoped would open the system and lead to a change of regime. The momentum came almost exclusively from Kenyans who were not members of the president's ethnic grouping, the Kalenjin. There was some Luo and other participation in the resistance, but the leaders were mostly Kikuyus, an ethnic group which had lost power when vice president Moi became President upon the death in office of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta, in 1978.

Businessman Kenneth Matiba, a former Moi cabinet member, and Charles Rubia, a former mayor of Nairobi, who had a falling out with the ruling Kenya African National Union (KANU) party, both Kikuyu, gave a press conference in May 1990 announcing plans for a public rally on July 7. The announcement was well covered by the Kenyan and international press. In an interview, Rubia laughed as he recalled that the stated purpose was "to discuss development of the country and the economy. The strategy was we would have eight public rallies, one in every province. We would start with Nairobi." The two men held a second press conference soon after the first one, laying out in detail the issues they hoped would become the basis of a public debate on governance. Rubia said he hoped to avoid a mere personal attack on Moi. But everyone knew the real reason for the planned rallies was to open up the political system to competition.

> I felt, having been expelled from that party, I couldn't just keep quiet. Not just myself. There were many people who felt the same thing. And I thought perhaps if Kenya assumed a multiparty political situation, then there would be more political parties formed, and I, for one, would perhaps find a "home." It's like if somebody kicks you out of his house, you'll come later on … to think of building your own house. That in a nutshell was the main reason I felt, as a duty to myself as a Kenyan, to campaign for a multiparty situation.[10]

10 Charles Rubia, in an interview with the author, October 8, 2002, at the Nairobi Club, Nairobi, Kenya. Rubia added that he actually applied for a license for the rally but was turned down.

There was no organization behind the planned rally, only a small group of activists working together, including Raila Odinga. "In those days there were no proper structures for organizing protests. Mr. Matiba had contact with *matatu* operators which he said he would mobilize and I would organize the fans, my link there, so that we take them to Kamkunji."[11] The announcement by Matiba and Rubia of the planned rally sent a fresh burst of hope through the country for those hungry for change. "Everybody begins to gather courage, mainly because there was an example set when nobody else could wait and this is when Matiba became critical in people's minds."[12]

The Moi regime knew the real purpose of the rally and didn't like it. The president quickly warned that the rally would be unlicensed, illegal, and halted by force. The regime broke up the rally with force, attacking the large crowds that had showed up even though Rubia called off the rally, which had not been licensed, just before he and Matiba were arrested. Forced to sleep on the concrete floor of their cells, conditions that contributed to health problems of both Matiba and Rubia, they learned from sympathetic guards that there had been several days of demonstrations and clashes with police in various parts of the country following the aborted rally. Though the rally had been blocked, it had sent a signal through the country that change was needed and people were willing to stand up for it. In social movement parlance, this is both *relative deprivation* (realizing there is a problem) and *cognitive liberation* (seeing a way out of the problem). Despite the dangers, many people had come to the intended rally in Nairobi and many others had protested in various other parts of the country.

"Over a few weeks, Matiba and Rubia effectively transformed the long-repressed underground movement for multi-party democracy into a mass movement which for the first time threatened the government's control" (Throup and Hornsby 1998, 61-2.) Moving beyond what individual activists could accomplish, a small group of activists, supported by mass popular participation, had broken the wall of fear, though Kenyans were always aware of the dangers of protesting. The rally and the repressive response by the regime had attracted widespread domestic and international attention. Kenyan historian Munene (2013) notes, "Thereafter, the public lost fear of government. With the fear factor broken, the number of activists increased as the initiative for political action shifted from Moi to his opponents.

11 Raila Odinga, in an interview with the author, October 30, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

12 Macharia Munene, in an interview with the author, September 9, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

The government pays attention when the activists attract mass following. As long as they are not attracting international concern, they can be ignored.[13]

## Widening the Resistance: Kamkunji Rally 1991

A single photograph from the second major attempted rally on November 16, 1991 captures the spirit of protest better than the brief, soon-forgotten words by activist leaders who ducked police barricades and got to the site. The photo shows several opposition politicians[14] riding in a small pickup truck racing through downtown Nairobi with police in hot pursuit. One of them, Martin Shikuku, is sitting on the roof flashing the then-popular sign for multiparty, a two-fingered 'V.' As the van sped through working-class neighborhoods, shots were fired at the pickup, according to Shikuku. The photo was broadcast domestically and internationally. It was a stunning, bold, in-your-face challenge to the Moi regime, and a cold reminder that change was probably inevitable without massive use of force to stop it. Large crowds of Kenyans had shown up at the rally despite warnings from President Moi and despite a huge presence of riot police clubbing and chasing those who came. Some who showed up said they were no longer afraid of the regime; some who escaped tear gas then returned to the site a second time. The Kamkunji rally drew considerable international attention, especially when police moved in to violently suppress it.[15]

This marked a turning point in the nonviolent resistance in Kenya. For the second time in two years, the public had been invited to physically express their discontent with the Moi regime, a dangerous proposal at the time. For the second time, large crowds of Kenyans had responded, this time not to a call from two former Kikuyu members of government seeking a way to open up and get back into politics, but from a broader representation of Kenyans from different ethnic backgrounds. This posed a much greater threat to the Moi regime, signaling that it was not just the largest ethnic group against him but a potentially strong coalition of Kenyans from various ethnic groups. Given that political voting in Kenya was largely ethnic based, the coalition of organizers was a much broader challenge to the legitimacy

13 Macharia Munene, in a personal e-mail to the author, November 18, 2013.

14 They included, Martin Shikuku, James Orengo, Masinde Muliro, and Philip Gachoka.

15 Being more cautious than some of my fellow international reporters at the time who ended up injured by the police, I interviewed Kenyans near the rally site until a truckload of police ran toward me and a correspondent for Voice of America, forcing us to jump in my car and flee along the median strip to get our stories out to our editors.

of the Moi regime. Later that month, international donors meeting in Paris froze new funding to Kenya pending economic reforms. Days later Moi accepted multiparty elections, leading to the impression that it was the donor freeze that pushed him over the line. This study, however, argues that it was the growing domestic unrest, not the aid freeze, which led him to make the decision to allow multiparty voting, an argument with which an academic study of donors to Kenya agrees (Brown 2000).

A social movement whose supporters find little in the way of political "opportunities," or external advantages encouraging a movement can still move forward if enough people are willing to risk the dangers in an authoritarian setting. The first rally, *Saba Saba*, had been a bold attempt to push the regime into accepting multiparty politics, but the base from which that challenge came was narrow enough that the regime could afford to suppress the supporters who showed up for the planned event and not make any concessions. The tactics behind the Kamkunji rally were different. This time opponents created the outlines of a rival political party, calling it the Forum for the Restoration of Democracy (FORD). By limiting its charter members to a maximum of nine, they were technically in compliance with the law at the time that organizations with ten or more members had to have a government-approved license. There was no way a group of rival politicians could get a license for an organization.[16]

The fact that the individual politicians who stepped forward as members of FORD were of an older generation did not mean that younger political opponents of the regime were hesitant. It was intentional, according to one of the members, Shikuku. "We were old enough to die. We didn't want kids around who still have got hope of living; we had already brought people in this world and we were ready to die."[17] Behind this united front were younger political activists eager to find their place in government. "We were the Young Turks behind the movement," said Raila Odinga. He mentioned others, including James Orengo, Paul Muite, Peter Anyang' Nyong'o.[18] Raila Odinga said he had met with Allan W. Eastham in the United States Embassy who had encouraged formation of some kind of united front which would

16 The original members of FORD included: Oginga Odinga (Raila's father), Martin Shikuku, Masinde Muliro, Philip Gachoka, George Nthenge, and Ahmed Salim Bamahriz. The formation of the group was announced at a press conference July 4, 1991 which was widely covered by both the local and international press.

17 Martin Shikuku, in an interview with the author, October 3, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

18 Raila Odinga interview.

make it easier to garner international support.[19] A former US diplomat at the embassy in Nairobi later recalled:

> We [the US Embassy] were encouraging the opposition, if it wanted to make a difference, to present some sort of a united front. It was not so much to attract US support, although the context was twofold: First, to overcome Moi's biggest advantage, the ability to divide the opposition and prevail. Second, to convince the world outside Kenya that they [the opposition] were serious. The problem was that the opposition [was] divided as Kenya was, by ethnicity.[20]

In organizational terms, the establishment of FORD represented a further shift from individual activism to small group activism. Its members represented a broad range of political resistance to the regime from various parts of the country. It was the rebirth of institutionalization of political pluralism in Kenya. In the model introduced in this book of a culture of resistance, it represented the second phase, organizational activism, after individual activism, and it was connected to the third phase, mass public support. The number of Kenyans participating in the rally, like the number of Kenyans who stepped forward as members of FORD, was relatively small. A social movement rarely involves most people in any cause but it can focus public attention on an issue; its strength lies in the potential to rally a significant portion of the general public to that issue.

## What Quantitative Studies Miss

In their quantitative and archival study of political transformation in thirty-one African countries from 1985-94, Bratton and van de Walle provide important information on regime change. Among other insights, they concluded that political protests were important markers in the process. But such studies from afar cannot be expected to detect the importance of non-events, or attempted protests, nor the significance of any single protest. For Kenya, if one were to do a count of major protests, as many social movement studies do around the world, the count, assuming attempted

19 At the time, the ambassadors from the United States and Germany were both showing support for the opposition and political pluralism.

20 Allan W. Eastham, Jr., in a personal e-mail to the author, June 24, 2013. Eastham was political counselor at the US Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya 1988-92.

events were included, would be only two between 1990 and 1991. But the two attempted rallies, both violently suppressed by police, marked a political ground shift in Kenya from individual activism to small group activism – and the first indications that a mass support for change was welling up with no certainty of how far it would go. A quantitative analysis of Kenya at the time would have missed the groundswell of support for multiparty elections which many Kenyans hoped would bring a better economy, more jobs, and dignity for the individual. That support was first evident at the Saba Saba rally July 7, 1990, the day a wall of fear was cracked in Kenya, and then at the November 16, 1991 rally, both at Kamkunji grounds in Nairobi. After the aborted rally of 1990 there were riots across parts of Kenya. After the 1991 rally, there were further demonstrations in various cities, indicating a broad opposition to the regime.

## Organizational Resistance

The nonviolent social movement in Kenya continued but in a different form as a culture of resistance grew. Individual activism had gained important ground in focusing attention to a domestic and international audience on the excesses of the regime. The torture of dissidents had not stopped, but it had been sharply reduced. Small group activism had gained some initial mass public and international support in the form of illegal rallies. Now the regime had reluctantly agreed to allow multiparty elections. This opened the way for political opposition parties to take the lead in organizational resistance to the regime. In this phase of nonviolent resistance to the continuing authoritarian regime of Moi, it took on the form of more classical social movements with organized public rallies, growth of nongovernment organizations advocating for improved human rights, and widespread public commentary critical of the president. Many of the individual activists from the earlier phases of resistance joined the opposition parties; some were elected to Parliament; others assumed leadership positions in an NGO.

### Ethnic Divisions

Despite the hope of a united opposition with the formation of FORD, the group very quickly split. The euphoria of a possible united front quickly dissolved as the group divided into a number of political parties formed primarily along ethnic lines. Activist Paul Muite notes that ethnic politics "has terribly hurt and slowed down democratization. It is the most tragic

issue, not just in Kenya, but I would say in Africa. Also in human rights. It's the most divisive issue."[21] Ethnic politics, a feature of African politics, proved divisive in the 1992 and 1997 presidential elections when Kenyans mostly backed a candidate of their own ethnic group. It was not until the 2002 election when rivals came together under a united platform that they defeated the ruling party for the first time. Moi exploited this feature of Kenyan political life to help bolster his argument that a multiparty system would cause ethnic tensions. His regime fanned ethnic fears and rivalries around the issue of land which led to a series of deadly ethnic clashes from November 1991 to 1993 and again in 1997 in a coastal region. The coastal clashes were aimed at forcing Luo to move out of the area. Moi hoped to clear rival ethnic groups from areas he wanted to win electorally, according to Muite. "He [Moi] started it [ethnic clashes] even before elections, as a way of resisting the mounting pressure for multi-partyism for election purposes. He wanted to kick out the non-Kalenjin [primarily the Kikuyu] from Rift Valley so that they don't vote against the government."[22]

## Cycles of Activism

In Kenya there were peaks and valleys in activism. Tarrow (1998) writes of a cycle of activism. Though his analysis does not preclude multiple cycles, it primary theorizes about a rise and a fall with activists eventually growing tired or disillusioned. In Kenya there were multiple risings and fallings with the decline in activism coming between election years of 1997 and 2002. The multiparty reform had not been accompanied by other constitutional reforms that would diminish the power of the president who had the power to appoint officials from top to bottom in Kenya. Nor was there a change in the repressive laws the president used to attempt to control freedom of speech and assembly. Looking back, some activists said they should have pushed for greater reforms. Underneath the drive for multiparty politics there was little push by leading opposition figures for a reduction in the power of the presidency. The silence of leading presidential candidates on this issue showed their real intent: to win with such powers intact.[23]

21 Muite interview.

22 Muite interview.

23 It was not until 2010 that a constitution was finally adopted by public referendum that reduced presidential powers by establishing a system of shared governance of locally elected officials.

## New Tactic: National Citizen's Convention

It was against this background that another attempt was made by civil society for a new constitution. This required open, organized activism, wider alliances that activists hoped would transcend ethnic rivalries. The new drive for constitutional change began taking shape as the 1997 election drew closer. The focus: a national convention to push for reforms before the election so that the winner would not carry on with the same authoritarian powers. There were public meetings to choose delegates to the convention. Movement leaders framed their message in a way designed for mass appeal: the rallying cry was "no reforms, no elections." A National Convention Planning Committee was organized during 1996 to prepare for a National Convention Assembly (NCA) in April 1997 in Limuru, outside of Nairobi. The plan was to develop "a new constitutional order … a transitional constitution to democracy … and that was considered treason," according to one of the organizers.[24] The convention, unlike the politics of the day, was not designed for elitists. It drew on people across the country, rich and poor, urban and rural, to generate new ideas: students, teachers, farmers, laborers, minibus taxi fare collectors (*touts*), and roadside craftsmen (*jua kali*) as well as politicians. There were grassroots preparatory meetings.[25] At the convention, the assembly elected a National Convention Executive Committee (NCEC).

## "Foot Soldiers" for Freedom

A generational gap soon developed amongst the delegates at the National Convention. "The politicians during the first National Convention Assembly were asking for minimum reforms … to facilitate a smooth election. But we [the youth activists at the convention] were telling them there is no way we can have a free and fair election without comprehensively overhauling the

24 Davinder Lamba, in an interview with the author, September 28, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. Lamba, a public policy analyst with two master's degrees and one of the organizers of the national convention, is a Sikh, and was unaffiliated with any political party. He mentioned that the years of activism had a physical and emotional toll on the families of activists, including his own.

25 Some Kenyan observers characterized the preparatory meetings/assemblies as elitist-run and accomplishing little, while defenders such as Lamba argue they were a grass roots exercise in developing a participatory sense of democracy that was new to Kenya.

constitution of the Republic."[26] Young delegates at the National Convention, many of them former university student activists, began pushing for public demonstrations in 1997 instead of just resolutions. At the same time, they began to acknowledge that in many cases they were being "used" by the older politicians and activists at rallies, serving as organizers and bodyguards instead of speakers.[27] They were, in effect the "foot soldiers" in Kenya's struggle for greater human rights and democracy. The younger generation (under thirty), while admiring the courage of the better known veteran activists, including Willy Mutunga, felt they were not getting a chance to develop their own voice in the struggle for political reform. Some of them would later go into nongovernment organizations working on justice issues or run for Parliament themselves, with limited success, usually due to lack of funds. The table below shows the difference in the activities of the two generations with regard to public demonstrations.

**Table 1 Veteran Activists v. "Foot Soldiers" in Kenya's Political Demonstrations**

| veteran activists/politicians | youth activists: "foot soldiers" |
|---|---|
| middle class or above | often poor |
| lawyers; politicians; clergy | students; former students; unemployed |
| sometimes had bodyguards at | unprotected; sometimes served as bodyguards for |
| dangerous protests | veteran activists/politicians |
| legal representation if arrested | minimal or no legal support |
| planned protests | carried out the plans; recruited participants |
| highly publicized in media | mostly ignored by media |
| more conservative demands | more radical demands |

Source: Press (2012, 7), based on interviews conducted by the author in Kenya, 2002; plus archival materials

## Growing Support for Mass Public Demonstrations

At the National Convention in 1997 the younger generation of activists managed to help persuade delegates to endorse and carry out a series of monthly public demonstrations starting in May 1997 and ending in October.

26 Njoroge Waithera, in an interview with the author, November 7, 2002, at the NCEC office in Nairobi, Kenya.

27 Ndung'u Wainaina, in an interview with the author, December 15, 2005. At the time, Wainaina was program manager for NCEC.

To the delight of veteran activist Mutunga, the middle class began coming to the demonstrations, a contrast to the first two big opposition rallies in 1990 and 1991. This was an important expansion of the mass public support for the nonviolent social movement against the Moi regime, a point Mutunga made in both his book (1999) on the middle-class connection to the push for a new constitution, and in an interview.

> [I]f you're going to get anywhere in this country you've got to convince the professionals. The middle class as a social group is so important … And in '97 we were almost getting there because the accountants would come to the mass action, they park their little cars very far, they take off their ties and they march with everybody. There were certain issues that we were pushing forward: issues of power rationing, issues of water, a decayed infrastructure; we're getting punctures [from bad roads] and what not.[28]

The expansion of the resistance to include members of the middle class was further evidence of the growth of a culture of resistance in Kenya. Activists who had been elected to Parliament or taken up leadership positions in NGOs had been unable to wring substantive reforms out of the administration since its reluctant agreement to adopt multiparty elections starting in 1992. Opposition rallies were drawing huge crowds, sometimes interrupted by police. Now the middle class, an educated and vocal group were beginning to risk the ever-present threats of force by the regime at unsanctioned public rallies. A younger generation of activists was pushing for more demonstrations and starting to map out other strategies for expansion of rights. It was possible that all these sources of energy, like small streams would coalesce into a river that could further erode the regime's pillars of power, though an outright violent revolt seemed not to be in the cards. As the demonstrations began in May, the regime appeared uncertain of how to respond but it soon made its intentions clear.

The first demonstration in 1997, aimed at forcing the Moi regime to agree to constitutional reforms before the election late that year, was May 31. Demonstrators were met with only a mild (by Kenyan standards) response by police using teargas. Once the regime realized that the protests had the potential of growing as they continued, it responded with excessive force for the second demonstration, July 7, the familiar Saba Saba date that evoked memories of the 1990 initial mass rally. Hundreds of police and paramilitary

28 Willy Mutunga interview. Mutunga is one of the few scholars to recognize the important role of the youth activists in the reform process.

personnel were sent into the intended rally sites of Kamkunji grounds, Uhuru Park, and around the downtown business district. Some of the same veteran activists from earlier protests, James Orengo, Martin Shikuku, and Paul Muite, managed to get to one of the demonstration sites. Police showed no mercy, charging into the crowds "in a mad frenzy," using "unprecedented violence." At least fourteen people were killed (Peters 2001, 42). Police even chased people into the supposed sanctuary of the All Saints Cathedral, where the mothers in 1992 had stayed during their year-long vigil to win release of political prisoners. Among others attacked in the cathedral was human rights activist Rev. Timothy Njoya. He credits the fact that he was not killed to several courageous journalists who spontaneously shielded him from police blows with their own bodies.[29]

Still, the demonstrations continued – and grew beyond the planned monthly protests – with a boldness that could only have stunned the regime and given new hope to Kenyans eager for regime change, nearly two thirds of whom had voted against the president. Kenyans were still living under the control of an authoritarian regime; the economy was slipping, and legitimate protests were being met with violence. Release Political Prisoners (RPP), a human rights group that grew out of the mothers' vigil, staged a demonstration. Large crowds gathered twice at All Saints Cathedral to reclaim its sacred role as sanctuary and to pray for those killed in the demonstrations. Other demonstrations were held elsewhere in the country during July and August, and later in the year. "The defiance reflected by the mass action had confirmed the growing *culture of resistance* in the country" (Mutunga 1999, 189).

## Counter Tactics by the Regime: the Chess Game Continues

Resistance in a repressive setting is triggered by the repression itself. The response by an authoritarian regime, if not overwhelming enough to crush it, can lead to a new round of resistance/repression/resistance and so on until one side gives in or gives up. When individual activism was at the forefront of the resistance, the regime played a chess game of tactics, with each side learning from the other how best to proceed. This is what Dodd (1994) refers to as "institutional learning." It is a game both sides played well in Kenya. Some organizers of the National Convention were hoping it could transform itself into a "sovereign" national convention with the authority

29 *Weekly Review*, July 11, 1997, 5

to form a new government as had occurred in several West African nations, including Benin. In the face of international condemnation of the renewed regime violence, a determined segment of the public who did not back down and in the face of another funding freeze, this time by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Moi regime made its next move with cunning.[30]

What happened next shows (1) the strength of a nonviolent resistance to force a determined regime to make compromises; (2) how a regime can temporarily demobilize a resistance movement with partial concessions; and (3) how a regime can skillfully use rivalries within a resistance movement to split it and avoid further concessions.

Moi signaled a willingness to adopt some reform legislation prior to the upcoming election. He asked the clergy to withdraw from the reformist movement and mediate between them and the government. Religious leaders welcomed the chance to get back into a neutral role and withdrew from the National Convention structure. Once they had, the president ignored them. Most of the members of Parliament who were part of the National Convention quickly abandoned the convention and returned to Parliament with an eye to the upcoming elections and their record as politicians able to bring real reform. Moi backed the establishment of an Inter-Party Parliament Group (IPPG) to negotiate the reform laws. Donors who had been supportive of the Convention process quickly pulled back and expressed support for compromise in Parliament. Ironically, given his history of detention in years of struggle against the regime, the negotiations were headed by former activist and now member of Parliament, George Anyonya.

Moi had successfully neutralized a growing civil society drive for a new constitution, removed the clergy from their supportive role of reform, and quieted rebellious members of Parliament with the reward of some incremental reforms, and pleased international donors – all in one swift countermove that essentially left him with his powers intact. Looking back, one of the key, nonelected activists who helped organize the national convention, academic Kivutha Kibwana said:[31] "We invested so much power [in] civil society. We were leaders by default. And we developed a following. And then there was rivalry." The rivalry was essentially between elected politician/activists and unelected activists, a rivalry Moi exploited

30 The temporary suspension came with criticism from the IMF about personnel and other bureaucratic issues which caused one writer to complain that while Rome was burning, the IMF was merely examining the strings on the fiddle (*Weekly Review*, August 8, 1997).

31 Kivutha Kibwana, in an interview with the author, July 22, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya.

skillfully.[32] Member of Parliament Kiraitu Murungi, who participated in the NCEC at first, later wrote (2000, 78-9): "I felt that academics leading NCEC were getting carried away from political realities. The MPS were worried that the stand-off between NCEC and KANU hardliners would increase the political temperatures and drive the country into civil war."

In Parliament, KANU and opposition MPs negotiated a series of legislative reforms lowering barriers against freedom of speech and assembly which easily passed. Assessments differ on the importance of those reforms. "IPPG was a regression. Although there were some positive things that came out, we got a fraction of what we could have gotten. So we put back the reforms by five years."[33] MP Murungi (2000, 81) noted that the reforms had "little impact on the elections, but they definitely opened some political space." In the election of 1997, opposition parties nearly won a majority in Parliament. President Moi was reelected against a divided opposition and amidst some charges of voter fraud. Others were stronger in their criticism, calling the abandonment of the national convention process by activist members of Parliament a "betrayal" of the reform movement.[34] Public disillusionment with elected officials led to the further discussions on constitutional reforms as the Ufungamano Initiative, named after the meeting site in Nairobi, guided by religious bodies. "[Moi's] control of the judiciary hadn't changed; his control over the Army hadn't changed; his control over Parliament hadn't changed. And so what was different from a one-party state, except a lot of people speaking, which he learned how to live with."[35]

The sedition law banning what the government could interpret loosely as liable criticism against the government was abolished, but the law against incitement remained and "replaced the law of sedition in terms of being a convenient tool for harassment." The Public Order act was amended to allow, in theory, public demonstrations but police continued to treat police approval as a privilege and not a right and often stalled on issuing permits. The Preservation of Public Security Act was annulled, ending detention without trial. "That one has been observed." The Chiefs act which essentially gave the local chiefs appointed by the president the power to compel donations for public projects and to require labor on those projects was dropped. The

32 Macharia Munene in an e-mail to the author, November 18, 2013.

33 Lamba interview.

34 Pheroze Nowrojee, in an interview with the author, August 3, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. Nowrojee, an activist attorney, was highly regarded as a model for many of the younger activist attorneys in the late 1980s and 1990s.

35 Nowrojee interview.

law limiting licensing of new radio or television stations was amended, but the government continued to stall on issuing them.[36]

> All in all it was a "very, very, very, very false reform. It was part of the tricks that KANU [the ruling party] really had used to get the pressure that was building from mass action off its back. In reality, things did not radically change the way they were because the laws that had been used for this repression continued in place, and they continued being invoked.[37]

## Further Growth of a Culture of Resistance: A "Psychological Revolution"

As stated earlier, this study defines a culture of resistance as one in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime becomes a norm for activists and a visible segment of the general public. The resistance had begun through "individual courage … I think some of these people who took up positions, irrespective of what happened to them, were very courageous people, I think they were very principled people."[38] Their example in the 1980s and early 1990s inspired other acts of resistance. Small groups had joined the resistance, including the mothers in their protest against political detentions, and the political figures who organized the two rallies in 1990 and 1991. The 1997 mass demonstrations in the face of threats and violence from the regime was another sign of a growing culture of resistance, especially as it began to involve the middle class. And with the easing of restrictions in 1997 on freedom of assembly, leaders of opposition parties, especially James Orengo and later Raila Odinga and Mwai Kibaki, took full advantage of the concessions, holding political rallies across the country, often massively attended despite a police presence and occasional interference. The regime's reluctant acceptance of multiparty elections in late 1991, and the partial concessions in 1997 on speech and assembly "add up to a point where they become irreversible … [part of an] historic buildup of changes that occurred in the last 10 years [1992-2002]."[39]

36 Kathurima M'Inoti, in an interview with the author, July 18, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time, M'Inoti was the junior law partner in the firm of Kuria and Murungi.

37 M'Inoti interview.

38 Munene interview.

39 Munene interview.

> Democratization did make halting progress through the 1990s, however, as Moi's grip on power started to slip and political momentum gradually shifted to the opposition. With a narrow parliamentary majority after the 1997 elections, KANU could no longer legislate as Moi pleased. More important, a new generation of politicians, in alliance with a cohort of the old guard, began to assert its independence and openly defy Moi … The tide was beginning to turn (Barkan 2004).

There were other signs of a growth in the culture of resistance. In the 1992 election, for example, there were five thousand Kenyans monitoring the election (Barkan 1998); for the 2002 election there were nearly twenty-eight thousand (Barkan 2004). Some tactics from the early 1990s became less potent as they became more commonplace under a more relaxed political environment. "You find that demonstrating as a tactic has been watered down. I mean everyone is holding processions in Nairobi nowadays, including church people, holding processions, urging people to attend their crusades."[40] There was a proliferation of nongovernment advocacy organizations (NGOs) in the 1990s: "professional associations … civil society organizations like the church – and basically groups of organized citizens and committed individuals using established and credible organizations."[41] Rural residents were also beginning to exercise more freedom:

> People are opening their mouth now. Even when you have development meetings, the Chief will call the chairman of the ruling party, the chairman of the main opposition parties. So there is also an acceptance, I think, largely, in many parts of the country, of multi-party system. And people can express opinions freely.[42]

The occasional dramatic legal challenge to the regime was now a thing of the past: law suits against the government became common. Public criticism of the regime also grew commonplace, including television comedy acts, newspaper cartoons, and open discussions. When the author first reported on political events in Kenya in the late 1980s, informants would call but not

40 Muthoni Kamau, in an interview with the author, December 21, 2005, in Nairobi, Kenya.
41 Mutuma Ruteere, in an interview with the author, August 21, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. At the time Ruteere was a researcher for the Kenya Human Rights Commission, a private organization.
42 Ruteere interview. Ruteere had carried out research on human rights in several rural areas of Kenya for the Kenya Human Rights Commission. According to Ruteere, by 2002 there were approximately fifteen small human rights groups in rural parts of Kenya. But it was still dangerous as police would sometimes try to block their work.

give their name over phone lines they thought might be tapped. Kenyans as a rule seldom spoke in public against a regime that was known for having many undercover spies. After the rallies of 1990 and 1991, especially after 1997, many Kenyans spoke their minds freely. Examples of resistance as a norm includes these culled from the *Nation* daily newspaper in 2002.

- (Sept. 27) "The High Court yesterday confronted a tidal wave of protest by issuing an order stopping public debate on the judicial reforms proposed in the Constitutional review report."
- (Oct. 4) "The President was jeered and at a political rally in his own territory, Eldoret. Crowds along the road waved the two-finger multi party salute as Moi's choice for President to succeed him in the 2002 election, Uhuru Kenyatta, drove by."
- (Oct. 10) "Most of Kenya's 3,000 lawyers held prayers and demonstrated in the streets, shunning the courts for one day to protest Judiciary attempts to block the work of a constitutional review team."

Shortly before the 2002 election in which the ruling party candidate for president was defeated for the first time, a former individual activist attorney said: "There's [been] a *psychological revolution of the people*."[43]

## International Resistance against Kenya

Domestic protests can win international support that helps add pressure on a repressive regime to adopt reforms. That much is clear. What isn't clear is under what circumstances that support is forthcoming. Cliff Bob (2005, 4-6) argues that international support from developed countries is not so much a product of "top-down" assistance as it is a "marketing" process involving efforts by insurgents to attract support and choices by NGOs abroad to choose causes that fit their own criterion. Domestic activists in the country of repression have to take the initiative to "raise international awareness" about their cause. The current study concurs with this argument. Kenyan activists, especially during the period of primarily individual activism, assiduously courted international support by relaying details of the oppression

43 Kiraitu Murungi in an interview with the author, July 18, 2002. Murungi was the law partner of Gibson Kamau Kuria who, after Kuria was detained in 1987 for filing a legal challenge to detention and torture, courageously refiled the same challenge. But after accepting a key post in the Kibaki government after 2002, Murungi became, in the eyes of some former activists, an obstruction to reform rather than an advocate.

under the Moi government. It was such reporting that enabled Amnesty International to document its important report in 1987 about torture in Kenya. It was because various other human rights organizations in the West were kept informed by activists that they were able to provide quick and public condemnations of the Moi regime that no doubt helped win the release of some well-known activists who were detained.

The dynamics of support are different, however, when it comes to bilateral assistance programs being used as leverage for human rights and democracy. For one thing, even repressive regimes can lobby for support, as Kenya's did. Such aid usually falls within the parameters of political expediency and changes in global politics. Until the end of the Cold war, symbolically fixed in the minds of many by the tearing down of the Berlin in 1989, there was little Western support for nationalist movements or domestic human rights campaigns in Africa. South Africa became an exception despite the reluctance of President Ronald Reagan to apply sanctions on the white regime to dismantle the apartheid system and to allow blacks to vote. The release of Nelson Mandela in 1990 after nearly twenty-seven years in prison stirred hopes across the continent that change was possible.

In Kenya it was the Americans and the Germans, especially – not the British – who pushed for multiparty elections and an improvement in human rights. The British played down the human rights issue because Kenya was already pro-Western at a time when the West was playing a political chess game in Africa for allies against the Soviet Union. "It [Kenya] was a friendly country. You had instability in Ethiopia, you had instability in Somalia, you had instability in Sudan, you had … the [Idi] Amin years in Uganda and the post-Amin instability. Kenya was seen as a haven. And [British – and other Western] business and other interests wanted to keep it that way."[44]

The Kenyan government also wanted to keep things that way. As a former British foreign service official from that period noted, Kenya used a "well organized lobby in London" to make their case for a single party regime to avoid what Moi often referred to as the risk of ethnic political splits that could tear the country apart. There was also a "sort of built in Kenya lobby of former colonial figures" within the British government. As a result, Britain tended to send pro-Kenyan diplomats to Nairobi to represent the

44 Malcolm Harper, in an interview with the author, July 2, 2002, in London. From 1968 to 1971, Harper was the field director for Oxfam in East Africa.

government.[45] But democracy was far from a buzz word in the halls of the US State Department in the 1980s with regard to Africa.

> I would argue that the US didn't have any problem with the single party states. There were single party states that were their friends and single party states that weren't. But that was based on whether these folks were lined up with the US or the Socialist Bloc. So this [the start of multiparty elections in Kenya] was not a gift from the donors by any stretch of the imagination and that point needs to be emphasized.[46]

## A "Rogue" US Ambassador Supports Kenyan Human Rights

The US, like Britain, was a player in the same political chess game of the Cold War. As a former journalist covering East and West Africa for *The Christian Science Monitor* from 1987-95, I had trouble getting any US ambassador in the region to go on record in support of democratic governance before the early 1990s. I literally chased one ambassador in West Africa down the hall as he strode rapidly away from my questions without uttering a single word in favor of democracy. Fortunately, there was at least one exception: Ambassador Smith Hempstone in Kenya. Hempstone, a former journalist who had reported on Kenya pre-independence and author of two history books on the region, arrived in Kenya as a "conservative cold war warrior. Over time, as he accumulated experience with the repressive and rapacious practices of that government, Smith went in the other direction."[47] The start of Hempstone's shift apparently came when the popular minister of foreign affairs, Robert Ouko, was murdered and his body burned in 1990 shortly before Ouko was to report to the president about government corruption he had detected. The murder also came after Ouko had received

45 Christopher T. Hart, in a personal e-mail to the author, 2002. From 1985-90 Hart was head of Africa research section of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; he also served in Nairobi 1974-76. Hart added that President Moi in the eyes of the diplomatic community was "underrated. He was very, very, energetic; gets up early, works very, very hard; very assiduous in visiting all around Kenya."

46 US House of Representatives International Relations Committee staffer, who requested anonymity, in an interview with the author, May 21, 2002, in Washington.

47 Allan W. Eastham, Jr. interview.

special attention from US officials as part of the delegation of President Moi's official visit to the White House.[48]

"I suppose the scales first fell from my eyes when Ouko was so cruelly murdered," Hempstone wrote in his book about his time in Kenya: *Rogue Ambassador: An African Memoir* (1997, 167). He began meeting with opposition activists, shared a meal with them in a local restaurant, and offered refugee protection in the US Embassy for attorney Kuria when the government was seeking to arrest him. The US Embassy, as noted previously, encouraged opposition figures to form some kind of united front which would make it easier to support them.[49] Hempstone and the German ambassador, Bernard Mutzelburg, whom Hempstone called "a courageous fighter for freedom" (95) worked together to support an expansion of democracy, sometimes pressing their points jointly in meetings with Kenyan officials. At one point Hempstone called the international and local press to accompany him to a very public and somewhat confrontational meeting with the Kenyan attorney general to complain about lack of human rights. Despite the public denouncement of Hempstone by the Moi regime, "I think he had an effect" in helping push the Moi regime toward reforms.[50] The State Department, particularly the Africa Bureau, was "lukewarm" and somewhat reluctant regarding Hempstone's statements for human rights and democracy.

> We were still in the Cold War and the uncertain transition out of it, and of course there was also the first Gulf War; and Kenya was our best friend in East Africa, with a [military] access agreement in force. We kept asking them [the Kenyan government] big favors and they were very helpful. So what we did on human rights and with opposition figures was not explicitly blessed by Washington, nor was it prohibited.[51]

A speech Hempstone gave in May 1990 to the Rotary Club in Nairobi nearly got him recalled to Washington. He said in part: "A strong political tide is flowing in our Congress, which controls the purse strings, to concentrate our economic assistance on those of the world's nations that nourish democratic institutions, defend human rights, and practice multiparty politics" (Hempstone 1997, 91). Unbeknownst to him, the same day two

48 The Moi regime refused to release a report by Scotland Yard that pointed to two top aides as the "principal suspects" (*Weekly Review*, November 29, 1991).

49 Allan W. Eastham interview. Two Kenyan activists received similar advice from a British politician (Throup and Hornsby 1998, 76).

50 Hart interview.

51 Allan W. Eastham interview.

former members of a Moi cabinet who had been expelled from the ruling party, Kenneth Matiba and Charles Rubia, held a press conference in Nairobi also calling for multiparty elections. Both the Moi regime and the US State Department were angry with the American ambassador. Hempstone found himself on thin ice and was nearly recalled to Washington.[52]

## From Regime Reform to Regime Change: Who gets the Credit?

Activists had won important concessions in 1992 and 1997 but they were not successful in achieving regime change until rival candidates came together in a united slate in 2002. Political science professor and member of Kenya's Parliament Peter Anyang' Nyang'o worked hard behind the scenes to achieve that unity. The unity agreement finally came in the form of the National Alliance Rainbow Coalition (NARC) with Moi's former Vice President Mwai Kibaki as the winning presidential candidate. Kibaki easily beat Moi's handpicked KANU candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Kenya's first president, Jomo Kenyatta. Looking back, one could ask, who gets the credit for the regime reforms and ultimately for the regime change: domestic activists? International actors? Both?

Did the US and other international pressures on the Moi regime cause the president to reverse himself and accept, in a speech to his party in early December 1991, multiparty elections? Most analyses conclude, given the time of the decision shortly after donors froze new funds that the answer is yes. This study, however, after an examination of the domestic buildup of pressure for change starting in the mid-1980s, including the two politically ground shifting attempts at national opposition rallies, argues that it was primarily domestic pressure that tipped the scales. The funding freeze alone would not likely have pushed him to make the decision; it probably influenced the timing of his decision.

The funding freeze came at a meeting of World Bank and bilateral donors in Paris in late November 1991. A World Bank official at the Paris meeting recalled that human rights and other political abuses were not discussed at the meeting, which focused on economic issues.[53] Donors were

52 Allan W. Eastham interview. At the time of Hempstone's death in 2006, then-Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger described him as "a man of real courage" and said that "to have pulled him out or to have disciplined him would almost certainly have created real problems politically at home" (Bernstein, *Washington Post*, November 20, 2006).

53 Stephen O'Brian, in an e-mail to the author, 2002. At the time of the freeze, O'Brian was head of the World Bank delegation in Kenya.

inconsistent before and after this freeze, sometimes increasing funding at times of serious human rights abuses; sometimes reducing it; sometimes praising Moi and at other times criticizing him. An examination of donor funding compared with the record of human rights abuses from 1987 to 2002 shows an inconsistent relationship. It also shows that Moi was in no apparent hurry to restore aid, either in 1991 or in 1997 when the IMF froze new funds at a time when the regime was killing some unarmed protestors in public demonstrations for constitutional reform. If the president had felt so crucially vulnerable to funding shifts, he might have moved quicker to meet the demands behind the two freezes – but he did not (Press 2006, 124-5, 182). Donors took too much credit with regard to the adoption in Kenya of multiparty elections and gave too little heed to the mounting domestic pressure. A former British diplomat familiar with Kenya noted: "The role of external donors has been grotesquely exaggerated. Donors claim great credit from their aid: Everyone is so vain."[54] A study of donors concluded, "In the case of Kenya, the reform movement was mainly domestically driven, with donors lending their support after a critical mass had already been achieved and actually discouraging more fundamental political reform" (Brown 2000).

Domestic pressure had been growing since the 1980s as a range of activists using different tactics and strategies challenged the power of the regime and called for a multiparty system. Moi could afford to ignore the activism by individual or even organizational activists who were mostly "elitist" middle and upper-class, well-to-do people; he could not afford to ignore protests where the elitists began mobilizing mass demonstrations – nor could the international community."[55] The rallies in 1990 and '91 were the culmination at that time of this pressure with major potential consequences which the Moi administration recognized. One of the most prominent activists at the time, attorney Paul Muite, offered this analysis of why the Moi regime adopted multiparty elections.

> Human Rights Watch, donors, agitation by lawyers, critical statements by the churches; they were all there. But the last straw that made the government give in was the defiance, first in July 1990 and November of 1991 … [T]hat sent the message to the government that her own people are

54 A former British diplomat, who requested not to be named, in an interview with the author, November 18, 2002, in London.

55 Munene interview. Historian Munene argued that it was the "convergence" of domestic mass demonstrations and international actions that pushed Moi to make the reform.

> prepared to rise up and defy the government. It was when, in July of 1990, despite the detention of people like Matiba, people went to Kamkunji [site of the rally]; that frightened the government. The government saw there was going to be chaos, general chaos across the entire [country]. So here were people jumping out into the streets who were prepared to be killed. That is what frightened the government. And we repeated the same in 1991. So it is that defiance. That is what does the trick in the end.[56]

The view from within the administration is a harder one to assess. Moi had a tendency to criticize outside pressure from groups such as Amnesty International then quietly respond to at least some demands for human rights improvements. He verbally and publicly clashed with US Ambassador Hempstone on numerous occasions. One of President Moi's close aides during the buildup of pressure for change said, "I find it very difficult to see which one [was more significant: domestic or international pressure]." He cited the activism of "marginalized" politicians including Oginga Odinga, son Raila Odinga, Kenneth Matiba and the vocal criticism from Bishops representing at least their own dioceses – and the mass demonstrations. This provided a handle for the international community to grasp and apply pressure for reform. "You see if there is no internal pressure, it is very difficult for the West now to put too much pressure."[57]

## Implications of a Culture of Resistance

This study offers a model for the growth of a culture of resistance involving three primary and sometimes overlapping elements: individual activism, organizational activism, and mass popular support. Kenya had all three phases. The nonviolent social movement in Kenya, whose visible roots can be traced back at least into the 1980s (and earlier in historical studies) had grown from mostly individual activism (1987-91) to small group (1991-92) then organizational activism from 1992 onward. After the adoption of multiparty elections and formation of opposition parties, the focus of the resistance shifted to these parties. Some former individual activists became leaders in opposition parties, running for president or winning

56 Muite interview.

57 Bethuel Kiplagat, in an interview with the author, October 7, 2002, in Nairobi, Kenya. Kiplagat served as Moi's permanent secretary in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation from 1983 to 1991.

parliamentary seats. Others moved into leadership in advocacy NGOs or returned to their professional careers.

The organizational phase of activism drew mass support, most visibly in rallies across the country. In a repressive setting it is not surprising that there may be no formal organization or central organization. While most studies of social movements try to identify organizations that scholars can focus on to measure and analyze their growth, their use of exogenous opportunities, and their eventual decline, the broader model of a social movement presented in this book enables the scholar to detect a more flexible range of strands of a movement. At times there was a predominant strand; at other times not. Though the strands may have appeared isolated when viewed separately, they were usually connections between them as activists shared information and sometimes jointly planned acts of resistance. Muhula (2005, 326) notes in his study of social movements in Kenya: "Social movements are not permanent entities with structured leadership like the rest of civil society. They might even appear transitory in nature."[58]

In his famous poem "The Second Coming," W.B. Yeats (1920) penned the oft-quoted line: "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;" In Kenya, even after it became safer to organize openly, there was no "centre" or central organization that emerged as politically ambitious politicians split the nonviolent resistance along ethnic lines. There were peaks and valleys in the resistance. The drive for a wider campaign for constitutional reform, for example, only peaked in election years and even then without the support of leading opposition presidential candidates.[59] Without a center, a resistance risks failing to achieve its goal, in this case regime change. It took until 2002 to replace the regime and then only because of the temporary unity among rival candidates. But support for the rival candidates had grown as popular resistance against the regime grew into a culture of resistance.

Though this study of Kenya focuses on the period 1987-2002, it is essential to add that the election of Mwai Kibaki in 2002 brought mixed changes. There was an important easing of restrictions on freedom of speech and assembly. Corruption remained a major problem. Some human rights abuses persisted. Several human rights/democracy activists from the resistance

58 Muhula identifies three social movements in Kenya 1988-2002: the formation of FORD, which quickly split into ethnic groups; the formation of the NCEC, which was undermined by Moi's counter-tactics; and the brief coalition of parties that agreed to support Kibaki but quickly dissolved after the election.

59 This was not resistance movement in abeyance; it was the ebb and flow of interest and critical events.

years accepted appointments to the cabinet, where their actions brought strong criticism from some former activists. Two human rights investigators were murdered in 2009, spreading fear among the human rights community. In the disputed presidential election in 2007, opposition candidate Raila Odinga, who was well ahead at one point, lost to Kibaki, who was hurriedly sworn in for a second term. After the results were announced, the country was torn apart by violence. A group of local and international mediators forged a shared governance plan in which Kibaki and Odinga both ruled until the 2013 election which Odinga lost to Uhuru Kenyatta. The International Criminal Court indicted several Kenyans for crimes against humanity for their alleged involvement in fomenting the postelection violence, among them Uhuru Kenyatta and William Ruto, who nevertheless were elected president and deputy president in 2013. Meanwhile, in 2010 a new constitution had been adopted that finally reduced the concentrated powers of the president and brought new hopes to Kenyans of a more stable, democratic future.

**Figure 12 Slum and downtown skyline, Nairobi, Kenya, 2006**

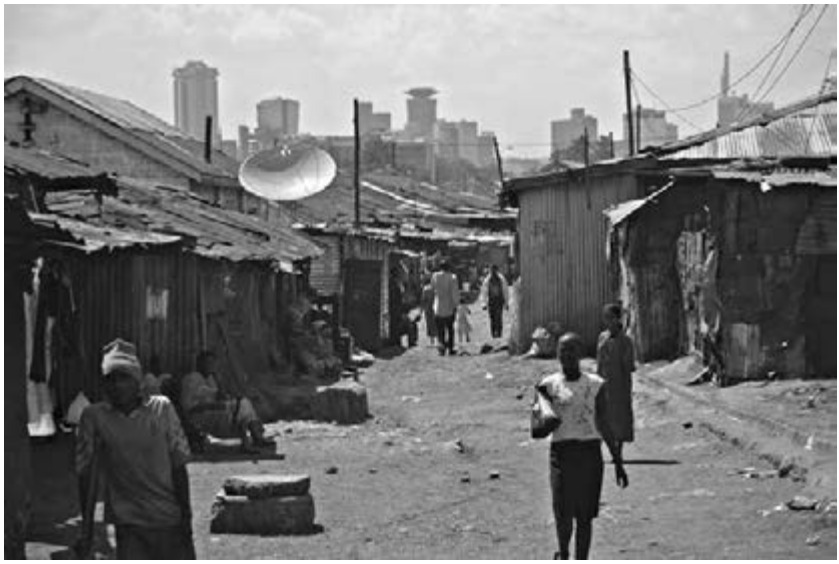

Photo by Betty Press

**Figure 13 Police attack mothers and supporters protesting for release of political prisoners, Nairobi, Kenya, 1992**

Photo by Betty Press

# Conclusion

## Implications for the Study of Social Movements and Nonviolent Resistance

We started this exploration of people standing up for human rights and democratic freedoms with a statement made by Robert F. Kennedy in 1966 in Cape Town, South Africa, during apartheid, and it is worth repeating:

> Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.[1]

Just two years before Kennedy spoke in South Africa, Nelson Mandela had been imprisoned in a small cell on nearby Robben Island off the coast of Cape Town. He was freed after almost twenty-seven years then led four years of tough negotiations with the South African white government. He was elected president in 1994 when blacks could vote for the first time. His sense of reconciliation and leadership helped avert a civil war. By the time of Mandela's death in 2013, South Africans were no longer separated by color and the laws of apartheid. But the realities of economic disparities between the races, as well as high levels of unemployment and crime meant millions were still living in hardship. Mass political activism had helped bend the course of history in South Africa toward good, but for many, the goal of justice remained distant.

In the three sub-Saharan Africa countries studied in this book – Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Kenya – the goal of justice remains distant for many today in terms of poverty, education, and health. Human rights abuses continue. But the progress in all three countries has been impressive in those same categories. The accomplishment of ordinary people in all three countries in helping overcome the tyranny and abuses of past regimes is now a matter of record. The resistance was mostly nonviolent despite the violence against them. Gandhi, a main proponent of nonviolence observed

1 Robert F. Kennedy, "A Tiny Ripple of Hope" (Day of Affirmation address at Cape Town University, Cape Town, South Africa, June 6, 1966), *American Rhetoric*. http://www.americanrhetoric.com/ speeches/rfkcapetown.com/.

that tyrants eventually fall. "When I despair, I remember that all through history the ways of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants, and murderers, and for a time they can seem invincible, but in the end they always fall. Think of it – always" (Gandhi 2010).

But that statement does not explain *how* tyrants fall. This study of three sub-Saharan African countries has argued that nonviolent resistance can take different forms than what one normally pictures when thinking of social movements. In Sierra Leone at one point a small independent newspaper, *The Tablet*, became the focus of opposition; in Kenya, opposition political parties took the lead in the resistance after an earlier period of mostly individual activism. In Liberia, where repression was more intense than in those two countries, resistance took a variety of forms. There were few if any obvious "opportunities" for resistance: the repression was intense much of the time. At times elements of resistance operated in abeyance, at low levels, until they managed to emerge more openly.

This book has shown how ordinary people can rise up courageously against tyrants and challenge them. Most of the events highlighted in this book – the repression and the nonviolent responses – were known to residents of the countries, though the full panoply of activism over a decade or two had not been collected or examined in the way this book does. The contributions of many of the individuals had not been woven together into visible patterns. An advance reader of the Sierra Leone chapters, political author Lans Gberie, wrote: "The cacophony of voices, which could have cluttered the text, feels fresh and original, because they are drawn from many sources, some expected, some not. They add up to a very convincing account of the political history and social activism of the country for the past few decades" (Gberie 2013). Liberian scholar T. Debey Sayndee, director of the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation at the University of Liberia observed that the section on Liberia "highlights deep-rooted issues that any serious person seeking to engage the Liberian society can take clues from. It brings out hidden reasons for the way the society operates" (Sayndee 2013). Kenyan, historian Macharia Munene wrote that the nonviolent resistance there started "with uncoordinated individuals each trying to right perceived wrongs in different places within a given polity … then develops into a *Culture of Resistance* to the *Culture of Repression* [emphasis in original] which in turn attracts additional attention and support both locally and internationally … The argument, using Kenya, is very persuasive" (Munene 2013).

## Activism and Structural Conditions

The focus has been on people, not on conditions; on domestic resistance, not international pressures and interventions. This focus is intentional. The study does not make the claim that activism led to the regime changes that came in all three countries. Rather, the argument is that without the domestic resistance it is unlikely that changes would have come when they did. Domestic opposition to a regime opens the door to the kind of international pressures and, in the case of Sierra Leone and Liberia, to international military intervention which pushed the tyrants aside. The example of Sierra Leoneans welcoming the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), a military junta, in 1992 is illustrative. With people literally dancing in the street at their arrival, the international community had no reason to intervene. But the massive noncooperation that greeted the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) coup in 1997 sent a different signal to West African troops (and eventually the British) that the regime had to go. It was defeated by these forces. In all three countries, international diplomatic pressures played a role. In Kenya, for example the US and Germany, especially, were quite clear about their opposition to the Moi regime. Donors cut off aid more than once in Kenya, though this study has argued it was primarily the growing domestic unrest and resistance that pushed Moi to accept multiparty elections.

External conditions (usually referred to in the social movement literature in terms of "structure" and "opportunity') were important. For one thing, repression was the condition which sparked the nonviolent resistance. Poverty may have pushed some to join the resistance though it likely held many others back who were focused on making a living, on keeping whatever job they might have risked by openly confronting the regime. The book argues, however, against a deterministic interpretation of events in all three countries, against the notion that conditions primarily determined what happened politically. This has been a detailed account of how individuals, small groups, informal and formal organizations, and mass demonstrations, became part of what eventually amounted to a *culture of resistance* in all three countries. In the process they defied the main structural limitations, the repression, and the danger of opposing regimes that at times were ruthless and vindictive. Some in the resistance stayed in the shadows of anonymity, though perhaps participating in a demonstration, spontaneous or planned; others helped organize such demonstrations; a smaller number stepped directly into the regime spotlight and openly challenged the repression in various ways.

## Uncertainties

This study does not argue that the presence of a social movement, in abeyance or in full operation, will lead to a particular outcome or result. The author makes no predictions based on the findings of this study other than, as mentioned above, to argue that without the resistance that took place, change of regimes would likely not have come when they did. In other cases regime change may not occur. In these three cases, change did come. People stood up for freedom, often at great risk. Activists sometimes were saved or helped by the spontaneous assistance of minor actors, making prediction of their activism uncertain. Taxi drivers, jail keepers, and others warned activists of pending arrests, helping them survive harsh confinement or to seek legal defense (as in Kenya).

Chenoweth and Stephan (2011) and Ackerman and Karatnycky (2005) found that nonviolent resistance is much more successful in obtaining regime change than violent campaigns and that a country is much more likely to remain a democracy if the campaign for change was nonviolent (see the theory chapter for details). But the nature and behavior of the new governments achieved with the help of nonviolent resistance is never a certainty. Another uncertainty is what role activists will play once a regime change occurs.

Some former activists later accepted government posts once there was a transition. In Liberia, several courageous human rights attorneys took cabinet posts under Africa's first elected female president. In Sierra Leone when I interviewed her, Zainab Bangura, who helped lead a women's movement for peace and democracy in the mid-1990s, was minister of foreign affairs. Hindolo Trye was minister of tourism; and another former key *Tablet* newspaper contributor, I.B. Kargbo was minister of information and communication, both in an APC government, the same party they had opposed in their activist days.

In all three countries, some former activists have been criticized for their performances in the new governments; in a few cases they have been blamed for corruption and even for obstructing moves toward greater human rights and other reforms. Activists seen as heroes at one point in their country's struggles for human rights are not always seen that way later. In Kenya, for example, attorney Martha Karua, one of the most fearless advocates for human rights and democracy, later became a senior government official when her ethnic group won the presidency. She was criticized for vouching for the authenticity of the 2007 presidential election, widely condemned as flawed. She ran unsuccessfully for president in 2013. Kenyan attorney Kiraitu Murungi, once a human rights advocate, was seen by some of his former fellow activists as an obstructionist after he joined the Kibaki government.

## Arguments Supported

Six arguments were introduced in the chapter on theoretical perspectives. The evidence presented to support them contributes to the literature on social movements, democratization, and our understanding of how nonviolent movements operate in repressive settings.

1 **Individual activism, a much understudied part of social movements, can play a significant part in nonviolent resistance.**

The literature is practically silent on the contributions of activists acting as individuals and not members of an organization. But in all three countries, to varying degrees, individual activists played an important role in building a nonviolent resistance at a time when organized resistance was not prevalent. The term "individual activism" is defined herein as activism unsupported by an organization. In some cases, the activists' organizations opposed their resistance; in other cases the "organization" they belonged to was so weak it offered little or no support. In Sierra Leone, during a period of high repression under the military junta the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), some independent journalists went underground with their skeletal staff and continued publishing clandestinely. In Kenya, for example, before most organizations joined in the open resistance to Moi's regime, individual writers, lawyers, mothers, and others challenged the regime openly, drawing both domestic and international attention to the abuses of the regime. Another source of resistance in all three countries was the individuals drawn into the resistance not as members of an organization but as people committed to the principles of their profession, including independent journalists, attorneys, and some academics. In such cases they were generally operating as individuals, not representatives of their profession.

2 **During periods of high repression, nonviolent social movements may lack a formal structure but continue in abeyance, informally, at a lower level of resistance, waiting for safer times to emerge more openly and formally.**

This happened in all three countries at times. In Sierra Leone, a university student protest in 1977 against the president that spread to a nationwide student strike was thwarted from becoming a full social movement by regime repression and co-optation, and by lack of planning and alliance

building on the part of the students. Resistance continued in abeyance, in the form of an independent newspaper, *The Tablet*, organized by earlier activists and in the 1980s with more university student demonstrations. The resistance in abeyance set a model for the open social movements that did emerge in the mid-1990s. By the time the AFRC seized power in the late 1990s, a culture of resistance had been developed but resistance efforts were forced to operate in abeyance because it was too dangerous to mount an organized, open resistance. There was mass, informal noncooperation that closed schools, many businesses, and slowed government bureaucracy to a crawl. A clandestine radio station encouraged the noncooperation that continued until the junta was ousted by international military intervention. In Liberia, the extreme violence of the Samuel Doe regime blocked formation of a full social movement. But some journalists, lawyers, clergy, and others kept a low level of resistance alive in the 1980s that blossomed in the 1990s into two social movements, one against the regime, and one led by women who campaigned for an end to the civil war. In Kenya, in the late 1980s when the regime was torturing political dissidents, the individual attorneys and other activists informally mounted a social movement in abeyance, one that grew bolder and bigger in the 1990s in the push for multiparty elections.

### 3 Nonviolent resistance can take place even under severe repression, and without favorable conditions or "political opportunities," and with only limited material resources.

As shown, most of the openings or opportunities often cited in the literature – external conditions that could encourage a movement's advance – were not present. Instead activists and supporters often faced a wall of repression: armed police attacks; detentions; torture; execution. This study concurs with more recent studies which argue that repression can stimulate resistance; it provides fresh evidence of this. With regard to material resources, the resistance studied took place in countries still developing and under circumstances of poverty for the majority. Many of the activist leaders were elites, educated and with a profession. Many who joined in resistance demonstrations were poor, though some in the middle class also took part. In a pre-cell phone era, some activists had access to offices and fax machines, but often material support for the resistance was meager. As shown through interviews, however, many activists were motivated by ideas, including a stubborn commitment to justice and human rights, while others were motived by hopes of personal gain.

**4 Nonviolent social movements in repressive settings involve a broader and more complex array of participants than is generally recognized.**

In addition to the large organizations and mass demonstrations that usually feature in most social movement studies, the three case studies showed the important role individual activists and small, informal groups can play in building a nonviolent resistance movement. This includes persons drawn into the resistance by way of their commitment to their profession (e.g., attorneys; independent journalists). In Sierra Leone, it was a small group of students who planned the demonstration against Stevens. In Liberia and Kenya, small, informal groups of attorneys helped each other in the defense of accused political activists. A group of Kenyan mothers challenged the illegal detention of activists.

**5 From modest starting points, nonviolent activism can grow into a "culture of resistance" unless blocked by extreme repression.**

Building on an historic record of nonviolent resistance, activism in all three countries led to the establishment of a culture of resistance. The study defined the development of a culture of resistance as a process in which public challenges to the abuse of power by a regime become a norm for activists and for a visible segment of the general public. The student demonstrations in Sierra Leone in 1977 and the 1980s broke the silence that had engulfed much of society during the repression of the Stevens years. The women-led push against a military junta in the mid-1990s involved a broader-based, public resistance that grew further into the mass noncooperation against a second junta in the last half of the 1990s. In Liberia, resistance in the 1970s, followed by some courageous examples in the 1980s under severe repression, grew into a culture of resistance in the 1990s. An example was the dramatic marches by women for peace. Kenya's wall of fear began to crack in the late 1980s when individual, and some organized, resistance took place against the regime. It cracked further in the early 1990s with two non-licensed major rallies by political opposition figures. It openly flourished after that and included mass demonstrations, an active media and open criticism of the regime.

**6 There is a need for a universal model of social movements, one that can work in the democratic West as well as in repressive settings.**

This study suggests a new model for social movements to help bridge this gap, recognizing social movements as a *process of challenges to targeted authorities that may involve individual as well as organizational activism, and at times mass public support, aimed at either regime reform or regime change*. Though emerging primarily from the democratic West, social movement theory has been applied increasing to repressive settings elsewhere, especially in Latin America and more gradually in Africa. For reasons noted above, social movements in dangerous conditions are obliged to adopt more flexible approaches than those in less harsh settings. There is another important difference: social movements in democratic settings usually seek regime reform; in repressive setting they may seek regime change. This makes activists targets of the regime. Often activists cannot be open and formally organized or they risk being blocked or crushed by the regime. Yet another difference: they do not always have "opportunities" favorable to them, or significant material resources. A broader, more flexible concept of a social movement is needed to apply to both repressive and non-repressive settings. The model presented in this book involves individual, organizational, and mass activism, allowing for goals of regime reform or regime change. The model does not limit social movements to the usual characteristics often cited in the literature of being "sustained, organized, and public." The model recognizes that repression sometimes makes these goals impractical and dangerous.

Longtime Kenya resident Harold Miller, an advocate for peace, cautions about trying to see African societies through the lens of Western theories.[2]

> I find the Western need for a clear theoretical framework that makes sense within the world of Western academia not fully satisfying … Perhaps the closest approximation to a continually (sub-Saharan) recognized ideological concept is *Ubuntu*,[3] which … more recently associated with South Africa in the context of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established by Mandela, chaired by [Archbishop Desmond] Tutu.

2 Harold Miller, in an e-mail to the author, November 25, 2013.

3 There are many interpretations of the term, including the concept of "living harmoniously in community," in *I Am Because We Are: African Wisdom in Image and Proverb*, by photographer Betty Press with proverbs compiled by Annetta Miller (2011, 1).

Miller does see more "commonalities" than differences among people. He is discouraged that some Kenyans (and the same concern was recognized in Sierra Leone and Liberia) "deploy the term or concept 'human rights' largely [for] opportunist ends." This study does not disagree with his concern. Some activists clearly sought political benefit. But many others did not. They stood up for greater freedom, for human rights, including the right to be treated with dignity and to be able to live safely and make one's living in a dignified way. Those who stepped forward as part of the resistance did so at risk, sometimes grave, personal risk. The results anticipated or not, are a heightened awareness of human rights and other democratic freedoms and greater sensitivity of attempts by governments to abuse them. A lingering question is whether a society anywhere that once experiences that spirit and awareness will mobilize to protect those rights if they are threatened anew. This author remains optimistic that they will. Once a culture of resistance has been established in a society, it is not likely to disappear again, at least not without a struggle.

*In our journey we have seen fresh evidence of the power of the human spirit.*

**Figure 14 Family in their street sales stall, Nairobi, Kenya, 1991**

Photo by Betty Press

**Figure 15 Hope for the future: sign board with image of Africa's first elected female President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Monrovia, Liberia, 2006**


Photo by Betty Press

# Appendix

## Methodology

After completing initial interviews in Kenya, I looked for two other countries with even more repressive regimes to see if significant and contemporary nonviolent resistance had occurred there as well. Both Liberia and Sierra Leone had experienced more repressive regimes and civil wars. Usually the fighting was away from the capitals, where most of the resistance took place. Instead of looking for great variance, the study uses "sequential case selection," as methodologist Charles Ragin (2004) of the University of Arizona describes. "The key is that in much qualitative work, case selection is often sequential, based on what has been learned so far. The goal is to solve puzzles through careful [sequential] case selection," looking for similar cases to see if what happened in one country may have happened in others. The historic analysis included establishing timelines for key events. In Sierra Leone, most interviewees pointed to the precedent-setting student demonstrations against the government in 1977. In Liberia most analysts suggested the logical starting point for the study was the demonstrations in 1979 against government plans to make a major hike in the price of rice, a staple food there. In Kenya, overt, nonviolent resistance emerged prominently in 1987 with legal challenges to political detention. The interviews with activists and other knowledgeable observers were supplemented by archival research specific to the three countries and by an extensive literature review of social movements and nonviolent resistance.

### Structural Issues

The study is an intentional look at the role activists played in the nonviolent resistance that occurred in all three countries and the repression of the regimes aimed at stopping them. This is a clear "agency" approach which some scholars might argue provides only a limited view of the forces at work during the repressive periods studied. The study does not argue that structural factors within the three countries or that international actions were not important; they were, and often they are noted. The reforms in the 1990s, for example, were part of a sweeping wave of democratic reforms that occurred in many parts of Africa in the post-Cold War period when the West was no longer in competition with the Communist bloc for allies. Human rights became a popular and internationally supported theme

in Africa from developed nations on both sides of the Atlantic. But this study argues, on the basis of deep research, that it was domestic resistance that in most cases started the move toward reform. International help and pressures followed and may well have tipped the scales in some cases. But without the activism on the ground, changes would not likely have come as soon as they did.

Quantitative studies based on available data sets or constructed ones based on economic and political features of societies in developing nations such as these can yield informative correlations. But this qualitative study yields insights not available through such studies. The details and motivations, fears and tactics and emotions of former activists, their relationships with each other, the hardships they faced and suffered, become clear through this kind of qualitative study and involve interviews.

**Interviews**

The book is based in large part on interviews with some 170 individuals (mostly activists but also people knowledgeable about the activism in the three countries) and with political analysts familiar with those countries. Key activists were located using a "snowball" method: asking early and well-known activists to name others. Building a list of prospective interviewees was not the problem. Finding people was the challenge. Despite the relatively confined geographical area where most activists still lived – the capital cities – activists from as long as twenty to thirty years ago were not always easy to trace. Eventually I was able to track down almost all persons I sought to interview.

Interviewees in all three countries recalled events and their activism with amazing detail, which I cross-checked by way of multiple interviews covering similar time periods and events and by matching the interviews with the historical record. On only a few occasions did someone get a date wrong. Fitting the various narratives together in a way that had not been done before in any of the three countries yielded a rich volume of evidence for theoretical interpretation.

I used a semi-structured interview method, preparing questions but remaining ready to divert temporarily from my questions when an unexpected comment indicated a new and fruitful path. At such points, just listening instead of rushing on with preconceived questions often unearthed very relevant information that would otherwise have been missed. At some reasonable point, I would return to my planned questions. All interviews were conducted by the author. All but a few interviews were conducted in person in one of the three countries; a few were conducted

in London or Washington, and a few by telephone. I have also used some comments sent to me by e-mail. Interviews typically lasted from one to two hours, sometimes longer. It was not unusual for a scheduled interview to be extended at the request of the interviewee. One Kenyan who had been tortured for his activism interrupted his legal work of the day to grant me "ten minutes," but he ended up allowing me more than an hour. In many cases it seemed the interview was the first opportunity the former activists had been given to detail their nonviolent resistance.

Whenever possible, I requested that the interview be conducted with no one else in the room. At times I politely asked others to leave. It is the author's conviction, based on years of journalistic reporting, that interviewees are more likely to speak candidly when they are not speaking in front of an "audience" of even one other person. One of the keys to successful interviews was being patient, not rushed, out of respect and because personal narratives generally are not quick, yet can yield rich material. Sometimes I learned nothing new in terms of events since I soon become familiar with the key events of the study period. But I learned something about the individual, their motivation, and their own views of what happened. Also, in a general way, especially in African cultures I am familiar with, it is considered impolite to push aside comments others are making to get to your preconceived questions. Often some of the best material emerged slowly toward the end of a long interview after some level of trust had been established.

In all but a very few cases, the individuals granted permission to be quoted by name; two of the exceptions were government officials, one in Britain and one in the US. In almost all cases, the interviews were taped with their written consent for later publication. The activists had been public, often at risk, and they had no need to hide their identity. Knowing their names may be used strengthens the chances of credibility since their words might be seen by fellow activists and others from the study period. And in many cases it also gives them credit for their courage.

**Accuracy of Interviews and other Findings**

Because this book covers several decades of political history in each country, to verify my findings, I sent the chapters to experts to review in advance, including a historian in each country, plus political analysts and other scholars. It is encouraging that these experts all welcomed the analyses as unique and accurate except for minor suggested corrections which I have made. Some added additional nuances of interpretation which I have included. By cross-checking between multiple interviewees and archival

material, I was able to arrive at narratives that made sense. Occasionally there was a discrepancy between the memories of activists regarding an event. The differences, when they appeared, seldom involved historical facts, but generally interpretations of them. Where the differences were significant, I have provided the conflicting versions.

The research used a form of "triangulation" to assess the credibility of information, drawing from (1) a wide range of interviews; (2) an extensive literature review (human rights reports and other documents, including ten years of the Nairobi-based *Weekly Review*, considered to be one of the most reliable and consistent sources of political news during much of the study period); and (3) my own assessment as the information gathering continued. In Kenya, the first country examined, I had the advantage of working as a foreign correspondent for *The Christian Science Monitor* based in Nairobi for eight years covering East and West African countries.

**Limits of the Interviews**

The "snowball" method of locating interviewees has its limitations. For example, men generally named other men as good contacts. I made intentional efforts to find women activists. Only the best-known male or female activists tend to be the ones named by others. But I also intentionally followed up on some names suggested by only a few persons, and I tried to find interviewees from a range of backgrounds.

Another limitation in the methodology is that most of the interviews were with urban-based activists. While it is true that most of the resistance I was able to document occurred in the three capital cities, undoubtedly there are many other instances yet to be unearthed and analyzed in smaller cities and rural areas. It is possible that some of the resistance in those other areas may have been even more dangerous than in the urban areas due to the presence of either rebels, army personnel, or both. There was a degree of protection for known (mostly urban) activists in the form of appeals from international organizations and perhaps embassies in the case of their arrest or detention. Lesser-known activists did not have this benefit, though numerous well-known activists suffered at the hands of the regimes.

Most of the interviews were conducted in the three countries. This meant that most of those who were active in the resistance in the important diaspora were not contacted. It should also be noted that only a portion of the activities of activists are recorded in this book. Future researchers can find plenty of unused material for additional analyses. Kenyan historian Macharia Munene (2013), who reviewed the Kenya chapters and approved

their accuracy (with slight changes made that he suggested) noted this: "There is a danger of being absorbed so much in some 'activists' that other players are ignored while glorifying the select." That is true. Many people interviewed for this project do not appear in these pages or the book would be too long. And I am convinced there also are many other activists and others whom I never came across and who played a role in nonviolent efforts to bring about change in the countries studied. Even if I don't know their contributions, they do.

Finally, the book is not intended as a complete period history of the three countries studied. For example, the book does not include a detailed analysis of the civil wars that occurred during the study periods in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Nor does it include details of the ethnic conflicts that occurred in Kenya during the study period.

**Availability of Interview Transcriptions**

The author made transcripts of almost all the interviews, a slow process but one that helps bring out details that might otherwise be overlooked in simply listening to the taped recordings and making notes. Weaving excerpts from the transcripts into a narrative was like working on giant puzzles. For the benefit of future scholars, interviews with Kenyans who gave permission for publication of their remarks have been posted on the Library of Congress as part of their Africa collection at: http://www.loc.gov/rr/amed/afs/kenyanhumanrightsinterviews.html. The author plans to do the same thing at some point for the Sierra Leone and Liberia interviews if there is continued interest on the part of the Library of Congress. In the meantime, I have listed in this Appendix the names of my interviewees except for the few who requested anonymity. Most of them were still alive at the time of this writing and can be located by other scholars who may arrive at different interpretations of events based on accounts of these activists and others. In other words, the conclusions in this study are falsifiable; they can be challenged.

## Interviews

Those interviewed by the author for this book included (mostly) activists who were operating during the study periods, and others familiar with their resistance and/or the countries. NGO refers to nongovernment organization. For activists, Profession indicates their profession at the time of their activism; for others it reflects their profession at the time of the interview.

## Sierra Leone

| Name | Profession |
|---|---|
| Anonymous | Lebanese businessman |
| Bah, Ibrahim | journalist |
| Bah, Sheikh Mohammed | Moslem imam |
| Bangura, Alimamy Pallo | academic |
| Bangura, Zainab | insurance |
| Bassie, Gibril | NGO |
| Bayraytay, Abdulai | university student leader |
| Bob-Kandeh, Marie | market sales |
| Conteh, Max | labor union |
| Davies, Beresford | academic |
| Davies, Shellac | NGO |
| Ellis, Stephen | academic |
| Foday-Musa, Gibril | university student leader |
| Fofanah, Alusine | member of Parliament |
| Foray, John | journalist |
| Foray, Pios | journalist |
| Foullah, Hanna | bank employee |
| Fyle, C. Magbaily | historian |
| Gbujama, Shirley | educator |
| Gordon, Olu | journalist |
| Grant, Emmanuel | member of Parliament |
| Hull, Tom | former US ambassador to Sierra Leone |
| Humper, Rt. Rev. Joseph | clergy |
| James, Ambrose | NGO |
| Johnbull, Patrick | clergy |
| Jusu-Sheriff, Yasmin | human rights attorney |
| Kabba, Alie | university student leader |
| Kamara, Ayesha | NGO |
| Kamara, Paul | journalist |
| Kamara, Sallieu | journalist |
| Kandeh, Jimmy | university student activist |
| Kargbo, Ibrahim | university student activist |
| Karim-Sei, Ibrahim | journalist |
| Kassim, Tejan | labor union organizer |
| King, Jamesina | human rights attorney |
| Kposowa, Abdul Dimoh | high school activist; journalist |
| Kposowa, Frank | journalist |
| Leigh, Jonathan | journalist |
| Lewis, Kelvin | journalist |
| Mambu, Charles | NGO |
| Minah, Festus | teachers union organizer |
| Momoh, Hindowa | university student activist |
| Munchi, Kiki S. (Harris) | former US Embassy official |

| Name | Profession |
|---|---|
| Neville, Philip | journalist |
| Pratt, Nana | NGO |
| Samu, Marian | university student activist |
| Sesay, Mustapha, | journalist |
| Sheriff, Brima | NGO |
| Smythe, Amy | NGO |
| Spencer, Julius | journalist; Kabbah cabinet |
| Tejan-Cole, Abdul | attorney |
| Thomas, Abator | NGO |
| Thorlu-Gbla, Abdul | university student activist |
| Timbo, Alpha | union organizer |
| Totangi, Kalilu | university student activist |
| Touray, A. Marie | market women leader |
| Trye, Hindolo | university student activist; journalist |
| Wai, Abdulai | university student activist |

## Liberia

| Name | Profession | Activism period* |
|---|---|---|
| | | Doe/Taylor |
| Anonymous | Liberian attorney | |
| Anonymous | Western diplomat | |
| Best, Kenneth | newspaper publisher | Doe |
| Bility, Hassan | journalist | Taylor |
| Bowier, Emmanuel | Doe cabinet | |
| Brown, Dempster | attorney | Taylor |
| Brownell, Mary N. | educator | Taylor |
| Butty, James | journalist | Doe |
| Cee, Esther Seton | attorney | Taylor |
| Cooper, Etweda | activist | Taylor |
| Danweli, Cecelie | NGO | Taylor |
| Delaney, Thomas | clergy | |
| Draper, Richmond | commercial | |
| Dunn, Elwood | political scientist | |
| Gongloe, Tiawan | attorney | Taylor |
| Guannu, Joseph Saye | historian | |
| Howard-Diawara, Lindora | sociologist; NGO | Taylor |
| Jallah, Rev. Tolbert Thomas | clergy | |
| Johnson-Morris, Frances | attorney | Taylor |
| Karku, Sampson | student leader | Taylor |
| Karnley, Father Andrew Jagaye | clergy | Taylor |
| Konneh, Sheikh Kafumba F. | Moslem leader | Taylor |

| Name | Profession | Activism period* |
|---|---|---|
| Korto, Joseph | educator | |
| Kulah, Bishop (Ret.) Arthur F. | clergy | Doe |
| Rennie, Ledgerhood | radio journalist | Taylor |
| Matthews, Baccus | politician | * |
| Moore, Sando | photojournalist | Doe, Taylor |
| Mulbah, Elizabeth | nursing | Taylor |
| Pajibo, Ezekiel | student | Doe |
| Parker, Marie | economist | Taylor |
| Porte, Bertha (Mrs. Albert Porte) | retired | |
| Roberts, James | educator | |
| Sainworla, Frank | radio journalist | Taylor |
| Sawyer, Amos | politician/academic | *Doe, Taylor |
| Stewart, John | student; journalist | *Doe, Taylor |
| Tikpor, Monsignor Father Robert | clergy | Doe, Taylor |
| Tipoteh, Togba-Nah | politician/economist | * |
| Toe, J. Aloysisus | activist | Doe, Taylor |
| Toe, J. Augustine | attorney | Taylor |
| Tokpa, Alaric | student; academic | Doe, Taylor |
| Verdier, Jerome | attorney | |
| Waines, David | missionary | |
| Wesseh, Conmany B. | student; NGO | *Doe, Taylor |
| Williams, Gabriel I.H. | journalist | Doe |
| Woewiyu, Tom | Taylor cabinet | |
| Woods, Kofi | attorney | Doe, Taylor |

Student means university student. The * indicates those who were active in reform-seeking civil society organizations in the 1970s leading up to the 1980 coup by Doe. Individuals shown may have been active in additional periods than those indicated.

## Kenya

| Rank* | Name | profession | Phase 1 1987-'91 | Phase 2 1991-2002 | Interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Muite, Paul | attorney | I/O | O | √ |
| 2 | Imanyara, Gitobu | attorney | I | O | unavailable |
| 3 | Orengo, James | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 4 | Kuria, Gibson | attorney | I | I/O | √ |
| 5 | Mutunga, Willy | attorney | activist earlier | O | √ |
| 6 | Njoya, Timothy | clergy | I/O | I/O | √ |
| 7 | Murungi, Kiraitu | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 8 | Kariuki, Mirugi | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 9 | Maathai, Wangari | biologist | O | O | √ |

| Rank* | Name | profession | Phase 1 1987-'91 | Phase 2 1991-2002 | Interviewed |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10 | Nowrojee, Pheroze | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 11 | Kinyatti, Maina wa | academic | activist earlier | √ | √ |
| 12 | Nyong'o, Peter A. | academic | I/O | O | √ |
| 13 | Mbugua, Bedan | journalist | O | O | √ |
| 14 | Khaminwa, John | attorney | I | I | √ |
| 15 | Odinga, Raila | activist | I | O | √ |
| 16 | Wamwere, Koigi | activist | I | I/O | √ |
| 17 | Karua, Martha | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 18 | Muge, Alexander | clergy | O | | deceased |
| 19 | Kibwana, Kivutha | academic | I/O | O | √ |
| 20 | Oginga Odinga | politician | I | O | deceased |
| 21 | Kababere, Njeri | business | I | O | √ |
| 22 | Matiba, Kenneth | business | I | O | √ |
| 23 | Rubia, Charles | business | I | O | √ |
| 24 | Kariuki, G.B.M. | attorney | I | O | √ |
| 25 | Kiai, Maina | attorney | | O | √ |
| 26 | Buke, Wafula | youth activist | I | O | √ |
| 27 | Gitari, David | clergy | O | O | √ |
| 28 | Lamba, Davinder | architect | | O | √ |
| 29 | Nzeki, Ndingi | clergy | | O | √ |
| 30 | M'Inoti, Kathurima | attorney | I | O | √ |

## Additional interviews of Kenyan activists and others

| | |
|---|---|
| Anonymous | former British diplomat |
| Anonymous | US congressional staffer |
| Balala, Sheikh | Moslem activist |
| Duko, James | human rights researcher |
| Fisher, Hillary | human rights researcher |
| Harper, Malcolm | former NGO official |
| Hart, Christopher | former British government researcher |
| Hill, Martin | human rights researcher |
| Kamau, Muthoni | youth activist |
| Kathangu, Njeru | attorney |
| Kihoro, Wanjiru | diaspora NGO |
| Kihoro, Wanyiri | attorney |
| Kinuthia, Margaret | youth activist |
| Kinuthia, Milcah | mother; housewife |
| Kinuthia, Rumba | attorney |
| Kiplagat, Bethuel | former Moi senior official |
| Koome, Martha | attorney |
| Makali, David | journalist |
| Muthoni, Kamau | youth activist |

| | |
|---|---|
| Mugenda, Abel | academic |
| Munene, Macharia | historian |
| Mute, Lawrence | NGO |
| Muthoga, Lee | attorney |
| Ndegwa, Stephen | academic |
| Nyamwamu, Cyprien | youth activist |
| O'Brien, Stephen | World Bank |
| Ombati, Kepta | youth activist |
| Ong'wen, James | NGO |
| Oyugi, Edward | psychologist |
| Ruteere, Mutuma | human rights researcher |
| Shikuku, Martin | politician |
| Shinn, David | former US State Department official |
| Shitemi, Simeon | former Moi government official |
| Waithera, Njoroge | youth activist |
| Wainaina, Ndung'u | youth activist |
| Wanyande, Peter | academic |
| West, Tina | former US Embassy official |

Notes: **Rank* reflects the frequency with which the top thirty Kenyans were mentioned by other interviewees as key players in the nonviolent resistance during the study period, 1987-2002 (Press 2006, 193). Additional non-ranked interviews are included after that. *Profession* refers to their primary activity during the study period. Phase 1 was primarily individual activism; Phase 2 was primarily organizational: I = individual activist; O = organizational activist. Some were both. Many individual activists later became organizational activists as more organizations, including opposition parties, started up. "Unavailable:" After a brief initial interview, Imanyara was not available despite repeated attempts to make an appointment, but with archival materials I was able to document his contributions to the resistance. Deceased indicates activists who had died before the interviews were conducted.

## Comparative Levels of Repression

### State Repression in Kenya, Sierra Leone, Liberia: 1981-2003

(*Lower scores = more repression/less respect for human rights*)

| | Kenya | S.L. | Liberia |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1981 | 6 | 8 | 5 |
| 1982 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| 1983 | 6 | 6 | 6 |
| 1984 | 6 | 6 | 5 |
| 1985 | 5 | 7 | 2 |
| 1986 | 6 | 7 | 5 |
| 1987 | 5 | 6 | 5 |
| 1988 | 3 | 6 | 4 |
| 1989 | 4 | 6 | 3 |

| | Kenya | S.L. | Liberia |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1990 | 5 | 5 | 0* |
| 1991 | 3 | 3 | 0* |
| 1992 | 2 | 0 | 0* |
| 1993 | 5 | 1 | 0* |
| 1994 | 4 | 0 | 0* |
| 1995 | 4 | 0 | 0* |
| 1996 | 4 | 3 | 0 |
| 1997 | 4 | 0* | 2 |
| 1998 | 2 | 0* | 0 |
| 1999 | 1 | 0* | 1 |
| 2000 | 2 | 0* | 0 |
| 2001 | 3 | 4 | 1 |
| 2002 | 2 | 8 | 1 |
| 2003 | 3 | 5 | 1 |
| Total | 91 | 87 | 46 |

Source: Cingranelli-Richards (CIRI) Human Rights Data Set. www.humanrightsdata.org which began in 1981

Notes: The numbers measure Physical Integrity, which includes torture, extrajudicial killing, political imprisonment, and disappearance. "It ranges from 0 (no government respect for these four rights) to 8 (full government respect for these four rights." The data is based primarily on analyses of the United States Department of State annual Country Reports on Human Rights Practices and on Amnesty International's annual reports. "If there are discrepancies between the two sources, coders are instructed to treat the Amnesty International evaluation as authoritative … to remove a potential bias in favor of US allies" (CIRI 2008). * Indicates "Chaos" (civil war); no data available; coded in this article as 0, indicating no government respect for human rights given the atrocities that occurred. Most nonviolent resistance examined in this book took place in the capitals, outside the war zones, though at times in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, the conflict swept into the capitals. The coding shown is national, not limited to the capital.

## Chronologies

To help readers keep key political and resistance events clear, a chronology for each is provided below for the three case-study countries. In some cases, especially Sierra Leone where there were three distinct periods of resistance, inclusion of some details not in the previous chapters offers additional insights on the rich and multifaceted, nonviolent resistance that took place. The political chronology is drawn from the BBC timeline offered online for each country and is fully referenced in the bibliography. The resistance chronology is drawn from the author's interviews and other research for this book.

**Sierra Leone**

*Political Chronology*

1898 Hut tax "war" against colonial British administration.
1961 Sierra Leone becomes independent from Britain.
1968 Siaka Stevens returns to power as civilian president following a military coup.
1985 Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh becomes president following retirement of Siaka Stevens.
1991 Start of civil war by Revolutionary United Front (RUF).
1991 New constitution provides for multiparty elections.
1992 President Momoh ousted in military coup by National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC); Captain Valentine Strasser becomes head of state.
1996 February. NPRC steps down after major civil society pressure. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah elected president; signs peace accord with RUF rebels.
1997 May. President Kabbah ousted in a military coup by Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) headed by Major Johnny Paul Koroma. Kabbah flees to Guinea.
1998 Nigerian-led West African intervention force drives rebels out of Freetown; President Kabbah returns from Guinea.
1999 January. Elements of army and rebels seize parts of Freetown in an orgy of violence before being driven out again. United Nations troops arrive to police peace agreement.
2000 British troops arrive.
2002 January. War declared over.

*Resistance and Repression Chronology*

Except where their names start the sentence, names of interviewees cited as sources are shown in parentheses.

Early resistance (examples)

– 1898 Hut tax "war" against colonial British administration
– 1947 mine workers strike

The Siaka Stevens years

– Students were active in the opposition, including in a 1968 demonstration. "Right from independence, whenever we have a repressive government in this country, one of the voices, one of the pressure groups that always comes out, that always speaks [is] the students" (Beresford Davis).

- There was a "climate of fear" from 1980s onward (Julius Spencer).
- Resistance in the 1960s. Lawyers were the most vocal critics of government until Siaka Stevens began repressing them: then "lawyers went into their shells" (Frank Kposowa). With few exceptions, the country's bar association remained quiet throughout the rest of the Stevens era and even during the NPRC and AFRC military juntas. But some *individual* lawyers did challenge the government, including Charles Margai and others, for example, in the defense of those charged with treason and later executed under Stevens (Jamesina King).
- Churches in the 70s: "not vibrant" (Frank Kposowa)

1977 student demonstrations

- Stevens government and student politics. From the 1970s, the Stevens government got involved in student politics – a government/campus relationship that continues today (Brima Sherriff). Alie (2006, 98) notes there were government-paid student spies on campus in those years, which meant planning a demonstration had to be done in secret. The 1977 demonstration surprised President Stevens just as he stood up to deliver a speech at a graduation ceremony.
- The 1977 demonstration lacked labor support. The demonstrations, which spread to secondary schools and colleges across the country, might have toppled the government with the help of labor, according to various interviewees.
- Students staged mass demonstrations at State House (the president's office) during talks with student leaders.

1977 Parliamentary election violence: voting as resistance

In the wake of the 1977 student demonstrations, the shaken Stevens regime conceded to elections that year and lowered the voting age to eighteen. But there was a highly rigged nomination process and the campaign was marred by government thuggery and other violence (Alie 2006, 86.)

University student demonstrations: 1980s-'90s

- There were more student strikes, either local or national, including one for multiparty elections and another over the quality of water (Abdul Kposowa). By the time Momoh came to power, students knew how to make firebombs (Kalilu Totangi). In the face of student demonstrations, labor unrest, and international pressures for democracy, the Momoh government accepted multiparty shortly after the civil war began.

- 1980 – Campus strike against Organization of African Unity summit in Sierra Leone (*The Tablet*, Feb. 20, 1980, in Rashid 2004, 78).
- 1981 – students burn the official car of the Mayoress of Freetown, Dr. June Holst-Roness (Rashid, 2004, 78).
- 1984 – major demonstration: students and others reacted to ambiguity by Siaka Stevens about becoming a president for life: "Over 2,000 college students and urban youth took to the streets carrying placards which condemned the president's plans for life presidency. The demonstrators stormed the City Hall and disrupted the ongoing APC party congress" (Rashid 2004, 80).
- 1985 – Fourah Bay College students protested expulsion of student leaders; burned Mercedes Benz car of the vice-principal, Cyril Foray (Hindowa Momoh). The demonstration spread to the city. "Cars were smashed, government buildings ransacked, and shops looted." The University expelled forty-one students and three lecturers: Olu Gordon, Jimmy Kandeh and Cleo Hanciles. Kandeh later won a court ruling against his expulsion (Rashid 2004, 81, 89).
- 1990-91 – university students organize nationally; lobby Momoh directly.
- 1991 – students at Njala demonstrate peacefully at Taiama Junction (on road to Bo) for multiparty elections (Abdulai Wai & Marian Samu).
- 1991 – students at Fourah Bay march down from campus for multiparty; police beat and teargas students. Eight white American students used as a "shield" with their consent. Some students were jailed (Hindowa Momoh).
- 1997 (Aug 18) students march against the AFRC; met with violence.

Other resistance: 1980s
- 1981 labor strike without the help of students.
- 1981 "Ndogbowusi:" – A guerrilla movement formed in Pujehun District near Liberia "in the wake of the 1982 elections, to retaliate against what they perceived as "state-sponsored terrorism" (Alie 2006, 99).
- Mid to late 1980s: early indications of a gradual emergence of civil society. Kassim and King point to a real emergence in the mid-1990s in response to the excesses of the NPRC and their failure to bring peace.

RUF civil war begins: 1991 (mass killings and amputations)
- Hindowa Momoh argues that domestic pressures and frustration triggered the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) civil war. He argues that the RUF was not specifically a *lumpen* revolution as some scholars

have said (e.g., Ismail Rashid, 2004, 66-89). When you look at the RUF itself, it has a lot of intellectual backing. Rashid defines *lumpen* youth as (71): "used in its crude Marxist sense to represent those strata of the society that cannot fully employ or sell its labour power because of capitalist transformation, restructuring or retrenchment." In an endnote (87) he thanks Ibrahim Abdullah "for sharing his ideas/notes on his project on the *Lumpen* and unemployed in Freetown." Rashid (2004) does not deny the links between the so-called lumpen youth of Freetown and "student radicals" who "helped reshape the role and agency of these youth" (86). Alie Kabba was elected unopposed as president of the student union at Fourah Bay College. This was, as Abdullah (2004, 56) points out, after a number of students, including Kabba, had gone to either Ghana or Libya (or both) for training and planning in revolutionary concepts. Abdullah adds that only three of these people decided to pursue actual revolution, including Foday Sankoh, who was not an intellectual. In March 1991, the RUF rebels invaded Sierra Leone.

NPRC coup 1992

- The first resistance to the NPRC began soon after they seized power, but the resistance grew much stronger in 1994 and 1995 after the junta had failed to end the war, had compiled a record of corruption and abuse of civilians, especially in Freetown, and was seen stalling in the promised transition to democracy rule.
- NPRC attacks prominent woman (Paul Kamara's *For Di People* newspaper reported it).
- NPRC executes without trial head of police and some journalists.
- NPRC expels German Ambassador, Karl Prince; women, church leaders, and diplomatic community rally around him.
- Civilian politicians in NPRC and civil society: "Politicians had infiltrated" NPRC (Hindolo Trye). They were invited to join by the NPRC, which needed help running the government. But these civilian politicians were, according to Trye, also seeking power for themselves. Trye adds that these civilian politicians also had "penetrated" civil society, again seeking power.

Early push for peace and NPRC divisions

- Youth march in 1994 for peace: As members of the Youth Federation for World Peace, women organized rallies, meetings, and a march that attracted a "couple of hundred" participants (Marian Samu).

- Women marched in 1995 in Freetown, ending up at the national stadium.
- NPRC splits by 1994. There were divisions over governance issues. The aim stated early on by NPRC leader Strasser was to return the country to democracy. But they had moved away from that to "amassing wealth" (Brima Sheriff).
- Palace coup 1995: Bio replaces Strasser.
- There are several explanations for the coup. Bio accused Strasser of planning to delay the transition to democracy and Strasser late in the game decided to be a candidate for president himself. Bio and others in NPRC had already chosen another candidate (according to Julius Spencer); some former military cabinet ministers were upset with Strasser because he had sent them back to the barracks.

Resistance to NPRC

The NPRC failed to end the war or pay for it, instead collaborating with rebels to plunder resources in the field and raiding the treasury. Information was coming out that the NPRC was draining the Ministry of Finance, supposedly to pay for the war; much of it was a matter of misappropriation, which prolonged the war, adding to demands for constitutional government. The war was having a widespread economic impact on society, including, for example, market women and families; teachers were not paid in war zones (Festus Minah).While Strasser's own youth had appealed to youth early on, by 1994, student groups were criticizing the NPRC and some religious leaders began speaking out against continued NPRC rule (Brima Sheriff).

- Journalists mounted a steady resistance to the NPRC through independent reporting of their abuses.
- "All these groups shoot up. There was pressure [on the NPRC] from every corner." Some told them to their face, others 'spoke' through graffiti on walls or at community meetings. When NPRC leaders went to a public forum, they would be confronted "diplomatically" (Abdul Kposowa).

Women's resistance to NPRC

According to Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, women were politically active as far back as the 1940s. In 1952 the Sierra Leone Women's Movement was formed. But during the repressive years of Siaka Stevens, women mostly retreated into social, educational, and development groups, only remerging to push for peace around 1994 and eventually for "elections before peace" to push the NPRC out of power.

- Background: Women felt left out of the World Conference on women, Nairobi, Kenya, July 1985 because it was mostly government officials that

attended (the official name was: "World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace"). Women in Sierra Leone began organizing for the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing, September 1995 (Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff). The organizing, lobbying, and participation of women led to their participation in the important Bitumani I and II political conferences in 1995 and 1996 on the NPRC role and war.

- Women's Forum – According to Marian Samu, women meeting under Amy Smyth at the YWCA in 1993 formed a special group for peace, which "later developed into the Women's Forum. Smythe says the Women's Forum started in the 1994 after the women's conference in Dakar, which was a preparatory meeting for the 1995 women's conference in Beijing (Amy Smyth); it was most active 1994-'96 (Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff). It was a coalition of women's organizations and the key movement of women during this period of a push for *elections before peace*. Dr. Nana Pratt spoke against the NPRC; Zainab Bangura and others came later, according to Ibrahim Kargbo.
- SLANGO (Sierra Leone Association of Non-Government Organizations) started in 1994.
- Women staged a massive peace march "20,000-strong women's peace rally" in Freetown in February 1995 (Bradbury 1995, 49, cited in Keen 2005, 154).
- Sierra Leone Women" Movement for Peace formed (Jusu-Sheriff).
- Formation of Women for a Morally Enlightened Nation led by Zainab Bangura. Keen (2005, 156) says this group was "[p]articularly effective … They had reportedly threatened to expose corrupt politicians" financial links with the military unless the politicians backed the elections" (*Africa Confidential*, 29, March 1996, vol. 37, no. 7, cited in Keen 2005, 156). Keen notes a point by Jusu-Sheriff that, in Keen's words, "the women's intervention might also have made a negotiated settlement a more respectable option, minimizing loss of face for both government and rebels" (156).
- Mid 1990s. Three key groups, among others, "came together" to oppose the NPRC: Civil Society Movement of Sierra Leone; SLANGO (Sierra Leone Association of Non-Government Organizations) and the Women's Forum, according to Ayesha Kamara.
- Bitumani I, August 15-17, 1995. Women negotiated increased representation in the conference, more than was planned by the organizer, head of the Electoral Commission, James Jonah. The women lobbied nationwide on the issue. Delegates voted to hold elections before peace.

- Bitumani II, February 12, 1996. Delegates vote to hold elections before peace.
- Head of state Maada Bio's had attempted to "manipulate" the transition, to delay a return to democratic rule and prolong the military's stay in power (Brima Sheriff). "Two days before the conference, the Interim National Electoral Commission offices and the homes of Electoral Commission boss, James Jonah, and presidential candidate, Tejan Kabbah, were attacked with grenades and gunfire. Soldiers were widely suspected of being behind the attacks. Jonah, however, was determined to press on with the elections (Keen 2005, 156.)
- Women were again key players at Bitumani II. Not clear was how much doubt delegates had about proceeding to elections, but by most accounts the speech by market woman Marie Touray on going ahead was dramatic and effective.
- International pressure: Julius Spencer notes that the will of the people was overwhelming at Bitumani II. The international community also played a role: "They were watching." They also offered scholarships to the NPRC, many of whom accepted them, according to Spencer.

Voting in 1996: a form of resistance to NPRC in view of threats and gunfire. One might not immediately consider the vote for a civilian president in 1996 "resistance," but Julius Spencer, who later became a cabinet minister in the government elected that year, describes it as resistance. "People went out to vote, even though there were threats of violence [by the regime]. On polling day, even with sounds of gunshots, people stood in line and insisted they were going to vote."

- Election of Kabbah in February 1996.
- NPRC chairman Julius Maada Bio handed over power to the democratically elected president, Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah March 29, 1996.
- Kabbah government took power; fourteen months later he was ousted in a coup.

AFRC coup May 25, 1997: mass noncooperation by civilians

During their more than nine months in power, the civilian population in Freetown mounted an extraordinary nonviolent resistance campaign in which noncooperation was the key tactic. Driven by strong opposition to the junta and encouraged by both the unpredictable violence on the streets and fears of being labeled a collaborator later, much of the commercial and institutional life of the city shut down.

- AFRC invites RUF rebels to join the military government. The RUF rebels quickly "took command" of the government (Charles Mambu and others).
- Sierra Leone Labour Congress denounces the rebels two days after the coup. They call on the regime to step down. Other immediate denunciations came from the National Union of Sierra Leonean Students (NUSS), Women's Peace Movement, petty traders association, and the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ), and "university dons," (Gordon 2004, 187).
- Silent protest after rebels burn Treasury building in 1997. The destruction of records on seven state officials came the day before they were to go on trial on charges of stealing state resources. "[T]housands of Sierra Leoneans gathered at the site of the burned Treasury in mute protest" (Gordon 2004, 187).
- Student demonstration August 18, 1997. Two students were killed (Jonathan Leigh; Kelvin Lewis mentions one was killed.) Military helicopters flew over the city shooting live rounds at students; some 200 students were arrested and some female students were raped at military barracks (Brima Sheriff).
- Some civilians ate with rebels who were "family or friends" (Charles Mambu). It was a "matter of survival." Rebels would locate food and other items and share it in the civilians' compound. There were revenge killings of collaborators after the war, something few Sierra Leoneans mentioned but which are noted in international human rights reports. Charles Mambu said some AFRC fighters were recruited against their will.
- Clandestine opposition journalism. Significantly, a number of independent newspapers began publishing from clandestine locations, continuing to expose junta abuses.
- Clandestine radio station. The Kabbah government in exile in Guinea set up a clandestine radio station that kept hope alive of their return. They used psychological tactics against the junta, using informants to report the junta's moves and even plans.

Kabbah government returns in 1998; invites rebels into government

- Women in 2001 bravely march (peacefully) on rebel leader's home amidst rumors of a coup. Rebel leader Foday Sankoh refuses to talk; he threatens the women, but does not open fire.
- Second march on Sankoh's home coup turns violent as rebels fire on crowd, with estimates of about 27 killed.
- Abuses under Kabbah: delayed & unfair trials; mistreatment of prisoners (Brima Sheriff; also human rights reports).

Rebels' brief violent return: January 1999
The violence was so horrific and sudden that resistance was impossible. Estimates of the number of civilians killed range from six thousand to more than seven thousand with some one hundred thousand driven from their home. Nigerian troops at a cost of up to a thousand of their troops, pushed them back after several weeks. The war was official declared over in January 2002.

**Liberia**

*Political Chronology*

| | |
|---|---|
| 1847 | Liberia declares independence. |
| 1971 | William R. Tolbert, Jr. becomes president; promises reforms. |
| 1980 | President Tolbert assassinated in military coup; Master Sergeant Samuel K. Doe becomes head of state. |
| 1985 | Doe wins disputed presidential election; coup attempt fails. |
| 1989 | National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), led by Charles G. Taylor, launches civil war. |
| 1990 | Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) sends peacekeeping troops; Doe is executed by a splinter group of the NPFL. |
| 1990-97 | Interim governments, including one of a coalition of rebel leaders. |
| 1997 | Charles G. Taylor elected president; disarmament brings temporary peace. |
| 1999 | Second civil war begins. |
| 2003 | Rebels advance to within ten kilometers of Monrovia; Taylor resigns facing international indictment on charges of war crimes of supporting rebels in Sierra Leone to help his own fight in Liberia. |
| 2005 | Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf elected president of Liberia – first woman elected as head of an African state. |
| 2006 | President Johnson-Sirleaf switches on a generator powering street lights in the capital, a city that had not had electricity in fifteen years. |

*Resistance Chronology*

1970s Civil society groups push for political reforms. The Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and the Progressive Alliance of Liberia (PAL) actively seek greater participation of Liberians in the political system; their leaders become role models for younger activists.

1979 "Rice Riots." Led by Gabriel Baccus Matthews of PAL, with students and others protest an anticipated government hike in the price of rice. Tolbert uses force to halt the demonstrations. His reaction shows weakness of his administration, opening the door for the coup a year later.

1980s Some professionals and activists (journalists, clergy, and attorneys) push for greater democratic freedoms, but mass repression by Samuel Doe's regime severely limits nonviolent resistance. Some activists distributing antigovernment literature are arrested; some are tortured. Six university student leaders condemned to die are released at the last minute after widespread statements ranging from professionals to market women. Thousands demonstrate on the streets when they are freed. University students demonstrate on campus after arrest of popular faculty members Amos Sawyer and George Clay Kieh, Jr. Doe targets independent newspapers, burning some of their offices. Mass public march in 1990 to get Doe to resign as rebels draw near is put down with violence by the regime.

1991 Catholic Justice and Peace Commission (JPC) created and provides nationwide, clandestine monitoring of human rights abuses, transmitting the findings to international human rights organizations and Western governments. Archbishop Michael Kpakala Francis boldly condemns abuses by rebels, as he had abuses under Doe and did later under President Taylor.

1992 Catholic Church establishes its own radio station, Radio Veritas, which broadcasts live testimonies from victims of the war and related atrocities.

1994 Early phase of women's peace movement. Women hold public meetings and attend some peace conferences, though they are never allowed in as delegates. Women lobby government officials; issue public statements; stage marches and "stay home" strikes. Four-day "training" session in nonviolence for rebel leaders is sponsored by women's peace activists.

1990s During Taylor's presidency: formation of numerous civil society organizations centered on human rights and rule of law. Attorneys and others work closely with international human rights groups to report Taylor's regime abuses. Activists in some NGOs stage various protests. Culture of resistance grows stronger.
1998 Rape and murder of a market woman in Monrovia by Taylor's forces sparks united protest by female lawyers and others.
2003 Women stage mass marches and vigils and use other tactics to get Taylor and rebel leaders to stop the war. Taylor resigns.

**Kenya**

*Political Chronology*

1963 Kenya gains independence from Britain.
1964 Jomo Kenyatta becomes president.
1978 Vice President Daniel arap Moi becomes president upon the death of Kenyatta.
1982 Kenya declared a one-party state; coup attempt is unsuccessful.
1987 Opposition groups suppressed; international criticism voiced over arrests and abuses, including torture.
1988 Parliamentary elections held using controversial queue voting; widespread rigging reported.
1990 Popular Foreign Minister Robert Ouko murdered; Scotland Yard points finger at two Moi officials.
1991 Moi agrees to multiparty political system after mounting mass pressure and public rallies calling for this. The decision came shortly after a mass protest and donor freezing of new aid funds.
1992 Ethnic conflicts linked to the government's attempt to control key electoral areas. Moi re-elected president amidst a divided opposition.
1997 Moi re-elected amidst continuing divisions among opposition. Some reforms passed by parliament.
1998 Bombing of US Embassy in Nairobi; more than 200 killed. A similar bombing hits the US Embassy in neighboring Tanzania; both bombings are linked to Al-Qaeda.

2002 Mwai Kibaki wins election as president. Moi is ineligible to run again; his favored candidate, Uhuru Kenyatta, son of Jomo Kenyatta, loses (but is elected in 2013). Kibaki is reelected in 2007 in disputed vote counting which is followed by mass political violence, much of it ethnic related. Power-sharing government instituted with Kibaki and Raila Odinga, son of Kenya's first vice president, Oginga Odinga.

*Resistance Chronology*

1970s Some published and oral dissent from academics and opposition members of Parliament.

1980s Formation of several underground opposition groups in an era of fear, including Mwakenya.

1987 Attorney Gibson Kamau Kuria sues the government to stop torture of political detainees.

1988 Bedan Mbugua, editor of National Council of Churches magazine, *Beyond*, exposes government fraud in the 1988 elections.

1989 Conservationist/political activist Wangari Maathai challenges regime plans to build tall party headquarters and statue of Moi on only big city park. With the help of donor pressure she wins her case, showing Moi can be rebuffed.

Late 1980s-early 1990s Some attorneys, acting as individuals, without the support of their bar association, challenge the Moi regime's human rights abuses and lack of rule of law. Several independent magazines challenge the regime, leading to arrests of the editors. Four clergy speak out for reform: Bishops Henry Okullu, David Gitari and Alexander Muge plus Rev. Dr. Timothy Njoya.

1990 First of two major non-approved opposition political rallies held: "Saba Saba," July 7, in Nairobi. Police use violence to block it.

1991 Formation of the Forum for Restoration of Democracy in Kenya (FORD) by opposition politicians calling for multiparty elections.

1991 Second major non-approved opposition political rally held in Nairobi ("Kamkunji') Nov 16, 1991, to press for multiparty elections. Police respond with force. Not long after that, and a donor freeze of new funds, Moi approves multiparty electoral system.

1992 Small group of mothers of political detainees stage public sit-in and partial hunger strike in a downtown park to win release of their politically detained sons. They are successful after one year of protest.

| | |
|---|---|
| 1990s | The mostly individual resistance gives way to mostly organizational resistance as political opposition parties and activist NGOs form following adoption of multiparty politics. |
| 1996-97 | Nationwide advocacy network for reform established; holds national convention in 1997 near Nairobi. Youth delegates are very active at convention and push for demonstrations. |
| 1997 | Series of public demonstrations approved by National Convention Assembly. Regime uses extreme violence against demonstrators, who include members of the middle class. At least fourteen people are killed; many are clubbed. |
| Late 1990s | Public criticism and even ridicule of President Moi and his regime becomes commonplace in magazines, newspapers, radio, television, public rallies as a culture of resistance begun in the late 1980s blossoms. |

## Abbreviations and Significant Terms

**Sierra Leone**

| | |
|---|---|
| AFRC | Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (junta in power parts of 1996-97) |
| APC | All People's Congress (political party) |
| Bitumani I and II | Two national conventions in 1995 and 1996 of a range of citizens who voted on whether to have presidential elections and end military rule before the civil war was over or wait until the war ended. The delegates in both conventions voted to have "elections before peace," blaming military junta for prolonging the war to stay in power. (The sessions were held in the Bitumani hotel in Freetown.) |
| CDF/CDM | Civil Defense Force/Civil Defense Movements: usually formed around a core group of traditional hunters, during the Sierra Leone civil war. In addition to the Kamajors in the Mende region of the South, there were "the Kapras and Gbetes among the Temne, the Donsos of Kono District and the Tamaboras of Koinadugu District." The term "Kamajors" was widely applied to all such forces, though they specifically were formed among the Mende (Keen 2005, 90) |
| CSMSL | Civil Society Movement of Sierra Leone |

| | |
|---|---|
| ECOMOG | Economic Community (of West African States) Monitoring Group. The military force comprised of (mostly) Nigerian troops under the direction of ECOWAS that intervened in the civil wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia |
| ECOWAS | Economic Community of West African States |
| MARWOPNET | Mano River Union Women Peace Network (women's peace groups from Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea) |
| MRD | Movement for the Restoration of Democracy |
| NCCP | National Coordinating Committee for Peace (coalition of some sixty professional, voluntary and religious organizations advocating for peace) |
| NPRC | National Provisional Ruling Council (military junta in power 1992-96) |
| OAU | Organization of African Unity (later reorganized as African Union) |
| Radio Democracy | A clandestine radio station operated inside Sierra Leone by the ousted government of Kabbah during the time the AFRC/RUF junta was in power in 1996 and 1997. The aim was to encourage noncooperation with the junta, lift spirits of citizens, and put psychological pressure on the junta members by exposing their plans and actions through informants |
| RUF | Revolutionary United Front (Sierra Leone rebel force) |
| SLA | Sierra Leone Army |
| SLAJ | Sierra Leone Association of Journalists |
| SLANGO | Sierra Leone Association of Non-Government Organizations |
| SLPP | Sierra Leone People's Party (political party) |
| SLTU | Sierra Leone Teachers Union |
| SLWPM | Sierra Leone Women's Peace Movement |
| USIA | United States Information Agency |
| WOMEN | Women Organized for a More Enlightened Nation (NGO formed in 1995 to promote peace and democracy) |

**Liberia**

| | |
|---|---|
| COLIDAP | Citizens of Liberia in Defense of Albert Porte. An early civil society organization in support of pamphleteer Albert Porte, a frequent critic of governments and advocate for reform |
| ECOMOG | see listing under Sierra Leone |
| ECOWAS | see listing under Sierra Leone |
| INPFL | Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Rebel group that broke off from Charles Taylor's NPLF, headed by Prince Johnson, who later oversaw the torture and assassination of President Samuel Doe |
| JPC | Justice and Peace Commission, an organization started by the Catholic Church in Liberia in the early 1990s to support rule of law and human rights |
| LWI | Liberia Women's Initiative. Women's peace advocacy group begun in the early 1990s |
| LURD | Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy. Rebel group opposed to Charles Taylor |
| MARWOPNET | see listing under Sierra Leone |
| MODEL | Movement for Democracy in Liberia. Rebel group opposed to Charles Taylor |
| MOJA | Movement for Justice in Africa. A private organization formed in the 1970s that advocated for political reforms |
| NPLF | National Patriotic Front of Liberia. The rebel force led by Charles Taylor that invaded Liberia in December 1989 |
| PAL | Progressive Alliance of Liberia. A private organization formed in the 1970s that advocated for political reform. PAL founder Baccus Matthews organized the mass protests in 1979 against the government's plan to raise the price of rice |
| PRC | People's Redemption Council. The name of the military regime headed by Samuel Doe which seized power in 1980 |
| PUL | Press Union of Liberia. Association of journalists in Liberia |
| WIPNET | Women in Peace Building Network. Formed in 2003 to advocate for peace |

**Kenya**

| | |
|---|---|
| CID | Criminal Investigation Department (a government agency) |
| CPK | Church of the Province of Kenya |
| FORD | Forum for the Restoration of Kenya. Organization advocating for multiparty democracy |
| IMF | International Monetary Fund |
| IPPG | Inter-Party Parliament Group, formed in Parliament in 1997 to propose reforms |
| KANU | Kenya African National Union. The party of President Daniel arap Moi |
| LSK | Law Society of Kenya |
| NARC | National Alliance Rainbow Coalition, the unity group that backed one major presidential candidate in 2002 against the KANU candidate of outgoing President Moi. The compromise candidate, Mwai Kibaki won the election |
| NCA | National Convention Assembly in 1997 to advocate for constitutional reform |
| NCEC | National Convention Executive Committee, formed at the NCA |
| NCCK | National Council of Churches of Kenya |
| RPP | Release Political Prisoners, an NGO formed to advocate for political rights |
| SONU | Students Organization of Nairobi University |

**Figure 16 Looking to the future: young couple in Freetown, Sierra Leone, 2009**


Photo by Betty Press

# Acknowledgments

This book foremost is about brave individuals who stepped out of the relative safety of anonymity and challenged repressive regimes in sub-Saharan Africa. They had no guarantee that their efforts would make a difference, though eventually their nonviolent actions helped bring political change. Protesting was often dangerous. Some activists were killed, some were tortured, others were detained then released unharmed. Still others were injured while protesting. Of course some activists sought political advantage; but all those who stepped forward took a risk. The author of this book is deeply grateful to the activists who not only challenged their regime but took time to give me their account of how and why they did it. For many of those interviewed, this was their first (and perhaps only) opportunity to recount in detail those heady and dangerous times when they stood up for change.

As for the theories presented in this book about social movements and nonviolent resistance and my critique of some of them, I want to express my sincere appreciation for those scholars whose thoughtful works over the years have opened the door to a better understanding of how people protest and why. There are far too many to name here (many more are cited in the book), but I am grateful especially to those scholars who took the time to read my writings, including before publication. They include James Jasper, Cliff Bob, and Doug McAdam, who patiently read and commented on drafts of my theory chapter in this book. Sidney Tarrow and David S. Meyer have been academic mentors in my development of revisions of social movement theory and commented on drafts of numerous journal articles that have since been published. Scholars Michael Chege and Goran Hyden, especially, and Nelson Kasfir, have patiently supported my work in this field from the inception. In brief contact, two other scholars, now deceased, gave me encouragement to pursue new approaches: Robert Dahl, who liked my idea of paying more attention to individuals in politics and not just organizations; and Charles Tilly, who in his office at Columbia University, only months before he died, patiently watched me diagram my new concepts of social movement analysis and said he found it "interesting."

Since this book includes a great deal of history of each of the three countries in a way not previously presented, I asked scholars from each country to help make sure I got it right. They include: Sierra Leone historians Joe Alie and Ismael Rashid; and Lansana Gberie; Kenya historian Macharia Munene; and on Liberia, political scientist Elwood Dunn, Aaron Weah, Sayndee T. Debey, and James Gray.

This book's theoretical structure is built from the bottom up, based on findings from the interviews and archival materials. I started in Kenya, where many scholars and others there and abroad helped me explore how that country transformed from torturing dissidents to regime change in an open election. They include political scientists Peter Anyang' Nyong'o, Jackie Klopp, and Stephen Ndegwa, as well as Binaifer Nowrojee, Pheroze Nowrojee, Nguyi Mutahi, Mutuma Ruteere, Willy Mutunga. Personal friends living in Kenya encouraged my work and provided the friendship that is so important in doing research outside one's own country. They include, among others, Chiuri Ngugi, Michael Ochoro, Donald and Ruth Thomas, Harold and Annetta Miller, Damien and Elizabeth Cook, and Hadija Ernst.

I next went to Liberia to see if the concepts I had developed in Kenya would apply under even more repressive conditions. As in all three countries, I got help from activists and others in analyzing that country's resistance politics. I also got help from a range of scholars including Verlon Stone, Amos Sawyer, Mary H. Moran, and others in the Liberian Studies Association. Elwood Dunn, Joseph Young, Todd Landman, Jeff Goodwin, and methodologist Charles Ragin helped me develop my analysis and some read my early drafts of journal articles on Liberia.

In Sierra Leone, while on a nine-month Fulbright Fellowship teaching at Fourah Bay College and doing research, activists and many others helped me piece together what amounted to some thirty years of nonviolent resistance that had never been assembled in a coherent way. Among those who provided assistance were historian Joe Alie and Desmond George-Williams at Fourah Bay, Ambrose James, Abdulai Bayraytay, the late journalist Olu Gordon, Beresford Davis, Julius Spencer, Sallieu Kamara, Brima Sheriff, Kenneth Best, Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, and many others.

By their own work and conference presentations, Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow helped me broaden my analytical spotlight to be more receptive of unexpected findings and interpreting new ideas. Political scientist Philip Williams at the University of Florida first introduced me to the social movement literature, including its gaps; Larry Dodd, also at UF, helped me think more creatively, to question theories and the way we acquire knowledge.

Editors, publishers, and reviewers obviously play a key role in development of a book like this. Scholar James Jasper, (co-editor of this series with Jan Willem Duyvendak) at Amsterdam University Press, and senior acquisitions editor Marjolijn Voogel were supportive of this project from the start. The two reviewers provided valuable suggestions to improve the manuscript. Editor Jaap Wagenaar, Kristi Prins, and others ably helped

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Finally, a word of appreciation is due to my father and mother, both deceased, for nurturing in me a spirit of curiosity and compassion for others anywhere in the world and for giving me the freedom to try new adventures. And even though this book is dedicated in part to my wife, Betty Press, an international photographer and a professor of photography, I want to express my deep love for her and her passionate concern for the human rights of all people, everywhere – and for her endless patience with me in completing the years of work behind this book.

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Robert M. Press is an associate professor of Political Science at the University of Southern Mississippi where he teaches about social movements and human rights, among other topics. He is the author of *The New Africa: Dispatches from a Changing Continent*, published by the University Press of Florida, 1999, which won a national award, and *Peaceful Resistance: Advancing Human Rights and Democratic Freedoms*, published by Ashgate, UK in 2006. Prior to his academic career, he was a journalist with *The Christian Science Monitor*, including being based in Kenya for eight years covering East and West Africa. He and his wife, photographer Betty Press, once hitchhiked across Africa, Europe, and to India, as part of a personal two-year, around-the-world trip of discovery. In his free time he enjoys running and choral singing (not at the same time). He may be reached at bob.press@usm.edu or The University of Southern Mississippi, 118 College Drive #5108; Hattiesburg, MS 39406-0001.

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