

## **Epilogue: Between Poetry and Rhetoric<sup>1</sup>**

*Nonviolence is not a functional alternative to violence. Certain ends can be achieved by violence which nonviolence by its very nature cannot achieve ... to acknowledge this does not mean that one cannot intervene by nonviolent means in ways which can contribute to a reduction in the level of conflict and the amelioration of suffering, and in the process lay the basis for a more cooperative future between erstwhile antagonists.*

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Over the several months in which I authored this examination of transnational nonviolent empowerment, two things occurred. First, following in the pattern of earlier successful nonviolent revolutions in Serbia and Georgia, Ukrainians massed in downtown Kiev to protest a fraudulent presidential election, ultimately succeeding in forcing the Soviet-era president to desist in blocking a new election. In the second election, in which swarms of Western election monitors were present at polls throughout the country, the liberal, Western-leaning candidate won. The “Orange Revolution,” as it was called, seemed to have mobilized a vast majority of Ukrainians to extra-parliamentary political action, winning them significant concessions and ultimately electing a leader more representative of the majority’s views. A similar campaign in the spring of 2005, this one marred by some instances of violence, drove the president of Kyrgyzstan out of the country following accusations of fraud during parliamentary elections. Each of these events reflected the lessons learned during Otpor’s successful movement to depose Serbian president Slobodan Milošević, and former members of that student campaign trained leaders in each of the other movements.

<sup>1</sup> “The difference between poetry and rhetoric / is being / ready to kill / yourself / instead of your children.” From “Power,” Audre Lorde, 1978. Richard Ellman and Robert O’Clair (1988). *The Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry: Second Edition*. 1973. W.W. Norton & Company, New York, pp. 1433–1434.

<sup>2</sup> Rigby (1995), 466.

Simultaneously, the ongoing genocide in Darfur, Sudan, reached appallingly new depths of cruelty. More than 1.6 million Darfuris were chased from their homes by Janjaweed, soldiers acting in loose coordination with the state government at Khartoum. Estimates of those slaughtered range from 50,000 to 300,000 individuals, and more are killed each day in the regions around the refugee camps in western Sudan and Chad. Despite the naming of the crisis as “genocide” by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, US President George W. Bush and US Secretary of State Colin Powell, very little action has been taken and no intervention has been considered. Many of the same dynamics that occurred in 1994 during the Rwandan genocide are playing out once again. As Samantha Power documented, governments refuse to commit peacekeeping troops for fear of becoming enmeshed in an ethnic conflict, place too much faith in state powers when those powers were themselves perpetrating the slaughter, and in general turn a blind eye to suffering and death. In an eerie reflection of Rwanda, a recent study by the *American Journalism Review* stated that of the three major television networks, the combined *total* amount of time dedicated to covering the Darfur crisis in 2004 was a mere 26 minutes.<sup>3</sup>

What might nonviolent intervention have to contribute to these situations? What does my examination of nonviolent intervention suggest about the possibilities for intervention, nonviolent and otherwise, in the face of genocide?

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri would argue that in response to an “emergency” situation, be it an unstable Eastern European government or a central African genocide, the global political order often creates its own new authority. In January 2005, following a devastating tsunami that struck across the Indian ocean, the Indonesian government — which, until then, had been seen as increasingly illegitimate in the Aceh province — was suddenly

<sup>3</sup> Sherry Ricchiardi, “Déjà Vu,” *American Journalism Review*, Feb./Mar. 2005.

charged with the management and distribution of aid. This immediately increased their legitimacy, in the eyes of Indonesians and international political élites alike.

The question, then, is not whether a sovereign authority has to be created or recreated in the event of an emergency situation. Authority will be imposed, whether by practical assignment of responsibility through an international body, such as natural disaster recovery managed by a UN agency, or conceding just enough to opposition groups and international élites to hold off destabilization, as in genocide and other breakdowns of state governance. Could a burgeoning social movement create an alternative power in that moment, using Gene Sharp's tactics of nonviolent action — or must the authority be created through violent coups or international judicial fiat?

The gaping enormity of violence in genocides suggests that nonviolent intervention will not do the trick — how could interventionists have halted the Rwandan genocide when perpetrators of that violence were purposely targeting Westerners in order to scare off outside intervention?<sup>4</sup> Therefore I believe it is accurate to say that nonviolent intervention will not function at this stage.<sup>5</sup> In John Paul Lederach's terms, this is the crisis stage, when immediate aid is needed and long-term visioning is often impossible. Intervention has been successfully used to support local movements for social justice. It has never been successfully used to instantaneously quell warfare.

Yet a look at the democracy movements in Eastern Europe and Central Asia in the past few years gives a measure of hope. Nonviolent intervention likely would not have stopped the

<sup>4</sup> Hutu soldiers systematically rounded up ten Belgian peacekeepers, killing and mutilating them in order to “thus guarantee Belgian withdrawal from Rwanda.” See Power (2000).

<sup>5</sup> A disclaimer is in order here: For the past several months I have been a part of the management team of the Genocide Intervention Fund, currently raising money to fund armed peacekeepers from the African Union in Darfur.

ethnic cleansing in a violently destabilized Serbia any more than the Balkan Peace Team stopped the ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. But a systematic, long-term campaign of empowerment, in which Western nonviolent strategists trained students and other activists within Serbia, ensured that when instability did begin to mount the nonviolent movement could hold on to the momentum and prevent the population from descending into genocide. Nonviolent campaigns in Guatemala and Sri Lanka have managed to de-escalate the situation and open valuable space for peaceful reconciliation and justice to occur.

The slaughter of innocents occurred in Rwanda and is occurring in the Sudan because the world is not involved and does not wish to be. Yet rather than being confronted each decade with a new genocide, in which political élites invent new ways to excuse themselves from intervention, a more extensive plan of prevention could reap many benefits. Nonviolent interventionists need to determine where the next Rwandas and Darfurs might be, and work to enact transnational empowerment there. Then we will not be faced with the choice of doing nothing or sending in the troops.

The vision is that with enough resources, volunteers and thoughtful, empowering strategy, interventionists may be able to enable a peaceful society to avoid the bloody crises altogether.