Connecting Contemporary African-Asian Peacemaking and Nonviolence

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From Satagraha to Ujamaa

Edited by

Vidya Jain and Matt Meyer

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“Satyagraha”—Sanskrit word meaning “truth-force”, “soul-force”, or “love-force”. It was popularized by Gandhi throughout India to suggest the establishment of power based on truth, soul, and love rather than on greed, individualism, and striving for personal profit.

“Ujamaa”—Swahili word describing village-based socialistic practices. Significantly, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania used it in his effort to bring scattered peasant communities together in order to encourage the collective production and provision of social services.

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FOREWORD

TRUTH, SOUL, AND LOVE

AMBASSADOR THANDI LUTHULI

I am honored to write a foreword for this important book, which consists of a blend of African and Asian philosophy and action for justice. This integration is represented in a much-appreciated statement in the preface, which suggests how we should view our struggle against domestic and international oppression:

> Here the vision of a world with people dedicated to "satyagraha" (power based on truth, soul, and love rather than greed, individualism, and personal profit) is merged with a Swahili word popularized by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Nyerere was the man who, years after observing the complications of being known as a "great soul", elected to change his honorary title from "Mahatma" to "Mwalimu": the East African word simply designating one as a "teacher".

As a child, my exposure to the organizations fighting South African apartheid introduced me to the ongoing debate between violent and nonviolent strategies as a means to achieve our goals. My father, Chief Albert Luthuli, was president of the African National Congress (ANC) and always espoused nonviolence, regardless of what happened politically or strategically in the movement. The older I became, the more I aligned myself with this view. But we remained part of the ANC, even after the beginning of the organized armed struggle, as people dedicated to the liberation of South Africa and the world around us.

The coordination of African and Asian strategies and philosophy was present in my South African experience as a youth and my work fighting South African apartheid, while in the southern part of the United States. It was, and is, a powerful blend, as it is based on "*truth, soul, and love*".

Gandhi was exposed to the oppressive system of apartheid against Indian, Chinese, and black African communities in my country: South Africa. This was also where he developed his nonviolent tactics for

change. Rather than "hate against hate," he offered the world his strategy and plan of non-compliance toward oppression. This "nonviolent passive resistance" was applied, in many instances, by the South African movement against apartheid. In 1956, for example, 20,000 South African women marched in Pretoria in protest of Pass Laws; in addition, in 1960 5,000 marchers rose up in the Sharpeville Massacre. There was also the Soweto student uprising in 1976, where between 3,000 to 10,000 students marched against derogatory Bantu education. All of these initiatives, which continued through the 1980s and early 90s, as well as the violent reaction from South Africans, led to increased international attention directed toward oppressive apartheid policies, which intensified pressure against those in favor of this racist regime.

It is also important for me to mention that my father was in correspondence with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., in the United States, who, like my father, was also inspired by the nonviolent teachings of Gandhi. The two of them shared ideas about how Gandhi's strategic planning could be adapted to the particular circumstances that they were facing. King applied Gandhian resistance in his organizational strategies against the draconian policies in the southern United States.

"Love?" King would say, "I love you, but I do not like what you do!"

I was the direct beneficiary of King's and my father's philosophical grounding in nonviolence when I moved to Atlanta in the 1970s and began my work against apartheid. Thanks to Dr. King and those around him, the philosophical grounding of nonviolent social change was in the very air we breathed. With the support of Coretta Scott King and others, we were able to tap into that spirit in our anti-apartheid organization in the United States. When the apartheid regime came to an end in 1994, I was able to bring that same spirit into my work as a diplomat in Latin America, where it became clear that the desire to blend philosophies, as well as practical grassroots people's movements, went far beyond Africa and Asia and extended to all the peoples of the Americas.

The significant African organization against western colonialism and oppression combined with African resistance—whether in Africa, Asia, or in North and South America—indicates that the power of love has invariably made the difference and helped us to rid ourselves of institutional and individual oppressions. It is important that people from all over the world understand this important reality; "***Satyagraha/Ujamaa: Connecting Contemporary African-Asia Peacemaking and Nonviolence***" will help to instill this feeling as we continue in our efforts to make the world a more just and peaceful for all.

A Textual and Political Prologue

Peace, Nonviolence, and Power

Matt Meyer

As this book goes to press towards the end of the second decade of the century, militarism and violence are manifest in more of the world than ever before. At the same time, research on nonviolent tactics and theories, on peaceful processes for conflict reduction and resolution, on mediation and the role of civil society, seems to expand with great attention and gusto. Are key stakeholders just not listening? Or is something else at the root of our collective inability to create lasting and meaningful peace?

Although this volume does not seek to answer that expansive question, it offers some space for thought—challenges, examples, and gaps—specifically within the context of contemporary African and Asian studies. Our premise itself is not without controversy: that an examination of grassroots social movements of the past half-century alongside a discussion of the current moment on these two continents can provide a significant foundation for international comparisons, which might help us to understand the wider global questions of war and peace. It is not just that Africa is the cradle of ancient civilization and modern peacebuilding, or that Asia is the land of Gandhi, that mythologized "great soul" who is posed as the central figure of nonviolent philosophy and practice. We assert that little-known initiatives exist and continue to grow, which provides both hope and concrete possibilities for replication, modification, and best practices in building civil resistance in creative and successful ways. The essays contained herein, therefore, are intended to form a quilt or mosaic, which together will inspire further work and investigation with regard to peacebuilding and nonviolence through Africa, Asia, and beyond.

The origins of this book lie in the workings of the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), the foremost organization bringing together social scientists, professors, students, and practitioners from every corner of the planet. Although loosely held together through a network of regional

groupings, individual members (who may be voted onto a governing Council to ensure geographic diversity), and volunteer Secretaries-General, the IPRA has been distinguished for decades for its close cooperation and work within UNESCO, for its consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council, for its work with leading scholars including scores of Nobel laureates, and for its ongoing commitment to support of grassroots indigenous knowledge bases and production. The IPRA is organized primarily through content and discipline-oriented commissions, and much of the work of this book was originally presented as part of IPRA's Nonviolence Commission. In 2015 a conference in Abuja, Nigeria, held at the Parliament of the Economic Community of West African States and hosted by the African Peace Research and Education Association, brought together African scholars and scholars of African peacebuilding issues; the core essays contained in this book were first presented at that event.

The essential and critical role of co-editor Vidya Jain, a life-long specialist in Gandhian Studies and administrative leader of cutting-edge educational practice and college life in Jaipur, India, cannot be overstated. As co-convenor of the IPRA Nonviolence Commission and a leader of the Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association, her presence in Nigeria and in subsequent IPRA conferences held in Sierra Leone, Nepal, Malaysia, and elsewhere have laid the basis for the conversations that the essays in this book only begin and encourage. Nonviolent social change must not be viewed as an Indian, or Asian, or African phenomenon. Conversations and the sharing of best practices across the Global South, especially from the point of view of local change agents, must intensify as we are collectively called upon to sharpen our definitions of and redefine traditional concepts of nonviolence, constructive programs, and social justice for this century.

This book is organized into three broad sections, the first of which sets the scene by reviewing contemporary conflict and attempts at conflict resolution. From there we move to case studies centered on the African and Asian "giants" of the emerging BRICS socio-economic network: the growing coordination of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa as arbiters of a new era of global organization, where super-power imperial centers are both served and partially replaced by cooperative regional associates. Within an African-centered context, it was a logical choice to add Nigeria to this section of case studies given its economic, political, and cultural significance throughout the continent. The final section looks beyond individual nation-states, regions, and the current moment. Pan-African and Post-Gandhian ideas and developments are covered here: through some examples of cross-continental cooperation, some

suggestions of new ways of thinking about and building alternative societies, and even a manifesto for militant nonviolent action on climate. Our placing of poetry as bookends to the essays was done with a full intent and understanding that we have many ways in which we must learn to speak to one another.

It's worth noting that there is far from a singular ideological thread that binds the authors of this volume, or the associations they work in, together. Thus, one will find some quite radical interpretations of, and prognosis for, societal ills but then note elsewhere more conservative notions about the nature of contemporary history and events. We were clear from the outset that, like the open and diverse IPRA conferences and conversations, we would not limit the voices contained in this volume to a single approach. Perhaps, the most distinctive and common difference found within these pages is the way authors define "violence" and "nonviolence". The question of "renouncing violence", for example, is an assumed requirement by some, but not so much so by others. It is necessary to state here, however, that whatever the point of view of individual authors, we must all treat the data and conclusions using an even measure. Standing armies of national governments cannot be allowed to hold onto monopolies of power, while communities who bear the brunt of state violence are disarmed and left vulnerable to repression. But even this viewpoint is not so clearly stated, and perhaps not so clearly understood, in all the essays.

In much of our overall work, although this is not always the emphasis in every essay that appears in these pages, we try to avoid a focus on history as the province of "great men" or leaders-as-mythologized-figures, who have more to do with change than, say, material conditions. Peace studies itself, it should be noted, has had scholars who focus primarily on class and economic constructs, but there is no consensus in the field about the application of liberal, neoliberal, socialist, communist, anarchist, or other approaches. This, then, can "muddy the waters" regarding how authors use the term "nonviolence". Some, for example, see nonviolence as a philosophical system and personal lifestyle: believing that nonviolence is greatly diminished unless understood and practised in this holistic manner. For others, nonviolent social change is a tactic, or perhaps a strategy, that can be used within campaigns or even as guiding principles for effective change, but not as an exclusive ideological concept. Some write of "revolutionary nonviolence" to distinguish a set of practices which eschew liberal and conservative policies or a short-term reformism. Others think of all nonviolence as inherently revolutionary, while still others believe that no true revolution can take place without some level of

armed conflict. While we do not attempt to provide uniformity throughout these essays, we did try (not always with complete success) to be clear and consistent that our goals are not simply for more peaceful functioning of a state apparatus that serves to uphold repressive and reactionary regimes—or even to uphold more liberal regimes. Still, we are not all clear enough (linguistically at least, but likely also politically) on the extreme violence contained in almost every modern social status quo. The role of state coercion, and of power imbalances between states and communities, are also questions in need of greater review and debate.

On a personal note, recent efforts to understand revolution and nonviolence—in a very practical and specific context—bring us to the question of "insurrection": the tactics and strategies required to actually realize revolutionary social change. The "bourgeois democracy" found in some quasi-socialist experiments may be greatly preferable to fascism, but cannot be considered "nonviolent" in any significant way. Cooperation with bourgeois leaders, whose very presence upholds the social inequalities at the core of the worst violence in the world, cannot be seen—even, and especially, by nonviolent adherents—as more palatable than cooperation with guerrilla leaders engaged in armed action designed to liberate a people. Perhaps this dynamic is nowhere more striking than in Western Sahara of Northwest Africa, where the Polisario Front has been steadily moving towards reliance on nonviolent civil resistance as the core means of achieving their long-sought freedom. A 2018 conference examining the possibilities for such a struggle in the context of the Moroccan occupation ended with some of us invited to meet the President, who is recognized by the African Union but without a seat at the United Nations as a bona-fide nation. Is it okay for a pacifist to be ill-at-ease shaking hands with a man wearing military fatigues, fighting staunchly (and now nonviolently) against decades of draconian colonialism, but be comfortable shaking hands with a suit-and-tie business representative of the global north who may use the language of nonviolence but is actually responsible (directly or indirectly) for some of that draconian devastation?

This book does not begin to answer that question. What it does do, however, is bring together a chorus of voices those on the frontlines, who are working to analyze and effect change as best they can. It is up to us now to engage with these voices, to broaden the implied conversations, and to rebuild the world from the bottom up!

* * * * *

Editors' note of acknowledgement:

This book would not have even begun to be possible without the copy-editing skills, careful eye, sharp mind, critical commentary, and encouragement of U.S. based solidarity activist and poet Steve Bloom. We are also grateful to Soumanou Goura of Benin, for his assistance in the editing and organizing process. Copy-editor Joanne Parsons provided late-stage cleaning up of many portions of the manuscript in dire need of such detailed work; we are grateful for her keen eye and dedicated spirit. We also than the entire team at Cambridge Scholars Press, who helped guide us through several stages of this process—from initial idea through to competition. Their professionalism, patience, and general interest in the work contained herein has helped us stay the course. We are also grateful to all our colleagues at Peace and Justice Studies Association, who introduced us to CSP and invited us to be part of their book series, and to the International Peace Research Association, who continued to provide consistent settings for critical new thinking and collaborative new engagement.

Finally, needless to say, a "thanks" is also in order to all the contributors of every section of this book. We remain inspired by your words and look forward to our future work together.

INTRODUCTION

SATYAGRAHA AND UJAMMA, PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT

IBRAHIM SEAGA SHAW

The central theme of our most urgent work, connecting peace and development, is a concern that runs throughout this book. It was also a key priority of the 2016 conference held in Sierra Leone by the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), and was one of the main reasons I decided to run for the Secretary-General post within that organization. For peace researchers, and all those concerned with global issues of justice, human rights, development, and peace, it is noteworthy that neither IPRA nor many other international organizations have held their general conferences on the continent of Africa. It is really important—both for the people of Africa and for the people of the world—that we bring our work and our messages to everybody's home. Bringing this work "closer to home" might mean redefining our concepts, broadening our perspectives, and building bridges where they didn't exist before. But, without this building, we will never understand the true meaning of peace, much less be able to practice and plan for it.

In Sierra Leone, IPRA was able to examine the post-conflict challenges faced by people living through 21st century war, violence, and disease. Participants were also able to witness how overcoming these challenges can mean great advances for a people. Finally, as a vibrant network with contacts on every continent, we can and did experience how the global community is able to work in tandem: a solidarity that is not one-directional but which fosters the ability for diverse people to learn from one another and re-build together. We cannot simply talk, or even just study or write about peace, if we do not deeply understand what has happened to those most affected by modern war. Without communicating with one another directly and frankly, we will not be able to solve the crisis of our times. Bringing people together like this—at conferences as in Sierra Leone or in books such as this one—may not be easy, but it must be

done.

When people talk about research, sometimes we limit ourselves just to the abstract. We do not even try to touch all of the places and issues that might be affected by our work. That is why we must also listen to the voices of the activists and the petitioners. Our colleagues in non-governmental organizations need to be involved and must inform our studies because without practice, our work will not grow. Practical outcomes must come out of our research, such as the new media, new materials, and the new approaches to peacemaking discussed in this volume. Our research and the practices we influence must ultimately lead to new policies in order to shape new ways of managing the world around us. We are not just looking to end war and the negative peace as discussed by our founder Johan Galtung. [1] We must build a world without gender violence, domestic violence, cultural violence, hate speech, and the marginalization of young people (all the ways in which people are oppressed in modern society).

Peace researchers and academics must work harder to provide a concrete service to all those struggling for an end to injustice and for long-lasting peace. I commend the editors of, and the contributors to, this book for helping to connect African and Asian scholar/practitioners. I challenge us all to recommit ourselves to building a better tomorrow.

Notes

1. Johan Galtung was born in 1930 in Oslo, Norway. He is a mathematician, sociologist, political scientist and the founder of the discipline of Peace Studies. He has served as a Professor of Peace Studies at universities including Columbia (New York), Oslo, Berlin, Belgrade, Paris, Santiago de Chile, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Sichuan, Ritsumeikan (Japan), Princeton (New Jersey), Hawaii, Tromsoe, Bern, Alicante (Spain), and dozens of others on all continents. He founded the International Peace Research Institute, Oslo (1959), the world's first academic research center focused on peace studies, and the influential *Journal of Peace Research* (1964). For more information, visit https://www.transcend.org/galtung/.

PREFACE

BRINGING TOGETHER SATYAGRAHA AND UJAMMA

MATT MEYER AND VIDYA JAIN

Both physicist and social scientists now agree that time and space are more fluid, malleable, and subjective constructs than has previously been imagined. Yet, when asked about the proper length of training for a satyagrahi (a disciplined and devoted practitioner of nonviolence in pursuit of total revolution), Gandhian devotees always suggest that it takes a lifetime. One must plan to make peace and justice one's lifework because how else would one achieve success.

Social change activists, academics, and pedagogues talk, write, and push for change whatever the historic time period. But there can be little doubt that the second decade of the twenty-first century has given rise to a rapid rate of intense movement building and powerful attempts to create a full social transformation. The crisis of capitalism has generated great economic and political turmoil, as well as environmental devastation thereby affecting every corner of our planet. In addition to the heightened oppression and repression that inevitably arises in its midst, we have also seen tremendous opportunities for grassroots social change practitioners to intensify their efforts by creatively pressing for a lasting peace centered wholly on justice and pursed largely through nonviolent means.

Although there is much experience related to this dynamic emerging from the slums of a divided Europe and the favelas of Latin America (for example, Brazilians protesting in record numbers when the world tried to watch its Olympic games oblivious to the situation), this book is deliberately focused on new movements, as well as new questions and answers, created by a new generation of peace practitioners in Asia and Africa. While not officially sponsored or published by the International Peace Research Association (IPRA), there is no getting around the fact that both co-editors are, or have been, IPRA Council members: both editors were active in the IPRA Nonviolence Commission (with Dr. Jain

serving as convener); leaders in IPRA's regional associations (the Asia-Pacific Peace Research Association (APPRA) and North America's Peace and Justice Studies Association) and served as co-conveners of the nonviolence commission presentations held at the inaugural conference of the African Peace Research and Education Association, held in Abuja, Nigeria in April 2015 at the Parliament building of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). Indeed, many of the papers in this volume were originally presented in preliminary form at that august venue. Although the conference was marred by logistical and fiscal irregularities, the high level of scholarship and the deep devotion to the causes of peace and justice evidenced, especially by young scholars and practitioners in attendance, was a testimony to this period of renewed resistance and creative engagement in social change. We are pleased that this volume emphasizes that positive energy, spirit, and ongoing commitment.

In addition to the young scholars published here, we reached out to faithful colleagues and friends whose work has long been on the cutting edge of theory and practice in Asia and Africa. Thus, voices of key APPRA leaders can be found, along with the leading peace education specialist from China, post-Gandhi adherents of nonviolent revolution in India, and insightful specialists from the Philippines, Thailand, and elsewhere. The perspectives of the Pan African Nonviolence and Peacebuilding Network (PANPEN), who sponsored a panel in Abuja and brought together representatives from over fifty African countries in 2014 (the year before the Abuja conference), can be found between these covers alongside introductory remarks from a Ugandan of Indian descent long known for building bridges between the peoples of the Global South. A PANPEN co-chair from South Sudan writes of their decades-long work to lay the foundations for nonviolent social change. This contribution is made more poignant by the exacerbated conflict in that region and the recent reports of flourishing Peace Studies and academic activism that address local issues as well as the "climate-conflict nexus". From the independent Ahfad University for Women in the north to the University of Juba in the south, this activism, like so many of the essays presented here, intentionally crosses boundaries—ideological, religious, socio-economic, and governmental divisions—to forge a new unity and to share best practices among those most affected by violence and injustice at grassroots level.

We have divided this book into four basic sections. Our introductory material is designed to set the tone and explain the provenance of the project. We have attempted to set a tone that underscores the rationale, process, and structure of this work by placing poetry at the helm. This

comes from a young duo, who have African and Asian origins and who live in the diasporic internationalist shores of New York City and their poetry merges their messages with fellow vocalists from both continents. The first formatted section sets the scene with examples of conflict and conflict resolution in both regions. These essays document the contemporary case studies of Algeria, Kenya, the Philippines, Central African Republic, Tanzania, and Burundi. The second section provides a similar set of case studies, this time focusing on both the role of civil society and on those countries which make up the new elite: the BRICS axis of Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa which, as BRICS expert Patrick Bond articulates, make up a sub-imperialist bloc. By including essays on and from India, China, South Africa, and also Nigeria—omitted from the official club, but very much an active part of new and renewed attempts at serving imperial designs—this section seeks to review the state of movements and organizations, as well as the possibilities for peacebuilding and resistance in these crucial countries of, but not necessarily for, the Global South.

The final section provides overview essays which are less country or region specific and present, in diverse ways, some of the new thinking and action coming out of Africa, Asia, and elsewhere in order to challenge inadequate old dynamics that have not brought about the much hoped for liberatory changes. Here, a word on the title of this volume might be instructive as it indicates a vision of a world where people dedicated to "satyagraha" (power based on truth, soul, and love rather than greed, individualism, and personal profit) are merged with a Swahili word popularized by Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Nyerere was the man who, years after observing the complications of someone being known as a "great soul" elected to have his honorary title "Mwalimu" (the East African word simply designating one as a "teacher"), instead of the usual "Mahatma". Nyerere attempted to spread Ujamma (village-based socialist practices) throughout his country, and remained steadfast in believing that the core concept behind that word had never been given a fair try in East Africa or elsewhere. Satyagraha/Ujamma is, therefore, an ode to a cross-cultural South-based transformation of a new kind that places a people's perspective at the heart of any movement for social change. It is also borrowed from our colleagues calling out, in the first chapter of the final section and elsewhere, for a shutdown of business as usual in all the corporate centers, which literally fuel the devastation of life on our fragile but resilient planet.

As we learn of groups like WoMin—an African gender-based alliance focused on the issue of mineral extraction which has recently brought

together women from over a dozen countries working on issues of land, natural resources, environmental and climate justice, and women's rights—we know that a "Satyagraha/Ujamma" perspective is possible. One need only read the newspaper to know that it is necessary. We believe that this book, in its linking of ideas, authors, readers, and continents, can show us some steps forward in the world we must build together. We are proud of our academic work and new scholarship, but the crisis we face is much more than an academic matter. We look forward to your reaction to the words contained in these pages but even more to the actions, which these words will hopefully inspire.

I CHOOSE PEACE

YALINIDREAM AND JENDOG LONEWOLF
(BROOKLYN DREAMWOLF)

Simply put, I choose PEACE because common sense tells me that war kills innocent people...but, then again, my Mom always said "Common sense ain't common"

I choose Peace almost as much as Peace chose me
I had my own rages that soured faces and stopped pages of my own story from turning
But now, Peace knows me...because I know Peace...and
I spread Peace cuz it's the fair thing to do

So, I choose Peace for violence on Urban streets
I choose Peace for little kids who get beat
I choose Peace because war is bull-SH Shhhh
War kills.
...and war-bucks keep the rich rich
I choose Peace for the government's war on our health
for the mentally challenged battling Self

I choose Peace for every soldier who found out
they killed for NOTHING but bloody oil, money, land, and power
for unarmed citizens of over 60 countries who didn't choose war
for victims and survivors of police brutality

I choose Peace because the so-called "War On Terror"
will ***NOT*** go after itself

I choose peace for folks detained in cells
While poli-tricks commend corporate criminals

I choose peace for workers in factories

For prisoners without families
For children robbed of purity
By marauders cloaked in liberty

I choose peace because of blood spilled by false democracies
Because of predators preaching, posing as priests

I choose Peace because our vibration,
like Light, travels for eons throughout this Universe……..
because each Soul is destined for sovereignty
Standing against human-made suffering is *our* responsibility

We are *all* part Star Dust.
We are all meant to shine
It is not Light that holds another in shadow.
I choose Peace because
Light magnifies Light.

LOOKING TO AFRICA FOR PEACE

PAN AFRICAN NONVIOLENCE AND THE NEED TO MOVE BEYOND MYTHOLOGIZED HISTORIES

MATT MEYER

This presentation was first made as the opening of the plenary session on nonviolence, at the inaugural conference of the Africa Peace Research and Education Association (AFPREA) held in the Parliamentary building of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja, Nigeria, April 2015. It provides an overview of contemporary nonviolence in the Pan African context: including Nkrumah's "positive action" and the independence of Ghana, the hidden history of nonviolence in the armed struggle for the liberation of Mozambique, today's movements to free South Africa and the continent from neocolonialism and neoliberalism. In evaluating the false dichotomies often presented between revolutionary forces utilizing diverse tactics, it hopes to suggest that a new way of looking at Africa is needed for the entire international peace community: since the Africa of war, violence, poverty, and devastation is a mythologized misrepresentation based on colonialism and racism, while the Africa of unquenchable, creative struggles for peace and justice provides a true hope for all humanity.

There is a tragic assassination many know about but few fully recognize and since this vicious serial killer is still very much on the loose—especially targeting radical and revolutionary leaders—it is imperative that we work harder to end his reign of terror. African activists have been particularly vulnerable. The best-documented victim, of course, is the American of African descent who proclaimed that the US, approaching a "spiritual death", was in dire need of a true revolution. The man's name is Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Many commemorate his 1968 passing, but the more pervasive, devious, damaging, and preventable

death is the posthumous assassination of King which, starting with August 29 1963 (the date of the famous "March on Washington"), generates a myth that relegates him to icon status. Beloved Nelson Mandela also receives the same treatment.

This attitude began with Mohandas Gandhi; a man whose radical ideas might, in fact, be useful today if only they could be understood in the context of an imperfect 20th century lawyer trying new techniques within an Indian movement instead of a man stretched beyond recognition into a saint-like father-figure who paved a path of personal and political revolution. Even if *every one* of his ideas were good enough to fit *all* human situations (which they were not even close to doing), we really do not need that kind of patriarch.

It is likely that no one's ideas can ever have such a wide application, making the icon-creation project more universally dangerous, even when it is not being used by an entrenched upper class, caste, and race so firmly, and obviously, fighting to maintain the status quo and strengthen its own ever-expanding lust for more power, land, money, and influence. Taking the real lives of good men and transforming them into broad unobtainable stories of greatness does not even make good myths. Instead it robs these men of what was really was good about their lives. Mandela, King, and Gandhi in larger-than-life myth form (and other men as well because, incidentally, very few women are given this treatment) are *not* made easier for kids and non-intellectuals to understand. In the erasure of their errors and highlighting only what is palatable to the establishment ("nonviolence is essential in every single circumstance", "compromise and reconciliation are values above all others", etc.), the messages of these myths become easily consumed by masses of people.

These messages are: "You can never lead social change movements because you are not a good enough person. Your critiques of capitalism, or thoughts about using violence (even if only against property or in confrontational language) are not helpful". Thus, the myth—which Gandhi sadly enabled by allowing himself to be called "Great Soul" (Mahatma)—in fact turns these potentially useful men into something they were not: counter-revolutionaries. Only by plucking them from their icon-cocoons, thereby pulling out the truly insightful and radical critiques they espoused, can we make use of their many contributions.

That is why the work of Ashwin Desai is so very vital at this time for South Africa, for India, and for the world. Gandhi's warts were not pretty, and must be examined closely so they do not continue to fester and develop in worse forms in tomorrow's movements.

Only a revolution that looks deeply at the role of capital and

neoliberalism and understands how caste, white supremacy, and patriarchy bolster the diversified imperialisms of the current moment, can meet the needs required by our future struggles. Gandhi, King, Mandela, and many others have much we can learn from, but only if we see them in the historical context in which they actually lived with all the contradictions they grappled with and, occasionally, failed to recognize. Gandhi was both a crafty anti-colonial strategist and an occasional apologist for British imperialism, while Mandela led the fight against apartheid but succumbed to some of the pressures of neoliberalism. These facts are hard enough to swallow in the very hard times we live in. Let us not allow our struggles to be made more difficult by blinding ourselves to nuances and seeing only the good or bad in the history lessons we need to learn.

* * * * *

Today, when many think about the concept of "revolution" they think of Latin America, including:

- Cuba and a re-energized population, who have finally made the US back down
- Venezuela and the continuation of the eco-socialist Bolivarian experiment

Today, when many think about the concept "nonviolence" they still think of Asia, including:

- India, the land of Gandhi
- Tibet and the Dalai Lama
- Nobel laureate, Aung San Suu Kyi

But when AFRICA comes to mind in the Global North even our colleagues in peace research think of a big piece of land—maybe a country, maybe a continent— that is confusingly organized and suffers from:

- poverty and/or corruption,
- war and/or random violence,
- failed states and/or poorly managed resources.

Now it is not enough, as peace scholars and activists within Africa or concerned scholars outside of the continent, to simply correct or repudiate

these misconceptions. As IPRA founder and former secretary-general Elise Boulding noted in a remark still relevant today: "It is time to begin learning from Africa—not just about it." After two decades of working with African civil society groups in every region of this vast, extremely diverse, and extraordinarily rich continent—rich in both mineral resources and extraordinary people—it is clear to many of us in the burgeoning field of African peace studies and development that this continent should be seen as a, if not *the*, leading source for examples of advanced, sensitive, and highly developed revolutionary nonviolence on the planet today.

In order to better understand how to analyze, learn from, and support these examples some basic myths about nonviolence and social change must be dispelled or updated to form 21st century conceptualizations of the tasks ahead. In the field of nonviolence, for example, most scholars and practitioners are still stuck in what I will call a "Martin Luther King/Mohandas Gandhi" complex which does little justice to those men, even less so to their legacies and the movements they were part of.

In Martin's case, for example, so many people in the US and around the world are still stuck in the debates concerned with the strategies and tactics of Martin Luther King vs. Malcolm X (nonviolence vs. armed self-defense). However, this, in fact, is a largely false dichotomy, which is not really about what these two men were or what they stood for and it is made more problematic as their politics, strategies, and movements moved closer and closer to one another. *Perhaps*, if one was a mature activist or researcher in 1959 or 1963, or even 1967, one might have felt a need to choose between Martin and Malcolm. Today, however, any reasoned and careful assessment of their work suggests that our task is to refuse to choose. We must attempt, instead, to understand that the concepts of revolutionary nonviolence run deeply through the most mature aspects of the philosophical contributions of both men. Also, unless we reexamine and redefine the concepts of revolution and nonviolence as inseparable forces, rather than as dichotomized opposites or at best an uncomfortable mash-up, we will be doomed to repeat past history and rewrite tired old academic tracts.

I wish to say a few words about Gandhi before returning to Africa. Many contemporary Gandhians will proudly agree that the man was indeed a revolutionary activist but few know about the work of Jayaprakash Narayan and Narayan Desai (who passed away recently) and the pioneering concept they called "total revolution" as *the* most fitting descriptor of contemporary nonviolent direct action. "Total revolution"—now there would be a good interdisciplinary academic department!