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Gandhi and Indian Nationalism in South Africa

— I —

Satyagraha in South Africa: Principles, Practice and Possibilities

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Introduction

In his book *Satyagraha in South Africa,* first published in India in 1928,[1] Gandhi set out in very clear terms the essentials and substance of satyagraha, but it is also through the newspaper *Indian Opinion* that we can understand satyagraha's core values since Gandhi took great pains to explain these to readers as the campaign unfolded between 1906 and 1914. Gandhi's philosophy of resistance has been recognised in the literature as one that drew on various traditions, teachings and practices in the west and east.[2] It was nonetheless, as Bhiku Parekh has argued, a "highly original and creative contribution to theories of social change and political action".[3] While there have been lucid expositions by academics about satyagraha, this article seeks to historicise its development. Research about the South African satyagraha struggle has largely focused on strategies of mobilisation that Gandhi adopted, the class-based support of the movement and, more recently, its appeal to various cultural and religious groupings.[4] This article focuses rather on the principles or essence of satyagraha as they manifested themselves in the course of the struggle. It seeks further to analyse the extent to which satyagraha, in its essence, survived in the period 1915-1952 after Gandhi's departure from South Africa. In this context the ideas and work of Manilal Gandhi are significant, for it was he who took over Gandhi's *Indian Opinion* and in the course of these decades specifically advocated the application of satyagraha in the total meaning of the word. A focus on satyagraha after Gandhi provides an opportunity to evaluate the transmission of Gandhi's ideas in a different time and context. The article finally makes some conclusions about the relevance of satyagraha to some contemporary struggles in South Africa.

Principles of Satyagraha

The South African struggle began in the Transvaal in 1906 against a draft law requiring Indians to register and provide their fingerprints on the required certificate.

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1 Navajivan Publishing House, Ahmedabad In this article the revised second edition, 1951 is used

2 D Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*: *the Global Legacy of His Ideas* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 2003), pp 39-65

3 B Parekh, *Gandhi: a Very Short Introduction* (OUP, Oxford, 1997), p 73

4 See M Swan, *Gandhi: the South African Experience* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1985); U S Mesthrie, "From Advocacy to Mobilisation: Indian Opinion, 1903-1914", *in* L Switzer (ed), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1997), pp 99-126; S Bhana and G Vahed, *The Making of a Political Reformer: Gandhi in South Africa, 1893-1914* (Manohar Publishers, New Delhi, 2005)

Over the course of the eight-year struggle new issues were added, such as the immigration laws which restricted Indians' free movement across the Natal-Transvaal borders, the three-pound tax that Indian workers in Natal had to pay following freedom from indenture and the non-recognition of marriages concluded by Hindu or Muslim rites. Gandhi explained the search for a new word to describe the unfolding South African struggle. Passive resistance, he believed, did not fully indicate "the new principle that had come into being"; "it gave rise to confusion and it appeared shameful to permit this great struggle to be known only by an English name".[5] The term "passive resistance" was used until early 1908 when the result of a competition run in *Indian Opinion* for a new word was announced.

After Gandhi had chided readers for their lack of thought and interest in language, he announced the word "satyagraha" as the most suitable. Maganlal Gandhi, a key resident of Phoenix, the communal farm Gandhi bought in Natal in 1904, had suggested the word "sadagraha" which was then adapted to "satyagraha". Gandhi explained that "sadagraha" simply meant "firmness in a good cause". Gandhi's modification elevated Truth to being the central force. Satyagraha was "the Force which is born of Truth and Love or non-violence".[6] Truth may be interpreted as the voice of the conscience whereby individuals responded to an inner call to resist what was clearly a wrong, an injustice. Laws were passed, but these need not be right and fair and one had to obey one's conscience above all. Extracts from the American trancendentalist Henry Thoreau's essay on civil disobedience, published in *Indian Opinion,* provided support for such a position.[7] Leo Tolstoy's *The Kingdom of God is Within You,* which Gandhi had read since the 1890s, provided a clear exposition of the force of Truth. Tolstoy emphasised that while government may have all the seeming strength of organisation, it could succumb before Truth. He created the image of the light of one candle being passed on to several and argued: "This light need only burn, and like the wax before the face of the fire, all this seemingly so powerful organization will waste away."[8]

If Truth was an important principle to uphold, satyagraha also invoked the support of God. Religion was an important ingredient in the struggle – the very first resolution to resist in August 1906 was taken as a vow before God. Truth also had its equation with God. Gandhi argued for the need for faith: "he who leaves everything to God can never know defeat."[9] The cause for which satyagrahis fought for was "just" and "religion forms its motive power".[10] Gandhi writes of the final phase of resistance which began in Phoenix from 1913 as "holy", a "pilgrimage", a "religious war".[11]

Self-suffering and self-sacrifice were primary principles of satyagraha. The satyagrahi intended no harm to come to the opponent. Self-suffering entailed going to jail, losing one's wealth and the ultimate sacrifice was one's life. Gandhi informed the *Rand Daily Mail* in 1907 that the movement was really "a policy of communal

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5 Gandhi, *Satyagraha,* p 102

6 Gandhi, *Satyagraha,* p 102; *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi VIII* (hereafter *CWMG*), 1908 (Government of India, New Delhi), pp 22-23; *Indian Opinion* (hereafter *IO*), 11 January 1908 (Gujarati, hereafter G) and pp 131-132; *IO*, 7 March 1908 (G)

7 *IO,* 26 October 1907

8 *IO,* 5 March 1910

9 *CWMG IX* (1908-1909), pp 225-227; *IO*, 29 May 1909 (G)

10 *IO*, 25 September 1909 (editorial)

11 *CWMG XII* (1913-1914), pp 510, 513; *Golden Number of Indian Opinion*

suffering".[12] The capacity to suffer was in fact a weapon, or to use Gandhi's word, "the sword" of the satyagrahi.[13] He urged readers of *Indian Opinion* in 1908: "The more we suffer, the earlier we shall be free." Suffering would "tire out the government" and would give individuals "real worth".[14] It is through this, rather than physical force, that the opponent would be conquered. Physical force never remained an option for the satyagrahi. I have argued elsewhere that it was Gandhi's personal witnessing of the violence in the British suppression of the Bambatha rebellion in 1906 which ruled out in his mind any appreciation of the efficacy of violence. All it produced was a further cycle of violence. Gandhi wrote of how twelve Africans were put to death by cannon fire for killing two whites and how those that participated in this execution themselves were killed in another skirmish. "Such is the law of God," Gandhi proclaimed.[15]

Gandhi worried about the extent of self-suffering that satyagrahis had to endure during the struggle in South Africa. While he held up many examples of suffering as worthy of emulation, the death of Hurbatsingh, the seventy-year-old labourer in 1914, provoked the most soul-searching. Gandhi resolved this inner dilemma by reflecting on the value of self-sacrifices:

> Truly is it said that without yagna [sacrifice] this world would perish But yagna is not merely kindling wood and pouring ghee and other things into it This may purify the air, but surely it will not purify the spirit When we offer up our bones to burn like wood, pouring out our blood like ghee in order that they burn, and sacrifice our flesh to the flames, that alone will be true yagna, and by such sacrifice will the earth be sustained Without such yagna, such sacrifice of self, it cannot be sustained [16]

While Gandhi never offered fasting as a form of satyagraha during the political struggle from 1906 to 1914, he had begun to use it on family and residents at Phoenix. He undertook a one-day fast in June 1913 at Phoenix when some young students, including his youngest son Devadas, refused to confess to a misdemeanour. Gandhi slapped himself in frustration because of his son's attitude; his self-suffering produced the necessary confessions. His real big fast, for seven full days, occurred in July 1913 when his son Manilal was caught out having an extra-marital relationship with a female teacher. The fast was meant to influence Manilal's future behaviour, but it was also an act of penance for Gandhi himself who took responsibility for the young peoples' serious lapse. Later in April 1914 Gandhi undertook a fourteen-day fast as a result of a repeated misdemeanour at Phoenix. The effect of the fast on his son Manilal was significant – he feared for the rest of his life to give cause to another fast by his father.[17]

In the struggle, several satyagrahis, including Gandhi's sons Manilal and Ramdas, went on hunger strikes in prison in 1913 to secure improved conditions.[18] The origins of these must be sought in Gandhi's fasts at Phoenix which were also

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12 *IO*, 6 July 1907
13 *CWMG VIII* (1907), p 401; *IO*, 30 November 1907
14 *CWMG XI* (1908-1909), pp 2, 6; *IO*, 5 September 1908
15 See U Dhupelia-Mesthrie, "Gandhi in 1906: Towards a Critical Appreciation", opening address to symposium on "Gandhi in His Times and Ours", Wiser, University of the Witwatersrand, 20 September 2006, pp 9-10
16 *CWMG XII* 1913-1914, p 319; Letter to *IO*, post 5 January 1914
17 U Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner? The Life of Gandhi's Son Manilal* (Kwela Books, Cape Town, 2004), pp 108ff , 128
18 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner?,* pp 113-114

observed by several members of the community, including Manilal himself. It was only in India in the 1930s and 1940s that Gandhi employed fasting to convert a broader public to his views. Thus fasting becomes a key part of satyagraha. Hardiman and Parekh have argued that Gandhi's fasts were used with circumspection. They were directed at converting those with whom one had some form of relationship and emotional attachment. His fasts were thus directed more at the people of India than at the British. The goals of the fast were always clearly set out and did not demand the unthinkable.[19] They are largely correct, since the fasts were aimed at resolving issues affecting the depressed classes and also at stopping Hindu-Muslim animosities. Yet Gandhi did employ the fast against the rulers – this is clearly evident in the fast in 1939 when Gandhi protested against the ruler of Rajkot reneging on a promise made to the nationalist leader Vallabhbhai Patel and he did expect the Viceroy to intervene. His fast of 1943 was directed against the Viceroy's charge that Congress and Gandhi should take responsibility for the violence that erupted in India as a result of the resumption of civil disobedience. The Viceroy, Linlithgow, clearly felt that Gandhi was attempting "political blackmail".[20]

In the satyagraha struggle in South Africa a central element of Gandhi's philosophy emerged: the capacity of the satyagrahi to compromise. The decision in 1908 to voluntarily take out the necessary permit with fingerprinting was a compromise that Gandhi had to work hard to explain since opposition to fingerprinting had been the crux of the campaign. Gandhi wove a delicate argument defining the difference between a voluntary act and compliance by legislation.[21] Compromise was a necessary part of Gandhi's "dialogic resistance" and, in later stages of the struggle in India, Gandhi cemented his commitment to this. He explained: "All my life through, the very insistence on truth has taught me to appreciate the beauty of compromise. I saw in later life that this spirit was an essential part of satyagraha."[22] The compromise in South Africa was an opportunity to escape a stalemate and give the state a chance, but the state's failure to repeal the legislation after voluntary fingerprinting led to a ready resumption of resistance.

Gandhi also did not approve of taking advantage of the opponent's weaknesses. At the end of 1913, Gandhi was contemplating yet another march in protest against the membership of the government-appointed commission to look into the 1913 strike. Apart from bowing to pressure from Gopal Krishna Gokhale, the Indian nationalist leader, Gandhi also could not take advantage of the government's position when it was faced with the strike of white railway workers. The reaction of a secretary of Jan Smuts, minister in the Union cabinet, to this decision provided Gandhi with validation for his position. Gandhi provides an account of the official's conversation:

> I do not like your people, and do not care to assist them at all But what am I to do? You help us in our days of need How can we lay hands upon you? I often wish you took to violence like the English strikers, and then we would know at once how to dispose of you But you will not injure even the enemy You desire victory by self-

19 Hardiman, *Gandhi,* p 51; Parekh, *Gandhi,* pp 72-73

20 See R Gandhi, *Mohandas: a True Story of a Man, his People and an Empire* (Penguin, New Delhi, 2006), pp 440, 500-501

21 For a recent analysis of Gandhi and fingerprinting, see K Brekinridge, "Gandhi, Smuts and the Origins of Satyagraha", unpublished paper, 2008

22 Hardiman, *Gandhi*, p 52

> suffering alone and never transgress your self-imposed limits of courtesy and chivalry And that is what reduces us to sheer helplessness [23]

Gandhi's decisions did not often sit well with people and he had considerable difficulty explaining the compromise of 1908. This led to a further important principle of satyagraha: how to relate to one's opponents without hatred and loathing. Opponents were not only the government, but could emerge from within the community. The violent attack on Gandhi by the Pathan, Mir Alim, in protest against the compromise provided Gandhi with an opportunity to reflect on what reaction this action merited. In an account for readers of *Indian Opinion* soon thereafter, Gandhi explained: "As I came to, I got up with a smile. In my mind there was not the slightest anger or hatred for the assailants."[24] Here was a clear impress of Christ's Sermon on the Mount which Gandhi had read in the 1890s: "love your enemies, bless them that curse you … forgive men their trespasses."[25] The most effective way, he argued, to respond to an attack is "to accept blows with courage":

> We see everywhere that the force we exert will be wasted if it does not meet with any resistance at all … If someone swears at me and I do not swear back, he will soon become silent, having exhausted himself The same is true of a man who uses violence to attack another It is my belief that this attitude and endurance cannot be cultivated in a day I think it requires more courage to bear up with violence to one's person …
>
> If we want to be satyagrahis, we must have courage to range ourselves against the Government or our own community, if necessary, and courage consists in being fearless We must be fearless about everything We must have no fear of violence to our person or of loss of money We may even lose the good opinion of others, we may let everything go But we must not allow truth to forsake us This and this alone is fearlessness [26]

As for himself, Gandhi wrote: "On reflection, I feel that we fear death needlessly. I believe that I have not known such fear for a long time now. And I have grown more fearless after this incident."[27]

Yet while arguing for a non-violent response, Gandhi did not exclude a violent response. He provided a hierarchy of preferred response. He urged that rather than being a coward, if one did not have as yet the courage to accept a beating, then at the least one needed to learn to defend oneself physically. In the order of things, fearlessness and a non-violent response were the highest goal to attain but cowardice was probably the worst trait one could have – it was worse than physically retaliating.[28]

Yet by 1914 Gandhi could not sanction the action of some Indian workers who had retaliated with sticks and stones during the strike in Natal. These incidents occurred on the north-coast sugar estates. During his farewell addresses, Gandhi spoke to a large gathering of workers at Verulam. He took a firm line as a report of this meeting indicates. He also underlined his belief in the power of self-suffering:

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23 Gandhi, *Satyagraha*, pp 292-295
24 *CWMG VIII (ebook)* (1908), p 154; *IO*, 22 February 1908 (G)
25 Louis Fisher, *The Life of Mahatma Gandhi* (Granada Publishing, London, 1982), p 53
26 *CWMG VIII (ebook)* (1908), pp 329-330; *IO*, 23 May 1908 (G)
27 *CWMG VIII (ebook)* (1908), p 154; *IO*, 22 February 1908 (G)
28 *CWMG VIII*, pp 328-329; *IO*, 23 May 1908 (G)

> He did not care that provocation had been offered to them or how much they had retaliated with their sticks or with stones, or had burned the sugar cane – that was not Passive Resistance, and, if he had been in their midst, he would have repudiated them entirely and allowed his own head to be broken rather than permit them to use a single stick against their opponents And he wanted them to believe him when he told them that Passive Resistance pure and simple was an infinitely finer weapon than all the sticks and gunpowder put together They might strike work, but they might compel nobody else to strike work, and, if, as a result of their strike, they were sentenced to be imprisoned, whipped, or to both, they must suffer even unto death – that was Passive Resistance, nothing else … if therefore, he was indentured to Mr Marshall Campbell, or Mr Sanders, or any friends about there, and if he found that he was being persecuted or not receiving justice, in their case he would not even go to the Protector, he would sit tight and say: "My master, I want justice or I won't work Give me food if you want to; otherwise, I sit here hungry and thirsty " And he assured them that the hardest, stoniest heart would be melted [29]

Gandhi had come far in developing the essential principles of satyagraha. In 1907, he, did use coercion to ensure compliance with non-registration. This came not from threats of violence but from shaming and naming those who registered and by referring to them in demeaning ways in *Indian Opinion*. This coercive strategy had all but disappeared by 1909.[30]

By 1909, Gandhi believed that training was crucial for satyagraha, for how did one cultivate the necessary fearlessness that was required for going to jail and how did one develop the capacity for endurance? Years of discipline were necessary. The essential qualities of a satyagrahi were a love for the truth, fearlessness, a disregard for wealth, comforts and good food, a willingness to lessen family attachments and an overall trust in God.[31] Satyagraha was thus bound with a philosophy of life – it was a lifestyle. He believed that it was the way of life at Tolstoy Farm, founded by him and Hermann Kallenbach in 1910 just outside Johannesburg, that really developed the capacity for resistance. Once that closed in 1911 and many of the residents moved to Phoenix, they brought a new spirit to Phoenix. As Gandhi explained: "to tell the truth, the education in Phoenix was for the most part a preparation for satyagraha … thus the third struggle began with the residents of Phoenix."[32] He also attributed the prolonged struggle to the fact that pure satyagraha had not always been adopted. He explained:

> The use of this force requires the adoption of poverty, in the sense that we must be indifferent whether we have the wherewithal to feed or clothe ourselves During the past struggle, all Passive Resisters, if any at all, were not prepared to go that length Some again were only Passive Resisters so-called They came without any conviction, often with mixed motives, less often with impure motives Some even, whilst engaged in the struggle, would gladly have resorted to violence but for most vigilance supervision Thus it was that the struggle became prolonged; for the exercise of the purest soul-force, in its perfect form, brings about instantaneous relief For this exercise, prolonged training of the individual is an absolute necessity, so that a perfect passive resister has to be almost, if not entirely, a perfect man

This training, he elaborated, needed to begin from earliest childhood so that the child had ingrained in its upbringing that "it can easily conquer hate by love, untruth by truth, violence by self-suffering".[33]

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29 *Golden Number of Indian Opinion: Souvenir of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa 1906-1914*, pp 26-27

30 Mesthrie, "From Advocacy to Mobilisation", p 119

31 *CWMG IX*, pp 225-227; *IO*, 29 May 1909 (G), pp 236-237; *IO*, 5 June 1909 (G)

32 *CWMG XII* (1913-1914), Gandhi on the last satyagraha campaign, p 510

33 *Golden Number of Indian Opinion*, p 9

Gandhi also advocated the idea, as the campaign developed, that numbers were not necessarily crucial to satyagraha – even if a few held out then there could still be victory. He thus emphasised individual commitment and quoted Thoreau's argument that even if a single individual stopped owning slaves that was a victory.[34] Gandhi argued: "In satyagraha, the victory of a single member may be taken to mean the victory of all, but the defeat of the side as a whole does not spell defeat for the person who has not yielded. For instance, in the Transvaal fight, even if a majority of Indians were to submit to the obnoxious act, he who remains unyielding will be victorious indeed for the person, for the fact remains that he has not yielded."[35] It is significant that he made such an argument in 1909 when only a few remained committed to the struggle. It should also be noted that it was really only when the masses came out in 1913 that satyagraha was assured of some victory.

Understanding the essentials of satyagraha is only part of understanding the struggle. The strategies employed as the campaign evolved are also important. There was brilliant leadership by Gandhi over the course of the eight-year struggle. Volunteers and pickets ensured the success of the anti-registration drive of 1907; when the compromise of 1908 failed, the registration certificates were burnt in a cauldron; when the campaign expanded to include the immigration law, cross-border transgressions were employed; when families suffered as a result of imprisonment, Tolstoy farm was established to care for the wives and children; strike action was called for in 1913 and women were brought into the struggle; the unexpected mass turnout in 1913 led to the historic march towards the Transvaal borders with over two thousand people. Throughout the campaign, Gandhi used *Indian Opinion* to mobilise resisters – courageous resisters had their photographs printed and names were listed.[36] Gandhi drew on, as James Hunt has argued, "a spiritual community of legitimizing authorities"[37] such as Thoreau, Giuseppe Mazzini and the American abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.[38] He drew on Gujarati poetry, Hindu mythology, role models from western antiquity such as Socrates, and also contemporary examples of bravery such as the suffragette movement of England, the white miners who went on strike on the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg in 1907, and the African women who resisted the pass laws in 1913. Gandhi's Johannesburg Letter answered readers' fears and questions about the struggle and anticipated all possible consequences. Through the course of the campaign, a camaraderie developed amongst resisters that only served to strengthen them. Support groups consisting of sympathetic whites emerged and public opinion in India was roused to support the campaign. This was not insignificant to the success of satyagraha.

So what did satyagraha achieve? Fatima Meer argued in the late 1950s, when black organisations were seeking a new direction, that the Gandhi campaign "resulted in meagre gains".[39] However, the abolition of the £3 tax on ex-indentured workers must not be seen as a minor victory, for it pressed on workers driving them into unending cycles of poverty. Yet it is true to say that much of the restrictions on Indians as

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34 *IO*, 18 December 1909

35 *CWMG IX* (1909), pp 224-225; *IO*, 29 May 1909 (G)

36 The following is drawn mainly from Mesthrie, "From Advocacy to Mobilisation", pp 114-121

37 J D Hunt, "Thoreau and Gandhi: a Re-evaluation of the Legacy", *Gandhi Marg*, 14, 3, 1970, p 328

38 While this section highlights the influence of the west on satyagraha, the eastern roots of satyagraha have been pointed to by Hardiman, *Gandhi*, pp 41ff

39 F Meer, "Satyagraha in South Africa", *Africa South*, 3, 2, January-March 1959, p 24

encompassed in immigration, trading and land laws remained. The latter two were not part of satyagraha demands though. Gandhi also extracted from General Smuts a commitment that these existing laws would be "administered in a just manner and with due regard for vested rights".[40] Indian marriages would remain an issue for many years – they could only be recognised if solemnised locally by government officers and polygamy as practised by Hindus and Muslims would not be accepted. The immigration law allowed for the future entry of wives and children of domiciled Indians instead of closing this door entirely. More research is needed on the crucial question of the registration certificates that Indians were required to have as proof of their residence in the Transvaal. Historians are surprisingly silent on such a key issue of the campaign.

The young, newly qualified Doctor A.H. Gool, who would in future decades become a leading light of the radical Non-European Unity Movement in the Western Cape, had an answer in 1914 to critics who doubted the Gandhi-Smuts settlement:

> There is no doubt our gain … is little in material welfare, but who can gauge the large gain in sentiment to the community The relieving of a few from paying a poll tax, the principle of the open door (if not the practice of it), and, lastly, the promise for just administration of the laws, are in themselves small matters Yet they stand as landmarks to the community of the self-respect, the freedom from the taint of slavery, and the awakening to nationhood which we have gained in this struggle What we must recognise is that the tide of anti-Indian legislation has at last turned, and that we have in self-sacrifice a weapon wherewith to free ourselves from the existing bonds [41]

The rewards of satyagraha were thus not simply in terms of issues but, as Gandhi himself noted, its rewards lay in the demonstration of courage by people, in the example of "the power of truth" and the demonstration of the "value of religion". Through their conduct of satyagraha, Indians had gained in "prestige" and this was recognised internationally.[42] The tide of anti-Indian sentiment would return after World War I, but Gandhi had left behind many trained resisters. It is to the post-Gandhi period that this article now turns.

Satyagraha Post Gandhi (1915-1946)

There is a natural tendency for scholars to proceed from a discussion of Gandhi's satyagraha struggle to the 1946-1948 passive resistance campaign. Meer, for instance, argued in her discussion of the 1946-1948 campaign: "For many years after the departure of Mahatma Gandhi from the country, the creed of Satyagraha lost its continuity in the life of formal Indian political expression."[43] This approach is not surprising since the 1946-1948 campaign was the first mass resistance by Indians since 1914. Yet, as I have argued elsewhere, one needs to look at lesser-known acts of, or attempts at, satyagraha prior to 1946. I specifically pointed to the attempts by Indians in the Transvaal in 1932 and 1939 to launch satyagraha through the Transvaal

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40 See Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner?*, p 129

41 *Souvenir of the Passive Resistance Movement in South Africa, 1906-1914*, p 8

42 *CWMG XI* (1911-1913), p 99; *IO*, 3 June 1911 (G)

43 Meer, "Satyagraha", p 26 See also Hardiman, *Gandhi*, p 277; M Swan, "Ideology in Organsied Indian Politics 1890-1948", *in* S Marks and S Trapido (eds), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (Longman, London and New York, 1987), pp 182-208 To her credit, Swan does, however, look at the growth of radicalism in Indian politics in the 1930s

Indian Congress and the more individual satyagraha that was offered in 1941.[44] In this article I would like to, however, point to an even earlier offering of individual satyagraha that has been quite missed in the existing historiography.

In 1919 Manilal Gandhi, who had returned to South Africa in 1917 after three years in India, offered civil disobedience during a journey across central Durban by tramcar. Discrimination and segregation on tramcars had long been an issue in Durban, but crowded tramcars in 1919 produced racial tensions with white passengers arguing the need for segregation. There had been numerous altercations between Indian passengers, conductors and white passengers. Indian passengers were forced to vacate seats and take up seats at the rear or on top of the tramcar. Some were physically thrown off the trams by conductors. Manilal refused to take a particular seat allocated to him by a conductor. This had also been the response of others such as Bernard Sigamoney, a teacher and church warden in Durban. A constable urged Manilal to get off the car but he refused. For this Manilal was taken to court where he defended himself. He explained his decision not to heed the conductor and constable: "one had a right to refuse to do what one's conscience said was wrong." The case was dismissed on technical grounds. Manilal was in fact all prepared to go to jail as he had no intention of paying a fine.[45]

This may seem like a small incident but it reveals years of exposure to Gandhi's teachings. Manilal had been a student of both Tolstoy Farm and Phoenix, he had served his first term of imprisonment in the Johannesburg Fort as a seventeen year old in 1910 and then served five further prison sentences during the struggle. The prison terms varied from seven days to three months with hard labour. In India, in 1915, he had been a founder member of the Satyagraha ashram in Ahmedabad. He returned to Phoenix, worked in the press and took over the editorship of *Indian Opinion* in 1920. Through *Indian Opinion* he not only advocated the purest application of satyagraha but also served by example.[46]

In 1922 Manilal and Sorabjee Rustomjee, son of veteran resister Parsee Rustomjee, spent seven days in jail for disobeying police at the Durban harbour. The harbour police had asked them to step away from the departing boat but they refused believing that Indians were discriminated against while whites were not asked to move back. When Manilal refused to step back, he so angered the police that the officer threatened to hit him. Manilal met the anger with calm and asked to be arrested. Sorabjee's and Manilal's arrest drew a crowd of a thousand Indians in support of their action. Both were fined £5 or seven days in jail and both chose jail. In jail they offered satyagraha again as Sorabjee's kusti and sudreh (the thread and undergarment worn by Parsis as required by their religion) were taken away. They went on a hunger strike for four days after which the items were returned.[47]

These were individual acts of satyagraha which undoubtedly drew on the spirit of the non-cooperation movement launched in India. The size of the crowd of

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44 U S Mesthrie, "Indian National Honour versus Trader Ideology: Three Unsuccessful Attempts at Passive Resistance in the Transvaal, 1932, 1939 and 1941", *South African Historical Journal*, 21, 1989, pp 39-54 Swan does look at 1939 but not 1932 and 1941

45 *IO*, 28 March 1919

46 These are fully discussed in his biography See Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner?*

47 See *IO*, 2, 9, 23, 30 December 1921; 17 February and 4, 11 August 1922

supporters indicates the mood amongst Indians against petty discrimination. It was, however, only a decade later, in 1932, that Manilal, Thambi Naidoo, Pragji Desai and Surendra Medh, all seasoned satyagrahis, sought to stir the masses into satyagraha in the Transvaal. The ten-year delay can be explained easily. Following the growing anti-Indian agitation in Natal and the Transvaal, which resulted in threats of segregation and repatriation, the South African Indian Congress lobbied the Indian government to intervene. The Indian and South African governments, after prolonged negotiations, concluded the Cape Town agreement in 1927. This put a temporary halt to new restrictive legislation. Within about four years this agreement was in danger. The South African government moved to pass a law that would have affected thousands of traders and residents on the Witwatersrand who had been living illegally on proclaimed land.[48] The proposed bill also aimed at segregating Indians for both trade and residential purposes. The actual law passed in 1932 was less harsh in that it proposed a commission to investigate the position of illegal traders and residents and there was a possibility that in some cases their occupation of the land would be validated by the creation of exempted areas.[49]

The official position of the Transvaal Indian Congress and the South African Indian Congress was that there would be resistance to the Act. It is significant how strongly Gandhi's ideas of satyagraha were called on during the brief campaign to resist. This was not simply a lingering memory of Gandhi's earlier struggle in South Africa, but was also influenced by the non-cooperation movement in India and the more recent Dandi march. Manilal Gandhi, who was one of the 78 satyagrahis voluntarily accompanying Gandhi on that march, had in fact served a ten-month term of imprisonment for his role in the march on the Dharasana salt works. He returned to South Africa fuelled by the spirit of resistance.[50] Through *Indian Opinion* he wrote of the need for resistance to preserve the "honour" and "respect" of Indians, for the proposed exempted areas were nothing more than segregated areas. He argued, following Gandhi, for the need to undergo self-suffering and declared that "we have now handed our cause to God".[51] A pledge was also published in *Indian Opinion*, one that must have been derived from the non-cooperation movement in India:

> We pledge ourselves by all we hold sacred and dear to suffer and endure without retaliation, whatever consequences may result to ourselves through the passive resistance we hereby undertake …
>
> We pledge ourselves to meet any violence with which we may be confronted unresistingly, and in a spirit of charity and forgiveness [52]

Resistance, however, did not take place – there was ultimately little support for the campaign as traders moved to safeguard their interests and cooperated with the commission.

A chance to offer resistance came seven years later when the Asiatic (Transvaal Land and Trading) Act was passed.[53] No exempted areas had yet been

48 The Gold Law of 1908 forbade all coloured people from living or trading on proclaimed land It was never, however, fully enforced, which led to many Indians, Coloureds and Chinese establishing interests on these lands over many years

49 This account of the 1932 move to resistance and its failure is drawn from Mesthrie, "Indian National Honour versus Trader Ideology", pp 42-48

50 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner*?, pp 199-206

51 *IO*, 9 September 1932 (editorial)

52 *IO*, 9 September 1932

created and the Act simply pegged the status quo. The Act had crucial implications for Indian hawkers and traders as no new licences would be granted unless these were in the old locations established for Indians. There were clear indications that the next step would be legislation to implement full residential and trading segregation. This time there was charismatic leadership from the young Doctor Yusuf Dadoo. All indications were that passive resistance would have overwhelming support. Some meetings recorded crowds of up to six thousand men and women. There were veterans from the earlier satyagraha struggle such as the seventy-year-old E.I. Asvat; there were the children of the now deceased Thambi Naidoo; there was support from Natal leaders and experienced resisters like Albert Christopher and Manilal Gandhi. Asvat's speech is worth noting: "Our road is clear and as Satyagrahis we shall march with Truth on our side and Faith in God." At one meeting, Manilal Gandhi read out Gandhi's speech on passive resistance delivered in 1908 and once more emphasised the value of "self-suffering". He also began publishing, on a regular basis, on the front page of *Indian Opinion* quotes from Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru on ahimsa (non-violence), the qualities of a satyagrahi, and the choices open to people when faced with injustice. Many of Manilal's articles stressed the key principles of satyagraha – truth, faith in God, self-suffering and the belief in the "goodness of human nature". He also stressed that training for all this and a "chaste life" was necessary.[54]

It was unfortunately Gandhi's intervention that prevented passive resistance from being launched as he urged Dadoo and others to await negotiations between the Indian and South African governments. Here again Gandhi gave the opponent a chance to make a settlement and thus passive resistance was thwarted by the very man who inspired the resistance. The newly constituted government by Jan Smuts abandoned plans to impose segregation and the energies of government were diverted towards the outbreak of war in Europe.

In 1941, when the government once again put a freeze on Indian occupation and ownership, passive resistance was launched but on a very small and individual scale. This was a deliberate decision "not to embarrass the Government during the progress of this [world] war". I.A. Cachalia was leader of the movement while Dadoo served a term of imprisonment for opposing the war effort. A volunteer corps was established and Cachalia spoke of their path of "truth and suffering". At least seven stalls were set up by resisters who defied the hawking laws. There were, however, no arrests and very little media coverage. Manilal argued that even if there were just a few resisters they would be successful. He thus reiterated a belief in Gandhi's views on the value and importance of individual resistance.[55]

In all these instances we see how satyagraha principles were still strongly adhered to by a solid core of Indian politicians. Yet there was one aspect stressed by Gandhi – the need to compromise – that found little support. Compromise in the 1930s and 1940s in Indian politics in South Africa came to signify a very dirty word and smacked of collaboration. Indian politicians divided into two groups – those

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53 See Mesthrie, "Indian National Honour and Trader Ideology", pp 48-51

54 *IO,* 3 and 10 March (editorials), 21 and 28 April, 12 May 1939 and editorial, 19 and 26 May (editorials), 9 June 1939

55 Mesthrie, "Indian National Honour versus Trader Ideology", pp 52-53

standing by principles and those willing to attain whatever small gains they could by negotiation and compromise.[56]

In the 1940s, the struggle ceased to be articulated in terms of a war based on religion and trust in God. This is evident in the 1946-1948 passive resistance campaign. Forty years after Gandhi and Transvaal Indians had first initiated satyagraha, a major passive resistance offensive was led by Dadoo and Doctor Monty Naicker. The vast majority of the two thousand resisters who resisted the passage of the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Act of 1946 (which imposed segregation in Natal and granted a very segregated and extremely limited form of representation in parliament), were between the ages of eighteen and thirty.[57] A new language was adopted by the leaders who spoke to a younger constituency. There were a few like Manilal Gandhi, then 54 years old, who invoked "the higher law of the Universe" and the impulse of his conscience in explaining his decision to resist.[58] However, as Swan has noted, Gandhi's watchwords had been "truth" and "conscience", in 1946 these were replaced by "equality" and "democracy". There was also reference to a much broader struggle by all black people for rights.[59] Yet there were many key principles of satyagraha adopted by the resisters.

Vahed's article in this issue on Monty Naicker demonstrates the crucial influence of Gandhi on Naicker.[60] An examination of some of the speeches that passive resisters gave during the course of the campaign shows the adherence to non-violence and to the principle of self-suffering. Trade unionist M.D. Naidoo stated in an address before court:

> I have chosen the path of self-imposed suffering and hardship … By our suffering we hope that those misguided Europeans who have allowed their irrational attitudes to commit a grave wrong upon a peaceful and freedom-loving people, will appreciate the inhumanity of this Act in all its enormity
> This is the deep faith of the non-violent passive resister [61]

There were many acts of fearlessness. Resisters were subjected to much more severe challenges than Gandhi and his satyagrahis had been. This was evident when the resisters set up tents on municipal land in Gale Street and were subjected to considerable abuse and violent acts by young white youth. Zainub Asvat, the daughter of E.I. Asvat, was a medical student who suspended her studies to take part in the campaign. She had this to say about the violent attacks which left several women injured. "If sacrifice we must, then sacrifice we shall, no matter what happens. We propose that we win them over and make them see the justice of our cause by our very suffering and our sacrifice, not by hatred or malice. That is why we refuse to retaliate in the face of strongest provocation."[62]

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56 See S Bhana, *Gandhi's Legacy: the Natal Indian Congress 1894-1994* (University of Natal Press, Pietermaritzburg, 1997), pp 33ff

57 E S Reddy and F Meer (compilers), *Passive Resistance – 1946: a Selection of Documents* (Madiba Publishers, Institute for Black Research, Durban, 1996), p 397

58 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner?,* pp 308-309

59 Swan, "Ideology in Organised Indian Politics", pp 192, 203-204

60 G Vahed, "Monty … Meets Gandhi … Meets Mandela: the Dilemma of Non-Violent Resistance in South Africa, 1940-1960"

61 Reddy and Meer, *Passive Resistance*, p 164

62 Reddy and Meer, *Passive Resistance*, pp 128-129

There was also a belief in some training, for training committees were established "to impart political and general knowledge and to instil discipline and a sense of responsibility".[63] Yet these may have been more inspired by the Communist Party's method of operation, for Dadoo was a key member of the Communist Party in the Transvaal. It is also notable that in their decision to call off the campaign in 1948 the leadership drew on Gandhi for legitimation. A new government had been elected in 1948 and the leadership argued that "following the tenets of satyagraha", they needed to give the National Party and Premier D.F. Malan time to make known their policy.[64]

Like the satyagraha campaign of 1906-1914, this campaign was marked by exceptional leadership. There was sound organisation which saw action committees and coordinating resistance councils established. There was a sustained media campaign with the quick dissemination of news through the *Passive Resister* and *The Flash.* There were appeals to the international community. The campaign, however, did not secure as large a following as it should have. Swan has explained this in terms of the fact that the full impact of a future life of segregation could not yet be appreciated by the working classes who put "their most pressing needs" first.[65] As with Gandhi's satyagraha, the impact of the campaign lay beyond the material outcome. It is generally appreciated that the significance of this campaign lay in its ability to influence the African National Congress in terms of the importance of defying unjust laws by non-violent methods. As Mandela explains: "The Indian campaign became a model of the type of protest that we in the Youth League were calling for."[66] It also set the basis for a united struggle against apartheid.

In the 1950s there was some discussion of non-violence as simply a strategy to be employed versus non-violence as a fundamental principle to be adhered to. A debate that preceded this was whether communism and satyagraha were compatible. This emerged in the course of the 1946-1948 campaign and amongst those who were troubled by the growing and influential presence of communists in the Indian Congresses were Albert Christopher, S.B. Medh and Manilal Gandhi. Manilal debated the issue openly. He indicated that while there were those who did not approve of participating in the campaign because it meant "associating with communists", he was not of this view because the campaign was a "just cause". Towards the end of the campaign, however, he began to have doubts:

> To be quite frank Satyagraha and communism do not go well together The former is based on Truth and Non-Violence and indomitable faith in God Communists do not believe in God and therefore do not believe in truth, and their creed is to achieve their end by any means [67]

This doubt and other considerations influenced Manilal's attitude towards the Defiance Campaign of 1952.

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63 Reddy and Meer, *Passive Resistance*, p 74
64 Reddy and Meer, *Passive Resistance*, pp 208-209
65 Swan, "Ideology in Organised Indian Politics", pp 203-204
66 N Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Abacus, London, 1995), p 119
67 Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner*?, pp 325-326

Satyagraha in the 1950s

A reading of *Indian Opinion* for the years 1951-1952 reveals the total commitment to satyagraha as a means to fight apartheid. There were quotes from Gandhi, explanations about all the principles of satyagraha and reproduction of pledges that a satyagrahi should take. Time in fact stood still. It is worth visiting Manilal Gandhi's views on satyagraha, for almost alone he stood for its application in its full essence.

Manilal above all believed in discipline and distrusted the young men who led the Indian Congress not the least for their embrace of ideologies such as communism, but also for their lifestyle. He recalled Gandhi's training and contrasted this with the young leadership:

> He trained us children to live the hardest sort of lives We could never drink or smoke We were not allowed to become slaves to anything … It now pains my heart to see that good Indians, even men who hold high office in the Indian Congresses, cannot use their brains unless they have cigarettes in their mouths Many Indians are also slaves to drink and midnight dancing and carousing These things must be made subordinate if one is to become a person with inner discipline All material things must be made secondary to spiritual values [68]

As Manilal voiced a rigid adherence to Gandhian ideals, he became isolated within Congress. The younger Congressmen talked a different language. At a mass meeting in central Durban to protest against the Group Areas Act, Manilal tried to impress on the younger crowd to be "watchful and wakeful to the enemies within". He was mocked and shouted down and he admitted that his discourse was quite foreign to the crowd.[69]

Manilal also embarked on a fourteen-day fast in April 1951. He reflected on the need to act against apartheid. He explained his decision to fast as "an unshakeable faith in the power of God", the need to respond to one's "conscience" and the need to purify the self to better fight the enemy without hatred. His fast was thus meant as a fast for self-purification prior to taking action. The fast drew significant attention to Phoenix and received both national and international attention. In New York, there was a picket outside the South African consulate by religious and pacifist groups. Following this fast, Manilal began an individual campaign of civil disobedience, one that preceded the Defiance Campaign of 1952 by several months. However, he was not arrested and charged. In March 1952 he undertook a 21-day fast once again to purify himself. He feared that the Defiance Campaign which was to be launched would be violent and argued that its chief slogan should be "Glory to God". The fast was aimed against the government as "a prayer in its intense form" for it to change its policy.[70]

The Defiance Campaign of 1952 which began in June saw as many as 8 326 resisters of all races, but predominantly African, arrested for defying apartheid laws. This was a concerted programme of action by the Indian and African National Congresses. While there were those like Albert Luthuli who believed in non-violence as a principle, Mandela explains how several within the Congresses saw non-violence as merely a strategy:

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68 R St John, *Through Malan's Africa* (V Collancz, London, 1984), p 308
69 *IO*, 2 June 1950
70 See Dhupelia-Mesthrie, *Gandhi's Prisoner*?, pp 343-351

> We also discussed whether the campaign should follow the Gandhian principles of non-violence or what the Mahatma called satyagraha, a non-violence that seeks to conquer through conversion Some argued for non-violence on purely ethical grounds, saying it was morally superior to any other method This idea was strongly affirmed by Manilal Gandhi … Others said we should approach this issue not from the point of view of principles but of tactics, and that we should employ the method demanded by the conditions If a particular method or tactic enabled us to defeat the enemy, then it should be used In this case, the state was far more powerful than we, and any attempts at violence by us would be devastatingly crushed This made non-violence a practical necessity This was my view … I saw non-violence on the Gandhian model … as a tactic to be used as the situation demanded … I called for non-violent protest for as long as it was effective [71]

The strategy was more, as Lodge notes, to fill the jails thus "disorganising authority" than about converting the oppressor through self-suffering. In the actual course of the campaign there was some closeness to core principles of satyagraha. There was "religious fervour" amongst people. There were pledges taken "to a code of love, discipline and cleanliness" and in some instances even an appeal to prayer and fasting. Further, "the verbal imagery of the campaign involved ideas of sacrifice, martyrdom, the triumph of justice and truth".[72] This was how the campaign panned out and it made a huge impression on Manilal Gandhi who ultimately joined the campaign and served a fifty-day prison sentence for entering a black location without a permit. Non-violent resistance, however, would not survive the decade.

Satyagraha's Future

All the examples of satyagraha as detailed above show that since Gandhi's departure from South Africa, it enjoyed a certain amount of respect as a tool to resist oppression, but with each decade its essence was whittled down and in the new times of the 1940s and 1950s only certain elements of it were embraced widely. An insistence on the full acceptance of it could only lead to political isolation. Over the following three decades the South African struggle embodied several non-violent methods, but violence was also a dominating feature. There were many youngsters who embodied Gandhi's fearless satyagrahi. Their lives of resistance indicate that fearlessness is not exclusive to satyagraha. While embracing non-violence may be born of training and discipline, fearlessness is not. Violence, too, requires an embrace of fearlessness. Theirs was a fearlessness born out of experience of apartheid and passion for a different future. There was in the lives of some of the leaders, such as Allan Boesak (a co-founder of the biggest coalition against apartheid, the United Democratic Front, in 1983), Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Rev. Beyers Naude, a religious element to their struggle. There was in the midst of the necklacing of black collaborators, enforced consumer boycotts and violence in the townships, the fast of Doctor Ivan Toms. In October 1985 he took residence in the St Georges Cathedral and embarked on a twenty-day hunger strike in protest against troops in the townships. He read the Bible, drank only water and served to bring to the fore the ideals of the End Conscription Campaign. His refusal to serve in the military when called up in 1987 led to a prison sentence of 630 days. Here was an example of satyagraha and a commitment to peace.[73]

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71 Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, pp 74-75

72 T Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Ravan Press, Johannesburg, 1983), pp 41-46

73 See M Morris, "The People's Doctor", *Cape Argus*, 26 March 2008 He was released after serving half his term

Critics have argued that satyagraha should not be seen as "a panacea" and that it should not become "a catholicon". Arguments stress the flaw in its central assumption in the goodness of human nature and its inapplicability in totalitarian states.[74] Satyagraha against the apartheid state had no chance as the state lacked morality and conscience. Its policies created widespread and untold sufferings of millions. While satyagraha has been subject to some scrutiny as a method of transformation, violence and its results need to be subjected to that same scrutiny. One central argument for satyagraha is that the wielder holds the moral high ground. The key reason why the satyagraha campaign, the passive resistance campaign and the Defiance Campaign have such a place of recognition in our history is because of this moral high ground and bravery of people. They were potent evocations of a people's protest against injustices.

This article points, however, to how satyagraha, to retain its appeal, has to be modified to fit new times. The language of the early twentieth century needs to be recast for its favourable adaptation in a globalised world. Today South Africa has a democratic and legitimate state. Elected by the masses it has a moral responsibility to see to the needs of the masses. There has been some focus on Mandela and the leading role he played in attaining a non-violent transition to a democratic state and parallels are drawn with Gandhi.[75] There are, however, numerous contemporary popular struggles and many strategies are employed: marches, appeals to the courts, threats to not vote in the next elections, land invasions, and violent expulsion of foreign residents from the townships. I would briefly like to focus on two struggles to indicate the relevance of Gandhi's ideas and some difficulties: the struggle to secure anti-retrovirals and cheaper medicines for HIV-positive individuals and AIDS sufferers, and, secondly, struggles over housing in Cape Town.

The Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) founded in 1998 is one of the strongest of several social movements today and it has been in a debate with the state about the "truth" as to whether HIV causes AIDS and the efficacy of anti-retrovirals as a treatment method. Steve Robins has pointed to a very effective campaign that works within the context of globalisation. It represents a "health activism [that] straddled local, national and global spaces, resembling what Arjun Appadurai and others describe as 'globalisation from below'".[76] For the purposes of this article, two acts are significant for they come the closest to methods of satyagraha. The first was Zackie Achmat's decision not to take anti-retrovirals till these were available at public clinics. Such an act endangered his health and provided an opportunity to focus national attention on the issue. This, combined with court actions, has resulted in the state agreeing to provide ant-retrovirals. The second was the Christopher Moraka Defiance Campaign of 2000. It was sparked off by Moraka's death from AIDS and the argument made by the TAC was that cheap drugs were not available to the public. Once again in defiance of the law, Achmat visited Thailand and imported into South Africa five thousand capsules of a cheap generic drug. This action focused attention on international drug companies and Pfizer then made its drugs available to clinics at no cost. In these two cases one sees the relevance of satyagraha in contemporary

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74 Parekh, *Gandhi*, pp 73-75

75 See Hardiman, *Gandhi*, pp 279-280

76 See S Robins, "'Long Live Zackie, Long Live': AIDS Activism, Science and Citizenship after Apartheid", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 30, 3, September 2004, p 651

struggles, though the language of the movement does not derive from satyagraha.[77] The TAC's struggle, however, points to how "truth" can be a contested term with activists and the state making differing claims. The same can be said about housing struggles in Cape Town.

On 8 October 2008 there was some happiness in Kewton, Athlone, Cape Town for some families as they received keys to their new homes. One of the new homeowners was 65-year-old Pamela Augustine who had been on the city's waiting list for 22 years. Doreen Benting, 56 years old, indicates with some poignancy what it means to finally have a home: "It made me feel like I am worth something …"[78] A perusal of articles in the city's daily newspaper just for the month of October reveals that this kind of happiness eludes many. In Cape Town's largest black township, Khayelitsha, some of those less lucky took the action of moving into partially completed homes – earmarked for others – in the Mandela Park area. These were the actions of the desperate and the frustrated. One of those branded "home invaders" by the media, Malusi Pamba, indicated with some defiance: "If they come to evict us, I am going nowhere as long as I am alive and kicking."[79] Vivien Damba, a 64-year-old grandmother, has been on a housing waiting list for 25 years. She lives in a one-room shack with her children and grandchildren in an informal settlement called KTC. She and other residents – some two hundred of them – took to the streets and marched to the municipality to highlight their plight. They presented a petition and vowed to protest on an ongoing basis until they were heard and something was done.[80] Other shack dwellers also marched a week later, highlighting the poor conditions in the informal settlements at Khayelitsha and Delft. Mzonke Poni, chairperson of Abhlali base Mjondolo, an organisation representing the interest of shack dwellers, gave an indication that they would move beyond marches and petitions: "We will not be as friendly and polite as we are now if we do not get a word from the mayor herself." The media reported that some marchers, including many women and children, had threatened to damage local government property if their grievances were not attended to.[81] The above indicates some strategies adopted by the poor of Cape Town: marches, petitions, invasions, non-cooperation and a promise of direct action that could include damaging property.

One of the biggest contestations about the meaning of justice can be seen in the state's plans to remove thousands of families living in the Joe Slovo squatter camp (near Langa) along the N2 freeway so that it can proceed with a major housing project. According to the Department of Housing:

> The N2 Gateway is a national pilot project aiming to pioneer a new and improved housing policy that will see the delivery of more and better-quality houses for poorer South Africans in integrated human settlements It is a project that should be nurtured and guarded by all South Africans [82]

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77 Robins, "Aids Activism", pp 662,664-665
78 *Cape Argus*, 9 October 2008
79 *Cape Argus*, 2 October 2008
80 *Cape Argus*, 16 October 2008
81 *Cape Argus*, 23 October 2008
82 SA Government Information, "N2 must be protected from anarchy", 19 February 2008 Accessed at http://www info gov za/speeches/2008/08022009451002 htm

It released visual depictions of the project showing a happy three-step process: removal from the informal settlement, resettlement in temporary relocation areas, and, finally, the attainment of a Breaking Ground New Home.[83] According to Marianne Merton, a spokesperson for the Housing Ministry, "shacks and informal settlements are no places to live in dignity, to raise families".[84]

Residents of the Joe Slovo camp do not see the N2 Gateway project as a fair and just process and have contested the truth behind the policy. Martin Legassick, a retired professor who is actively involved with the residents, articulates this truth:

> The N2 Gateway project … was conceived less to build houses, or to contribute to solving the Western Cape housing crisis, than to prettify the margins of the N2 highway before the 2010 World Cup The poor were to be eliminated from the sides of the N2, and more expensive housing installed there [85]

Residents argue that they would be subjected to relocation to poor-quality temporary homes in a really poor area (Delft) which is far from their places of work and the city. This argument derives from the experience of thousands of families from Joe Slovo who were relocated in Delft after a fire in 2005. One observer calls this "a concentration camp". A further argument against the project is that not all families would attain the new homes built on the land they have to vacate. Many would have to wait to get homes in Delft itself. One of the boldest tactics employed was a massive blockade of the N2, a major route into the city centre, on 12 September 2007, a day that brought the city to a standstill. There was an appeal to the high court to stay off evictions and when this failed residents turned to the highest court of the land, the constitutional court and now await this ruling.[86]

In Delft itself another scene plays itself out amongst another group. Some of those desperate for housing who have been on housing lists for decades and who live in the backyards of other residents, invaded homes allocated to others in December 2007 in the belief that the allocation process had not been fair. They painted their names on the houses they occupied thus stamping an ownership that the law would not allow. They were then forcibly ejected and placed in camps. At least eighty families refused to move to these camps, setting up home instead on the pavements of Symphony Way where they live in conditions far worse than in the camps. This particular step is an example of satyagraha, though there have been incidents of violence amongst these dwellers themselves. The dwellers also accuse the police of violence against them.[87] A touching exhibition of visuals and writings by the children themselves reveals the precarious nature of their existence.[88]

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83 *Sunday Times*, 24 August 2008

84 *Sunday Times*, 23 November 2008

85 M Legassick, *Western Cape Housing Crisis: Writings on Joe Slovo and Delft* (Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign and Socialist Alternative Publication, 2008), p 38

86 For these arguments against the plan, see Legassick, *Western Cape Housing Crisis* and *Sowetan*, 21 August 2008 (article by Anna Majavu)

87 For an account of the situation in Delft, see report by Kerry Chance at http://antieviction org za/2008/05/21/housing-and-evictions-at-the-n2-gateway-project; also articles at http://antieviction org za/category/archives/brutal-eviction-in-delft/, especially those dated 29 June and 4 July 2008; *Cape Argus*, 11 February 2008 (article by Diane Hawker) and 4 March 2008 (article by Tanya Farber)

88 *Cape Argus*, 13 October 2008

In both these cases there have been contested versions of some acts of violence, with the police arresting eight in the N2 blockade for "incitement to violence"(supporters argue that the crowd was non-violent).[89] Police have also fired rubber bullets into protesters at Delft arguing variously that the crowd was non-cooperative, threw stones at police, and that the rule of law had to be maintained.[90] Another version is that "people were evicted from houses at Delft at police gunpoint – despite their own non-violence".[91]

One of the movements most active in promoting the causes of the poor in their struggle for housing is the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign which was formed in 2000. It advocates "direct action" such as marches, demonstrations and appeals to the legal system. However, it also supports the invasions of homes as in the case of Delft and when people are evicted from homes (for non-payment of rent, for example) it argues that it would not stop short of "rendering the contested property unliveable, saying if the people cannot have the land, then no one will".[92] The latter sentiments are quite contrary to satyagraha.

The above struggles around AIDS and housing provide an understanding of how justice and truth can have differing meanings for both the state and the people. It also indicates the limited concept of self-suffering to people who are already suffering. Advocating satyagraha almost seems like an elitist concept – it may also smack of paternalism as in Gandhi's admonition to Indian workers in 1914. Gandhi's struggles have, however, pointed to the importance of retaining the moral high ground. The state will have to bear responsibility if violent methods are resorted to for it has to respect non-violent methods and respond positively to these. The hard lines on the Joe Slovo crisis point to a need for negotiation and compromise, that key principle that Gandhi underlined.[93]

Conclusion

This article has pointed to how, with passing time and new circumstances, the key principles of satyagraha came to be eroded in South African struggles – in particular the religious dimensions and the training of the self in a puritanical lifestyle. New leaders in new struggles borrowed from Gandhi's strategy and adopted a new language. Advocating satyagraha in a discourse deriving from the early years of the twentieth century could not get full support in the mid-years of the century. While the principles of satyagraha have whittled down, Gandhi's methods have been relevant even in the midst of the cycle of violence of the 1980s. They continue to be relevant as demonstrated by the recent fasts by South African activists against the sufferings of the people of Zimbabwe.[94] In contemporary struggles, especially around housing, the

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89 See Legassick, *Western Cape Housing Crisis*, pp 4-5, 11

90 *Cape Argus*, 5 March 2008 For an account of the police action, see article by Chance at http://antieviction org za/2008/05/21/housing-and-evictions-at-the-n2-gateway-project

91 Legassick, *Western Cape Housing Crisis*, p 37

92 http://antieviction org za/about-us/

93 Legassick has argued that both the Ministry of Housing and Thubelisha Homes (the company charged with the N2 Gateway project) have failed to consult with the people (see *Western Cape Housing Crisis*, pp 29-32)

94 See *Cape Times*, 22 January 2009; *Sunday Times*, 1 February 2009 The prolonged fasts by Kumi Naidoo, to be followed by Nomboniso Gasa, have sparked worldwide support with many fasting for a day in solidarity

serious threat of violence lies just at the surface, while methods of satyagraha are also deployed. Gandhi's vision of a non-violent society where members see themselves as interdependent, where people have work (rather than being recipients of welfare) and where the lines between those with excessive wealth and excessive poverty are not sharply drawn seem to have great relevance for contemporary South African society.[95] This is evident from a quote by Gandhi that has a prominent place on the website of the Western Cape Anti-Eviction Campaign: "When large numbers of people live in abject poverty, a handful of people living in comfort and luxury amounts to a kind of violence."[96]

Abstract

This article elucidates the key principles of satyagraha by noting how they evolved during the campaign of 1906 to 1914. It then seeks to analyse the extent to which the essence of satyagraha survived in struggles between 1915 and 1952. It argues for a recognition of earlier acts of satyagraha before the 1946-1948 passive resistance campaign. The article also examines the relevance of satyagraha in contemporary struggles over AIDS treatment and housing struggles. While the evidence suggests that there was a strong influence of satyagraha on several struggles in the 1930s to the 1950s, not all its principles were accepted and there was a whittling down and reshaping of its meaning. There were but a few adherents of satyagraha in its fullest meaning by the 1950s. Satyagraha has relevance for contemporary struggles largely because the wielder retains a strong moral high ground, but non-violent protest needs to be heeded by the democratic state. Gandhi's abhorrence for a society based on unequal wealth and his concern for the poor have important contemporary relevance.

Opsomming

Satyagraha in Suid-Afrika: Beginsels, Uitvoering en Moontlikhede

Hierdie artikel verduidelik die sleutelbeginsels van *satyagraha* deur te kyk hoe dit gedurende die veldtog van 1906 tot 1914 ontwikkel het. Dit probeer vervolgens analiseer tot watter mate die wese van *satyagraha* in stryde tussen 1915 en 1952 oorleef het. Dit betoog ten gunste van die erkenning van vroeëre dade van *satyagraha* voor die passiewe weerstandsveldtog van 1946-1948. Die artikel ondersoek ook die betekenis van *satyagraha* in tydgenootlike stryde rondom die behandeling van Vigs en behuising. Terwyl die getuienis aandui dat *satyagraha* verskeie stryde van die 1930's tot die 1950's sterk beïnvloed het, is nie al die beginsels daarvan aanvaar nie, en is die betekenis daarvan gesnoei en hervorm. Teen die 1950's was daar maar slegs enkele aanhangers van *satyagraha* in die volste betekenis daarvan. *Satyagraha* het betekenis vir eietydse stryde veral omdat diegene wat dit beoefen, 'n sterk posisie op die morele hoë grond inneem, maar ook omdat vreedsame protes geneig is om die oor van die demokratiese staat te wen. Gandhi se weersin in 'n gemeenskap gebaseer op ongelyke welvaart en sy besorgdheid oor armes het is ook van groot hedendaagse belang.

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95 For a full exposition of this, see Parekh, *Gandhi*, pp 92-110

96 http://amtieviction org za When accessed in October 2008 the quote appeared just below the name of the organisation suggesting a guiding thought It has more recently been replaced by a quote from Steve Biko

Key words

Aids activism; anti-eviction campaign; defiance campaign; fasts; Gandhi; housing struggles; hunger strikes; informal settlements; non-violence; passive resistance; satyagraha.

Sleutelwoorde

Behuisingstryde; Gandhi; geweldloosheid; hongerstakings; informele nedersettings; passiewe weerstand; *satyagraha*; teen-uitsettings veldtog; vaste; Vigs aktivisme; weerstandsveldtog.